

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Teruma How Can We Create a Sacred Space in our Lives and Land?

How did My Childhood Quest for Sacred Space Lead Me to True Holiness?

Since childhood, I have always sought to create sacred spaces around me. As a young girl scout, I would adorn the entrance to our tent with magnificent rocks and other intriguing objects I found in nature. I wasn't just decorating; I was marking the threshold with beauty and meaning as if to invite a deeper presence into that space. Even then, without fully understanding the concept, I was trying to create a sacred space – infused with intention and reverence. As I grew older, my yearning for sacred space deepened. When I became a teenager, I claimed the basement of our family villa as my own – a privilege I was granted as the eldest of three sisters. With wall hangings, psychedelic colors, crystals, and the ethereal sound of Pink Floyd, I transformed an ordinary upper-middle-class suburban basement into a mystical, kaleidoscopic refuge for spiritual seekers. It was more than a teenage hangout – it became my sanctuary. I created an atmosphere where the mundane dissolved into something transcendent, a space where I could explore my spiritual yearnings. Even as I traveled, whether for a day or longer, I would leave my mark on the spaces I temporarily inhabited. Draping scarves and hanging necklaces – was my attempt to infuse each temporary dwelling with an atmosphere of sacredness, however imperfect. It was the best I could do with my limited understanding of true holiness. Yet, I got a glimpse – perhaps more accurately, a scent – of something deeper. When I visited my grandparents in Israel, I was welcomed by the fragrance of citrus groves, a sacred scent that imprinted itself upon my soul. It was as if my heart was being prepared, softened, and opened to receive something greater. And then, when I stood before the Western Wall for the first time, I knew – without scarves or necklaces or any adornment that this was kedusha – true holiness. My childhood instinct to sanctify space had found its source.

The Eternal Repercussions of the Mitzvah to Create Sacred Space

In *Parashat Teruma*, Hashem commands the Children of Israel:

ספר שמות פרק כה פסוק ה וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם:

“They shall make for Me a *Mikdash* (Sanctuary), and I will dwell among them” (Shemot 25:8).

This verse encapsulates a profound spiritual truth – our mission to create sacred spaces where the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence), can reside. The command to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the wilderness was not merely a physical task; it was a spiritual act – a calling to transform the physical space into a dwelling for the Divine. A fascinating passage from *Pesikta Zutarta* offers deep insight into our verse attributing the Shechinah dwelling among Israel with eternal significance: This refers to both the present world and the world to come. It refers to the eternal dwelling, for all time. The Holy One, Blessed be He, expresses extraordinary affection for the people of Israel by constricting His Presence within them. Happy is the nation for whom this is true. Happy is the nation that Hashem is his G-d (*Pesikta Zutarta, Shemot 25:8*). The sanctuary is not only a physical structure in this world but primarily imbues us with a profound and everlasting relationship – our eternal bond with the Divine that transcends into the world to come. Hashem’s special love for Israel is manifested in the choice to have His Presence contained within us, making Israel a vessel for the Divine. While the *Mishkan* served a critical role in the wilderness as a portable sanctuary – a place where Heaven and Earth converge, and the Israelites could experience the presence of Hashem in their midst – its true fulfillment was always intended to be in the Land of Israel.

There, the *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) would be built, a permanent home for the Shechinah. The connection between these sacred spaces highlights a deeper truth: our mission to create a sacred space extends beyond the temporary buildings we construct or the lands we inhabit during exile.

What is the Connection Between The Mishkan and the Land of Israel?

The holiness of the Mishkan extends into the Land of Israel by serving as a place of Divine guidance – just as Hashem spoke to Moshe from the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies), prophecy flourished only in the Land of Israel. It is the land where the voice of Hashem is most clearly heard. The Beit HaMikdash became the central point from which divine wisdom and guidance were transmitted to the people of Israel. Moreover, the Mishkan was a place of service to Hashem; similarly, the Land of Israel is a place of service, where mitzvot such as *terumot*, *ma'aserot*, and *shemita* sanctify the very acts of eating, working, and living on the land. The daily lives of the Israelites are infused with sanctity, as the land itself reflects the holiness of the Mishkan. Thus, the portable Mishkan in the desert was only a temporary construction, whereas our permanent sanctuary can exist only in the Holy Land. As Ralbag explains, the ultimate mitzvah of building a *Mikdash* is not to be carried out in just any location, but in the specific place that Hashem will choose when the people cross the Jordan and settle in the land. The Mishkan in the desert was merely a temporary dwelling, designed to train the Israelites in divine service and prepare them for their inheritance of the land. They did not stray from this path, as they did not have a permanent sanctuary until Hashem revealed to them the location of the eternal Temple on Mount Moriah (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, *Shemot* 25:8). The Promised Land is so much more than just a geographical location. Only in the Land of Israel do the spiritual and physical meet in perfect harmony. Just as the Mishkan was fashioned from earthly materials to house the Divine, the Land of Israel is the soil where Hashem's Presence can take root among His people. The very earth of Israel holds the potential to become a dwelling place for the Divine. This connection reinforces the deep sanctity of both the Mishkan and the Land, highlighting that Israel is not only a place for the Jewish people to live but the place where Hashem's glory is to be revealed (Based on Yoel Yakoby, *Parashat Teruma: The Encounter Between Two Types of Sanctity*).

To Build or Not to Build the Beit Hamikdash?

We all pray and yearn for the rebuilding of the permanent Beit HaMikdash on the Temple Mount. But why don't we begin the construction already? One reason often cited is the belief that the Temple is meant to descend from Heaven. However, this view is not as clear-cut as it may seem. It is based on one interpretation of Rashi's commentary on the Babylonian Talmud (*Sukkah* 41a). Yet that interpretation of Rashi is disputed among our Sages (see, for example, the *Me'iri* on that Talmudic passage). Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger succinctly reconciles these differing perspectives: "Certainly, the future Beit HaMikdash will be built literally by humans. That which is written, 'The Mikdash, Hashem, Your hands established' (*Shemot* 15:17), as expounded in the *Midrash Tanchuma* – that it will descend from above—refers to the spiritual Beit HaMikdash, which will enter the physical, already-built Beit HaMikdash, like a soul within a body" (*Aruch LaNer* on *Sukkah* 41a). Another widely held assumption is that the mitzvah of building the Beit HaMikdash is contingent on the majority of *Am Yisrael* (Jewish People) residing in *Eretz Yisrael*. Yet this claim is also unclear. In contrast, the *Minchat Chinuch* asserts: "Even today, it is possible that if the nations were to grant permission to build the Beit HaMikdash, there would be a mitzvah to do so, as is evident from the *Midrash*, which recounts that in the days of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, permission was granted, and they began construction" (*Minchat Chinuch*, Mitzvah 95). Similarly, Rav Teichtal states that the Beit HaMikdash can be built whenever the opportunity presents itself: "If permission were given to *Am Yisrael* to build the *Beit HaBechirah* (Chosen House). ...it is a mitzvah for all generations, as we are commanded to build the Beit HaMikdash. Therefore, *Chazal* said, 'A generation in which the Beit HaMikdash is not built in its time is as if it were destroyed in its

time.' (*Em Habanim Semecha*). The reason is that whenever *Bnei Yisrael* contribute wholeheartedly, yearning to build Him a house, they will be able to attain their aspirations" (*Sefat Emet, Parashat Teruma*, Year 1850). Based on these authoritative Torah scholars, I venture to ask: *So what are we waiting for?!*

How Can We Bring the Mishkan into Our Lives Today?

Although our final Beit HaMikdash has not yet been rebuilt, the message of *Parashat Teruma* remains deeply relevant. Every home in the Land of Israel – and every Jewish heart – can serve as a mini-Mikdash. By filling our lives with Torah, kindness, and devotion to Hashem, we continue the legacy of *Parashat Teruma*, creating a space where the Divine Presence can dwell.

The connection between creating sacred space and our role as partners with Hashem in building a dwelling place for the Shechinah is profound. The Land itself is holy, as it is the place where the Shechinah dwells most intimately. Every act of sanctifying the space around us – whether through physical action or spiritual devotion—brings us closer to fulfilling the mitzvah of *Parashat Teruma*: “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.” This call is not just for the Israelites of the past but for us today, as we continue to build sacred spaces where the Divine can reside among us. May we merit seeing the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash speedily in our days, when its holiness will once again shine in its full glory. The lesson of creating sacred spaces – whether in our homes, our communities, or our land – continues to guide us toward a deeper connection with Hashem, inviting His Presence to dwell among us. Just as I instinctively sought to transform my surroundings into sacred spaces, the Torah calls on all of us to recognize that every space, every moment, and every act can become an opportunity to invite holiness into our lives. The Land of Israel, in particular, is where this sacred work is most fully realized. It is not merely a home for the Jewish people but the very foundation of our relationship with Hashem.