

T'rumah, Exodus 25:1-27:19

Terumah: A Summary of the Parsha

God instructs Moses to collect gifts from the Israelites in order to build a Tabernacle so that God can dwell among the people; God describes to Moses the vessels and structures that comprise the Tabernacle.

By Nancy Reuben Greenfield

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God has just told Moses “to come to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, to receive God’s Commandments.” Moses goes up the mountain, and a cloud comes to cover it, hiding the mountain completely. On this mountain, within the presence of the Lord, Moses remained for forty days and nights.

God first instructs Moses how to fashion a Dwelling Place, a sanctuary for God’s presence.

“In this sanctuary,” God says, “the Israelites are to bring me gifts.”

The gifts can be of any kind from any person whose heart moves them in a giving way. In this sanctuary, there shall be oil for the light and spices for the sweet incense and anointing oil.

God continues, “And let the people make Me this sanctuary so that I may dwell among them. This is the pattern of how the Tabernacle and furniture is to be made.

“The Ark must be a precise blend of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay this Tabernacle with pure gold and golden rings and poles to carry the Ark. You shall make a cover of pure gold with two gold Cherubim on both ends of the cover.

“Into the ark, you shall you put the Testimony which I, the Lord, will give you. There I will meet with you at appointed times. I will speak with you from above the Cover, from between the two cherubim on the Ark of the Testimony.

“Make a table of acacia wood for the Ark and cover it with pure gold with a gold crown all around. Then adorn it with bowls, ladles, jars and jugs made of gold. Make also a pure gold menorah with six almond-blossom type branches and seven lamps to give light.

“In the Tabernacle, enclose the Dwelling Place with ten curtains of fine twined linen of blue, purple and scarlet. Make the tabernacle with wooden planks and silver rings and stakes of copper.”

Questions for Discussion

- 1) God instructs Moses how to make a sanctuary for God’s presence. Can you describe different kinds of sanctuaries that are filled with God’s presence?
- 2) Why is God so precise on the details of constructing the sanctuary and ark and tabernacle? What difference does it make what these look like and how they are made?
- 3) Describe the most spiritual sanctuary you have visited. What made that sanctuary the most spiritual for you?
- 4) In the sanctuary, God requests gift offerings of any kind from any person whose heart moves them in a giving way. What kind of gift offerings do you bring God from your heart?

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PARASHAT TERUMAH

Rabbi Lewis Warshauer, Rabbinic Fellow

A woman of valor-who can find her? In ancient Israel, the place one could not find her was in the Temple, except in a section called the ezrat nashim - literally, women’s territory. Only men served in the Temple as priests and Levites. This was partly a consequence of monotheism. In other ancient religions, with goddesses as well as gods, women would often control the temples to goddesses.

Women did come to the Temple to offer sacrifices, but the instance in which a woman is specifically required to appear is when she’s in trouble: in the case of the Sotah. A Sotah, as described in the Book of Numbers (5:11 and following) is a woman whose husband suspects her of adultery but cannot prove it. She is required to appear at the Tabernacle (predecessor of the Temple in Jerusalem) to undergo a trial by ordeal to test her fidelity.

Although the Torah tell much of women’s presence in the Temple the Midrash does fill in. The Torah specifies that a large, copper-plated washbasin is to be built for the Tabernacle. (Exodus 30:18) According to a midrash, the copper plates were actually mirrors that had been brought by the Israelite women from Egypt and were used in the

Tabernacle in order to commemorate the valiant deeds of those women. The background, as the midrash relates, is that husbands had separated from wives as the result of Pharaoh's oppression. Their wives used these mirrors to entice their menfolk back to them to ensure their fertility and thus the continuity of the Israelite nation.

This week's parasha refers to women in an indirect but intriguing way. It contains the instructions for the setting up of the Tabernacle, which was portable, since the Israelites needed to carry it with them during their wanderings in the wilderness. The Tabernacle was contained within a tent, and the last verse of the parasha notes that all the pegs of the tent should be of copper (Exodus 27:19). Then, as now, pegs were needed to keep a tent from either blowing away or collapsing inward. A peg becomes an item of security and stability. This is the case in the metaphor used by Isaiah when speaking of the revival of Jerusalem:

When you gaze upon Zion, our city of assembly, your eyes shall Jerusalem as a secure homestead, a tent not to be transported, whose pegs shall never be pulled up (Isaiah 33:20)

Yet a peg, when pulled out of the ground, can be transformed from an innocent tool into a weapon. Last week's haftarah was the Song of Deborah, a triumphal poem celebrating the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites. Yael, the woman who kills the Canaanite general Sisera, is singled out for special praise, with due attention to the way she killed him: with a peg.

"Most blessed of women be Yael
Smost blessed of women in tents /
Her hand reached for the tent pin, her right hand
for the workmen's hammer/She struck Sisera, crushed his
head, smashed and pierced his temple" (Judges 5:24;26)

This Biblical poem makes quite clear that Yael was able to kill Sisera because she had first seduced him. Similarly, another tale in the Book of Judges tells of another seductress, Delilah, who, in one of her many attempts to rob Samson of his strength, weaves his hair into a web and pegs it to the wall (Judges 16:14).

All these examples can be seen as an explanation for why ancient Judaism did not want women too-publicly present in the Temple: they were considered too seductive. Their seductive force would have to be safely contained in the plating of the washbasin, or domesticated in de-weaponized tent-pegs - or punished in the ritual of the Sotah. Modern Judaism, too, in some of its varieties, keeps women apart from men - in a section of synagogue called *ezrat nashim*, just as in the Temple. This, too, according to many

explanations, is to prevent the men from becoming distracted.

The Temple in ancient Israel was essentially men's territory. Because it was so central to the public expression of Judaism, women's role in that public expression was, in consequence, limited. In the two thousand years since the destruction of the Temple - an era in which prayer and study replaced Temple ritual - women have also had a limited place in public Judaism. One of the features of today's Judaism that makes it very different from that of the past is that in many communities -- even some that consider themselves traditional -- women are acting and not just observing. Women are acting as leaders of prayer and study. Women are being seen as themselves, not just as mirrored reflections. Women are bringing themselves in, not just being taken in.

Shabbat shalom.

Parashat Terumah By Rabbi Steven Foster

"*V'asoo li mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham*—Let them make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them (Exodus 25:8)." In a parasha packed with details about the nuts and bolts of building the *Mishkan*, this verse stands out. But the grammar of the sentence doesn't seem quite right—shouldn't it read, "Make me a sanctuary that I might dwell in it"?

Our rabbis point out that there is nothing wrong with this verse; it is absolutely correct. Instead of trying to see God in the structure, in that holy place in which we pray, our rabbis realized that the building is simply a vehicle through which God may dwell among us.

Events during recent weeks have caused me to reflect on this verse. While we still do not know how many lives will be counted as lost because of the tsunami, the sheer number of deaths is already staggering, to say nothing of the millions of people who are sick, hungry, ill-housed and in total shock because of this natural disaster. The entire world has responded to their plight with extraordinary generosity.

For Jews, this is a natural response to a tragedy. Instead of asking the question, why, which of course has no answer, we ask how we can make a difference in the lives of those who have been so terribly affected by this natural disaster.

This response is, in turn, the natural outcome of this week's parasha. When the Torah says, "Build me a sanctuary that I might dwell among them," perhaps the Torah was thinking of just such an occurrence as this one. "Build me a

sanctuary that I might dwell among them” means to create places of worship so that we might be changed, so that we might understand our role in the world, so that we might do for others and live with a sense of *tzedakah* in our hearts.

It is specifically God's desire to dwell amongst a people who take action, as we have, in the face of human suffering and need. When we respond as so many have done—whether through our local federations, national organizations, or religious movements—we are acting in a way that was foretold in this simple verse.

We Jews are an amazing people. We have walked this earth often despised, and yet we live in such a way as to affirm that each person is created in God's image. Perhaps we have carried that with us from the earliest days in the *midbar* when God said, “Build me a sanctuary that I might dwell among them.” We have, through our deeds, done exactly that. And for that we ought to be very proud.

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WHY A MIKDASH? THEN AND NOW

Dina L. Burt

Parashat Terumah describes in great depth the building of the first Sanctuary, the Mikdash. The Mikdash is defined as a separate and sacred space that is clearly meant to foster a special relationship between God and the Israelites. God instructs Moses to have the people build a Sanctuary. Does this imply that the only place in which we can talk to God is in a Sanctuary?

It is worthwhile to stop and think for a minute about how we answer the question Where does God dwell? Can we really know? Do we dare guess? Are answers such as "Everywhere" satisfactory?

*Before the building of the first Sanctuary, people prayed wherever they felt moved to pray—on the tops of mountains, by flowing streams, in valleys. Did these people have less of a relationship with God than those who prayed in a Sanctuary? Probably not. Many scholars have addressed the question of God's dwelling. In Martin Buber's *Tales of the Chasidim*, Rabbi Mendle states that God dwells wherever we let God in. Sa'adia ben Yoseph HaGaon says there is no place that is without God. The *Mechilta* says that wherever you find a human footprint, you have found God.*

Jewish tradition teaches that God is everywhere. What then is the purpose of the Sanctuary? Perhaps, some have speculated, the Mikdash exists to fulfill a human need. It is a human need to desire a sacred space in which we could gather our thoughts and feel close to God. It is a human need to search for inspiring environments. Taking it further,

could we surmise that God sensed we would always need a reminder of the Divine Presence? Did God feel that we would need a separate and holy space in which we could return to our own hearts and to God?

Rereading the opening lines of the parashah, we see that God tells Moses to collect "gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him." (Exodus 25:1) Although some of the gifts did not come from the heart, they were accepted nonetheless. The gifts that were given from the heart, however, were more readily accepted. The first Mikdash was built by the Israelites out of love for God. Just as God had created the world out of love, our ancestors gave their hearts to God and to Jewish law.

In the space we dedicated to God, we are reminded that God is everywhere. In our Sanctuary, we decide whether we fulfill our mitzvot, our responsibilities as Jews, out of love or out of obligation. The last question, then, is, How do we put our hearts and our love into the world?

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BECOMING THE MISHKAN

Ellen Dreskin

This week's parashah tells us that all of the terumot, or contributions, that are brought to build the Mishkan must be "from every person whose heart so moves him." Other commandments are not necessarily contingent upon our willingness to comply. Then why is it that out of all of the commandments given to us in the Torah, we are told specifically that the response to the commandment to build a place for God to dwell must come from one's heart?

Each of us knows how difficult it is to pursue a challenge when our heart is simply not in it. Our thoughts wander, our feet drag, and although we may indeed achieve our goal, we derive no real satisfaction from our achievement and take little pride in the accomplishment. We have "gone through the motions," but our spirit remains unmoved by the effort. However, when our heart is truly involved in a particular endeavor—even though the challenge is daunting—the thrill of accomplishment stays with us long after the completion of the actual task. When our heart moves us to do something, very few goals are beyond our reach.

*The Kotsker Rebbe teaches, "Where can we find God? Wherever God is admitted—there God is to be found." But how do we "admit" God? To this, too, we may find the answer in our heart. The *Ve'ahavta* teaches us: "These words that I command you this day shall be upon [italics mine] your heart." Our ancestors ask the reason for the use of the word "upon." Shouldn't these words of Torah be "in" our heart and not merely laid on top of it? Martin Buber*

answers: "The verse does not say 'in thy heart.' For there are times when the heart is shut. But the words lie upon the heart, and when the heart opens in holy hours (when our hearts are moved to open and let God in), they sink deep down into it." Each of us can become today's Mishkan--a dwelling place for God. But it is up to us. When we pour out our heart into even our daily endeavors, the simplest tasks can become moments of holiness, infused with the uplifting sense of God's Presence.

Food for Thought

1. Have there been times when you were required to do things into which you could not put your heart? How do the outcomes in those cases compare with the ones that result from activities about which you were truly excited?
2. What are some of the ways in which we can open our heart to God's Presence? Describe the moments in which you feel as if God is dwelling within you.
3. Can you suggest some situations during which we could make a more concerted effort to open our heart to God and to those around us?

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Finding Freedom in Limitations

Jessica Levitt

We don't usually think of God as an interior decorator--an architect of worlds, perhaps, but not a designer of curtains. Does the Eternal really need to worry about poles and lamps and yarns and linens? Are not earth and sky and water and wind more in keeping with God's grandeur? (And how long is a cubit, anyway?) In this week's portion, *T'rumah*, we read about the creation of the sanctuary, the *Mishkan*. Willing hearts donate beautiful materials to build God's dwelling place. God asks the Israelites to bring gold, wood, jewels, fine linens, yarns, and even dolphin skins to use in its construction. (Exodus 25:3-7) God also specifies that within the *Mishkan*, the Israelites should create sacred furniture: an altar, a menorah, curtains to divide various sections, a special table, and golden angels. The question is, Why is God so concerned with the minutiae of this sacred space?

Perhaps it's not the space that concerns God but rather the purpose. The last time we heard God dictating such fastidious measurements was in Genesis 6:14, regarding the construction of Noah's ark: "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch." At that time, the creation of Noah's ark was necessary to save a remnant of humanity and begin the world anew.

This time, the creation of the *Mishkan* is not a physical salvation but a spiritual one. The world is beginning again but in a different way. The Israelites, a remnant people, are now creating a space for God in the same way that God created a space for them by redeeming them from Egypt. Freedom does not evoke chaos. In the same way, Revelation does not require a warm, fuzzy "spiritual" feeling but rather an exacting and demanding artistry.

Before his death in 1955, Albert Einstein stated, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds." It is not God who needs the structure and design but we. Through them we dimly glimpse an Eternal and Abiding Presence. In a few weeks, we'll read about the creation of the golden calf, which actually springs out of the fire of its own accord. Its creation is both random and artless. Aaron says: "I hurled it [the gold] into the fire and out came this calf!" (Exodus 32:24) Idols, both molten and psychological, are created when we leave God's directives behind and follow our own darker impulses. Like the commandments, the details of construction do not burden us. Rather, they enable us to create beautiful and inspiring works of art. Our lives themselves become works of art as we respond to God's unyielding but ever-loving demands.

How can we translate the minutiae of the *Mishkan* into our daily lives? It's clear that we are not going to build another sanctuary any time soon. Perhaps this week's portion reminds us to see God in the beauty of the *mitzvot* that command us to create beauty, for example, in the crowns we see on the letters in the Torah scroll; in the steady glow of the eternal light in a dark sanctuary; in the melodies that lift our spirits; and in the fruits that hang in a *sukkah*. How often are we blind to the small beauties of our own tradition! The architect Mies van der Rohe once said, "God is in the details." From *Parashat T'rumah*, we learn that Judaism says the same.

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HOUSING GOD

Marc J. Rosenstein

Parashat T'rumah is the first fund-raising brochure. Just when we thought that we have been liberated from building campaigns in our own synagogues, the *parashah* reminds us that Moses came down from Sinai, carrying a sheaf of blueprints for a portable sanctuary, lists of (expensive) materials, and a powerful campaign slogan: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8)

Wasn't Abraham's revolution against idolatry supposed to be the basis of a belief in a God who cannot be confined to a particular place, who cannot be described by a physical image, who resides in no star or mountain or edifice, but who is to be found wherever we seek God? Didn't we flee to the empty wilderness in order to clarify our vision of a Power who does not reside in things and to purport our belief in a God who is seen in all of creation but ultimately is not seen at all?

And now we're told to start collecting gold and silver and precious stones and fine fabrics in order to build the *Mishkan*, a dwelling, for God? Will God dwell among us in a tent?

The Rambam (Maimonides) argues that the *Mishkan* and its sacrifices (as well as the Temple in Jerusalem, its successor after we had settled in Israel) were necessary stages in the spiritual maturation of the Jewish people. At first, we could not tolerate what was too different from what we knew as religion: That is, if all the other gods were worshiped with sacrifices in fine temples, then until we were fully educated about the uniqueness of our God, we, too, had to be permitted to have a similar set of rituals. Suggesting that Judaism had developed historically from a more "primitive" religion to a more "advanced" one is a radical view for a rabbi living in the twelfth century.

The question is, Has anything really changed? Granted, sacrifice has been replaced by prayer, and a central shrine has been supplanted (at least temporarily) by thousands of synagogues throughout the world. But the key, problematic idea remains the same: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." The tension between the God who is everywhere and unseen and the God who dwells in the sanctuaries we build is still a part of our consciousness.

We spurn any form of idolatry, and we reject the deification of leaders, objects, and places. However, we are concrete creatures living in a concrete world. We may believe that the Divine Presence is everywhere, but we'd still like to know where God lives, and we'd like to be able to visit God there. And so we contribute gold and silver, fine fabrics and leathers, and wood and stone to build sanctuaries. We sacrifice time and energy and possessions in order to make them beautiful. And yet, many of us also harbor suspicions that these sanctuaries are actually only monuments to our own success, fictions that make us feel good. After all, does God really need a house?

We are caught in our relationship to our synagogues--just as we were in our connection to the Temple before its destruction--between two understandings of God's covenant with Israel. One is unconditional: As long as there is an appropriate edifice in the neighborhood, God will dwell among us. The building and its rituals are sacred. By contributing to the building and the maintenance of the edifice and its service, we are insuring God's presence and

protection. The other is conditional: God's providence depends on our behavior and on our keeping the commandments. We cannot "buy" protection by contributing to the building fund. Beautiful edifices and impressive ritual give us only a false sense of security (see Isaiah, chapter 1).

Therefore, as we study the divinely inspired blueprints in *T'rumah*, we are confronted by some difficult questions:

1. What do we mean when we say that we desire God to dwell among us?
2. Will God dwell among us if we don't build buildings or "tents of meeting"?
3. If God doesn't need such "tents," then why do we build them?
4. If God does need such "tents," then what kind of a God do we believe in?

A possible answer is: God dwells among us when our community life reflects the values of justice and mercy that animate God's commandments. Community life requires institutions, and institutions require buildings. When our "hearts move us" to build buildings that manifest these commanded values, buildings in which we "devote ourselves to justice," then the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, is found in them, and God dwells among us.

Maybe our synagogues are not concessions to our need for the physical accoutrements of religion (à la Maimonides) but rather the proving grounds where we demonstrate the value-content of our religion by how we behave in them, by what they stand for, and by what they do. They can be temples to vulgarity and materialism or sacred spaces in which we gather to pursue social justice and treat one another with fairness and mercy. They provide us not with guarantees but with opportunities.

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GIFTS FREELY GIVEN

Maynard Bell

Parashah Overview

- God asks the Children of Israel to donate gifts (*t'rumah*) for the building of the Tabernacle so that God may "dwell among them." (25:1-9)
- Instructions for the construction of the Ark, table, and menorah are provided. (25:10-40)
- Detailed directions are given on how to build the Tabernacle. (26:1-27:19)

Focal Point

Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him. And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair; tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. (Exodus 25:1-8)

Your Guide

1. Why would God, the Source of existence and the world's substance, need or desire material gifts from the Israelite people?
2. God's gift of the Torah to the Israelite people coincides with the divine call to build and furnish the Tabernacle. What connection is there between these things? Is there any significance to the order in which the three major events of the Exodus—the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the sin of the golden calf, and the building of the Tabernacle—seem to unfold?
3. Prior to the building of the Tabernacle, where do you think our people found "sacred space"?
4. What is the focal point of our own synagogue sanctuaries? What parallels exist between our sanctuaries and our people's first worship structure, the Tabernacle?
5. Why did the Israelite people need a structure to feel connected to God? Where do you feel the greatest sense of spiritual uplift or connection to God? Are our contemporary sanctuaries necessary?
6. What is the significance of the verse "You shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him"? Why was the commandment to bring gifts for the building of the Tabernacle not mandatory for everyone? What would happen if paying temple dues were completely voluntary?
7. What is the qualitative difference between a "gift" and a "gift freely given"? What kind of gifts have you brought to your congregation or community?
8. Why does the Torah say, "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" rather than "And let them make a sanctuary for Me in which to dwell"?

By the Way...

* "Gold, silver, and copper." The metals are listed in descending order of their value. This, in turn, determines their use for various objects [furnishing the Tabernacle and its parts]; the closer the object is to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable the metal of which it is made. Iron is notably absent...because its utilization for more efficient weapons of death made it incompatible with the spiritual ends that the Sanctuary was intended to serve. (Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*)

* A folk saying states, A fool gives and a wise man takes. This refers to a person who gives *tzedakah*. A fool who gives *tzedakah* thinks that he is giving, while a wise man who gives realizes that he is taking: He is the one who will benefit most by his action. (Rebbe David of Kotzk)

* "That I may dwell [Hebrew, *v'shachanti*] among them." The verb is the one from which *Shechinah*, the rabbinic term for the Divine Presence, is derived. (*The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, edited by J. H. Hertz, published by Soncino Press, London, 1950)

* "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Great is work, for even the Holy One, blessed be He, did not have the Divine Presence abide among Israel until they had worked." (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan*)

* "That I may dwell among them." It says "among them" and not "in its midst" to teach you that each person must build the Sanctuary in his own heart; then God will dwell among them. The Kotzker was once asked, "Where is God?" And he replied, "Wherever they let him in." (Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk)

Your Guide

1. The late professor Nehama Leibowitz asks, "What prompted the divine command to build the Tabernacle?" Based on the commentaries above, what is your opinion?
2. Much fruitful commentary has been generated by the qualification offered in the text: that donations for the Sanctuary should come from those whose hearts so move them. Why do you think this is so?
3. This is also true of the oft-quoted words "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" and the text's use of the words "among them" (i.e., the people), as opposed to "within it" (i.e., the Tabernacle). How do you interpret the significance of this wording?

D'var Torah

Do you remember the famous musical dialogue between Tevye and Golda in *Fiddler on the Roof* on the subject of love? Tevye asks, "Golda, do you love me?" And she responds, "Do I what?"

Can you imagine Golda and Tevye exchanging valentines?
Hardly! Valentine's Day isn't exactly a Jewish holiday.

It is purely an accident of the calendar that juxtaposes *Shabbat T'rumah* with Valentine's Day. But risking a banal comparison, I suggest that *Parashat T'rumah* is apropos for the season because it also deals with the subject of love. In this case, it is not romantic love but love in its more profound sense-love as it manifests itself in intimate personal connection, in our willingness to do for or to be fully present for another.

The *parashah* begins, "Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts." The Torah then adds, "You shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him." Apparently, God does not want gifts from just anyone. The materials that are to be used to create the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), to build a place of holiness, must come from those who give their gifts from their own free will. These gifts must be (to use a term from the realm of psychotherapy) ones "that are freely given."

The road to spiritual connection is an elusive one, but those who have experienced moments of God-connection will attest that such events only come as a result of open-heartedness. Even more significantly, those who testify that they have felt a God-connection compare it to the feeling of intimacy they have experienced with other human beings.

If we accept that premise for the moment, let us try to see the God-connection from the other side. Maybe the *parashah* gives us an insight into what God is seeking from us. In the milieu of the Bible, *t'rumah*, sacred donations, were a popular medium through which people reached for the Divine. The Torah, speaking in God's voice, suggests that God's love is not for sale, that what God wants from human beings is a gift freely given. Connection with the Divine is in its higher sense "a love connection."

God says, "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." Those who bring God their freely given gifts-not only material gifts but the gift of their fullest presence-invite the Divine to abide within them.

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