



Parshat Terumah - Shekalim - 28 February 2025 Shabbat times start 5:20 finishes 6:30

Rabbi Shraga Simmons

This week's Parsha is the dream of every Jewish architect and interior designer. It describes the construction of the Mishkan, the portable Temple that traveled with the Jewish People during their 40 years in the desert (and for 500 years after), until finding its permanent home in Jerusalem. At the center of the Mishkan was the Holy Ark which contained the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. This Ark was a square box made of wood. The Torah explains (Exodus 25:11): "You shall cover the wood with pure gold from the inside and from the outside."

The need to cover the outside of the Ark with gold is understandable: The centerpiece of the Mishkan should certainly be majestic and regal. But what need is there to cover the wood on the inside of the box as well?

The Talmud (Yoma 72b) explains: A person's outward appearance must be an accurate reflection of their insides as well. In other words, don't be a hypocrite.

We all know someone who is a fake - quick with a smile, yet ready to stab you in the back just the same. Sadly, part of getting by in life is the ability to discern the genuine from the fake. (Children happen to be particularly adept at this.) Maybe that's what King Solomon meant when he said, "Better the anger of a friend than the kiss of an enemy." At least you know what you're getting. One of the wonders of Judaism is how the Hebrew language reveals truths about everyday life. The Hebrew word for face - "paneem," is nearly identical to the Hebrew word for interior - "pineem." This teaches that the face we present must reflect our insides. (Contrast this with the English word "face," which shares its origins with "facade," meaning a deceptive appearance.) This aversion to hypocrisy is reflected in the laws of kashrut as well. The one Jewish law that everyone in the world seems to know is that a Jew is not allowed to eat ham, pork or anything else derived from a pig. Interestingly, there is nothing in the Torah that seems to make this prohibition more stringent than eating, for example, catfish or a chocolate-covered ant. Why then have we singled out this prohibition against the pig?

The Torah tells us (and zoologists concur) that the pig is the only animal in the world possessing the outward symbol of kosher (split hooves), but not the inward symbol (chewing cud). The pig therefore represents that which is kosher in outward appearance, but is in fact unclean on the inside.

Holy Inside and Out

This type of hypocrisy is described in the Talmud as one of the categories of behavior that God detests. For that moral reason, the pig is universally viewed as reprehensible to the Jew.

Back to our Parsha... We're left with one glaring question: If the Ark is covered with gold both on the inside and the outside, then what need is there at all for the shell to be made out of wood?! Why not simply make the ark one solid piece of gold?

The answer is that attaining purity and sincerity does not necessarily happen overnight. Like any important goal, it is achieved through constant, steady growth. Wood - organic and dynamic - represents this idea.

Judaism is not all-or-nothing. Observance of Torah might begin with the lighting of Shabbos candles. Or it might mean studying the weekly Parsha, 15 minutes a day. (ArtScroll's Stone Chumash is particularly good for this.) Or it might mean reciting Shema Yisrael before going to bed.

Imagine stumbling across a gold mine. Would you turn down the gold because you know you won't find all the gold mines in the world? So too, every Mitzvah is a gold mine. Of course, we strive ultimately to fulfill them all. But even if we do just one, our lives are enriched forever.

The important thing is not where we are on the ladder, but rather in what direction we're headed, and how many rungs we've climbed. One tree does not compare its rings against another. Growth through Torah is the same way. Whatever effort you make to come close to the Almighty, whatever Torah you learn - the impact is cumulative. Perhaps that's why the Torah likens a person to a tree (see Deut. 20:19). Steady and constant, every drop counts.

The Talmud (Brachos 28a) says that in the Yeshiva of Rabban Gamliel, the prerequisite for admission was that a student's internal character had to match his outer appearance. Rabban Gamliel did not accept just anybody into the Yeshiva; he accepted only those who were honest, sincere and free of hypocrisy.

The Talmud continues: After Rabban Gamliel left his position as head of the Yeshiva, they instituted a new policy whereby any student - fitting or not - could be admitted. Hundreds of new students flocked to sign up. At which point, Rabban Gamliel became depressed and said, "Perhaps, God forbid, I have withheld Torah from the Jewish People!"

The Chiddushei HaRim (19th century Europe) asks: What was Rabban Gamliel saying? Of course he knew all along that his strict admission policy prevented some people from learning! So why is he so surprised now and getting depressed?

The answer is that Rabban Gamliel saw that because all those new students spent time in the Yeshiva, they too became honest and sincere by virtue of having learned Torah. Torah has the power to transform a person from mediocre to great.

Some years ago, I was speaking privately with a great Torah scholar and I said to him: "Rabbi, I am so grateful for the opportunity I've had to learn Torah. Without it, I don't know where I'd be."

The rabbi looked at me and said, "Me, too."

At the beginning of this week's parsha, God commands the Jewish People to "make Me a Mishkan, so that I may dwell within them" (Exodus 25:8). The Talmud points out that the verse should have read, "Make Me a Mishkan, so that I may dwell within it." Why then the language of "dwell within them"?

Because, answer our Sages, the Torah is telling us that the goal of building the Mishkan is not merely to create a House for God, but to sanctify a place for Him within the people. Each individual Jew must personally strive to become a microcosm of the Mishkan: a living, breathing bastion of holiness.

Today, let us hope to find the strength and inspiration to build our very own Mishkan. And may its Ark be crafted of fine wood, laden with gold, both inside and out.

Rosh Chodesh ADAR

Known as a month of celebration and happiness, the late-winter month of Adar contains the joyous holiday of Purim that takes place mid-month. Purim, however, isn't the only thing that makes Adar special.

1. Be Happy Now!

The Talmud tells us that "when the month of Adar arrives, we increase in joy" to welcome a season of miracles. Accordingly, the Talmud tells us that this month is fortuitous for the Jewish people.

2. What's in a name?

The Hebrew name "Adar" is related to the word "adir," which denotes strength and power. The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, points out that the term adir is used to refer to the Jewish people. What could be more apropos for the month when the Jewish people's fortunes are strong?

If it is the purpose for which you were placed here, then it is impossible to achieve. Before you were here, there was no one to do it. Now that you are here, it remains impossible.

When will it become possible? Never. Just do the impossible.

Stop calculating and start doing. In all innocence, throw yourself into the fires headstrong.

Stop thinking that the dragons are tall and you are little. Then will the flames vanish, the dragons will come to your aid, and victory will be yours. Why must it always be that way?

Because that was the plan, the hidden storyline, the subliminal motive of the One who imagined you, who created this stage upon which you act, and breathed you into this reality:

That you should do the impossible.

Joke

Four Israelis are sitting in a restaurant in Tel Aviv. For a long time, nobody says a word. Finally, one man groans, "Oy."

"Oy vey," says the second man. "Nu," says the third.

At this the fourth man gets up from his chair and says, "Listen, if you guys don't stop talking politics, I'm leaving."

Story time

The Jewish community of Frankfurt was in mourning for their beloved Chief Rabbi. The rabbi had no heir, but he hadn't left his flock entirely without recourse. A few days before he died he had called the Jewish leaders together and instructed them on finding a replacement. The potential candidate would have to pass a test consisting of three complicated and difficult questions, involving very deep Torah concepts. "Whoever answers these questions," the rabbi had stipulated, "should be appointed the Rabbi of Frankfurt."

The search began after the funeral. A delegation was chosen of three of the most distinguished leaders of the community, and they set out to find their candidate. As a major Jewish center, Frankfurt required a very special personage; only a scholar with the highest level of piety and erudition would do.

The first city the delegation arrived at was Cracow, which boasted many Torah scholars. Surely it wouldn't be too difficult to find someone there who could answer the three questions.

On the day they arrived they learned that a great celebration would be taking place later that evening. The son of one of the wealthiest Jews in Cracow was becoming Bar Mitzva, and the entire community was invited. The members of the delegation from Frankfurt were also invited to attend. In the middle of the festivities the Bar Mitzva boy stood up to deliver a speech, as is customary. The hall fell silent as everyone listened attentively.

The boy's sermon was very deep, revealing an unusual mastery of Torah knowledge and proficiency. It was, in short, the most impressive Bar Mitzva speech that anyone had ever heard. The boy began by postulating three difficult problems; when the members of the delegation realized that they were the same three questions the rabbi had raised, they looked at one another in amazement. They could hardly believe it when the boy proceeded to answer them skillfully one by one. All of the guests were impressed, but the members of the delegation could barely contain their excitement. Clearly, the hand of G-d had steered them in the right direction. All they had to do was find the tutor who had prepared the boy for his Bar Mitzva; whoever he was, it was obvious that he must serve as the next Rabbi of Frankfurt.

They thanked G-d for having led them to a suitable candidate so quickly.

Indeed, it wasn't difficult to locate the boy's teacher. As they learned from the boy's father, his name was Reb Yosef Shmuel the Teacher.

They found Reb Yosef Shmuel in a corner of the study hall surrounded by little boys. The teacher was dressed simply and rather poorly, but they didn't hesitate to approach him.

"We'd like to speak to you about an urgent matter," they said, but Reb Yosef Shmuel was busy. "Not now," he replied. "I am an employee, and it wouldn't be right to shirk my duties." Reb Yosef Shmuel resumed his teaching.

If anything, the teacher's answer made the members of the delegation even more hopeful. This was obviously a man of ethics, G-d-fearing and devoted to his job. They agreed to speak with him later that day.

When they came back they got quickly to the point. They told him about the passing of their rabbi, and the three questions he had established as a test for his successor. "So now you're going to be our rabbi!" they concluded.

They were shocked, however, when Reb Yosef Shmuel declined their offer most adamantly. He wasn't looking for honor or glory, he explained, and he already had a job as a teacher from which he derived great satisfaction. Politely but firmly he turned them down. All their pleas fell on deaf ears. They begged and implored the teacher, and even promised him an impressive salary, but to no avail. Reb Yosef Shmuel could not be budged.

The members of the delegation prepared to leave Cracow, dejected and forlorn. Who knew if they would be able to find another qualified candidate? They had just left the outskirts of the city when their carriage broke down, and for several hours they had no choice but to sit by the side of the road until it was repaired. All of a sudden a messenger caught up with them; he had come directly from Reb Yosef Shmuel on a special mission.

The messenger revealed that the teacher had suddenly taken ill, and seemingly overnight had arrived at death's door. Indeed, the doctor who was summoned asserted that he had no more than a few days left to live. When Reb Yosef Shmuel heard this pronouncement he had cried out, "Master of the Universe! If You really want me to serve as Rabbi of Frankfurt, I'll do it!"

No sooner had he uttered these words than the mysterious illness began to dissipate. A messenger was immediately dispatched to intercept the delegation from Frankfurt and inform them of his decision.

The joy of the Jewish community of Frankfurt knew no bounds. Divine Providence had clearly demonstrated that Reb Yosef Shmuel was meant to be their leader, and he was formally appointed Chief Rabbi of the city a short time later. And everyone marveled at the prophetic vision of their previous Chief Rabbi, who had provided his flock with such a worthy successor.

Parsha Summary

The name of the Parshah, "Terumah," means "Offering" and it is found in [Exodus 25:2](#).

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, G-d says to Moses, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them."

On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled, transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary's inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark's cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the "showbread" was arranged.

The Sanctuary's three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts. Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.