

Parshat Terumah
Repair, Revelation and Rededication
Rabbi Marianne Novak - Class of 2019

Long before HGTV programs took over our lives with a constant stream of shows highlighting the design/build process, our Torah, beginning in Parashat Teruma, presents us the original home improvement program. We read this Shabbat about the intricately detailed design and eventual building and dedication of the Mishkan. This entire process takes up four parshiyot and almost a third of the entire Book of Shemot. More verses in the Torah are devoted to this than Matan Torah- revelation at Sinai!

What's even more curious is that the entire incident of Chet HaEgel, the Golden Calf is bracketed by these parshiyot. In Teruma and T'tzaveh the Torah describes the very detailed blueprints for the Mishkan, its courtyard and all of its fixtures. Ki Tissa then follows with the incident of the Golden Calf. Vayakhel and Pekudei, which relate the actual building of the Mishkan, end Sefer Shemot.

What exactly is going on with the order here?

Rashi, the medieval French commentator, quotes the Midrash Tanchuma and explains that our Parasha and all the subsequent parshiyot detailing the Mishkan actually occurred sometime after the incident of the Golden Calf. It is here the Rashi brings the famous concept:

אין מקדים ומאחר בתורה – מעשה העגל קדם לצווי מלאכת המשכן ימים רבים הנה – שְׁהִי בִי"ז בְּתַמוּז נִשְׁתַּבְּרוּ הַלוחוֹת, וּבַיּוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים נִתְרַצָּה הַקֶּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלִמְחֵרֵת הַתְּחִילוּ בְּבִדּוּבַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְהוֹקֵם בְּאֶחָד בְּנִיסָן (תנחומא):
וַיִּתֵּן אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְגו'

“There is no “earlier” or “later” (no chronological order) in the events related in the Torah: in fact the incident of the golden calf (related in ch. 31) happened a considerable time before the command regarding the work of the Tabernacle was given (ch. 25 and the following chapters). For on the seventeenth of Tammuz were the Tablets broken (when the people were worshipping the calf) and on the Day of Atonement God became reconciled with Israel and on the next day they began collecting contributions for the Tabernacle and on the first of Nissan, the Tabernacle was completed.”

The S'forno- Rav Ovadiah Sforno, the Renaissance Italian commentator further explains Rashi's point here by saying:

(Shemot 31:18)...after the Torah described all the spiritual heights B'nai Yisrael was supposed to achieve—to be an entire nation of Priests (*mamlechet Kohanim*) and a Holy Nation- (*Goi Kadosh*), the Torah now has to explain why all these plans God had laid out for B'nai Yisrael did not in fact happen, so that it became necessary to build a Tabernacle, etc. So, then, the reason for building the Mishkan is that it served as a *Tikkun* for the building of the Golden Calf. Before the sin, there wasn't a need for B'nai Yisrael to build a place to worship God. After the sin, after B'nai Yisrael had built something for God that was improper and idolatrous, the Mishkan was necessary to channel any building energies towards something holy for God.

The Ramban, Nachmanides, however, completely disagrees with this analysis. First, he believes that the Torah is in chronological order and so he argues that our Parasha is right where it belongs. Ramban shifts his focus to parshiyot that have come before- Yitro and Mishpatim- that describe Revelation at Sinai, *Matan Torah*. And he says:

‘...וְסוּד הַמִּשְׁכָּן הוּא, שִׁיְהִיָּה הַכְּבוֹד אֲשֶׁר שָׁן עַל הַר סִינַי שׁוֹן עֲלָיו בְּנִסְתֵּר... (25 Shemot)

“The secret of the Mishkan—the real reason of the Mishkan—is that the glory of God that was on Har Sinai, dwells in the Mishkan- but in a hidden fashion.” The Mishkan then is not a repair, a *tikkun* for Chet HaEgel, but is rather a place to continue the experience of being in God's presence at Sinai.

Professor Umberto Cassuto was an Italian Bible Scholar, who was the Chief Rabbi of Florence and then moved to Israel in 1938 to become a professor at Hebrew University. In his perush on Sefer Shemot, notes

the textual parallels between Revelation and the description of God's presence as it filled the Mishkan. Cassuto goes on to say that the connection between B'nai Yisrael and the Mishkan continues forever the connection that was formed at Sinai between the people and God. The meaning of: " וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי יְיָ" - "and let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them"; is that God will dwell in the midst of the people wherever they wander in the desert. Towards the end of his commentary, Cassuto states the following:

... יכלה דוקא צורתו של המשכן לעורר בלב העם את רגש הבטחון בנוכחותו של ה' בתוכם...

'The very design of the Tabernacle was to awaken in the heart of the nation a feeling of confidence that God was in their midst...'

The Kedushat Levi (Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev-the Berdichever Rebbe)- sees the purpose of the Mishkan as not only to be a reminder of God's connection with us at Har Sinai but also as a tangible way to recreate that very connection when we pray. He says as follows:

'The entire Tabernacle must be viewed as the tangible symbol of holy thoughts expressed by the righteous when they worship the Creator, which, as we explained, need a כלי, visible, tangible instrument, in the form of a commandment to be performed by the worshipper, in order to give concrete expression to the נדבת לבו, the generosity of the heart, of which Exodus 25:2 speaks. The completed Tabernacle is the expression of the collective service of the Jewish people, or the לבוש, the "garment" behind which the holy nature of the collective soul of Jewish people resides....' The Kedushat Levi goes on to explain, however, that although other commentators-namely Rashi-understand that when the Torah states in our Parasha (25:8):

וְכַן תַּעֲשׂוּ קָלִל אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְרַאֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֶת תְּבִנֹת כָּל-כֵּלָיו

"Exactly as I show you—the pattern of the and the pattern of all its furnishings—so shall you make it."

This means that as you build the Mishkan now, you will make it again in the future- *ta'asu*- when you build the Beit HaMikdash. But the Kedushat Levi takes his understanding beyond just the physical building of any future sanctuary. In his view, we continue to build a Mishkan through our prayers and in doing so, we continue the revelation of the Torah. The כן תעשו is a reminder of a future of what prayer will look like beyond being in a building itself.

So, if the true purpose of the Mishkan was to remind us of revelation, then the way to perpetuate it is not by having a structure but rather to continue to reinterpret Torah in every generation.

By incorporating the Kedushat Levi and Ramban's interpretations, we can see a slightly different interpretation of the purpose of the Mishkan. In (25:2) the verse states:

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבָבוֹ יִקְחוּ-אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי:

"Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him."

The use of the word לבו- lev, heart, here is quite interesting. And although נדבת לבו is understood as volunteerism, it also has very strong echoes in how we view Tefillah and how we can maintain one's relationship to God without a physical structure, without a Mishkan and without a Mikdash.

The accompanying Haftara for Parashat Teruma from Sefer Melachim also hints at what prayer will look like in the future without a Mishkan or a Mikdash. The reading describes Shlomo HaMelekh's building of the first Temple. Later on in the Navi, Shlomo has a dedication ceremony for the Temple where he gives the following inaugural speech. In the first book of Kings, Chapter 8, verses 46-48 (JPS translation)

כִּי יִחְסְאוּ-לָךְ כִּי אֵין אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִחְטָא וְאִנִּי אֲנִי אֲנִי וְנִתַּתָּם לִפְנֵי אֵיבִיב וְשָׂבוּם שְׁבִיחָם אֶל-אֶרֶץ הָאֵיבִיב רְחוּקָה אוֹ קְרוּבָה: מִזֶּה וְהִשִּׁיבוּ אֶל-לִבָּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבוּ-שָׁם וְנִשְׁבוּ | וְהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלַי בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁבִיחָם לְאֹמֶר חֲטָאנוּ וְהִעֲוִינוּ רָשָׁענוּ: מִחַ וְנִשְׁבוּ אֵלַי בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֵיבִיחָם אֲשֶׁר-שָׁבוּ אֵתְךָ וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ אֵלַי דְּרָךְ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִתְּתָה לְאֲבוֹתֶם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר בְּחָרְתָּ וְהִבִּיתָ אֲשֶׁר-בִּנִיתָ [בְּנִיתִי] לְשִׁמְךָ: מִטּוֹ וְשִׁמְעַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִכּוֹן שְׁבִיחָךְ אֶת-תְּפִלָּתָם וְאֶת-תְּחִנָּתָם וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִשְׁפָּטָם:



“46"When they sin against You -- for there is no man who does not sin -- and You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and their captors carry them off to an enemy land, near or far; 47 and then they take it to heart in the land to which they have been carried off, and they repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captors, saying: . . .48 and they turn back to You with all their heart and soul, in the land of the enemies who have carried them off, and they pray to You in the direction of their land which You gave to their fathers, of the city which You have chosen, and of the House which I have built to Your name . . .”

At the very outset, on the very opening day of the Beit HaMikdash, King Solomon seems to predict a time when the Jewish people will be in exile and won't have a Mishkan or Mikdash and in its place will be very the heart of the human being. They, the Jewish people, will take it to their hearts, והשיבו אל ליבם and pray to God for forgiveness.

So, unlike the Kedushat Levi's idea that to fulfill the requirement of Standing at Sinai in every generation one must actively participate in the continued revelation of the Torah, King Solomon suggests something slightly more accessible - prayer as a group. By standing as a Kehilla and praying and engaging in the intricate choreography, B'nai Yisrael, with all of its *n'divat libo/ ndivat libah* and deep intention of your hearts- *Kavanat HaLev*- now will have the tools to reenact and renew its relationship to God. When we turn our hearts- and follow the prescriptions that God has presented to us, we make our own Mishkan-where God can dwell within us and a Mikdash- where we can make ourselves holy.

And lest we think we have forgotten about Rashi, Shlomo HaMelekh also hints that this new space is also to function as a repair, a *tikkun* for our sins, as his speech continues:

וְשָׁמַעַתָּה הַשָּׁמַיִם מְכוּן שִׁבְתְּךָ אֶת-תְּפִלָּתָם וְאֶת-תְּחִנָּתָם וְעָשִׂיתָ מִשְׁפָּטָם
 וְסִלַּחְתָּ לְעַמֶּךָ אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ-לָךָ וְלִכְל-פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשְׁעוּ-בְּךָ וּבְנִתָּתָם לְרַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי שִׁבְיָהֶם וְרַחֲמוּם:

“Oh, give heed in Your heavenly abode to their prayer and supplication, uphold their cause, and pardon Your people who have sinned against You for all the transgressions that they have committed against You. Grant them mercy in the sight of their captors that they may be merciful to them.”

So, we then have in our hands and our hearts the mechanism to insulate ourselves from any outside noise and keep ourselves focused on what I believe the Mishkan means for us today: a way to renew our relationship with Hashem through prayer and serious learning of the Torah. And, it can also serve as we saw from Rashi as a means to ask God for forgiveness and that God help us repair ourselves. When we avail ourselves of the divine tools given to us to *simu lev*, to truly place our hearts *l'shem shomayim*, we can renew the awesome experience and connection we had with the Holy One at Sinai. And while we have now been commanded to do this reconnection, and the element of *n'divat liboh* is somewhat muted, we should have the confidence that not only can we do it but also that God truly wants to hear from us.



Rabbi Marianne Novak received her BA in Political Science from Barnard College and her JD from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. She has served as the Endowment Director at the Jewish Federation of St. Louis and also helped start the Women's Tefillah Group at Bais Abraham. Rabbi Marianne then moved to Skokie, Illinois, became a Gabbait for the Skokie Women's Tefillah Group, and taught Bat Mitzvah students. Rabbi Marianne is an instructor and curriculum developer for the Florence Melton Adult School of Jewish Learning and taught Tanakh at Rochelle Zelle Jewish High School. She has lectured for many Jewish organizations and synagogues and writes a blog for the Times of Israel. Rabbi Marianne lives in Skokie with her husband Noam Stadlan and family.