

# Torah Table Talk

## Why We Build Houses of Worship

### Parshat Terumah

Exodus 25:1 – 27:19/ I Kings 5:26 – 6:13



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt  
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.  
“He was the perfect child.”*

*Do you have thoughts, comments or questions on Table Torah Talk?  
Please share them with me at [Haravmark@Optonline.net](mailto:Haravmark@Optonline.net)*

This week's Torah and Haftorah describe the building of a special house of worship for the people of Israel that was to serve as a place for the indwelling for God's presence. The Torah portion describes the building of the *Mishkan*, a portable house of worship, which the Jewish people used from the time of the Exodus until the reign of Solomon. In the time of Solomon, the great King of Judah began a monumental public works project which involved not only taxing the people but also the public conscription of forced laborers. We are told that Solomon endowed with great wisdom, was able to make a treaty with the neighboring monarch in Lebanon. Both in the case of the Tabernacle and the Temple the Hebrew verb *shachan* is used to describe the relationship between God and the house of worship. This word is also the root word of *shekhinah*, the indwelling presence of God. We are left to ponder what we mean when we describe a synagogue or a church as a House of God. In what way is God present in such places?

### **I Kings 6:11- 13**

Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, “With regard to this House you are building – if you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you My promise that I gave to your father David; I will abide (*v'shachanti*) among the children of Israel and I will never forsake My people Israel.”

### **Exodus 25:8**

Let me make them Me a sanctuary that I may dwell (*v'shachanti*) among them. Exactly as I show you – the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings so shall you make it.

### **Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Bechukotai, 5**

When Israel arose, the Holy One said to them, The only reason I took you out of Egypt was in order that you might build me a sanctuary, as it is written, “They shall make me a sanctuary.” Similarly he said to Solomon, “With regard to this House you are building – if you follow My laws and observe My rules and faithfully keep My commandments, I will fulfill for you My promise that I gave to your father David; I will abide among the children of Israel...” However, “If you and your children turn away from Me...” (I Kings 9:6) what will I do? “I will sweep away Israel from the land that I have given them and I will reject the House which I sanctified to my name...” (I Kings 9:7) Why is this? These are conditional, as it is written,

“If you follow my statutes...I will establish My abode in your midst....but if you do not obey Me...I will make your sanctuaries desolate.

### **Mekhilta Yitro, Amalek, 4**

Three things--the Land of Israel, the Temple, and the dynasty of David--were given conditionally. Proof for the Land of Israel? "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived . . . and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you . . . and you perish quickly from the good Land" (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). Proof for the Temple? "With regard to this House you are building – if you follow My laws," etc. (1 Kings 6:12); but if not, "this house which is so high [shall become desolate]" (1 Kings 9:8). Proof for the dynasty of David? "If your children keep My covenant . . . their children also forever shall sit on your throne" (Psalm 132:12); if not, "I will visit their transgression with the rod" (Psalm 89:33).

### **Kings 8: 11 -13**

Then Solomon declared: “The Lord has chosen to dwell (*lishkon*) in a thick cloud: I have now built for You a stately house, a place where You may dwell forever.”

### **Isaiah 66:1**

Thus said the Lord: The heaven is MY throne and the earth is My footstool; where could you build a house for me? What place could serve as My abode. All this was made by My hand and thus it all came into being; yet to such a one do I look: to the poor and the broken hearted, who is concerned about My word

### **Around the Table**

1. What does the Bible mean when it speaks about God dwelling in the Tabernacle or Temple? Does God really dwell in a physical location?
2. What conditions does God place upon dwelling in Solomon’s house? What promises does God make to Solomon? Upon who are the conditions in Kings made: upon the king or the people?
3. Are there any conditions placed on God’s indwelling presence in the tabernacle described in Exodus? How is the Exodus Tabernacle different from Solomon’s Temple as they are described in the Bible? Why do you think these differences exist?
4. One of the common complaints about the contemporary synagogue is that it is not spiritual enough? How do you feel about this statement? Do you feel that God is present in the synagogue when you attend services? Why or why not? What can you do to make religious services and synagogue life more spiritually meaningful?
5. Midrash Tanhuma and the Mekhilta both speak about the existence of the temple/tabernacle being conditional? What responsibilities should laypeople and rabbis have in maintaining the integrity of a synagogue/house of worship? Do you think that synagogues are different in this regard from the great Temple in Jerusalem? If so in what way?

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*“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind  
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”*