

PARASHOT VAYAKHEL-PEKUDEI

This shiur is dedicated le-zekher nishmot Amelia Ray and Morris Ray upon the occasion of their fifth yahrzeits by their children.

The Parokhet of the Kodesh and the Parokhet of the Screen
By Rav Amnon Bazak

A. Concealment

Sefer Shemot ends with a description of the establishment of the Mishkan, and the Torah then repeats all of the details of its construction, as well as that of its vessels. As in other repetitions in the Torah, we find some significant differences between the account we read here and what we read in the previous parashot. Our shiur will focus on the parokhet, which separates between the Kodesh (Sanctuary) and the Kodesh Kodashim (the Holy of Holies), and the differences between the two texts with regard to it.

Let us begin with the contradiction pertaining to the order of activities in establishing the Mishkan. Was the Ark first placed in the Kodesh Kodashim, and then the parokhet spread to separate it, or was the parokhet spread first, with the Ark placed inside only afterwards?

In Parashat Teruma we read:

And you shall make a parokhet of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen... And you shall hang up the parokhet under the clasps, and shall bring there inside of the parokhet the Ark of Testimony, so the parokhet will divide for you between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim. And you shall put the covering upon the Ark of Testimony in the Kodesh Kodashim. And you shall set the Table outside of the parokhet, and the Menora over against the Table on the side of the Mishkan towards the south; and you shall put the Table on the northern side. (26:31-35)

The text tells us that first the parokhet is put in place, then the Ark of Testimony is brought into the Kodesh Kodashim ("inside of the parokhet"), and finally the covering (kaporet) is placed over the Ark.

However, in the account of the actual execution of the command in our parasha, there is a significant discrepancy. We find this first at the stage of the command:

On the first day of the first month you shall put up the Mishkan, the Tent of Meeting. And you shall place there the Ark of Testimony and screen the Ark with the parokhet. (40:2-3)

This suggests that Moshe must first place the Ark and only then create a screen for it by hanging the parokhet. Indeed, we find when the command is carried out:

He took and placed the Testimony in the Ark, and he set the staves on the Ark, and placed the covering above, upon the Ark. And he brought the Ark into the Mishkan and set up the parokhet screen and screened the Ark of Testimony, as God had commanded Moshe. (20-21)

This tells us that Moshe first put the covering upon the Ark and put the Ark in its place, and only afterwards hung the parokhet.

How are we to reconcile this contradiction? The Ramban (commenting on 26:33-34) maintains that the first part of the description of the process in Parashat Teruma ("And you shall hang up the parokhet under the clasps, and shall bring there inside of the parokhet the Ark of Testimony...") is not intended to establish the order of the various actions, but rather to explain the purpose of the parokhet:

He did not command now [in Parashat Teruma] that Moshe should follow this order... Rather, the point was that the text commands that the parokhet be hung under the clasps so that the Ark will be located inside the parokhet and the parokhet will separate the Kodesh from the Kodesh Kodashim.

Nevertheless, the question remains: why does the literal meaning of the verses in Parashat Teruma suggest an order – an order that is different from that in our parasha?

B. The Two Functions of the Parokhet

Perhaps the difference between the two parashot expresses a difference between two different functions of the parokhet. In Parashat Teruma, the point of the parokhet is "so the parokhet will divide (ve-hivdila) for you between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim." As Rashbam explains, "This term denotes a barrier and separation between one area and the other." The parokhet marks the border between the two parts of the Mishkan, like the clasps, under which it is hung, which demarcate this border at the top of the Mishkan. Thus, it makes sense that the hanging of the parokhet comes before placing the Ark inside. So long as the Kodesh Kodashim has not yet been defined by the parokhet, the Ark cannot be placed "inside," since that space does not yet exist.[1]

In Parashat Pekudei, in contrast, the parokhet "screened the Ark of Testimony" – that is, it provided special protection for the Ark. As Rashi explains in his commentary on our parasha, "'You shall screen the Ark' – this is an expression of protection, for it [the parokhet] was a barrier" (40:3). From this perspective, there is no significance to the act of hanging the parokhet until the Ark, which it is meant to protect, is put in its place.

The two functions of the parokhet are expressed in its two names. In our parasha, it is referred to as the "parokhet screen" (parokhet ha-masakh), and this reflects its role in our parasha: "It shall screen the Ark of Testimony." But elsewhere, the parokhet is called the "parokhet of the Kodesh" (Vayikra 4:6), and that name reflects its function as described in Parashat Teruma: "...So the parokhet will divide for you between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim." The role of the parokhet in protecting the Ark finds special expression in Bamidbar 4:5 – "When the camp moves, Aharon and his sons shall go in, and they shall take down the parokhet screen, and cover the Ark of Testimony with it." It makes perfect sense that the parokhet is referred to here as the "parokhet screen."

We find, therefore, that the two parashot express two different aspects of the parokhet. According to the aspect presented in Parashat Teruma, it is proper that the parokhet be hung first, and only afterwards that the Ark be brought to its place. But when the action is actually taken in Parashat Pekudei, in order that the parokhet can serve as a "parokhet screen," the Ark is brought to its

place first. What is the significance of this discrepancy? And why did the aspect of the "parokhet screen" ultimately take precedence of that of the "parokhet of the kodesh"?

The reason seems simple. As noted, the "parokhet of the kodesh" separates the Kodesh from the Kodesh Kodashim, but this function is actually already fulfilled by another item in the Mishkan, as we read: "And you shall hang the parokhet under the clasps...." The clasps (kerasim) that connect the two sets of the lower coverings, by virtue of their very location, already demarcate this separation.[2] We may therefore say that the boundary of the Kodesh Kodashim is already demarcated and defined by the clasps, such that the parokhet only reinforces and emphasizes this demarcation. For this reason, when a contradiction arises between the two roles of the parokhet, the aspect of the "parokhet screen" takes precedence. The Torah "foregoes," as it were, the symbolic significance of the "parokhet of the kodesh," which is fulfilled in any case by the clasps, and focuses instead on the "parokhet screen" aspect, which can be expressed only when the Ark is already in place.[3]

An interesting possibility regarding the expression of the dual role of the parokhet in reality arises from a mishna in Massekhet Yoma (5:1) that describes the manner in which the Kohen Gadol would enter the Kodesh Kodashim on Yom Kippur:

He walked through the Sanctuary until he reached the place between the two parokhets which separated between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim, with one cubit separating them. [But] R. Yossi said: There was only one parokhet, as it is written, "And the parokhet shall separate for you between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim."

The mishna records a disagreement among the Tannaim as to whether there was just one parokhet in the Temple, as R. Yossi deduces from the specifications concerning the Mishkan, or whether there were in fact two. The gemara (Yoma 51b) affirms that "R. Yossi gave a good response to the Sages." How, then, are we to explain the Sages' assertion that there were in fact two parokhets?

[The single parokhet] applied in the Mishkan, but in the Second Temple, when the cubit-thick partition wall which had featured in the First Temple did not exist, the Sages were uncertain as to whether the level of sanctity [of the space] reflected that of the Kodesh Kodashim [inside the parokhet] or that of the Kodesh [outside of it] and they made two parokhets.[4]

According to the gemara, then, there were in fact two parokhets in the Temple! Admittedly, the reason for this reality is technical in nature; it is the result of the doubt as to the status of the cubit-wide space separating the Kodesh from the Kodesh Kodashim. Nevertheless, it may well be that the two parokhets in fact represented the two aspects of their role: one served as a "parokhet screen," while the other was the "parokhet of the Kodesh." [5]

C. Creativity in Fashioning the Parokhet

The function of the parokhet as set forth in Parashat Teruma also includes another aspect. Parashat Teruma describes the plan of the Mishkan in three main parts. First there is the command to fashion the vessels of the Mishkan – the Ark, the Table, and the Menora (25:10-40). This is followed by the command concerning the structure – the coverings and boards (26:1-30). Finally, the parasha describes the sacrificial altar (27:1-8). At the end of the parasha, the Torah describes the structure of the courtyard (27:9-19). There is an important difference between the command concerning the three parts of the Mishkan, and the command concerning the courtyard. At the beginning of the parasha, God tells Moshe to make the Mishkan and its vessels "according

to all that I show you, the form of the Mishkan and the form of all of its vessels, and so you shall do" (25:9). As Rashbam comments, "God actually showed Moshe an image of each of the vessels and their construction." Indeed, these first three sections conclude by affirming this principle: at the end of the first section, at the conclusion of the command concerning the vessels, we read:

And see and make them according to their form, which is being shown to you on the mountain. (26:40)

At the end of the second section, following the description of the coverings and the boards, we read:

And you shall establish the Mishkan according to its specifications which were shown to you on the mountain. (26:30)

And at the end of the third section, following the command to build the sacrificial altar, we find once again:

As you are shown on the mountain, so shall you do. (27:8)

However, when it comes to the courtyard, there is no repetition of this command, since the emphasis on everything being made exactly as shown to Moshe on Mount Sinai applies only to the Mishkan and its vessels, not to the courtyard.

However, in the above review, we skipped one unit: the unit devoted to the parokhet (26:31-37), which is located in between the structure of the Mishkan (coverings and boards) and the altar. Seemingly, the parokhet is part of the structure of the Mishkan. But, as stated, the verse that concludes the description of the structure of the Mishkan – "And you shall establish the Mishkan according to its specifications which were shown to you on the mountain" (26:30) – comes after the coverings and the boards; the unit on the parokhet is not included in it. This would suggest that the principle that applies to the parokhet is the same principle that applies to the courtyard – that its fashioning is not limited to an exact copy of the form that God showed Moshe at Sinai.

What is the significance of this difference between the parokhet and the other parts of the Mishkan?

It seems that this distinction arises from a more prominent difference between the parokhet and the other parts of the Mishkan. At the beginning of Parashat Teruma, God tells Moshe: "Speak to Bnei Yisrael, that they take a contribution for Me..." (25:2). The purpose of the contribution is, "Let them make for Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (verse 8). The Mishkan is meant to be a place where the Divine Presence will rest, and hence there is a need to emphasize that everything related to it must be done exactly in accordance with God's command, with no human intervention in the planning. Only one part of the Mishkan is not meant for God: the parokhet, which – from the perspective of Parashat Teruma – is meant "to separate for you between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim" (26:33). The parokhet is meant for Bnei Yisrael, to separate between the two areas for them. For this reason, there is room for human creativity in its fashioning; only its general form is transmitted to Moshe.

Indeed, in the summary of all the labor of the Mishkan in our parasha, we are told:

According to that God commanded Moshe, so Bnei Yisrael did all the work. And Moshe saw all the handiwork, and behold – they had done it; as God had commanded, so they had done it; and Moshe blessed them. (39:42-43)[6]

We may therefore deduce that the parokhet – whose role in these parashot is to be a “parokhet screen” and not just a separation for Bnei Yisrael – is fashioned just like the other vessels. (Indeed, the “parokhet screen” is mentioned in the list of all the components of the Mishkan preceding these verses of conclusion.)

We may therefore say that in fashioning the "parokhet of the Kodesh," there is room for human creativity, but the "parokhet screen" must be fashioned precisely as God had commanded Moshe.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1] This aspect of the parokhet – its demarcation of the Kodesh Kodashim – is especially highlighted in the unit describing the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur: "God said to Moshe: Speak to Aharon, your brother, that he should not come at all times into the Kodesh that is inside of the parokhet, [coming] before the covering that is upon the Ark, so that he will not die, for I shall appear in the cloud over the covering... And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before God, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside of the parokhet... And he shall slaughter the goat of the sin-offering that is for the people, and shall bring its blood inside of the parokhet..." (Vayikra 16:2,12,15). Similarly, concerning the service of the Kohanim in Parashat Korach, we read: "And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood in everything pertaining to the altar, and to that which is inside of the parokhet, and you shall serve; I give you the priesthood as a gift of service, and any non-kohen who approaches shall be put to death" (Bamidbar 18:7). The Kodesh Kodashim is not mentioned in any of these verses; we read only of the space "inside of the parokhet."

[2] The lower coverings ("yeri'ot"), which are referred to as "mishkan" (see our shiur on Parashat Teruma), consisted of ten pieces, each four cubits wide. These were joined together to form two groups of five pieces each, such that each group was 20 cubits long, and the two groups together formed a length of 40 cubits. The Mishkan was 30 cubits long. When the coverings were spread over it, one group of coverings stretched from the entrance of the Mishkan up to the clasps – that is, the 20 cubits of the Kodesh, while the other covered the 10 cubits over the Kodesh Kodashim and then hung down another 10 cubits of the boards behind it. Thus, the clasps marked precisely the line separating the Kodesh from the Kodesh Kodashim, at a distance of 20 cubits from the entrance to the Mishkan.

[3] We may add that the two aspects of the parokhet also characterize the lower coverings themselves. On the one hand, the function of the lower coverings is to be a "mishkan" – a roof for the structure within which the Divine Presence resets. Just as the “parokhet screen” covers the Ark from the side, so the yeri'ot cover the Ark above. At the same time, the division of the coverings into two groups, with clasps joining them and marking the border between the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim, is reminiscent of the “parokhet of the kodesh,” which separates these two locations. Indeed, both the parokhet and the lower coverings are made of "twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, with keruvim..." (36:8; see also verse 35 concerning the parokhet). Admittedly, the screen at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting is likewise fashioned from "blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen" (36:37), but it lacks "keruvim." Only the parokhet, which is part of the Kodesh Kodashim, symbolizes in its very fashioning the keruvim that it covers.

[4] In the First Temple, the Kodesh and the Kodesh Kodashim were separated by a cubit-thick cedar wall. The Second Temple was much higher than the first, and it was impossible to build such a narrow wall to such a great height. The solution arrived at was to hang two parokhets, with a cubit between them. However, the status of that cubit of space – i.e., whether it belonged to the Kodesh or to the Kodesh Kodashim – was not clear (see Rashi ad loc.).

[5] Perhaps there is room for an even more audacious idea: On the literal level of the text, the Sages might have responded to R. Yossi there is another verse – "And you shall place there the Ark of Testimony, and screen the Ark with the parokhet" – suggesting that in the Mishkan, too, there was another parokhet. According to this suggestion, the dispute of the Tannaim concerns not only the Temple, but the Mishkan, too.

[6] In the parashot of Vayakhel and Pekudei, the affirmation that the work was carried out "as God had shown Moshe" is routinely omitted (see especially 37:24; 36:34; 38:7). In its place we find our parasha repeating over and over that the work was performed "as God had commanded Moshe."