

Terumah March 4, 2017

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם: כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מֵרְאָה אוֹתְךָ אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת כָּל-פְּלִי 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 this week's portion, the Torah records G-d interacting with Moses on the mountain. Through Moses, G-d charges 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 are material; the substance to build a sanctuary according to the exact pattern outlined by G-d. Eventually, that sacred space will be housed inside the Holy Temple. That holy sanctuary, along with the Temple itself, is destroyed in 70 AD and never rebuilt. What then becomes of this sacred place, in which G-d could dwell with the people?

Rashi, renowned 11th century French commentator of the Bible and Talmud, points 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) are precise. Every detail has to follow G-d's exact blueprint. The Bible informs us that the locus of G-d's presence is to be in the Israel, the Holy Land - a place where the Jewish people become a nation.

After expulsion and living for centuries in disparate lands, Jewish people begin to return and rebuild. However, while the instructions for nation-building were clear in the Bible, the blueprints for how contemporary Israel would be rebuilt had to come from the imagination and ingenuity of early Zionist leaders and Jewish Nationalist dreamers. With no explicit instructions for building the State of Israel, individuals had a hand in laying the foundations and to this day Israel continues to be a "work in progress." The *mikdash* served a religious function, allowing G-d's presence to radiate out to the people and give them a holy place to gather. The State of Israel functions as a country in which Jews can gather, once again an independent people in their own state. But Israelis and Jews in the diaspora must forge a new path, informed by history and a more contemporary ideology.

The foundations proposed by early Zionists at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, under Theodore 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.

In this week's portion, G-d gives the Israelite people specifics about the construction of a sacred space in Israel where the people can enter and behold the presence of the Divine. Modern Israel has no temple, 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:

Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006.