

# United We Stand

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Parshas Terumah

4th of Adar 5786

## The Parsha's Path

*Viyikchu li terumah - And they shall take for me a gift (25:2).*

This week's Parsha opens with G-d's command to build a Mishkan. Ibn Ezra and Ramban explain that the Mishkan was to serve as an extension of Har Sinai, where G-d's presence would continue to dwell amongst the people. This idea is illustrated in a radical and somewhat cryptic way by a famous Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 33:1). The Midrash reads our verse homiletically as not *take for me a gift*, but rather *take me as a gift*. The Jewish people had just accepted the Torah at Sinai, and through the command to build the Mishkan, G-d told us, "take Me, too."

The Midrash offers the following parable: A king had an only daughter, and another king came along to marry her. The groom wished to take his bride back to his kingdom. The father told him, "My daughter is one of a kind. I cannot bear to part from her, yet I also can't stop you from taking her, as she is your wife. So do me this favor: Wherever you go, make a small room for me so that I may live by you, for I am unable to leave my daughter." This is what G-d says to us: "I gave you the Torah. I cannot part from it, yet I can't tell you not to take it. So wherever you go, build me a house so I may live in it," as it says, *and you shall make for me a Temple (25:8)*.

We may be able to wrap our heads around the idea of making a dedicated space for G-d on Earth, but the Midrash suggests that the primary purpose of the Mishkan is not for the people in and of themselves to connect to G-d, but for G-d to be united with His Torah, which He gave the people. What does this mean? In what sense does G-d "require" closeness with His Torah?

In the famous story of the Oven of Achnai (Baba Metzia 59 a-b), the Talmud illustrates what it means for G-d to have "given up" the Torah to the

Jewish people. Despite Rabbi Eliezer mustering many miracles in support of his opinion, culminating in a Heavenly voice affirming that Rabbi Eliezer is correct, the Rabbis remain firm in their opposition, invoking the principle, "It is not in heaven." When G-d gave us the Torah, He "sacrificed" its most pristine and objective meaning by investing us with the authority to interpret it and carry it out as best as we are able. It became up to us to be an exemplar of how human initiative, without supernatural intervention, can use the Torah to build a better world.

When we "married" the Torah, G-d took a major "risk" with His "daughter". There was always a very real danger that, as the guardians and representatives of the Torah, we could, *chos v'sholom*, "cut G-d out." While a relationship with G-d is central to the Torah, as epitomized by the *Shema*, such ideas are not concrete enough to ensure they don't get marginalized or violently distorted. The latter possibility was brought home by the Golden Calf. Despite having just heard forty days prior G-d command them not to make idols, the people, not knowing how to connect their Torah to their conception of G-d, publicly and blatantly flouted G-d's Torah in an ironic quest for G-d Himself. If G-d is only in the Heavens while His Torah is on Earth, then uniting G-d with His Torah is no sure feat.

Enter the Mishkan. By creating a physical space devoted to our relationship with G-d on Earth, we were afforded the opportunity to cling to both G-d's Torah and G-d Himself. We were able to show that there is no contradiction between living a Torah of this world while clinging to a G-d beyond this world - because we can make a space for G-d in this world as well. The Mishkan ensures that G-d stays central to the Torah and that the Torah stays central to our understanding of G-d.

There is a parallel dimension of the Mishkan which the Midrash highlights as well. Ramban cites the Midrash (ibid. 49:3) on the verse (25:3) *Vezos haterumah asher tikchu me'itam - and this is the gift that you shall take from yourselves*. The Midrash says

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that the Jewish people are a “*terumah*”, based on a verse in Yirmiyahu (2:3). According to the Midrash, the verse is telling us to take ourselves for G-d. Ramban connects this Midrash with the Midrash on our *pasuk* and equates it to the verse in Shir HaShirim, *I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me*. Through the Mishkan, we give ourselves to G-d, and in turn, G-d gives Himself to us. The Mishkan is thus the meeting place of G-d, the Torah, and the Jewish people.

The necessity of the Mishkan, in light of the times we live in, should be self-evident. It is all too easy for even those most dedicated to Torah to inadvertently “cut G-d out.” Even as one fulfills the *mitzvos bein adam limakom* in an optimal fashion, one remains vulnerable to a myopic vision of G-d based on his limited understanding of the Torah’s will. The singular way to preserve the integrity of the Torah and to serve G-d properly is to make a space for G-d in our lives that is unmediated by our finite understanding of his Torah. We need to be able to say, “G-d, I want to keep Your Torah on Your terms, and my understanding may be wrong. I don’t know what to do or how to make things right. Help restore me to You.” We need a space to embrace humility and responsibility to fulfill the Torah that G-d wants us to carry out, not the Torah we’ve fashioned for ourselves.

Even with the Mishkan/Beis Hamikdash, this has proven to be an extremely difficult challenge. That is why the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. The Talmud relates that during the Bayis Sheini period, the Jewish people were full of Torah and mitzvos, but they couldn’t get along. The Beis Hamikdash failed to restore our vision to what G-d really wanted of us, and it itself became a tool for self-righteousness. G-d had “no choice” but to take it away.

In the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, there are still three ways we can attempt to imitate its function. First, just as our giving to build the Mishkan was, according to the midrash, an act of giving ourselves, which in turn helped us “acquire” G-d, we must strengthen our giving of our resources and ourselves in the service of G-d - giving to institutions and causes that are universally recognized as embodying G-d’s Will, and devoting ourselves to mitzvos that even come at great personal sacrifice (like

Aliyah - though most people here believe the greater sacrifice is living in Chutz Laaretz).

The second way is by devoting ourselves to our Shuls - our *mikdash me’at* - and our tefillos, the closest thing we have to a dedicated space to interact directly with G-d on His terms. We need to ensure that these spaces and times are kept sacrosanct and are maximized, whether through our selection of our minyan, our timely attendance, volunteering, learning halachos of the Shul and of tefillah, learning the meaning of the tefillos on a deeper level, or of adding more personal prayer into our davening.

The third way, as the Midrash states, is that we have to build a Mishkan *inside ourselves*, doing our own contemplation on how we can purify and elevate ourselves to be more G-d-centric and fit for G-d to dwell within us.

Together, these three steps comprise teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah. May our strengthening of these areas, just like in the time of Purim, succeed in wiping away any evil decrees and merit complete salvation and peace - both from without and from within.

## Goal of the week

Reevaluate one area in your personal and/or communal life based on “what does G-d really want from me?”

*This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Yisroel Zev ben Menya Rochel, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, and Gavriel Margoliot ben Malka.*

*Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.*

## Have A Great Shabbos !!

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