



## Parashat T'rumah: Because the World Has a Heart

Dear Friends,

Last week (Parashat Mishpatim) I pointed out that we are beginning a series of parashot which entirely change the Israelite narrative as we have read it up until this point. This week it happens again: Parashat T'rumah is all about the construction of an earthly sanctuary for God.

This is a tremendous shift in thinking! From the God of the four winds of Bereishit and the first half of Sh'mot - a God who is everywhere - He suddenly chooses to “shrink”, and enter a sanctuary.

This huge shift is even more significant when we understand that the Mishkan (tabernacle) was the only topic of conversation that God raised with Moshe in the course of the forty days and nights that Moshe spent on Mount Sinai. He did not eat or drink, and all for ... the Mishkan!

Not only that, but whereas the Creation of the entire universe is described in one and a half chapters, the details of the Mishkan take up five entire parashot (fifteen chapters)!

It is not a coincidence that so many interpretations have been written about the Mishkan. Therefore, it is good that we return to it every year...

This year I would like to share with you a wonderful interpretation by the Malbim (Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser), one of our greatest thinkers from the 19th century in Eastern Europe. The text is not difficult, but it requires great concentration! I have added chapter headings and comments in square parentheses in order to make it easier to understand.

### **The universe is called “the big person”, and like the human body, it works in wondrous and holistic synergy:**

It is already known that all of the worlds join together as one person, and all of existence is called “the big person”... Just as all of the organs of a person [which make up the whole], even though each one of them has its own temperament and quality, they join to become one person; they are all connected and each part complements the other, so that if one organ is missing or one sinew, it is a flaw or a blemish for the entire body. So too, all of

existence and all of the worlds which God created are lined up and organized as one person and body which includes everything and everything is connected...

**Just as the Neshama is the life of a person, so, too, the Divine presence is the life of the universe:**

And just like a person whose essence is the divine soul, which gives life to all of the body and affects its movement and its thinking, and if it [the soul] separates from the body, then all of the organs will scatter as dead bones, so too the divine spreads its light and its animation in all of the worlds... In this [way] the intelligence of the Creator is evident, because His wisdom is His being, may He be blessed, which abounds in all of the worlds... to enliven them, to lead them, and to sustain them.

**The infinite Divine is wisdom, and it gives each and every organ its unique quality:**

Because the Einsof [a Kabbalistic/spiritual term for the Divine] which is God's essence, cannot be seen, everything that the prophets saw and that the sages understood is only from [the fact that] He is the soul of the worlds, its spirit, its vitality... It [the Divine soul] manifests itself in all organs according to its needs...for example in the brain [the Divine] appears as a cerebral soul, in the heart as a life sustaining soul, etc.

**So the Divine is in the world:**

And the Divine will spread throughout the infinite universe... And just as the soul in a person is his essence, and the body is just an external cover... so, too, the Divine is clothed by "the big person" which is the general reality...

**The world is "a big person" and humans are a "small world":**

...just as the entire world is called "big person", so an individual person is called "a small world," ...

The Mishkan is to the world as the soul is to a person, sustaining it and giving it life.

But - you should ask - if the divine flows in the entire world and gives it life, like the soul gives life to the body, then why does it require a sanctuary? "The entire world is filled with His presence" - said the prophet Yisha'yahu. Why then was it necessary to reduce it to a specific place? To a tent, no less?

Well, just as we view the heart as our spiritual and physical center ("follow your heart," we say, or "my heart is broken," or "he has a pure heart." and so on), so, too, the Mishkan is the metaphoric heart of the world.

Of course our physical heart is a muscle, no more (albeit, an essential one), and so, too, the Mishkan is a tent, nothing more.

**But yet, is that truly so? Is the heart only a muscle and no more???**

"Heartbreak", for example, is not just a metaphor. It is also very real. We know all too well that our heart can REALLY "break"! I know people who have died of a broken heart. Don't

you? And do we not put our hand on our hearts when we say to a friend “I swear to you.” And it is not a coincidence that the hospital monitor checks the state of the heart in order to see if we are still alive.

**“Everything has a heart, and even the entire world has a heart,”** said Rabbi Nachman in his final story, “The Tale of Seven Beggars.”

Indeed, every single thing has a heart - not only the world, and not only human beings. Even a single cell has a heart. So does a molecule, an atom, and a subatomic particle.

**“The entire world is filled with His presence”**, means that everything has a heart. Furthermore, everything is one infinite heart.

Only we did not notice!

Because the human brain is unable to grasp infinity or unity, but only separate things, we are unable to grasp God’s presence in the world. But the heart knows love. The heart grasps unity. The heart understands infinity. Hence it is the heart, and not the brain that is the seat of the soul, the seat of human vitality.

The next five parashot are a delightful attempt to allow the world to actually have a heart - both metaphorically, as well as figuratively. From this heart vitality was to spread throughout the universe. , therefore, tell the story of the Mishkan in exhausting, minute detail. Yet they are an amazing journey on which to experience the heart of the world, the heart of the universe, and of existence.

And, as we will see next week, the ones who built the Mishkan were the “wise of heart” - both men and women. Not engineers and not craftsmen and women. For only the wise of heart know how to weave all the contributions, all the gifts of Israel into One whole and holy tapestry. One which is both fully alive as well as life-sustaining.

Next week is the elections. The Israeli Knesset is called the “Mishkan”! Will our leaders know how to weave the many and diverse hearts of Israel into one life sustaining nation? I am not sure. For they are not wise of heart.

But you are! You can be! And that is a terrific start!

**And they shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them.** (Parashat T’ruma 25:8).

Shabbat Shalom, happy Adar, and a good heart!

Elisha

