

Short Comments on Terumah
Rabbi Eliot Malomet February 5 2022 4 Adar 1 5782

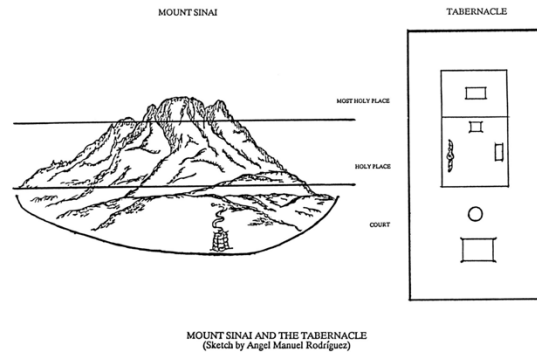
שמות כ"ה:ב' דבר אל-בני ישראל ויקחו-לי תרומה מאת כל-
 איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את-תרומתי:

Exodus 25:2 *Speak to the Children of Israel that they may take me a raised-contribution from every man whose heart makes-him-willing, you are to take my contribution.* At the end of the last week's parasha, God asked Moses to go up the mountain, where he would receive "the tablets of stone, the Torah and the Mitzvah." We then learn that he would remain there for 40 days and nights. It's at this point, that Moses gets the instructions for building the sanctuary and for collecting the materials out of which it would be fashioned. In other words, he's on the mountain when he gets the plan and, presumably, this would have been the first thing he says to the people when he returns to them. But, as we know, that doesn't happen. Instead, in what will become the greatest crisis of the Torah, the people engage in idolatry and the break the covenant. Only after shattering the tablets and beseeching God for forgiveness, will Moses issue the call for gifts. Note that there is no mechanism for solicitation and collection. Presumably, Moses would have had to devise that himself, and note also that God anticipates that the people, that is, most of them, will respond generously. There is a slight hint here that some might not be so willing.

כ"ה:ח' וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכָם:

25:8 *Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.* Collect the materials so that they will make Me a sanctuary. It's as if God is giving Moses the best strategy for collecting the materials: ask first, explain second. Not, *We have a big project. Here are the plans. Please give.* Instead it's: *Please give. Here's what we need. This is what it's for.* By asking for the materials in this way, the emphasis is on generosity and the act of giving over the act of building. We have long noted that the role of the sanctuary is not that God will dwell in it but that *God will dwell among them.* In addition to being the iconic verse of the whole enterprise it also discloses the central theological problem: where does God dwell? Can we even speak of God dwelling anywhere? Is a *mikdash* something that God needs or something that the people need? How

does sacred space evoke God's presence? Why is it necessary? These are huge topics. All structures, from the most banal to the most sacred, convey a narrative. What is the narrative of the sanctuary? Mount Sinai. Examine this diagram:



Just as Mount Sinai had three "zones" the sanctuary is designed with three "zones."

Mount Sinai	Sanctuary
Summit - Where God meets Moses	Holy of Holies where God will meet the Kohen Gadol.
Mid-mountain- where the elders reside during Moses' stay on the mountain.	The Holy Place - where the Kohanim will function in their service.
Base of the Mountain - where the people remain during the encounter	The Outer Court - where the people remain when they offer sacrifices.

The sanctuary is a "portable Sinai." For obvious reasons, you can't take it with you. We discern that God wants a symbolic Mount Sinai to accompany the people, and have that symbolic Mount Sinai become the central, organizing feature of its life. The narrative of the structure, therefore, is Sinai and covenant. Recall that when Moses first encounters God at the Burning Bush, he sees that *the bush is not consumed*. Moses realizes at that moment, that God, who, almost everywhere else, is *a consuming fire*, can also be a life-giving presence that can, if properly followed, sustain those who follow it, ie. *a fire that does not consume*. The sanctuary, (fire-and-smoke-Sinai-Covenant), conveys that God can reside with the people without consuming them.

כ"ה:ט כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מֵרְאֶה אוֹתָךְ אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת קַלְבֵּלְיוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה:

25:9 *Exactly as I show you—the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings—so shall you make it.* We cannot underestimate the value of this little piece of information. There is a difference between following written *assembly instructions* that come with say, a piece of furniture, and following a diagram. It's possible to put it together, but you get a better idea of how to do so by looking at the diagram or better yet, finding a how-to video on YouTube. How God shows this to Moses is a question that occupies a lot of the commentators. Was it in a vision? Was there a heavenly model? Set those questions aside and consider the relational aspect of this. Would you rather read your grandmother's recipe for making chicken soup or stand with her at the stove and watch her? We convey one kind of information by a text and another kind of information by modeling. How can we even measure it or describe it? All the nuances, hidden secrets, history, emotion? All the love? God is not only conveying visual information to Moses; God is teaching Moses, and modeling to Moses a way of being a leader/teacher, and in the process, conveying to Moses information that can hardly be represented in text and expressed in words.

כ"ה:ט"ז וְנָתַתָּ אֶל־הָאָרוֹן אֵת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ:

25:16 *And you are to put in the Ark the Testimony that I give you.* The verse doesn't explicitly refer to the tablets but arguably, that's what is implied. The Akkadian word for treaty, 'adu, may be related to the Hebrew word 'edut used here. Thus, the Ark is a "treaty box", the receptacle for the tangible symbol of the covenant, namely the two tablets of stone. God's "copy" of the covenant and Israel's "copy" shared the same "safety deposit box". But 'edut - testimony can also be understood abstractly. After all, how do you adequately record the totality of the Sinai experience? In our age of video and audio recording, we know that while those media do a great job of capturing an event, they can never convey the totality of an event. Seeing a video or listening to a recording of an event is never as good as experiencing it in person. The box then contains something that is akin to the 'singularity' that existed prior to the *Big Bang* "a hot, dense

seed, smaller than a proton, yet containing all the mass and energy of our universe." (D. Matt) In other words, the totality of testimony of God's revelation is so intense and indescribable, and contained by an 'invisibility' located in the holiest space on earth. In this theology, Creation and Revelation have something in common. The universe emerges from a singularity and the testimony is another species of a singularity.

כ"ה:כ"ב וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לָךְ שֵׁם וְדַבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־אָרוֹן הָעֵדוּת אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה אוֹתָךְ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

25:22 *There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you—from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Testimony — all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.* The box containing the testimony (either the tablets or something else) is covered with a lid called the *kapporet* which E. Fox calls *the purgation-cover*. In other words, the Ark is also the instrumentality for purging the people of sin, thus it figures prominently in the Yom Kippur rituals of purgation. It is from above the covering of the Ark, *between the cherubim* that God "speaks". An infinitesimal space. Maybe the box contains the actual tablets of testimony, and the 'singularity' is located between the cherubim! Psalm 150:1 הללו Hallelu El Bekodshu - Halleluhu birkei'a uzo Praise God in His holy place, Praise God in the expanse of the universe, conveys the theological paradox: The same God who is "located" in the infinitesimal space above the Ark and God is also "located" throughout the universe. The testimony of that God's revelation is located in the Ark.

כ"ו:ל"א וַעֲשִׂיתָ כְּרֻבֹת תְּהַלֵּל וְתִלְעַת שְׁנֵי וְשֵׁשׁ מִשְׁנֹר מֵעֵשֶׂה חָשֵׁב יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים:

26:31 *You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen; it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it.* The rabbinic tradition is rich with descriptions about the design and fabrication of the curtain. Its purpose is to designate the holiest zone. But it also speaks to the intimacy of the God's relationship with Israel. Shabbat Shalom!

This week's Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Paula and Aaron Kondioti to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the Bar Mitzvah of Adam Marc Kondioti z'l.