

17 – Vayakhel-Pekudei – Outline

Summary Extra Thoughts

1. This is not only the last portion in Exodus, it's also the last portion fully within this spiritual year, as Nissan begins in the middle of next wee
2. The description here of the *making* of the Tabernacle can be thought of as the reverse of the "vision" given to Moses on the mountain
 - a. mountain: furniture, tent, Sabbath commandment
 - b. creating: Sabbath commandment, tent, furniture
3. Near the end of Pekudei we find new, holy clothing, as in Revelation.
4. And so they end a truly momentous year that started in Egypt, progressed to Sinai, and ended with God's indwelling presence

The Passion of the Ba'al Teshuvah

1. The people have a great need to worship – connected to the sin of the golden calf
 - a. but they seem even more eager to worship now
2. The ba'al teshuvah – master of repentance
 - a. a deep thread in Jewish teaching is the ba'al teshuvah, the one who wanders away and comes back in repentance
 - b. the ba'al teshuvah is said to be able to go higher with the Lord than even a tzaddik
 - c. Israel at this point could be dead, and they know that. This brush with death and God's graciousness, even His desire to dwell among them, takes them, like a ba'al teshuvah, from very low to a very high place of great love for God
 - i. they are not the same people that came out of Egypt

Do Not Hesitate in Doing Good

1. There is a finite amount of time open for the people to contribute; they needed to act quickly.
2. The Sages: when a person intends to do a good deed, he or she shouldn't delay
3. Let this be a reminder to us that we are only given a certain amount of time to be the Lord's hands and feet in this place
 - a. and if we give our life away here, the more of an adventure we're going to have!

"Vayakhel" – "And He Assembled"

1. has "kahal" in it, the word that is translated later as "church"
2. again, we're being pointed toward unification at the end, as in "Ki Tisa," "when you lift" the head to reckon those among the nation of Israel
3. in the same way that we underestimate the power of the mo'edim to unite, we also underestimate the power of the Temple to unite
 - a. people from around the world will be drawn to the Holy Land, to the Holy City, to the Holy Temple, and they will be drawn together in their experience

- b. when Israel is drawn back together after the Babylonian-Persian exiles, what brings them together is the rebuilding of the Temple, which was a vision given to Cyrus, King of Persia
- c. even today, the Jews do not consider the exile of Rome to be over until the Temple is rebuilt

Maturity and the “Word”

1. first sentence of the portion: “Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, ‘These are the words that the LORD has commanded you to do’ (Exodus 35:1)
 - a. the phrasing brings us back to Genesis 1, where God created with his words
 - b. maturity is not God speaking and creation coming forth; maturity is God speaking to His bride and working with her to bring forth the creation; that’s what’s happening now, with these redeemed people
 - i. the physical fruit of their first year of redemption is the Tabernacle
 1. the Tabernacle is the archetype of the fruit of redemption
 - ii. we need to be looking for tangible fruit in our lives as evidence that we are growing
 1. receiving the vision is one thing, insight, understanding, knowledge are one thing, but the goal is the doing
 - a. this is why so much space is being given over to this reflection of the vision given to Moses – each detail says, “They followed through according to the vision.”

“Pekudei” – “Accountings”

1. it’s the idea of “here’s what ended up happening in the end,” from the verse that begins the summary of the amounts of gold, silver, and bronze used in constructing the Tabernacle
2. this is what we should expect here, but we need to be careful
 - a. counting is a kind of hemming in, a summing up in numbers; there’s a deep grounding in physicality here
 - i. this construction of a finite form is actually the gift of the bride, who makes the body for the infinite spirit to dwell in
 - b. but we need to be careful that we don’t look at the final physical form and fail to see the spiritual it contains; we need to be careful with numbering and labeling people
 - i. illustration: the pouring out of contributions for the making of the Tabernacle was a deeply spiritual action – linked to hearts overflowing with gratitude and love for the God who had spared them, and linked to the great news that God wants to even dwell with them, and they will have a kosher way to worship Him
 1. all of this is reduced to numbers – talents and shekels of gold, silver, and bronze

- a. these numbers have a lot of significance, but on the surface, they just look like numbers
- c. there is a connection to this counting and death
 - i. death is also to be expected at the end
 - ii. the idea of hemming in, reducing to a finite form, is the idea of “curse”
 - 1. “blessing” is the opposite, the idea of the extending of walls
 - iii. one word for “curse” and the word for “female” come from the same root: N-K-V
 - 1. are women cursed because they are able to give a fixed form? God forbid!
 - 2. what women do is of God, Who wants us to bring forth the final form, but we must not treat that final form as if it is all there is
- d. a main point here: we need to be very careful with reducing people down to an adjective or a political party or a gender choice, as weighty as such a choice is
 - i. we note these things, and we stay rooted in the truth of Torah, but we also acknowledge that a person is much more than any given characteristic or choice
 - ii. in Yeshua’s time, the crucified person was summarized by their crime written on a sign: “Rebellion” or “Thievery,” their whole lives being summed up by their fatal mistake
 - 1. for Yeshua, this was “King of the Jews,” which might be accurate, but is still an aspect of the curse that He took on, since it is not at all appropriate to sum up His life with a few words
- 3. Why does the Torah give this accounting here in Pekudei?
 - a. we are seeing the final form, the goal
 - b. also, when the final form presents itself, we are removed from this life, and we must then stand before the Judge and give an accounting of our lives
 - i. thankfully, the One Who judges us is not a human; His vision is much better!

Get Moving!

- 1. this time of year is prone to depression, which is a paradox since Adar is to be our time of greatest joy
 - a. spiritual coldness at this time
- 2. Israel, too, could slide into depression here, but they don’t
 - a. God gives them a task, the building of the Tabernacle, and this gets them “moving” again
- 3. R’Akiva Tatz teaches about depression
 - a. depression results when the pathways before us seem to have closed down (a business dies, a marriage ends), and the way forward is obscured
 - i. we can be frozen, afraid to try another path
 - ii. our bodies reflect what’s going on inside, and our body’s reaction to this lack of inner vision is the obscuring of our outer vision: crying

- b. the antidote to depression is to GET MOVING, even if you don't know where you're going
 - i. and God may come along and carry you a bit
 - ii. story of Rav Hanina Mendosa and the rock at the Temple
(https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2501950/jewish/Building-the-Mishkan.htm 21m)

Reflections on the Laver

1. the basin of water for washing made from the donated mirrors of the women
2. the mirror is associated with ego and self-focus, so this is a giving up of ego
 - a. what's beautiful is that in the surrender of ego and self-focus is the cleansing of others, as with Yeshua's surrender of His life which cleanses all of us
3. the laver, being the priests' first stop (to wash their hands and feet) has a special seed-like quality to it; we can learn from it about the Tabernacle in general
 - a. the Tabernacle in general is highly "reflective," as we are told in Hebrews that Moses is told to make it strictly according to the plan shown him on the mountain because it reflects the heavenly Tabernacle
 - i. since we, too, are Tabernacles, are we acting to "reflect" the upper realm? If the upper realm is described as a place of unity, are we *acting* down here to be in unity with others?

Decorating Advice

1. R'Raskin brings from R'Schneerson that in order to bring the "aura" of the Temple into our homes, each home should have a siddur, a Chumash, and a charity box
 - a. and this is also true of a baby's room; it should be decorated with a siddur, a Chumash, a charity box
- b. these are representative of prayer, Torah study, and good deeds, and these are at the root of the activities at the Temple

Yeshua

1. Vayakhel – Yeshua first gathers together a kahal, a church
 - a. there is a limited time to contribute to the building of the church
2. Pekudei – finally, there is an accounting
 - a. Yeshua is the Judge
 - i. From Acts 10: "They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day...And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead."
 - ii. From Matthew 25: ""When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." (Matthew 25:31-42)

- iii. From John 5: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” (John 5:21-30)

Joshua 13-14

1. Ch. 13: the description of the territories east of the Jordan given to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manassah. Ch. 14: includes the story of how faithful and wholehearted Caleb gets Joshua’s blessing to go and take a special inheritance, the city of Chevron
2. we should keep in mind that these allotted territories are meant to reflect each tribe’s character; the dividing up of the Land is being divinely influenced
 - a. what does this mean for the tribes that settle east of the Jordan
 - i. the land somehow “suits” them
 - ii. we could be critical of them, but Moses doesn’t criticize them
 - iii. we could see them as being brave to be on the flank, not safely surrounded by other tribes
 - b. these tribes all have something in common: they are first sons of their mothers
 - i. Reuben from Leah, Gad from Zilpah, Manassah from Joseph’s wife (and thus, Rachel), eventually Gad from Bilhah
 - ii. God puts a little something extra in the soul of firstborns to protect the family, even if that means endangering themselves

Chazak, chazak, v’nit chazek!

17 – Vayakhel-Pekudei—Script (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called Spiritual Seasons. In this series, we are exploring the Torah portions in the light of the spiritual calendar, drawing out connections between each portion and the spiritual season of the year in which we read it. Today we are in the double portion of Vayakhel and Pekudei, the final 6 chapters of Exodus starting in chapter 35. In recent teachings, we have been focusing on how the portions we are reading now in the month of Adar connect with and help to support our highest point of development in the whole year. The calendar will soon start over with Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the first month. Nissan begins next week on Wednesday night. So this final portion in Exodus is actually the last portion that is fully within this spiritual year. We've come to the end. And what a glorious double portion this is.

Summary

Let's summarize the portion now. Vayakhel follows the interruption of the golden calf and its aftermath and Moses' intercession for Israel. It begins with Moses gathering the people together into a kahal, an assembly. He first reiterates to them the commandment to rest on the Sabbath. He then tells them what is needed for the construction of the Tabernacle. 35:20 says, "Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the LORD's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments" (Exodus 35:20-21). As they begin working, the people keep bringing more every morning until they have to be told to stop because they have more than enough.

The work progresses under the leadership of Bezalel and Oholiav. Interestingly, the order of how the Tabernacle is created here is something like the reverse of the vision God gave Moses on the mountain. God begins with the furniture, proceeds to the tent, itself, and finishes with the repetition of the Sabbath. In this portion, Moses begins with the Sabbath, then the people create first the tent itself, including the curtains and coverings and clasps and frames, followed by the furniture, starting with the ark. We'll mention this idea again later.

Portion Pekudei begins with an accounting of all the weights of gold, silver, and bronze used in the construction of the Tabernacle. Pekudei then goes on to describe the making of the clothing for the priesthood. It's interesting that at the end comes new clothing, holy clothing, which is something we also see in the book of Revelation.

When all is finished, the people bring everything to Moses, and Moses sees what they have done. And this is the very special verse that describes that moment: "And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them." (Exodus 39:43)

God then speaks to Moses, telling him to set up the Tabernacle and inaugurate Aaron and his sons on the first of Nissan. Moses does so on the first day of the second year. And the glory of the Lord fills the Tabernacle with His presence in a mighty way.

And so the people of Israel put behind them one of the most momentous years any people have ever had in the history of the planet. It started in Egypt with the finishing of the plagues, proceeded to the foot of Mt. Sinai where they saw the God of the Universe come down on a mountain like fire, and finished with God drawing yet nearer to them, dwelling in their midst in a home that they had constructed with their own hands. It was a year for the ages. And yet...every bit of it is showing us what WE walk through EVERY YEAR, too, because we walk in the footsteps of Israel, because we, too, are Israel.

The Passion of the Ba'al Teshuvah

One reason I really like this portion is that you can see the people are so eager to worship God. They have this great need within them to worship. This was at the root of the golden calf incident, but I think it has increased here. And Moses, in giving the instructions for the Tabernacle, is giving them the pathway for doing that, the kosher pathway.

But there's a special kind of passion here that we can see in their contributions and in their taking upon themselves this work. It's a passion that comes from a brush with death. It's a passion that comes from not knowing if they would live or die, only to have God extend the hand of forgiveness to them in the end. It's the passion of the ba'al teshuvah, the one who has wandered away, has ended up in the pit, and has returned, and has been embraced with a welcome back that he didn't deserve.

There is a deep thread in Jewish teaching about the lost one who returns, the ba'al teshuvah who is like the prodigal son in Yeshua's parable. Over time, many Jewish teachers have recognized that, in many ways, the one who goes astray and returns can go EVEN HIGHER WITH THE LORD than the one who never strayed, and we see references to this idea in the Apostolic Scriptures, even directly in Yeshua's words. The Jewish Sages also say that receiving that grace fills us with a love for God that touches us so deeply that this love goes beyond even the love a tzaddik is capable of, a righteous one. The people who a short time ago had fashioned an idol and who were disciplined harshly are now being given the opportunity to use their own hands to express their regret and their thankfulness for God's forgiveness and their desire to know Him better and have Him live among them in a special way. They could be dead. But instead, they get to use their living hands to bring their Creator to earth, and this fills them with a passion. You can see why they are so eager to contribute their precious things to the work. What good would any of that stuff have been if they were all lying there cold and lifeless, becoming food for the wild animals?

It's a beautiful portion that just sings of giving and unity and the sweetness of having arrived at a place of healing together. It's a stunning reversal, a great light that shines out of the darkness of Egypt. These chapters in Exodus have always been some of my favorites in the Bible.

So, this is a different people who are filled with the passion of returning to life.

Do Not Hesitate in Doing Good

I want to make one quick second point here before turning to connecting this portion to the calendar. There is a finite amount of time open for the people to contribute here. They needed to be quick if their contribution was to be accepted and, in the end, counted among the offerings used in the Tabernacle. The Sages say that when a person intends to do a good deed, he or she shouldn't delay. Be quick about it. And we see a verse like that in Romans, Romans 12:11. Let this week's portion be a reminder to us that we are only given a certain amount of time to be the Lord's hands and feet in this place. Not only that, but the more we give our life away here, the more of an adventure we're going to have!

“Vayakhel” – “And He Gathered”

As we turn now to doing a little work to place this portion in the calendar more directly, I'd like to take a look at the two names “Vayakhel” and “Pekudei.”

“Vayakhel” means “And he assembled.” You can hear the word “kahal” in “vayakhel,” and Grant often used the word “kahal” in place of the word “church.” A church is an assembly, a gathered group. Again, the title of the portion is pointing us toward the unification that is such a strong characteristic of the end of the cycle. We see here an echo of the last portion, Ki Tisa, which means “when you lift,” talking about the census, being counted as part of the body of Israel.

We spoke last week about how we underestimate the power of the mo'edim to set a rhythm and unite people together. Eventually the whole world will pulse with the heartbeat of the mo'edim. In the same way that especially Gentile Believers tend to underestimate the power of the mo'edim, we also tend to underestimate the POWER OF THE TEMPLE to unite people, to unite the world. What a powerful thing it is to have a physical place like Israel that all people will recognize as holy. In the future, people from around the world will get off a plane at Ben Gurion and be especially conscious that they are in a land that is set aside as none other is, holy. And even more, with gifts in hand, these pilgrims will travel by train and by bus and by car to one place, Jerusalem. And as they crest some hill or other, they will catch their first glimpse of a fully restored Temple gleaming on the Temple mount, with smoke rising from the courtyard. And as they approach, they will be drawn together in the moment, drawn to the others who are sharing the moment with them, peoples from all cultures and languages, as they ascend the steps. They will feel it in the depths of their soul that they are in the Holy Land, among the holy people who speak the holy tongue, and now they are at the holiest place of all, where God has chosen to put His name.

Let me just pause here to ask a seemingly unrelated question: “What ended the Babylonian and Persian exile? The Land had its rest, yes. But there's a central point around which the nation is gathered together, and what they are coalescing around is clear from the very beginning before a single Jew sets foot on the way back to Jerusalem. Here is what it says at the beginning of Ezra: “...the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to BUILD HIM A HOUSE AT JERUSALEM, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you OF ALL HIS PEOPLE,

may his God be with him, and LET HIM GO UP TO JERUSALEM, which is in Judah, and rEBUILD THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, the God of Israel—He is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”” (Ezra 1:1-4)

Do you see how God is reuniting His dispersed people? It is through the rebuilding of the Temple. And so it is that the Jewish people consider themselves to still be in exile even though the nation of Israel has been reconstituted in the Land. They will not consider this millenia-long Roman exile to be over until they have rebuilt the Temple. It has a critical role in uniting them.

Let me slip in a quick point here about including people who are a bit different among us. We're seeing a backlash now against the woke call to inclusion that is demanding everyone accept and approve of every kind of moral degeneracy. They use this word "inclusion" a lot. As we push back against this madness, we need to be careful that we still make it a priority to welcome into our communities those dealing with mental and physical handicaps. We must not overreact against the word "inclusion." Believers, in particular, should be marked by the compassion we show to the most vulnerable. Let's redouble our efforts to invite and welcome in these lovely souls.

Let's continue moving forward now. As we continue making connections here to the calendar, there's a little something hidden in the very first sentence that I find to be beautiful and which teaches us about an aspect of maturity. What is Moses gathering the people for in this portion? We know it's to build the Tabernacle, but listen to the exact wording of the sentence: "Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, 'These are the words that the LORD has commanded you to do' (Exodus 35:1). "These are the WORDS, the "devarim," that God has commanded you to do." This phrasing takes us all the way back to the beginning, to Genesis 1, where God creates by His words. But it's different here because this moment is a higher state of development for the creation. God's overall goal is not to speak and create as at the beginning, BUT TO SPEAK TO MANKIND AND LET MANKIND WORK TOGETHER WITH HIM TO BRING FORTH CREATION. This is maturity. With immaturity, God speaks and it happens. With maturity, God speaks to His bride, and the bride gives of herself to bring forth that creation, that fruit. His words are the seeds that she gives a body to.

And this physical fruit that reflects spiritual growth is something we should see at the end of the cycle. And so we are to see in this Tabernacle not just God's home and a place to draw near to Him and worship Him; it's also the physical fruit of a year of walking with Him. The Tabernacle IS THE ARCHETYPE OF THE FRUIT OF REDEMPTION IN OUR LIVES. Let me repeat that: the Tabernacle is the archetype of the fruit of redemption in our lives. You want to know what it looks like to produce good fruit? One important place to look is the tabernacle, especially these portions here that end the book of Exodus and end the cycle of months.

And we need to be looking for tangible fruit in our lives as evidence that we are growing. We need to be seeing physical fruit in our lives. Receiving the vision is one thing, but wholeness is

found in the doing of the vision exactly according to the vision. Insight, understanding, knowledge – these are good, and they are necessary beginning points for godly action. But insight is useless without the doing. I think this is why we’re seeing all of this description of the Tabernacle repeated. God is giving over a lot of precious space in His Torah to this repetition. First God gives the vision to Moses on the mountain. But the real goal is the REFLECTION down below in the physical world of action. So we see a kind of mirror image happening here with the order, a reflected image. The vision on the mountain is furniture, tent, Shabbat commandment, and the mirror image below is Shabbat commandment, tent, furniture. It’s the same, just reversed, and that’s what happens with a mirror reflection.

“Pekudei” – “Accountings”

Let’s skip forward now to “Pekudei.” “Pekudei” means “accountings” or “records.” It’s the idea of “here’s what ended up happening in the end.” It comes from the verse that begins the summary of the amount of gold, silver, and bronze they ended up using. The verse begins: “These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony...” (Exodus 38:21).

On the one hand, there is a sense that this summary of metals used is exactly what we should expect at this point according to the salvation pattern, but on the other hand, we need to be quite careful when counting anything, particularly people. As Grant has taught us, counting people is best left to God. Why is that? Counting is a little bit like hemming something in with a fixed quantity, reducing something to a number. And that’s quite tricky. It requires a very deep knowledge to do that.

Now, this kind of reduction to a fixed form is actually the gift of the bride, the woman who crafts within herself the physical body to be the home for the spirit of a child. The bride’s job is to take the spiritual and bring it into the physical realm by giving it this fixed form. This requires paring down the millions of possible physical forms to just the right one for that spirit. So, the idea of fixing something in the physical is, in a way, the goal of the whole pattern, the end point, what the bride is made to do.

But on the other hand, we must be extremely careful with numbering things and labeling things. We can never forget that the physical form is just the tip of the iceberg, the part we can see. The spirit of a person is vast and multifaceted. So we have to be in the business of seeing the outside but also looking deeper into the spirit of a person.

Let me illustrate this idea by speaking to what’s happening here in this Torah portion. What the people of Israel did when Moses asked for contributions was to give from their hearts. It was a SPIRITUAL act as their hearts overflowed with gratitude and love for God. They sense that they almost perished because God was angry with them, but God decided to spare them, and now Moses comes with the wonderful news that God wants them to build a home so He can live among them and travel with them, a place for them to worship Him. So they pour out their hearts of gratitude with contributions. And here in Pekudei, this complex spiritual act gets translated into 29 talents and 730 shekels of gold, a hundred talents and 1,775 shekels of silver, and 70 talents and 2,400 shekels of bronze. Do you feel what’s happened there? This soaring

act connected to God's grace and the people's sorrow and joy and repentance and hope for the future is reduced to so many talents and shekels of these three metals. Now there is a great depth of meaning in these numbers, but on the surface, it just looks like numbers.

Clearly, since this is the Torah, this is what is good and right to do in this moment, this summary, this accounting. But there's some kind of close connection here to death, as well, which is also to be expected at the end of the cycle. The idea of hemming something in, putting it into a box, is related to the idea of "curse" in the Bible. The opposite of curse is blessing. When we are blessed, we have to widen our tents. We expand. We are not confined. When we are cursed, we are trapped in fixed walls that can't move. And so we see in Hebrew that one word for "curse" and the word for "female" are from the same root, "nakav." The idea of "curse" and "female" are connected. Does this mean that the bride is cursed or that women are the source of curse because they're in the business of providing a fixed physical form? God forbid!

I think what's going on here is that in the end, we human beings reach a final tangible form, and that's good. That's what God wants. But on the other hand, WE CAN NEVER TREAT THAT FINAL FORM AS IF IT IS ALL THERE IS. When we do that, we are reducing the spiritual to the merely physical, and that's deadly. We humans are given the challenge of constantly seeing only the physical but always needing to see beyond to the spiritual source. We are to use the physical only as a beginning point for understanding.

Here is one of the points I'm driving at in this discussion. If the previous discussion was a bit much, just listen to this point. We need to be very careful with reducing people down to an adjective or a political party or a gender choice, as weighty for a person's life and our whole society as such a choice is. Yes, we can make note of someone's worldview and whatever characteristics we can see and whatever choices they are making that we can see; we NEED TO take note of these things, and when such choices don't agree with Torah, we stand firm in that judgment. But at the same time, WE ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT A PERSON IS MUCH MORE THAN ANY GIVEN CHARACTERISTIC OR CHOICE. We lose the ability to communicate with someone when we reduce a human made in God's image to a stub, a few words or a label in our minds. This reductionism is not God's way.

In Yeshua's time, when someone was crucified, they reduced the convicted person to the title of the crime. They wrote this crime on a sign. Maybe the sign said "Rebellion" or "Thievery." Their life was summed up by that fatal mistake; the whole complexity of their life, both the good and the bad they did in life, were reduced to their crime. For Yeshua, this crime was described as "King of the Jews." It was accurate, but even this was an aspect of the curse He bore on that day. He's more than that, and it's an insult to put a label on the Messiah that's meant to be the summation of a life, to put Him in the box of those few words composed of a few letters.

So, why does the Torah do this here in this portion? Why is the last portion of Exodus named "Pekudei," "accounting?" Well, as we said before, what comes at the end is the final form. And

this is as it is supposed to be; it is the goal. And when the final form is revealed, we are removed from this life, and we have to give an accounting. We are judged. We can replace the translation “accounting” here for “pekudei” with the word “judgment.” And the good news here is that the Judge is not a human being. As we have been saying, human beings have to tread very lightly in this area because our vision is so limited. But the One Who judges at the end is beyond humanity, and praise the Lord for that. Ultimately, we will all have to stand before the King and give an accounting for what actually ended up happening in this life. And as Grant would often say, that’s not just a bad thing. The word “judgment” is neutral. On the one hand, our judgment will be the basis for regret when we see how much more we could have done had we only had the faith for it. But on the other hand, the judgment is also the basis for our reward. We can be encouraged that though humanity struggles with judgment, God judges perfectly. Let’s let Pekudei be a reminder to us today that very near the end comes a judgment, an accounting of what happened.

Get Moving!

I’d like to make one more point connected to the calendar here. One of the paradoxes of Adar is that scientists say we are very prone to depression at this time of year, yet Purim and Adar in general are meant to be the season of greatest joy in the whole year. In some places, the winter is just dragging on. And we can just be exhausted. Spiritual coldness is a danger here.

Israel, too, could have fallen into a kind of depression at this point in the story. After the incident of the golden calf, the people hear through Moses that God called them a stiff-necked people, and they mourn over that. In chapter 33 it says, ““When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward” (Exodus 33:4-6).

There is a heaviness that comes upon the people here that they don’t completely shake off. It sounds like they don’t put their jewelry back on for 40 years. But it’s one thing to take a lesson as they do here, and it’s something else to sink into depression.

R’Akiva Tatz teaches that depression results when all the pathways before us seem to have closed down. All the time and energy and hope we had invested in a certain pathway suddenly came to nothing. And the path forward is obscure. And why should we even try again if the path can end so suddenly like that? And he makes the beautiful point that our bodily reaction to this lack of inner vision is to flood our eyes with water. We cry. Our inner vision is obscured, and so our outer vision is also obscured.

And he says that what we must do eventually is get moving, and that is what Israel does here. Even if we don’t know where we are going, we start going anyway. Where will they end up in this journey with God? They can’t see that at this point, but they start doing anyway. He gives them the task of making a home for Him, and this is a gift. He gives them a short-term goal:

create something intricate and beautiful with your hands. Work together to do it. In faith that you will live and not die, in faith that there are great blessings in store, in faith that healing will come, start doing. Don't sit just because you don't know where to go or you're too afraid to choose another path. Go anyway. Start moving and ask where you're going later. And you just might find that God will step near to you.

R'Aaron Raskin tells the story of Rav Hanina Mendosa. He was once on the way to the Holy Temple. But he was a very poor man. And he sees how the Jews around him are bringing these beautiful fat cows and sheep for sacrifices. And he knows he can't do that. But he didn't just leave, dejected. He went to the outskirts of town and found there a huge, beautiful white stone. And he thinks, "This would be wonderful on the Temple grounds." He doesn't think about how he would get it there. He just starts carving it with decorations. And when he thinks it is complete and befitting for the Holy Temple, he looks for some porters to help transport the stone. He sees a group of 5 porters, and he says, "Fellas, I need your help." "What do you want?" they say. "I need your help to move this to the Temple." They say, "Sure, for 50 shekels we'll do it." "50 shekels? You outa your mind? How about 5 shekels?" "5 shekels? No way?" And they leave him standing next to this stone that he has put so much work into. A moment later, he turns around and sees 5 men standing there. He calls them over and explains the situation and says, "Can I offer you 5 shekels?" "Yeah, we'll take 5 shekels. We'll shlep it for you to the Temple. But you have to put at least one finger on the stone." He says sure. He puts his finger on the stone, and the next thing he knows, in the blink of an eye, he's standing in the middle of the Holy Temple. He turns around to pay the men, and they had vanished. So he goes to the Sanhedrin and tells them the story, and they decide that he was helped by angels.

(https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2501950/jewish/Building-the-Mishkan.htm 21m)

I'm not sure why I like that story so much. But one thing we can take from it today is that sitting down and doing nothing isn't an option. Do something, even if you're not quite sure where that road is taking you. And your spirits will be lifted. And you just might be surprised how God will come along and carry you when you need it because you stepped out in faith to honor Him.

Reflections on the Laver

I want to zoom in now on one particular item, the laver, or "kiyor." It's made from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the tent. And so there are some who make the lovely point that the surrender of these mirrors is like a releasing of ego and self-focus. Obviously a mirror is used to see yourself. The fact that these have been melted down and now hold the water for cleansing the priests is a kind of poetry connecting surrender of self to the cleansing of others, which sounds a lot like Yeshua. Let me say it again: in the laver made of donated mirrors, we see the surrender of self that leads to the cleansing of others.

Let me add one more point about this laver. There's something special about this vessel because the service of the priesthood begins here. It's the first stop. They must wash their hands and feet here before they go about doing other business in the mishkan. So the laver has a special first quality to it, and firstness is like the seed that contains the rest. The laver has something to teach us about the whole Tabernacle, and it's made of mirrors.

The Tabernacle as a whole is especially reflective. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the reason God impresses upon Moses so strongly that it must be made exactly according to the pattern shown him on the mountain is that it is a reflection of the heavenly Tabernacle, and the High Priest Who ministers at the heavenly Tabernacle is Yeshua. The water in the laver is literally reflective, and the base is made from mirrors. And the whole of the Tabernacle is especially clearly reflecting the upper realm, the heavenly Tabernacle.

And of course we know that, we, too, are Temples of God's Spirit. So the application here is that we, too, are to be reflecting the upper realm. We also must follow God's description of the true reality to the tee. If God shows us that the true reality above is unity within a body, then WHAT ARE WE DOING DOWN HERE TO ACCURATELY REFLECT THAT? Let's be about the business of community and connection and self-sacrifice. That's how we become accurate mirrors.

Decorating Advice

The last point I want to make for these portions today comes from R'Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, again through R'Raskin. R'Schneerson gives a little practical decorating advice. He requested that in order to bring the aura of the Temple into each home, in order to make each home into a miniature sanctuary, each home should have a prayer book, a book of the Torah, and a charity box. These three are connected to prayer, Torah study, and the fulfillment of the commandments, good deeds. And especially in children's rooms, from the moment they are born, these three should decorate the room to bring in as early as possible the ethos of the Temple, that they be surrounded with this scent of the Temple. And more than decorations in the home, these should be USED for prayer and for Torah study and for good deeds. (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2501950/jewish/Building-the-Mishkan.htm 19:45)

Yeshua

Let's turn now to a view of Yeshua in the light of this conversation today and bring out another idea connected to the calendar, the end of the cycle. We've been making some connections to Yeshua along the way here. But I want to return to the names of this double portion, Vayakhel and Pekudei, meaning "and he assembled" and "accountings." In Yeshua, we are first gathered into a people, like "vayakhel," a kahal, a church, an unlikely gathering from around the world. And we are given a period of time to contribute, to do our part in building His kahal. And then He returns, and there is an accounting, pekudei. There is an accounting for what we did in this life. And who is the Judge? Yeshua is the Judge. Yeshua, having lived a human life, knows what it is like to be a human being. We don't always think of Yeshua as the Judge, the One Who oversees the accounting that comes at the end. But Yeshua is very clearly connected to this moment in Scripture. So let me just take a moment to read out some of these verses that describe Yeshua as the Judge Who oversees the accounting of what we did with the precious time we were given here:

From Acts 10: “They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him on the third day...And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.”

From Matthew 25: ““When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.” (Matthew 25:31-42)

From John 5: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” (John 5:21-30)

Joshua 13-14

Lastly, let's turn to Joshua chapters 13 and 14. We read in these chapters first the description of the territories east of the Jordan given to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manassah. In Chapter 14, we also read the story of how faithful and wholehearted Caleb gets Joshua's blessing to go and take a special inheritance, the city of Chevron.

As we begin to see the territories being portioned out to the tribes, we should keep in mind that this whole process of dividing up the Land is being divinely influenced. Though I wouldn't be able to explain how this works for each tribe, what we know must be the case is that every tribe's allotted territory somehow reflects the inner character of that tribe.

If that's the case, the big question here is what does it mean that several tribes settle east of the Jordan? Well, from their original proposition to Moses, we know that they recognized that the land suited them there. It suited their livestock, for one thing.

I think there's probably room to criticize these tribes, at least Reuben and Gad. We don't really have a record of Manassah requesting to settle on the east side, so splitting Manassah may have been done partly as a way to keep the two sides connected.

But rather than criticize them today, I'm going to note that Moses doesn't disapprove, at least not after they say they're willing to cross over and help to fight for the Land. I'm going to say today that the eastern tribes actually did something brave because they put themselves out there on the flank. A tribe would feel safer if its territory was mostly surrounded by other Jewish tribes. But these tribes bravely decided that they could act as the buffer.

And there's something that these tribes on the east all have in common that speaks, I think, to that braveness and that role of protector. What do they have in common? They're all first sons of their mother: Reuben from Leah, Gad from Zilpah, Manassah from Joseph's wife, and so Manassah is a descendent of Rachel. And there's just one of Jacob's wives missing from the east side. Who was the first son of Bilhah? It was Dan. And where does Dan end up migrating to? At

least some of them end up in the far northeast, near Mt. Hermon, again east of the Jordan. So all four of them are first sons of their mother, and each of the four is from one of Jacob's wives.

What does it mean? I think it means that God puts a little something extra in the soul of firstborns to protect the family, even if that means they endanger themselves. Somehow those eastern lands were calling to these four because they were suited to them. I'm sure there's much more going on there. We can rest assured that no detail of Israel's history happens by accident or coincidence.

Well, we'll leave it there for today. May God forge us into a deeply united people, a people that is quick to do good while we have the opportunity, a people that has one eye always looking to that time when we will give an accounting before the Judge. And may He make us into the people He wants us to be.

And we say together at the end of a book of Torah, "Chazak, chazak, v'nit chazek!" "Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!"