



Terumah 2023

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 וְשָׁכַנְתִּי 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 – וְשָׁכַנְתִּי 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 בְתוֹכָם. 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.

Living with Newness

3 minute read | Straightforward

One of the key skills children learn is how to read a clock; what time is it?

Beyond answering the basic question with hours and minutes, there is something deeper behind the question; knowing the time means knowing what to do. The time of day and time of year, the seasons, and the calendar establish the boundaries and time frames upon which our world is built, with specific routines for morning, afternoon, evening, and night, summer, fall, winter, and spring.

Different cultures have used other numeral systems and calendars to measure time. Today, most of the world uses the Gregorian calendar, a fixed calendar determined by how long the earth takes to make one complete orbit around the sun.

The Torah asks us to track time using the moon as a frame of reference; when people spot the new moon, they would report it to the highest court, which declares the beginning of a new month – Rosh Chodesh. It's not Rosh Chodesh because there's a new moon, but because the Jewish leaders say so. It's the very first commandment in the Torah, given to the Jewish People still enslaved in Egypt:

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֹדְשֵׁי שָׁנָה – This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. (12:1)

There are lots of mitzvos, so one of them has to come first. But why is establishing the lunar calendar through Rosh Chodesh the first mitzvah as opposed to any other?

The story of the birth of the Jewish People begins at a time of stuckness, with the Jewish People systematically subjugated and oppressed, powerless objects with no choice or control over their circumstances.

Although slavery is illegal in most of the world, it persists. Moreover, slavery isn't just a legal status; it's a state of mind, body, and soul. If you have ever felt helpless or stuck, you have experienced an element of slavery.

When we internalize that forces of change exist and that we have the power to harness and steer them, the possibilities are limitless. This moment can be different to the moments that have come before; this newness is the beginning of all newness – הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֹדְשֵׁי שָׁנָה.



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 – ליבטל 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-אֹהֲלִיאָב וְאֵל כָּל-אִישׁ חֲכָמִים לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' חֲכֵמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נָשְׂאוּ לְבֹ לְקַרְבָּה אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ 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 – נָתַן ה' – חֲכֵמָה בְּלִבּוֹ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נָשְׂאוּ לְבֹ לְקַרְבָּה אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ 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



מצאתי 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 לּוֹ אַרְבַּע טְבַעֲתֵי זָהָב וְנִתְּתָהּ עַל אַרְבַּע פְּעֻמָּתָיו וּשְׁתֵּי טְבַעֲתֵי עַל־צַלְעוֹ הָאֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי טְבַעֲתֵי עַל־צַלְעוֹ הַשְּׁנֵיטָ: וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּדֵי עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אַרְבַּע טְבַעֲתֵי זָהָב: וְהִבַּאתָ אֶת־הַבְּדִים עַל צַלְעֵת הָאָרֶץ לְשֵׂאת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בָּהֶם: בְּטְבַעֲתֵי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיוּ הַבְּדִים לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ: 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 – אַסְתַּכֵּל בְּאוֹרֵייתָא וּבְרָא – עלמא; it can bend space and time because it does not belong to space and time.

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.

The Ohr HaChaim notes that the Torah is self-referential as a way of life, a way of being – אַם־בְּהִקְחֵתִי וּבְלִכְתֵּהּ בְּדֶרֶךְ – תֵּלְכוּ. It speaks to us on the go, in the desert, in liminal space, the place between places – 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.



Sacred Space

6 minute read | Intermediate

If you ask people what the defining traits of religion are, holiness will be on most people's lists.

Holiness is a shorthand code word everyone recognizes, and we sagely and solemnly nod our heads. Yes, yes, holiness, of course!

But what is holiness?

We sometimes think of holiness as something we do on our own. Withdrawing from the world, from the joys and vices of life, fasting, going into the woods, or perhaps profound meditations on lofty metaphysics, retreating deep into the recesses of the mind.

There may be substance to some or even all of those things, but that's not how the Torah talks about holiness.

The Torah talks about withdrawing in part and designating times and spaces; the Hebrew word for holiness means to designate or separate – קדושה.

But a critical element is missing from the word's everyday use. Most appearances of holiness throughout the Torah describe it as a function of plurality, something we do with others together.

When the Torah asks us to be holy, Rashi notes that the instruction is given to everyone together – דָּבָר אֶל-כָּל-עַדַת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַמְרַתְּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תְּהִיוּ. Moreover, it follows this instruction with commands to be charitable, fair, and honest in dealing with others. As the Chasam Sofer notes, the Torah's conception of holiness is one of connection and interdependence, not disconnection and asceticism.

When the time comes to build the Mishkan, everyone must come together for God to be found in their work:

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

Standing at the hallowed Mount Sinai, on the cusp of receiving the Torah, God tells the gathered people their overarching mission:

וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ – You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation... (19:6)

Beyond the Torah explicitly speaking about holiness as a function of togetherness – תְּהִיוּ / וְעֲשׂוּ – our Sages emphasize the central importance of the Jewish People coming together at Har Sinai – וַיִּתְחַוֶּשׂוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר / כאיש אחד בלב אחד.



Almost all sacred gatherings require a group, from prayers and sacrifices to reading the Torah and weddings – כל דבר שבקדושה לא יהא פחות מעשרה –

So why is holiness so tightly linked to togetherness?

In the Torah’s formative story of the emergency of humanity, it describes the first man’s existential aloneness as bad – לא־טוב הָיִית הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ – Being alone and doing things alone is terrible; being together and doing things together is good.

Our prophets and sages talk about the soul as the thing that animates our consciousness, the part of you that makes you uniquely you, and they speak of soul fragments directly connected to God – חלק אלוהים ממעל.

But when we come together, we become whole, which is why holiness is linked with connection – כנסת ישראל.

R’ Jonathan Sacks suggests that if the Creation story is about the space God makes for us, the Mishkan narrative is about the space we make for God. Noting that the Torah spends a lot more time discussing the Mishkan than Creation, R’ Sacks teaches that the Torah is far more interested in what we do for God than what God does for us.

Far more esoterically, Chassidus speaks of tzimtzum, the space or vacuum God separates from God’s fullness so that existence can have an independent existence and reality. But maybe when we build a Mishkan, a separate return space, we form our own inverse or parallel tzimtzum, which we can only do in our enhanced state of togetherness.

In the external world, it starts with individuals, human to human. The Torah has its fair share of lofty arcane things, but a full half of the Ten Commandments are grounded in interpersonal regulations – בין אדם לחברו. It’s not enough to love humanity in the abstract; you have to love people in particular – your annoying neighbor and the guy who never stops talking.

Among the most misunderstood laws are the mitzvos about sanctifying and profaning God’s name – ולא תחללו את־שם קדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. But in the context of holiness as something we do together, they make perfect sense – בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. If holiness is related to togetherness, our public actions either draw people in or alienate them.

The Chemdas Dovid explains that while an individual is like a string, a group is more like a rope, far stronger than the individual components alone, which is to say that togetherness generates something greater than the sum of its parts.

While the Mishkan project had an open call for donations of all kinds of things that were wonderful and welcome, the core donation to the Mishkan project was a simple half-shekel and was required of everyone – הַעֲשִׂיר לֹא־נִרְבָּה וְהַדֵּל לֹא יִמְעִיט מִמִּחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל לְתַת אֶת־תְּרוּמַת ה' לְכַפֵּר עַל־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם –



While the Torah predates the notion of corporations or public companies, it seems thematically similar. Every person was invested in the Mishkan, or perhaps better; everyone was a contributor and owner of that holiness, which could be precisely what made it holy in the first place.

There is undoubtedly an aspect of generosity that we need to welcome and celebrate – כל המרבה הרי זה – משובה. But it can often feel like we miss the everyman who can't quite swing a high roller donation.

The unit of the mandatory universal contribution to the Mishkan was a half shekel, not a whole shekel, and most or all of the measurements in the Mishkan ended in half cubits, reflecting the same core theme that your contribution can only ever take you halfway. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos teaches that it is not for us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist, with the obvious conclusion that we count on others by necessity – לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה

We ought to remember the Mishkan project that indicates smaller nominal contributions are just as valuable as everyone else's. Everyone gives the whole of what they should, rich or poor. You give a fraction, and not only does it count, but it's enough, and that's all we need. More than how much you give, it matters that you participate.

This isn't cutesy moralizing – the half-shekel contributions were melted down to form the sockets that connected the base of each wall segment. The part everyone gave together formed no less than the foundation of the entire Mishkan.

We're better off through what we do together, for, and with others. The Gemara says that collecting the half shekel from everyone elevated and uplifted them – כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת-רֵאשׁ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לִפְקֻדֵיהֶם, וְנִתְּנוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר – נִפְשׁוּ. Avos d'Rabi Nosson notes how valuable human contribution is; God is everywhere, but we can manifest the divine presence a little more palpably by coming together to make something for God. The Midrash goes so far as to suggest that God is most pleased by what we do down here, as exhibited by God leaving Heaven behind to be a little closer to us – דירה בתחתונים

It is almost natural that the thing we build when everyone comes together is the holiest thing there is. As R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch notes, it follows that it is the physical and spiritual center of our lives, which the entire camp is built around, the site we aim our prayers, and the place we come closest to the divine.

Moreover, it follows why our sages attribute the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash to animosity and hatred; disputes and internal strife led to division, and without togetherness, it only followed that sanctity would disappear as well. The Ohr Pnei Moshe notes that the inverse is true as well; for Moshe to inaugurate the Mishkan, he must bring all the people together – וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The Torah commands the commission of each utensil in the Mishkan in the second person singular, but not the Aron, which it commands in the plural – ועשית / ועשו. The Alshich notes that the Torah is not like monarchy or priesthood, which fall to specific individuals; the call to Torah is open-ended and universally accessible – it beckons to all of us, to you.



TorahRedux

R' Menachem Mendel of Vorki notes that if holiness is something that everyone has to do, it has to be according to the capabilities and circumstances of every individual. There can be no one-size-fits-all; as the Kotzker famously put it, God doesn't need more angels.

The Chafetz Chaim teaches that the Torah is everyone's to take up, even if our stakes look different; a bit more of this, a bit less of that. You might be a scholar, maybe you offer financial support, or perhaps you help tidy up your shul a little. Everybody counts, and everybody's contribution is counted.

We are not designed to be alone; we cannot exist alone. We need each other, and it's not weakness; it's our greatest strength. Where you find togetherness, you'll find wholeness and holiness; and we must yearn for it perpetually – בְּרַכְנוּ אֶבְיָנוּ בְּלִנּוּ כְּאֶהָד בְּאוֹר פְּנֵיךָ.

But don't just yearn for it; work for it too. Find somebody to mentor, find an interesting local community project or charity to support, or get involved with, in whatever way, big or small.

Your participation doesn't just make a difference; it makes it better.

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. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.

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. I have been blessed to operate a business that allows me to dedicate a substantial amount of time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I broker healthcare businesses for sale; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers, and introductions to anyone who might want to buy or sell a healthcare business!*

PPS - *It took me years to start making a parnassa; if anyone you know is looking for a job, please put them in touch with me. With a helping hand from Above, I have successfully helped **8 people** find jobs so far!*



TorahRedux

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.