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Parsha

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Terumah

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A question for the week:

What "metal" am I bringing — and am I valuing my contribution without minimizing myself or others?

Gematria on the Parshah: Becoming a Mishkan for Hashem

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits



In Parshat Terumah, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael to bring offerings from the heart to build the Mishkan. He then promises **וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכְכֶם** (I will dwell within them). Chazal famously ask: why does it say **וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכְכֶם** (within them) and not **בְּתוֹכּוֹ** (within it)? The Ramban explains that before the sin of the Golden Calf, every Jew was meant to be a personal Mishkan, a dwelling place for the Shechinah. How can we make our daily life holy to become a Mishkan for the Divine Presence?

Becoming a Mishkan

The first way to become a Mishkan is by working on our character. Noam Elimelech teaches that the Mishkan was built with precise middot. Only when those measurements were exact did the Shechinah dwell within it. So too, when a Jew refines his middot (his character), he becomes a living Mishkan. The gematria of **מִשְׁכָּן** (Mishkan) is 410, the same as **קָדוֹשׁ** (holy). The more a person sanctifies his thoughts, speech, actions, and character, the more Hashem's Shechinah rests upon him.

Chochmat Lev and the Builders of the Mishkan

A second way to become a Mishkan is to remember Hashem's love for us. The Tikkunei Zohar 13a asks: why are the builders of the Mishkan called **חֲכָמֵי לֵב** (wise of heart)? The gematria of **לֵב** (heart) is 32, corresponding to the 32 times the Name Elokim appears in the story of creation. The Sefer Yetzirah explains that these 32 correspond to the 22 letters and 10 sefirot, the building blocks of creation. The builders understood the secret of 32, how Hashem used the letters & sefirot to form the world.

The Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim explains that the yetzer hara seeks to make a person forget his value in Hashem's eyes. Allegorically, we too must become **חֲכָמֵי לֵב** (wise of heart), by constantly remembering Hashem's love and desire to connect to us. The holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev teaches that a person would be horrified to see an idol in the Beit HaMikdash. So too, we should have the same attitude with sin. For Hashem desires to dwell within us just as His Presence dwelled in the Mishkan.

Shabbat and the Mishkan

A third way to become a Mishkan is to draw

the holiness of Shabbat into our week. Shabbat teaches us how to sanctify ordinary life so that it becomes a dwelling place for the Divine Presence. The 39 melachot of Shabbat are derived from the Mishkan because they correspond. The gematria of **שָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכְכֶם** (I will dwell within them) is 1248, the same as **שׁוּמֵר שַׁבָּת** (guarding Shabbat).

The Alter Rebbe explains that the goal is constant alignment of thought, speech, and action with Hashem. On Shabbat, our words are elevated, our thoughts are refined, and our actions are directed toward holiness. Shabbat teaches us how to become a Mishkan.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that when a person guards his speech and speaks as he would speak on Shabbat, he draws the light of Shabbat into his everyday life. The holiness of Shabbat is not meant to remain confined to one day. It is meant to expand. When we speak with holiness, think and yearn for Hashem, we carry the sanctuary of Shabbat into the marketplace, the home, and every interaction. In this way, time itself becomes a Mishkan, and the promise of **וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכְכֶם** becomes real within us.

Practical Challenge

Choose one specific area this week where you will consciously bring Shabbat into your weekday. It may be guarding your speech, setting aside a moment for focused tefillah, or performing one mitzvah with unusual care and joy. Before you begin, pause and say to yourself that this act is your personal Terumah. Through that deliberate act of holiness, you transform an ordinary moment into a dwelling place for Hashem and make **וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכְכֶם** a lived reality.

Why do we need physical objects to serve G-d?

By: Rabbi Adam Law



וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר: דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה מאת כל איש אשר ידגנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי

"G-d said to Moshe.... Speak to Bnei Yisrael and take for me a portion from every man whose heart moves him, they shall take my portion."

The main subject of Parshat Terumah is the holy vessels that were found in the **מִשְׁכָּן** (Tabernacle), and later the **בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ** (Temple), which were used in the divine service. G-d instructs Moshe on their exact design. But before this, the people are taught about the proper mindset when serving G-d.

To build the holy, G-d asks to "take me" for a portion, and that the donation must be voluntary. This is one of the first appearances of the concept of intentionality (**לְשִׁמּוֹה**) in mitzvot. It is not just the vessel or act that is important, but the intention of the petitioner.*

A bigger question opened in our parsha is the use of material objects in service to infinite G-d. This manifests in a debate amongst the Rishonim regarding G-d's intent in giving the sacrificial service.

Rambam shockingly says in the Guide to the Perplexed (III:32) that sacrifices are not G-d's first intention for our mode of service, but that He had to "wean us" off of what people were used to doing in the service of idolatry. He therefore gave us a service that incorporates material service as an intermediary stage. G-d's "first intention" is a purely spiritual and intellectual service of divine contemplation and prayer. This accords well with Rambam's position that the upper, spiritual world is superior to this one. Therefore the goal of a person would be to somewhat eschew worldly matters and move towards G-d through matters of the mind.

Rambam also mentions later that G-d wanted to "stick it" to some of the pagan cultures of the area as well. Thus, the animals that we sacrifice were their gods.

However, reading the Torah itself, full of devotional verses such as above, and the fact that scripture goes at great length in detailing the vessels and sacrifices, leads most to find Rambam's position difficult. The strongest opponent is the Ramban (**וִיקְרָא אֵיט**). He thinks it is ludicrous to think the sacrifices mean anything other than exactly what they seem to be: G-d's desired way for us to connect and show our devotion to Him. He gives a moving explanation to the details of the sacrifice in accordance with the contrition of the one who brought it.

A few centuries later, the Remah mentions the controversy in his book **תורת העולה** and in his letter to his cousin R. Shlomo Luria. He does not attempt to reconcile it, rather he indicates they're both correct but different perspectives.

A profound perspective is found in the works of the kabbalists and rebbees. In opposition to Rambam, they don't see this world as having low intrinsic value. Actually, this material reality is full of godliness. We have the ability, even the obligation, to refine and uplift this world. This is done through mitzvot such as the divine service.

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The vessels and sacrifices are not only connected to deep concepts above, but are intrinsic to the redemption of the world in the bringing of course material reality to the ultimate oneness of G-d. This is done with the proper intentions as delineated in our Torah.

*Strictly speaking, gemara **ובחים** derives the concept of **לשמו** from **ויקרא**, but I believe its appearance earlier here shows its importance.

Inner Dimensions

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



As we enter Parshas Terumah, Sefer Shmos makes a shift from the drama of Yetzias Mitzrayim to the detailed fabrication of the Mishkan. Among its walls, curtains and vessels, the Menorah stands out for its details (Shmos 25:31-40).

Firstly, we must know that the Gemara in Shabbos 22b states that the purpose of the Menorah is certainly not to provide physical light in the Mishkan. Instead, the Maharsha there shares that it symbolizes spirituality.

The Gemara in Menachos 28b summarizes its ornamental features as follows: eighteen Tefachim tall, twenty-two goblets, eleven knobs, and nine flowers. These details are not solely decorative, but essential components, each element is **מעבב** one another.

But what is the deeper meaning of these numbers - eighteen, twenty-two, eleven, and nine - and these forms: goblet, knob, and flower?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains the following: The knob is round, without beginning or end. It represents the celestial realm - the **עולם המלאכים** - where existence is bound up in an endless awareness of the Divine. The cup is a **בית קיבול** - a receptacle; it receives and transmits. It represents the intermediate realm, which absorbs higher influence and channels it downward. The flower represents our physical world, the realm of growth and change. Through the twenty-two letters of the Torah, a person gains access to these three dimensions of existence.

A Midrash brought by the Yalkut Reuveini explains as follows: The seven branches parallel the seven words of the first Pasuk in Bereishis. The eleven knobs correspond to the eleven words of the opening Pasuk of Shmos. The nine flowers align with the nine words of the first Pasuk of Vayikra. The height of the Menorah eighteen Tefachim, but seventeen complete Tefachim - corresponds to the seventeen words in the opening Pasuk of Bamidbar. And the twenty-two goblets correspond to the twenty-two words of the first Pasuk in Devarim. Altogether, these components total forty-nine, hinting at the forty-nine days of Sfiras HaOmer, which culminate with Matan Torah on the fiftieth day. In essence, the Menorah represents the acquisition of the Torah.

At times, the sections detailing the Mishkan can feel technical. Chazal reveal and helps us understand that embedded within those details is a map to a deeper life - a Jewish life.

How to Survive Your Darkest Days!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Jacob knew that the Egyptian exile would be a brutal and traumatic test for his children. He understood that the Jewish people would need something to ensure their survival during the vicious realities of the Egyptian exile. Simple whispers of a future redemption would not be enough to keep hope alive. Vague utopian promises would not be enough to withstand the crushing weight of the very real chains that would enslave his nation. Jacob, therefore, did something entirely counterintuitive.

He hauled massive cedar trees from the Holy Land to plant in the foreign dirt of Egypt. He gave instructions. His descendants were to use the cedar wood two centuries later when they would be free to build a sanctuary in which to serve G-d. This was a masterclass in the psychology of survival. As the Israelites endured 210 years of agonizing Egyptian oppression, they watched those cedars, planted by their grandfather, grow taller and stronger every year. The trees were not indigenous to Egypt. They were from the Holy Land. They were a tangible anchor of hope that their current situation was not permanent. There would come a day when they would leave this wretched place and build a physical edifice which would be G-d's home on earth.

Right now, you might feel completely trapped in your own personal Egypt. You might feel totally buried by your current struggles. The message of Jacob's cedar trees is: don't ever lose hope. Seek out those magnificent cedars.

Know this: they have already been planted by the spiritual giants of Jewish history. The great sages embedded their towering wisdom into the soil of our collective souls. Their inspired teachings will carry us through every hardship. When you attach yourself to the words of a true Tzaddik, you absorb their monumental strength. Their legacy fills your heart with unbreakable spiritual courage. Open a holy text to bond with their enduring hope. Let their divine energy empower your soul to conquer any obstacle in your path. Let them comfort you. Let them remind you that you will be liberated, and when that great day arrives, you too will construct a divine sanctuary from the building materials they have provided.

Gold, Silver, and Copper

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



Parashat Terumah opens the building of the Mishkan with a striking list of materials:

“זהב וכסף ונחשת.”

“Gold, silver, and copper.” (Shemot 25:3) Gold is rare and radiant, silver is valuable and steady, and copper is common and humble. And yet the Mishkan is built from all three. The Torah is teaching that holiness is not created by a single kind of gift. The Divine dwelling is formed from the exalted and the ordinary together.

The Zohar frames this inclusively:

“לית שכינתא שריא אלא בכלולא דכלא.”

“The Shechinah rests only where all levels are included.” (Zohar II, 161a) Holiness rests where difference is gathered into unity.

The Zera Shimshon explains that the Torah emphasizes voluntary giving — “**ויקחו לי**” — to teach that what sanctifies a gift is the heart behind it.

Hashem desires the **נדיבות הלב**, the willingness to give, more than the material itself. The Mishkan becomes a dwelling for Hashem when people bring themselves, not just their resources. (Zera Shimshon, Terumah)

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov brings this into the inner world. He teaches that each person has a unique “**נקודה טובה**” — a good point — that no one else can offer. Holiness is built when each person brings their particular **נקודה** into the shared work. When we compare ourselves to others, we silence our own gift; when we bring our **נקודה** with simplicity, we help build a dwelling for Hashem in the world. (Likutei Moharan I:282)

The Sefat Emet teaches that the Mishkan is built from the inner **רצון** of each person — the will to give — and that every Jew has a unique **חלק** in building kedushah. What creates sacred space is not sameness, but the joining of different inner contributions into one **עבודת הלב**. (Sefat Emet, Terumah)

Rav Yisrael Salanter reminds us that small, consistent acts of giving and care build a person more than dramatic gestures. Kedushah is shaped not only by moments of inspiration, but by steady habits of generosity, responsibility, and quiet **לב טוב**. The copper that is given again and again sustains the structure just as surely as the gold.

Parashat Terumah challenges the way we measure contribution. We are quick to compare our “metal” to someone else's. The Torah gently corrects that instinct. Sacred space is not built by gold alone. It is built when each person brings what they can, with sincerity.

In our communities and families, this matters deeply. Some bring gold — leadership, resources, visibility. Some bring silver — steadiness, reliability, quiet consistency. Some bring copper — small acts of care that rarely receive attention. The Mishkan stands because all of these are present.

