



## Building the Mishkan



Approximate Size 20" x 12"

### Aims:

- To find out what the Mishkan was and when it was built.
- To learn about why Bnei Yisrael needed a Mishkan.
- To think about the importance of holy places in Judaism.



Shalom Roshim, Sganim v'Madrachim,

So far, Sefer Bereshit and the first half of Sefer Shemot have been full of the most exciting stories and famous people. It's been a blast! This week we enter a block of parashiyot which deal with the seemingly much drier subject matter of the building of the Mishkan. Let's have a look at it and see that there is actually loads we can engage with.

Bevirkat Chaverim l'Torah v'Avodah

Zoe Daniels and Chana Be'eri

## **Aim 1: To find out what the Mishkan was and when it was built**

### **What was the Mishkan???**

The Mishkan was the travelling Temple that Bnei Yisrael used to serve Hashem while they were in the desert. It was the precursor to the great Beit Hamikdash built in Jerusalem many years later under King Solomon.

We are first commanded to build the Mishkan in this week's parasha...

*And they shall make for me a sanctuary and I will dwell in them.  
(Shemot 25:8)*

The Torah takes a mere 34 verses to describe the creation of the world yet it takes a massive five parshiot, namely Terumah, Tetzaveh, part of Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, to describe the building of the Mishkan! What was the idea of the Mishkan and why is it so central to Sefer Shemot?

### **Mishkan: Was it always the plan?**

Two of the most famous commentators on the Torah, Rashi and Ramban, disagree as to when exactly this command took place – did it take place before or after the sin of the golden calf?

## Ramban's Approach

Ramban believes that unless the Torah specifies otherwise, it is written in chronological order. Therefore, as the diagram below shows, the command to build the Mishkan occurred before the sin of the Golden Calf (Chet Ha'Egel) because that's where it is found in the Torah.

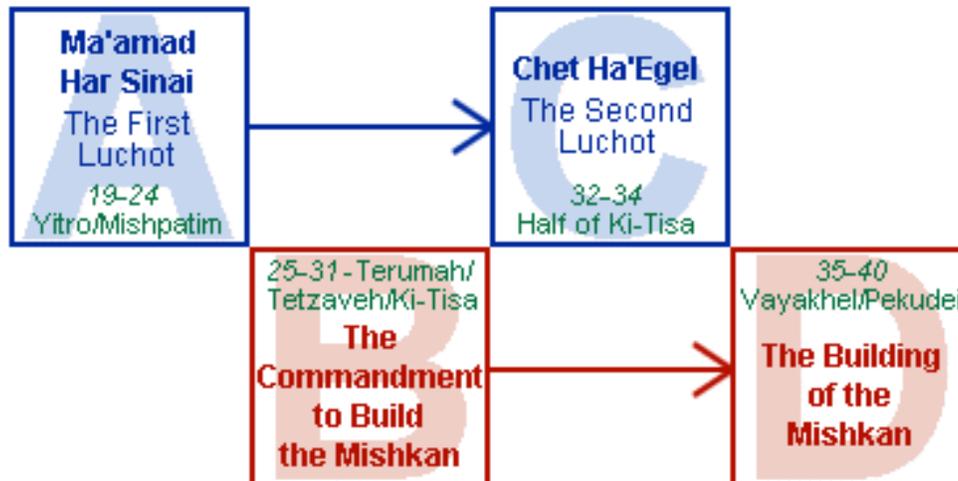


Image from Rav Leibtag's [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org) – a great website for learning Tanach!

Ramban's views make logical sense – the Mishkan was **always the plan** and it represents a way of perpetuating the Sinai experience into a set structure, whereby the Jewish people would have a focus of worship through their desert wanderings.

## Rashi's Approach

But Rashi disagrees, as he holds the principle of 'there is no chronological order to the Torah'. This doesn't mean that the Torah is in random order; rather that the Torah prefers a conceptual sequence rather than a chronological one. And when Rashi noticed that the command to build the Mishkan reminded him of the sins the Jewish people did at the Golden Calf...

- ♣ *They used gold to sin... and were commanded to donate gold to the Mishkan.*
- ♣ *Bezalel is commanded to build the Mishkan and his grandfather, Chur, was (according to the Midrash) killed as he tried to prevent the sin of the Golden Calf.*

- ♣ *The quote we started with (25:8) says that Hashem will return to dwell amongst Bnei Yisrael... was this because Moshe was told to move his tent away from Bnei Yisrael after the sin?*

...He believed that the Mishkan was a way of rectifying the sin of the Golden calf and took place after the sin.

## Activities

### Younger Groups

- Pairs: play using materials, builders and measurements of the Mishkan found in this week's parasha.

### Older Groups

- Court Case between the two opinions as to why we were commanded to build the Mishkan – was it because of the Golden Calf or always the plan? Bring evidence and witnesses etc.

## **Aim 2: To learn about why Bnei Yisrael needed a Mishkan.**

We have seen two very different approaches to the command to build the Mishkan. Ramban felt that the Mishkan was a way of continuing what was started at Mount Sinai whereas Rashi believed that it was only necessary to re-focus Bnei Yisrael on worshipping Hashem, after they mistakenly decided to worship an idol.



Either way, we see that Hashem intended for Bnei Yisrael to have a central focus, a place where they could see Hashem's presence. It wasn't enough to just rely on past religious experiences – Judaism is for the here and now, and the Mishkan served as a place where Bnei Yisrael could reconnect to Hashem.

The Mishkan was another step in ensuring that Bnei Yisrael became a holy nation. First, the people were 'made holy' by being set apart from the nations through the covenant at Sinai. This is sanctifying **people**. Then, we have the commandments to sanctify **time**, both on Shabbat (which we learnt in the Ten Commandments) and Chagim. Finally, we sanctify **place**

with the Mishkan. A people set aside for Hashem, on days set aside for Hashem, in the place set aside for Hashem.

## **Aim 2: To learn about why Bnei Yisrael needed a Mishkan.**

- **Floo Powder:** Inspired by Harry Potter, chanichim have to take turns to “step up to the fireplace” and complete a challenge by which they have to get to the correct place in the shul by a certain time. Emphasises the key components of the purpose of the Mishkan!
- **Design your own Mishkan:** groups make adverts or even show designs using chairs and tables for how their ideal place of Jewish worship would look.



## **Aim 3: To think about the importance of holy places in Judaism.**

Have a look at the Jewish people’s various holy places throughout history...



## Mishkan (Tabernacle)

A temporary home for Hashem as Bnei Yisrael wandered through the desert.



## Beit Hamikdash (Temple)

The ideal home for Hashem, set in Jerusalem. There were two Temples, the latter destroyed in 70 CE.



## Beit Knesset (Synagogue)

A small sanctuary that can be built anywhere in the world, to maintain Jewry in exile.



## Beit Hamikdash (Temple)

To be rebuilt very soon!

*Adapted from Covenant and Conversation, Parashat Terumah 5765 by the emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks:*

Following the destruction of the second Temple, dramatic changes were made to the Jewish way of life to ensure its' survival without its central focus – the Beit Hamikdash. The prophet Ezekiel made the first reference to what we now understand as the modern synagogue

*'This is what the sovereign Lord says: although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet I have become to them a small sanctuary [mikdash me'at] in the countries where they have gone' (Ezekiel 11:16).*

The central sanctuary had been destroyed, but a small echo, a miniature, remained. We tend to forget what an innovation the idea of a synagogue was. This was the synagogue became Jerusalem in exile. It is the ultimate expression of monotheism - that wherever we gather to turn our hearts towards heaven, there the Divine presence can be found, for G-d is everywhere.



- How do you think the place of worship affects the Jewish people? That is to say, what do you think the differences are when the only 'shul' was the Beit Hamikdash and today, when there are thousands?
- If everywhere is holy and Hashem's presence fills the world, why do we need a holy site to focus our worship?

### Activities

- Give chanichim information on the components of the Mishkan, then go into Shul and play a real-life version of 'spot the difference' (or the similarities) between the Mishkan and a Shul.
- Play pairs using materials and items found in the Mishkan and a shul, to show the link between them.

### **Aim 3: To think about how we relate to it nowadays**

*'in establishing the synagogue, Judaism created one of the greatest revolutions in the history of religion and society, for the synagogue was an entirely new environment for divine service, of a type unknown anywhere before'.*

(Professor M Stern)