and crimson yarns, and in fine linen. 

26And all the women who excelled in that skill spun the goats' hair. 27And the chieftains brought lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece; 28and spices and oil for lighting, for the anointing oil, and for the aromatic incense. 29Thus the Israelites, all the men and women whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that the Lord, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord.

30And Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 31He has endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft and has inspired him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood—to work in every kind of designer's craft and to give directions. He and Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan

27. The chieftains of the tribes contributed the precious stones on which the names of the tribes are to be incised, in accordance with the instructions of 28:9—12, 21, 29.

MASTER CRAFTSMEN (35:30—36:1)

After the donation of materials had begun, Moses informed the people of God's designation of Bezalel and Oholiab as the chief artisans and supervisors of the entire project (see 31:1—11).

34. and to give directions They are endowed with the ability to instruct others, which is a divinely bestowed gift.

30. singled out by name The name Bezalel is taken to mean b'tzel el, “in God's shadow” or “God seen in shadow.” In the religious structure that he will build, people will be able to glimpse, in limited manner, the presence of God. Prompted by this verse, the Midrash speculates on the importance of having a good name, a good reputation. A person's first “name,” we are told, is based on the reputation of his parents and family. But one can only go so far based on inherited merit. A person then acquires a second “name,” based on his or her communal activity. But community-based reputation can be the result of superficial factors, so ultimately it is only our living a good life that establishes our name.

Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur Hur is described in midrash as having sacrificed his life in an effort to prevent the sin of the Golden Calf. See Comment to 32:5. The selection of his grandson to build the Ark was Hur's ultimate vindication (Exod. R. 48:3).

31. skill, ability, and knowledge Rashi defines “skill” [ḥokhmah] as what a person learns from others, “ability” [ṭ'yunah] as the result of one's own insight and experience, and “knowledge” [da-at] as divine inspiration, ideas that suddenly come to a person from an unknown source. In the Amidah prayer recited on weekdays, we pray to be blessed by God with these qualities, among others.

32. It takes great wisdom to be able to use gold and silver for worthy purposes [Y. Avigdol].
35 have been endowed with the skill to do any work—of the carver, the designer, the embroiderer in blue, purple, crimson yarns, and in fine linen, and of the weaver—as workers in all crafts and as makers of designs. Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom the Lord has endowed with skill and ability to perform expertly all the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary carry out all that the Lord has commanded.

Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skilled person whom the Lord had endowed with skill, everyone who excelled in ability, to undertake the task and carry it out. They took over from Moses all the gifts that the Israelites had brought, to carry out the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary. But when these continued to bring freewill offerings to him morning after morning, all the artisans who were engaged in the tasks of the sanctuary came, each from the task upon which he was engaged, and said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work that the Lord has commanded to be done.” Moses thereupon had this proclamation made throughout the camp: “Let no man or woman make further effort toward gifts for the sanctuary!” So the people stopped bringing; their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.

OVERABUNDANCE OF DONATIONS  
(yw. 2–7)
The outpouring of donations produced materials far in excess of what was needed, and so the people had to be persuaded to discontinue their contributions.

CHAPTER 36

2. The Hebrew translated as “skilled” (hakham lev) literally means “wise-hearted.” A Hasidic master comments, “Wisdom of the mind alone, without wisdom of the heart, is worthless” [Aaron of Karlin].

3. morning after morning The repetition of the word “morning” (boker) is interpreted to mean that the people brought their gifts at dawn’s first light, when no one could see them, to emphasize that they were contributing out of love for God, with no wish to be recognized for it [David Shoham].
He placed the table in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain, on the north side of the Tabernacle. Upon it he laid out the setting of bread before the Lord—as the Lord had commanded Moses. He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table, on the south side of the Tabernacle. And he lit the lamps before the Lord—as the Lord had commanded Moses. He placed the altar of gold in the Tent of Meeting, before the curtain. On it he burned aromatic incense—as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Then he put up the screen for the entrance of the Tabernacle. At the entrance of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting he placed the altar of burnt offering. On it he offered up the burnt offering and the grain offering—as the Lord had commanded Moses. He placed the laver between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing. From it Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash their hands and feet; they washed when they entered the Tent of Meeting and when they approached the altar—as the Lord had commanded Moses. And he set up the enclosure around the Tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen for the gate of the enclosure.

When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting.

29. be offered up  The subject is either Moses or Aaron and his sons.

33. When Moses had finished the work  The Hebrew word for “finished” (wa-y’khal) echoes the same word in a different form (wa-y’hullu) at the close of the story of Creation (Gen. 2:1). This is significant, because the link between shrines and Creation was traditional in the ancient world. It is echoed both in the structure of the tabernacle and in the procedure entailed in its construction.

34. cloud . . . Presence  The tabernacle was to function as a portable Sinai, a means by which a continued channel of communication with God could be maintained. As the people move away from the mountain of Revelation, they need a visible, tangible symbol of God’s abiding presence in their midst. Thus the phenomenon that oc-

35. At this point, there are two embodiments of holiness in the Israelite camp: the Tent of Meeting [Ohe- Mo-ed] and the tabernacle [mishkan]. We can think of them as rep-
because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys; but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift. For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in [the cloud] by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.

Promised Land are determined by the movements of the luminous cloud.

The Book of Exodus, which opened with a narrative of misery and oppression, closes on a note of confidence and hope. Israel is assured that, day and night, the divine spirit hovers over it, guiding and controlling its destiny (see Num. 9:15–23).

God’s constant presence in our lives without its becoming so ordinary that we take it for granted. After all of this dedicated effort—taking up four-and-a-half parashiyot of the Book of Exodus—God comes down and approves of the work. The Book of Exodus ends on that note. “Our book which began in darkness concludes in the brilliant illumination of God’s glory before the eyes of the entire House of Israel.” [B. Jacob].

May this Book be a blessing in your hands, a light in your way, and a lesson for your heart.


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12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. 3Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

This chapter, a composite of several strands of tradition, contains a number of literary units. Each unit centers on an aspect of the Exodus events. Some of these units deal with immediate concerns, such as the last-minute preparations for the departure from Egypt; others relate to the enduring effect of the events in shaping the future course of Israel's life as a people.

REFORM OF THE CALENDAR  (v. 2)
The impending Exodus is visualized as the start of a new order of life that will be dominated by the consciousness of God's active presence in history. The religious calendar of Israel is henceforth to reflect this reality by numbering the months of the year from the month of the Exodus.

This month Elsewhere it is called "the month of Abib," meaning literally "when the ears of barley ripen," referring to the spring (March and April). The month of Abib is nowadays known as Nisan.

first of the months The Hebrew months, like the days of the week in Hebrew, are called by numbers. The absence of names may be due to the desire to avoid any connection with the ancient calendars that associated days and months with heavenly bodies or pagan deities and rituals. There is evidence that at least some Israelite months once had Canaanite-Phoenician names, because the Bible refers to the months of Ziv (1 Kings 6:1), Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), and Bul (1 Kings 6:38). The names of months now used by Jews were borrowed from the Babylonian calendar during the first exile.

THE PASchal OFFERING  (vv. 3–13)
The laws relating to the sacrificial meal that is to take place immediately before the Exodus are now set forth in detail.

3. community of Israel  The word translated as "community" (elohim, from a root meaning "to come together") was the term used to designate the people Israel acting as a covenant community, in relation to worship.

tenth of this month The completion of the first 10 days of the lunar month apparently held
But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons; you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day

some sort of special significance now lost to us. Yom Kippur, the most sacred day in the religious calendar, falls on the 10th of the seventh month, and in ancient times this same date ushered in the jubilee year. Joshua chose the 10th of the first month to cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan.

*a lamb* See verse 5 and Deut. 14:4. The Hebrew word seḥ can mean both “a lamb” and “a kid of the goats.” In light of the fear expressed in Exod. 8:22, this act broke the sense of dread felt by the enslaved Israelites and removed the psychological barrier to liberation.

*a family* The Hebrew phrase beit avos literally means “a house of fathers” and is a subunit of a clan (the biblical mishpahah). It is made up of a husband, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters and sons, and his married sons with their wives and unmarried children.

*a household* Originally, the paschal celebration was a domestic experience. Later it became a pilgrimage festival.

4. *too small* In Second Temple times, a minimum quorum of 10 participants was required for this ritual. The actual slaughtering of the animal was performed in the presence of no fewer than 30.

*a will eat* The eating of the animal is an essential part of the ritual. By means of this sacrificial meal, kinship ties are strengthened, family and neighborhood solidarity is promoted, and communion with God is established.

5. *without blemish* A defective gift is an insult to the recipient; hence the harmony between the one who brings the gift and God would be impaired by such a gift.

6. *keep watch* The animal, selected on the 10th of the month, is to be carefully protected psychological liberation from fear of Egyptian opinion and from an eagerness to imitate Egyptian customs, a necessary prerequisite to physical liberation. The Sages see the lamb as a symbol of idol worship, and its public slaughter as a repudiation of idolatry. It has also been noted that in times of drastic change people need specific, action-oriented advice. This gives them a sense of control over a chaotic situation, as we see with mourning customs in the wake of a death.

The shared meal, with matzah and bitter herbs [v. 8], will become the prototype of the Pesah Seder, when we not only remember but strive to re-enact our ancestors’ deliverance from Egypt. Members of some communities come to the Seder table with sandals on their feet and a staff in their hand (v. 11), as if they were setting out on a journey to freedom.

Although we celebrate Rosh ha-Shanah, beginning a new year, in the fall, the Hebrew calendar actually begins in the spring with Nisan, the month of Pesah, as the first month. Tishrei, the month of Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, is the seventh month [see Lev. 23:23ff.]. Some scholars see this as a compromise among ancient cultures, those who celebrated the beginning of the new year in the spring when the harsh winter rains were over and the plants and flowers re-emerged, versus those who celebrated the new year in the fall when the rains returned to replenish the land after summer’s harsh drought. We can see it as analogous to our beginning a new calendar year in January but marking our personal age on our birthday. Thus Rosh ha-Shanah is seen as the anniversary of the creation of the world, marking our shared humanity with other peoples; Pesah is the birthday of the people Israel, symbolizing our special destiny as Jews.

4. Like so much of Judaism, Pesah, although a family celebration, is not to be observed in isolation. It is an occasion for families to join with other families and create a community. More than the poor need the rich, the rich need the poor. Let those whose households are too small to absorb all the blessings that God has given them seek out their neighbors and share the bounty with them [Hirsch].
45 The entire population shall give this offering to the prince in Israel. And the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the libations on festivals, new moons, sabbaths—all fixed occasions—of the House of Israel shall be the obligation of the prince; he shall prepare the purification offerings, the grain offerings, the burnt offerings, and the offerings of well-being, to make expiation for the House of Israel.

Thus said the Lord God: On the first day of the first month, you shall take a bull of the herd without blemish, and you shall purify the Sanctuary. The priest shall take some of the blood of the purification offering and apply it to the doorposts of the Temple, to the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and to the doorposts of the gate of the inner court. You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month to purge the Temple from impurity caused by unwitting or ignorant persons.

On the fourteenth day of the first month you shall have the Passover sacrifice; and during a festival of seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. On that day, the prince shall provide a bull of purification offering on behalf of himself and of the entire population; and during the seven days of the festival, he shall provide daily—for seven days—seven bulls and seven rams, without blemish, for a burnt offering to the Lord, and one goat daily for a purification offering. He shall provide a grain offering of an ephah for each bull and an ephah for each ram, with a hin of oil to every ephah.