

In this week's Parasha, the mishkan finally is finished. First the finished materials are brought to Moshe, and as is says in the last two verses of Chapter 39 of Exodus:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּן עֲשׂוֹ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל־הָעֲבֹדָה :

Just as ה, had commanded Moses, so the Israelites had done all the work.

וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כָּל־הַמְּלָאכָה וְהִנֵּה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה בְּן עֲשׂוֹ וַיְבָרַךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה : {פ}

And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks—as יהוה had commanded, so they had done—Moses blessed them.

Most of Chapter 40 then described how each of the materials were placed, setting up the physical structure of the mishkan, the tabernacle. Then, after 32.5 verses of set-up, Moshe stops, and retreats. As it says in verses 33-35:

וַיֵּכַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמְּלָאכָה : {פ}

When Moses had finished the work,

וַיִּכַס הָעֲנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּכְבֹּד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן :

the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of יהוה filled the Tabernacle.

וְלֹא־יָכַל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי־שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעֲנָן וַיִּכְבֹּד ה' מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן :

Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of ה' filled the Tabernacle.

There are several notable things about the inauguration of the mishkan. First of all, the blessing Moshe gives to the people when they bring the materials. Rashi says he blesses them: “May it be the will of God that His Shechinah rest upon the work of your hands. . .”

But Rabbi Dr. Erin Leib Smokler points out, it's kind of a redundant blessing – “a mere repetition of God's opening guarantee regarding the Tabernacle.” But she quotes a Chassidic commentator, the Ktav Sofer, who suggests that may it be Your will, is directed at the people rather than God – that the people should remember the purpose of this sacred task. She writes, “Lost in the details or awed by the majesty before them, there was much in the process that might have taken bnei yisrael away from its core aim: to create space for God to dwell amongst them. So Moshe subtly, but ever so effectively, draws his people back to the essence of

their mission just before it is to be fully realized. He calls them back to attention; beckons them to keep God close at hand. For Moshe understood a great irony-- that sometimes we can lose God when trying so hard to come close to God."

The project could only be fulfilled in its holiness when the people *stopped* the work, and made space for God to enter.

In his dvar torah for the Hadar institute this week, Rabbi David Kasher notes the many parallels between the verbs used in Bereshit at the beginning Chapter 2, describing the end of creation and the first Shabbat, and the verbs in this Parashat. The end of the creation narrative is:

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: {פ}

And God saw all that had been made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

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וַיִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם:

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array.

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken: [God] ceased on the seventh day from doing any of the work.

וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּו שָׁבַת מְכַל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: {פ}

And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—having ceased on it from all the work of creation that God had done.

Both the finishing of god's creation and the finishing human's creation involved the verbs of seeing, stopping labor, holiness and blessing.

And it is only when Moshe stops the work that the presence of Hashem comes and fills the mishkan. This reminded me of a dvar Torah I read two weeks ago about Parashat Ki Tissa. Rabbi Andrea Goldstein noted that the key difference between the Golden Calf, as a collective creative project and the building of the

mishkan was not just that one was commanded by God and one was idolatrous, but that, as she put it: “for all its specificity and beauty, the Mishkan was largely a structure made up of empty spaces. Yes, the table, lampstand, and altar were all important. However, the Mishkan and the courtyard surrounding it were dominated by a sense of spaciousness. Rabbi Shefa Gold teaches that the most sacred part of the Mishkan, the Holy of Holies, was empty of all furnishings, save the Ark, precisely so that space for God could exist. In contrast, the Calf was solid, existing, in Gold’s words, “only of and for itself.” It left no room to encounter the Divine ([Torah Journeys](#), 91).

I would argue that the spaciousness and openness of the Mishkan was the source of its holiness. The Polish Chasidic master, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787–1859), teaches that each of us is to build our own *mikdash me’at*, our own small sanctuary, within the recesses of our hearts (quoted in *Itturei Torah*). If we do, then God will dwell with us, no matter where we are.”

We see that emptiness in the moment when the mishkan is inaugurated by Moshe’s stepping away and making room for the presence of God to rush in.

It’s the same moment I try to create when, at candlelighting, I ask you to take a deep exhale, to make some room inside to take in the light of shabbat.

If we want to create holiness, if we want to shabbat, we must leave some empty space.