

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Terumah  
February 25, 2023 \*\*\* Adar 4, 2023

Terumah in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/1311/jewish/Terumah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1311/jewish/Terumah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Terumah," means "Offering" and it is found in Exodus 25:2.

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 the 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: I Kings 5:26-6:13**

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/632637/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](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 *haftorah* 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 Gift of Giving: Terumah by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/terumah/the-gift-of-giving/>

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-ch-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 *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence.

Central to its meaning is the idea of closeness. *Shachen* 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 in *parshat Va'era*, 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 today, 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 recite 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 *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.

[Our Mishkan - Who Is In and Who is Barred Entry? By Rabbi Doug Alpert](https://truah.org/resources/doug-alpert-parshat-terumah-moraltorah2023/)  
<https://truah.org/resources/doug-alpert-parshat-terumah-moraltorah2023/>

I can't say that this week's parshah, Terumah, keeps us on the edge of our seats. My rabbi of childhood, Rabbi Morris Margolies z"l, suggested as much at my bar mitzvah. Bible professor Ellen Davis describes the exhaustive detailing of the building of the Mishkan as "arguably the most boring [section] in the whole Bible." (*Opening Israel's Scriptures*)

But there is meaning to be made here. A few weeks from now, when the Mishkan is completed, we will read, "When Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks — as THE ETERNAL had commanded, so they had done — Moses blessed them." (**Exodus 39:43**). Not blessed it, the Mishkan; blessed them, the people. **Rashi comments** that Moses' blessing is the end of **Psalm 90**: "May the favor of the ETERNAL, our God, be upon us; let the work of our hands prosper, O prosper the work of our hands!" All of which is to say that, more than all of the materials that went into constructing the Mishkan, what really matters are the hands that built it. Taking it a step further, Professor Mark George explores the social aspect of the layout of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was a series of "zones of holiness." According to George, "geographers and sociologists argue that space is not a given [i.e., does not just happen], rather, it is something that societies produce that, in turn, reproduces the social structure and hierarchies of those societies. Space is in fact social space... the organization of the Tabernacle [Mishkan] shows that the Priestly writers of Terumah had a broad, inclusive understanding of Israel in the world." (*Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*) "The social structure and hierarchy organizing Tabernacle space is expansive and inclusive, reflecting the Priestly writers' 'democratic' understanding of Israel's role in the world." (*Ibid*) In this democratic understanding, George sees the Mishkan as open and affirming space for anyone who has covenanted with the Divine: "women, men, queers and sojourners alike." While George in this essay is laudably focused on the queer community, his application of an inclusive Mishkan could and should be applied to other communities as well.

Thinking of this teaching in the context of community organizing, the question that arises for me is: Who gets into the Mishkan? Whose voice and membership in the community are allowed to count?

Recently, we have seen renewed and cruel vigor from those who seek to control that question, in so many arenas. I am now involved in one in particular as one of 13 clergy plaintiffs in a lawsuit, suing the state of Missouri and the state's abortion

bans as unconstitutional pursuant to the Missouri constitution.

With the fall of *Roe*, we are now faced with a slew of state abortion bans. Women and other pregnant people are denied the basic right to make crucial decisions regarding whether they should have to give birth to a child, as well as other matters affecting their health and future. Healthcare providers are being paralyzed into inaction in delivering vital and even emergency healthcare, fearful of possible criminal prosecution.

These abortion bans are imposed based on a specific religious perspective not our own. In my home state of Missouri, the legislators advocating for these harmful bans continually invoked their own narrow interpretation of God and Bible to assert that life begins at conception and abortion is murder.

The establishment of this narrow religious view in Missouri comes at my and our expense. In seeking to impose a singular religious dogma in counseling congregants, we are compelled to disclose to them that abortion options that would be available pursuant to halakhah are not available in Missouri. This is not only true for us as rabbis, but for many other religious leaders from many different faith traditions whose teachings are in conflict with Missouri's abortion bans.

Our basic freedoms are under attack. The authoritarian extremists pushing these laws are saying that only they qualify to be in the Mishkan. Only their narrow (read: white Christian nationalist) religious view is a path toward the Divine presence.

By drawing parallels between the creation story and the building of the Mishkan by human hands, Nehama Leibowitz teaches that it is incumbent upon us to imitate our Creator. We do so when we establish our world as a Mishkan, a broadly inclusive sacred space, welcoming all who are created in the divine image, no matter how they understand God's wish for how we live our lives.

*(Rabbi Doug Alpert is the rabbi of Congregation Kol Ami-KC in Kansas City, Missouri. Ordained by the Academy for Jewish Religion-NY, he presently serves on the boards of 10 organizations working for justice, including Planned Parenthood Great Plains, and the Missouri chapter of the NAACP.)*

[An Age Old Message for Current Consumption: Parshat Terumah by Rabbi Ariel Shalem](https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/02/02-parshat-terumah-an-age-old-message-for-current-consumption)  
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The Mishkan, the traveling "House of G-D" built by the Jews in the desert, was an elaborate structure, built of royal and expensive materials. Reading the passages that describe its construction, one could easily be led to ask, "What does such a grandiose and physical building have to do with Hashem?" Yet the Mishkan is the epitome of Divine presence. The word Mishkan means "dwelling place" and is

inherently connected to the word Shechina, “presence,” which is also one of many of Hashem’s titles. The Mishkan is the essential place of Hashem’s presence in this world. About the Mishkan, Hashem says, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them.”[1]

Parshat Terumah opens with an elaborate list of the materials that will be used in the building of the Mishkan and instruments within it: “...gold, silver, and copper; and turquoise, purple, and scarlet wool; linen and goat hair; red-dyed ram skins, tachash skins, acacia wood; oil for illumination, spices for the anointing oil and the aromatic incense; shoham stones and stones for the settings, for the ephod and the breastplate.”[2]

Regarding the aforementioned wood, the Midrash Tanhuma[3] on Parshat Terumah tells us that Ya'akov received a prophecy that his descendents, while in the desert, would be instructed to build a Mishkan, a dwelling place for Hashem. He subsequently planted saplings in the land of Israel and saw to it that his children would diligently transplant them to Mitzrayim. By making this wise decision, Ya'akov prepared a whole forest that would later supply B'nei Yisra'el with at least 800 cubic feet, or twenty tons, of usable wood for the Mishkan.

Yaakov longed to participate in the building of the house of Hashem, and took the necessary action to ensure his own involvement. Perhaps more significantly, Ya'akov's actions express the teaching of our sages “Who is wise? Those who foresee the consequences of their actions.”[4] Ya'akov had the wisdom to act on the prophecy Hashem had shown him. He saw the need for large amounts of wood in Midbar Sinai, an environment that did not produce wood at the time. He therefore created a sustainable solution for the sacred needs of Bnei Yisrael. We, too, must look ahead and ask ourselves if we are creating sustainable environments for the needs of our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren. Since the Industrial Revolution, our predecessors have not taken forest management seriously enough to warrant the respect that Yaakov earned for his foresight. In fact, they, and we, have acted all too foolishly with Hashem's resources. Humankind, and in particular the industrialized West, has imprudently plundered one of earth's most precious and critical resources.

The 2021 report given by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change summarizes the drastic effects of reaching over 1.5 C of global warming. In addition, the Climate and Land Use Alliance explains the oft forgotten benefits of trees and warns of the effects of deforestation:

Limiting average temperature rise to 1.5°C requires both drastic reduction of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and removing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. While high-tech carbon dioxide removal solutions are under development, the ‘natural technology’ of forests is currently the only proven

means of removing and storing atmospheric CO2 at a scale that can meaningfully contribute to achieving carbon balance.[5]

Responsible use of forests and natural forest expansion are key components of maintaining a livable world.

The Midrash[6] also analyzes the choice of acacia wood in the construction of the Mishkan. It explains that the Hebrew root of the word *shittim*, meaning acacia, shares the same root as the word *shtoot*, meaning folly. A connection is made: by building the Sanctuary out of this particular wood, we are reminded to rectify the folly that B'nei Yisra'el pursued with the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Midrash's link between acacia and *Cheit Ha'egel* presents an ironic and poignant connection to the current correlation between deforestation and beef production. According to the Center for International Forestry Research, cattle ranching for beef has caused the majority of felled forests in Latin America, amounting to tens of thousands of square kilometers each year! In the Brazilian Amazon, alone, the total area of deforestation rose from 41.5 million hectares in 1990 to 58.7 million hectares in 2000 - that is forest area twice the size of Portugal lost in just ten years.[7] The overwhelming majority of that lost forest becomes pasture that is largely used for grazing cattle, which are intended for eventual export on the international market. Modern-day beef consumption may thus represent the pursuit of our own material comfort at the expense of our forests. Careless and selfish deforestation is also caused by urban sprawl. We might benefit from reevaluating our habits of building new highways, building larger homes than we might actually need, and using endless amounts of resources for commuting and transportation of goods. Natural resources such as forests are meant for us to use, but we must learn from Ya'akov how to wisely use, reuse, and replenish them. We must learn to avoid the "shtoot" and use the "shittim."

The Sanctuary served as a microcosm of world harmony and was a Divine gesture to B'nei Yisra'el in response to *Cheit Ha'egel*. We are given Hashem's world in order to construct a house for Hashem; one of peace, harmony, and sustainability. The world's resources are not here so that we may pursue materialistic paths towards happiness and fulfillment. The moment that we misuse the physical and degrade the planet, we act against the spirit of the Mishkan that Hashem commanded us to build.

Let us be blessed with the wisdom and foresight of our forefather, Ya'akov, to provide sustainable and justified coexistence with the remainder of Hashem's forests. Let us establish an awareness of how precious our natural world is. By doing so, may we herald in a new era of human consciousness, and may Hashem build the third, and final, *Beit Hamikdash* as a testament to our efforts. As the prophet Yeshayahu said, "I will give in the desert cedars, acacia trees, all kinds of

civilization. Even in them will I give all kinds of wisdom, goodness, and peace... In order that they see and know, and pay attention and understand together that the hand of the Lord did this and the Holy One of Israel created it.”[8]

[1] Shemot 25:8 (translation by Artscroll Mesorah) [2] Shemot 25:3-7 (translation by Artscroll Mesorah) [3] Midrash Tanhuma on Parshat Terumah, chapter 9 [4] Babylonian Talmud, Tamid 32a [5] Report by Climate and Land Use Alliance - “Five Reasons the Earth’s Climate Depends on Forests” [6] Midrash Tanhuma on Parshat Terumah, Chapter 10 [7] Report by the Center for International Forestry Research - “Hamburger Connection Fuels Amazon Destruction” [8] Allegorical rendering following Rashi on Yeshayahu 41:19-20

### Yahrtzeits

Mel Zwillenberg remembers his father Nathan Zwillenberg on Wed. March 1.  
Merna Most remembers her mother Minna Handleman on Thurs. March 2