

Parsha Ponders

Terumah | February 27, 2020 | 3 Adar 5780

Confusing orders¹

וזאת התרומה אשר תקחו מאתם זהב וכסף ונחשת: ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם: ועשו ארון עצי שטים וגו'
This is the contribution that you shall take from them: gold, silver, and copper. Make for Me a sanctuary, such that I will dwell amongst them. Make an Ark of acacia wood...²

After reading the Torah's delineation of all the various parts of the portable Temple known as the *Mishkan*, we notice something strange. The Torah first lists all the vessels that are part of the *Mishkan*, detailing all of their dimensions and materials. Then, the Torah describes how to construct the *Mishkan* itself, with all its hooks and the tapestries that are used as partitions. Why did the Torah list them this way? Describing the structure of the *Mishkan*, and only then the vessels, would seem to be more logical. Usually one builds a house before you figure out the furniture.

In fact, the *gemarra* records³ that this is exactly what Betzalel, the chief architect of the *Mishkan*, asked Moshe. When Moshe told him to build the vessels first, Betzalel made the same arguments as above. It would seem to be more logical to first build the *Mishkan*. Moshe responded to Betzalel that this is indeed what Hashem commanded⁴. Betzalel's name is true to his nature. His name literally means in the shadow of G-d. It was as if Betzalel was so-to-speak hiding in Hashem's shadow, and overheard what the Almighty commanded Moshe.

If this is really what Hashem commanded, why then are the verses in this week's *parsha* the wrong order? Why is the construction of the vessels described first, and only then the *Mishkan*⁵? More than that, the Torah relates the command for the Jews to make a donation. Only subsequently does it say that the purpose was to build the *Mishkan*. Why wasn't the command to build the *Mishkan* related first, and afterwards the donations towards it?

In the previous *parsha*, we were given more details as to what transpired at the revelation at Mount Sinai. The Jews famously declared ונעשה ונשמע, we will perform and we will listen⁶. This declaration of trust in Hashem showed that they were willing to do anything He commanded, even before hearing what it is that He would command. Hashem wanted to put their words to the test. Hashem told them to all make contributions, and donate their gold, silver, and copper. Hashem didn't tell them what this was for, to see if they would question Him.

As well, Hashem commanded them to make the vessels for the *Mishkan*. They didn't ask, "where will we put these vessels?", rather they unquestioningly accepted the command. They glowingly passed the test. After the commands were given and the test passed, Betzalel understood that it had to be that the *Mishkan* should be built before its vessels. Moshe told him that he must have been there when Hashem commanded it, as that's exactly what He said.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe I to Exodus 25:3 [#1]

² Exodus 25:3, 8, 10

³ Berachos 55a. For more on this conversation, see <https://parshaponders.com/eikev-5777>

⁴ See the previous note for explanations for why Moshe switched the order

⁵ See Tosafos *ad. loc. s.v.* לך אמור

⁶ Exodus 24:7