

International Rabbinic Fellowship

Weekly Dvar Torah

Parshat Terumah

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This week's Dvar Torah is provided by Rabbi Aaron Finkelstein, The Prospect Heights Shul

The building of the Mishkan in Parshat Terumah ushers in a new phase of the Torah. Suddenly (or so it seems), the miracles of the Exodus give way to architectural blueprints. Anticipating this shift, Ramban introduces the Mishkan by directly linking it with the giving of the Torah (in Parshat Yitro) and the subsequent relationship forged between God and the Jewish people (in Parshat Mishpatim). Only now, after experiencing the initial covenant and defining this relationship's contours, are the Jewish people worthy of having God's presence dwell among them.

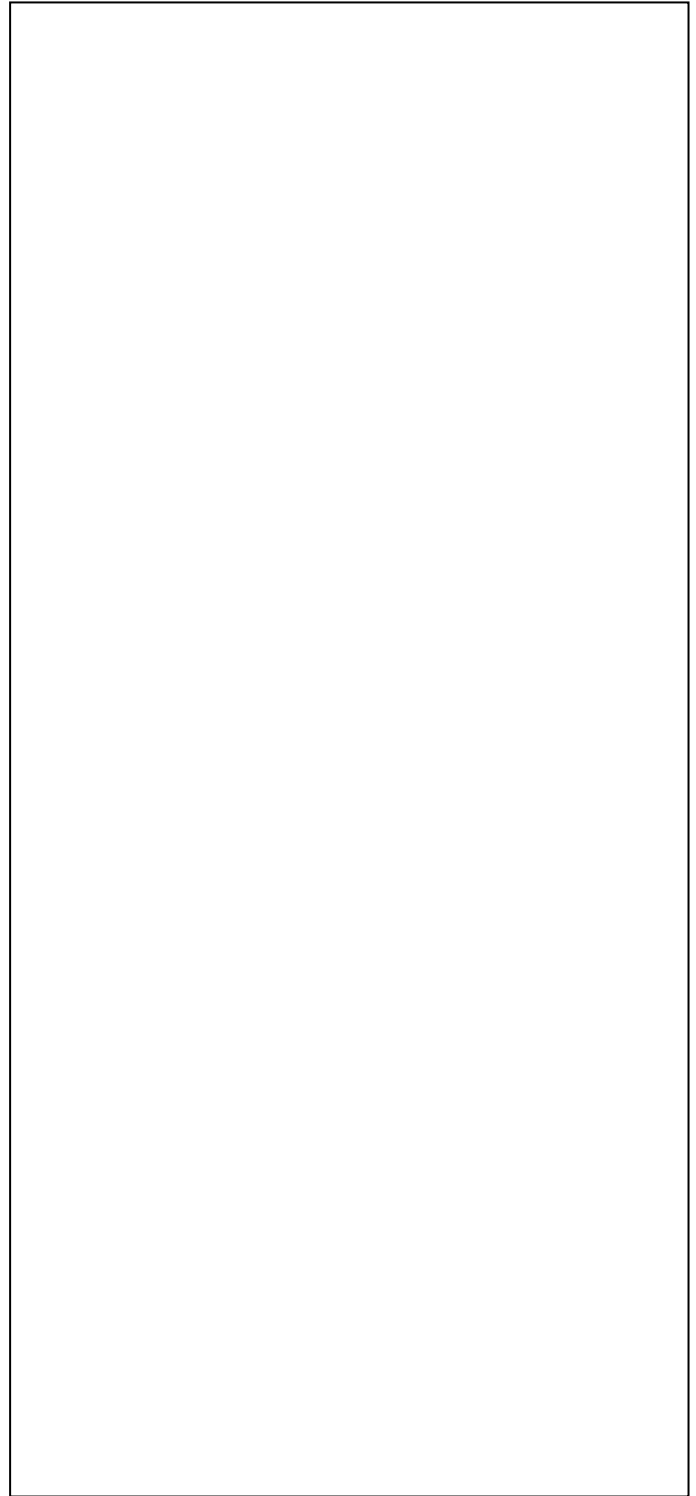
Additionally, Ramban highlights a discrepancy between the initial instructions of the Mishkan in Terumah, and it's the subsequent execution in Vayakhel. The ark and its components take priority, as God explains to Moshe, for "I shall meet with you there and speak with you." Ten chapters later, we learn in Vayakhel that Moshe inverts the order, instructing the tent and panels of the Mishkan to precede the construction of the ark and its component parts. From this minute discrepancy, a dichotomy emerges. Terumah describes the Mishkan in descending order of holiness, prioritizing the Ark of the Covenant, from which God will communicate. However, the actual human construction of sacred space begins from the

peripheral, culminating in creation of the most sacrosanct.

David Grossman, in his recent novel, "To the End of the Land," speaks to this same theme in a very different setting. The novel centers around Ora, an Israeli mother anxiously awaiting her son's release from army service. Ora embarks on a trek with a long-time companion, Avrum, who has never met her son Ofer. As the narrative unfolds, readers realize that Ora's true objective of the trek is the forging of a bond between Avrum and her son Ofer. Finally, while hiking, Ora prepares to introduce her son to her companion. Yet, when the much anticipated moment of introduction (and intimacy) is upon them, Ora and Avrum step back. "Let us approach from afar," they remark. Such sanctity (in this case, Ora's son Ofer) must be approached carefully from the periphery.

To create space for holiness, we must also approach from afar. As individuals, we witness moments of deep meaning and profundity: the birth of a child or the marriage beneath a chuppah. In our communities, we mark milestones and anniversaries, the construction of new buildings or rededicated libraries, overflowing with promise and

potential. Like Matan Torah, these experiences signify a covenant and initiate an ongoing relationship. However, the experience of ongoing sanctity requires careful construction, beginning from the periphery and slowly working toward that which is most essential. Through this process, we craft the spaces where holiness exists, truly fulfilling the mission of the Mishkan and allowing God to dwell among us.



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