



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

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4 Adar, 5766

Parashat Teruma
(Exodus 25:1–27:19)

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D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom chaverim,

It would be pretty easy to make a list of the top ten most beautiful places you have ever been or would like to go in the world. The world is just brimming with beauty and marvels that fill us with awe and wonder.

Yet the Torah uses only about thirty verses to describe the creation of the entire world: the sun, moon, and stars, oceans and landmasses, trees and plants, bugs and beasts, the existence of time and the measure of day and night, the creation of humans endowed with the spark of the Divine in them, even Shabbat, the crown of creation! All in a mere thirty verses.

But then, beginning with our Torah portion this week, the Torah uses some 250-300 (some say 400!) verses to describe the “*mishkan*” in the desert. Thirty verses for the whole world; ten times that many to describe the portable, transient sanctuary in the desert whose construction was about twenty boards in length and eight boards in width, didn't have a roof, and was sheltered by curtains. Even the purpose of the “*mishkan*” was pretty simple and straightforward: “...and let them make me a sanctuary; and I will dwell among them.” (Shemot 25:2-8)

Why does making God's dwelling place amongst us require so much more description than the creation of the whole world?!

The answer to this big, macrocosmic question is found in a small, microcosmic observation.

The rabbis noted that there are not two but three partners in the creation of a new human being—The Holy One Blessed be He together with the father and the mother. When a child honors its parents, God notes it and says “I account it as though I were dwelling among them, and they were honoring Me.”

In other words, how we behave in our own little world, in our relationships to our parents for example, has larger cosmic consequences. The impact of our actions either shakes the heavens and calls down from on High the Divine Presence of God to dwell among us, or repels the spirit of the Divine in gross anathema.

The creation of the world is a given. There is no need for the Torah to describe its construction in detail or for us to know much more than we do about it: it's larger than we are, so much beyond us.

But many verses are needed to describe how we create a place in the world, in the midst of our human society, wherein the Presence of God can see fit to dwell. The maintenance of the world is the task of us humans, and the Torah comes to tell us how to go about it. We need to learn a lot about making our world Holy, about how to sanctify the gift of life that we've been given.

Making a “contribution” (*Teruma*, “contribution” or “gift”, is the name of this week's Torah portion) towards God's dwelling amongst us requires training our hearts to be willing to serve both God and the greater goals of our human society. Indeed, by stressing the construction of God's dwelling on earth over the creation of the earth itself, the Torah is telling us that the created world only has significance and value when we make our world hospitable to the divine Presence. We do so by “contributing” the way we live our lives - when we offer with all of our hearts, with all our souls, with all our might our own unique talents and tasks - in the service of God. This week's Torah portion is rightly called *Parashat Teruma*, the Torah portion of your *Teruma*, your “contribution”, your “gift”.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
2 Adar 5766

2nd March, 2006