DVAR TORAH PARSHAT TERUMAH
What Makes a House a Home
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1. When I work with wedding couples, I do one session with them where they reflect on the homes in which they grew up. What did they see in their parents' relationship? What do they want to bring from their past into this new family they are creating? What do they want to leave behind? Beyond the walls and the furnishing of their parent's and childhood home I ask them to think about what went on inside of it. What made it a holy place, a mikdash me'at, as our tradition calls it – a sanctuary in minature.

2. Then, we start to think about the future, and the Jewish home they will be creating together. I then share with them just how important the home is within Jewish thought.

3. Starting with this week's Torah portion, Terumah, from the middle of the book of Exodus and is the story of the building of the Mishkan, the tabernacle or tent of meeting. The portable synagogue that the Israelites built and carried with them throughout the desert.

4. Continuing with this week's Haftarah portion from Kings is the story of how Solomon build the first Temple in Jerusalem some 460 years later.

5. In both instances God commands that the sacred place, be built. God even dictates in exacting detail how the sacred places should be built, what they should look like, the finery of their edifice. But in neither does God provide the money or the material to build it, that is left to the people to come up with. So, what do they do? Two very real and very different responses to the challenge.

6. In the desert Moses, like nearly every rabbi after him holds a fundraiser, everyone is encouraged to give, as much as they can, whatever they can, something of value to them, the emphasis is on full participation. The Torah highlights the fact that the people as a whole volunteer their possessions and services to build the Tabernacle.

7. God enunciates the ideal at the outset: "Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person **whose heart so moves him**" (25:2). By implication, should they fail to contribute, the project would be delayed, if not aborted. And later the narrative stresses their extraordinary degree of compliance. The occasion stirred both men and women to share equally and unstintingly of their valuables and handiwork for the glory of the sanctuary. Indeed, contributions flowed in at such a furious pace that word had to be issued

to end the campaign (Exodus 36:5-6).

8. In Jerusalem temple during Solomon's reign there is no trace of voluntarism in the financing of the sacred project. To pay for the cedar and cypress wood and to quarry and transport the building materials, Solomon taxed and imposed forced labor on all of Israel; 30,000 men were forced into labor, he sent them to Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month. . . Solomon also had 70,000 porters and 80,000 quarriers in the hills, apart from Solomon's 3,300 officials who were in charge of the work" (I Kings 5:27-30).

9. The contrast is striking and the historical ramifications equally so. A medieval midrash observes, "The Tabernacle for which the people volunteered wholeheartedly never fell victim to the evil eye. The Temple, however, for which they did not, fell victim to the hand of the enemy" (*Kasher, Torah Shlemah*, v. 20, p. 6).

10. Both structures were Beiyti T'filah, Houses of Prayer, but only one could truly be called a home, in the same way that we frame what a home means for newlyweds reflecting on their childhood and planning for their future.

11. It was the Mishkan of the desert with it free will offerings and barn raising origins, like the scene from the movie Witness where every brings there tools, their labor and their generosity of spirit willingly and enthusiastically.

12. The lesson is clear, the fate of an institution, any institution be they physical buildings or emotional structures is determined by the measures taken to create it. Solomon's Temple, like some houses and relationships we know and have experienced rested on shaky ground from the beginning, it never had the full support of the people and it is no wonder that immediately after his death the kingdom split apart, and eventually so did the temple itself.

13. After the destruction of the first temple the prophet Ezekiel cries out (11:13), "Lord God, you are wiping out the remnant of Israel." God responds by declaring that He has "removed them far among the nations and I have scattered them among the countries, and I have become to them a *mikdash me'at*, a small sanctuary".

14. The sages have chosen to read God's becoming a *mikdash me'at* as a reassurance of God's presence in exile. However, others read it as another affliction of exile. The small temple is a diminished Temple, a sign of the restriction of God's presence. The comfort begins only in God's next words to Ezekiel, (v.17), "Yet . . . I will gather you from the peoples . . . and I will give you the Land of Israel."

15. Rabbi Julian Sinclair writes, “The ambiguity of mikdash me'at is that of the exile experience itself, one of suffering and restriction and yet of great creativity and achievement. But it is only *me'at,* small, compared to what the Jewish people can achieve when united in its homeland.”

16. Like so many lessons in life it is only after you have lost what your previously took for granted that you appreciate what you had, just how blessed you were. For anyone who has ever lived in a ‘home’ physical or emotional and finds them self homeless, the lesson is profound. Just as it was for our ancestors in exile who developed a far more intimate and personal relationship with god, the God of the Mikdash Me’at. But again we lost our way and Seventy years after the first temple was destroyed in 586 bce, the Jewish people returned from exile For close to 1000 years, God’s dwelling-place was thought to be the Temple in Jerusalem (in Hebrew, the location of the Temple Mount was Har ha-Bayit, or “The Mountain of the House”). But in the year 70, the Romans came and destroyed the Temple, leading to a huge question facing the Jewish community — will God still be with us if the Temple no longer existed?

17. The Rabbis answered with a resounding “yes”…although God would have to move into two new primary locations. The first, and less important one, would be the synagogue. The second, more important location where God would live would be the home. Jews were to make their home a “mikdash me’at,” a Temple in miniature, or as it’s often phrased, “a small sanctuary.”
18. “So,” I then turn to the wedding couple, “how will you make your home a mikdash me’at—a small sanctuary?“
19. With this framing, they start to think about their apartment our house in a new way. Words like “safe,” “joyous,” or “ours” often arise. Their sense of “home” shifts from a simple place where they keep their stuff to a place where holiness, connectedness and spirituality emanate.
20. As human beings, we are wired with a a desire to explore. But as the search for the first human home reminds us, we are also wired to feel a sense of rootedness and safety. We need more than a house — we need a home.
21. So perhaps, if we truly work on it, we can even transform our home into a true sanctuary—a place where we can find God’s dwelling-place in our midst.