

Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei 5778

The first half of Parashat Pekudei sets out a full accounting of all the materials that were given for the building of the Mishkan, and what uses were made of all the materials. Following the accounting, the Torah tells us that: *'All the work of the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting, was completed, and the Children of Israel did according to all that G-d had commanded Moshe, so they did'* (Shemot 39:32). Rashi comments: 'And the Children of Israel did the work according to all that G-d had commanded, etc.

This comment of Rashi is quite cryptic. Rashi has added the words "the work" to the basic text of the verse. Why? What extra meaning does this provide? As a general rule, in order to understand Rashi's commentary, we need first to discern the question that Rashi was trying to answer in his commentary. As he told us at the beginning of his Torah commentary (see his comments on Bereishit 3:8 and 3:24), he comes only to give us the plain meaning of the text, and he only does that when he sees some ambiguity in the text or some other reason why an element of the plain meaning of the text might otherwise elude us. What difficulty did Rashi see in this verse, and how does his comment address that difficulty? While others ask "What is bothering Rashi?" I tend to the view that Rashi is not "bothered", and I ask rather "What motivates Rashi" to make the comments that he does.

In order to understand this particular comment, let us turn to three super-commentaries on Rashi, which I bring in chronological order.

Mizrachi – commentary by R' Eliyahu Mizrachi of Constantinople (1450-1525)

Mizrachi says that Rashi is motivated to write his comment lest we misunderstand what is the object of the verb "to do" in the verse. What is it that the Children of Israel did? We might think they did what they were commanded. However, the verse would then have read *the Children of Israel did all that G-d had commanded*. However, the verse instead says *the Children of Israel did according to all that G-d had commanded*. In Hebrew, "according to" is a single letter "kaf". But it makes a substantial difference to Rashi, as interpreted by Mizrachi. It means that "all that G-d had commanded" is not what they did, but *how they did it*. What they did is implied but unstated – it is "the work" – the construction activities – and hence Rashi adds those words. How did they do the work? They did the work by not changing a single iota of detail of G-d's command.

Gur Aryeh – commentary by the Maharal of Prague (1526-1609) The Gur Aryeh comments that Rashi is motivated to comment because the verse has two parts. First we are told that all the work of the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting, was completed, and then we are told that the Children of Israel did according to all that G-d had commanded Moshe. We may therefore erroneously think that there are two separate actions – first the Mishkan was constructed, and then some other action was done according to all that G-d had commanded. To avoid us reaching this incorrect conclusion, Rashi adds the words "the work" to the second half of the verse – to refer us back to the first part of the verse, to tell us that what they did according to all that G-d had commanded was what went immediately before – i.e. the construction of the Mishkan.

Maskil L'David – commentary by R' David Pardo of Sarajevo (1710-1792)

Maskil L'David sees repetition of the words "so they did" at the end of the verse, which already stated that "the Children of Israel did". Rashi is motivated to make his comment because of this repetition, and because the first time it says that *the Children of Israel* did, but the second time the verse says only that *they* did. Rashi wants to explain both these details. So Rashi has added the words "the work", because "the work" has two elements: (a) the work of bringing the materials for the Mishkan, and (b) the work of making the Mishkan, its vessels, and the priestly garments. The work of bringing could be done by all *the Children of Israel*, while the work of making was done only by a smaller group of artisans and craftsmen – referred to as *they* to distinguish the subset. The verse is teaching us both that everything was *brought* as G-d commanded, and that everything was *made* as G-d commanded.

Having discussed what motivated Rashi, I conclude that I was motivated to write this Dvar Torah because I feel that sometimes we do not do Rashi justice – we skip over our learning of Rashi, without delving deeper into its meaning. I have brought here three super-commentaries on Rashi, which I commend to those who want to study Rashi in more depth in their daily and weekly learning. I suggest two further super-commentaries on Rashi: *Divrei David* – commentary by R' David HaLevi Segal of Poland (1586-1667) (The Taz); and *Be'er Yitzhak* – commentary by R' Yitzhak Yehudah Isaac Leib.