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Who is a Jew? The Supreme Court & The Supreme Judge

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered February 14, 1970)

One of the grand old men of Hebrew letters in Israel, Eliezer Steinman, wrote מי הוא יהודי? מי שאינו שואל, מי הוא יהודי. "Who is a Jew? One who doesn't ask, 'Who is a Jew?'"

The very raising of the question in our days is a troubling phenomenon. It means that our very identity, our Jewishness, has become problematical. It indicates that all of Jewish continuity has been brought under a question mark.

This issue has plagued the State almost since its very inception, and now has returned once again to monopolize public attention and stir public controversy, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

The problem does not concern Israeli citizenship. A political state comprises many different ethnic, racial, and religious groups. Even in ancient Israel, a non-Jew (ger toshav) was accepted as a citizen. What is at issue is Jewish nationality. Here the Halakhah is quite clear: a Jew is one born to a Jewish mother (regardless of his commitments or conduct) or properly converted to Judaism (in which case the conversion must be performed in a certain manner, and the convert must be genuinely committed to Torah). The Jewish tradition recognizes no other yardstick for entering Jewish peoplehood. Hence, any decision by the State concerning nationality (as opposed to citizenship) is of immediate importance to Jews the world over – as significant to the million Jews in the Diaspora as to the two million in the State.

In the most recent incident, the Supreme Court decided in the Shalit case to jettison the traditional criterion of Jewishness. A minority of four judges reaffirmed the halakhic standard, and in effect declared that there is no separation between nationality and religion; a Jew must fit into both categories or none. A majority of judges, five of them, decided to distinguish between nationality and religion, and permit a man to adopt Jewish nationality by simple declaration of intent, even if the Jewish religion does not regard him as Jewish. They preferred the subjective criterion (do I love Israel? Have I sacrificed for the Jewish people?) to the objective halakhic rule (birth to a Jewish mother or conversion).

The majority pointed to certain absurdities if the halakhic standard were to be accepted, as the minority wished. For instance, a son of a Jewish mother who joins the El Fatah and is an enemy of the State of Israel is considered Jewish, whereas the children of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish naval officer who has participated in the life of the State and sacrificed for it, are considered non-Jewish. Justice Silberg, who wrote a profound opinion as one of the minority judges, responded that the El Fatah Jew is simply a contemptible, wicked Jew, whereas the children of the petitioner in the present case are wonderful and noble Gentiles. But Jewishness, as he put it, is not an honorary doctorate that is awarded for specific achievements or accomplishments.

It should be added that every law, by its very nature, is productive of anomalies. Any law, no matter how fair and just, can be made to look ridiculous by pointing to certain exceptional cases. But we must realize that these rare cases are the price we pay for the greater good of the entire community. The only alternative is to abandon law altogether.

Furthermore, the halakhic standard, because it is objective, is much fairer than a subjective standard, in which judges may conceivably be called upon to check whether a man really has his heart and soul with the Jewish State. The objective standard is clear and identifiable, whereas the subjective one – the adoption of Jewishness by nationality on the basis of intent and willingness to share in the State – is something that could pave the way to a kind of modern Inquisition.

But the majority prevailed, and the halakhic definition was abandoned. As I mentioned to the reporter of the New

York Times who quoted me in that paper, the Court was asked, "Who is a Jew?" and answered, as if with a Jewish shrug of the shoulders, "Who isn't a Jew!" Or, as the headline in a Anglo-Jewish weekly put it more humorously and perhaps even more sharply, "You don't have to be Jewish to be a Jew."

However, more recently, the Knesset has voided the Supreme Court decision and has, thereby, confirmed the halakhic view of Jewishness.

It has been charged by many in Israel that the Knesset vote was a matter of the majority bowing to political pressure exerted by the religious parties in order to maintain the coalition that gives the Government its stability. I do not believe that that is the whole truth, or even most of the truth. A number of non-Orthodox people in Government have told me quite honestly that they find it more convenient to blame the religious parties for exerting political pressure on them, but if there were no religious parties, they would have to vote their own consciences, according to which, despite their secularism, they feel that the State must have some historic and spiritual continuity, which can only be provided by Jewish tradition and by Halakhah as regards this most basic of all questions. My own experience, in a limited way, has convinced me of the same. At a recent five-day Ideological Seminar of the World Union of Jewish Students near Helsinki, Finland, Mr. Uri Avneri, who is one of the most vocal opponents of the halakhic standard (and who might be described as the unofficial state pornographer of Israel), declared before the assembled students that there is a definite break between Israelism and Jewishness, that the relation between Diaspora Jews and Israeli citizens in no more close or meaningful than that between the Australian and the Englishman, or the Swiss-German and the German-German. When he made these statements, he was heckled from the floor and the reaction against him was extremely powerful – specifically by the non-Orthodox students, who thereby revealed that in certain "gut" issues they will not depart from the tradition.

Why do I speak of this now that the Knesset has affirmed the halakhic criterion and the problem is solved?

Because the problem is not solved, it is only delayed. First, a Court decision of this kind is a symptom of a profound, national malaise that cannot be overlooked; it has a moral force that must be reckoned with. Second, coalitions change, political realignments occur, new ideas take hold, and a new Knesset may decide to uphold the Supreme Court. Third, the problem will unquestionably be reopened in the very near future. The original text suggested for the Knesset vote was that one be recognized as a Jew who is בן לאם יהודיה או מי שנתגייר על פי דין תורה, that is, one who is the son of a Jewish mother or one who has been converted according to the law of the Torah. In the final reading, approved by the Knesset, the last several words were omitted, and we are left only with a statement that one is recognized as a Jew if he is born to a Jewish mother or if he is converted – with no mention of its legitimacy according to the law of the Torah. This means that the State will now face the problem of recognizing Reform conversions as legitimate. Needless to say, we do not do so. Halakhah regards a Reform conversion as utterly meaningless. Perhaps the typical American, in his ecumenical euphoria, would want Orthodox Jews to be more "sportsmanlike" about accepting Reform conversions. We shall then have to declare our unsportsmanship, and say that our principles, which are not subject to change by whim or caprice, do not permit us to accept a Reform conversion as Jewishly legitimate. Orthodox rabbis in the United States now check, as a matter of course, into the third generation of both bride and groom who come to them for marriage. If we discover that a conversion occurred presided over by a Reform rabbi, we know that we cannot marry this couple unless a re-conversion takes place. As an aside, for those who may consider such a policy as overly restrictive, may I offer the following information to explain, additionally, why we cannot accept the genuineness of a Reform conversion: I am reliably informed by a leading Reform rabbi that over a third of Reform rabbis will preside at the intermarriage of a Jew and a non-Jew without conversion by the non-Jew, and that the great majority of the other Reform rabbis will "refer" such couples to their colleagues who do preside at such marriages. In fact, there is a list of 35 rabbis in the Metropolitan area who will gladly officiate at a Jewish-non-Jewish wedding. Hence, the problem still is unsolved and no doubt will return to vex us in the near future.

Why does this issue agitate us so? Why is it so important to us? Obviously, it bothers us because it touches the very core of our being, the very essence of our deepest commitments. Orthodox Jews regard the Supreme Court decision as calamitous religiously, historically, and Zionistically.

Religiously, it strikes at what Judaism considers the essence of the history of the people of Israel: the berit or Covenant between Israel and God. The distinctiveness of our people, what has safeguarded its perilous journey

through the ages, is its special relationship to God confirmed at Sinai, a Covenant of which the record is the Torah and of which the mitzvot are the conditions. That Covenant legitimates the inseparability of God and Israel or, in other words, Jewish nationality and Jewish religion. Now, one can violate one or another of the conditions of the Covenant without being guilty of reneging on the basic relationship. But when Israel declares that it divorces nationality from religion, it denies the essence of the Covenant – the principle that this people is the people of God. The Supreme Court decision, therefore, represents an act of betrayal by Israel. It strikes at the heart of the Covenant – and thereby breaks the hearts of those who are loyal to it.

Historically too it is a misfortune. The State of Israel was not created *ab ovo*, from an egg, completely new, as it were. It is the product of centuries of hoping and praying and living and dying. For the Jewish nation today to reject the Jewish religion which gave birth to it after a 3500-year pregnancy, is a kind of matricide. (This seems to be a peculiarly contemporary Jewish obsession. One might almost see in it a projection onto a historic scale of that psychological aberration enshrined in contemporary literature in that obscene best-seller by a Jewish author who reviles and rejects his Jewish mother.)

The logic of the Supreme Court decision does not stop with according the status of "Jew" to an atheist who is not Jewish by halakhic standards. It must include even those who have religious commitments other than the Jewish. Thus, we will now have "Christian Jews," "Moslem Jews," "Hindu Jews," etc. But is this the mutation that generations of Jews labored to bring forth? Six million Jews died in the Holocaust; probably a majority of them were Orthodox. At least retroactively they may have had some infinitesimal consolation, that out of their agony would rise a state that would perpetuate the memory of the Jewish people. They died with an *ani maamin*, a song of faith – if not on their lips then deep in their hearts – that their anguish would not be meaningless, that something enduring would come of all this. But for what? For a State which will officially consider meshumadim as Jews? It is not merely that the Supreme Court decision will encourage and accelerate the rate of assimilation of many Jews. It is more than that – it is an effort to assimilate the whole people in one stroke.

If this decision were implemented, or ever will be, it will contribute to the cutting of the roots connecting Israel's past and Israel's present, and will reduce the State of Israel into little more than a technologically muscle-bound, spiritually unimportant little democracy on the shores of the Mediterranean, and one which, in addition, will appear to aid and abet our enemies' charges that Israel is an outpost of Western cultural imperialism in the Arab world. So that historically too, the rupture between nationality and religion is an act of betrayal or at least of ingratitude.

Zionistically, such a decision is totally self-defeating. Our rights to Eretz Israel are grounded in the Abrahamitic Covenant. In 1947 and 1948, Zionist leaders who presented our case to the United Nations maintained that the origin and sanction of our claims are contained in the Bible and in the subsequent history in which Jewish religion impelled us to return to the Jewish homeland. Only recently (*New York Times*, February 14, 1970) we read that the World Jewish Congress officials have been meeting with representatives of the World Council of Churches because the former are troubled by the Christian contention that the Bible is being misused to support Jewish views. "It was feared that this could be interpreted as challenging the Jewish view that the Bible justifies the claim to Israel as a homeland." Without Jewish religion, there is no Jewish nationality, and there is no Jewish "national homeland."

Let us be realistic. Not all critics of the State of Israel are malevolent and anti-Semitic. Some of them, although assuredly not all of them or even most of them, genuinely try to see the conflict in which we are embroiled in an objective manner. And, from an impersonal and objective point of view, it is possible to conclude that Israel's case is not as air-tight as we have imagined, and the Arabs may have some merit in their contentions. It is only in the context of the Divine promise, of the Covenant, that we have inalienable and unalterable rights to the Holy Land. Once we have cut ourselves off from that Covenant, the whole foundation of our case collapses, and we are in danger of appearing as hyper-efficient outsiders who have unjustly exploited what we ourselves consider as nothing more than an ancient myth, to usurp the land of others. It is the Covenant which says, above all else, that this people and God are intertwined with each other. And it is only that Covenant which assigns the land of Canaan to the people of Israel.

As Rashi put it in his opening comment to Genesis: Why does the Torah begin with a record of the divine creation of the world? "So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, 'You are thieves, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations (who occupied Palestine from antiquity),' you will be able to answer, 'All the world belongs to the Holy One. He created it, and He gave it to whom He pleased. He willed to give it to them, and He willed to take it from them and give it to us.'"

We cannot be eclectic and accept the Covenant only for political purposes and reject it for all other reasons. Let us remember that were the relationship between nationality and religion severed at any point in the past, there would be today no State of Israel, and no Israeli naval officers – and no Israeli Supreme Court.

That is why, as religious Jews, we feel impelled to react as vigorously as we do. The State of Israel is too dear to us to accept without protest the grievous decision which can only exacerbate (as it has already begun to do) the deep divisions within Israel's citizenry. It threatens to alienate from Israel many of the Jews of the Diaspora, who are probably five times as numerous as those within the borders of the State.

We who are committed religious Jews, inside of Israel and outside, will continue using the halakhic criterion exclusively, no matter what any Supreme Court says. Religious principle is not subject to majority veto.

A great contemporary Hasidic leader has pointed to the Talmudic maxim that "יחיד ורבים הלכה כרבים": when, in a dispute of law, we have the scholarly opinions of the one against the many, the Halakhah or law is decided in favor of the many. Why, he asks, should not this legal maxim be expressed more economically as simply "הלכה כרבים," "the law remains with the majority?" Why is it necessary to have the additional two words, "יחיד ורבים," "the one and the many?" He answers that the word "יחיד," the one, refers to God, the One who created the universe. When do we say that "הלכה כרבים," that the law remains with the many or majority? – only when "יחיד ורבים," when the majority has with it the One, when it is expressive of the truth of God. Otherwise, truth prevails despite any majority.

That is a principled and correct sentiment, and it does not detract from its essential truth that the author of this statement is the Satmarer Rebbe.

So even if the Knesset had not overruled the Supreme Court, that ruling would have no effect on us in our daily lives. Religiously committed Jews shall continue to look upon Jewishness as legitimated only by the Halakhah.

What shall determine our conduct is not the decision of those whom the world regards as the Supreme Court of Israel, but the One whom Israel regards as the Supreme Judge of the world.

It is because these issues are so very important to us that a good deal of re-thinking has already been initiated, and more will certainly take place.

I cannot accept the idea that no matter what the Government of Israel decides, we must not react because "we love Israel." This is a myopic view. Love accepts, but it is also critical. To love does not mean to suspend one's critical faculties. A parent who spoils a child by overindulging his every whim, does not really love him; he is only kind to him but is not really interested in him. True love accepts faults, but always strives to make the object of that love better, improved, more lovable. That is our attitude to Israel: we love it, and so we are terribly unhappy about its most recent fault.

There is another reaction that emerged instinctively in the hearts of some of us when the Supreme Court decision was announced: "Stop supporting Israel, let us ignore the State, let us begin to withdraw and retreat into our own community and make sure that we survive as the proper kind of Jews." That may be a psychologically understandable, but it is Jewishly an inexcuseable sentiment. It is an unthinkable thought. We dare not even entertain such a notion. For if love accepts and is critical, then let us be critical, but let us also accept. Israel is the land of our brothers, the children of the survivors of Hitler. They are our Jews. Even without crises, even if its existence were not constantly called into question, we would not cease to identify with it.

What seems to be emerging – and I mention this descriptively, without evaluation – is an emotional reorientation in which a distinction is made or felt between Eretz Israel and Medinat Israel, between the historic Israel of the generations, and the little State that exists today. There is continued appreciation of the State as the home for Jewish refugees, and admiration for its many achievements, but the spiritual affinity is considerably weakened. In the wake of the Government's self-desacralization has come a disenchantment. And with this disenchantment there may come a reassessment of our emotional priorities, granting relatively more importance to the spiritual welfare of our own American Jewry and of East European Jewry, both of which are bigger in population than the Jewish community of the State of Israel.

I do not recommend that feeling. I am deeply saddened and disturbed by it. But it is the kind of emotion and attitude that we must expect if the State will ever enforce a non-halakhic standard on so basic an issue or even continue to proclaim that it is refraining from doing so only because of nefarious political pressure by religious parties.

I believe that no matter what the legal and political situation is, we must begin now to rethink our entire position – not in a surge of initial resentment, but in a calm and collected manner. And we must begin to reassess some

of our practical policies.

Intellectually, we shall have to undertake what contemporary theologians call a procedure of "demythologizing." Religious Zionists and the Rabbinate have heretofore ascribed a certain Messianic quality to the State of Israel. They have seen it, whether explicitly or implicitly, as the initial stages of the Messianic kingdom-to-come. They have referred to it as the אתחלתא דגאולה, the beginning of the Redemption, and have referred to it in our prayers for the State as ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו, the first blossoming of our Redemption. But clearly, a State of Jews in which nationality is divorced from religion will find it difficult to lay claim to such honorific Messianic pretenses.

It will be much healthier for us and much less confusing, even if more painful, to begin to see the State of Israel in a more realistic light – as not necessarily the Jewish State foreseen by our Prophets and dreamed of by our forebears. Of course, as religious Jews, we accept it as part of a divine plan. I personally feel quite strongly that the State does mark a significant turning point in Jewish history, and that it figures most prominently in the calculus of Israel's relationship with God. I have made known my convictions, both orally and in writing, that the emergence of the State of Israel indicates the first break in the hester panim ("hiding of the face" or eclipse) of God that has lasted for centuries. However, this is much different from assigning Messianic significance and status to the State.

Of course I do not mean to deny the possible, even probable, role of the State of Israel in the Messianic redemptive process. To do so would be absurd. Rather, I prefer to suspend any judgment on this issue, and to avoid all such speculations. It is now time for us to disabuse ourselves of the spiritual presumptuousness which leads us to identify the stages of the Redemption, to indicate which step the Messiah is taking. We must learn to live without such illusions. We must not be distracted by all this talk about Israel as either the end or the beginning of the Redemption. We have a long and disturbing history of premature anticipation of the Messiah. More than once in the past, when people began to attribute Messianic qualities to individuals, they were later disappointed, and the disappointment left permanent scars in the body of the Jewish people. What happened with individuals can happen with a State.

Second, such Messianic pretenses attributed to the State have a double effect upon us, and paradoxically both effects are opposite to each other. On the one hand, it leads us to expect too much from the State. That is unfair to the government and the population, and leaves us resentful when the State does not live up to our high expectations. On the other hand, it causes us to suspend any criticism, because who will dare to judge adversely a Messianic State?

Third, such Messianic attributions, such a reading of the State of Israel as part of a heilsgeschichte, has a tendency to relieve us individually of too much responsibility. We begin to think that God will take care of things, and that we can relax; so, for instance, the great act of national teshuvah or repentance will be brought about by God, and we need not bother talking to those people who as yet have not been brought to Torah. But this is a mistake. We forget that if we are ethnically faulty or morally flabby or spiritually stale, we will repel the non-observant from Torah, and that no magic conversion will take place. It is our job. The Talmud (Sanh. 97a) tell us that the Messiah will come in היסח הדעת, at a time of distraction, when people are not thinking about him. It is only when people will be too busy to speculate about him because they are preoccupied in creating the right kind of environment, the proper kind of society, a genuine Jewish environment, that the world and especially Israel will be ready to receive the Messiah.

So we must learn to see Israel as it is, and not only as we would like it to be. We must look on it without illusions, but with ideals and visions. And this must lead us to a new course of action.

Primarily, we must recognize that although the majority of Israelis are non-observant, they remain our brothers. We must continue to support them, their security and their economy, not one iota less than we did before. We may have certain differing commitments – but one destiny.

Second, because we are brothers, we must increase our spiritual help and exert ourselves to do much more than before in order to save and enhance the Jewish character of the State. We can no longer rely upon Messiah or some mysterious redemptive process to do that automatically. We must plan for the day that, possibly, Religion and State will be officially separated in Israel. That will no doubt be bad, and will create havoc insofar as the unity of the State is concerned, because two different marriage systems will prevail, and intermarriage between the two may ultimately become very difficult. But with all these dangers, there will be some blessings in disguise. The air will be cleared. We will have an opportunity to talk to non-observant Jews unencumbered with the onus of our political affiliations. When we speak as Orthodox Jews to the non-observant, we will not be automatically suspected of looking for partisan advantage. We will not be greeted by a silent but deep

anti-clericalism. We will be able – and we should begin right now – to have genuine dialogue with non-observant Jews, "selling" ourselves and our way of life, not negotiating for political bargains. Israeli Jews must begin to build bridges between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox communities – and if Israeli Orthodox Jews are unwilling or incapable of doing it by themselves, then we from America must encourage and help them. We must tell them not that we want their votes, but that we want to share with them our mutual Covenant and our Torah, out of love and not out of superiority – because we are not necessarily superior at all. We must come armed not only with answers, but also with a shared quest, inviting them to join us in the search for the meaning that we can derive out of Torah.

Finally, American Jewish philanthropy must begin to follow through on these ideas by offering increased support to organizations such as "Gesher" which are attempting to do just that – to go out to high schools and the universities, to the cities and towns, to kibbutzim and moshavot, and talk as brothers to those who are outside the camp of Torah. We must begin to pay much more attention to those religious institutions, from kindergarten up, which prepare young Orthodox Israelis for a productive life within the State, teaching them not to retreat into ghettos within Israel, but to relate and communicate the messages and the ideas of Torah. We must increase our support for those schools – whether yeshiva, high school, university, or trade school – which create the type of student who is both in and of the State, who is totally committed to Torah, but who is part and parcel of the social fabric of Israel, one with whom non-observant Israelis can identify and, from whom they can therefore also learn.

A demythologizing of Israel will thus lead us not to withdraw, but to renew our efforts towards the great need of the hour: reconciliation, unity, peace.

In the Mechilta, R. Yohanan b. Zakkai refers to the Commandment which forbids us to use metal tools, such as the axe or the hammer, in building the altar. The altar, he says, was used as the means for reconciling God with Israel (the word korban comes from the word *karov*, close; and the word *shelemot*, "whole" stones, from the word *shalom*, peace). Hence, he said, we have before us a logical deduction (*kal va-chomer*). If the altar, which can neither see nor hear nor speak, is spared the pain of a sharp metal tool because it enhances peace between Israel and its Father in Heaven, then certainly a human being who brings peace between man and his wife, between man and his fellow man, between city and city, between family and family, most certainly will be protected from any punishment and shielded against any weapons forged by the enemy.

Let all of us – religious and secularist, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, Diaspora and Israeli Jews – strive for the blessing of shalom, of peace both without and within, of reconciliation of one camp with the other, of community with community – but above all else, of nationality and religion, of the State of Israel with the Torah of Israel, of the people with God.

Having done that, having secured our inner integrity, we shall be safe from all dangers from without.

"May He who creates peace in His high place, create peace for us and for all of Israel, and let us say, Amen."

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For God's Sake

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Parshas Terumah begins with God's command to Moshe that the people should contribute to the building of the mishkan which they shall build, and that God will dwell in. God tells Moshe, "And they shall take to me a portion" (Shemos 25:2). Rashi explains the word 'li,' - to me - as meaning, 'dedicated to My name." Why was it necessary that this contribution be made for God's sake, with that intention in mind? Perhaps we can explain this by pointing to a different explanation of the word 'li,' offered by the Da'as Zekeinim in parshas Tetzaveh, as cited by Rabbi Jacob Rabinowitz in his Yemin Yaakov, although with a different application of it than the one offered by Rabbi Rabinowitz.

In parshas Tetzaveh, God tells Moshe, " And you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, so that he shall be a kohein to me" (Shemos 28:1). The Da'as Zekeinim comments on the word for 'to me' - li - that whenever something lasts forever, this word is used. Rabbi Rabinowitz, applying this comment to our verse in the beginning of parshas Terumah, then widens it to refer to charity in general, bringing proofs that charity endures forever. However, while the Talmud does say that the charity a person gives does endure forever, charity is valid even when it is not given for altruistic reasons. The main thing is that the charity be given. In regard to the contributions made for

the building of the mishkan, however, they did need to be given for God's sake, according to the interpretation cited by Rashi. By placing the Da'as Zekeinim's explanation of 'li' within the general context of charity, and applying it to our verse in Terumah, the two explanations, that of Rashi and that of the Da'as Zekeinim, are no longer compatible. I would like to suggest a different application of the Da'as Zekeinim, by which the two explanations of 'li' are actually complementary of each other.

Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno, in the beginning of parshas Pekudei, notes that, unlike the Beis HaMikdash, the mishkan was never captured by the enemy and destroyed. He gives four reasons for this, one of which being that the building of the mishkan was organized by Moshe, and anything done by Moshe is eternal, just as the Torah itself, which he taught to the Jewish people, is eternal. I believe that the reason everything Moshe did will last forever is that everything Moshe did was done completely for the sake of heaven, to sanctify God's name. He was able to act in this way because he was the most humble person on the face of the earth, meaning that he did not attribute his accomplishments to himself, but to God, who gave him the abilities he possessed. Perhaps it is for this reason that the cause of Moshe's death, as the Torah tells us, is that he failed to sanctify God's name at the incident of the waters of Merivah. This is why the contributions made for the mishkan had to be made completely for God's sake. In fact, the Vilna Gaon is often quoted as saying that if a synagogue would be made completely for God's sake, down to the last nail, it would never be destroyed. Viewing the construction of the mishkan in this way, as something that would last forever, we can accept both interpretations of the word 'li,' the interpretation cited by Rashi, that it means for God's sake, and the interpretation cited by the Da'as Zekeinim, that it means 'forever.' The Torah is thus telling us that the mishkan must be made completely for God's sake from the collection of the funds to be used for it, since it is Moshe who is making it, and everything that Moshe makes must last forever.

By understanding the eternity of Moshe's deeds as being a function of his dedication of all he did to God, we can better understand a statement of the Rambam in his Laws of Repentance, 5:2. The Rambam writes there that every person has the capacity to be as righteous as Moshe. The commentators have pointed out that the Rambam does not say that every person has the capacity to be as great as Moshe, because that would not be a true statement, as the Torah itself tells us that no prophet as great as Moshe ever arose, and the Rambam himself lists this as one of the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith. The Rambam only says that every person can be a tzaddik as great as Moshe was. In what way can a person reach this level? Many commentators to the Rambam say that what he means is that just as Moshe fulfilled his own potential to its full capacity, so too is every person capable of fulfilling his particular potential to its full capacity. In light of our discussion, however, I would like to suggest that the Rambam is saying that just as Moshe performed all his actions for the sake of heaven, so, too, every person has the capacity to perform all of his actions for the sake of heaven. This approach would reflect the comments of the Rambam in the fifth chapter of his work Shemoneh Perokim, or Eight Chapters, which is an introduction to his commentary to Avos. In that chapter he writes at length of the need for a person to direct all of his actions towards one goal, which is that of reaching God. After a long discussion of this topic, he ends by saying that the rabbis summed this all up in one sentence when they said, in the mishneh in Avos (2:17) ,"and all your actions should be for the sale of Heaven." I believe it is this aspect of Moshe's character, which was brought out in the construction of the mishkan which lasted forever, that the Rambam is referring to in his Laws of Repentance when he says that every person can be as righteous as Moshe.

Be Normal

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on February 3, 2022)

One of the psukim in this week's Parsha talks about the building of the Mishkan: *Ve-asisa es ha-kerashim la-mishkan, atzei shitim om'dim.* Make beams for the Mishkan [made of] acacia wood, standing up. As you can imagine, there are two ways you could build a wall with planks. One is to have the planks lying down, one on the other. The other is to line up the planks vertically, next to each other. And Torah specifically commands us to build it with the planks standing up. You could have said: Maybe that's just for building mishkans. But Chazal did not understand it this way. They saw *atzei shitim omdim* as a *klal* in *kol ha-Torah kulah.* The tree stands vertically, the way

it grows. Therefore you are only yotzei all mitzvos *derech g'deilasan.* That is why you must hold the lulav and esrog the way they grow, vertically—and not sideways or upside down. OK, we don't necessarily need to understand the reasons why the Torah said anything or why Chazal made a certain drasha and applied it in a certain way—we follow what it says in the Torah and the Gemara, regardless. And sometimes we are not really sure we understand the reason, and we just try to get something out of it, derech drush or remez. But at the very least, be-derech drush, why would it be so important to tell us to build the walls of the Mishkan *atzei shitim omdim* if it is not a specific architectural point? Lulav and esrog are not about architecture. Why do all mitzvos have to be *derech g'deilasan*?

So I saw two very nice drushim on this. Rav Amital, the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, said once: *Derech g'deilasan* is the normal way of living. How do you take a lulav? The way it is normally situated on the tree when it grows naturally. Therefore, he says: You must do mitzvos as part of a normal lifestyle. That's *derech g'deilasan.* Mitzvos are not about going crazy to be *makpid* because you are a ben-Torah. And it is not about trying to transcend your humanity by doing mitzvos. You succeed by being a normal person and doing mitzvos as part of your normal lifestyle. It's about taking your humanity, expressing it, and making it grow through mitzvos. And it's very important to be normal in doing mitzvos *derech g'deilasan*—not to be weird, not to be crazy, and not to separate yourself in some mountaintop cloud. Hashem wants us to do mitzvos as part of normal life. And I think that's a very healthy insight for all of us.

I saw that Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his sefer *Drash Moshe,* has a different drasha. He does not learn from *derech g'deilasan,* necessarily, in terms of the normal way. But he is *medayek* in the language of Chazal: *Derech g'deilasan*—the way it grows—means the way it grows bigger. The lulav and esrog grow. *Aztei shitim* grow. He says: How do you have to do mitzvos? Unfortunately, not in the way so many people do mitzvos—just to be *yotzei zayn*. Oh, I need to be *yotzei* a mitzvah—I must do it. And then, when you finished doing it, you feel like you got that burden off your back, and now you can move on. No. Mitzvos must be ways of growing. Every mitzvah brings you closer to Hashem. And it should make you want to do even more mitzvos. I could do more mitzvos and more mitzvos. Every mitzvah I do now, I could do better. Doing a mitzvah is not just a matter of being yotzei your obligation. Doing a mitzvah always has to be part of a growth process of coming closer and closer to Hashem and being greater and greater in mitzvos. And I think these two vorts actually complement one another—perhaps coincidentally, but conceivably not. We have to do mitzvos as normal people without denying our humanity—without denying who we are. Normalcy means being consistent with who you are—not being someone you are not, that you can not be. You must do mitzvos normally—where you are at. However, we always strive to do mitzvos, aiming to take where we are—our normalcy and our *derech g'deilasan*—and bring it higher and higher and higher. And maybe the best way to succeed in getting higher and higher and growing in mitzvos is to be doing mitzvos continuously with normalcy. You need to understand where you are in order to be a regular, normal person. But if I do those mitzvos and try to integrate them into my lifestyle, that means I am not just doing a mitzvah to be *yotzei* and going back to my regular lifestyle. Part of the normalcy is that mitzvos are my lifestyle—mitzvos are what I'm trying to accomplish today. And if we could do mitzvos based on where we are, *derech g'deilasan,* and at the same time do them with the aim of getting higher and higher and higher, we will bring ourselves up. We will raise the normal. And we will be able to really succeed in coming as close as possible to Hashem, rising to the highest *madreigah*. Shabbat Shalom.

Give and Take

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Parshat Terumah is the start of an intervention. The Israelites seemed to be addicted to complaining. Their failures culminated in the tragedy of the Golden Calf. What strategy was employed to help shift their perspective? The answer, writes Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks in *Covenant & Conversation,* is that God commanded them to give. Being passive recipients of miracles did not have lasting effects on their personalities. They needed to unite and contribute collectively to a higher cause. Terumah, usually translated as "contribution," is better translated, according to Rabbi Sacks, as "something you lift up." By dedicating something to a higher cause, "You lift it up, then it lifts you up."

This essential message is embedded in another odd turn of phrase in Parshat Terumah. God tells Moses that he should, "Tell the Israelite people to take for Me gifts" (Ex.

25:2). The people subsequently contributed an abundance of gold, silver, copper, yarns, linen, skins, wood, oil, spices, and precious stones to the Tabernacle. The use of the term "*veyikchu*" which literally translates as "take" instead of the word "give" ("*veyitenu*"), leaps out of the verse and demands explanation. If the goal is for the Israelites to give to God, why does it say that they should take?

The 16th century commentator Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (Keli Yakar) interprets this wording as alluding to the notion that anyone who gives, receives more in return. God rewards givers, in this reading, with more material success. Alternatively, the emphasis can be on the spiritual reward that emerges from giving. According to Rabbi Mayer Twersky, in Insights & Attitudes, this alternative perspective can be adopted to overcome any resentment that is engendered when asked to contribute to charity. After all, "[w]e are being approached for a finite sum, which, when given to a worthy cause, will yield eternal reward."

An additional reading of "*veyikchu*" is that the giver benefits psychologically by contributing. Money, the saying goes, does not buy happiness. This aphorism, however, doesn't tell the full story, according to researchers. It is true that money does not automatically lead to happiness; money presents many potential psychological pitfalls. However, often money is not the source of the problem. How we relate to, and—perhaps more importantly—how we use money, impacts our happiness levels. In "*If Money Doesn't Make You Happy, Then You Probably Aren't Spending It Right*," psychologists Elizabeth Dunn, Daniel Gilbert, and Timothy Wilson argue that money can indeed buy happiness if spent in the proper way. One important finding of their research is that people tend to be happier when they used their money to benefit others. By giving, they received the blessing of happiness.

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar emphasized this message in his talk "Finding Joy in Crisis," launching the new Sacks-Herenstein Center book, *An Ode to Joy: Judaism and Happiness in the Thought of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Beyond*. Dr. Ben-Shahar noted that when he speaks to non-Jewish audiences, he generally teaches them one Hebrew word, "natan," which means to give. As Rabbi Elijah of Vilna pointed out centuries ago, the word is a palindrome, spelled the same way in both directions. When we give, we receive.

Dr. Ben-Shahar elsewhere elaborated on this point, referencing the work of Dr. Adam Grant, in his bestselling book, Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success. Dr. Grant emphasizes that givers are not only happier, but also enjoy more business success than takers. This being the case, perhaps the physical, spiritual, and psychological benefits are all interrelated. By giving, we become happier, more financially successful, and more spiritually elevated.

In the transitional stage between being passive recipients of miracles and active contributors to community and society, God assigned the ultimate intervention that transformed the character of the Israelites. By being called on to contribute, people felt empowered. Through their charity, they felt happier. By giving, they received the blessings of material, psychological, and spiritual flourishing.

Ramban on Our Parshah: Let's Go!

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

In elementary school we absorb a fundamental lesson about the Chumash: There are no redundant words. Two words toward the beginning of our parshah, *v'chen ta'as*u, provide a powerful illustration.

Hashem tells Moshe (Shemot 25:8-9), "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you, the form of the Mishkan and the form of all of its implements. And so shall you make [*v'chen ta'asu*]." What is the point of "And so shall you make?" The verses began with "They shall make" already!

Rashi suggests that "And so shall you make" is about the future; all future sanctuaries must follow the model of the Mishkan. But Ramban rejects this; when King Solomon built the Beit HaMikdash he indeed deviated from these original designs, and Hashem approved of it. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra contends that the initial "They shall make" was regarding the building, and the concluding "And so shall you make" was regarding the implements, but Ramban dismisses this idea as unnecessary.

Ramban declares that "So shall you make" was not an instruction, and it certainly was not redundant. It was an excited and exciting Divine charge, a coach rallying, "Let's go! Let's make this!" Hashem was inspiring Moshe and his "team" to emerge from the locker room with energy and alacrity, to dedicate materials and construct the building that would be the focus for Hashem's presence.

This is consistent with Ramban's general positive vision of the Mishkan. Per Rashi the instructions for the Mishkan

came after the Golden Calf, and the Mishkan atoned for that sin, Ramban sees the Mishkan as the original Divine plan. We could capture the Divine presence found at Sinai and bring it along with us in our travels, so that we would sense Hashem among us in perpetuity.

Ramban channels this exciting perspective in explaining the role of the angelic keruvim atop the Aron. Per Ramban, the celestial keruvim constitute a throne of sorts for Hashem (see Shemuel II 22:11, Tehillim 18:11, Tehillim 99:1). Our keruvim and Aron will be a similar throne, enabling us to sense Hashem's presence among us.

Those two words were far from superfluous; they asserted that we could ensure that the intimacy of Sinai would never end. More, they asserted that Hashem was excited about this prospect, and wanted to share that excitement with us. You will harbor a perpetual Sinai; let's go!

The Three Wars

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The world around us is swirling in confusion. Our people and our land were brutally attacked by barbarians bent on murder, rape, and destruction. A war of survival has been involuntarily thrust upon us. Predictably, our enemies have seized the opportunity to falsely accuse us of ghastly and baseless crimes. The ugly monster of anti-Semitic hatred has been reawakened. Just when we thought we had entered a new, modern period of enlightenment and tolerance, we were dealt a harsh lesson: the struggle for Jewish destiny continues. Our homeland witnessed horrors we thought were relics of our tortured past, living in exile. Wanton violence against defenseless Jews could not possibly occur in Israel. Unfortunately, it did, and the pogrom reminded us that we haven't fully redeemed our people or our land. The struggle for Jewish destiny continues.

Alongside the military battle in Azza, our enemies are waging a war of hatred and historical denial, protesting our rights to live in our homeland. Astonishingly, minority groups, whose own legitimate rights we have traditionally championed, have turned their backs on us. Regrettably, many in the African-American Community as well as many in the LGBTQ community, are spewing venomous and inciteful hatred against us. There is a shadow war being fought, both on the campuses of America and on the promenades of Europe.

Surprisingly, there is a third front to this war. Over the past three decades disturbing cultural narratives have upended many of our sacred traditional values. Many modern perspectives upon human identity, religion, family, and community are corrosive to Jewish values. Unexpectedly, many of these post-modern narratives are surfacing in protests against Israel and in the endless discussions about our rights to our homeland. We have a nagging sense that the modern cultural wars have become entangled with the war in Azza.

This threading of cultural wars with our war in Azza is confusing. What does the war in Azza have to do with Wokism or with post-modernism? They seem to be completely unrelated. However, as with everything in Jewish history, nothing is random.

The Sun Rises for All

Jewish redemption is pivoted upon a people and a land. We were meant to inhabit the land of Hashem, but repeatedly failed Him, and were banished to a two-thousand year odyssey of wandering this Earth. We are slowly climbing our way back to peoplehood and back to historical relevancy, but redemption will only conclude when we are resettled in our homeland, living under the eye of Hashem. Redemption is national, and it is geographical.

Though redemption is pivoted upon a people and their land it isn't a phenomenon limited to Jews. Judaism is unique, in that its redemption radiates outward to all of humanity. As we reconvene back in our homeland, all of humanity recognizes Hashem, accepts His authority, and enjoys widespread prosperity. Jewish redemption is a microcosm for a broader redemption.

Chazal applied a series of metaphors to describe the texture of redemption. As redemption hasn't ever occurred, we don't know its specific details, or, to paraphrase the Rambam, we will only know that Moshiach has arrived after he has arrived. Seeking to describe the unknown world of redemption, Chazal generated a rich array of metaphors.

One popular metaphor for redemption is the rising sun. The Yerushalami in Yoma (3:2) documents two Tanaim who witnessed the sun rise above the Kinneret lake. They commented that a sunrise mirrors redemption: just as the sun rises gradually or קימעא קימעא, similarly, redemption unfolds in stages.

Additionally, the sunrise metaphor accentuates the universal nature of Jewish redemption. The sun rises above

the horizon and provides light and life for all of humanity, not just for Jews. Redemption is a universal event, powered by a nationalistic experience.

As redemption is universal, Moshiach will heal all social illnesses and repair all human failings. War will cease, poverty will be eliminated, and social strife will abate. The great advances of the past few centuries are all part of the leadup to redemption. The political, industrial, technological, and economic revolutions of the past four hundred years are harbingers of Moshiach. As humanity surges toward a better state, the whisper of Moshiach can be heard.

The Moral Cost

Progress though, has come at a steep moral cost. Human experience has been enhanced and individual freedom has been extended, but moral values and ethics have each declined. With its emphasis upon individualism and personal expression, modernity has thrown core elements of human identity into question. Fundamental social hierarchies have been abandoned while the basics of human identity are no longer self-evident. We are more comfortable than ever, but feel morally adrift.

Just as redemption must advance human material prosperity, it must also repair moral decline. Moshiach must deliver moral clarity.

Part of the Redemptive Process

It is obvious that this war isn't a local geopolitical skirmish, but part of the historical battle to advance Hashem's presence in our world. Though we are left with many perplexing question marks, we know that this war is part of the redemptive arc and that, one day, the mystery of Oct. 7 will become clear. If this historical war is part of a Messianic trajectory, it must also begin to repair the toxic cultural narratives which afflict humanity. Any war which is part of redemptive Jewish history must also advance moral clarity.

Therefore, it is totally expected that the war in Azza be interlocked with the cultural wars. We are designated by Hashem to defeat evil. We defend humanity against its darker self. We are placed on this earth to defeat evil and to help repair broken cultural narratives.

Post-modernism

This war has showcased the perils of post-modernism which asserts that that truth isn't absolute or objective, but subjective. Post modernism claims that truth is merely a social construct and that different communities or cultures may "construct" different truths. This counterfeit ideology has obliterated any abiding notion of a fixed and factual truth. Every fact can be manipulated, and every narrative can be justified based on falsifications masquerading as socially constructed truth. Throughout the war we continually faced baseless accusations, as casualty figures were glibly falsified and pictures from Azza doctored and photoshopped. No sane or civil conversation is possible, since there isn't a baseline of truth and fact. Everything is up for grabs in the post-modern swirl of confusion. A former dean of a major US college clarified to us that rabid and violent calls for the murder of Jews must be understood in the "context" in which they were stated. Truth, we are taught, is always contextual. Our battle, in part, is to restore the concept of truth. Hashem is the ultimate אמת and any forgery or counterfeit blocks His presence in this world. Our battle for truth is a battle for His presence. Intersectionality Intersectionality theory asserts that all forms of oppression or discrimination are interconnected. Therefore, all marginalized groups with grievances must support one another in their respective battles for equality. The battle for freedom and equality for an African American has become fused to the war in Azza. An ignorant world, intoxicated with intersectionality and seething with antisemitic fury, has thoughtlessly adopted a colonialist narrative, recasting the war in Azza as a battle between an indigenous population and their foreign occupiers. Depicting Jews as white male occupiers, criminalizes us in the eyes of every underprivileged group. We have nothing to do with bigotry or discrimination. We have built one of the most liberal democracies in the world, which grants freedom of worship to every religion. Intersectionality, though, blinds its naïve victims into hating whoever they deem to be the "oppressor". It leaves no room for facts, education, or nuance. The weak must hate the strong.

We are fighting three concurrent wars. We will defeat the evil murderers of Azza. We will defy antisemitism. Slowly but surely, we will help humanity recover its senses, and repair its broken cultural narratives.

Constructing An Abode of Holiness & Spirituality

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Terumah, the Torah introduces us to the Mishkan. The journey from slavery to freedom occurs in the book of Shemos - also known as *Sefer ha'Geula* (the book of Redemption) in three main stages: physical freedom (Shemos, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach), spiritual freedom (Matan Torah - Yisro and Mishpatim), and the culmination of freedom: the construction of a home where the Shechinah and Klal Yisrael would dwell together, *keviyachol* (Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tisa, Vayakhel, Pekudei). The apex of freedom is bringing HKB"H into our lives, into our homes, into our very selves, and living with His Presence daily.

Furthermore, as Matan Torah was a marriage between HKB"H and Am Yisrael, a home for Hashem and the nation to dwell together was now needed.

In Terumah, Tetzaveh and the beginning of Ki Tisa, Hashem commands Moshe regarding the construction of the Mishkan. In Vayakhel and Pekudei, the Mishkan is built.

The Mishkan consisted of different spaces or areas, each serving a different purpose, and housing different keilim (implements). In the courtyard of the Mishkan, which was surrounded by curtains, were two copper keilim: the copper altar for animal sacrifices (*mizbayach ha'nechoshes*) and the copper laver (the *kiyor*), which the kohanim used to wash their hands and feet before performing the daily avodah. So important was this washing that a kohen who neglected to wash before his service was chayav misah (*b'yidei Shomayim*).

The next space was the interior of the Mishkan, known as the *Kodesh* (the "Holy"). In the *kodesh* were three golden *keilim*: the golden altar for the daily *ketores* (incense) offering (*mizbayach ha'zahav*), the golden table (*shulchan*) which housed the show bread (the twelve loaves of *lechem ha'panim*), and the golden menorah, which was lit every evening.

Moving to the most interior space, known as the *Kodesh ha'Kodashim* - the Holy of Holies - was a single kli, the golden Ark - the *aron kodesh* - which housed the Torah (*luchos* and sefer Torah that Moshe wrote), and was topped with two golden keruvim. It was between these two keruvim that the Shechinah dwelt, *keviyachol*, and from there the Voice of Hashem emanated to speak with Moshe. Into this space of intense holiness, only the Kohen Gadol was allowed to enter, to perform the avodah on Yom Kippur.

The Mishkan was surrounded by wooden beams, which were covered in gold, and topped with three layers of coverings which lay atop, and down the sides of, the Mishkan.

In regard to the placement of the Shulchan and Menorah, the pasuk tells us: וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת הַשֻּׁלְחָן מִחוּץ לַפָּרֹכֶת וְאֶת הַמְּנֹרָה נֹכַח הַשֻּׁלְחָן עַל צֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן תֵּימָנָה וְהַשֻּׁלְחָן תִּתֵּן עַל צֶלַע צָפוֹן - *And you shall place the table on the outer side of the Partition (the dividing curtain between the Kodesh and Kodesh ha'Kodashim) and the menorah opposite the table, on the southern side of the Mishkan, and you shall place the table on the northern side* (Shemos 26:35).

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski z'l, writes, "This verse, with two references where the Table should be placed, appears cumbersome. It would have been much more concise to say, 'Place the Table outside the partition on the north side.' This awkward sentence structure is an indication that the verse contains a message for us.

"The Table and the Menorah represent two aspects of life. The Table and the showbread, which rested at all times on the table, represent the physical aspects of life, the food we need for survival, and the Menorah represents the light of Torah, and the spiritual aspect of our lives.

"When life begins, the infant knows only his physical needs and their gratification. The juvenile mind cannot conceptualize or understand spirituality. We thus begin life with our physical and material drives being dominant, and constant. When one reaches the age of reason, the spiritual aspect of life begins to set in, and over time, this aspect of ourselves should achieve primacy. The physical needs should eventually become subordinate to the spiritual. Inasmuch as one cannot achieve spiritual goals unless one is physically healthy, one must provide the body with all its essential needs. However, this should not be as in childhood, when satisfying one's hunger or resting to overcome weariness were dominant.

"Too often, however, maturation is limited to the acquisition of knowledge. We may learn how to do things we could not do in childhood, but the goal in life, sadly, may remain unchanged. There may be brilliant people who have earned advanced degrees, yet whose goal in life is primarily pleasure-seeking. Though their intellect has matured, their philosophy in life has remain essentially unchanged. They begin life with the primacy of the Table, and end life with the primacy of the Table. The only change is from baby food to gourmet cooking and a more sophisticated palate.

No "Menorah" has been introduced to alter their goals and direction in life. This is why the Torah describes the placement of the Table and the Menorah in precise detail. The beginning of life for all of mankind is, indeed, the Table. However, maturity is not limited to intellectual progress, but requires that spirituality becomes the goal of life, and physicality becomes a means to a more exalted end (*Twerski on Chumash*, Artscroll, p.162-163).

The Mishkan is the blueprint for the homes we must build, and the relationship we are to have, and cultivate, with HKB"H in our lives. As Torah Jews, as we mature and grow, this growth must not only be physical, it must be spiritual as well. It is sadly a reality of the societies in which we live, that far too often, individuals seek the physical satiation of the Table, but neglect the spiritual quest of the soul.

In our journey through life, we must always remain well-satiated, and keep our physical selves healthy, not as a goal unto itself, but as a means to reach a higher goal. Accessing, learning from, retaining, and integrating the wisdom of Torah into our homes and our lives is the highest goal we can reach. When we live with the Menorah as our compass, and the Table the means to help us reach our goal, we will truly merit to construct a home, of which it will be said: וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ; וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם, *and you shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them* (Shemos 25:8).

Rav Soloveitchik on Teruma: The Temple in Our Midst

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023)

Nearly two millennia have passed since the Second Temple, the focal point of Jewish life, was reduced to rubble. Nevertheless, God promised "I shall be a minor Temple (מִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט) for them" (Ezekiel 11:16) in exile. What does this mean? The Sages tell us it refers to the synagogues and study halls that thankfully heavily dot the map of the Jewish Diaspora.[1] The Rambam understood this to be no mere homily but a halachic reality. He notably extended the biblical prohibition against destroying the Temple recorded in Deuteronomy 12:4 to synagogues and study halls.[2] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik deduced from this that there is indeed a profound link between the ultimate house of worship and our own humble houses of worship, a link reflected in Halachah.

The Source of the Temple's Sanctity

The first step in precisely defining the nature of the synagogue's sanctity is to understand the source of the Temple's own holiness. According to the Ramban, "the main intent of the Mishkan was to have a place for the divine presence to rest, namely, the ark, as it says, 'I shall meet with you there and speak to you from on top of the cover' (Exodus 25:22)."[3]

The difficulty is that according to tradition the ark was absent from the Second Temple, so did it lack the full sanctity of the First Temple? The Rambam wrote: "When Shlomo built the Temple and foresaw that it would eventually be destroyed, he built a chamber below, in the labyrinthine depths, in which to hide the ark."[4] The Rav explained that while the ark did not rest in the Holy of Holies during the Second Commonwealth, it was still physically located at the Temple Mount, albeit deep beneath the ground. Therefore, it continued to radiate its holiness onto the magnificent structure above.[5]

The ark as the Temple's true source of sanctity has halachic implications for the "minor Temple" today. A synagogue without an ark containing a Torah scroll, the Rav argued, does not possess the full status of a synagogue.[6] Praying with a quorum where there is no Torah scroll, such as outdoors, discharges the obligation of tefilah be-tzibur, public prayer, but lacks the framework of holiness provided by the synagogue.

A Temple in Miniature

The sanctity of the synagogue being modeled on that of the Temple leads to a number of halachic requirements governing its structure and ambiance:

(1) Location of the bimah: The Chatam Sofer ruled that the platform on which the Torah is read, the bimah, must be in the middle of the synagogue rather than at the front, as was the contemporary practice of nascent Reform: "Since our bimah is like the inner altar, it is fitting to place it in the middle of the synagogue to make it as similar to the Temple as possible. One should not change our miniature Temple."[7]

(2) Hanging of the ark curtain: In today's synagogues, the Torah scrolls in the ark are separated from the rest of the room by a curtain that is usually lavishly embroidered with a verse or images. Since our ark represents that of the Mishkan and Temple, it requires the same dividing curtain:

"you shall cover the ark with the curtain" (Exodus 40:3).[8]

(3) Necessity of gender separation: Although we often associate gender separation in the synagogue as necessary for modesty and appropriate decorum for prayer, there is another fundamental reason for it. The Rambam states: "The women's courtyard [of the Temple] was surrounded by balconies, so that women could look from above and the men from below without intermingling."[9] The Maharam Schick adds that what was true of the Temple must apply to the synagogue.[10]

The Rav appealed to history (in addition to Halachah) when declaring the mechitzah, the barrier separating the sexes, an absolute requirement, in contrast to those denominations of Judaism who were doing away with it:

[T]he separation of the sexes in the synagogue derives historically from the Sanctuary, where there were both a Court of Women and a Court of Israelites. … the people of Israel have never violated this sacred principle. […]

It would seem to me that our remembrance of history alone should keep us from imitating today the practice of primitive Christianity almost 1900 years ago.[11]

(4) Elevated modesty: Many observant, married women who do not usually cover their hair do put on some covering upon entering the synagogue for prayer. Rabbi Hershel Schachter explains that there is a real basis for this practice. As a miniature Temple, the synagogue is a place designated for the resting of the Shechinah, the divine presence, and thus entails a heightened regard for modesty. Parashat Terumah says that the curtain at the entrance of the Mishkan was folded over (Exodus 26:9). Rashi likens this to "a modest bride whose face is veiled."[12] This seems to indicate that modesty is essential for God's presence to be manifest.[13]

(5) Planting trees in the courtyard: The Rav cites the position of the great Talmudist Rabbi Akiva Eger, which prohibits the planting of trees on the premises of a synagogue based on the biblical prohibition against planting trees in the Temple precincts: "You shall not plant for yourselves an Asherah tree—any tree—near the altar of Hashem your God" (Deuteronomy 16:21).[14]

(6) Strolling in the synagogue: Rabbi Yosef Caro rules in his Shulchan Aruch that one may not act frivolously in a synagogue. One example is "do not stroll in them."[15] In the synagogue, one must maintain not only decorum but reverence for its sanctity. Apparently staying put is a perennial problem, as Rav Chaim Brisker made the following remark about one of the miracles associated with the Temple: "They stood crowded, yet prostrated with ample space."[16] Even the first part, the standing still, quipped Rav Chaim, was miraculous.

Not Quite a Temple

Though it is clear that the synagogue is like the Temple in many respects, of course the two should not be conflated. The Rav captures the qualitative distinction in the following evocative manner. God refers to the Temple as "My house" (Isaiah 56:7), and David ha-Melech likewise calls it "the house of God" (Psalms 27:4). If the Temple is God's palatial home, when we cross its threshold awe and dread should overpower us. God instructs us to "fear My Temple" (Leviticus 26:2).

The synagogue, on the other hand, is our communal home. The Talmud makes the comparison explicit: "[The synagogue] is like one's house. Just as one objects to walking through the house as a shortcut but not to spitting or wearing shoes, the same is true of the synagogue."[17] It is into this communal home that we invite God, so to speak. "When the Holy One enters a synagogue and does not find ten men there, He immediately becomes angry."[18] The synagogue therefore deserves our respect, but not fear.

In a lecture, Rabbi Menachem Genack presented this distinction of the Rav and mentioned an intriguing practical ramification. Both Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and the Rav were asked their opinion regarding bringing a seeing-eye dog into a synagogue during prayer services. Since the Talmud says that Rabbi Imi permitted scholars to enter the study hall with a donkey, Rabbi Feinstein felt it would be certainly permitted in this circumstance.[19] The Rav argued that just as we do not bring a dog into a Jewish home, we should hold to the same standard for a synagogue. Apparently, the Rav could not fathom that a Jewish home would welcome a dog.[20] However, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rav's son-in-law, taught that the Rav permitted bringing a guide dog into the synagogue because a person would allow such a dog to enter one's home when accompanying a blind man[21] In both versions of the Rav's ruling, one can see that the analysis rests on a comparison between the synagogue and the home, and what constitutes proper respect for both.

Exploring the Rav's Insight

Regarding the practice of nefilat apayim, resting the head on the arm when reciting the tachanun supplication, the Rema rules: "Some say that we only do nefilat apayim in a place where there is an ark containing a Torah scroll… and this is the accepted practice."[22] Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky recorded an exception to this:

In Jerusalem, the custom is to do nefilat apayim even in a structure that does not contain a Torah scroll, and even in a place that is not regularly used for prayer. Doing nefilat apayim only in a place that contains a Torah scroll is based on a biblical allusion, "And he fell on his face toward the ground before the ark of God" (Joshua 7:6). Since Jerusalem's holiness is everlasting, it is tantamount to being in the presence of God's ark.[23]

Applying the Rav's logic, if the ark beneath the Temple Mount infused the Second Temple with its sanctity, perhaps its presence at the spiritual center of Jerusalem extends its sacred presence to the entire city. Moreover, according to the Rambam the entire city of Jerusalem is considered to be the machaneh, the camp that surrounds the Temple Mount.[24] When one prays in Jerusalem, then, one can be said to be praying in the presence of the original ark, and one must do nefilat apayim.

The beautiful notion that the entire city of Jerusalem is an extension of the Temple appears in a verse recited during the Hallel prayer: "In the courts of the House of God, in your midst, Jerusalem, Hallelujah" (Psalms 116:19). Commenting on this verse, both the Radak and Don Yitzchak Abarbanel suggest that because the holiness of the city of Jerusalem results from the ark's presence, it is most appropriate that God be praised in the midst of this holy city.

1. See Megilah 29a.
2. Minyan ha-Mitzvot ha-Katzar, lo ta'aseh §65.
3. Ramban on Exodus 25:2.
4. Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit ha-Bechirah, 4:1.
5. Schachter, Eretz ha-Tzevi, 91.
6. Genack, Shi'urei ha-Rav, 314.
7. Shut Chatam Sofer, Orach Chayim, §28.
8. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 2:347.
9. Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit ha-Bechirah, 5:9
10. Quoted in Schachter, Eretz ha-Tzevi, 93.
11. Soloveitchik, Community, Covenant and Commitment, 134.
12. Rashi on Exodus 26:9.
13. Schachter, Eretz ha-Tzevi, 96.
14. Genack, Shi'urei ha-Rav, 300. Interestingly, Rav Chaim Brisker, the Rav's grandfather, permitted such planting in Brisk.
15. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 151:1.
16. Pirkei Avot, 5:7.
17. Berachot 63a.
18. Berachot 6b.
19. Igerot Moshe, Orach Chayim, vol. 1, §45.
20. Rabbi Menachem Genack, "Chidushei Torah on the Approach of Rav Soloveichik zt"l to the Sanctity of Beit Haknesses and Beit HaMedrash," https://outorah.org/p/33420/ (accessed March 14, 2021).
21. Rabbi Howard Jachter, "Halachic Perspectives on Pets," *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* XXIII (Spring 1992; Pesach 5752), http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/halacha/jachter_1.htm (accessed March 14, 2021).
22. Rema on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 131:2.
23. Eretz Yisrael, 1:9.
24. Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit ha-Bechirah, 7:11.

The Conundrum of Charity: Make for Me a Sanctuary, and I Shall Dwell in Their Midst

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Terumah, G-d tells Moses to instruct the Jewish people to collect all the valuable materials that are needed to build a מִשְׁכָּן, Mishkan–a Tabernacle. In Exodus 25:8, Scripture states: וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם, *They [the people of Israel] shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.*

The commentators immediately note that the verse reads: וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם, and I shall dwell among them. It does not say, as we might have expected, that G-d shall dwell in it–in the sanctuary.

The Mishkan, the portable Tabernacle that traveled along with the people of Israel throughout their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, is not a dwelling place for G-d. G-d, as we know, is omnipresent. He is to be found everywhere, and at all times. The purpose of the sanctuary then, is not to serve as a dwelling place for G-d, but rather to serve as a place for the Jewish people to focus on G-d.

In his pithy statement justifying fixed prayer, the famous British scholar, Israel Abrahams quipped: "Those who pray in any manner and in any way, are likely to pray in no manner and in no way!" Similarly, people who have no place to focus their prayers, will most likely not focus at all! Once again, we find that Judaism's practice of "concretizing the abstract" by building a Mishkan, proves to be a most effective method of making Jewish life more realistic and palatable for its adherents.

But doesn't the concept of a sanctuary contradict the basic Jewish premise that G-d is to be found everywhere, at all times? It probably does. But the overriding need for the Jewish people to be able to properly focus their prayers, takes precedence over the philosophical principle about G-d not being limited by time or space.

But where does G-d truly dwell? The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked, "Where can one find G-d?" He answered in Yiddish, "*Voo m'luzt ehm arein,*"—"wherever He is allowed to enter!" This is the meaning of "they shall make for Me a sanctuary." If the innermost emotions of the human being are "saturated" with love and reverence of G-d, then, says the Kotzker Rebbe, "*v'sha'chan'tee b'toh'cham,*" G-d will dwell inside them–in the people's innermost core!

The Malbim says it quite forthrightly. Every Jew is to build a Tabernacle in his or her own heart in which G-d is to dwell. Not only must every Jewish home be infused with sanctity, and every individual's private life be saturated with holiness, but, indeed, the very core of the human being shall be transformed into a veritable sanctuary.

This metaphor is most beautifully expressed in a poem found in Sefer Chareidim, attributed to Rav Elazar Azikri, and put to hauntingly beautiful music by the contemporary composer Rabbi Shmuel Brazil. Known in Hebrew as "*Bil'vavi Mishkan Evneh,*" the poet writes:

In my heart I will erect a sanctuary to glorify His honor,
And in the sanctuary, I will place an altar,
to acknowledge His splendor.
For the eternal light, I will take the fire of the Akeidah,
and with this fire, my singular soul, I will sacrifice before Him.

This poem says it all. The Mishkan, the portable Tabernacle, is not meant to be a place where tens of thousands of Jews gather for perfunctory services or robotic prayer. It is meant to be a place that will serve as an inspiration for Jews to light a flame in their own hearts, so that that flame will rise as high as the flame of the Akeidah, the flame used at the Binding of Isaac.

For the past 2000 years, Jews have been bereft of both Tabernacle and Temple. We have in its stead the מִקְדָּשׁ מְעַט, the miniature temples in the form of synagogues that are found in Jewish communities throughout the world. The challenge of our generation is to light the fire of the Akeidah in each one of our synagogues, to feel the passion of being Jewish, and to hear the music within our hearts that will burst forth and transport us spiritually as it sings praise to G-d.

Come, Children of Israel, let us build the Tabernacle–let us build it in our hearts.

We are Stewards of God's Fund

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

In commanding Benei Yisrael to donate materials for the construction of the Mishkan, God told Moshe, דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה – "*Speak to Benei Yisrael, that they should take for Me a donation*" (25:2). Many commentators raised the question of why Hashem formulated this command with the word ויקחו – that the people should "*take*" a donation. Clearly, a donation is something that we give, and not take.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in his *Lahavos Eish*, answers based on an analysis of an earlier pasuk, in Parshas Mishpatim (22:24), regarding the mitzva to lend money to the needy: אם כסף תלוה את עמי, את העני עמך – "*If you lend money to My people, to the poor person with you.*" Noting the seemingly unusual word עמך ("*with you*") in this pasuk, Rav Druck explains that the Torah here is teaching us the proper perspective with which to view our material blessings. The money we are to give to the poor is עמך, with us, entrusted in our hands. This isn't our money; these funds are earmarked for the person in need, and God chose us to manage these funds, and give it to the pauper on His behalf, so-to-speak. When we earn money, we are to view a portion of it as God's fund, over which He has appointed us stewards. Thus, the charity we give isn't our own money that we generously part with. From the outset, it was God's "charity fund" which He appointed us to responsibly oversee and administrate.

This is why the Torah commands "taking" donations for the Mishkan. Benei Yisrael were told to take the money from Hashem's fund which had been entrusted to them, and allocate it לי – *for Him*, meaning, for the construction of the Mishkan.

For this reason, Rav Druck adds, this pasuk concludes, תקחו את תרומתי – "*you shall take My donation*." Surprisingly, the Torah speaks of the people's donation not as תרומתם – *the people's donation*, but rather as תרומתי – *God's donation.* Rav Druck explains that the materials brought for building the Mishkan were God's תרומה; they came from His fund. They never belonged to the people; they had been entrusted with them for the purpose of being distributed to charitable causes.

This is how we are to perceive all our assets, all the money in our bank account, and our entire portfolio. Ninety percent of it is for us to enjoy and use as we wish. But the other ten percent isn't ours. It is Hashem's fund, and we are the stewards, or managers, of this fund, charged with the

responsibility of allocating these assets to worthy causes.

Let us imagine for a moment that one of the world's richest men – for example, Elon Musk – establishes a multibillion-dollar charity fund, and he hires somebody to be in charge of it, entrusting that person to allocate the assets for the most important causes. What an amazing privilege this would be – to have the opportunity to find the best way to impact, repair and improve the world! And, of course, he receives a very nice salary…

Each and every one of us has even a greater privilege – to oversee God's fund, to manage His money, to choose the best way to use it. Ten percent of our assets isn't ours, but is rather Hashem's, and He charged us with the responsibility of dispensing it in the best possible way, to be His representatives to allocate this money to important and meaningful causes. This is a remarkable privilege that we have, and a great responsibility that we are dutybound to fulfill.

Moshe Rabbeinu and the Urim ve'Tumim

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ... כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מַרְאֶה אוֹתְךָ... וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ.

They shall make a Sanctuary for Me… In accordance with everything that I am showing you… and so you shall do (25:8-9)

We note that the final phrase, "and so you shall do," is redundant, seeing as the first pasuk already commanded "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me"! In response to this, the Gemara (Shavuos 14a) expounds that the words "and so you shall do" refer not to the Mishkan currently under discussion, but to all future sanctified places, indicating that the means through which they are to be sanctified is similar to the way in which the Mishkan was originally sanctified. Among the elements required, the Gemara mentions the Urim ve'Tumim.

Tosafos (Ibid. 15a s.v. ve'chen) are somewhat taken aback by the inclusion of the Urim ve'Tumim on the list for future sanctifications. After all, as we have noted, the requirement of these items relates back to the Mishkan, yet at the time the Mishkan was being built the Urim ve'Tumim did not yet exist!

The Meshech Chochmah's initial reaction to this question is one of surprise. After all, the requirement of these things was not for the initial building of the Mishkan, but for its sanctification! This took place much later on, during the seven Miluim days, by which time the Urim ve'Tumim were very much in existence![1]

However, he proceeds to explains that even if we accept Tosafos' position that all those items were required at the time of the building, there were Urim ve'Tumim present at that initial stage…

Prophecy and the Urim ve'Tumim

Although the Gemara we have quoted states that the Urim ve'Tumim are required for all sanctifications, this is actually a matter of dispute among Tannaim, as discussed in the Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 1:3):

It was taught: If there is a navi present, what need is there for the Urim ve'Tumim? R' Yehuda says, one [nonetheless] needs the Urim ve'Tumim.

This presentation of the two disputing views is somewhat cryptic. Why does the first opinion feel that the Urim ve'Tumim are not necessary if there is a navi present, and why does R' Yehuda maintain that they are necessary nonetheless?

The reasoning of the first opinion is easy to understand, for both a navi and the Urim ve'Tumim perform essentially the same function, communicating messages from Heaven. Therefore, if we have one, we don't need the other!

What is R' Yehuda's response to this?

In order to understand his position, we need to consider whether there is any aspect contained within the Urim ve'Tumim which does not exist in a navi. As we will see, this matter itself is discussed by R' Yehuda and his colleagues.

Elsewhere in the Yerushalmi,(Yoma 7:3) it cites an opinion that the messages received from the Urim ve'Tumim are not unconditional in nature, for they can, in fact, be subject to repeal. As evidence of this idea, he refers to the episode of Pilegesh be'Givah, (Shoftim perek 20) where the people inquired of the Urim ve'Tumim if they should go out to battle against the tribe of Binyamin. The answer they received was yes, yet when they went to battle they were defeated the on first two occasions. It was only on the third occasion that they were successful. The reason for this is that on the first two occasions their merits were not sufficient to allow them victory, hence, the message of the Urim ve'Tumim was not fulfilled. It was only on the third occasion, when they did complete teshuvah, that the Urim ve'Tumim's message was fulfilled.

The Yerushalmi then cites the opinion of R' Yehuda who disputes this and maintains that a message from the Urim ve'Tumim is indeed irrevocable. The reason they were

not successful the first two times, he explains, is because on those occasions the Urim ve'Tumim did not actually foretell success, it simply told them "עֲלֵה אֵלָיו, *go up against him.*" (Pasuk 23) It was only on the third time that the Urim ve'Tumim responded with the message: "עֲלוּ כִּי מָחָר אֶתְּנֶנּוּ בְיָדֶךָ *Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hands.*" (Pasuk 28)

We can now understand the background to the first dispute between R' Yehuda and his colleague. The first opinion there reflects the view that a message from the Urim ve'Tumim can be repealed. As such, there is no difference between the Urim ve'Tumim and a navi, whose prophecy can also be subject to repeal. Therefore, that opinion holds that if there a navi there is no need for the Urim ve'Tumim as well, since they do not add anything to what is already present.

In contrast, R' Yehuda holds that the Urim ve'Tumim do add something to the presence of a navi, for unlike prophecy that comes through a navi, a message from the Urim ve'Tumim cannot be repealed. This is a critical contribution to the process of bestowing unconditional kedushah on the Mishkan or Mikdash and hence, we require the Urim ve'Tumim in addition to a navi.

Which brings us back to our discussion of Urim ve'Tumim as a requirement for building the Mishkan.

The Prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu

Although the rule is that the prophecy of a navi can be revoked, the Meshech Chochmah states that the exception to this rule is Moshe Rabbeinu. Since his domain of prophecy included transmitting mitzvos of the Torah and Mitzvos, which are eternal, this impacted to totality of his prophecy and bestowed a permanent and unconditional quality on all matters concerning which he prophesied.

We can now understand how the Gemara maintains that the Urim ve'Tumim were required for the sanctification of the Mishkan. Tosafos objected that at the time the Mishkan was being built, the Urim ve'Tumim did not yet exist! As we have seen, the requirement of the Urim ve'Tumim is in order to bestow an irrevocable quality to the sanctification, something which cannot be achieved by a navi alone. The one exception to this was the building of the Mishkan, at which time the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu ensured this irrevocable quality. As such, Moshe Rabbeinu himself filled the role of the Urim ve'Tumim! On all subsequent occasions, however, the Urim ve'Tumim themselves are required in addition to the presence of a navi.

The Meshech Chochmah concludes his presentation of this idea with the words: "Look into this matter well, for it is indeed wondrous, with the help of Heaven."

1. Indeed, the Meshech Chochmah notes that Tosafos elsewhere (Avodah Zarah 34a s.v. bameh shimesh) state further that even during the Miluim days themselves the Mishkan only had the status of a bamah, and did not attain the status of Mishkan until the eighth day, the first day of the month of Nissan.

God Dwells Within Us

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

Weeks have turned to months, and while we have been blessed with the release of two of the hostages, too many more are still languishing in Gaza, the number of heroic casualties continues to climb, and it feels difficult to envision an end to this war. The physical, emotional, financial, and social toll is felt heavily here in Israel. We seek inspiration to carry us from one day to the next. Personally, I can think of no better dose of motivation at this time than the opening of Parshat Teruma. After the Torah is given, God instructs the Jewish people to construct the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, a portable house of God that would accompany the Jewish people along their journey to the Promised Land. It is puzzling, though, that in detailing the instructions for the Mishkan's construction, God says to Moshe, "And they shall make for Me a temple, and I shall dwell within them." At face value, there would seem to be a mistake – certainly, the Torah meant to say that God will reside in 'it', namely within the Tabernacle. But the classical commentators all agree that the verse is actually coming to convey a message that is deep and profound: God does not just dwell in the Tabernacle. God wishes to dwell "in them" – in us, within the Jewish people. As we face the trauma of this moment in Jewish history, undergoing what at this point is the longest war in the history of the State of Israel since the War of Independence, we need the reminder that God's ultimate real estate is not a sacred house or temple, but within each and every one of us. Within our very essence is holiness, a spark of the Divine. As the Sfat Emet (Teruma 5631a) writes, "for through a person's understanding that every word and action carries within it a Divine spark, one merits the revelation of "and I shall dwell in them." God

invites us to find within our everyday actions and within our unique personalities, an expression of Godliness. God wants us, appreciates us, and even needs us. Each one of us has something unique to offer to the world, and God is counting on us to do our part. On our darkest and lowest days, we must remember that in every one of us, there is God. In Orot ha-Kodesh (II:5, 15 & 17), Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook writes that in an expression of partnership with humankind, God is in a divinely imposed state of growth! God becomes even "greater", as our own souls, the piece of God within us, shine ever more brightly in the world.

It didn't have to be that way. God certainly could have made do without our worship and activity, sitting on the celestial throne in the perfect, flawless divine abode. The Midrash Tanchuma (Naso #19) describes the conversation between God and Moshe, introducing the instructions regarding the building of the Mishkan. "Do not think," says God, "that I am instructing you to build the tabernacle because I have nowhere to dwell, for I have in the heavens a temple built before the creation of the world. Rather, out of My love for you, I am deserting the supernal, timeless temple, in order to descend and dwell among you." For reasons that are far beyond our comprehension, God wants to be in this world with humanity and wants us to be His partners. Not up above in the heavens, where there is no trauma or strife or suffering, but down here with us, in this world with all its struggles, brokenness, and fear. God cherishes what we as individuals and as communities have to offer, and wants us to know that we are not alone. This is the meaning of God's dwelling among us. What is left for us to do is to feel His presence and to strive continually to make society a better dwelling place not only for the Divine, but for all of humankind.

Hearing God Enthusiastically as Children

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

In addition to its detailed instructions about how to construct the Mishkan, Parshat Terumah also identifies where in the Mishkan God's commands could best be heard. Specifically, we are told that: 'from above the cover, between the two keruvim (cherubim), above the Ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you, and speak with you, and give you all My commands to the Israelites' (Shemot 25:22). What this tells us is that the voice of God emerged from 'between the two keruvim'. The question is: why?

Interestingly, we should note the words of our Sages (Sukkah 5b) that the word 'keruvim' is made up of the prefix 'ke' (meaning 'like'), and the word 'ruvim' (meaning 'children'). From here we learn that the keruvim had child-like features. Still, once again, what is the significance of God speaking to the people from between the two child-like keruvim atop the Aron?

Quoting the Ba'al HaTurim (on Shemot 25:20) and Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel (as recorded in Sefer Zichron Shmuel pp. 541-546) suggests an answer while referencing Hoshea 11:1 where we read that, 'when Israel was a child, I (God) already loved him; from Egypt I (God) called him to Me to be My son'. According to Rabbi Finkel, what this verse means is that the Jewish people have always maintained a youthful spirit and a desire to learn, and this is why God spoke from between the keruvim in order to teach us that we should hear the word of God as inquisitive children who wish to listen and learn.

But in addition to this exquisite explanation, there is – I believe - a further way to understand the above-mentioned verse from Hoshea and what it tells us in terms of why God chose the space between the keruvim as the location from where He would speak.

As we know, children are naturally less cynical than adults, and as a result, they are often much more prepared to believe in various spiritual encounters than many adults in whom a certain level of cynicism has already set in (in fact, it was this youthful spiritual quality, to be as receptive to the word of God as a child, which the Baal Shem Tov sought for himself in his final years - see Biurei HaChassidut L'Nach on Hoshea 11:1).

Thus, by choosing to speak from between the keruvim, I believe that God is teaching us an important message, that in order to be attuned to hear the words of God, we need to maintain a child-like, or what some may call 'temimusdik' (innocent), approach to spirituality, because if we don't, God may well speak to us directly, but our cynical adult heart and mind will dismiss it as just being background noise.