

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Terumah
March 1, 2025 *** 1 Adar, 5785

Terumah in a Nutshell

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 Nushell for Shabbat Shekalim: II King 11: 17 – 12:17](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/640159/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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The Parshat Shekalim Torah reading discusses the annual obligation for every Jew to give half a shekel to the Temple coffers. The haftarah discusses the efforts of King Jehoash (9th century BCE) to earmark these communal funds for the upkeep of the first Holy Temple.

Background for this haftarah: Because of an alliance with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, idol worship had become rampant in the erstwhile righteous Davidic dynasty-controlled Southern Kingdom. When the king of the Southern Kingdom, Ahaziah, was killed, his mother Athaliah murdered the remainder of the royal family and seized the throne. During her brief reign, she actively promoted idolatry. Unbeknownst to her, one of Ahaziah's sons, a small baby, was hidden and survived. When he became seven years of age, Jehoiada the High Priest led a successful revolt against Athaliah, and installed the child king, Jehoash, as the new King of Judea.

The haftarah begins with the new king renewing the people's covenant with G-d. They destroyed all the pagan altars and statues and appointed officers to oversee the Holy Temple. Jehoash then instructed the priests regarding all the funds that were donated to the Temple. According to his plan, all the funds would be appropriated by the priests. In return, the priests would pay for the regular maintenance of the Temple. In the 23rd year of Jehoash's reign, the priests neglected to properly maintain the Temple. Jehoash then ordered that all monies should be placed in a special box that was placed near the Temple altar, and these

funds were given directly to the workers and craftsmen who maintained the Temple.

Food for Thought

The Architecture of Holiness: Terumah by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5772)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/terumah/the-architecture-of-holiness/>

From here to the end of the book of Exodus the Torah describes, in painstaking detail and great length, the construction of the Mishkan, the first collective house of worship of the Jewish people. Precise instructions are given for each item – the Tabernacle itself, the frames and drapes, and the various objects it contained – including their dimensions. So for example we read:

“Make the Tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker. All the curtains are to be the same size - twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide... Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the Tabernacle - eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size - thirty cubits long and four cubits wide... Make upright frames of acacia wood for the Tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide...” Ex. 26:1-16

And so on. But why do we need to know how big the Tabernacle was? It did not function in perpetuity. Its primary use was during the wilderness years. Eventually it was replaced by the Temple, an altogether larger and more magnificent structure. What then is the eternal significance of the dimensions of this modest, portable construction?

To put the question more sharply still: is not the very idea of a specific size for the

home of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, liable to mislead? A transcendent God cannot be contained in space. Solomon said so:

“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this Temple I have built.” 1 Kings 8:27

Isaiah said the same in the name of God Himself:

“Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be?” Isaiah 66:1

So no physical space, however large, is big enough. On the other hand, no space is too small. So says a striking Midrash:

When God said to Moses, ‘Make Me a Tabernacle,’ Moses said in amazement, ‘The glory of the Holy One blessed be He fills heaven and earth, and yet He commands, Make me a Tabernacle?’ ... God replied, ‘Not as you think do I think. Twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south and eight in the west are sufficient. Indeed, I will descend and confine My presence even within one square cubit.’ Shemot Rabbah 34:1

So what difference could it make whether the Tabernacle was large or small?

Either way, it was a symbol, a focus, of the Divine Presence that is everywhere, wherever human beings open their heart to God. Its dimensions should not matter.

I came across an answer in an unexpected and indirect way some years ago. I had gone to Cambridge University to take part in a conversation on religion and science. When the session was over, a member of the audience came over to me, a quiet, unassuming man, and said, “I have written a book I think you might find interesting. I’ll send it to you.” I did not know at the time who he was.

A week later the book arrived. It was called ‘Just Six Numbers’, subtitled ‘The deep forces that shape the universe’. With a shock I discovered that the author was the

then Sir Martin, now Baron Rees, Astronomer Royal, later President of the Royal Society, the oldest and most famous scientific body in the world, and Master of Trinity College Cambridge. In 2011 he won the Templeton Prize. I had been talking to Britain's most distinguished scientist.

His book was enthralling. It explained that the universe is shaped by six mathematical constants which, had they varied by a millionth or trillionth degree, would have resulted in no universe or at least no life. Had the force of gravity been slightly different, for example, the universe would either have expanded or imploded in such a way as to preclude the formation of stars or planets. Had nuclear efficiency been slightly lower the cosmos would consist only of hydrogen; no life would have emerged. Had it been slightly higher there would have been rapid stellar evolution and decay leaving no time for life to evolve. The combination of improbabilities was immense.

Torah commentators, especially the late Nechama Leibowitz, have drawn attention to the way the terminology of the construction of the Tabernacle is the same as that used to describe God's creation of the universe. The Tabernacle was, in other words, a micro-cosmos, a symbolic reminder of the world God made. The fact that the Divine Presence rested within it was not meant to suggest that God is here not there, in this place not that. It was meant to signal, powerfully and palpably, that God exists throughout the cosmos. It was a man-made structure to mirror and focus attention on the Divinely-created universe. It was in space what Shabbat is in time: a reminder of creation.

The dimensions of the universe are precise, mathematically exact. Had they differed in even the slightest degree the universe, or life, would not exist. Only now are scientists beginning to realise how precise, and even this knowledge will seem rudimentary to future generations. We are on the threshold of a quantum leap in our understanding of the full depth of the words: "How many are Your works, Lord;

in wisdom You made them all” (Ps. 104:24). The word “wisdom” here – as in the many times it occurs in the account of the making of the Tabernacle – means, “precise, exact craftsmanship”.^[1]

In one other place in the Torah there is the same emphasis on precise dimensions, namely, Noah’s Ark:

“So make yourself an Ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The Ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around.”

Gen. 6:14-16

The reason is similar to that in the case of the Tabernacle. Noah’s Ark symbolised the world in its Divinely-constructed order, the order humans had ruined by their violence and corruption. God was about to destroy that world, leaving only Noah, the Ark, and what it contained as symbols of the vestige of order that remained, on the basis of which God would fashion a new order.

Precision matters. Order matters. The misplacement of even a few of the 3.1 billion letters in the human genome can lead to devastating genetic conditions. The famous Butterfly Effect – the beating of a butterfly’s wing somewhere may cause a tsunami elsewhere, thousands of miles away – tells us that small actions can have large consequences. That is the message the Tabernacle was intended to convey.

God creates order in the natural universe. We are charged with creating order in the human universe. That means painstaking care in what we say, what we do, and what we must restrain ourselves from doing. There is a precise choreography to the moral and spiritual life as there is a precise architecture to the Tabernacle.

Being good, specifically being holy, is not a matter of acting as the spirit moves us. It is a matter of aligning ourselves to the Will that made the world. Law, structure,

precision: of these things the cosmos is made and without them it would cease to be. It was to signal that the same applies to human behaviour that the Torah records the precise dimensions of the Tabernacle and Noah's Ark. [1] See Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:54

Rosh Chodesh Adar: Turning Grief to Joy as Resistance

by Rabbi Tova Leibovic-Douglas

https://truah.org/resources/tova-leibovic-douglas-rosh-chodesh-adar-moraltorah_2025_/

During times of upheaval, I often find myself thinking of my ancestors, wondering how they navigated the challenges they faced. Though the circumstances are different, I imagine they too felt uncertainty, helplessness, and fear. I often ask myself: How did they find joy in their lives? As we enter the Hebrew month of Adar, I am reminded that not only did they find joy, but they were obligated to do so — and in this moment, that reminder is especially poignant.

With each passing day of this administration, and the ongoing devastation that marginalized communities are experiencing, it feels as though joy may be something we're not allowed to have. Most people I know seem overwhelmed by worry, grief, and exhaustion, with little capacity for happiness. Yet, our tradition tells us something different. Joy is not just permitted — it is essential. The Talmud teaches us: "When Adar arrives, we increase our joy." (Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 29a)

Adar is a month that invites us into an ancient, collective experience. It calls us to cultivate joy, even when we do not feel it naturally. Our ancestors knew there would be Adars when joy was hard to find, yet they committed themselves to honor the spirit of the month, to dare to seek joy even in the hardest times. This practice — choosing joy despite difficult circumstances — is a core part of why our people

have not only survived but, in many ways, thrived through the generations.

Our tradition doesn't ask us what we feel; it tells us to live according to a spiritual value system greater than ourselves. In this way, we are not merely spectators of our emotions, but active participants in shaping our lives. The system compels us to act, even when we don't know how we feel. And it is through this very act of choosing joy that we connect to something larger, something that transcends our individual experience. Joy, then, is not just an emotion; it is a practice. It is something we must choose, especially when it feels out of reach.

What is it about Adar that invites this joy? For one, Adar is the last month of the mystical calendar, marking the completion of the year's cycle. It is a time of celebration, a time to reflect on what we've accomplished and look ahead. The Hebrew letter associated with Adar, kuf, is connected to the word kadosh, meaning "holy" — suggesting that joy has the power to elevate us, to connect us with the sacred. And of course, there is Purim, the holiday that falls during Adar, reminding us that joy can emerge from grief. The Hebrew Bible describes Adar as "the month that was reversed for them from grief to joy." (Esther 9:22) This idea of transformation — from sorrow to happiness — is one of the most powerful aspects of this month. For those of us sitting in grief, this shift resonates deeply. It reminds us that joy is always possible, even when it feels impossible.

As we enter Adar, we are invited to move from grief toward the possibility of joy. This is not about denying our sadness, but rather about acknowledging it and then choosing to move forward. In doing so, we resist the forces of despair that seek to define this moment. It is through this act of choosing joy that we become resisters in a world that demands something else from us. By embracing joy, even in the face of hardship, we honor the resilience of our ancestors, who found ways to celebrate and live despite their struggles — and perhaps because of them.

Through our joy, we resist the forces that would have us stay in despair. We affirm

our connection to something larger than ourselves — a connection that has sustained our people through every generation. In embracing the energy of Adar, we join with those who came before us, carrying their legacy forward. And through our joy, we not only survive, but thrive, becoming agents of resistance in this present moment. (*Tova Leibovic-Douglas is a rabbi, ritualist, spiritual coach, writer, and teacher based in Los Angeles. She is a graduate of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, a former fellow of New Ground, M2, and Atra, and the founder and director of The Ritual House.*)

Parashat T'rumah: Transcending One's Self by Offering Tzedakah

by Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz

<https://schechter.edu/parashat-trumah-transcending-ones-self-by-offering-tzedakah/>

Why Tzedakah is so important today and for the Future.

In many ways, Parashat T'rumah represents a thematic transition from engaging biblical narrative to technical description and detail.

As the parashah opens, we become privy to the details of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances.

Immediately, from the title of this parashah, an exegetical direction is hinted at. At the heart of the word t'rumah, translated as “offering,” one discovers the Hebrew root meaning “lifting up” or “high.”

God speaks to Moses saying, “Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts (t'rumah); you will accept gifts (t'rumati) for Me from every person whose heart so moves him” (Exodus 25:2).

To make a gift, or in more sacred language, to give tzedakah, literally involves an act of lifting one's eyes and heart higher. One must become selfless, transcending self and envisioning a reality of tikkun olam. That is precisely what God demands of the Israelites in this parashah—they must set their sights higher, and doing so

will elevate their own souls and more important, will bring God's Presence into their midst.

This lesson cannot and should not be lost on the generation of young Jewish professionals today. While the Jewish community has reached the pinnacle of affluence, giving, and especially tzedakah to Jewish organizations, has diminished. Sadly, too often the perception is "When I retire, I will give."

Tzedakah is a mitzvah for young and old alike, and learning to give and to give generously is critical to the future of the Jewish community.

A beautiful midrash sparked by this week's Torah reading sums up the essence of thinking toward the future.

Exodus 26:15 states, "and you will make the boards for the Tabernacle." Midrash Tanhuma queries, "Where did the boards come from? Jacob, our father, planted them. When he came down to Egypt, he said to his sons: MY sons! You are destined to be redeemed from here, and when you are redeemed, the Holy One will tell you that you are to make a Tabernacle for God. Rise up and plant cedars now, so that when God tells you to make a Tabernacle, these cedars will be ready. So Jacob's sons set to planting cedars, doing just what he had told them.

Hence, Torah speaks of 'the boards,' the boards their father had arranged should be ready" (Tanhuma T'rumah 9).

May we all take a lesson from Jacob, his sons, and this week's parashah: we must lift up our eyes, think selflessly, and act generously. *(Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, an accomplished educator and artist, brings decades of experience in development to his position. He is a founding partner of Kol HaOt studio project in Jerusalem's Artist Lane — which weaves the arts deeply into Jewish learning.)*

[Terumah: An Age-Old Message for Current Consumption by Ariel Shalem](#)

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 (CO₂) 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 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 "shitim."

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] *(Rabbi Ariel Shalem lives in Israel with his wife Yarden and their 5 children. He currently teaches and counsels people of all ages how to live more healthy balanced lives. As of late, he has particularly had success working with people who have experienced trauma using innovative methods of treatment and seeks to explore working with people who are coping with terminal illness.)*

[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