

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #51—Parshat Terumah 5762

"God said to Moshe, tell the Jews to take for Me a *TeROoMaH*, a contribution...gold, silver, copper, [three types of] wool, linen, animal skins...acacia wood...[olive] oil...spices..." (*Exodus* 25:1-6).

TeROoMaH contains the letters TORaH which was given in *Mem* (40) days (*Likutey Halakhot, Terumot u'Maasrot* 3:7). Rebbe Nachman teaches that the average person blows "hot and cold." One sometimes burns with a deep yearning for God sometimes burns with material desires. Other times one might do both: yearn for both God and the ungodly.

The most effective tool for ensuring a balanced way of life is Torah study. Torah study "cools off" one's excess burning for God so that his deeds are in sync with his abilities to ascend the spiritual ladder. In addition, Torah study "cools off" one's burning desire for material pleasures (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #78). Reb Noson teaches that giving charity has the same "cooling" and balancing effects. Thus we see that *teroomah* implies both charity and Torah study (*ibid.*).

What were the Jews to build from their contribution? The *Mishkan*, the Sanctuary, wherein "dwelt the Shekhinah," the Divine Presence of God. The Shekhinah would be manifest for all to see. This is why it is called *MiShKaN*, from the word *ShaKheN*, "dwell." Scripture thus states, "They shall make for Me a *Mikdash* (holy place), *v'ShaKhaNti*, and I will dwell, amongst them."

Although the verse is speaking about building the Sanctuary, it is also referring to the building of the ultimate sanctuary of holiness, the Holy Temple, which stood on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The objects made for the Holy Temple — the Ark, Table, Menorah, Altar, etc. — were to be the same form and format as those in the *Mishkan*. The existence of these objects is permanent, as our Sages teach, "acacia wood that stands" (*Exodus* 26:15). "It **stands** forever" (*Yoma* 72a). As the ARI explains, anything ever connected to the realm of holiness will always remain.

What is the contribution? What is the power of the charity one gives that it enables him to build a sanctuary of holiness? Our Sages compare charity to fasting (*Berakhot* 6b). In an empirical sense, a sacrifice in the Sanctuary was performed by placing the animal's fats upon the Altar to be consumed by the heavenly, spiritual fire which burned upon the Altar. When we fast, we "burn up" our physical fats. By not adding calories to our bodies, we automatically diminish our body fat; thus fasting is akin to a sacrifice. (This, of course, is when one fasts for spiritual reasons. If one is fasting just to lose weight, then not only does one upset one's physical well-being, one can actually cause serious harm to the body.)

Our Sages are teaching that when one gives charity, the act of taking from one's material possessions and transferring them to another is akin to "cutting off" excess materialism. Therefore, giving charity is akin to fasting. So the first thing this week's parshah is teaching us: If we want to build a sanctuary of holiness, we must learn to give of ourselves. We must give charity if we don't already give; we must increase our contributions if we do.

What is Torah? Why does it have the power to diminish one's burning desires both for excess, in both the spiritual and material realms? The following is from one of Rebbe Nachman's lessons.

Every single Jew possesses the quality called "the Radiant Countenance" associated with knowledge and comprehension of the Holy Torah in its capacity as an "elixir of life." (See *Yoma* 72b. The Torah's power can be unleashed as an elixir of life, or, if one is unworthy, a potion of death.) This quality constitutes the holiness of the Jewish People who, at their root, are far-removed from all the negative behavioral traits and all physical lusts and cravings. Every Jew also contains within him the quality of the seventy nations, which is associated with the Torah in its capacity as "a deadly poison" and "the Dark Countenance," which is identified with darkness and the concealment of knowledge.

When a person continues to struggle in Torah study for the sake of Heaven, rather than for some ulterior motive, until he merits to grasp and understand the wisdom of the Holy Torah, he moves from the Dark Countenance to the Radiant Countenance. In turn, his enslavement to the physical desires and evil traits of the seventy nations, which correspond to the Dark Countenance, is nullified. Then, and only then, does one merit being called "Adam," a person, as in, "This is the Torah, Adam..." (*Numbers* 19:14). Furthermore, our Sages taught, "You are called 'Adam,' but the nations are not" (*Yevamot* 61a). For the main way that a person merits to be called Adam is through the Holy Torah. This is because the Torah is identified with the Radiant Countenance and with breaking and being removed from all physical desires and negative behavioral traits. Through Torah a person merits having his yoke of enslavement to the nations removed, even on the physical plane; as our Sages, of blessed memory, teach (*Avot* 3:7), "Whoever accepts the yoke of Torah upon himself has the yoke of the nations lifted from him" (*Kitzur Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #101).

Thus the Torah's power, when related to properly, is one of life-giving proportions! Its radiance can overpower any darkness, its force can propel the person to the greatest heights. In his lesson, Rebbe Nachman speaks about attaining Chakhmah (Wisdom) and Binah (Understanding), which Kabbalistically correspond to some of the greatest levels an Adam can ever hope to attain. These levels themselves parallel the first two letters of God's Holy Name YHVH, the Tetragrammaton. When we strive to attain proper knowledge of Torah, and we desire to use that knowledge properly, for example, to teach others; and we do not use the Torah for personal gain, then the radiance of Torah will shine through. Not only will it illumine our lives, but that same light will break through the darkness and remove the yoke of the nations.

The Mishnah (*Keilim*, Chapter 1), lists ten levels of holiness related to the Holy Land. Some apply to the Land as a whole, others to the city of Jerusalem, but most apply to the Holy Temple itself. Reb Noson often points out that the goal of entering the Holy Land was the building of the Temple. When the Temple was whole — with all its accoutrements — the Divine Presence, the Spiritual, was revealed for all of mankind to see. Even on a simple level, we can understand the need for "levels" of holiness, for one cannot enter all the gateways and passages of spirituality at once. One must strive for it, must yearn for it, must work his way into the Inner Courtyard, before he can truly experience a spiritual way of life. (See "The Inner Temple," by Yehoshua Starrett [Breslov Research Institute, 2001] for an explanation of how the Temple reflects the spiritual pathways of man). Thus, entering the Holy Land was the means for of entering a spiritual lifestyle. The Temple is the culmination of such a lifestyle.

Today, we face obstacles to entering the Land, and ever more to building a physical Temple. In fact, those who, for the moment, have possession of the Temple Mount, are actually engaged in destroying the

Mount and any evidence of the Temple which stood there. Despite their claim of religious motives (used solely for the sake of imposing their rule upon others), their true intentions are to eradicate any presence of Jewish presence on the Temple Mount. Should we worry? Not really. These intentions are not new; they've been with the Countenances of Darkness since the Temple's destruction. We're still here, as a proud nation, still serving God as best as we can. Nevertheless, is there any way we can counter their evil intentions?

Just look from what the Sanctuary was built. It was built with contributions of the people, people who were willing to sacrifice of their material lives in order to make their spiritual connection to God. The materials used were wool, wood, oils, spices, animal skins, etc. All four levels of existence — mineral, vegetable, animal and human — were used in the building of the Mishkan. We are given the ability to elevate ALL of creation to a higher plane because we want to serve God. We do not have to live ascetic lives, for example, by fasting for a whole month. Through the Torah, we can understand that God exists in all of creation. With the Torah, we can partake of all parts of creation and elevate physical things by incorporating them into a Sanctuary. We can build with everything that is found at our fingertips — literally. All we have to do is to be willing to contribute a bit of ourselves to God, for His sake, not for personal gain. All we have to do is to study His Torah, to look deeply into His creation and understand that He is there.

"Bring them and plant them in the Mount that You possess; the Place that You dwell in, the Temple that Your Hands, O God, have founded" (*Exodus* 15:17). Rashi explains that God Himself will build the Third Temple, when His reign is accepted upon this earth. It is our good deeds which are the "mortar and bricks" that God is using to build His Temple. OUR GOOD DEEDS. Yes, we are that important. These deeds are our contributions. We must continue to contribute more. For then, when God is manifest through OUR deeds, the Sanctuary we have built, God's Temple, will appear upon the Temple mount. The yokels of the wakf will be relegated to the dustbins of history, while at the same time the yoke of the nations will be removed from us, forever. And the People of Israel, like the Holy Land and like the Sanctuary, will stand forever.

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