Pekudei: Shemot (Exodus)

What's it all about?

The parsha gives us an accounting of the gold, silver, and copper donated by the people for the making of the Mishkan, God's temporary dwelling place on earth. Betzalel and Aholiav, the two wise-hearted artists in charge of the work, make the priestly garments and other items according to God's instructions. Finally, the Mishkan is completed, and Aaron and his sons are anointed into the priesthood. A cloud appears over the Mishkan, signifying the Divine presence within it.



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"Moses saw that they had indeed done all the work exactly as God had commanded, and Moses blessed them."

Take a deeper dive

This week, we conclude the Book of Exodus.

Moses has risen as the people's leader and teacher. Egypt was subdued. The slaves were freed. The sea was split. The Torah was given. The sin of the golden calf overcome. The Mishkan was built. And now, it's time to pause, reflect on all that has been achieved, give thanks to God, and take a moment to celebrate this milestone.

Moses does exactly that.

"Moses saw that they had indeed done all the work exactly as God had commanded," the parsha tells us, "and Moses blessed them."

This ability to reflect on everything that's going well in our lives is essential to a good life, wrote the famed 18th Century sage known as the Vilna Gaon. "Hakarat HaTov, or recognizing the good things coming our way," he wrote, "is a moral virtue of the first order."

And by embodying this virtue, Moses isn't just behaving in a godly manner. He also delivers something of a tikkun, or repair, for the Israelites earlier sins. The Israeli rabbi Gur Galon teaches us that much of human behavior in the Torah before this moment was thick with ingratitude: Adam and Eve, for example, opted to defy God rather than merely being grateful for the paradise He had given them, and the Israelites erected an idol instead of remaining faithful to the God who had rescued them from slavery with great fanfare and then sustained them in the desert. Such ingratitude corrodes the soul, which is why Moses's speech of thanksgiving comes as such an essential course corrective.

The blessing he gives the Israelites is one that continues to inspire us all, instructing us to slow down, contemplate all that is bountiful and beautiful in our lives, and give thanks for each and every single thing.

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