

## Terumah “Offering”



וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם: כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵרְאֶה אֹתְךָ אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת כָּל־כֵּלָיו וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ

*Exodus 25:8-9 Make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. Precisely as I show you, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the furnishings inside, so shall you make it.*

In G-d’s interaction with Moses on the mountain, G-d charged the people with a tremendous task - the construction of a central place in which the Divine could reside amongst and within them. The gifts required were material; the substance to build a sanctuary according to the exact pattern outlined by G-d. Eventually, that sacred space would be housed inside the Holy Temple. That holy sanctuary, along with the Temple itself, was destroyed in 70 AD and has never been rebuilt. What then became of this sacred place, in which G-d could dwell with the people, after the destruction of the Holy Temple?

Rashi, renowned 11th century French commentator of the Bible and talmud, pointed out that the command: “as I show you” (9a) addresses the contemporary biblical generation, while the command “so shall you make it” (9b) extends the obligation to all future generations. Like our biblical forebears, Rashi says, we, too, shoulder the obligation to construct a space wherein G-d can dwell and sacred community can gather. The

directions set forth by G-d for the biblical mikdash (sanctuary) were precise. Every detail had to follow G-d's exact blueprint.

The Bible informs us that the locus of G-d's presence was to be in the Israel, the Holy Land - a place where the Jewish people could become a nation. After expulsion and centuries in disparate lands, Jewish people began to return and rebuild this holy place. However, while the instructions for nation building were clear in the Bible, the blueprints for how contemporary Israel would be rebuilt had to emerge out of the early Zionists leaders and the dreams of Jewish Nationalists.

There were no explicit instructions for building the State of Israel, the first and only modern Jewish nation. Many individuals had a hand in laying the foundations, yet Israel has always been a "work in progress." The mikdash served a religious function, allowing G-d's presence to radiate out to the people and giving them a holy place to gather. The State of Israel functions as a nation in which Jews can gather, once again an independent people in their own nation, but Israelis must forge a new path, informed by history and personal ideology.

The foundations proposed at the First Zionist Congress in Basel by early Zionists, under Herzl's leadership, outlined specific details for both the spirit and the body of the proposed state: 1. The promotion of the settlement of Jewish agriculturists, artisans, and tradesmen in Palestine. 2. The federation of all Jews into local or general groups, according to the laws of the various countries. 3. The strengthening of Jewish feeling and consciousness. 4. Preparatory steps for the attainment of those governmental grants which are necessary to the achievement of the Zionist purpose.

G-d gave the Israelite people specifics about the construction of a sacred space in Israel where the people could enter the presence of the Divine. Modern Israel had no template, rather the pioneers looked to Zionist ideologies and Jewish history for guidance. As Israel continues to rebuild and build anew, the blueprint of this modern State, so deeply connected with ancient biblical traditions, will continue to emerge—a growing and evolving Jewish space.

### **Discussion Questions:**

How do we share the story of the State of Israel as both a realization of our Biblical aspirations and a place where Jews can determine their own future?

Compare and contrast the construction of the mikdash and the initial building of the State of Israel. How do the instructions, outlined at the First Zionist Congress, compare to the proposal for the mikdash in Terumah?

### **Additional References:**

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea, A Historical Analysis and Reader*, JPS 1997