



Carnegie Shul Chatter

February 3, 2022



Shabbat Shalom

Light candles 5:24pm

Shabbat Services 10:00am

Zoom in for Services

Shabbat services will be held by Zoom through February, beginning at 10am and lasting 60-90 minutes. A link is sent to all Shul members; if you don't receive it, contact Wendy Panizzi at panizziw@gmail.com.

Terumah in a Nutshell

Exodus 25:1–27:19

From Chabad.org

The people of Israel are called upon to contribute thirteen materials—gold, silver and copper; blue-, purple- and red-dyed wool; flax, goat hair, animal skins, wood, olive oil, spices and gems—out of which, G-d says to Moses, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell amidst them.”

Outlandish!

I remember when all that Whoopi Goldberg was to me was a funny comedienne who I first saw on Saturday Night Live. Then I remembered Whoopi as a fine actress who starred in the movie, “Ghost.” After that I thought of Whoopi as a controversial, left-leaning Co-host on ABC’s morning show, “The View.” But this week, I discovered that Whoopi was also one who believed that the Holocaust was not a racist attack on Jews. Really, Whoopi?

It all started on Monday morning’s episode of “The View,” during a discussion of a Tennessee school board’s banning of the Holocaust book, *Maus* (and that is a story of its own that I will leave for another commentary), when Whoopi shared her belief that the Holocaust “isn’t about race.”

“Well, this is White people doing it to White people, so y’all gonna fight amongst yourselves,” Goldberg said, referring to the Holocaust. Then she said, “The Holocaust isn’t about race.” And, in answer to another Co-host, “If

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On the summit of Mount Sinai, Moses is given detailed instructions on how to construct this dwelling for G-d so that it could be readily dismantled,

transported and reassembled as the people journeyed in the desert.

In the Sanctuary's inner chamber, behind an artistically woven curtain, was the ark containing the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; on the ark's cover stood two winged cherubim hammered out of pure gold. In the outer chamber stood the seven-branched menorah, and the table upon which the "showbread" was arranged.

The Sanctuary's three walls were fitted together from 48 upright wooden boards, each of which was overlaid with gold and held up by a pair of silver foundation sockets. The roof was formed of three layers of coverings: (a) tapestries of multicolored wool and linen; (b) a covering made of goat hair; (c) a covering of ram and tachash skins. Across the front of the Sanctuary was an embroidered screen held up by five posts.

Surrounding the Sanctuary and the copper-plated altar which fronted it was an enclosure of linen hangings, supported by 60 wooden posts with silver hooks and trimmings, and reinforced by copper stakes.

Sacks on Terumah

After all of the exciting parshahs at the beginning of Exodus, parshahs that include the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of the Ten Commandments, and so much more, I often get to this week's parshah, parshah Terumah, and think, *Wow, this one's not very exciting. Boring instructions on how to build the Tabernacle.* And then I read Rabbi Jonathon Sacks's commentary on the parshah, talking about The Gift of Giving, and I found that there was much more to the parshah than I originally realized. I hope you find Rabbi Sacks's commentary to be inspiring, too.

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you're going to do this, then let's be truthful about it because the Holocaust isn't about race." She said, rather, that it was about "man's inhumanity to man" and it involved "two White groups of people."

After her statement was met by numerous protests, Goldberg retreated and, later in the day, issued a statement on Twitter: "On today's show, I said the Holocaust is not about race but about man's inhumanity to man. I should have said it is about both.

"As Jonathan Greenblatt of the Anti-Defamation League shared, 'The Holocaust was about the Nazi's systematic annihilation of the Jewish people — who they deemed to be an inferior race.' I stand corrected."

She added: "The Jewish people around the world have always had my support and that will never waiver. I'm sorry for the hurt I have caused."

Well, Whoopi, I for one do not accept your apology. And apparently ABC didn't think it was adequate either because on Tuesday evening, Whoopi was suspended for two weeks for her remarks.

Thanks, ABC, but two weeks wasn't enough. She should have been fired.



Covenant & Conversation

The Gift of Giving



It was the first Israelite house of worship, the first home Jews made for God. But the very idea is fraught with paradox, even contradiction. How can you build a house for God? He is bigger than anything we can imagine, let alone build.

King Solomon made this point when he inaugurated another house of God, the First Temple: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much

less this house I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27). So did Isaiah in the name of God himself:

“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What house can you build for me? Where will my resting place be?” Is. 66:1

Not only does it seem impossible to build a home for God. It should be unnecessary. The God of everywhere can be accessed anywhere, as readily in the deepest pit as on the highest mountain, in a city slum as in a palace lined with marble and gold.

The answer, and it is fundamental, is that God does not live in buildings. He lives in builders. He lives not in structures of stone but in the human heart. What the Jewish Sages and mystics pointed out was that in our parsha God says, “Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell in them” (Ex. 25:8), not “that I may dwell in it.”

Why then did God command the people to make a sanctuary at all? The answer given by most commentators, and hinted at by the Torah itself, is that God gave the command specifically after the sin of the golden calf.

The people made the calf after Moses had been on the mountain for forty days to receive the Torah. So long as Moses was in their midst, the people knew that he communicated with God, and God with him, and therefore God was accessible, close. But when he was absent for nearly six weeks, they panicked. Who else could bridge the gap between the people and God? How could they hear God’s instructions? Through what intermediary could they make contact with the Divine Presence?

That is why God said to Moses, “Let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” The key word here is the verb *sh-kh-n*, to dwell. Never before had it been used in connection with God. It eventually became a keyword of Judaism itself. From it came the word *Mishkan* meaning a sanctuary, and *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence.

Central to its meaning is the idea of closeness. *Shakhen* in Hebrew means a neighbour, the



person who lives next door. What the Israelites needed and what God gave them was a way of feeling as close to God as to our next-door neighbour.

That is what the patriarchs and matriarchs had. God spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah intimately, like a friend. He told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child. He explained to Rebecca why she was suffering such acute pain in pregnancy. He appeared to Jacob at key moments in his life telling him not to be afraid.

That is not what the Israelites had experienced until now. They had seen God bringing plagues on the Egyptians. They had seen Him divide the sea. They had seen Him send manna from heaven and water from a rock. They had heard His commanding voice at Mount Sinai and found it almost unbearable. They said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” God had appeared to them as an overwhelming presence, an irresistible force, a light so bright that to look at it makes you blind, a voice so strong it makes you go deaf.

So for God to be accessible, not just to the pioneers of faith – the patriarchs and matriarchs – but to every member of a large nation, was a challenge, as it were, for God Himself. He had to do what the Jewish mystics called *tzimtzum*, “contract” Himself, screen His light, soften His voice, hide His glory within a thick cloud, and allow the infinite to take on the dimensions of the finite.

But that, as it were, was the easy part. The difficult part had nothing to do with God and everything to do with us. How do we come to sense the presence of God? It isn’t difficult to do so standing at the foot of Mount Everest or seeing the Grand Canyon. You do not have to be very religious or even religious at all, to feel awe in the presence of the sublime. The psychologist Abraham Maslow, whom we encountered a few weeks ago in these pages, spoke about “peak experiences”, and saw them as the essence of the spiritual encounter.

But how do you feel the presence of God in the midst of everyday life? Not from the top of Mount Sinai but from the plain beneath? Not when it is surrounded by thunder and lightning as it was at the great revelation, but when it is just a day among days?

That is the life-transforming secret of the name of the parsha, Terumah. It means “a contribution”. God said to Moses: “Tell the Israelites to take for me a contribution. You are to receive the contribution for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give” (25:2). The best way of encountering God is to give.

The very act of giving flows from, or leads to, the understanding that what we give is part of what we were given. It is a way of giving thanks, an act of gratitude. That is the difference in the human mind between the presence of God and the absence of God.

If God is present, it means that what we have is His. He created the universe. He made us. He

gave us life. He breathed into us the very air we breathe. All around us is the majesty, the plenitude, of God's generosity: the light of the sun, the gold of the stone, the green of the leaves, the song of the birds. This is what we feel reading the great creation psalms we read every day in the morning service. The world is God's art gallery and His masterpieces are everywhere.

When life is a given, you acknowledge this by giving back.

But if life is not a given because there is no Giver, if the universe came into existence only because of a random fluctuation in the quantum field, if there is nothing in the universe that knows we exist, if there is nothing to the human body but a string of letters in the genetic code and to the human mind but electrical impulses in the brain, if our moral convictions are self-serving means of self-preservation and our spiritual aspirations mere delusions, then it is difficult to feel gratitude for the gift of life. There is no gift if there is no giver. There is only a series of meaningless accidents, and it is difficult to feel gratitude for an accident.



The Torah therefore tells us something simple and practical. Give, and you will come to see life as a gift. You don't need to be able to prove God exists. All you need is to be thankful that you exist – and the rest will follow.

That is how God came to be close to the Israelites through the building of the sanctuary. It wasn't the quality of the wood and metals and drapes. It wasn't the glitter of jewels on the breastplate of the High Priest. It wasn't the beauty of the architecture or the smell of the sacrifices. It was the fact that it was built out of the gifts of "everyone whose heart prompts them to give" (Ex. 25:2). Where people give voluntarily to one another and to holy causes, that is where the Divine Presence rests.

Hence the special word that gives its name to this week's parsha: Terumah. I've translated it as "a contribution" but it actually has a subtly different meaning for which there is no simple English equivalent. It means "something you lift up" by dedicating it to a sacred cause. You lift it up, then it lifts you up. The best way of scaling the spiritual heights is simply to give in gratitude for the fact that you have been given.

God doesn't live in a house of stone. He lives in the hearts of those who give.

In Need of Help?

The Jewish Assistance Fund is available to members of the Jewish community who are faced with mounting expenses that they are having trouble meeting.

The Fund's volunteers meet weekly with applicants and provide financial assistance, in the form of a check, with absolutely NO Repayment required. All requests are confidential.

During the long span of the pandemic, the Fund has modified its practices:

- ◆ People can apply for assistance every 6 months (and on a case by case basis more frequently)
- ◆ Currently meetings are over zoom
- ◆ Grant amounts have increased, in response to the increased expenses people are experiencing

Community members in need can contact the fund by calling 412.521.3237 or via email at JewishAssistanceFund.org. The Jewish Assistance Fund is a part of JFunds and information about other financial resources is available at JFundsPgh.org.

Yahrtzeits

This week the Carnegie Shul acknowledges the yahrtzeits of:

Rose Klee Karp

Ruth Ash Katzner

Herschl Shifrin

Sarah Rebecca Kalson

Dr. Jacob J. Peresman

May their memories be for a blessing.

