

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Terumah
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פרשת תרומה
ו' באדר תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Shmot* (Exodus) 25:1-27:19

In this *parasha*, Hashem instructs Moshe to collect gifts from Bnei Yisrael in order to build a *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) so that Hashem can dwell among the people; Hashem describes to Moshe the vessels and structures that comprise the *Mishkan*.

An oft-quoted verse appears in Chapter 25:8: “וַעֲשׂוּ לִי, מִקְדָּשׁ; וְשִׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם – They will make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in [among] them.” One would expect the grammar in this verse to be “...and I will dwell in *it*,” since the immediate antecedent noun is “מִקְדָּשׁ – sanctuary.” So why does the clause say “I will dwell among *them*” instead? This surprising phrasing addresses a theological issue and teaches a number of important lessons.

The theological question is this: if God is infinite, how can God's presence be contained within the finite walls of the sanctuary? This verse tells us that although the Divine Presence may be more concentrated, if you will, within the walls of the sanctuary, it is not confined there. The presence of God dwells not in the sanctuary, but among the people of Israel – in “them,” not in “it.” The human spirit is infinite, so the “אֵין סוּף – *Ein-Sof*,” the “Infinite Presence” of mystical thought, is surely able dwell among the Jewish people.

The verse also teaches an important lesson which can be summed up by the aphorism, “God dwells wherever the Divine Presence is allowed in.” There is something to be said for prayer in a dedicated area such as a synagogue. But it is important to remember that a house of worship is created by people, not determined by four walls and opulent appointments. I remember many years ago, I was traveling with friends in New Zealand. We were in the middle of nowhere, and it was time for *Mincha* [the afternoon prayer] as the sun was setting. We pulled

off the road, and there, at the ends of the earth, with no other people in sight, and probably no synagogue for miles around, we created our own *Mikdash Ma'at* – small sanctuary. It was probably one of the most meaningful prayers of my life.

In addition, the verse quoted above uses the term וְשָׁכַנְתִּי – *v'shachanti* to mean “dwell,” despite the fact that there are any number of other terms in Hebrew which could have been used (לשבת, לגור, לדור, וכו'). *V'shachanti* specifically is used to indicate that the aspect of Hashem which will dwell in the מִשְׁכָּן – *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle) and among the people of Israel is the שְׁכִינָה – *Shechina*, the mystically feminine aspect. All three words use the same three-letter root: ש כ נ – *shin, kaf, nun*. It is the *Shechina*, that facet of the Divine, which watches over us and guards us day by day, moment by moment.

May we all continue to do our part in allowing Hashem in all of the Divine Glory to “dwell among the [Jewish people].”

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If you were building a synagogue, what would it look like? What would you want to make sure to include? Why?
- What does it mean that “God dwells among the Jewish people”?