

Parashat Terumah, 5779, 2019:

Why Build the Mikdash?

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* focuses upon the *mitzvah* of constructing the *Mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary).

The *pasuk* (verse) that conveys this commandment is found early on in our Torah reading: “And they shall make Me a sanctuary (*Mikdash*) and I will dwell in their midst.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) formulates this *mitzvah* in the following manner:

The 20th *mitzvah* that we are commanded is to build a House of *Avodah* (the Temple Service). In it we offer sacrifices, burn the eternal flame, offer our prayers, and congregate for the festivals each year...The source of this *mitzvah* is G-d’s statement (exalted be He), “And they shall make Me a sanctuary.” (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, translation, Rabbi Berel Bell)

As the *Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael* on our *pasuk* notes, however, the very act of constructing a *Mikdash* for Hashem is quite problematic:

And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst;” why was this ever stated? After all, was it not already said, (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 23:24) ‘Behold I fill the heavens and the earth?’ [And, therefore, how can any dwelling contain Hashem?] (Translation and brackets my own)

This question is echoed, as well, in Yeshayahu’s well-known declaration: “So says the L-rd, ‘the heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool; which is the house that you will build for Me, and which is the place of My rest?’” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 66:1) Rashi underscores the intent of the prophet’s proclamation in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeshayahu*: “The heavens are my throne”

— [Therefore,] I do not need your Temple; “which is the house that you will build for Me” — that is fitting for My *Schechinah* (Divine Presence)?”

We now have a true conundrum: If there is seemingly no need for a *Mikdash*, why did the Torah command us to build one, and why do we pray three times a day following the conclusion of the *Shemoneh Esrai*, “May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days?” (Translation, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*) My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, addresses our question in his analysis of the underlying rationale for the construction of the *Mikdash*. He notes that “G-d created the world to reside in it, rather than reside in transcendence.” (This and the following quotations, *Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Shemot*, page 226) According to the Rav, this was precisely the extraordinary environment in which Adam and Chava initially lived:

Man could have continually experienced Him instead of trying to infer His Presence through examining nature. But in the wake of the original sin by Adam and Eve, He retreated. “And they heard the voice of the L-rd G-d going in the garden to the direction of the sun, and the man and his wife hid from before the L-rd G-d in the midst of the trees of the garden.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 3:8)

Tragically, as a result of Adam and Chava having eaten from the *Pri Etz HaDa’at* (Tree of Knowledge), Hashem withdrew into otherworldliness, and, as the Rav explains, humanity’s ability to continually experience Him abruptly ceased:

These “footsteps” were those of G-d leaving the garden and departing into infinity. Had they not sinned, G-d would always have been close. As a result of Adam’s hiding and fear of communicating with G-d in the wake of his sin, G-d removed His Divine Presence.

In sum, as a result of Adam’s sin and abject fear of further direct communication with Hashem, the Almighty removed His immanence (the *Schechinah*) and left mankind’s deep-rooted need for a dynamic connection to the Almighty unmet. Little wonder, then, that the Rav teaches us that

the ultimate "...purpose of the tabernacle was to restore the relationship between man and G-d," in order that His *Schechinah* could reside amongst us.

With Hashem's help, may we strive to live lives wherein we continually seek the Almighty and search for his Holy Presence. Moreover, "May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days" in order that our relationship will be complete once again. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.