

## Parshas Vayakhel - Pekudei – Michael Lebrecht (reprint)

כג אדר תשע"ה – 13 March 2015 – שבת פי ויקהל-פקודי

'And it was on the first day of the first month of the second year (after leaving Egypt) that the Mishkan was set up' (Shemos 40:17)

25 Kislev

The Mishkan has been completed. This magnificent edifice is standing ready to accommodate the Divine presence. The Kohanim are eager to don their ornate garments and begin officiating. The vessels are shining in their pristine condition ready to be utilised in the service of Hashem.

But wait.....

1 Nissan

Hashem does not want the Mishkan to open its gates until the month of Nissan - three months after its completion. Why was Hashem disinclined to allow the Mishkan to operate as soon as it had been completed ?

The Medrash (Shemos Rabbo 52) notes that the construction of the Mishkan and all its vessels took only three months from start to finish. This is nothing short of miraculous ! Indeed this miracle is compounded by the realisation that the chief architect and builder – Bezalel – was only 13 years old at the time ! (Sanhedrin 69b). Thus the question becomes stronger. Why was the miracle engineered in such a manner that there was a three month hiatus before it came into operation ? Why did Hashem not arrange the completion to coincide with Nissan ?

Why the wait ? R' Yosef Salant offers the following answer.

The Medrash states that the building of the Mishkan was to act as an atonement for the sin of the eigel. 'Let your generous donations of jewellery to the Mishkan cancel out your donations of jewellery to the eigel' (Shemos Rabbo 48). 'Let your gifts of gold to the Mishkan erase the memory of your gifts of gold to the eigel hazohov' (Shemos Rabbo 51).

Indeed the connection between the Mishkan and the sin of the eigel can be understood from a different angle.

The Ramban explains the sin of the eigel in the following manner. The Bnei Yisroel had a burning desire to construct something tangible towards which they could direct their tefillos to Hashem. Afterall, Moshe had promised them something to act as a spiritual home for the shechina. Now that according to their calculations Moshe was late in descending from Har Sinai they presumed he may not return at all. In their eagerness to do what they thought was right they took the law into their own hands and chose to make the form of one of the animals that supports the Divine throne upon which Hashem sits. Unfortunately and disasterously, things got out of hand and they ended up serving it as an idol.

If only they had waited for another six hours by which time Moshe would have returned ! If only they had not let their natural exuberance get the better of them ! If only they had not taken the law into their own hands ! If only .....

Therefore, if the building of the Mishkan was to act as an atonement for the eigel, as the Medrash says, then the Bnei Yisroel would have to prove that they had learnt a lesson from the mistake that led to the episode of the eigel. If a similar situation arose they would need to demonstrate that never again would they decide such weighty issues on their own – however tempting it may be to do so. From now on they would act only by the command of Hashem via Moshe.

It is perhaps for this reason that the making of every item of the Mishkan concludes with the phrase 'just as Hashem has commanded'.

It is now understandable why Hashem deliberately caused a period of time to elapse between the completion of the Mishkan and its consecration. How would the Bnei Yisroel react faced with a similar scenario as at the time of the eigel? Would their enthusiasm and impatience get the better of them and lead them astray again - or could they now prove that the same error made at the time of the eigel would not be repeated ?

The response of the Bnei Yisroel to this waiting period was critical if the Mishkan was to atone for the sin of eigel.