

## Terumah: The Emotional Ownership Experience

Dvar Torah Shabbat Terumah 2023

Cantor Adam Davis

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*Tekhelet v'Argaman v'Tola'at Shani v'shesh v'izim.*

Blue, purple and crimson-dyed yarns, linen and goat skins. This week's Torah portion, *Terumah*, repeats these words over and over. They are some of the precious materials that will be used for the *Mishkan*, the portable cultic center of our ancestors, as well as the uniforms of the *Kohanim*, the priest, who will serve there and later in the Temple in Jerusalem.

At times this portion, with its lengthy and detailed list of materials, weights, sizes and instructions feels like a sanctified IKEA manual: how to assemble a *Mishkan* (umlaut added for emphasis). If you don't put it together in the correct order, the whole thing might collapse. Before anything, though, follow the diagram to make sure you have all the right parts:

וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנִחָשֶׁת:

And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver and copper;

וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים:

blue, purple and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair;

וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים:

tanned ram skins, dolphin skins and acacia wood;

שָׁמֶן לְמָאֵר בְּשָׂמִים לְשָׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת הַסָּמִים:

oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense;

אֲבִנֵי-שֹׁהַם וְאַבְנֵי מִלֻּאִים לְאַפֹּד וְלִחֹשֶׁן:

lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

We can accept anything, as long as they're the materials we need: gold for the implements of the innermost sanctum; silver for the crenulations holding together the walls; and copper for the outer altar items—and then blue, purple and crimson-dyed fabrics, skins of goats and dolphins, acacia wood planks.

Where does one get dolphin skins in the desert, by the way? Mishkan Depot? These were not easy asks. The materials our ancestors were “given” by their Egyptian neighbors as they departed; these fulfilled the purpose. And, interestingly, some of the same gold given to make the Egel Zahav, the Gold Calf, was used for a more appropriate sacred purpose.

The medieval commentator Sforno says, וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה, the word *זאת* means “that no substitutes for the materials listed would be acceptable, such as perishables, for instance. Even the kind of gemstones (such as pearls) not usable for Aaron's breastplate were not accepted. The only type of contributions that were accepted were those that themselves would be usable in the construction of the Tabernacle and its paraphernalia.

So how do we get all these fine things? By asking for them, as gifts, freely given, from among the people.

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיקַחוּ-לִי תְּרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּבוּ לְבֹו תִקְחוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי:

Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved. But what if people don't give of their hearts? What if they give out of other motivations? One would like to think that “gifts” are given willingly, out of devotion, rather than out of fear or another form of force.

Clearly, our ancestors were not *required* to give of their hearts. It was nevertheless requested of them. Moses seems to be leading the world's first capital campaign. Then, as now, it was all in the art of the ask.

In Egypt, there would not have been an ask but a demand, so this was already a sea change. To be clear, this was not the mandatory *shekel hakodesh*, the modest and equalizing tax to maintain the priesthood and temple. It was a request.

All those were willing to give through the wisdom of their heart, motivated to give by love of The Eternal, it would seem. Don't mind those smitten by plagues, snakes or swallowed up by the Earth, but give what you can—phone lines are open.

This wasn't a Public Radio on-air drive, so what was the reward for lavish giving? There was no commemorative tote bag—or mug from Terry Gross. What if the motivation is not material, but rather recognition in the eyes of one's community? Is it so bad to be seen as generous?

Of course not. The art of the ask has less to do with money than with imagination. It's about getting people to feel that they're part of something.

This isn't "Professor" Harold Hill's "think system." People like to support institutions and organizations that bring beauty, goodness and hope into this world: hospitals, performing arts centers, botanic gardens and, yes, temples, synagogues and other organizations of faith. There is great value in contributing toward a common purpose, value that goes beyond the gift itself. By giving freely, one also can claim a stake of emotional ownership in the communal goal.

A different professor, Nigel Nicholson, who teaches organizational behavior at London Business School, first coined the phrase "emotional ownership." He used this to describe the significant factor motivating members of a family enterprise to carry it forward to the next generation. There's pride in dedicating time and resources to something in which they feel a sense of pride. He writes, "Emotional ownership is the golden thread that underwrites a family business's future existence. EO is a natural state of mind in a healthy family, but it needs to be nurtured from quite early on and can be easily disturbed," says Professor Nicholson.

A 2015 *Harvard Business Review* article on the principle of psychological ownership reported on a **2014 Gallup survey of U.S. workers** which found that less than one-third were engaged in their jobs; 51 percent said that they were "not engaged" and 17.5 percent said that they were "actively disengaged." These principles aren't limited to the workplace.

The 2020 Pew Research Center's study on the American Jewish community shows that a growing trend is of religious disaffiliation: 27 percent of U.S. Jews do not claim any religion, e.g. atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular." That's virtually identical to the 28 percent of U.S. adults overall. I'm not even getting into the numbers of affiliation with a temple or synagogue. It's too complicated for the time we have, so instead let's just look at the subset who don't attend services.

The good news for cantors and rabbis is that among those who attend services, 90 percent say it fulfills a spiritual need. For those who don't attend, of the 11 reasons offered, 66 percent of infrequent service attendees said, "I'm not religious." Another common explanation was "I'm just not interested" (57 percent). Only 6 percent were "I fear for my security," which we are very aware of this weekend, or "People treat me like I don't really belong" (4 percent).

Lest we think finances would be another major reason, especially for younger adults, think again. To an extent that's true, but less than we might think. Finances as a barrier for adults younger than age 30 are just 10 percent, which is *less* than the 19 percent of older adults who say they don't attend religious services because "it costs too much."

Only 11 percent said, "I feel pressured to do more or give more." Fifty-five percent said, "I express my Jewishness in other ways." These last ones, those surrounding payments, giving and other ways are worth teasing out. They're the ones most closely connected to the principle of *Terumah* (offering).

In the end, I'm not much of a numbers guy, but it's clear that *Terumah* is critical to a sense of Emotional Ownership in any shared enterprise—and especially the one we know as institutional Judaism.

Look around this temple and thousands of others like it and you'll see the evidence before you. Many are adorned with plaques acknowledging *Terumot*, the willing generosity of its members. Many, but not all. I worked at one temple that had no such plaques. None, not even for artwork. Generosity, their philosophy went, was not something to be recognized—rather something to treat as normal for everyone to weave into the fabric of the community.

And this is precisely what God is instructing in the Torah. Giving to the community is something we should do, something to be encouraged without force. Beautifying God's dwelling place in the middle of our people isn't the end, it's the means by which we create community and make the divine presence manifest in our world. In a very real way, we have to make space for God in our lives, and to dwell in this world, but it's the process of contributing toward that shared project that allows us to experience it.

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכְנָתִי בְתוֹכָם:

“And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” *Exodus* 25:8

Compare that with **Targum Jonathan on Exodus 25:8**:

And they shall make a Sanctuary to My Name, that My *Shekinah* may dwell among them.

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּן לְשִׁמִּי מִקְדָּשָׁא וְאֶשְׁרֵי שְׁכִינָתִי בִּיְהוֹן

In Hebrew, *B'Tocham* means in their midst. And while *Beineihon* is the Aramaic corollary, it bears a striking resemblance to the Hebrew term for “between,” as we hear in the words of *V'shamru* each Shabbat: “*Beini u'vein B'nei Yisrael oti hi l'olam*.” It is an eternal covenant between Me and the Children of Israel. Contributing to a shared process that makes space for the divine is what allows the divine to dwell *between* us.

The Torah literally asks people to contribute strands of richly dyed threads and other materials to be woven together into an incredible whole that was more than the sum of its component parts. The symbolism couldn't be more apt, and the *Mishkan* had no recognition plaques.

There's a common complaint among both Jews and Jewish professionals that congregational life is sometimes all too transactional rather than relational. For some that's true, because they get a statement in the mail for something they think they really don't use. The value proposition is missing. But, as we often hear, we get out what we put in—and then some. That's true whether it's given to God, to someone we love or our community. The gift is truly in the giving. And, so, if all you're doing is paying dues—then all you're getting are statements.

What if we upend how we think about our communities, our temples and synagogues. They needn't be places where the clergy and the staff provide Judaism in exchange for mandatory payments. Rather, they should be the means by which Jews contribute toward common purpose; *that's* the experience for which we long.

I know we're already doing this on some level, and by speaking to you perhaps I'm preaching to the choir. I think we all know that whether it's the souls we nourish through our services, the minds we feed through study and learning, or the stomachs we fill through our *zedakah*, what we give, willingly and freely, is what builds our community stronger, fulfills us as individuals and brings us closer to one another.

That's the *Terumah* God seeks, the emotional ownership we need to experience. When we give, we get far more in return. That's the true gift of *Terumah*. When we all do that, we weave our community together more tightly from brightly colored strands into a dazzling dwelling place for us and for God. *Tekhelet v'Argaman v'Tolaat Shani v'shesh v'izim*.

Shabbat Shalom.