

Parashat Terumah 5778, 2018:

“And They Shall Make Me A Sanctuary”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The most celebrated *pasuk* (verse) in our *parasha* is, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary (*Mikdash*) and I will dwell in their midst.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) It is followed by a great many verses that specify every possible detail of the construction and constitutive elements of the *Mishkan* (portable desert *Mikdash*). Yet, as the *Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael* notes, the very act of constructing a *Mikdash* for Hashem is quite problematic: “And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst;” why was this ever stated? After all, was it not already said, (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 23:24) ‘Behold I fill the heavens and the earth?’ [And, therefore, how can any dwelling contain Hashem?)]” (Translation and brackets my own)

The *Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael* teaches us that the idea of building a *Mikdash* for Hashem seemingly makes no sense. On the surface, at least, this appears to be the intent of Isaiah’s famous declaration: “So says the L-rd, ‘the heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool; which is the house that you will build for Me, and which is the place of My rest?’” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 66:1)

The great Lithuanian Torah sage, Rav Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821), was acutely aware of the conceptual challenges posed by the *mitzvah* to build a *Mikdash* for Hashem. He addressed them by emphasizing the later part of our *pasuk* wherein it states, “and I will dwell in their midst,” and suggested the following revolutionary interpretation:

Behold, there is no doubt whatsoever, that the very idea of the holy (*hakodesh*), the sanctuary (*hamikdash*) and the in-dwelling (*shriyat shechinato*) of the Holy One blessed be He refers to man, himself. [This is the case,] for if he sanctifies himself in the proper manner through the fulfillment of all the *mitzvot*...then he, himself, will be the sanctuary of Hashem (*hu atzmo hamikdash mammash*) and within him will be Hashem, may His Name be blessed. (*Nefesh HaChaim*, I:4, this, and the following translations and brackets my own)

The power of Rav Chaim's extraordinary *chiddush* (novel idea) cannot be overestimated: If we sanctify ourselves through the performance of the *mitzvot*, then we will be the ultimate *Mikdash* of Hashem. Rav Chaim bases his reasoning upon a verse from Jeremiah, and a well-known statement of our Sages, as found in the *Midrash Aggadah*:

[As proof for what I have suggested,] we have the text from *Sefer Yirmiyahu*: "...The Temple of the L-rd, the Temple of the L-rd, the Temple of the L-rd are they." (7:4) This is similar in kind to the utterance of our Sages, may their memory be blessed, "and I will dwell in their midst" – "It does not say, 'in it' [i.e. the physical *Mikdash*,] rather it says, "in their midst," [i.e. literally within them.]

At this juncture in Rav Chaim's presentation, it appears as if the physical structure of the *Mikdash*, or even of the *Beit Hamikdash*, is well-nigh superfluous, since it is superseded by the Jewish people, themselves. A careful reading of Rav Chaim's next words seem to support precisely this approach:

In addition, according to our manner of explanation, one should not think that the essential purpose of My [G-d's] intention [regarding the commandment to construct the *Mikdash*] is the creation of the physical *Mikdash* itself (*hamikdash hachitzoni*).

What, then, is the rationale inherent in the construction of the *Mikdash*? For Rav Chaim, it is nothing less than the creation of the greatest heuristic device the world has ever known:

But you should know that My [Hashem's] overarching purpose and desire regarding the *Mikdash*'s construction and all its vessels, is solely to indicate to you [the Jewish people individually, and as a people,] that you should model yourselves after these physical entities and reconstruct yourselves and all of your actions, so that they will be as proper to Me as the building of the *Mikdash* and all its [sanctified] vessels. [For in truth,] all of you are holy, fitting and prepared (*kedoshim, re'uyim u'muchanim*) for My holy presence to literally dwell within you (*lehashrot shechinati*)

b'tochchachem mammash). This, then, is the true meaning of, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary (*Mikdash*) and I will dwell in their midst.”

Rav Chaim's message is unbelievably inspiring: We, the Jewish people, are holy and fitting for the *Schechinah* to dwell amongst us, for in truth, we are His *Mikdash*. With Hashem's help, may we rededicate ourselves to His holy Torah and the heart-felt fulfillment of His *mitzvot*, so that we will be ready to be His *Mikdash* soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.