

In the final parashah of the Book of Exodus Moses issues a detailed accounting of the *mishkan* project, not only of the weights, measures, and monetary value of its components, but also of the work performed by the people in charge of its construction and outfitting. The opening verses read like a year-end audit, complete with a detailed review of financial records listing income and expenditures plus all the pertinent documentation. At first glance, it seems that parts of parashot Terumah and Tetzaveh are repeated in parashot Vayak'hel and Pekudei nearly verbatim, but there is a subtle, but very important difference. In the first pair HaShem's instructions are worded in the future (you shall make), whereas in the second pair the verbs are in the past (he made), signifying a recapitulation and assessment of the work that has been done. Assisted by his chosen foremen Betzalel and Ohaliav along with the countless artisans under their command, Moses has completed the work and is now rendering his account in preparation for setting up the *mishkan*. At Moses' command and under the watchful scrutiny of his chief accountant, Aaron's son Itamar, every measure of gold, silver, and copper, and each fabric and thread with their corresponding dye is registered, along with precise details of how and where they were used. It all seems somewhat overdone, almost as if Moses is worried about how the people truly regard the entire project. After all, the incident with the golden calf revealed a prevailing undercurrent of distrust that began almost immediately after they had left Egypt, with each new challenge reawakening a longing for Egypt, where their lives as slaves were difficult, but predictable. Midrash Tanchuma Pekudei offers a story with valuable insight: "Moses declared: 'I am aware that Israel is contentious; therefore I shall give them an accounting of the construction of the Tabernacle.' ... He accounted for everything ... While he was doing the accounting and going over everything that had been made for inside the Sanctuary, he forgot, because they were not visible, the 1775 shekels with which he had fashioned the hooks for the columns. He became distressed and said to himself: 'Now the Israelites will grasp the opportunity to say that I have taken them.' He began to review every aspect of his work. The Holy One of Blessing thereupon opened his eyes and caused him to lift them upward, and he saw the hooks of the columns. He told them loudly that the 1775 shekels of gold had been used for the hooks for the columns. Then the Israelites were satisfied. ... R. Isaak explained: When one person would praise him, his companion would retort: 'Fool, do you imagine that a man in charge of the work of building a Sanctuary, with weights of silver and gold that are not examined, nor weighed or accounted for, will not become wealthy!' When he heard that he said, 'Be assured, when the work of the Tabernacle is completed, I will give them an accounting.'" The number 1775 references 38:28: "And out of the 1775 shekels [that accounting error] he made hooks for the pillars, and he covered their tops and banded them." It is noteworthy that the Hebrew word for hook is וָו *vav*, pronounced like the richly symbolic 6th letter (ו) of the Hebrew alphabet. Linguistically, the letter *vav* is a multitasker. Prefixing a verb, it can change its tense; it can function both as a vowel or a consonant; and it also means and. Moving from the linguistic to the symbolic, inserting a *vav* into the spelling of a name can indicate positive character traits, while the absence of a *vav* indicates the opposite. In gematria (numerical value of letters) *vav* is 6, a very important number: Humanity was created on the 6th day, which was also the final day of creation; and there are six dimensions in space. In short, *vav* is indeed a mighty hook, connecting us to each other and to HaShem. And it is in the painstakingly constructed *mishkan* that this connection is enacted and experienced. We understand that HaShem does not really need a "dwelling place," because HaShem is everywhere. But as the golden calf episode proved, the Israelites did need a tangible focal point, a special place in which to express the fullness of their human emotions. In addition, the *mishkan*, as the sole place of worship, was instrumental in illustrating the monotheistic principle in a time and place where polytheism was the norm and the boundaries between human and divine were porous. The *mishkan's* ornate infrastructure, the equally elaborate priestly garments, and the meticulously crafted sacrificial rites all emphasized the profound distance between our world and the inviolable world of HaShem. Serving both in the *mishkan* and among the people, the priests provided the vital connection between the people and HaShem. Today, that connection is our Torah. Many Torah scrolls are written in the kabalistic tradition of *vavei ha'amudim* (hooks of the pillars), the practice of beginning as many columns as possible with the letter *vav*. This alludes to those words in 27:10-11 and 38:10-12 & 17, all describing the construction of the *mishkan*. In chapter 27 (Parashah Terumah) HaShem is issuing instructions for the future *mishkan*, while chapter 38 (Parashah Vayak'hel) speaks of completed work. But as we know, the work of our human hands is as ephemeral as we are. The *mishkan* and both Temples have long vanished, along with their elaborate rituals, leaving only the Western Wall as evidence of their former glory. But our identity as Jews and the practices that have continued to evolve over the millennia are grounded in Torah, the true and eternal *vav* that connects us to HaShem and to each other. Setting up the courtyard around the *mishkan* and the altar, and erecting the screen at the entrance, Moses completed the physical work. It is now up to us to carry its message forward.

Shabbat shalom!