



Parshat Teruma – Feb. 17, 2024

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Shabbat Shalom!

This week's parsha, Teruma, is simple at face value. It describes the gifts and offerings that the Israelites bring to build the Mishkan in great detail. We read of gold and dolphin skin, but there is not much storyline or dialogue. I am most interested in the beginning, though; God commands Moshe and the Israelites to bring a Teruma, often translated as a sacrifice, to construct the Mishkan. God specifies that the sacrifices have a greater purpose than just creating the physical Mishkan. Chapter 25 verse 6 reads, "וַיִּעַשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁבְתִּי בְתוֹכָם". Meaning, "Make me a Mikdash so that I [God] may dwell among you [the Israelites]". So, the Teruma will build the Mishkan, but it will also build the relationship which will allow God to dwell among Israel. In this Drash, I will talk about the meaning and translations of Teruma and the relationship between the building of the Mishkan and prayer and Shabbat.

First, I want to think about the meaning of the word Teruma. Today's Parsha uses Teruma to mean a gift or offering. The most common translation, though, is a sacrifice, specifically the ashes of a burnt offering at the Temple. Translating Teruma as sacrifice highlights the link between the Parsha and prayer. The word Teruma bridges between sacrifices of the Temple and gifts to God, which we can offer in the form of prayer.

In the Masechet Brachot, on Daf 26:b, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi argues the same belief more explicitly. He asserts, "תְּפִלוֹת כְּנֶגֶד תְּמִידִין וְתִקְוָה", that sacrifices determined the practice of prayer. His proof connects back to the Mishnah at the beginning of Brachot, where sacrifice times specify the timing of Shema. Rabbi Yehoshua expands on the idea, though. He claims that all prayer timings align with sacrifice timings of the past, revealing that prayers find their basis in sacrifices,

coupling the two ideas. So Teruma, commonly translated as sacrifice, may also suggest prayer.

Sacrifices and prayer are united, but in the case of our Parsha, there is a further connection. In the Parsha, God does not ask Israel for animal sacrifices. He asks for sacrificial gifts to build the Mishkan. The way in which Israel builds the Mishkan is a basis for the 39 Melachot, the 39 categories of actions that the Rabbis forbid on Shabbat. The construction of the Mishkan determines the 39 categories of Melacha, all work that is forbidden on Shabbat. So when God orders Israel to build a Mishkan, He is cementing the future practices of Shabbat. Why is God establishing the norms of Shabbat in such an odd, and seemingly unrelated, way? Does God know that the Rabbis will interpret his commandments as the 39 Melachot? (Is God all-knowing?)

Answers to these questions come in Sefer Kodshin, the Sefer of the Mishnah that focuses on sacrifices. Daf 29:b in Masechet Menachot, from that Sefer, tells an Agadah about Moses receiving the Torah. The story goes that when Moses gets the Torah, he looks at the crowns on certain letters. He is confused, and questions God, "Why are they here?" God responds by saying, "עקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתיד" "לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות". Rabbi Akiva will find mounds and mounds of Halakha from these crowns. God explains that while elements of the Torah may seem random at times, they carry significance to be later interpreted by the Rabbis. (The Agadah continues, but for my purposes, the ending is not important.)

I want to concentrate on God expressing that Rabbi Akivah will extrapolate Halacha from the crowns of the Torah. God's explanation reveals that the Torah is a blank canvas requiring interpretation. God wrote the Torah with a hidden meaning waiting to be discovered, in both the crowns and in the 39 Melachot of Parshat Teruma. Therefore our community's job, as Jews and scholars of the Torah, is to tell our opinions to uncover truths in the Torah.

Given this goal of discovering hidden meanings of the Torah, I will again look at the sacrifices in Parshat Teruma. God asks for sacrifices to build the Mishkan, so that God may make a Mikdash and dwell among the people. The word מִקְדָּשׁ is usually translated as a sanctuary. But, its root קִדְּשׁ, simply means holy. So, rather than calling the Mikdash a sanctuary, I propose the name "holiness", meaning a holy area in space and time.

As we established earlier, God is asking for a sacrificial prayer, so that He may create a "holiness" where He may dwell among the people. That sounds like Shabbat to me. God established a holy day, and each week He comes down to dwell among us. In return, we offer Him a sacrificial prayer.

I believe that Parshat Teruma is not just a story about the construction of the Mishkan. It is also a metaphor for how we should celebrate Shabbat. Through our prayer, we should bring gold, silver, and copper, just as in the Parsha. We should pray as the Cohanim offered their Teruma sacrifices during the time of the Temple--with care and love. If we follow these guidelines for Shabbat prayer, which God set out in the Parsha, then God will keep his promise. God will come down and dwell among us, creating the sense of Shabbes Kodesh we feel so often. Shabbat Shalom!