



Parshat T'rumah: Our Sacred Centers

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Last week, the epic narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai came to a grinding halt as we read the first set of civil laws in *Parshat Mishpatim*. At first glance, many of these laws might have seemed out-of-date, but they all can apply to our society today. Then we arrive at this week's Torah portion, *Parshat T'rumah*, when even the civil law code comes to a grinding halt, as we begin a detailed verbal-linguistic rendering of the Mishkan, Israel's portable sanctuary.

The parashah begins with God telling Moses to accept gifts from B'nai Yisrael for the construction of the portable sanctuary, which will accompany Israel during their 40 years in the wilderness and even into the Promised Land, where eventually King Solomon will build a permanent version of it in Jerusalem.

The physical structure of the Mishkan serves as B'nai Yisrael's sacred center for generations. Even in our day, many still regard the site of the Beit Mikdash (The Temple in Jerusalem) as our holiest site. In the center of the Mishkan, we find the *aron* (the legendary ark), a rectangular box containing the two tablets of the covenant given to Moses by God symbolizing the covenant between God and Israel. In the days when the Mishkan (and later, the Beit Mikdash) stood, when someone wanted to experience closeness to God, to experience the holy, he or she could visit the Mishkan, make an offering, and feel that closeness.

However, the opening verses of *T'rumah* betray a secret about the Mishkan: this holy physical structure did not begin as something intrinsically holy. In order to create the holy, we begin with the mundane. Taking everyday materials and fashioning them into something that helps serve God, elevates those materials into something holy. The name of this parashah, *T'rumah*, comes from the root *reish-vav-mem*, which means 'to elevate.' The gifts that B'nai Yisrael brought to Moses were elevated into something that went beyond their material value.

The parashah opens with a list of the Mishkan's ingredients:

- Gold - \$1,115.70 per ounce today
- Silver - \$16.30 per ounce today
- Copper - \$2.91 per pound today
- [Tekhelet](#)/blue dyed wool - \$70 for eight threads
- Argaman/purple dyed wool - \$70 for eight threads
- [Tola'at Shani](#)/crimson dyed wool

- Shesh/White Linen
- Izzim/Goats' hair
- Different kinds of animal skins
- Acacia wood
- Olive Oil
- Aromatic Spices
- Precious stones
- The cost of these ingredients: hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Making a Mishkan to house God's earthly presence: Priceless.

This got me thinking about our school's campaign to commission a new Torah scroll. There is an important connection between the Mishkan and a Torah Scroll, and this is a major concept I teach in a 6th Grade Jewish History unit:

After the B'nai Yisrael return from their exile in Babylon, their everyday experience of God changes.

The Babylonians had destroyed the Beit Mikdash. For 70 years, the Jewish people lived without one physical place as its sacred center. During those years, the Jews invented the institution of the synagogue and the Torah was completed (in a process about which we have virtually no knowledge). Even though we did build a second Beit Mikdash, Ezra the Sofer (the Scribe), the main religious leader at that time, introduced a **new** sacred center to the Jewish people: a book – namely the Torah.

Jewish life became portable. You could move to another part of the world, take a Sefer Torah with you, read it, learn it, discuss it, and live a Jewish life there. The Jewish People became a text-centered people and not only a place-centered people.

Before Ezra the Sofer, a Jewish person could only expect to experience God through the Mishkan or the Beit Mikdash. Now, any Jewish person could experience God through the learning of Torah.

Both the artist who made the Mishkan and a sofer do the same thing: create holiness in our midst.

Like the making of the Mishkan, the Sofer also takes raw materials: in his or her case, animal skin, ink, sinew, wood, and feathers. With wisdom, skill and understanding, the sofer elevates these raw materials into something far greater than the sum of its parts: our most sacred possession: a Sefer Torah.

May our new Sefer Torah help to infuse Godliness into every aspect of our school: our board, our offices, our hallways, our Mercaz, and, most importantly, our classrooms.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Pepperstone

AS A FAMILY:

1. If you have not already, consider a verse or section from the Torah that is meaningful to your family, and dedicate that section for Gross Schechter's new Sefer Torah.
2. Talk about projects where the reward was greater than the effort.
3. Parshat T'rumah highly values arts and crafts. Find an arts-and-crafts project or decorating project that you can do as a family to enhance your home.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION [T'RUMAH](#), ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What is the first part of the Mishkan described in T'rumah?
2. What does it look like?
3. What is the second object described in T'rumah?
4. What does it look like?
5. How does the Torah describe that various parts of the Menorah?
6. According to Parshat T'rumah, what color is Holiness?
7. What are the other major parts of the Mishkan?