



**Around the Shabbat Table
Terumah 5764**

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Shalom!

Introduction

This week's parasha, Terumah, consists of many details pertaining to the building of the tabernacle, which was to serve as the center of the Israelites' spiritual life during their travels through the desert, and through the early years of settlement in the land of Israel.

As the parasha opens, God instructs Moses to collect donations of raw materials which will be used to create the tabernacle, its utensils and its furnishings. Among the materials to be gathered are: gold, silver, copper, colored yarn, animal hides, wood, oil, and a number of gems.

In the verses that follow are descriptions of the specific items that are to be built:

1. The Ark - in which the tablets of stone containing the covenant between Israel and God is to be kept
2. A covering (*kapporet*)
3. "Cherubim" on each end of the covering (these are believed to have been some representation of angel-like creatures)
4. A table on which bread will be displayed daily
5. Various small utensils to be used in the service
6. A seven-branched menorah
7. The structure itself, including its roof, curtains, wooden beams, bars and joints

8. An altar for offerings
9. An enclosure around the entire tabernacle area

Questions for your Family's Discussion

As your family shares their Shabbat meal this Friday evening, you might want to discuss some of the following thoughts and questions:

1. The people had left Egypt only a short time before, and were now in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. From what source were they to obtain the materials that needed to be gathered for the construction of the tabernacle? You might want to consider the items they took from their former masters in Egypt, purchases from traveling merchants, personal possessions, or other sources.
2. In the previous parasha (Mishpatim) were descriptions of laws pertaining to how society should function, property law, and laws of indentured servitude. These are followed by laws pertaining to agriculture, the Jewish holiday cycle, the promise that God will protect the people and help them to dwell in the land of Israel, and the acceptance by the people of the laws. Why is it appropriate for the instructions about building a tabernacle, to serve as the center of Jewish religious life, to be given at this point?



Some Texts to Wrestle With

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Tell the people Israel to take gifts for me, from each person whose heart moves him.

Exodus 25:2

- In other situations, people are required to give towards community needs. How come here, for the building of the Tabernacle, giving is voluntary? What if someone didn't want to contribute?

They shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.
Exodus 25:2

- How does the building of a sanctuary enable God to dwell among the people?
- What role did the *mishkan* (tabernacle) appear to play in the community?
- How is this role different or similar to the role of synagogues in our time?
- Some translate the verse as: "They shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them," i.e., God lives within each person. How does that affect the verse's meaning?



Towards an Action Agenda

This parasha dealt largely with the community's voluntary support for the creation of a "holy place" to serve as the center of the Israelites' spiritual life. Our synagogues also rely on voluntary support. That support can be in the form of money or of volunteer hours. Contact your synagogue's rabbi or educational director to find out ways that you can help to support the work of the synagogue and its programs.

In the desert, there was only one tabernacle for the entire nation. Today, there are countless numbers of synagogues serving the Jewish world. Most American synagogues belong to one of the several major organizations, each of which is organized according to religious movements. You can learn more about synagogue organizations, and even search worldwide for synagogues affiliated with each movement at:

- Union for Reform Judaism: <http://www.urj.org/>
- United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism: <http://www.uscj.org/index1.html>

- Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation: <http://www.jrf.org/index.html>
- Orthodox Union: <http://www.ou.org/>



Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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