



Torah Reflections on *Parashat Terumah*

Exodus 25:1 – 27:19

6 Adar, 5767

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To many of us, the word *Menorah* evokes images of a nine-branched Chanukah lamp illuminating a festive holiday table. The original *Menorah*, however, had seven branches instead of nine; stood on the south wall of the Sanctuary opposite the table with the show bread; and was built in the desert of Sinai.

This original *Menorah* of our ancestors was a human sized lamp (18 handbreadths high, or somewhere between 54 - 72 inches)¹ that was designed to shed light on itself. As was commanded by God, this *Menorah* was hammered out from a single ingot, or bar, of gold; hammered out as one, unbroken, continuous piece. Its architecture was such that the six outer branches faced and illuminated its innermost stem, which served as the central seventh branch.

In Exodus 25:8, Moses was commanded to build a Sanctuary in the desert where the Almighty's presence could be felt. The 17th century commentary *Zedah La-derech* ("Provision for the Way") interprets that the phrase, "And they shall make Me a sanctuary—and I will dwell in their midst,"² means that what God is seeking is not entering into the sanctuary, but into their hearts.³ Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz says this verse can also be translated as meaning that every person should make him or herself into a Sanctuary wherein the Divine Presence can rest;⁴ and the Rebbe of Kotzk said of these words, "If you build sanctuaries within yourselves, then I will dwell in them."⁵

Our tradition teaches that we are made in the image of God, and that within us is a spark of the divine creative force. Wouldn't that mean that God already dwells within us? Why would we need to build a Sanctuary, or to hammer a block of gold to produce a lamp that illuminates itself?

Hammering is a process in which the form of something changes as the result of repeated and hard blows. Through pounding and striking, a single block of gold was transformed into a seven-branched candelabra, and done in such a way that all of its parts were intact. Parts could not be made separately, or broken off, and then attached. That the result of this feat of force was designed so that its branches were turned inward, therefore lighting its inner core, is a powerful symbol.

The Spanish-Jewish Bible commentator, Abravanel, supports the necessity of seeking an allegorical explanation of the Tabernacle, "...the prophet [Ezekiel] admonished them to study carefully every detail of the plan of the Temple and measure it accurately, i.e. understand its allegorical meaning... The very details of its construction contained the cure for their spiritual ills if they would only look carefully."⁶

Each of us is a block of gold that accepts the inner and outer blows of our life. We hammer ourselves internally with our strivings, insecurities and self doubts, and the external world hammers us with models of success and beauty, as well as all manner of mental and physical toxins. As we live through life's challenges, joys, and traumas, our characters and our bodies are hammered out, experience by experience. How each of us responds to and survives these visible and invisible blows, creates our personal *Menorah*. The question each of us must pose is not about *why* we experienced the blows; the question we must ask

is about the resulting architecture: has this hammering transformed me into a source of illumination? Like the *Menorah* in the Sanctuary, do I have insight and shed light on myself, while also giving light to others?

That we were made in the Divine image implies that a Godly element already resides within us, but that does not necessarily mean that we are in touch with it. Our inner sanctuaries are continuously being built as we become sensitive to the subtleties of the Divine creative force in and around us.

The Talmud tells us that our prayers are our opportunities for connection and conversation with the Divine; that they act as substitutes for the daily sacrifices and service that took place in the ancient Temple.⁷ Rav Kook said that prayer should not become a rote repetition of words, but rather be a meaningful dialogue with the Creator.⁸ Through our prayers and our insights, may we succeed in transporting ourselves to our innermost sanctuaries. And may the precious moments we spend there fill our lives with spirituality, and help us to meet God in ourselves, and in the world.

¹ Talmud, *Menachot* 28b; Rashi commentary on Exodus, 25:35.

² Exodus, 25:8

³ Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot*, p. 463, WZO, 1986. *Zedah La-derech*, a super-commentary on Rashi's interpretation of the Bible, was written by Rabbi Issachar Baer ben Israel-Lazer Eilenburg (Poland, 1550-1623).

⁴ Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, *Twerski on Chumash*, p. 160, Shaar Press, 2003. Rabbi Horowitz (c.1565 Prague - 1630 Safed) is known as Shelah HaKadosh, "the Holy SheLaH", from the title of his best-known mystical work *Shnei Luchot Ha-brit* ("The Two Tablets of the Covenant").

⁵ Gideon Weitzman, *Sparks of Light: Essays based on the Philosophy of Rav Kook*, p. 114, Jason Aronson, 1999. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgensztern of Kotzk (1787-1859) was a Hasidic leader in Poland.

⁶ Leibowitz, op cit, p. 500. Don Isaac Abravanel (1437 Lisbon - 1508 Venice) was a Bible commentator, philosopher and Finance Minister to the kings of Portugal, Spain, and Naples.

⁷ *Berachot*, 26b

⁸ Weitzman, op cit, p. 114. Rav Avraham Yitzhak Ha-kohen Kook (1865 Latvia - 1935 Eretz Israel), was the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine. He was a religious mystic whose deep respect and love for the whole of the Jewish people was reciprocated by the Jewish masses.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Leah Golberstein, MA, MFA, Mother, Artist, and Teacher, from The Twin Cities Jewish Healing Program, Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging.