

Stone Soup
Parashat T'rumah
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Once upon a time, a weary traveler came to a quiet village. He went door to door begging for food to silence the hunger in his belly. The fearful villagers each, in turn, told the stranger that food was scarce, there was nothing to share, and they closed their doors to him.

Oh, they are in great need indeed, thought the hungry man.

So from the center of the village square, the traveler called out, "All of you take heart. I will make enough stone soup to feed us all!"

Stone soup? How ridiculous, thought the villagers. *You can't make soup from a stone. ...*

The traveler pulled from his knapsack a banged up old tin can and filled it with water from the town well. He built a small fire and set the can over the flame. The village children wandered over out of curiosity and watched from the safety of nearby trees. They were amazed to see the man take from his pocket a common earth-tone stone and toss it with a loud kerplunk into the can of water.

As he crouched down, stirring with a stick, the traveler spoke aloud, "Oh, this will be a fine stone soup, more than enough for everyone to share."

"My parents think you're a fool!" one of the boys called out.

The traveler kept stirring.

One small girl ran from the shelter of the trees and approached him. She watched him hum quietly as he stirred. "Mister, that can won't hold enough soup for all of us," she said. "My mother has a much bigger soup pot. Would you like us to go get it for you?"

"Why, thank you, sweet girl," replied the stranger. "You are most kind."

The children returned with the larger pot and helped fill it with water. They asked him what stone soup tasted like. "Oh, it's quite delicious," he said, "and the best thing is that it's always different every time and every place I make it."

"Why?" they asked.

"Because whenever I make this soup, something magical happens. Someone brings a carrot. Someone else brings onion. Most people think the stone needs a little help. And I have found that people have much more to share than they think they do."

The children were quiet for a moment. Then they ran home, calling out, "We'll be back soon, keep stirring!"

Before long, villagers began arriving in the square. The little girl and her mother brought carrots. Others added potatoes, barley, herbs, salt, even a bit of meat. With every contribution, the traveler said thank you.

Soon the square was filled with the smell of soup and the sound of laughter. Tables were set. Bread appeared. Bowls were passed around. And everyone ate until their bellies were full.

When it was time for the traveler to leave, the little girl handed him the stone. "I think you should keep it," he said gently. "Use it whenever you need to remember that you have enough, and that when you share together, there is always enough." And then he walked on, slipping another common earth-tone stone into his pocket.

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In this story, the stone was never the point. The soup was created when each person brought something of their own.

That is exactly the story of this week's parashah, Terumah. In *Exodus* 25:2, God says to Moses, "Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart is so moved."

God says: From every person whose heart is so moved. Not from the wealthiest. Not from the most powerful. Not from a single donor who can do it all. From every person.

The Torah then lists the materials: gold, silver, copper, blue and purple yarn, acacia wood, oil, spices, precious stones. Later, in *Exodus* 35:25–26, we are told that the women spun yarn with wisdom. Some gave precious materials. Some gave their hands. Some gave their skill. Some gave artistry. No one person builds the Mishkan.

The Mishkan is a kind of sacred stone soup. God does not drop holiness down from heaven fully formed. Instead, the people build it together. Each person brings what they have.

Holiness emerges not only from gold or yarn or wood but from the act of shared offering.

And remember who these people are. They are newly freed slaves. They are in the wilderness. They are not settled. They are not secure. If anyone had reason to say, "We have nothing to give," it would be them. But Terumah insists otherwise.

Just like the traveler in the village square, the Torah teaches that we have more to share than we think we do. A community is not built by one generous person. It is built when each of us brings our carrot, our time, our talent, our voice, our presence.

The question of Terumah is not, "Do you have enough?" The question is, "Is your heart moved?" Because when our hearts are moved and we each bring what is ours to bring, something holy takes shape among us.

The Mishkan is what happens when each person's small offering becomes part of something larger than any one of them. It is built by neighbors. It is built by people who are willing to bring what they have and place it in the center of the camp.

The villagers needed each carrot and each handful of barley. The Israelites needed each thread and each plank of wood. And we need one another.

Because when we share together, there is enough. When we build together, holiness dwells among us. And when our hearts are moved, we discover something powerful and simple:

We need each other.