

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashat Terumah  
February 17, 2018

פרשת תרומה  
ב' באדר תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (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*.

The *parasha* begins with a description of all of the ornate trappings of the *Mishkan*. Here is a short sample (25:3-7):

וְזֹאת, הַתְּרוּמָה, אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ, מֵאֲתָם: זָהָב וְכֶסֶף, וּנְחֹשֶׁת. וּתְכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן  
וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי, וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים, וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים.  
שָׁמוֹן, לְמָאֵר; בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמוֹן הַמְּשָׁחָה, וְלְקַטְרֵת הַסַּמִּים. אַבְנֵי-שֹׁהַם, וְאַבְנֵי  
מְלֵאִים, לְאַפֵּד, וְלַחֲשׂוֹן.

And this is the offering which you shall take of them: gold, and silver, and brass; and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair; and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins, and acacia-wood; oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the *ephod*, and for the breastplate.

Does God really need all of this opulence? Do the Jews? Could there not be better uses for the money other than acquiring all of these expensive items?

Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century Spain-Egypt) is probably considered the ultimate logician and rationalist in Jewish thought. Yet, surprisingly, in his tome *Guide to the Perplexed*, he devotes a hefty section to how the environment surrounding us affects us. According to Maimonides, God created a physical world to meet the needs of the physical human. The physical human is inextricably linked with the spiritual human. Therefore, the surroundings in which we find ourselves affect not only our physical beings but our spiritual beings.

This notion is reflected in *halacha*, Jewish law. The *Shulchan Aruch*, code of Jewish law (16<sup>th</sup> century) prohibits prayer from taking place in a room containing garbage, refuse, or excrement. Such physical surroundings prevent the soul from creating a pure prayer experience. This law may explain why many contemporary synagogues are furnished and appointed so beautifully: to make the prayer experience more complete and meaningful.

These sources lead to one possible answer for the questions above. God did not need the opulence of the *Mishkan*. The Jews are the ones who needed it, especially at this stage in their history, when they were used to slovenly and slave-like surroundings. A place of such magnificence devoted to worship would promote the proper environment for their souls to connect completely and absolutely to God.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What does your synagogue look like? Do its surroundings help or hinder prayer?
- If you were to design a place of prayer, what would it look like? Why?
- What things other than our surroundings might affect how we feel?