

Parashat Terumah 5783, 2023:

*Why the Mishkan?*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechezkel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Terumah focuses on the various raw materials necessary to construct the *Mishkan* (Portable Sanctuary) and its holy *kalim* (vessels). Therein, we find a well-known *pasuk* that speaks to the general *mitzvah* of building the *Mishkan*: “*V’asu li mikdash v’shachanti b’tocham*—And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*). The very next *pasuk*, however, employs the word, “*mishkan*,” in place of *mikdash*: “According to all that I show you, the pattern of the *Mishkan* and the pattern of all its vessels; and so, shall you do.” Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar *zatzal* (1696-1743), known as the Or HaChaim Hakadosh after the name of his commentary on the Torah, addresses this change in terminology:

... It appears to me that when the Torah says, “*v’asu li mikdash*,” it is referring to the general positive commandment that incorporates all times, whether [the Jewish people were in] the desert or when they entered the land [*Eretz Yisrael*], as well as the entire period the Jewish people would dwell therein throughout the generations. [Moreover,] the Jewish people were obligated to create a *mikdash*, even in the Diaspora (*galut*), [but were prevented from so doing, since] we find that Hashem forbade all other places [outside of *Eretz Yisrael*] from the point in time of the construction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, as it says in the Torah: “For you have not yet come to the resting place or to the inheritance, which the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you.” (*Sefer Devarim* 12:9) This, then, is why the Torah does not declare, “*v’asu li mishkan*,” in order that we may understand that the creation of the *mishkan* was a *mitzvah* solely at that time... (*Or HaChaim, Sefer Shemot* 25:8, translation, brackets and parentheses my own)

According to the Or HaChaim, the Torah first utilizes the term, *mikdash*, and then *mishkan*, to teach us a crucial lesson: the *mitzvah* of the *mikdash* is obligatory at all times in *Eretz Yisrael*. In

contrast, the *mitzvah* of the *mishkan* was time-bound, that is, its construction was a commandment to the *Dor HaMidbar* (Generation of the Desert) to create a temporary stand-in for the yet to be built *Beit HaMikdash*. As such, the Torah commands us, “*v’asu li mikdash,*” rather than “*v’asu li mishkan.*”

A different approach as to why the *Mishkan* was called *mikdash* is offered by Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa (1255–1340) in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse: “The *Mishkan* was called ‘*mikdash*’ because it was made holy through the indwelling of the *Shechinah* (*b’shriat haShechinah*). Then, too, it is possible to say that it was an earthly representation of the heavenly *Beit HaMikdash*.” (Translation my own) In sum, the *Mishkan* was a *makom mekudash* (holy place) and called, “*mikdash,*” because Hashem’s holy presence was manifest therein, and it was a human reflection of the *Beit HaMikdash* in *Shamayim*.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the “Rav” by his followers and disciples, builds upon these ideas and notes that the ultimate purpose of the *Mishkan*, and, by extension, the *Beit HaMikdash*, was to reinstate the original relationship between the Almighty and Adam and Chava:

God created the world to reside in it, rather than to reside in transcendence. Man could have continually experienced Him instead of trying to infer His Presence through examining nature. But in the wake of the original sin of Adam and Eve, He retreated. *And they heard the voice of the Lord God going in the garden to the direction of the sun, and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God in the midst of the trees of the garden* (Gen. 3:8). These “footsteps” were those of God leaving the garden and departing into infinity. Had they not sinned, God would always have been close. As a result of Adam’s hiding and fear of communicating with God in the wake of his sin, God removed His Divine Presence. The purpose of the tabernacle [*Mishkan*] was to restore the relationship between man and God. (Public lecture, Boston, 1979, cited in *Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Shemot*: with Commentary Based Upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Dr. Arnold Lustiger, editor, page 226, underlining my own

May the time come soon and, in our days, when the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people is fully restored and His *Shechinah* once again dwells in the soon to be rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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

Please contact me at [rdb718@gmail.com](mailto:rdb718@gmail.com) to be added to my weekly email list.

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

\*\*\* 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: [The Rav](#)