

**Parsha Terumah:  
 Creating A Space For Revelation**  
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*Class of 2019*

On the heels of intense revelation and spiritual experience, we delved into some details of Jewish law in Parshat Mishpatim. After experiencing the joyous and ecstatic wedding between God and the Jewish people, we came back into “real life,” life in which we need to learn how to act with one another in the structure of our day-to day routines. The contrast between the transcendent spiritual experience and detailed laws of everyday life seems striking; I submit that we can see a resolution of this contrast and dialectic within the context of Parshat Terumah.

Parshat Terumah opens with the building of the *mishkan*. The *mishkan* is meant to be a sanctuary for the Jewish people as we travel through the desert. The verses in the parshah are filled with very intricate details regarding how each piece is to be built. We notice something particularly striking when we look at the construction of the *keruvim* (cherubs) that are to be placed at the top of the *aron* (ark). There are to be two golden *keruvim*, one on each end of a golden cover of the *aron*, facing each other with their wings spread upward. On this verse, Chapter 25:20, Rashi comments:

<p>“With wings spread - You shall not make them with their wings lying down, but rather, spread and raised high, next to their heads, so that the space between the wings and the lid should be ten <i>tefachim</i>, as stated in Tractate Sukkah.”</p>	<p>פורשי כנפים - שלא תעשה כנפיהם שוכבים, אלא פרושים וגבוהים למעלה אצל ראשיהם שיהא עשרה טפחים בחלל שבין הכנפים לכפורת כדאיתא בסוכה”</p>
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There is a necessary “space” here with a prescribed measurement. The space is a place for encounter; the space allows for meaningful connection. In the palliative care world, this is the space where healing can take place. It is a powerful thing, this space in between. In this space that we create between the two cherubs and between the cherubs and the covering of the ark, we can meet God.

But why ten *tefachim*? It is interesting to note a few other things in halakha that share this measurement: *sukkah*; *eruv*; *menorah*. A *sukkah* must be a minimum of ten *tefachim* in order to be considered kosher. An *eruv* must be constructed of walls or doorways that must be at least ten *tefachim* high in order to work. And a *menorah* must be placed at least ten *tefachim* above the ground. In each case, ten *tefachim* seems to create a significant, intentional space.

The mitzvot of *sukkah*, *eruv* and *menorah* are all about the ‘in-between’ spaces. How so? The *sukkah* that we build is an outdoor space that is supposed to resemble our indoor space—our home, תשובו כעין תדורו. The *eruv* that we create is a boundary that is designed to make a public domain into a private domain; it’s a construction that allows us to then move freely outside our homes as we do inside our homes. The *menorah* - the mitzvah of lighting candles or oil that can be seen by the public outside, is done from near or within our homes. The interesting piece in all of this is that the space is

one that is boundaried. It is not an amorphous, unregulated or overwhelming ‘in between-ness,’ but rather has measurements that create a structure within.

We can see this in the creation of the *mishkan* as well. In relation to the *aron*, where the *עדות* (Testimony) is placed, the verse reads:

“You shall put into the aron the Testimony that I shall give you.” וְנָתַתְּ אֶל-הָאָרוֹן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ:  
 (Shemot. 25:17) (שמות כה:יז)

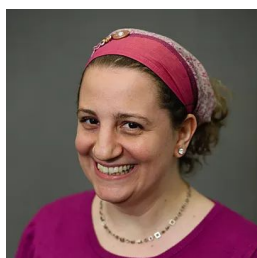
A few verses later, after the *keruvim* and golden covering of the *aron* dimensions are mentioned, a verse seems to be repetitive:

“You shall place the covering on the *aron* from above, and into the aron you shall put the Testimony that I will give you.” וְנָתַתְּ אֶת הַכַּפֶּרֶת עַל הָאָרוֹן מִלְּמַעְלָה וְאֵל הָאָרוֹן  
 (Shemot 25:21) תָּתֵן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ (שמות כה:כא)

Rashi wonders why there is a need for this repetition of information; he responds by saying that it’s here to teach us that when the *aron* has no covering, the Testimony should be placed within it, and only after it is within should the covering be placed on top.

Before we can put on the *כפרת*, the beautiful covering of a space, onto which we can mount the *keruvim*, we must first put in the Testimony, the *עדות*. In other words, we must steep ourselves first in Divine law, *halakha*, and its structure in order to be able to access the space between the *keruvim* - that place where we can encounter God in an ecstatic religious experience.

As spiritual seekers, it is sometimes difficult to live with the contrast and dialectic between law and spirituality. We crave unfettered religious experiences that are deep, meaningful, and lasting. God is perhaps telling us here that in order to create our *mishkan*, the meeting place between God and us, we need to put the *עדות* first and foremost. If Torah and *halakha* is what grounds us, if there is a structure in place with boundaries, then He promises that He will meet with us, וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לָךְ שָׁמָּה. This is how revelation can continue.



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