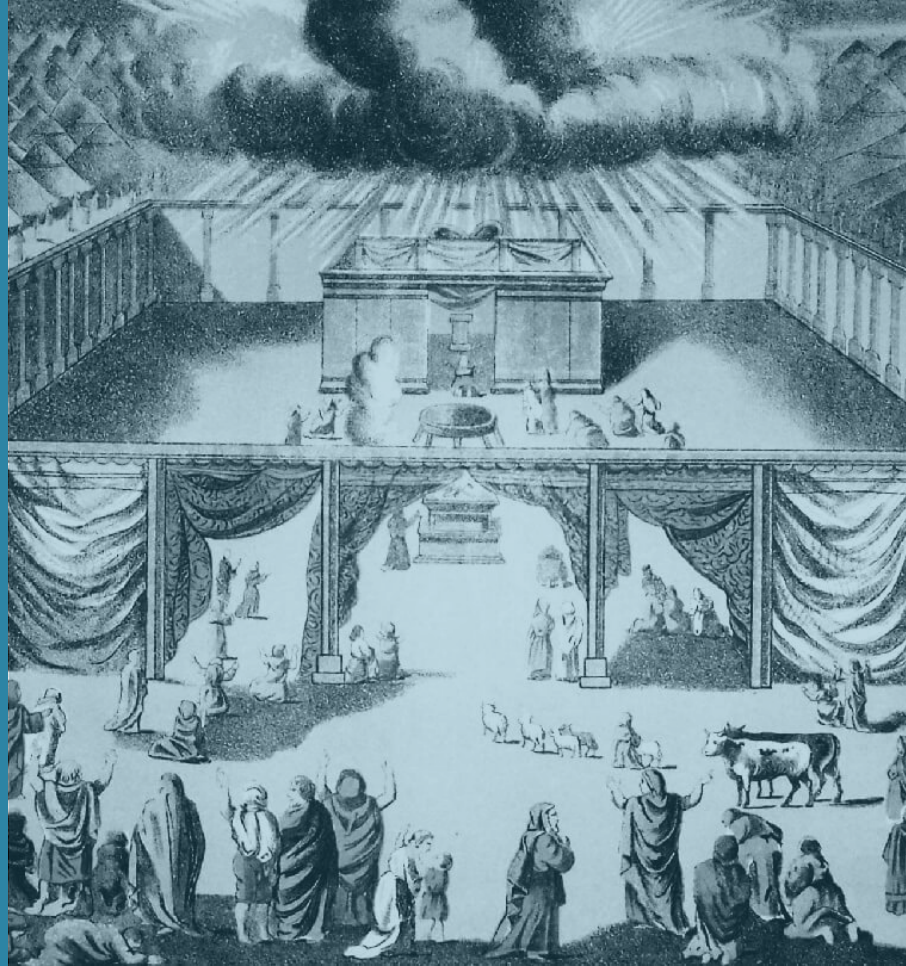


The Power of Our Contribution

Parashat Terumah



Parashat Terumah

I love Parashat Terumah because it speaks about the heart, about giving. It deals with the inner struggles that we all have between the desire to give and help, and the natural inclination towards selfishness, to care about the most important person in the world – “me”. It teaches the value of investment, of giving, and of creating.

We learn that the Israelites gave a heartfelt contribution. They gave a lot more than was necessary, until Moses actually had to issue an order for them to stop giving.

And as a result of this generosity, God came and dwelt among the people:

“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.” – Exodus 25:8 [NIV]

And so it was! After the children of Israel completed the construction, God came down to the home that they built for Him:

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” – Exodus 40:34,35 [NIV]

A Place of Generosity and Love

Legend has it that the location of the Temple, like the Tabernacle, is also connected with generosity and love.

According to the story, two brothers worked in a field that they inherited. One brother was married with children while the other was single.

The two brothers made sure to divide their harvest evenly, but every night each of them walked secretly towards his brother's crop pile, in order to add to it.

The bachelor brother thought to himself: “My brother has a family. He has a wife and children to feed. But I'm a bachelor who can make do with little. That's why he needs more of the crops than I do.”

The married brother thought to himself: “I have children who can care for me when I grow old, while my brother has no family to look after him, there is no one to help him in old age. That's why he needs more crops than I do.”

Every morning the brothers were surprised to see that, even though they had taken from their crops, their pile of grain remained intact.

Every night the two brothers continued their secret generosity, until one night the brothers met on their way, with sacks of grain in their hands. The brothers dropped the sacks and hugged each other.

That meeting place was chosen as the location for building the Temple.

The story is a beautiful story. We must see how we can give, not only to the Kingdom of Heaven and to God, but also within the home, to our families.

Instead of asking, “What's in it for me?” We should be asking, “What can I do to build the family and give to the family?”

And from the family unit we move onwards, to how we can contribute as a family unit, how we can contribute as a community, and onwards...

Building the Tabernacle Means Building the People

Let's go back to the building of the Tabernacle. There were a number of reasons for the construction of the Tabernacle. One of them was to unite the people in a common project, a national project.

We have to remember that Pharaoh's intention was to break the spirit of the people. Now we have to rebuild the spirit of the people, to build mutual responsibility and cooperation, ending with something that is not only beautiful and glorious, but also has profound spiritual significance.

Indeed, the building of the Tabernacle required the cooperation of the entire nation, everyone was invited to participate in any way, be it with assets or with skills. And even if you had none of those things, you were invited to go to Bezalel and learn a craft, for he was the one who had "the ability to teach others" (Exodus 35:34).

It was a privilege, not an obligation, to contribute. The entire nation responded. And the excitement, the activity, and the generosity accompanied the project until its successful completion.

As we mentioned in the beginning, the people gave so much and did so much work that Moses had to issue an order to stop the contributions and the labor, because the people gave and did too much (Exodus 36:5-7).

God is Interested in the Smallest Details

Thanks to the contribution and the great work of the entire nation, everyone in the nation felt that the Tabernacle was their own, and that the successful completion was both a personal and a national achievement.

According to this understanding, we can understand why so much of the Book of Exodus is devoted to a detailed description of each stage and detail in the construction of the Tabernacle.

This was the greatest and most important project carried out by the people of Israel together, each and every detail was precious and important to them, and to God too. Let's see how God delves into the smallest details of the Tabernacle:

“Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker. All the curtains are to be the same size—twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together, and do the same with the other five. Make loops of blue material along the edge of the end curtain in one set, and do the same with the end curtain in the other set. Make fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the end curtain of the other set, with the loops opposite each other. Then make fifty gold clasps and use them to fasten the curtains together so that the tabernacle is a unit.” – Exodus 26:1-6 [NIV]

Look at the detailed description. God makes sure to detail the dimensions of the curtains, their quantity, their color, the materials for the loops, and the placement and material of each thread.

Like in last week’s Torah portion, and throughout the Bible, God teaches Moses and us the subtleties of civil legal liability. Suddenly we see that now God is interested in things like the compensation for a dog bite or the theft of a donkey.

God is concerned with the quarrels of humans, even if they are over tiny sums. God takes interest in the width of the curtains of the Tabernacle, the materials they’re made of, and how many loops they have. Nothing is too small for God.

The God who created the galaxy decided that this world was important to Him, so every leaf that blows in the wind and every grain of sand in the middle of the desert has meaning.

Yes, the almighty God is interested in us, in the people He created in His image.

Yeshua teaches and emphasizes this line of thinking. God notices the smallest details in our world, in our surroundings, and of course in our lives.

I am sure that at times we have all felt lonely and small. Too small for God to take us seriously, too small for God to be distracted from leading the world to touch our little lives.

The world is so big, and God is so great, who are we in His eyes? Dust?

In this week's parasha, we see that God cares, and there is meaning even for the smallest loop. Yeshua adds and teaches us that God sees and counts everything:

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” – Luke 12:6,7 [NIV]

We are Equal Because We are Made in His Image

A forest is really just a tree and another tree and another tree, and humanity is a person and another person and another person. And our Father in Heaven cares for and counts the smallest details, like the hairs of our heads.

And no one is marginal or unimportant, the Jewish Sages rightly say that every person is an entire world.

The origin of the concept of the image of God is found in the Book of Genesis, it is described to us that man was created in the image and likeness of God. From here comes the concept of sanctifying life and the severe prohibition on shedding blood, for killing a person cancels out a life of divine meaning.

From this we also get the ideas of equality, liberty, and brotherhood amongst men. For all are created in the image of God.

The Jewish Sages expressed this by saying that no one's blood is redder than that of another, therefore it is not fitting for a person, as great as he may be, to cancel the existence of another for his own existence, or to rule over him. Rather, we are to treat one another with love, as a brotherhood.

According to this perception, when one harms the other, physically or mentally, he does harm to the image of God. And those who despise a person, actually despise God reflected in them.

The Power of Our Contribution

The word “Terumah”, which is the title for our parasha, is Hebrew for “contribution”. Contribution is a great and important thing, because it brings a sense of belonging. It opens the heart and enhances emotion.

Let’s put aside, for a moment, the idea in our minds of a magnificent tabernacle in the heart of the desert. Let’s look at how the Tabernacle project is described in Scripture. It’s a poor people’s project. It’s a shaky desert hut – made of a patchwork of materials and products. But all of it together forms one large collective heart.

The message of the meticulous detailing of the contributions is that the simplicity of the materials is actually the greatness of the Tabernacle.

Our contribution connects us to each other and to God, and giving with all of our heart entitles us to the presence of God among us.

Shabbat Shalom.

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context*

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