

Parshat Terumah
A Fundraising Dream
Nomi Kaltmann - Class of 2022

Many not-for-profit organizations spend countless hours strategizing ways to appeal to donors. They craft consistent messaging, create appealing logos and use personal anecdotes and stories to create a sense of urgency and purpose to urge donors to give generously.

In some cases, the hard work pays off and the organization receives contributions which match their expectations. In other cases, the donations received may be less than expected as organizations are then forced to assess their priorities as they face their financial realities.

And, rarely, the contributions received far exceed an organization's wildest expectation and they are inundated with so many contributions that they then face the positive challenge that many other organizations wish they had: what should the organization now focus on now that they have donations and contributions in abundance! What an uncommon and exciting position for those lucky organizations to be in!

In this week's Parsha, Terumah, we read about the offer Hashem makes to the people of Israel to contribute to the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle.

"Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for Me an offering; from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering."

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה
מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לִבּוֹ תְּקִחוּ
אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי:

The commentator Rashi makes it clear that the inclusion of the words "take for Me" meant that God wanted the contribution to be made by people of their own free will and not because of social coercion or in pursuit of recognition of their generosity.

However, so enthusiastically do the people of Israel respond to this offer to contribute, that those in charge of collections had to ask Moshe to halt the contributions as within a short period of time they were inundated and overwhelmed with donations.

What a fundraising dream! To request people stop providing donations as they are simply inundated with generosity and giving!

The items that were donated to the Mishkan were often rare, as well as being extremely expensive and precious. Valuable stones, animal skins, spices, silver, and gold.

Turquoise wool, which was extremely difficult to make as it used the secretion of a rare amphibious animal known as a *chilazon* (Menachos 24a) was also donated. Only a tiny amount of colour was exacted from the sea creature, so the wool was extremely laborious to create and used by nobility in their robes and clothes. Only recently did Israeli archaeologists uncover [purple coloured wool](#) in excavations matching this description.

To this very day, the items donated to the Mishkan retain universal recognition for their value and beauty. The symbolism behind this beauty was to use the Mishkan and all future houses of worship for the Jewish people as central rallying points.

By making the Mishkan beautiful, the place of gathering for all the people of Israel would help to elevate the souls and prayers of the Jewish people who gathered and thronged to this central location.

As the Talmud states at Megillah 29a:

Rava interpreted a verse homiletically: What is the meaning of that which is written: *“Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations”* (Psalms 90:1)? This is referring to the synagogues and study halls. Abaye said: Initially, I used to study Torah in my home and pray in the synagogue. Once I heard and understood that which King David says: *“Lord, I love the habitation of Your house”* (Psalms 26:8), I would always study Torah in the synagogue, to express my love for the place in which the Divine Presence resides.

דרש רבא מאי דכתיב (תהלים צ, א) ה' מעון אתה היית לנו אלו בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות אמר אביי מריש הואי גריסנא בביתא ומצלינא בבי כנשתא כיון דשמעית להא דקאמר דוד (תהלים כו, ח) ה' אהבתי מעון ביתך הואי גריסנא בבי כנישתא

From this Gemara one can see the importance of understanding why the Jewish people require, in every place and generation, central locations to gather and bring down God’s presence on this earth. These sanctuaries serve both people and God alike. People gather there to bring down God’s presence and God is drawn to the central place of prayer and study.

Around the world, Synagogues that are beautiful offer a bonus: although not a prerequisite for prayer, the beauty makes the location an appealing place to gather and a place that people will want to spend more time increasing their devotion.

The rich descriptions in this week’s Parsha also serve an additional purpose: they increase longing for what we as a people once had and increase our devotion for a return to a time in which God’s presence is felt openly amongst all people. To be able to gather once again in person and rejoin our communities in soulful prayer as a community.

One of the most isolating experiences of the pandemic has been the cancellation of mass gatherings and the opportunity for group prayers. These weekly anchors have meant that for many, their ritual connections have been diminished and their experiences of isolation increased.

As we read this Parsha, we yearn for a day in which our central locations for prayer will once again be open for crowds and masses of people in safety so that we can gather and re-experience what we now know to be an ordinary but extraordinary weekly experience.

May we merit a speedy resolution so we can once again use our Synagogues to bring down God’s presence!



Nomi Kaltmann lives in Melbourne, Australia and comes to Maharat after earning her Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Politics and Jewish Civilizations from Monash University. In 2019, Nomi became the first Australian woman to enroll in the Yeshivat Maharat four-year Semikha program. She also holds a Masters degree in Legal Practice from the Australian National University. Nomi has worked for the Shadow Attorney General of Australia and as an advisor to the former Minister for Small Business in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Specialising in charities and not-for-profit law, Nomi has worked for the Australian Charities Commission. In 2020 Nomi was selected to intern at Tablet Magazine and for a fellowship at Hillel International's Centre for Rabbinic Innovation. Nomi is one of the founding members of the Women's Orthodox Tefillah Group in Victoria. She is also the inaugural president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance in Australia, which she looks forward to formally launching in Australia when COVID-19 restrictions ease.