

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Terumah  
February 17, 2024 \*\*\* 8 Adar I, 5784

Terumah in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default\\_cdo/aid/15565/jewish/Terumah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default_cdo/aid/15565/jewish/Terumah.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.

Terumah in a Nutshell: I Kings 5:26 – 6:13

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/632637/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/632637/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftorah 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 haftorah 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

Building Builders: Terumah by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/terumah/building-builders/>

As soon as we read the opening lines of Terumah we begin the massive shift from the intense drama of the Exodus with its signs and wonders and epic events, to the long, detailed narrative of how the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that they carried with them through the desert.

By any standards it is a part of the Torah that cries out for explanation. The first thing that strikes us is the sheer length of the account: one third of the book of Shemot, five parshiyot – Terumah, Tetzaveh, half of Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, interrupted only by the story of the Golden Calf.

This becomes even more perplexing when we compare it with another act of creation, namely God's creation of the universe. That story is told with the utmost brevity: a mere thirty-four verses. Why take fifteen times as long to tell the story of constructing the Sanctuary?

The question becomes harder still when we recall that the Mishkan was not a permanent feature of the spiritual life of the Children of Israel. It was specifically designed to be carried on their journey through the wilderness. Later, in the days of Solomon, it would be replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. What enduring message are we supposed to learn from the construction of a travelling Sanctuary that was not even designed to endure?

Even more puzzling is that fact that the story is part of the book of Shemot. Shemot is about the birth of a nation. Hence Egypt, slavery, Pharaoh, the Ten Plagues, the Exodus, the journey through the sea, and the covenant at Mount Sinai. All these things would become part of the people's collective memory. But

the Sanctuary, where sacrifices were offered, surely belongs to Vayikra, otherwise known as Torat Kohanim, Leviticus, the book of priestly things. It seems to have no connection with Exodus whatsoever.

The answer, I believe, is profound.

The transition from Bereishit to Shemot, Genesis to Exodus, is about the change from family to nation. When the Israelites entered Egypt, they were a single extended family. By the time they left they had become a sizeable people, divided into twelve tribes plus an amorphous collection of fellow travellers known as the *erev rav*, the "mixed multitude."

What united them was a fate. They were the people whom the Egyptians distrusted and enslaved. The Israelites had a common enemy. Beyond that they had a memory of the patriarchs and their God. They shared a past. What was to prove difficult, almost impossible, was to get them to share responsibility for the future.

Everything we read in Shemot tells us that, as is so often the case among people long deprived of freedom, they were passive and they were easily moved to complain. The two often go together. They expected someone else, Moses or God Himself, to provide them with food and water, lead them to safety, and take them to the Promised Land.

At every setback, they complained. They complained when Moses' first intervention failed:

"May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Ex. 5:21

At the Red Sea they complained again. They said to Moses:

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt, that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

Ex. 14:11-12

After the division of the Red Sea, the Torah says:

"When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and believed in Him and in Moses His servant."

Ex. 14:31

But after a mere three days they were complaining again. There was no water.

Then there was water but it was bitter. Then there was no food.

The Israelites said, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

Ex. 16:3

Soon Moses himself is saying:

"What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

Ex. 17:4

By now God has performed signs and wonders on the people's behalf, taken them out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, given them water from a rock and manna from heaven, and still they do not cohere as a nation. They are a group of individuals, unwilling or unable to take responsibility, to act collectively. Their first response is always to complain.

And now God does the single greatest act in history. He appears in a revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history that God has appeared to an entire people, and the people tremble. There never was anything like it before; there never will be again.

How long does this last? A mere forty days. Then the people make a Golden Calf. If miracles, the division of the sea, and the Revelation at Mount Sinai fail to transform the Israelites, what will? There are no greater miracles than these.

That is when God does the most unexpected thing. He says to Moses: speak to the people and tell them to contribute, to give something of their own, be it gold or silver or bronze, be it wool or animal skin, be it oil or incense, or their skill or their time, and get them to build something together – a symbolic home for My Presence, a Tabernacle. It doesn't need to be large or grand or permanent. Get them to make something, to become builders. Get them to give.

Moses does so. And the people respond. They respond so generously that Moses is told, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done" (Ex. 36:5), and Moses has to ask them to stop giving.

During the whole time the Tabernacle was being constructed, there were no complaints, no rebellions, no dissension. What all the signs and wonders failed to do, the construction of the Tabernacle succeeded in doing. It transformed the people. It turned them into a cohesive group. It gave them a sense of responsibility and identity.

Seen in this context, the story of the Tabernacle was the essential element in the birth of a nation. No wonder it is told at length; no surprise that it belongs to the

book of Exodus; and there is nothing ephemeral about it.

The Tabernacle did not last forever, but the lesson it taught did. It is not what God does for us that transforms us, but what we do for God. A free society is best symbolised by the Tabernacle. It is the home we build together. It is only by becoming builders that we turn from subjects to citizens. We have to earn our freedom by what we give. It cannot be given to us as an unearned gift.

It is what we do, not what is done to us, that makes us free. That is a lesson as true today as it was then.

### Terumah: How Much is a Human Being Worth by Allan Berkowitz

[https://truah.org/resources/allan-berkowitz-terumah-moraltorah\\_2024/](https://truah.org/resources/allan-berkowitz-terumah-moraltorah_2024/)

How much is a human being worth? Here's some perspective. There are approximately 300 Rembrandt paintings in the world; one of them recently sold for \$13.8 million. There is only one of the masterpiece that you are. That I am. That each human being is. If there are 300 Rembrandts and one is worth \$13.8 million, how much is a human being worth? Parshat Terumah offers us some understanding.

Through the building of the Mishkan/Tabernacle, the Torah masterfully reveals a deeply powerful system of kedushah, holiness. The very word terumah means "that which is elevated," and Parshat Terumah begins to reveal to us which objects are worthy of such elevation.

The gradations of holiness presented by the Torah are two-fold. Some objects require that we designate them for sacred use; doing so elevates their status from "ordinary" to "kadosh." For example, a table donated to the Tabernacle was no different physically from any other table. But once designated for the Tabernacle, the mere act of intent bestows automatic kedushah.

The second gradation of holiness centers on God. God, the Ultimate Holy, imparts kedushah on those objects that are a direct extension of God. The Ark, which contained the tablets from God and was the place where God and the Israelites met, was sanctified in this manner.

So, there are objects that become holy because of our intentions for them, and there are objects that are holy because of their emanation from or proximity to the Holy One. And what of human beings? Are we kadosh because of our proximity to and creation by God? Or is there a process of terumah, an action which elevates our kedushah even higher? The answer is both.

Just as the Ark was sacred for it contained the Word of God, each human being is sacred because we contain the Divine Spirit. Our tradition is clear that we are

created in God's image, and that bestows automatic kedushah on us and on each and every human being on the planet. So, theologically speaking, to be human is to be sacred. Full stop. And we also know that many of our classic commentaries teach us that the gift of tzelem Elohim, being created in God's image, comes with the consciousness of that phenomenon. To quote just one famous source, in [Mishnah Avot 3:14](#), Rabbi Akiva teaches, "Beloved is humankind having been created in God's image. And with an added measure of Divine love does humankind know they were created in God's image." Each of us is kadosh; each of us is moreover gifted with that knowledge — and each of us has an obligation to act on our, and each other's, sacred status.

In the Tabernacle, the curtain was a line between the Holy and the Holier. Similarly, our actions in a moment of human engagement are a curtain between the sacred and the even more sacred. The individual before us is holy. However, when we utilize the added gift of love that God has bestowed upon us and remain mindful of the sanctity of the other person, we consciously bring acknowledgment of our shared holiness to that human exchange. We pull back that curtain and reveal their holiness. At that moment, we further elevate the other and ourselves.

So how much are human beings worth? Their value lies somewhere between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. *(Rabbi Allan Berkowitz is the COO at Faith in Action East Bay, a social justice organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is the author of the newly published book, "The Psalms: A Guide For the Heart and Soul.")*

[Parshat Teruman: An Age-Old Message for Current Consumption by Ariel Shalem](#)  
[Edited by Shoshi Ehrenreich from Grow Torah](#)

<https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/02/02-parshat-terumah-an-age-old-message-for-current-consumption>

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 the 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 Yaakov received a prophecy that his descendants, 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, Yaakov prepared a whole forest that would later supply Bnei Yisrael 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, Yaakov’s actions express the teaching of our sages “Who is wise? Those who foresee the consequences of their actions.”[4] Yaakov 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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 Bnei Yisrael 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 Yaakov 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 Bnei Yisrael 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 toward 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, Yaakov, 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 (*Ariel Shalem was born and raised in Los Angeles and made aliyah to in 1995. He recieved a BA in English Literature from Bar Ilan University and is currently finishing his M.Ed. He is also an educator and encourages his high school students to think openly and consciously about themselves and their environment.*)

### Terumah - The Gift That Elevates by Eitan Fishbane

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/terumahthe-gift-that-elevates/>

Sometimes we all feel like we're giving more than we get, that we do more than our share, or that our individual needs are being sacrificed for the sake of someone else's happiness. It is an emotional struggle that we encounter in our families and friendships. Why should I give when the other person doesn't reciprocate in the way that I would want? If I give, will I also get what I deserve? But giving, we might suggest, is much more than a strategy to get something in return, and it is also far more than just about doing our responsible share in relationships and in our communities.

Why do we give, and what does that teach us about what it is to be human?

The great French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas rooted his ethical philosophy in the principle that the face of another person reflects a commanding moral power over us as individuals. It is not a symmetry of reciprocity, a state of equality; rather, we are called upon to subsume ourselves in the presence of the other person, to approach our relations with them through an attitude of radical generosity and giving. In Levinas's view, this posture involves an effacement of ego and an extreme elevation of the other: "Goodness consists in placing myself in being in such a way that the Other would count more than me" (*Totalité et infini*, 277). This responsibility for the other, says Levinas, is not contingent upon reciprocity, upon me getting my "fair share" in return.

Though perhaps we may temper the radical position of Levinas by acknowledging the important ethical state achieved in being able to receive the gift of the other with dignity and graciousness. Sometimes when we are at our weakest, we must surrender ourselves to the gift of the other, releasing ourselves into the grace (*hesed*) of compassion.

As much as evolutionary biologists teach us that we are wired for self-survival and self-protection, that we have evolved as humans to look out for "number one" (and who can deny that selfishness is a powerful obstacle that we all struggle

with?), there is a growing realization among scientists and psychologists that we are also deeply “wired to connect” in relationship to others. Our bodies and our minds are more healthy and fulfilled when we find ourselves in loving relationships, when we give of ourselves to the other with an open heart, with a heart made pure (see Mona DeKoven Fishbane, *Loving with the Brain in Mind: Neurobiology and Couple Therapy*, 59-63). When we are at our best, we give not in order to receive; we give in the way that the Hasidic masters speak of the ultimate service to God, the act of mesirut nefesh—the giving of one’s whole soul to divinity in the moment of worship, and in the fulfillment of the mitzvot. As Martin Buber taught, the self in relation to other persons, and in relation to the world at large, reaches through these encounters toward the ultimate relation with divinity:

Extended, the lines of relationship intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You. (I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann, 123)

The act of mesirut nefesh, several Hasidic mystics teach us, is a process of transcending the prison of our own egotism and self-centeredness; in the moment of devotion, in our deepest prayer, we seek to break open the self-protective walls of our hearts, to make ourselves truly vulnerable to the indwelling of the divine presence. And, as Buber expressed the matter, we encounter the eternal divine You through the mystery and wonder of our human relationships. In opening our hearts to others with generosity and vulnerability, we come to stand in the radiant and transformative presence of God—the divinity that dwells within, not only beyond the human.

Indeed, this deep lesson is reflected in Parashat Terumah, the Torah portion for this week:

God spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the Israelite people to bring me gifts ( ויקחו לי תרומה ) you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him ( ידבנו לבו ) (Exod. 25:1–2)

It is this last phrase that calls out to me, as it has spoken to generations of Jewish interpreters. The act of divine service is anchored in a personal state of nedavah, of generosity, which is here rendered as the moving and stirring of the heart to the task of giving the gift to God. As Rashi notes in his comments on this verse, the language of yidvenu libbo may be understood as leshon nedavah—the posture of generous giving, one which is marked, according to Rashi, by an attitude of ratzon tov, a good will and full-hearted intention that accompanies the gift. Indeed, we learn from these lines in Exodus that cultivating a heart of giving, being one who

realizes the ideal of *yidvenu libbo*, is essential to both the life of piety and ethics. This, the Hasidic masters teach, is the inner meaning of the word *terumah*, for it may be correlated homonymically to the verb *leharim*, to raise up, to reach for the *rom* and *ramah* (the height and summit) of divine glory. When we open our hearts with compassion and generosity, when we liberate ourselves from the enslavement of our egos and our need to self-protect, then we and those with whom we interact become truly elevated.

This is further how we may understand the inner spiritual meaning of another well-known verse from this week's parashah: And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them (ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם) (Exod. 25:8).

So much of Parashat Terumah is devoted to the building of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle), to the detailed instructions for its assembly, delivered by God through Moses. And interpreters have long noticed the fact that while the text refers to a sanctuary in the singular, God's dwelling place is in the plural—*veshakhanti betokham*, (that I may dwell among them). Thus several Hasidic thinkers, following earlier traditions, have suggested that *veshakhanti betokham* may be understood as the dwelling of the divine presence within the depths of each person. *Betokham mamash*. The divine sanctuary is recast from an architectural sacred space to the temple of the human heart, the holy interior of the human being within which the divine *Shekhinah* (drawn from the same Hebrew word as *veshakhanti*), the heavenly Indwelling, radiates outward from the inner depths of the self. As we stand before the mystery of God in prayer and *mitzvot*, we seek to be present to the Divinity that pulses within all things, the Oneness of Being that circulates and nourishes all of life. The *mikdash* (sanctuary) of the heart is felt and known through self-examination and introspection, through attentiveness to the wonder of the world, and through compassion and generosity toward others. In this sense, the act of *terumah* is a process of *mesirut nefesh* before God and our fellow human beings. The path of spiritual enlightenment and elevation is inseparable from ethical discipline as much as it about becoming attuned to the sublime holiness that dwells both within and Beyond.

In opening our hearts to the other with whom we exist in relation, in cultivating an attitude and practice of *terumah*, of giving without expectation of receiving in return, we release the inner divine point of life-giving energy from within ourselves—a *hiyut*, a vitality, that otherwise remains imprisoned in the grip of egotism and selfishness. For as Levinas suggested, the other person that we encounter in the human realm may be seen as a trace of ultimate transcendence—a reflection of the divine mystery, a presence that commands our ethical and spiritual attention.

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## Yahrtzeits

Merna Most remembers her mother Minna Mendelson on Sunday, February 18