



## Teruma 2024

### Personal Space

2 minute read | Straightforward

Historically, the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash were focal points in our religious lives, and quite rightly. The Jewish People would journey from near and far for the Holidays, and there were all manner of offerings and rituals the people would partake in. They were the seat of justice, with the highest courts headquartered there. They feature prominently in almost all of our prayers.

How could Judaism survive, let alone thrive, without these central sites and rites?

It's an essential question that speaks to the heart of what Judaism is; it matters. But if Judaism has lingered on long after those holy sites are gone; if Judaism has persisted for the overwhelming majority of its history without these holy places, then perhaps it was never about the bricks – it was about the people and their commitment. The bricks could break, but the people and their commitment would not.

It's all encoded in the very first instruction to build a communal holy place:

וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְתוֹכָם – And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. (25:8)

God is incorporeal and doesn't need a place to live; God is the place of all things and is in all places already. The important part isn't simply the place; but what the place does – it helps us experience and feel like God dwells among us – וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְתוֹכָם.

R' Shmshon Raphael Hirsch notes that the very fact that the Mishkan was built in the heart and center of the camp illustrates God's closeness to our lives.

It's not the form of the place we make for God that matters; it's the substance – the very concept of the entire Mishkan project speaks to the notion that sanctity is portable – that there isn't a single "holy place"; there are only the places we choose to make holy. If that place wasn't just for God, of course we could survive without the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash. If we built it there, we could build it here. If we built it once, we could build it again. Our ancestors could do it in a grand temple, and they could do it in a dark cellar on the run from danger.

The Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash were quite literally public works in every way – paid for by every citizen and member of the public, monuments representing the dedication to what we can build



together, carving out a dedicated space for God – which God promises to reciprocate in a mutual covenant – וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם. If we make the space, God will be there.

As the Kotzker famously quipped, where does God dwell? Wherever we let Him in.

If we make the space, God will be there.

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## My Grandfather's Trees

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Torah opens with Creation and describes the emergence of life and all things in just a single chapter. It spends the best part of two entire books detailing the Mishkan, with meticulous and exhaustive details of the planning, production, and assembly of the portable sanctuary that served as the physical and spiritual center of Judaism until the construction of a permanent Beis HaMikdash.

The Torah's primary construction materials list contained vast amounts of gold, silver, copper, and precious gems. If you had to say the one main thing the Mishkan was made of, you might say gold, used throughout the project, from finishes to furnishings.

But it's not.

The Mishkan had no foundation and no roof, just curtains and drapes. The only solid structure came from its walls, which were made of wood:

וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לְמִשְׁכַּן עֲצֵי שֵׁטִים עֹמְדִים – You shall make the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright. (26:15)

The people contributed precious metals and gems they'd brought from Egypt. But they were in the desert; where were they getting wood from?

Rashi highlights that the Torah typically refers to everyday items and general contributions in other instances uses but in the case of wood, uses the definite article – the planks – indicating a specific contribution – הַקְּרָשִׁים / הַקְּרָשִׁים. Rashi notes that this wood had been designated generations before; our sages teach that before our ancestor Yakov went to Egypt, he visited his grandfather Avraham's home, took some trees from there, and took them to Egypt with him, making his children swear at his deathbed to take the trees with them when they left to build a sanctuary with.



R' Yaakov Kamenetsky notes that Yakov didn't just plant trees; he planted actualized hope in a physical and visual form accessible in the external world of tangible things. Enslaved in Egypt, his descendants would look at and tend to their grandfather's trees, a promise and symbol that the hands that built pyramids and monuments for their masters would one day make sacred things and places for themselves; work that broke and destroyed could transform into work that built and united.

Yaakov knew his children would raise their eyes and cry in misery. They'd see trees that connected them to the roots of their history and would allow them a glimpse of his hopeful vision of a better, brighter future.

But hope for the future isn't necessarily specific to trees; Yakov could have left them anything.

He chose to leave trees because trees symbolize life and vitality, seasonality, and natural energy, representing the cycle of life and death. Like trees, generations of death in Egypt would burst to life once more.

Our great ancestors had a tangible vision for what these trees could become and took concrete action to imbue them with meaning so that this vision would unfold in reality. Yaakov was a visionary, but his dreams manifested in the world of action.

This is the wood they used, and it's ubiquitous – the Mishkan is made of this wood, the Ark is made of this wood, the table is made of this wood, and the large and small altars are made of this wood, too. The wood may be overlaid with metal, but it's all made of this wood.

More pointedly, wood is organic and simple, unlike gems and precious metals. R' Zalman Sorotzkin points out in a way that's hard to overstate that wood is the invisible support structure of no less than the entire project. You might see gold everywhere, but gold is just the decorative overlay; that's not where the support comes from. Support comes from the durability and enduring sturdiness of the wood – עֲצֵי שֵׁטִים עֲמֻדִים. The gold is useless without the underlying strength of the wood that holds it up.

Sparkle and glamor catch the eye, but remember, it's superficial only.

The boards must be assembled upright, not upside down, in the direction of the tree's original growth, with the lower part of the board corresponding to the lower part of the tree. Even though the board is symmetrical, this law extends to every mitzvah that uses plants, such as Lulav and Esrog. R' Joseph Soloveitchik notes that this instruction is a universal law; the way to grow something is with its feet planted on the ground with its head, heart, and spine aligned straight up a straight line, physically, spiritually, and emotionally aligned. You can't put something together upside-down and expect it to work right; things must be upright to grow correctly.



The Mishkan was built out of Yakov's hopes and dreams for his children, the promise they inherited about the places they'd go and who they could be. Those children passed on that dream to their children, who would build the Mishkan, but also to us, the children who would remember it.

Every breath of our lives fulfills countless generations' hopes and prayers. They aren't burdens; they can be building blocks of lasting meaning if we use them right.

The dreams and promises we inherit are priceless treasures.

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## **Your Heart in the Right Place**

3 minute read | Straightforward

In every field of human civilization, there are discoveries, technologies, and people that changed everything.

The printing press permanently slashed the cost of information, commoditizing and dramatically expanding the reach of human knowledge. Antibiotics and vaccination neutralized the dangers of the historically leading causes of human death. The internet has transformed how we communicate.

Closer to home, Rashi opened up our literature to the masses. The Rambam organized and synthesized broad and divergent streams of lore and thought into cohesive and comprehensive works of law and philosophy. Aish HaTorah and Ohr Someach demonstrated the urgency of outreach to combat the attrition wrought by assimilation. Chabad put a Jewish embassy in every major city on the planet.

These are all remarkable feats, and they should speak to something deep within us; who hasn't once dreamed of making an impact and leaving the world better off for it? Even once we have matured past the stage of wanting to make the world in our image, we still have ambitions; and we eventually face the question of how we can hope to succeed at those ambitious goals.

It's a familiar question because it's universal.

How are you going to succeed at that?

This line of thinking is common and garbs itself in the language of realism. But this line of thinking is actually pessimism in disguise, and ironically, often grants people the certainty they need to excuse themselves from getting started.



Survivorship bias is real. While it's not strictly wrong to say that the number of people who are fortunate enough to successfully pull off massive accomplishments is small, what they all have in common is that they got started, which might be half the battle – ולא אתה בן חורין – לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, וליבטל ממנה. Rashi himself wrote dismissively of people who say it's impossible to finish Shas; the only way it's ever been done is a couple of pages per session.

But there is something else to it as well.

Our sages suggest that the designer in chief of the Mishkan, Bezalel, was exceptionally gifted and perhaps even supernaturally clairvoyant. But when the Torah describes the architects and artisans, the common craftsmen and contributors of the Mishkan construction project, it consistently refers to one unifying characteristic of the men and women who rose to the occasion:

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּצַלְאֵל וְאֶל-אוֹהֵיָאֵב וְאֵל כָּל-אִישׁ חֲכָמִים לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' חֲכֵמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ לַקְּרָבָה אֶל-הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ: – Moshe called Bezalel and Oholiav, and every skilled person whom Hashem had endowed with skill in his heart, everyone who had given their hearts to undertake the task and carry it out. (36:2)

The Ramban notes that the working population of that moment consisted of freed slaves, who only had experience in manual labor – they were not skilled in metallurgy or textiles! Yet the Torah consistently describes their technical skill as a feature of having a heart for the task in question – חֲכָמִים לֵב. The Chafetz Chaim suggests that in doing so, the Torah subtly recognizes the skill of these volunteers as a product not of experience, but of desire; their hearts were in the right place – ה' נָתַן ה' חֲכֵמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ לַקְּרָבָה אֶל-הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ.

The Mishkan volunteers could succeed at something unprecedented with no relevant experience because God granted the requisite skill to the people whose hearts were in the right place and whose hearts were invested in the project. R' Noach Weinberg similarly encourages us to invest heart into our undertakings and trust that God sends us the fortune and wisdom required to succeed – יגעתי ולא יצאתי אל תאמן. If we want the right things for the right reasons, why wouldn't we throw ourselves in the deep end and hope for the best?

The Malbim suggests that all we truly can give is our all, and it's true enough of most things. Who can accomplish the impossible? The people who want it badly enough – רחמנא ליבא בעי. Our Sages taught that you could have anything you want if you want it badly enough – אין דבר עומד בפני הרצון – If you want it badly enough, you'll find a way; and if you don't, you'll find an excuse – בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין – אותו.

We all have big goals, and if we expect to influence the quality of our lives, we must be proactive. But what are the chances you get what you want if you don't go after it? And crucially, what are the chances you get it if you go about it half-heartedly?

If you want to succeed, your heart has to be in the right place, and you have to go all-in.



## The Places You'll Go

3 minute read | Straightforward

The Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash had different chambers and utensils laden with meaning and symbolism.

Quite arguably, the centerpiece and focal point of the entire endeavor was the Ark, the gold-covered wooden chest containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments; the seat of the Torah and the physical embodiment of God's immanent closeness, as represented by the cherubim, the angelic children sculpted on top in a warm embrace.

By its very nature, the Mishkan and its contents were built to be portable; taken apart then put back together every time the camp moved. Some items were simple to box and move, like knives and cups. Some oversized items were not designed to be dismantled and boxed, like the Menora and Table. Those items had built-in rings that enabled the insertion and alignment of moving rods; large poles that enabled and facilitated portability by the carrying crew.

These rods were auxiliary gear whose sole purpose was easy and balanced handling on the go; they weren't part of the furniture. When not being transported, they were entirely redundant otherwise and were removed and stored away. This was standard and uniform policy, with one notable exception – the Ark.

Just like every other large instrument and utensil, the Ark was built with rings for its moving rods. But quite unlike every other instrument and utensil, its moving rods were forbidden to remove:

וְיָצַקְתָּ לוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבַּעֲתֵי זָהָב וְנִתְּתָהּ עַל אַרְבַּע פַּעֲמֹתָיו וּשְׁתֵּי טַבַּעֲתַי עַל־צַלְעוֹ הָאֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי טַבַּעֲתַי עַל־צַלְעוֹ הַשְּׁנִייתַי: וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּדֵי עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים: – Cast four gold rings for it, to be attached to its four feet, two rings on one of its sidewalls and two on the other. Make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold; then insert the poles into the rings on the sidewalls of the Ark for carrying. The poles shall remain in the rings of the Ark: they shall not be removed from it. (25:12-15)

The Ark used the exact same prefabricated rods that went on and off everything else; only these remained permanently attached. But what is the point of designing the Ark with moving rods that don't come out? Why not simply design an Ark with elegantly built-in handles?

R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch suggests that these poles highlight a powerful symbolism. They weren't just ordinary handles, which perhaps truly could have been a permanent design feature. Instead, the

Ark – which contains and represents the Torah and all it entails – is deliberately designed with permanent moving rods, meaning the Ark is built to be permanently portable. It requires no preparation to arrive or depart; it is designed to be taken wherever we need and wherever we go at a moment's notice.

Our sages suggest that the Ark had a variety of physics breaking properties; that it had an anti-gravitational effect, hovering and never touching the ground, and carrying its carriers; that it flattened and smoothed the hills and obstacles in the way of the weary Jewish People; and that it bent physical space when measured end to end. When Jerusalem was sacked for the last time, the Beis HaMikdash was pillaged, and many vessels and utensils were famously plundered. Yet the Ark was not – it was mysteriously hidden, and legend has it that it will show up again one day when it's supposed to.

While each of these alone is wild, R' Nosson Adler takes them together to thematically reflect that the Torah contained in the Ark transcends space and time. Torah precedes creation – אסתכל באורייתא וברא – עלמא; it can bend space and time because it does not belong to space and time. It comes from somewhere beyond our dimensions and is not bound by them.

Permanently portable, we have carried the Torah through crusades, exiles, expulsions, and pogroms, the living memory we lovingly look to for wisdom and guidance through good times and bad. But perhaps in some sense, the Torah has carried us too, helping us soothe some of the bumps and scratches we've accumulated along the way, providing us with comfort and warmth in the times we need it most.

On a similar note, Rashi comments that Moshe taught the Torah in seventy languages; which the Chiddushei HaRim takes this as equipping the Jewish People with a way to bring the Torah to every corner of the world. As the Ksav Sofer highlights, the Torah in another language suggests that the Torah can be fully integrated into another culture, as history has shown.

The Ohr HaChaim notes that the Torah is self-referential as a way of life, a way of being – אמ-בְּחַקְתִּי – וּבְלִקְתָּהּ בְּדֶרֶךְ. It speaks to us on the go, in the desert, in liminal space, the place between places – תּוֹלְכֵי. While this certainly holds true in the global historical macro sense, you ought to at least attempt to make it true in the local and personal sense; in the small chunks of time between things, there have never been more opportunities to learn something short, so take your opportunities.

In the Torah's profoundly symbolic way, it goes as we go, built to move with us.

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## **How to Eat an Elephant**



6 minute read | Straightforward

In our storied and hallowed tradition, some of our sages have suggested that the Torah contains a Golden Rule, a comprehensive and holistic meta-principle that unifies and underlies the entire framework of the Torah.

It's worthwhile to take those suggestions seriously to understand why one, as opposed to another, might be considered the most important thing, or at a minimum, a close candidate.

Some are pretty intuitive, like R' Akiva's timeless and universal "love thy neighbor"; or Hillel's ethic of reciprocity – what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. Ben Azzai suggested that it was the notion that humans are created in the image of God, which teaches us the fundamental equality of all humans; Ben Zoma suggested it was Shema Yisrael – that there is One God. They're not hard to explain; they're not hard to understand.

But one suggestion is a little more ponderous – Shimon ben Pazi's suggestion:

וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי-שָׁנָה שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם תָּמִיד: אֶת-הַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם: – This is what you shall offer upon the altar: two year-old lambs; every day, regularly. You shall offer the one lamb in the morning and the other lamb in the evening. (29:38, 39)

Shimon ben Pazi taught that the Torah's Golden Rule is the daily ritual – the עֲבוּדָה – and more specifically, the instruction to bring the daily sacrifice at its designated times in the morning and evening – קָרְבַּן תָּמִיד.

Quite obviously, this stands in stark contrast to the other proposed candidates. It's perfectly plausible to suggest that treating other humans with kindness and respect might be the most essential thing the Torah has to tell us; it's perfectly plausible to suggest that pronouncing our belief in the existence of the One God might be the most important thing.

R' Shlomo Farhi notes that whichever candidate we decide upon, it would not be the Golden Rule of personal relations, nor would it be the Golden Rule of Judaism. If the Torah is the blueprint for existence, then it would be the Golden Rule of life and all things – הַסֵּתֶכֶל בְּאוֹרֵי תַא וּבְרֵא עֵלְמָא. It follows that identifying the Golden Rule and what it has to teach us is enormously consequential.

How could the specific and technical daily sacrificial service possibly be the most important thing the Torah has to tell us?

Perhaps it was selected as a candidate for the Golden Rule not to emphasize the importance of the sacrificial service or its technicalities; but rather to highlight another key value for us – the essential nature of consistency. It's not about the קָרְבַּן; it's about the תָּמִיד.



The defining feature of the daily sacrifice is quite arguably the regularity for which it is named – תמיד. It is the only mitzvah that happens every morning and every evening, rain or shine, hot or cold, weekday, Shabbos, or Chag; commitment with conviction.

R' Yehuda Amital suggests that the non-spectacular nature of the law is precisely what makes it remarkable. It does not commemorate some miraculous historical event nor deliver a moment of tangible spirituality. It is boring, plain, repetitive, and simple; twice per day, morning and night.

It is worth noting that the motif of regularity in the Torah appears almost exclusively in the context of the Mishkan; תמיד is intimately and tightly associated with עֲבוֹדָה. Aside from the regular daily sacrifices, the bread had to be on the table regularly – תמיד; there had to be a regularly lit candle on the Menorah – תמיד – and a regularly lit fire on the altar – תמיד. As the Mesilas Yeshtarim puts it, the only path to success for any serious undertaking is through disciplined, regular, and unwavering commitment.

If you've ever wanted to accomplish anything of note, you know that getting started can be challenging. All too often, we bite off more than we can chew. Maybe you sit down to think about everything you have to do, only to freeze up, intimidated and overwhelmed, no longer capable of taking that first step. We can get lost, frustrated, and impatient. We want instant results or lack the commitment necessary to follow through. We're unclear of the goal, or we run out of energy and time. We get sidetracked and distracted, bogged down, and get lost in the noise. We give up too soon or hang on too long. And so we fail. We don't finish. It flops. And nothing has changed.

If that sounds familiar, that's because you're human, and we need to remember the Golden Rule; it's not about the flourishes and sprints of inspiration and hard work. The great principle of our lives is consistency; small disciplines and routines repeated daily that empower us and lead to great and hard-won achievements gained slowly over time.

As Rashi notes, it seems impossible to finish Shas or Shulchan Aruch, but it's fairly easy to learn a page or two per day. It's insane to go from the couch to running a marathon, but it's quite doable to train for a 5K. It's too costly to pay off a house in one shot, but it's pretty realistic to pay your mortgage every month. It's tough to lose weight, but it's manageable when you stick to your daily diet and exercise. It's grueling to decide whether to spend the rest of your life with someone, but it's more straightforward to figure out if you're having a good time with them. It's challenging to cram everything for a test in just one sitting, but it's not too difficult to do the assigned reading and homework every week.

From health and finance to spirituality and relationships, any kind of serious progress must be incremental by necessity. It requires showing up and putting in the work, doing what needs to be done wherever you find yourself, whether you're in the mood or not.

Consistency requires perseverance through plateaus and setbacks and a lifelong commitment to establishing positive habits and routines that become almost second nature. All of your life's goals will require consistent effort to push toward them. If you do not consistently focus on achieving them and do not put in the work, you will likely fall back into old habits or lose motivation and interest. If you are persistent, you can get them. But if you are consistent, you will keep them.

It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives – it's what we do consistently.

Consistency is about time investment – a little bit of time, repeated over an extended period of time.

That being said, it's important to separate consistency from stagnation – it's not enough to mindlessly repeat one action over and over; we aren't machines. Far too often, we aren't successful because while we sustain our efforts, we fail to scale those efforts over time; we don't take responsibility for our progress. But it's just so obvious; if you never ratchet up your efforts incrementally, of course you will only ever find yourself right where you are!

Instead, you must adapt your actions as you grow and learn, gaining feedback from each action adjusting accordingly to help you stay on track and make progress towards your goal. Incremental improvements compound, leading to exponential gains if you stay on track. Each step forward fuses and stacks, gradually building greater momentum, which is typically the difference between success and failure in any field and the key to high levels of achievement.

Leonardo da Vinci quipped that a diamond is a lump of coal that just stuck to its job. If you think of any titan of business, entertainment, religion, or sport, they never got there on the back of a heroic one-off performance. They are legends because of their consistent, sustained efforts over the long-term – they heeded the Golden Rule. It's a mistake to compare yourself to someone successful and chalk up the difference to a difference in ability, intelligence, talent, or even hard work when, in all likelihood, the difference is consistency. You can get there too.

If it sounds like work, that's because it is – the definition of the term the Mishkan rituals fall under is quite literally “work” or “service” – עֲבוּדָה. It's an investment on our part; it's the contribution and service we can offer. In a certain sense, maybe it's all we truly can offer – all we have to offer is our all, that deepest part of ourselves, committing to what's important and putting the time in on a regular basis; and what we do is who we become. Consistency, continuity, and dedication is the עֲבוּדָה; and it's our עֲבוּדָה – the Golden Rule of all things.

We all have big dreams, and we should – they're part of what makes life beautiful and worth living. The Torah provides clear guidance on how to get there; the goal may be gargantuan, but you can still only ever take it one day and one step at a time. Getting anywhere serious requires building small habits and rituals that you partake in every day that keep you focused on your highest goals and priorities. Goals can change, but they can change us too; you might be pleasantly surprised who you have become when you're ten years in.



## TorahRedux

As the old saying goes, there has only ever been one way to eat an elephant: one bite at a time.

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*I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.*

*I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond.*

*If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?*

Neli

**PS** - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.*

**Redux:** *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.