

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

It was the first Israelite house of worship, the first home Jews made for God. But the very idea is fraught with paradox, even contradiction. How can you build a house for God? He is bigger than anything we can imagine, let alone build.

King Solomon made this point when he inaugurated another house of God, the First Temple: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this house I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). So did Isaiah in the name of God himself: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What house can you build for me? Where will my resting place be? (Is. 66:1).

Not only does it seem impossible to build a home for God. It should be unnecessary. The God of everywhere can be accessed anywhere, as readily in the deepest pit as on the highest mountain, in a city slum as in a palace lined with marble and gold.

The answer, and it is fundamental, is that God does not live in buildings. He lives in builders. He lives not in structures of stone but in the human heart. What the Jewish sages and mystics pointed was that in our parsha God says, "Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell in them" (Ex. 25:8), not "that I may dwell in it."

Why then did God command the people to make a sanctuary at all? The answer given by most commentators, and hinted at by the Torah itself, is that God gave the command specifically after the sin of the golden calf.

The people made the calf after Moses had been on the mountain for forty days to receive the Torah. So long as Moses was in their midst, the people knew that he communicated with God, and God with him, and therefore God was accessible, close. But when he was absent for nearly six weeks, they panicked. Who else could bridge the gap between the people and God? How could they hear God's instructions? Through what intermediary could they make contact with the divine presence?

That is why God said to Moses, "Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." The key word here is the verb sh-kh-n, to dwell. Never before had it been used in connection with God. It eventually became a keyword of Judaism itself. From it came the word Mishkan meaning a sanctuary, and Shekhinah, the

divine presence.

Central to its meaning is the idea of closeness. Shakhen in Hebrew means a neighbour, the person who lives next door. What the Israelites needed and what God gave them was a way of feeling as close to God as to our next-door neighbour.

That is what the patriarchs and matriarchs had. God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah intimately, like a friend. He told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child. He explained to Rebecca why she was suffering such acute pain in pregnancy. He appeared to Jacob at key moments in his life telling him not to be afraid.

That is not what the Israelites had experienced until now. They had seen God bringing plagues on the Egyptians. They had seen Him divide the sea. They had seen Him send manna from heaven and water from a rock. They had heard His commanding voice at Mount Sinai and found it almost unbearable. They said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." God had appeared to them as an overwhelming presence, an irresistible force, a light so bright that to look at it makes you blind, a voice so strong it makes you go deaf.

So for God to be accessible, not just to the pioneers of faith -- the patriarchs and matriarchs -- but to every member of a large nation, was a challenge, as it were, for God Himself. He had to do what the Jewish mystics called tzimtzum, "contract" Himself, screen His light, soften His voice, hide His glory within a thick cloud, and allow the infinite to take on the dimensions of the finite.

But that, as it were, was the easy part. The difficult part had nothing to do with God and everything to do with us. How do we come to sense the presence of God? It isn't difficult to do so standing at the foot of Mount Everest or seeing the Grand Canyon. You do not have to be very religious or even religious at all, to feel awe in the presence of the sublime. The psychologist Abraham Maslow, whom we encountered a few weeks ago in these pages, spoke about "peak experiences", and saw them as the essence of the spiritual encounter.

But how do you feel the presence of God in the midst of everyday life? Not from the top of Mount Sinai but from the plain beneath? Not when it is surrounded by thunder and lightning as it was at the great revelation, but when it is just a day among days?

That is the life-transforming secret of the name

of the parsha, Terumah. It means "a contribution". God said to Moses: "Tell the Israelites to take for me a contribution. You are to receive the contribution for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give." (Ex. 25:2) The best way of encountering God is to give.

The very act of giving flows from, or leads to, the understanding that what we give is part of what we were given. It is a way of giving thanks, an act of gratitude. That is the difference in the human mind between the presence of God and the absence of God.

If God is present, it means that what we have is His. He created the universe. He made us. He gave us life. He breathed into us the very air we breathe. All around us is the majesty, the plenitude, of God's generosity: the light of the sun, the gold of the stone, the green of the leaves, the song of the birds. This is what we feel reading the great creation psalms we read every day in the morning service. The world is God's art gallery and His masterpieces are everywhere.

When life is a given, you acknowledge this by giving back.

But if life is not a given because there is no Giver, if the universe came into existence only because of a random fluctuation in the quantum field, if there is nothing in the universe that knows we exist, if there is nothing to the human body but a string of letters in the genetic code and to the human mind but electrical impulses in the brain, if our moral convictions are self-serving means of self-preservation and our spiritual aspirations mere delusions, then it is difficult to feel gratitude for the gift of life. There is no gift if there is no giver. There is only a series of meaningless accidents, and it is difficult to feel gratitude for an accident.

The Torah therefore tells us something simple and practical. Give, and you will come to see life as a gift. You don't need to be able to prove God exists. All you need is to be thankful that you exist -- and the rest will follow.

That is how God came to be close to the Israelites through the building of the sanctuary. It wasn't the quality of the wood and metals and drapes. It wasn't the glitter of jewels on the breastplate of the High Priest. It wasn't the beauty of the architecture or the smell of the sacrifices. It was the fact that it was built out of the gifts of "everyone whose heart prompts them to give" (Ex. 25:2). Where people give voluntarily to one another and to holy causes, that is where the divine presence rests.

Hence the special word that gives its name to this week's parsha: Terumah. I've translated it as "a contribution" but it actually has a subtly different meaning for which there is no simple English equivalent. It means "something you lift up" by dedicating it to a sacred cause. You lift it up, then it lifts you up. The best way of scaling the spiritual heights is simply to give in gratitude for the fact that you have been given.

God doesn't live in a house of stone. He lives in the hearts of those who give. *Covenant and*

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**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). What does it mean for God to dwell among the people?

Does this not sound anthropomorphic, as if God were in human form dwelling on our street? And would the concept of a dwelling place for the divine not have been more appropriately expressed with a verse saying: "And let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in it"?

Moreover, what is the strange textual link between the Sanctuary and Shabbat? This portion and the following one, Tetzaveh, deal with the Sanctuary. The third portion of the sequence, Ki Tissa, suddenly features a ringing declaration to keep Shabbat (Ex. 31:14) – apropos of nothing. What is the relationship between the Sanctuary and Shabbat?

According to the Talmud, the aspect of Shabbat that is intimately linked to the construction of the Sanctuary is the fundamental definition of precisely which activities are prohibited on Shabbat. Similarly, in the portion of Ki Tissa, in the midst of God saying to Moses about Bezalel the great architect of the Sanctuary "...whom I have filled with the spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship" (Exodus 31:3) the Torah suddenly moves from the Sanctuary to Shabbat: "But verily you shall keep My Sabbath, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you..." (Exodus 31:14).

Aside from the general declaration forbidding creative activity (melakha) on Shabbat (Ex. 20:10), the Written Torah is virtually silent on specifically what is included under the rubric of creative activity. By virtue of the fact that an additional Shabbat injunction appears precisely within the context of constructing the Sanctuary, the sages derived the definition of creative activity or "work" from the different categories of labor involved in the construction of the Sanctuary. They taught that whatever was involved in the construction of the Sanctuary is forbidden on Shabbat.

From a traditional perspective, one might therefore explain the linkage by saying that the Sanctuary expresses sanctity of space and Shabbat expresses sanctity of time. Sanctity of time is on a higher level than sanctity of space, so the Sanctuary cannot be built on Shabbat and all the activities necessary for the building of the Sanctuary became the paradigm for prohibited Shabbat activity.

But let us look more deeply into the activities forbidden on Shabbat. I believe we shall discover an even more profound linkage between the Sanctuary and

Shabbat. The Mishna (Shabbat 7:2) lists 39 forbidden creative activities, beginning with seeding and plowing – basic agricultural activities. On the surface, there seems to be little relationship between these activities and the building of the Sanctuary. Rashi suggests that the initial group is related to the planting of herbs whose dyes were used for the Sanctuary curtains. However, if this is the case, then the eleventh listed category – baking – poses a difficult problem. According to Rashi's interpretation, it is cooking rather than baking that should have been included; after all, extracting the different ingredients needed to dye the linens required the cooking or the boiling of the herbs – not baking.

The Talmud explains that baking replaced cooking because the author of the Mishna, R. Yehuda HaNasi, wanted to list the processes involved in the manufacture of bread; hence the Mishna lists baking rather than cooking. This Talmudic response may very well be used to shed a fascinating light on all of the 39 activities. If the first group of forbidden activities in the Mishna is to be looked upon from the perspective of bread manufacture, then the next grouping of prohibited activities centers around clothing manufacture, the third around leather manufacture and the fourth around building construction.

From this perspective, R. Yehuda HaNasi is adding another dimension to the prohibited Sabbath activities: not only are they the activities involved in constructing the Sanctuary, but they are also the activities involved in producing food, clothing and shelter. He is informing us that although the human pursuit of food (bread, the "staff of life"), clothing and shelter (leather may be used for garments, shoes and tents) is legitimate and even mandatory for physical survival and certainly appropriate for the weekdays. Even animals require food and some form of protective clothing from the elements and shelter!

The Shabbat, however, is to be dedicated to God. The Shabbat is to be sanctified for the soul and the mind. The Shabbat is the means to the end for which God created human beings above animals: to catapult us into more exalted and spiritual realms of involvement. Shabbat is the key to essence, and not mere existence!

The story is told that the famed Hassidic Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once saw a Jew running very quickly. "I am running to make my living," explained the harried businessman. "But perhaps in the process you are losing your life," remonstrated the rebbe.

Indeed, the biblical explanation of the divine gift of desert manna teaches us that "...not by bread alone does the human being live but by that which comes forth from God's mouth," (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Targum Onkelos (in the more precise readings of the text) translates the passage thus: "Not by bread alone is the human being meant to exist [kayam], but by that which comes forth from God's mouth is the human being meant to live [hayei] (Onkelos on Deuteronomy

8:3).

"Existence" (kiyum) refers to the physical necessities of food, clothing and shelter, while "life" (hayim) is the purpose of human creation, the fellowship with God which teaches us to emulate His traits of compassion, graciousness, tolerance and truth, the hallmarks of His essence. The Sabbath is given as a day in which we can free ourselves from the "rat race" pursuit of a living, and dedicate ourselves to the more human pursuit of a life in the context of sacred time, "time off" which is really "time in," time dedicated to family, to Torah, and to God.

The building of the Sanctuary is the preparation, the means, just as the six days of the week are days of preparation, the means. The Sanctuary and the Sabbath are the goal, the purpose. To slightly change the apt phrase of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Sabbath is our Sanctuary in time, and the Sanctuary is our Sabbath in space. The days of the week are not yet holy time, whereas the Sabbath is a foretaste of the world to come. The world is not yet perfect, and we must transform it into a Sanctuary in which God and humanity can dwell together.

Once we understand that the Sanctuary and the Sabbath are parallel, we can readily see the similarity in language between the two. The Hebrew root *chl* (vayekhulu, vatekheil, to complete) and the Hebrew noun *melakha* (labor) appear almost exclusively in the two contexts of the Sabbath and the Sanctuary. Also, there are key verses in each context that are almost identical (for example, Genesis 1:31, Exodus 39:43). The biblical goal is for all space to become Sanctuary, all time to become Sabbath. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he parsha of Terumah follows those of Mishpatim and Yitro. In parshat Yitro we experienced the moment of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people. In parshat Mishpatim the Torah began to fill in the details of Jewish law and life, especially as they relate to human and societal behavior and the standards of such behavior that the Torah wishes us to uphold.

In this week's parsha of Terumah the Torah presents another challenge to human behavior – wealth, money, charity and the ability to give away what one may deem to be his or hers. The Torah demands from us the ability to donate to others, to give to great causes, to the public welfare and to be able to share with others our material possessions.

The rabbis of the Talmud stated that this is one of the major identity tests of life. Miserliness, a bad eye and an unwillingness to be able to contribute to others in need are held to be violations of Torah principles and morals. The Torah at Sinai instructed us not to steal, not

to take from others what belongs to them without their explicit consent. Now the Torah raises the bar and asks us to be able to give away what we deem to be ours to others less fortunate than us or to national and religious causes that benefit us all.

All of this is implied in the request for donations to help build the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle. The Lord could have provided us with a ready built spanking new Mishkan/Tabernacle on His own. Instead He challenged us then and in every continuing generation of Jewish life to build a Mishkan/Tabernacle on our own and from our own resources. And that requires a proper view of our own wealth and what we do with it.

My beloved Talmud rebbe taught me over sixty years ago how to read the daily newspaper – how to filter out the golden nuggets of life and morality from the overwhelming amount of dross that fills the pages of all of our newspapers. There was an item in the newspaper last week about a baseball pitcher who gave up a guaranteed salary of twelve million dollars for 2011 and retired from the game because he felt in all honesty that he could no longer pitch effectively and did not wish to be paid for essentially doing nothing.

This naturally goes against the grain of the vast majority of professional athletes whose greed and avarice is so well known. That is why it made news – it was a man bites dog story. But it indicated to me that the lesson of parshat Terumah still lives in the human heart.

To be able to walk away from money not honestly earned is a Torah value. And to share and give of our wealth to others and to the building of society, to Torah education and a national home for Jews, is also a supreme Torah value.

We have to build our own Mishkan/Tabernacle constantly in every generation. The Torah's attitude towards the sharing of our wealth is the key to such a form of Mishkan/Tabernacle building. ©2023 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**E**ach of the holy objects in the Tabernacle had symbolic meaning. Consider the Ark in which the tablets were placed (Exodus 25:10–22), whose very structure teaches much about halachah (Jewish law).

The Ark was comprised of three boxes. The outer and inner boxes were gold, while the middle was wood. What does this symbolize? Gold is inanimate, rigid, and unbending. Wood grows; it has the capacity to bend with the wind. What this teaches is that like the inner and outer gold boxes, halachah has its limits. But within these limits, halachah, like wood, has some flexibility.

In other words, Jewish law is not monolithic. Within rigid guidelines, there may be opposite opinions, but the power of halachah is that two positions, even if antithetical, may be correct in the spirit of “both views are the words of the living God” (Eruvin 13b).

On the sides of the Ark were staves (poles) by which the Ark was carried. These teach us that the Torah applies to every place and in every time. Torah is not stagnant: based on its biblical foundation and rabbinic input, halachah continues to evolve.

No wonder the holiday of Shavuot, unlike all other festivals, is not tied to a historical event. Nowhere in the Bible is it linked to the giving of the Torah. In fact, Jewish law is forever being given. A decision rendered by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein or a community rabbi is a manifestation of the continuum of Torah.

One other part of the Ark also deserves mention here. At the top was the kaporet (cover), upon which were the keruvim (cherubim), two figures with child-like faces. In the end, no matter our age, we are all children, hopefully trying to do good. The keruvim remind the decisor of law that the halachah is meant for people, humans living in the world, with all of life's highs and lows, exhilarations and pressures.

Commenting on the expression *emet l'amito* (true to the truth, Shabbat 10a), the Gaon of Vilna notes that *emet* is knowing the law; *amito* is recognition of the circumstances. A decisor of Jewish law must not only be erudite in the halachic text, but also must have an understanding of life itself, the problem at hand (Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliyahu*, Numbers 13:15). Thus, the message of the Ark goes beyond the details of its construction and speaks to the central messages of Jewish law itself. ©2023 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

**RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

## Migdal Ohr

**"S**o too for the six branches that come out of the Menorah.” (Shmos 25:33) The Menorah's specific designs and forms were to be beaten and cut from a single block of gold rather than from different pieces assembled or soldered together. It seems unusual, then, that the Posuk should tell us that the branches should extend from “the Menorah.”

Wasn't it all “the Menorah?”

Indeed, as we look at the verses, the various parts of this golden candelabrum had different names and are described individually as descending or extending from “the Menorah,” as though the Menorah was something else, perhaps a reference to the central core of the candelabrum. Since the parts came “out” of the Menorah, but we know they were all from the same piece of gold, we can suggest that the word Menorah here refers to the core from which each part was

hammered.

Taking this idea further, the Menorah doesn't just refer to the physical lampstand, but rather to the source, the essence of the Menorah, from which it expanded and became the vessel as Hashem commanded. The Menorah referred to was not the finished product, but rather the basic material and intent to create what Hashem wanted.

Rashi quotes the Midrash that Moshe was unable to fathom the crafting of the Menorah, so Hashem told him to throw the chunk of gold in the fire and the Menorah was formed by Hashem. This perhaps fits with the idea that the Menorah in the description of it refers to the potential that was there all along, as well as the desire to create it.

The Alshich describes in detail how the Menorah represents Man, and how each part represents a limb or desire to be mastered. It is through the Torah that we are able to refine and purify ourselves and become completely holy and pure as was the Menorah.

With our previous understanding of the reference to Menorah as the essence of the mitzvah and what was used to create it, we can infer more about ourselves and how to emulate the Menorah. Our limbs are not "us." Who we are is a deeper, central existence that cannot be confined to any one body part or attribute. It is our essence.

And, just as we explained that the Menorah refers to the basic starting material and the desire to bring about a development and change to it, so does Man's journey from being a clump of earth to becoming greater than an angel require not only the material, being the living person, but the desire to transform that person into something greater.

We were created to become more than we are. We must have this vision and seek Hashem's help in creating the finished product He knows we can become. Through that we can light up the world with our existence.

*R' Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, when he made a celebration upon the publication of his sefer, "Haamek Shaila," related to the assemblage that the book was almost never written. When he was younger, he wasn't very studious and his distraught parents didn't know what to do.*

*He overheard them tearfully saying that they would take him from Yeshiva and apprentice him to a shoemaker. Hearing this, he ran out and promised to work harder. He applied himself and became Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin and author of many books.*

*"Had I not heard that conversation," he said. "I would have become a shoemaker. When I died, I would have come before the Heavenly Court and been asked "Where is the Haamek Shaila?" I would have replied that I was a simple shoemaker! They would have told me that I could have been the author of this work, so today I thank G-d for having done this." ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz*

and Migdal Ohr

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

# The Holy Ark

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**W**hen people nowadays refer to the *aron kodesh* (the holy ark), they are generally speaking about the ark in the front of the *shul*, which houses the Torah scrolls. This ark is considered a *tashmish kedusha*, something that serves a holy object and thus is holy itself. Therefore, other items should not be stored in the ark. Additionally, even if an old ark is replaced by a newer one, the old one retains its holiness and should be treated accordingly.

The question arises: May we use the ark to store *Chumashim*, *Siddurim*, *Haftarah* scrolls (written on parchment), or Torah scrolls that have become unusable? It would seem that since all of these are of less holiness than a Torah scroll, such storage should be forbidden, as it would detract from the holiness of the ark.

However, a number of reasons have been adduced to permit this:

1. Since the Torah scroll is resting in the ark as well, the holiness of the ark is not diminished by these additional items. (If this explanation is correct, there is a problem when we remove all the Torah scrolls from the ark, as we do on Simchat Torah and (in some places) Hoshana Rabbah.)

2. The people who originally built the ark had in mind that it would be used for storing other holy objects besides Torah scrolls.

3. Since we customarily cover Torah scrolls with ornamental mantles, the ark is further removed from the scrolls' holiness. It is now a *tashmish de-tashmish*, something that serves an item that itself serves a holy object. Therefore, placing other holy items in the ark does not detract from its holiness.

Notwithstanding the above three reasons, there are still those who insist that Torah scrolls alone, and nothing else, may be stored in the *aron kodesh*. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

## RABBI DAVID LEVIN

# The Mikdash and the Mishkan

**H**ashem commanded Moshe to build a dwelling-place for Him among the B'nei Yisrael: "V'asu li Mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham, Make for Me a Holy place and I will dwell among them." This dwelling place in the Wilderness was part of three concentric camps encompassing the Inner Camp (The Camp of the Shechinah, Hashem's Presence), the Middle Camp (The Camp of the Leviim), and the Outer Camp (The Camp of the Yisraelim). We also find that the Mishkan (Temple) and its Courtyard were divided into three major areas: (1) the Mishkan itself, which was divided into the Holy of

Holies and the Holy, (2) the Ezrat Kohanim, the courtyard which contained the altar for the offerings to Hashem, (3) the azara, the outer courtyard which was open to any eligible person who had purified himself, this consisted of the Ezrat Nashim, the large women's court, and the Ezrat Yisrael, the small courtyard for men, Each of these areas was consecutively further away from the Kedusha, the Holiness of Hashem, Who dwelled within the Kodesh K'dashim, The Holy of Holies.

As one can clearly see, the use of the word "kodesh, holy" is found in a variety of forms when describing the Mishkan. Both the idea of "kodesh, holy" and of "shachein, dwell" are found in the commandment to build the Mishkan: "Asu li Mikdash, v'shachanti b'tocham, Make for Me a Holy place and I will dwell among them." We see that the translation normally given for a Mikdash is a Sanctuary, but that term is not complete when compared to the form of the Hebrew word. Most often when the Hebrew letter, Mem, precedes a root word, it intensifies the word or in some way refers to one's actions with the word, as in "m'dabeir, make words or speak." Mikdash would then be an indication of "make holy," indicating an action on Man's part which causes this place to be designated as holy.

In the Wilderness, this was of particular concern for the people as they travelled from place to place for forty years. It became their active responsibility to construct and deconstruct the Mishkan, each time creating a new dwelling-place for Hashem among them. The creation of a Holy Place, a Sanctuary, in each new location was a necessary part of their existence and survival and preceded establishing their own tents. The Chachamim explain that the Temple was one of seven foundations of the world without which the world could not have been created. Unlike some views of the Temple as being created in the Heavens and brought down to Earth, the implication from the name, Mikdash, is that it must be an act of Man to both construct and sanctify this structure. The Mikdash, the act of creating a Holy Place appears to be a requirement for a Mishkan, a dwelling-place for Hashem's Holiness on Earth.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the text, itself, implies that the promise of "and I will dwell among them" is a direct result of "make for me a Holy place." According to Hirsch, it appears that "all that is required of us to bring about the promised Shechina-Presence in Israel" is to build the Mishkan. Yet, "this blessing and protecting Shechina – proximity of Hashem – is not brought about by the mere correct erection and upkeep of the Sanctuary, but can only be won by consecrating and giving up our whole private and public lives in carrying out the Divine Torah." Hirsch views the term mikdash as our task in serving Hashem through His Torah; mishkan is the promise that Hashem has made to protect us if we perform this task.

The Or HaChaim distinguishes between the two terms mikdash and mishkan in a different way. The

commandment to build a mikdash is a commandment for all time, whether in the desert or after the B'nei Yisrael would enter the Land of Israel. This mitzvah is even applicable in exile, when the B'nei Yisrael would be prevented from serving Hashem in His land. The mitzvah for the Mishkan in the desert was not permanent in terms of its place or its construction. It was not made of stone like the Mikdash, since stone was permanently set in one place and the Mishkan needed to be portable, not permanent. Once the B'nei Yisrael entered the land, they could build a permanent structure in Jerusalem which would supersede any past Temples, even those that were established within the land.

There is another aspect of this mitzvah which is dependent on the definition of kadosh. It is often helpful to see what the language views as an opposite of our word when determining a definition that is applicable. When changing over from the holiness of Shabbat to the mundane of the week, we state, "hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol, Who separates between Holy and Mundane." The word, chol, can also mean sand. Just as one grain of sand cannot be distinguished from another grain of sand, so something which is mundane has no special quality, no special characteristics that would enable one to distinguish it from any other item. The term kadosh is also found in a marriage ceremony which is called by a form of that word, kedushin. The act of marriage separates a woman from a "relationship" with any man other than her husband. He has elevated her among women to a status of uniqueness for him. Thus, kadosh means special, separated for a special purpose.

Perhaps this is the message of the Mikdash and the Mishkan. The various materials that were required for the Mishkan were, of themselves, mundane, of no particular special quality. Some materials were more expensive than others, but by themselves, had no special significance. Hashem could have produced a miracle which would have presented the B'nei Yisrael with an incredible structure, a sight which would be remembered by generations to come. Hashem could also have left all the details up to Moshe and his assistant, Betzalel, but, instead, gave detailed instructions for the size and materials that would be used and a detailed description of the items that would appear in the Mishkan. Moshe and Betzalel needed to follow each instruction perfectly to create a "House" for Hashem. They needed to fashion each of these mundane materials into a structure which would elevate the materials and make them Holy because of their serving Hashem in the way in which He had designated. This is our same task in this world. Every thing we see, every action we take, every task we accomplish can take our mundane world and elevate it to a stage of holiness. Many people who view Judaism from afar, believe that our many laws and especially our seemingly exceptional attention to detail, are a sign of an antiquated religion that should have died long ago. They fail to grasp that it

is this attention to the details of Hashem's Laws which enables us to change our mundane existence into a pursuit of the Holy. May we learn from the Mikdash, our elevation to holiness, that we can bring the Mishkan, Hashem's Presence, into our world and raise our world from the mundane to the Holy. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

## Cross-Currents

**A**lthough there are several explanations in various midrashim for the word li in the phrase viyikchu li ("And have them take for Me"), Rashi, famously, simply comments "lishmi" - "for My sake" [literally, "for My name"].

On a basic level, Rashi is likely saying that, unlike general charity, which can be born of personal motives (e.g. "so that my son will live..." - [Pesachim 8a]), the terumah, or donation, for the Mishkan must be offered wholeheartedly lishmah, for Hashem's sake.

But the word lishmi, as noted above, literally translates as "for My name." Which raises the possibility of another approach to Rashi's comment.

Back in parshas Bishalach, after Amalek's attack on the newly freed Jewish people, we find an abstruse pasuk: "For there is a hand on the throne [keis] of Yah, [there shall be] a war for Hashem against Amalek from generation to generation" (17:16).

Rashi there, echoing the Midrash Lekach Tov (and Midrash Tanchuma in Ki Seitzei), explains that the use of "Yah," the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton, and the word keis for throne, missing the final aleph of the word kisei, indicates that: "[Hashem's] name will not be complete and His throne will not be complete until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated."

According to the Megaleh Amukos (in his derasha for Purim), the first two letters of Hashem's name represent His interaction in the higher realms; and the final two, in the lower realms. (The contention is alluded to in the pasuk "The heavens will be glad and the earth will rejoice" [Tehillim 96:11], where the first letters of the first phrase spell Yah and the first letters of the second one are vav and heh, the final two letters of the Tetragrammaton.) Amalek's existence prevents Hashem's full manifestation in the human realm.

The Gemara in Megilla (13b) recounts how Haman's 10,000 silver ingot bribe of Achashverosh for the privilege of destroying the Jewish people was "pre-empted" -and Haman's plan undermined - by the shekalim the Jews willfully donated to the Mishkan centuries earlier. .

Haman, of course, was an Amaleki, and sought to further the goal of his ancestors. But his plans were frustrated by the willful donation to holiness of his targets' own ancestors. Thus, the terumah of the Jews in Moshe's time were, quite literally, lishmi - "for My name" - for the goal of "completing" the Tetragrammaton.

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**RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**I**n my thirties (yes, a long time ago) I volunteered as a chaplain for the local Miami Beach based Boy Scout troop. Six or seven times a year, we would camp for a few days in campsites throughout the state. These camping excursions took us to some of the most remote parts of Florida.

Invariably, whenever we would get to a new locale, I would try to track down fellow "landsmen" and see if there was some type of Jewish connection. I quickly learned that a good way to figure out if there was a local Jewish population was to look at the donor boards of local hospitals, museums, and other community organizations.

This should not be surprising. Our sages teach that one of the characteristics of a Jew is kindness. In fact, according to the Talmud this is something that is in our very DNA -- something we inherited from our forefather Abraham: "Anyone that is kindhearted towards his fellow man is certainly of the children of Abraham" (Talmud Beitzah 32b). Furthermore, Maimonides declared that arrogant, cruel, misanthropic, and unloving people could be suspected of not being true Jews (Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 19:17).

Clearly, building communal infrastructure is part of the Jewish psyche. It should therefore come as no surprise that one of the first projects that the Jewish nation embarked upon after receiving the Torah was that of building the Tabernacle -- a home for the presence of the Almighty within the Jewish encampment.

Thus, this week's Torah reading contains the Jewish people's very first capital campaign, to which everyone was asked to contribute. Interestingly enough, the twelve heads of the tribes offered to deficit fund the project; that is, whatever wasn't raised they would contribute from their own pockets.

Our rabbis teach us that the entire amount needed was raised within two days -- perhaps the shortest capital campaign in history. The heads of the tribes, who had offered to deficit fund the project, were left with nothing to donate and merely made a token contribution. They were scolded for not showing true leadership in charitable giving because they had completely missed the point. It wasn't just about getting the project built; it was about becoming a charitable person!

I am reminded of the following joke. A man approached one of the wealthy widows in town, a woman known for her generosity, "Madam," he said in a broken voice "I wish to draw your attention to the terrible plight of a poor family living in the edge of town. The father of the family is dead, the mother is too ill to work, and the seven children are starving. They are about to be turned out onto the cold, empty streets unless someone pays

their rent, which amounts to \$400."

"How terrible!" exclaimed the woman, "May I ask who you are?"

The sympathetic visitor applied his handkerchief to his eyes. "I'm the landlord," he sobbed.

My beloved friend and mentor Rabbi Kalman Packouz, of blessed memory, was perhaps the most kindhearted person I've ever known and a paragon of this very virtue that defines us as Jews. Rabbi Packouz once asked his teacher Rav Noach Weinberg, of blessed memory, "If one has \$100 dollars to give, is it better to give \$1 to 100 people or \$100 dollars to one person for whom you can make a real difference?"

The rabbi answered with profound wisdom; a reply that shows us that giving charity is really about becoming a better person. He said, "Give \$1 to 100 people. Then when the 101st person asks you for help, you'll feel for his situation and look for ways to help him. If you give \$100 to one person, for the next 99 people who ask for assistance, you'll be defending yourself that you're already a good person because you gave to one person and made a difference. It will make you a hard person."

What kind of person do you want to be?

Do you want to be a compassionate person or a hard person? Do you want to be a giver or a taker? Part of the decision is determining what kind of example you wish to set for your children. When you focus on the kind of person you wish to be, then you will be able to formulate an approach to tzedakah to get you there.

Rabbi Packouz was determined to be a giver and he wanted to train his children to be givers and compassionate toward others. He and his wife set out to make their home a place where people would feel welcomed and receive something both monetarily and on a personal level.

When the doorbell rang, he quickly went to the door, greeted the itinerant fund-raisers with a warm smile, and invited them to enter. He then asked them, "Would you like something to eat or drink? Would you like to use the bathroom?" If they answered yes to refreshments then he would call to one of his children, "We have a guest!" The children would come and ask what they could get them to drink and if they'd like ice in their drink.

I want to point out that Rabbi Packouz was by no means a wealthy man. He and his wife were blessed with nine children -- a large family by any measure -- and were committed to paying full tuition for all of them. Nevertheless, they made life decisions to make sure that they always had monies for others. They lived and dressed simply, they drove very modest cars, and had few, if any, indulgences. In this way they were able to maximize their goal of helping others.

I once remember Rabbi Packouz remarking that in the previous year he had written out over five hundred checks to those who came to him seeking help. That

would be an astonishing number for anyone, let alone a rabbi who drew a modest salary. How did Rabbi Packouz manage to commit to paying full tuition for all of his children and distribute tens of thousands of dollars in charity?

Because he made those commitments a priority in his life. Most people decide how they want to live, and whatever money they have "left over" they will use for their children's education and for helping others. Not the good rabbi and his wife. They decided where their priorities were and then made the necessary accommodations in their standard of living to enable them to spend their money supporting their children's schools and helping others.

Rabbi Packouz was a one of a kind individual -- the kind of person whose life is an inspiration to others. We have just finished a book based on his remarkable life, which will be available in the coming months. Stay tuned for more details!

The Hebrew language is a holy one. Hebrew words don't merely refer to things or concepts; they define them. In Hebrew, the word for charity is "tzedakah" and it is best translated as "righteousness" or "justice."

It differs from charity, which is defined as "an act of generosity or giving aid to the poor." Thus, in Judaism it is not merely a charitable act to give to the poor; it is the very obligation to be righteous person. The late Kirk Douglas once put it well when he said, "Tzedakah is not just a good thing; it's the right thing!"

The mitzvah of tzedakah does not only apply to helping just the poor. Whenever one fills a need of others -- even the wealthy -- through money, food, or comforting words, he fulfills this mitzvah! © 2022 Rabbi Y. Zweig & Shabbat Shalom Weekly

