

Shabbat Shalom everyone.

Let me first start with a deep and personal connection to Terumah. This parsha was not just my bat mitzvah Torah portion, but also that of both of my kids, Joshua, 27, and Emily, now 25. It is for me truly remarkable and miraculous that this came to be, especially as our birthdays are quite spread out on the calendar. From a combination of temple scheduling and other extenuating factors, we all were blessed with this same parsha. Over these 12-15 years later, I have taken this as a sign from Gd that my kids are my sanctuary and home no matter what place we find ourselves, as I am to them.

One funny and ironic detail I will share of this personal story is that when we all learned this was to be our Torah portion, we had a similar reaction, as happens with disenchanted 12-13 year olds. I remember a familiar feeling when both Josh and Emi both spun some of the great retorts, such as “but this seems kinda boring! It’s just a list of things Gd is asking Moses to ask the Jewish people to find and put together for his portable temple! How am I supposed to find any meaning in this?”

From my study of Terumah this week, it’s amusing to be reminded that the enslaved Jews during the plagues and then freed through the parting the Red Sea and the revelation on Mount Sinai had bitterly complained to Moses and quite a bit. So, I guess the complaining my kids and I did upon first reading of our Torah portion falls right in line with the biblical and longstanding Jewish tradition of kvetching, which is always a comfort.

I can report -- in case you are curious—that we all somehow derived some solid meaning from Terumah at our young ages. I remember being struck by all the beautiful materials mentioned: the various gemstones, metals and woods to be gathered to construct this holy sanctuary. I tried to imagine how it would look in that vast desert with so many tribes, tents, belongings, people, animals—all the chaos and discombobulation of a shell-shocked formerly enslaved people, but in the midst of that, stood as a spiritual center and Gd-space to balance all that mayhem. In Josh’s midrash, he mentioned how Gd asked for these materials as gifts, but really the finished product was not for Gd but for the people Israel, that the Mishkan is a home, and that we make home wherever our family, and Gd is. My daughter Emi described “a sanctuary...where Gd is not only everywhere, but also with you.” She then asked the congregation, “Do you ever get that feeling, even just in your house, but you feel good? Sort of like you belong there? That is what a sanctuary felt like to the Israelites.”

She definitely captured the essence, and also the opposing realities of this parsha. We are asked to give gifts to build a highly intricate and ornate Tabernacle, but it is only a temporary dwelling. It is a portable space, but also a home. Other dialectics in this parsha are that Gd is both limitless in space and time, but then, as written in Exodus 25:8, “let them make me a sanctuary, so I may dwell among them.” Isn’t Gd already dwelling among them?

Always more questions than answers. But let’s move to where I will focus my drash: on the act of the building, of the Israelites being asked to build. Why did Gd instruct Moses to ask the Israelites to do this? Why did he take 40 days to tell him all these details while the people were getting restless at the base of the mountain? I find this parsha and the ones following through the story of the Golden Calf and then the actual building, to be very challenging but also very powerful, and so resonant to where we are right now in our world. As citizens in this nation, as we are in a similar way a nation in a transitory and fragile state, just like the Jewish people in the wilderness.

First, like other Fabrangeners of late, I’ll pose my two questions here, and then at the end.

**Question #1:** What do you consider a sanctuary in your life, either through Jewish practice or in your day-to-day life? What do you contribute to that sacred space to make it a God-dwelling?

**Question #2:** Terumah centers on the contributions and communal effort Gd is asking of the Israelites to build the Mishkan. What are the ways we in Fabrangen and as individuals demonstrate this today, communally working toward holy community, kedoshah kehillah? And in a wider context, what are ways we are or can contribute toward tikkun olam in this present state of our country?

To dive into this, I want to invoke the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, who wrote beautifully about the act of building as the divine force of this story. He emphasized that in Torah there are two acts of creation: Gd’s creation of the universe, and the Israelite’s creation of the Mishkan. Later in Exodus 35, after the Golden Calf and the Covenant presented through the 10 Commandants, the Israelites’ actually are moved to come together as a people. Lo and behold, they actually stop complaining and move forward from their rock bottom of losing faith and reactive idolatry, and take up the instruction of Adonai given to them by Moses: they dutifully start to build the Mishkan – together, collaboratively, using what they have and the skills they can contribute.

This is the first tzedakah of the Covenant I believe, but it’s really for themselves. We are reminded of age-old classic aphorism: ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your

country. As Rabbi Sacks puts it, and very well I might add: “it is what we do, not what is done for us, that makes us free.”

This led me to think about the times in our country when the chips were way down, when our brethren were despairing, and disparate, and divided, where faith in the principle of *e pluribus unum* was failing, that there were times when leaders had courage and conviction to bring together the disparate communities toward collective common cause, in communal effort, to build and create something that benefitted the many. That really is holiness, the holiness of a cohesive citizenry, caring neighbors and socially responsible and responsive civic institutions. It has happened in historic windows, like post-Civil War Reconstruction, the Progressive era at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the labor movement, the New Deal, the Civil Rights movement, and other national movements for human rights. It is never perfect, and its messy, but I’m sure the building of the Mishkan wasn’t perfect either. But that communal effort does bring freedom in that act of the effort, in that collective work toward betterment.

In this parsha but even more so later in Exodus 35-38, the Israelites seemed moved to action not from the revelation of Gd at Sinai, nor the parting of the Red Sea, nor the mind-blowing plagues wrought upon the Egyptians and Pharaoh. They are moved to come together and make a Mishkan, a space of holiness from their collective creativity and labor, from this rather simple act of being asked to give something—even small and minor—but just to give, of yourself, your belongings, your talents, in order to to build Gd’s presence among them. Not so much to ask of one individual, but moves a lot forward when done together.

Along with this central theme of communal effort, I want to close by remembering the Reverend Jesse Jackson who passed away earlier this week-- someone who was able to encourage many to come together from the Civil Rights era and many years after, working to sustain and build on that collective spirit and effort. He said and it’s worth repeating now, “Hold your head high, stick your chest out. It gets dark sometimes, but morning comes. Keep hope alive.” Hope and communal effort are a good combination toward building that Mishkan of our time, as we feel our way through this current wilderness.

So I come back to my two questions:

**Question #1:** What do you consider a sanctuary, where Gd’s presence is felt, either through Jewish practice or in your day-to-day life? What do you contribute to that sacred space to make it a God-dwelling?

**Question #2:** Terumah centers on the “communal effort” Gd is asking of the Israelites to construct Adonai’s dwelling, and it is that act of communal effort that becomes the spiritual force for the Jews to emerge as a nation. What are the ways we in Fabrangen and as individuals are demonstrating communal and collective spirit for both a holy community, kedoshah kehillah, and toward tikkun olam?

Feel free to answer these or any other comments as your heart moves you to share.