

Bringing meaning to life

Parasha with Rabbi Benji Levy

SHEMOT

VAYERA

BO

BESHALACH

YITRO

MISHPATIM

TERUMA

TETZAVEH

KI TISA

VAYAKHEL

PEKUDEI

19 TERUMA INSIDE OUT

God commands the Jewish people to establish a dwelling place for him, ‘make for me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell within them.’¹ The use of the word ‘them’ seems strange. Surely, having begun by specifically referring to the Sanctuary, the Torah should read ‘so that I may dwell within it’ i.e. within the sanctuary, as opposed to dwelling ‘within them’ to be grammatically sound? Why the use of a plural term, when the sentence begins in singular form?

The Torah does not use a singular term since God is not referring to dwelling in one specifically constructed physical location. Rather, according to the *Or HaChayim*, God is implying ‘among the Jewish people.’² God, is commanding the Jewish people to create a space among the people, between and within their camps, in which He can dwell. As such, the commandment to build a sanctuary is more about God’s desire to be close to His nation wherever they sojourn, than

about constructing a physical place for Him to dwell.

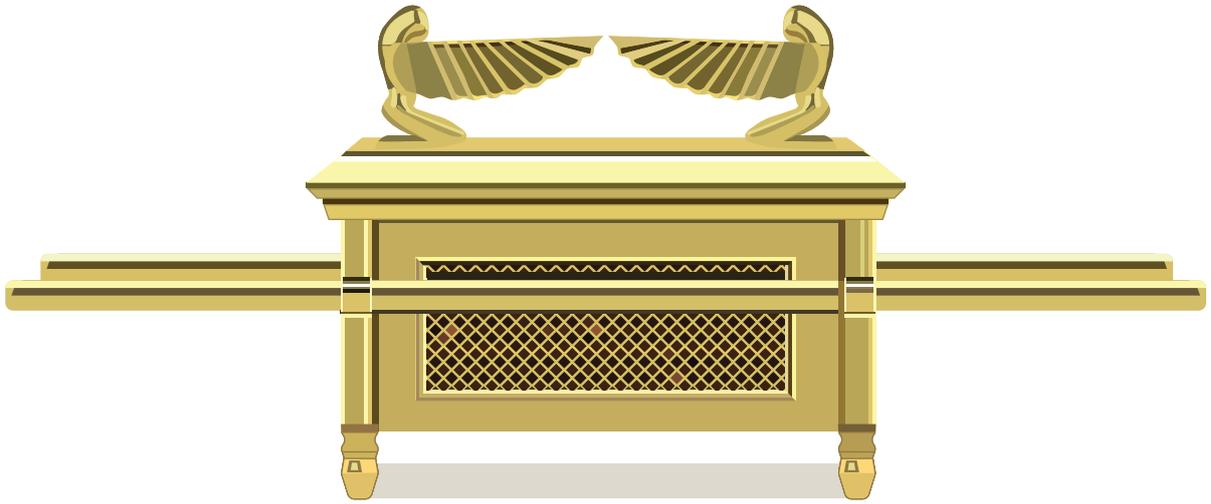
The Kotzker Rebbe has a somewhat different interpretation of this command. When asked where it is that God dwells, the Kotzker Rebbe answers, wherever we let God in.

It is up to each of us to make space for God in our lives, in our homes and in our hearts.

If we can create the space and opportunity for God to enter, enter he shall. Thus, according to the Kotzker Rebbe, the purpose behind the plural language in the commandment: is to teach us that each member of the Jewish people is obligated to build a personal sanctuary in their heart and so that God will dwell within them.³

These interpretations of God’s command to us to create a sanctuary for Him, leave us with the question of how. In what way should we be creating such an internal sanctuary? Some remarkable nuances in the construction of the ark which contains the Ten Commandments, the moral code of the Jewish people, serve as a blueprint for how we should construct this personal sanctuary for God within each of us.

When talking about the Ark, the Torah says, ‘you shall cover it with pure gold, from the inside and from the outside you shall cover it.’⁴ This description begs a few questions. First of all, why does the Torah initially refer to the inside and only afterwards to the outside? Secondly, why does the inside of the ark need to be covered with gold at all? Surely we only see the outside and thus only the outside needs to be decorated.



The Talmud expounds on this verse, ‘any student of wisdom⁵ whose interior does not match his exterior is not a student of wisdom.’ Thus, he explains that the gold is required both on the inside and outside because it is imperative that both are congruent.

Just as the ark, which symbolizes Torah knowledge, has gold on both the inside and the outside, so too a Torah scholar should not just speak wisdom on the outside, but rather internalize it on the inside.

The Torah says ‘from the inside and from the outside’, in that order because we must start from the inside. We must start by first perfecting ourselves internally and only then, match our internal reality with external messages, The Torah specifies ‘pure gold’ because the values that we build on the inside and reflect on the outside should be sincere, pure ones.

By identifying these pure values, building them within and letting them radiate out, ultimately we are able to transform ourselves into a fitting sanctuary where God can comfortably dwell within us as individuals and a collective.

Notes

¹ Exodus 25:8.

² Or HaChayim 25:8

³ Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, *Itturei Torah*.

⁴ Exodus 25:11.

⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Yoma* 72b.

Parasha Fact:

The construction of the tabernacle was designed by talented artisans. Judaism doesn’t suppress creativity or artistic expression, but asks that like everything else, it be directed towards holy purposes.

Next week in Tetzaveh:

In a stark contrast to what one would normally expect, the Torah goes into immense detail when describing the clothing of the high priest. Does every thread, bell and colour really matter that much? And does that not go completely against the grain of the famous teaching not to look at the container, but rather what it contains? Woven throughout the threads of the priestly garments are underlying messages for us that hint to the priorities we should be setting within our relationships.