



## Parshat Teruma: God Dwells Within Us

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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.