

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Mishpatim
February 5, 2022*** 4 Adar, 5782

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Terumah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1311/jewish/Terumah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, G-d says to Moses, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them.”

On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary’s inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark’s cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the “showbread” was arranged.

The Sanctuary’s three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.

Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Kings 5:26-6:13

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/632637/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week’s haftarah describes the construction of the Holy Temple under the direction of King Solomon, echoing this week’s Torah portion which discusses the construction of the Desert Tabernacle.

The haftarah discusses the manpower — both Jewish and non-Jewish — that Solomon recruited for the building of the Holy Temple. Also discussed are the hewing and transportation of the stone, the laying of the foundation, as well as the dimensions of the Holy Temple, its components and materials.

The haftarah ends with G-d's word to King Solomon: "This house which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, and execute My ordinances, and keep all My commandments to walk in them; then will I establish My word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people, Israel."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[The Labour of Gratitude: Terumah by The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust](https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/terumah/the-labour-of-gratitude/)
<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/terumah/the-labour-of-gratitude/>

There is an important principle in Judaism, a source of hope and also one of the structuring principles of the Torah. It is the principle that God creates the cure before the disease ([Megillah 13b](#)). Bad things may happen but God has already given us the remedy if we know where to look for it.

So for instance in Chukat we read of the deaths of Miriam and Aaron and how Moses was told that he would die in the desert without entering the Promised Land. This is a terrifying encounter with mortality. Yet before any of this, we first hear the law of the red heifer, the rite of purification after contact with death. The Torah has placed it here to assure us in advance that we can be purified after any bereavement. Human mortality does not ultimately bar us from being in the presence of Divine immortality.

This is the key to understanding Terumah. Though not all commentators agree, its real significance is that it is God's answer in advance to the sin of the Golden Calf. In strict chronological terms it is out of place here. It (and Tetzaveh) should have appeared after Ki Tissa, which tells the story of the Calf. It is set here before the sin to tell us that the cure existed before the disease, the tikkun before the kilkul, the mending before the fracture, the rectification before the sin.

So to understand Terumah and the phenomenon of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary and all that it entailed, we have first to understand what went wrong at the time of the Golden Calf. Here the Torah is very subtle and gives us, in Ki Tissa, a narrative that can be understood at three quite different levels.

The first and most obvious is that the sin of the Golden Calf was due to a failure of leadership on the part of Aaron. This is the overwhelming impression we receive on first reading [Exodus 32](#). We sense that Aaron should have resisted the people's clamour. He should have told them to be patient. He should have shown leadership.

He did not. When Moses comes down the mountain and asks him what he has done, Aaron replies:

“Do not be angry, my lord. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, ‘Make an oracle to lead us, since we do not know what happened to Moses, the man who took us out of Egypt.’ So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!”

Ex. 32:22-24

This is a failure of responsibility. It is also a spectacular act of denial (“I threw it into the fire, and out came this Calf!”).[1] So the first reading of the story is of Aaron’s failure.

But only the first. A deeper reading suggests that it is about Moses. It was his absence from the camp that created the crisis in the first place.

The people began to realise that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, ‘Make us an oracle to lead us. We have no idea what happened to Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt.’

God told Moses what was happening and said:

“Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have wrought ruin.”

Ex. 32:7

The undertone is clear. “Go down,” suggests that God was telling Moses that his place was with the people at the foot of the mountain, not with God at the top. “Your people” implies that God was telling Moses that the people were his problem, not God’s. He was about to disown them.

Moses urgently prayed to God for forgiveness, then descended. What follows is a whirlwind of action. Moses descends, sees what has happened, breaks the tablets, burns the Calf, mixes its ashes with water and makes the people drink, then summons help in punishing the wrongdoers. He has become the leader in the midst of the people, restoring order where a moment before there had been chaos. On this reading the central figure was Moses. He had been the strongest of strong leaders. The result, though, was that when he was not there, the people panicked. That is the downside of strong leadership.

But there then follows a chapter, [Exodus 33](#), that is one of the hardest in the Torah to understand. It begins with God announcing that, though He would send an “angel” or “messenger” to accompany the people on the rest of their journey, He Himself would not be in their midst “because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” This deeply distresses the people. (See [Ex. 33:1-6](#)) In verses 12-23, Moses challenges God on this verdict. He wants God’s Presence to go with the people. He asks, “Let me know Your ways,” and “Pray let me see Your glory.” This is hard to understand. The entire exchange between Moses and

God, one of the most intense in the Torah, is no longer about sin and forgiveness. It seems almost to be a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of God. What is its connection with the Golden Calf?

It is what happens between these two episodes that is the most puzzling of all. The text says that Moses “took his tent and pitched it for himself outside the camp, far from the camp” (Ex. 33:7). This must surely have been precisely the wrong thing to do. If, as God and the text have implied, the problem had been the distance of Moses as a leader, the single most important thing for him to do now would be to stay in the people’s midst, not position himself outside the camp. Moreover, the Torah has just told us that God had said He would not be in the midst of the people – and this caused the people distress. Moses’ decision to do likewise would surely have doubled their distress. Something deep is happening here.

It seems to me that in Exodus 33 Moses is undertaking the most courageous act of his life. He is, in essence, saying to God: “It is not my distance that is the problem. It is Your distance. The people are terrified of You. They have witnessed Your overwhelming power. They have seen You bring the greatest empire the world has ever known to its knees. They have seen You turn sea into dry land, send down food from heaven and bring water from a rock. When they heard Your voice at Mount Sinai, they came to me to beg me to be an intermediary. They said, ‘You speak to us and we will hearken, but let not God speak to us lest we die’ (Ex. 20:16). They made a Calf not because they wanted to worship an idol, but because they wanted some symbol of Your Presence that was not terrifying. They need You to be close. They need to sense You not in the sky or the summit of the mountain but in the midst of the camp. And even if they cannot see Your face, for no one can do that, at least let them see some visible sign of Your glory.”

That, it seems to me, is Moses’ request to which this week’s parsha is the answer.

“Let them make for Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst.”

Ex. 25:8

This is the first time in the Torah that we hear the verb sh-ch-n, meaning “to dwell,” in relation to God. As a noun it means literally, “a neighbour.” From this is derived the key word in post-biblical Judaism, Shechinah, meaning God’s immanence as opposed to His transcendence, God-as-One-who-is-close, the daring idea of God as a near neighbour.

In terms of the theology of the Torah, the very idea of a Mishkan, a Sanctuary or Temple, a physical “home” for “God’s glory,” is deeply paradoxical. God is beyond space. As King Solomon said at the inauguration of the first Temple, “Behold, the heavens, and the heavens of the heavens, cannot encompass You, how much less this House?” Or as Isaiah said in God’s name: “The heavens are My throne and the earth My foot-stool. What House shall you build for Me, where can My resting place be?” (Is. 66:1)

The answer, as the Jewish mystics emphasised, is that God does not live in a building, but rather in the hearts of the builders: “Let them make for me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8) – “among them,” not “in it.” How, though, does this happen? What human act causes the Divine Presence to live within the camp, the community? The answer is the name of our parsha, Terumah, meaning, a gift, a contribution.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying ‘Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from everyone whose heart moves them to give.’

Ex. 25:2

This would prove to be the turning point in Jewish history. Until that moment the Israelites had been recipients of God’s miracles and deliverances. He had taken them from slavery to freedom and performed miracles for them. There was only one thing God had not yet done, namely, give the Israelites the chance of giving back something to God. The very idea sounds absurd. How can we, God’s creations, give back to the God who made us? All we have is His. As David said, at the gathering he convened at the end of his life to initiate the building the Temple:

Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things ... Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

I Chronicles 29:12, 29:14

That ultimately is the logic of the Mishkan. God’s greatest gift to us is the ability to give to Him. From a Judaic perspective the idea is fraught with risk. The idea that God might be in need of gifts is close to paganism and heresy. Yet, knowing the risk, God allowed Himself to be persuaded by Moses to cause His spirit to rest within the camp and allow the Israelites to give something back to God.

At the heart of the idea of the Sanctuary is what Lewis Hyde beautifully described as the labour of gratitude. His classic study, *The Gift*,^[2] looks at the role of the giving and receiving of gifts, for example, at critical moments of transition. He quotes the Talmudic story of a man whose daughter was about to get married, but who had been told that she would not survive to the end of the day. The next morning the man visited his daughter and saw that she was still alive. Unknown to both of them, when she hung up her hat after the wedding, its pin pierced a serpent that would otherwise have bitten and killed her. The father wanted to know what his daughter had done that merited this Divine Intervention. She answered, “A poor man came to the door yesterday. Everyone was so busy with the wedding preparations that they did not have time to deal with him. So I took the portion that had been intended for me and gave it to him.” It was this act of generosity that was the cause of her miraculous deliverance. (Shabbat 156b)

The construction of the Sanctuary was fundamentally important because it gave the Israelites the chance to give back to God. Later Jewish law recognised that giving is an integral part of human dignity when they made the remarkable ruling that even a poor person completely dependent on charity is still obliged to give charity.[3] To be in a situation where you can only receive, not give, is to lack human dignity.

The Mishkan became the home of the Divine Presence because God specified that it be built only out of voluntary contributions. Giving creates a gracious society by enabling each of us to make our contribution to the public good. That is why the building of the Sanctuary was the cure for the sin of the Golden Calf. A society that only received but could not give was trapped in dependency and lack of self-respect. God allowed the people to come close to Him, and He to them, by giving them the chance to give.

That is why a society based on rights not responsibilities, on what we claim from, not what we give to others, will always eventually go wrong. It is why the most important gift a parent can give a child is the chance to give back. The etymology of the word Terumah hints at this. It means not simply a contribution, but literally something “raised up.” When we give, it is not just our contribution but we who are raised up. We survive by what we are given, but we achieve dignity by what we give. [1] In [Deuteronomy 9:20](#), Moses discloses a fact which has been kept from us until that point: “God also expressed great anger toward Aaron, threatening to destroy him, so, at that time, I also prayed for Aaron.” [2] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006). [3] Maimonides *Hilchot Shekalim* 1:1, *Mattenot Ani'im* 7:5.

[Redemptive Relationship, Epilogue: Sheltering a \(Distant\) Other – Teruman 5782](#)
[by Rabbi Aviva Richman](#)

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/aviva-richmans-divrei-torah>

Parashat Terumah brings us to what is a sort of epilogue—though also, in some ways, a prologue—of the love story in three scenes we saw between Israel and God in earlier *parshiyot* of Shemot.¹ Beyond Sinai (articulating commitment and marriage), we come to the moment of “moving in” as we build a home in the form of the *mishkan*. As we will see, creating a shelter for God is not only the climax of this love story, but was also its catalyst: divine hospitality towards Israel came in the wake of Avraham’s hospitality, much earlier. Through these intertwined acts of human and divine hospitality, Parashat Terumah teaches us to cultivate a readiness to give of ourselves to shelter and care for another, even when we cannot always clearly envision the recipient—or even the utility of what we have to give.

We explored three images in *midrash* on the Exodus story that evoked Israel “hiding/sheltering in the shade” (חבצלת) as they were redeemed. But the image in this epilogue is reversed, as our *midrash* connects the word “shade” (צל) with

the *mishkan* through the name of the architect, Betzalel, read as “*be-tzel El* - God is in the shade, or shelter.” According to this part of the *midrash*, God is the one who is sheltered, by Israel:

Shir Ha-Shirim 2:1

“Rose of Sharon”—that I made [God] shelter, through the hands of Betzalel, as it is written “Betzalel made the ark” (Exodus 37:1).

Israel takes initiative here, creating shelter for God through Betzalel building the *mishkan*, and specifically the ark. On top of the ark are the two *keruvim* spreading their wings in the form of a “canopy,” and it is from there that God’s voice emerges (Numbers 7:89). In the flow of the Exodus narrative, this act of “sheltering God” comes after God has sheltered Israel. Perhaps reflecting a kind of coming of age, Israel is now able to act on a sense of gratitude and return the favor, able to offer shelter to God. In addition to the specific moments of sheltering we have seen—on the eve of leaving Egypt, at the crossing of the Sea, and at Sinai—early Rabbinic tradition speaks of Israel being sheltered in an ongoing way by “the clouds of Glory” throughout their desert wanderings.² These Clouds of Glory are linked to a verse from Psalms that describes God spreading a cloud over Israel, “פרש ענן למסך - God spread a cloud for a cover” (Psalm 105:39), a description that resonates with the *keruvim* above the ark, “פורשי כנפיהם ... סוככים - spreading their wings and covering” the ark (Exodus 25:20). In this parallel language, we make the *mishkan*—and particularly the ark with the wings of the *keruvim*—to spread shelter over God just as God spread shelter over us. Yet, the story does not really start here. It turns out that the first act of shelter was not divine hospitality towards us, but human hospitality towards God. The only reason we merited the shelter of the Clouds of Glory, according to *midrash*, is because Avraham first invited God under the shelter of his own home, when he invited in the passersby who turned out to be angels (Genesis 18):

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael, Massekhta de-VaYehi, Introduction

With reference to Avraham it says, “recline under the tree”³ (Genesis 18:4). And the Holy Blessed One spread over his descendants seven clouds of glory, as it says “[God] spread a cloud to cover, and fire to illuminate the night” (Psalm 105:39).

Avraham’s stance of hospitality welcomed in even the Divine Presence. In turn, God offered hospitality to Avraham’s descendants in the form of the Clouds of Glory that sheltered Israel. In this account, human initiative began the relationship of mutual sheltering between us and God.

The scenes we have described of God sheltering us and our acts of sheltering God offer a beautiful picture of mutual love and care. But the confidence of this close relationship may not resonate with our own religious experiences at all. Far from the

security of dwelling in God's shelter, we may instead feel like God is in fact hiding and far away.

Another example of the word "shade/shelter" (צל) in Tanakh can lead provocatively in this direction of divine hiddenness. Psalms describes one who dwells in the "shade of Shaddai," someone who is apparently assured of divine protection:

Psalm 91:1

O you who dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide in the shade of Shaddai

Yet, a slight rereading of the vocalization points instead towards a God who is "hidden in shadow" so to speak, far away and obscured:

The Most High dwells in the secret place; Shaddai abides in shadow.⁴

How do we do this work of terumah, giving of ourselves to create a home for God, when it doesn't seem like God is anywhere nearby? We can learn from a different kind of terumah than the gifts for the mishkan in our parashah: the small gift given from one's produce to the kohen. Mishnah Terumot describes that there is a way to give terumah even if there is no kohen around.

Mishnah Terumot 2:4

Anywhere there is a kohen, one should give terumah from the best [produce]. But anywhere there isn't a kohen, one should give terumah from something that will last. R. Yehudah says: One should always give terumah from the best [regardless of whether there is a kohen nearby or not].

When there is a kohen around, one gives of their best items, e.g. fresh figs. If there is no kohen nearby, one takes what lasts longest, presumably in the hopes that it will eventually make its way to a kohen, e.g. dried figs. Yet R. Yehudah differs, saying one should always give of their best items, even if that is not necessarily what is most obviously useful to the recipient.

We can learn from this mahloket when thinking of what it means to give terumah to create shelter for God, even if we feel like we live in a place where there is no God, so to speak. We might need to adjust the nature of this gift, shifting our mindset to what is durable and rugged, as we know we may need to wait quite some time for anything we have to "reach" God. A beautiful but fragile faith simply won't cut it. On the other hand, perhaps R. Yehudah inspires us to always be ready to give what we think is our best, even if that will have no obvious "use" to God. In this view, it may be helpful for us to think of God as close because that will draw out the best we have to give, our terumah.

In the merging of human and divine hospitality that we have seen in the narrative from Avraham, through the Exodus, and through the mishkan, the model of Parashat Terumah should inspire the way we give to offer shelter and care for

others, not just for God. We can be ready to give from our best, but we also can—and must—give in the way that is most durable and sustainable. Even if we can't see right now who the beneficiaries might be of what we are able to give, and even if it is not clear whether its form will be useful, there is a power that comes from this stance of *terumah*. May we all land on the ways to give our best, and may we all land on the ways to not give our best when that is too fragile and unsustainable. This stance of readiness to give—whether our best or what is most durable—may ultimately lead to offering shelter and care even to those who are decidedly distant, whether physically or emotionally. And maybe that is what actually creates a home for the Divine Presence amongst us.

Shabbat Shalom. ¹ “Redemptive Relationship, Parts 1-3” on Parashat Bo, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/redemptive-relationship-part-1>; Parashat BeShallah, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/redemptive-relationship-part-2>; and Parashat Yitro, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/redemptive-relationship-part-3>.

² This appears as a *mahloket* between R. Akiva and R. Eliezer in a number of places, e.g. Sifra Emor Perek 17 and Talmud Bavli Sukkah 11b.

³ The context, vv. 3-4: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אֱמֹנָא מִצָּאתַי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ: יִקְחֶנָּא מֵעַט־מַיִם וְרָחֵצוּ: / [Avraham] said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree.”

⁴ Dr. Tzemah Yoreh, my spouse and biblical scholar, suggested this reading.

[Holding God, Our Tradition, and One Another Close: Teruman by Jacob Blumenthal](http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/holding-god-our-tradition-and-one-another-close/)
<http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/holding-god-our-tradition-and-one-another-close/>

As the Omicron variant crescendos, I'm back on Zoom as a congregant with my shul for my prayer experiences. And I'm very ambivalent about it. I spend much of my time on Zoom during the week, so it's hard to go back to the computer on Shabbat. It certainly feels “one step removed” from the immediacy of in person community and prayer. I look forward to being back in person soon and appreciate communities who have maintained their in-person experiences safely.

And yet on Zoom I can play with the harmonies as I sing along, and, when they go wrong, only I have to suffer (well, sometimes my wife does too). I see people I love and care about and can smile without a mask. Attendance is often higher than when we were in person, and as I look at the faces on my screen, I see many who had pulled back over the years who are now re-engaged in Shabbat, prayer, and shul life.

As a leader in the Conservative-Masorti Movement, I see my own ambivalence around the use of technology on Shabbat or for forming minyanim shared among many communities, clergy, and synagogue leaders. How should we position ourselves? Should the new opportunities provided by these technologies lead the way? Should we temper our enthusiasm? Should we heed Abraham Joshua

Heschel's call to experience Shabbat "independent of technical civilization" and trust in our inherited traditions to hold us together (The Sabbath, 28)?

Ultimately, are God and tradition leading the way, or should our needs, especially in a time of crisis and loneliness, push those boundaries? The Torah provides interesting models for us to explore this question and we can see how our own struggles are reflected in the biblical text itself.

Let's start with Abraham. As God seeks to strengthen a covenantal relationship with our founding patriarch, God appears to him and says: "I am El Shaddai. Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). Indeed, the subsequent "tests" that God presents to Abraham—sending away Ishmael, saving Sodom, the binding of Isaac—are efforts by God to put Abraham "out in front," testing his moral compass and offering the opportunity to push back on God's temper and strict sense of justice. But that is not the only model the Torah offers. In the story of the Golden Calf the people despair of Moses's fate as he carries in bringing back the tablets with the Ten Commandments. They panic and demand of Moses's brother, Aaron: "Rise up! Make for us a god who will go before us, for that man, Moses, who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know has become of him" (Exod. 32:1). The commentator Hizkuni notes that Aaron misinterprets what the people are seeking. They are not asking for a "god" (Hebrew word "elohim") but rather for a strong leader (another use of the term "elohim"), a human agent who will continue as God's proxy and lead them from out in front with confidence and certainty through the emotional and cultural upheaval that accompanies their transition from being slaves to being free people.

Finally, in this week's parashah the Torah offers a third model in our relationship to God's presence. This week begins a five-portion sequence (with the Golden Calf story at its center) in which the Israelites are instructed in how to build the Mishkan, the tent and "dwelling place" that will be associated with worship and God's presence throughout their journey to the Land of Israel.

What is the goal of this project? The text is explicit: "Make for me a holy dwelling place, and I will dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). The goal, fully realized in the final verses of Exodus, is for God's presence to reside, literally, in the midst of the Israelites. In fact, in the book of Numbers we learn how the Israelites are commanded to pitch their tents in a square encampment that places the Mishkan at the center. This arrangement is also clearly a metaphor for how we are to hold God's presence, doing mitzvot and bringing God into our minds, hearts, and actions.

If we take these stories chronologically, we see God pushing Abraham out in front, the people demanding a leader (God's proxy) out in front of them, and finally the realization of a mutual desire for God to live among the people.

Each model has its merits and its challenges. We might argue that sometimes Abraham falls short of the task of moral leadership. Aaron misinterprets the desire

of the people for an “out in front” leader and constructs an idol. And by the end of the book of Exodus, Moses and the Israelites complete the building of the Mishkan, but God’s presence is so intense that Moses “cannot approach the tent” (Exod. 40:35). God’s immanence is both welcome and fearsome.

I would argue that these models characterize our relationship with our leaders and also with Jewish tradition. Sometimes we insist on our needs coming first and demand that leaders actually follow. Sometimes we want leaders out in front, showing us the way. And sometimes we just want to hold our leaders, God, and our traditions close, and wrestle with them together in mutual conversation. In our Conservative-Masorti Movement, our clergy, volunteer leaders, and community members often shift among these roles as we create a conversation around challenging issues such as the use of technology for worship and for community building on Shabbat.

If I was to choose from among the three models, I am often personally drawn to the vision of this week’s parashah, which insists that ultimately our goal is for God’s presence to dwell among us, and within us. That requires us to hold our modern needs and our traditions in careful balance, and for us to hold one another close as well. (*Jacob Blumenthal is Chief Executive, The Rabbinical Assembly; JTS Alumnus (RS’99)*)

[And Now, A Word To The King: What Does It Mean for God to Dwell Amongst Us?](https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/table-for-five/2022/02/02/and-now-a-word-to-the-king/)

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/table-for-five/2022/02/02/and-now-a-word-to-the-king/>
[Table for Five: Terumah – Edited by Salvador Litvak, The Accidental Talmudist](#)

And the word of the Lord came to Solomon saying, regarding this house which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, and execute My ordinances, and keep all My commandments to walk in them; then will I establish My word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people, Israel.

– 1 Kings 6:11-13 (Haftarah for Parsha Terumah)

Rabbi Avraham Greenstein, AJRCA Professor of Hebrew:

This set of verses echoes the well-known passage in Leviticus 26 in which God promises the Children of Israel rain and agricultural abundance if they keep His statutes and ordinances. However, unlike the promise in Leviticus wherein God promises material well-being, God’s promise to Solomon suggests spiritual well-being and speaks here of an intimate bond of closeness to the Divine as a result of keeping the mitzvot.

Despite this seeming difference, the language of the two passages remains strikingly similar. The promise made to Solomon really does seem somehow to be a

reiteration of God's promise to Israel. Perhaps it is the case that they are two separate articulations of the same promise of Divine favor. For the Jewish nation being addressed in Leviticus, the most salient signal of Divine attention is the outward one of domestic security and material prosperity, whereas for Solomon, an individual, a more relevant sign of Divine ministrations is to feel God's proximity and caring on a personal level.

In another sense, these two promises are two different modes through which we can sense Divine providence. When we experience material well-being, we can recognize that God is providing it to facilitate our performance of His will. And even when we find ourselves in a precarious position or in a state of uncertainty, we can acknowledge and trust that God has not abandoned us, as we ourselves have not abandoned Him. God is always with us, and it is through the mitzvot that we realize this.

Rabbi Janet Madden, PhD, Fountainview at Gonda Westside:

Close to midpoint in the seven years that it takes to build the Temple—a visionary and costly enterprise in materials, ingenuity and effort—“the word of the Lord” comes to the man charged with its construction. Perhaps the word comes to Solomon through a dream, for his building is the dream denied to David, his father. Or perhaps, having begun with great energy during Ziv, the month of Light, the word comes as Solomon's initial enthusiasm dims, or because his focus on the physical structure is eclipsing the spiritual purpose of his enterprise.

Solomon is Israel's third king. Symbolically and literally, he embodies the principle of the harmony of opposites. Lauded as the wisest of men, his task is to balance dynamism and stability. He is enjoined to walk with his people in holy ways, charged with building a house in which Holiness will dwell. The word of the Holy One reminds the human builder that without the stable foundation of Israel's commitment to its essential purpose—living in relationship with the Divine—every aspect of this intricate and expensive project will be for naught.

Does Solomon perceive G-d's word as possibility or inevitability? Does he meditate on the futility of all things even as he continues building with unsurpassed opulence? Surely, as intended, he understands the Divine message and his musings in Kohelet conclude by repeating “The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments!”

Chana Margulies, Author of “Jumping in Puddles: a Transformational Memoir”:

Hashem is teaching us how to build a temple, a home, a haven of intimacy with the Divine. As expressed in the Zohar, Hashem's desire is for us to create a home in this world for us to dwell in together. Through Torah and mitzvot, we allow our minds and hearts to become Hashem's home in this world, a portable temple.

Hashem is sharing with us the secret to making this essential relationship and all cherished relationships thrive. The secret is making a commitment that doesn't change with the seasons.

The first category of mitzvot mentioned are "statutes/chukim," suprarational commandments, kabalistically sourced in the sefira of Keter, which transcends human intellect. It is known as our crown because it originates above our faculties of intellect. Such laws include kashrut, mikvah, and hair covering. The foundation for a healthy marriage is showing up, both when I feel like it and when I don't. The ability to give despite one's reluctance or skepticism allows for transcendence of one's nature.

There are times when our spouses need love and support in a way that appears irrational to us. If the basis of the relationship is intellect and emotions, we are limited. If the relationship is G-dly and transcendent, then we are free to show up for our soulmate regardless of mood or understanding.

As we embrace Hashem's suprarational commandments, the mitzvot that stretch our muscle of transcendence, we are ready to build a home for Hashem in this world, and within our being.

Rabbi/Cantor Eva Robbins, N'vay Shalom, Faculty AJRCA:

This Haftarah was chosen by the rabbis because of its connection to this week's Torah portion, Terumah, God's command to create an impermanent, traveling dwelling where God would meet with the people. It provided healing for the distance created at Sinai when God's powerful presence terrified the people, "...Let God not speak to us lest we die."

I believe God's psychological understanding motivated the building of a structure that was not only for the people, but by the people.

Centuries later, the command to build a permanent structure to replace the Mishkan is not created by the people. Solomon brings in outsiders to do the work. This time, the people's time investment must be applied to following God's laws – Mitzvot, Chukim, and Mishpatim. Terumah focuses on the people's participation through their skills or offerings, while the Haftarah focuses on the laws, "...Keep My commandments to walk in them."

As it turns out, the Temple was not permanent, it was destroyed twice, and the rabbis hold the people responsible. Perhaps an investment personally, in its creation, might have mitigated this result. I do believe that by comparing these texts we are reminded that both are important; being 'wholly/Holy' involved in the creation of a home for the Divine presence, whether standing in our communal midst or in our inner landscape, as well as following the laws that reflect walking in Divine ways. Both are necessary for God to dwell amongst us.

A father comes home from work. He's exhausted and all he wants to do is slump in his chair, unwind, and read the paper. The thing is, he has a young child who is incredibly happy he's home and wants to play with him. So, the father gets an idea. In the paper there's a complicated map of the world. The father takes it, rips it into a lot of different puzzle pieces, and tells his child, "When you put all these pieces together, we'll play." Then he leans back in his chair, confident that he's bought himself the time he needs to relax.

Moments later, the child runs back in and says, "I finished!" The father can't believe it. "How did you do it so quickly?" The child says, "It was easy. On the other side of the map, there was a picture of a person, and when I put the person together... the whole world fell into place."

This story is simple but profound. It solves a problem in the commentaries about the Holy Temple and its prototype the Mishkan or Tabernacle that we prayed in during our forty years in the desert. On the one hand, the Torah Commentators state that the Mishkan was a miniature of a human being. On the other hand, they state it was a miniature of the universe. From this parable we see that both opinions are true. That's because when we fix ourselves, we fix everything.

Yahrtzeits

Myrna Most remembers her mother Minna Handleman on Thurs. Feb.10 (Adar 9)