

# Temple Beth Am

## Adult B Mitzvah

### Class of 5785



1 Adar 5785  
March 1, 2025  
*Parashat T'rumah*



## Monica Alcabin

I joined Temple Beth Am in March 2021 during COVID because I wanted to be part of a community. When the opportunity to join the Adult Beginning Hebrew class opened up, I jumped on it and made some new friends. I was able to follow that up with the Adult B Mitzvah Class and have found my community. I am so glad I waited until this moment to become a Bat Mitzvah.

D'var T'fillah Mi Sheberach

And now we get to one of my favorite parts of the service, The Prayer for Healing, *Mi Sheberach*. I did not grow up with this prayer. As I heard Rabbi Ruth share a few weeks ago during a bat mitzvah service – Judaism is a maximalist religion – we add new prayers, songs, and commentary to stay current.

Biblical scholars agree that it began as a prayer for the congregation and only in the 12th century was it being said for individuals, which was new for that time. The Union Prayer Book, published in 1895 and last updated in 1940, did not include it, nor did the 1975 Reform prayerbook, *Gates of Prayer*, which I grew up with. Communal prayers for healing started to be included in Reform congregations in the 1980s during the AIDS crisis. Debbie Friedman, a popular Jewish folk singer who lost many friends to AIDS wrote this version of the *Mi Sheberach* that we will be singing today, in the late 1980s. It became so popular that it was added to the Reform prayerbook, the one you are holding in your hands, in 2007 and is now part of every Shabbat service on Friday night and Saturday morning.

Rabbi Amy Perlin of Temple B'nai Shalom writes “Our Jewish Prayers for healing call upon the God of our ancestors, those who came before us, to help us find the strength and courage to endure illness and suffering and the uncertainty of our mortality. They try to encourage us to have strength in times of adversity and to find hope at times of greatest fear. And when we pray for others, our traditional prayers for healing, like the *Mi Sheberach*, enable us to feel less helpless in the face of things we have no control over. Prayer can transform fear into faith and hopelessness into hope.”

This prayer asks God for healing, of mind, body & spirit, not just for us but also for those in our community. How many times have I sat in the sanctuary on a Friday night, right where you are sitting, waiting for this prayer, to cope with distressing news of the past week, the past month, or the past year. It has gotten me through the pandemic, news of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, as well as the unwelcome diagnoses, illnesses and deaths of friends and loved ones and even a bad work week. As we recite this prayer, I envision our voices, together, rising up to reach the heavens above.

## Kristen Cohon

As a proud parent raising two Jewish daughters, I recently completed my own conversion to Judaism. My conversion felt like the perfect way to align my spiritual identity with my beliefs. I have really enjoyed the journey of becoming an adult Bat Mitzvah, and I am excited to share this special milestone with my community!

### D'var Torah

I want to share some insight from *Parashat T'rumah*—a message that should resonate with us, given our modern concept of Jewish community. Just as the Israelites came together to build the Tabernacle, we too are often invited, or asked, or at times maybe even begged, to come together and contribute to our community in one way or another. But in our busy lives, we often agree to contribute because we feel the pressure of “shoulds,” as if giving is an obligation. But *T'rumah* teaches us a vital lesson: true giving is not about obligation; it's about the heart.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz offers an intriguing perspective on *T'rumah* focusing on the concept of a “willing offering.” When the Israelites came together to build the tabernacle, each contributed to their own ability, not because they had to, but instead out of a sense of pure heartfelt desire...because they wanted to. How lovely is that? It reminds us that an ideal Jewish community will reflect our genuine enthusiasm and joy, and not just represent another checklist responsibility.

In my local Jewish community here in Seattle, I feel fortunate to be surrounded by some incredible people—including some close friends and family (some of whom are here today)—who pour their hearts into our local Jewish organizations. Many of them prioritize Jewish volunteerism in their lives despite juggling children, careers, and otherwise packed schedules. I have seen how much their effort strengthens our Jewish community, which has inspired me to give much more of myself. And here is the thing—despite leading a very busy life myself, I have consistently found that carving out time to give to the Jewish community is actually quite rewarding, not just to the community or organization I am volunteering for, but to me personally.

In a world that often feels overwhelming, and where it's easy to feel insignificant, it's worth remembering that every contribution we make to our community, big or small, can reignite our sense of self-worth. Think again about the *Mishkan*, the Sanctuary. It was special because it was built with love and sweat by the Israelites. Each person got to feel the pride of their contribution, as well as the satisfaction of knowing they were part of something greater.

That spirit of giving—and desire to feel something greater—is just as vital in our Jewish communities today.

The word "*T'rumah*" means "to be raised up," and it captures the essence of giving to our community. As we navigate our busy lives, let's commit to embracing this lesson. Let's cultivate a Jewish community where giving is not a dreaded "should" but a source of

genuine joy and fulfillment. Because when we give joyously, we build a community where each of us feels more valued, more connected, more supported, and more inspired.

Thank you for being here and for giving generously to our Jewish community.

## Lauren Dudakov

I feel incredibly proud to have reached this milestone in my Jewish journey. Becoming an adult B'nei Mitzvah has enabled me to find a deeper connection with my community and Jewish practice. I feel empowered to support my children as they approach their own Bat and Bar Mitzvah in the next few years, and I'm excited for more learning!

### D'var Torah

One of my first experiences with the rituals of Judaism was a death. I remember being struck how everyone knew what they were doing. We were sad and mourning the loss of a loved one, but there was a plan and for lack of a better word, instructions, to follow. We knew when to show up for the family, what to do for them, and they knew what to expect from us. I remember being in awe of how calm and intentional everything felt. In a time when emotions were high and people often feel helpless – there was a ritual, and we knew what to do.

*Parsha T'rumah* is a set of instructions for building a Tabernacle, also known as the *Mishkan*, a portable place for God to dwell. A very detailed set of instructions! Looking around us now, the instructions laid out in this *parashah* are evident in the sanctuary – we have the arc and the bimah, modeled on the Holy of Holies and the altars. We have a place, that looks pretty much the same in any synagogue we enter, to perform the rituals of Judaism – Shabbat services, High Holy Days, B'nei Mitzvah, are all performed in this familiar place that feels like our home.

Judaism is built on rituals that make us who we are and allow us to come together in times of celebration and in times of mourning. We're sitting here today saying the same prayers and singing the same songs that have been recited for centuries. When we attend a Jewish wedding, we know they'll likely be a *chuppah*, when we attend *Simchat Torah*, we know there will be dancing. When we are feeling lost, we can find comfort in the familiar pattern of a Shabbat service; when we have lost someone, we have the rituals of Jewish mourning to guide us through our pain.

According to the Ramban, who we also know as the medieval philosopher Nachmanides, the *Tabernacle* and the Temple built after it offers our people a way to experience over and over again the defining moment at Sinai. Even though reading through *Parashat T'rumah* is a little like reading Ikea instructions, we are ALL reading the same Ikea instructions, and that connection to each other and our ancestors is powerful.

## Theresa Glatstein

I began this process to create a more personal connection with Judaism and prayers. I wanted to feel more comfortable and confident during Shabbat services. I am grateful for this experience and to have learned with all of you.

### D'var Haftarah

Today's Haftarah, or reading from the Prophets, opens with the statement that Solomon was wise. By noting Solomon's wisdom and then describing his enacting a treaty to procure (forced) labor and supplies, I think we are to understand that Solomon's wisdom was not in construction, but in working with others. We know this Temple, once a vital center for the religion, was later destroyed and Jews dispersed throughout the world where we live today, connected not by a place for rituals, but by our traditions and prayers. I don't think we can read this portion as solely the painstaking creation of a structure that was later destroyed, but as a depiction of the work that goes into creating and sustaining community.

Now, I'm going to pause here for a moment. *Hochmah* is often translated from Hebrew, as wise, but the *shoresh*, or the Hebrew root of the word, is also used in Hebrew to create the words for a *rabbi* (in the Sephardic tradition), a sage, or a learned, educated, or skillful person. I think in English we often use wise to denote having some intrinsic ability to process deep thoughts and think critically in a way unattainable to the rest of us. People who are learned, educated, and skillful, on the other hand, do not, necessarily, possess something innate that allows them to achieve over and above the rest of us. They work hard, make mistakes, and take the time to learn. This interpretation of wisdom allows us to think of Solomon's ability to work with others as a skill that we can all work to grow and strengthen.

Now, if Rabbi Ruth is right, and she usually is, and this is the "perfect Haftarah portion for this moment", I think we are supposed to understand today that working with others; finding a common, unifying goal; and then encouraging people to work toward that goal is vital to creating a thriving community that has withstood millennia of obstacles. And doing that is not an ability we are born with or without, but is instead a skill we can all improve through learning and practicing. Today we can carry forward Solomon's work by sustaining this community, welcoming new members to our community, and continuing to work as a community toward shared goals for our common good. Your leadership and active participation in this community bolsters us against hardships and makes our joys that much sweeter. And this isn't aspirational - you're all a part of that right now. Being here at Shabbat services; bringing your kids to Gan and staying to get to know other parents; serving on a committee or the Board; or supporting your child, parent, partner, or friend through their (adult) B'nai Mitzvah process is all part of the work necessary to building and sustaining an enduring community. It is not through inherited proclivities, but hard work that we thrive as a community.

## Megan Kagel

I view this experience as part of a continuum of learning that helps to inform my Jewish identity. While neither a start nor an end, becoming a Bat Mitzvah deepens my commitment to the Jewish tradition and helps me carry it forward to our community, our allies and the next generation of Jews.

D'var T'fillah Ahavah Rabah

There are many translations of *Ahavah Rabbah*, typically focused on the invitation to embrace a life of love, learning, and connection with the Divine. This blessing frames the *Sh'ma* as part of a compact of love, where love flows from God to us and back to the world through our actions. This reciprocal relationship transforms *mitzvot* from obligations into opportunities to help us reflect divine love in our thoughts, desires and actions.

Written from the perspective of the human, the prayer lays out the ideal social contract between the people of Israel and our God. In one translation, there is a specific request to God to “protect us from shame”. I found this request to be particularly interesting because shame is an emotion we create within ourselves, centered around the response of others towards our behavior. In essence, asking God to protect us from shame is asking God to protect us from ourselves.

The clinical definition of shame is “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety”. Within our array of human emotions, shame plays a dual role of punisher and regulator. While we manufacture feelings of shame within our consciousness to chastise ourselves for making bad choices, it is also a powerful tool to engage with at the decision point of such behavior. It is a built-in mechanism within the human psyche that police our choices, for better or for worse.

The divine wisdom to integrate shame into the human portfolio of emotions is monumental. Shame helps us feel the pain associated with the impact of our bad choices and can act as an intervention before we begin. Experiencing shame can also insulate us from repeating bad behavior. Asking God to protect us from shame seems reasonable because the experience of shame is so painful. However, this request not only denies us the power to develop wisdom around our choices and learn from our mistakes, but it rejects an important element of the human experience that God intentionally designed to ultimately protect us and help us grow into better people.



## Alana Knaster

Music has been central to my religious identity and experience as a child growing up in the Northeast and then as an adult in California. I have been able to add a chapter in my Jewish learning that was an important missing link.

### D'var Torah

In *Terumah*, the Israelites are instructed to build a sanctuary (*mishkan*) so that G-d may "dwell among them". Throughout the text, there are details on exactly what materials will be utilized and how every component will be designed. Each person is required to provide a contribution or gift (*Terumah*) towards this project. However, the text then includes the following key phrase:

"Tell the treasurers 'You must take the contribution for Me from every man whose heart prompts him to give'".

After reading our Torah *parashah*, I struggled with how to resolve the contradiction between simultaneously mandating compliance versus wanting an action to be done willingly. I put this question aside hoping that time would yield an answer.

Several months later, my husband and I traveled to Morocco. Morocco is a wonderful tourist destination. What I didn't realize was that it is also a place of Jewish historical significance. The first Jewish migrants arrived from Judea as early as 500 BCE, and again after the destruction of the first Temple in 70 AD. More arrived over the centuries including a major migration of Sephardic Jews in 1492. They found a relatively safe haven to practice Judaism. In Fez, we visited a synagogue built in the 1600s. The sanctuary and a few outer rooms had been preserved. As our guide pointed out various features, he pointed to the ark and said- you may touch anything in this room, but not this ark. It is holy to the Jewish people and only they can touch it. When the group left the room, I approached the ark, touched it and sobbed. How sacred this ark must have been to the original people who settled here. They came almost empty-handed but one of their first acts was to willingly contribute towards building an ark for their community. Their contribution was even more powerful because of their circumstances.

In Marrakesh, we visited a synagogue built in 1492 by Jews who escaped the Inquisition. They too were welcomed and permitted to worship according to their traditions. With few possessions and resources, they built a sanctuary and ark to be able to gather and worship. Our guide pointed out the features of the sanctuary and said- you can touch anything in this room, but not this ark. It is holy to the Jewish people.

As my tears once again flowed, I came to understand the meaning of “willingness” and its relationship to the ark over the centuries. The former slaves could go to the *mishkan* if they wanted to be near the holy stone tablets and be assured that they were in the presence of the Divine. This was true for the Jewish people for all the generations thereafter. Each ark was especially precious because they contributed willingly to its creation.

My tears in Fez and Marrakesh were not the first time I touched an ark and cried. As a young girl growing up in an Orthodox Jewish community, I was not allowed to go on the bimah let alone to touch the ark. I was thirty-five years old the first time I went up on a *bimah*. I had joined a conservative synagogue and was given an *Aliyah* as a new member- to open the ark. It was a combination of fear and awe as I walked up those stairs. Just touching the curtain brought tears. It still has the same meaning to me all these years later. It is a holy place and I feel closer to G-d.

The voluntary nature of the gift described in *T'rumah* is especially relevant to a class of adult learners. Certainly, many Jewish children are willing participants in this mitzvah. It might also be said that there is a little pressure from family and friends re what is expected of them. Adult learners decide to take on this responsibility many years later than at age 13 and each has a different reason for being willing to make this commitment and responsibility.

Participating in this class over the last 18 months has had a very special meaning to me. I have refreshed my reading Hebrew; I have translated the text of today's prayers as well of our torah and haftorah reading; and I have done extensive research on the meaning of the prayers and texts. Now I stand before you - our teachers, family, friends and members of the Congregation with great humility - to participate in this centuries' old tradition. I do so with some trepidation- but willingly.

## Maya Menon

I have been a member of TBA since 2020 and this community has become a home. I am so honored to stand up today and lead a service with 12 adult learners who I admire. This journey will always be a special chapter in my life.

### D'var T'fillah Avot V'imahot

When I first started going to services, I realized how little I knew about Jewish prayer. I also learned that the prayer book leaves a lot of instructions out such as when to repeat words, when to bow, and when to stand. I remember looking around, trying to copy everyone else, and getting stressed I was doing it all wrong. During this B Mitzvah process, I have gotten to spend time learning how to be competent and confident in services.

The *Avot v'Imahot* prayer translates as "Fathers and Mothers." It praises the God of our ancestors, hoping that we too can have the same loving relationship with God. During this prayer, individuals bow as a sign of respect and humility to God and his word. This is one of my favorite prayers.

As a convert, I had to wrestle with what this prayer means to me. I don't consider my ancestors to be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah or Rachel. Those born Jewish get to have a starting place to begin their conversation with God. For me, I need to start my relationship from scratch. I chose to join the adult B' Mitzvah class because a part of me felt like I had to "prove" that I am Jewish. Something I had to prove to the world, something to prove to my community, and something to prove to myself. Just like conversion was, being called to Torah is an important step in my relationship with God. God does not care about my resume. I don't need to make a checklist of all the services I've been to, the committees I've joined, or the amount of challah I've baked. God will see me for who I truly am- through my faith, through my love for this community, for my deep connection with Judaism, and for all the things that make me unique. In this prayer, I am stating to God that I am not a stranger. I am not here to compare myself to others. I am simply saying to God that I want and need a relationship with him.

Something I love about Judaism is everyone is free to determine their own relationship with God. When I say this prayer, I am choosing to love God just like the Jewish people have for 5785 years. And by choosing to live a Jewish life every day, I hope to have a special relationship with God too.

## Sarah Nichols

I am a California native, and when I moved to Seattle in 2022 I quickly found my spiritual home at Beth Am. After I took an Intro to Judaism class, I wanted to continue learning, so when I heard about the Adult B'Mitzvah program it seemed like the perfect opportunity! I've really enjoyed getting to know my classmates and rabbis over the past year and a half, and learning from their unique perspectives.

### D'var Haftarah

In the *Amidah* prayers we read silently earlier, we asked God: "God who is near to all who call, turn lovingly to your servants, and pour out your spirit upon us." Many of us go through times when we wish God were nearer to us, but aren't sure how we could accomplish such a thing. This prayer gives us a hint - but what does it mean to call to God?

In *Parshat T'rumah*, God gives Moses extremely detailed instructions on how the Israelites should build the *mishkan* so that God can dwell among them. In First Kings, Solomon discerns with his famous wisdom that he needs to build the Temple to exacting dimensions, materials, and construction rules so that God will abide among the children of Israel. These are both examples of our ancestors calling to God through the act of building physical structures. While the Jewish people have moved away from building literal houses for God to dwell in, we have found other ways to call God into our lives.

I grew up without religion, and for a long time I considered myself an agnostic. I had never found any compelling evidence of God or had any kind of personal religious experience, and I figured if I ever did I could always re-evaluate. But at the time I had no evidence or experience of a God, so I didn't feel like I was missing anything.

But in my mid-twenties, I began to feel like there was something missing in my life. You know that feeling - well, I don't think I can describe it better than one of my favorite bands, Apes of the State: "What's the point of living life, to work until I die, that can't be it and if it is then I want out." I was in search of that "missing something," some idea of how to live a good life and what the point of it all is. I moved away, changed careers, and started going to synagogue for the first time in my life. When I started coming to synagogue every week, that's when I finally started to experience God. My whole life, the idea of just talking to a God that I thought probably didn't exist felt kind of cheesy. Some people find *kevah*, the discipline of structured prayer and worship, a little dry and boring. But for me, something about the structure of the weekly prayer service put me in the right state of mind to start really, earnestly talking to God.

I began to experience what I later learned was *kavanah*, the almost indescribable feeling of gratitude and emotional connection to God. Sometimes when I'd pray from the heart after completing the fixed prayers or Shabbat rituals, I could feel God listening to my sadness or gratitude or confusion - the comforting presence, unfathomable mystery we talk about during the High Holy Days. I found God after I started praying every week, when my whole life I had assumed it could

only make sense the other way around. But of course, any scholar of *T'rumah* and First Kings could have predicted it: You have to call before God can answer. You have to build God a home, even if it's a home in your heart and in your schedule, before God can dwell with you. *Kavanah* follows *kevah*.

You may have experienced this relationship between *kevah* and *kavanah* in other areas of life as well. If you are an artist, you have to be disciplined about practicing your art in order to create space for inspiration to nest. You have to walk your dog every day to create a place for your bond to grow. To build a strong, loving family you have to be disciplined about things like family dinners and holiday traditions and showing up for each others' important life events (like B'not Mitzvah). If you want a relationship to last, whether it's with your children, spouse, pet, or with God, you need to build it a home. The home may change over time, just as our tradition's home for God has changed from the *mishkan* to the Temple to the fixed prayers, but if you build it out of *kevah* it will always protect the thing inside. And it doesn't hurt if you panel it with 5-cubit high planks of cedar either.

## Louie Raffloer

I have arrived here today, after a journey of a little more than sixty five year from my birth date, in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. My life has been filled with the most amazing distractions one could ever hope for. I am grateful to be here, now, becoming Bar Mitzvah.

D'var Torah

"...from every person whose heart is so moved "may never have been as important in an opening of a commandment, as it is in our current lives. Its importance lies in its inclusion of all, with the caveat of having a common desire for peace and, perhaps, fealty to the One. It is quite possible that the opening words of *T'rumah* are among the most discussed in the Torah.

We can imagine proceeding forward with next 39 verses in this chapter with the feeling of spiritual camaraderie for our fellows as we labor through the task that God has given. Fortunately for us, and all sockets, cubits, and lapis lazuli's aside, we understand a much more meaningful outcome. Among the tens of thousands of tribal members we had a goal to create a place that God said that God would be able to dwell with us. This concept is under constant discussion and in every conversation winds up being agreed that God is actually going to dwell within us, that's what I hear at least.

In addition to construction project that God gave us to do, we had aspired to have God living within us. It has been my own personal experience that there are people to my left and right (mostly on my left) that I can see that God lives within them.

In our current social landscape, we have to struggle really hard to see the Divine presence in some people that are in the headlines. Our teachings have assured us that the Divines spark burns everywhere and in everyone. This is a good time for us to try and create the brightest spark that we can and help our nearest to ignite a brighter light themselves. Moving forward we must continue building the sanctuary in our individual souls and recognize the holiness in the good people that we know.

Building the *Mishkan* was a grass roots effort and so will be, our survival.

Look to your neighbors, now; look at our Sanctuary here; Look at your neighbor again.

We built this and God lives here.

## Cynthia Lynn Schumacher

I was born May 22, 1953, in Hanover, New Hampshire. I grew up in Cleveland Heights. Met my husband in Chicago when he was a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I moved to Seattle to attend the University of Washington School of Public Health and worked as an activist in my 30s. I've been married to my husband, Steven Oscherwitz for 40 years.

### Dvar Haftarah

In his book *The Sabbath*, prominent Jewish philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel argues that reverence for sacred practices and the presence of the Torah, the Divine Presence, were central to the construction of the *synagogue*, whereas the building in which this practice occurred was not.

Therefore, this brings two facets to the architecture of Jewish synagogues. The first ironically, since the building itself was not a focus, the result was that Jewish synagogues were built in the style of the local architecture. Building a grand temple tethered in space and time was not the point. There was no need to make the temple on a mountain or in a grand, distinctly Jewish building. The style of the Temple of Solomon echoed other temples in Mesopotamia at that time.

Our Temple, Temple Beth Am, reflects the architecture of the Northwest. It has many ceiling windows with trees and birds open to the sky. Our sanctuary's rafters and vaulted ceiling are from our big northwest trees. This fashioning of the synagogue using local architecture has persisted since Solomon's time.

The second and most important facet of Jewish synagogue architecture involves Jewish practices. Because of this, our Temple is like King Solomon's Temple in the ways that Rabbi Heschel's thesis would predict. Of course, both have the Torah, the ark, and the fellowship of the community.

Although King Solomon had the tablets, the Torah was not yet written. However, they are both the word of God given to people throughout the ages. We both have the light that burns eternally. Both synagogues had porches. King Solomon's synagogue's patio was at the front entrance, where official business was transacted. Our patio is an area for Temple events such as building the *Sukkah* and other religious ceremonies. It is also a place for fellowship.

Both synagogues have columns. King Solomon's columns were famous and resembled those in other Mesopotamian religions. The columns were named Javin and Boas. They were an imposing nine meters high and forged from bronze. Following that tradition, we have columns at our entrance and parking lot. We thank King Solomon for giving us the first synagogue. As I come for the Bat mitzvah today, I am walking on that path, and I look forward to following it throughout time.

## Julie Siegel

I am so grateful for this opportunity that I have had to be called to Torah. It's not something I ever would have seen myself doing at this stage in my life, but it has been an incredible learning experience for me. I have learned over the last three years about Judaism, the Hebrew language, chanting Torah, and my ability to push myself to learn these things. Most importantly, I have developed lasting relationships with the people who entered into this experience with me that I hope will only continue to grow.

### D'var Torah

Anyone who has read this week's Torah portion, *T'rumah*, knows that it's a little on the dry side. It's nothing but measurements, materials, colors, and materials needed to build the *tabernacle*. At first, and maybe second, glance, there doesn't appear to be much there to for one to write a *D'var Torah*, even one that is only one to two pages long. When I Googled the word, "*T'rumah*," I found that it means contribution, gift, or an offering given of freewill. *T'rumah* is often summarized as God asking the Israelites to contribute materials, skills, and time to build the *Tabernacle* in the desert as a place of worship.

In my own part of this Torah portion, Exodus 25:8 is translated as, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." This seems to be referring to a physical dwelling, one that we are being given exact details of how to build, but do we need a physical place to dwell with God or can that also be a place inside each of us? Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus said, "We understand that we must be active participants in our relationship with God; that we must do something, bring something, in order for God to dwell in our midst. And we know that ultimately the most sacred dwelling place for God is within our own hearts. We offer, from our own hearts, to bring God into our hearts."

Most of us lead busy lives and feel like we are being pulled in multiple directions all the time. Work, significant others, children, family, friends, social obligations, household chores, and a never-ending list of other things can often make temple attendance feel, or be, impossible. Being here, at Temple Beth Am, feels like the obvious place to dwell with God. It's where I come for services, classes, social activities, and to form friendships and make a community with other like-minded Jewish people. All of this has built a foundation for me to make room for God to dwell in my heart when I am outside of these walls.



## Davida Sims

Although Davida Sims has lived her life in Jewish spaces, she is excited to finish her path to reading Torah that was paused between the ages of 12 to 50!

### D'var Torah

I have never been someone who gets excited by extravagant gifts. As a single mom, regardless of my financial situation, I have always told my boys the most meaningful gifts they could give me were handwritten notes or art. To this day I still treasure these sacred gifts from my sons. Included in these most beloved possessions are beautiful notes written inside cards and my older son's Bar Mitzvah D'var Torah from 2015. In fact, they are so cherished that I keep them in my bedside table, close to my heart.

So like many people when I first read *T'rumah* I was left perplexed by the over the top nature of the material gifts God requests from the Israelites. Here we are in the middle of Exodus, during a time of great suffering, and Moses is instructed to have the Israelites build the most extravagant temporary tabernacle for God. The tent was to be made of linen curtains, goat's hair tenting, a curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and overlaid with gold, silver, and dolphin skin. The Israelites barely could come together for survival, yet they were to build God an excessive temporary palace for God to dwell alone.

My liberal soul was wilted. Is this the God that I want to follow? Why would God need such a specific and luxurious temporary dwelling? But after reading many commentaries, including by Rabbi Joseph Prouser and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, I had a different thought. Maybe it wasn't about the tabernacle at all. Maybe It was about the Israelites coming together not to just survive, but to give the most valuable gift: their time, talents, and every conceivable luxury their hearts and minds could dream up, in service to another.

Even though it's only one sentence among hundreds, before the gifts of gold, linen and dolphin skin, God's very first request of Moses is that to build the tabernacle at all it must be voluntary and from the heart. So, without the Israelite's desire to give, the materiality of the gifts does not even come into question. What God was really asking of the Israelites was for them to get out of a selfish survival mindset and stop focusing on themselves. God wanted to give them a grand purpose to come together to create something for others. To voluntarily dive within their hearts and create the most beautiful dwelling conceivable. Not for themselves, but a place for another to dwell.

And it worked! For the first time since before they came to Egypt, the Israelites stopped complaining and started cooperating.

They gave selflessly, living within their hearts and within community. They went from a lost people in the desert, to a purpose filled communal group with a God who was now dwelling in grandness in the center of their community. And although this rich and luxurious dwelling was only temporary, it did last for nearly 400 years until Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem. But in many ways, it has lasted even longer. Still today thousands of years later, in every Jewish home

including here at Beth Am, God dwells at the center of our community so long as we voluntarily give service to each other from our hearts.

So in the end, maybe it doesn't matter how extravagant the tabernacle was. That doesn't appear to be God's goal. God wanted the Israelites to go inside their hearts and find a bigger purpose. Much like the beautiful notes from my boys that continue to inspire me, these are the best gifts. The ones in which we look inside our hearts and give to others the most beautiful and inspirational things. It is hard not to agree that the best gifts are in service to others and in service to building and sustaining the lasting bonds of family and community. It is hard not to agree that the best gifts are in service to others and in service to building and sustaining the lasting bonds of family and community.

Mazel Tov to the Class of 5785!

Monica Alcabin

Kristen Cohon

Lauren Dudakov

Theresa Glatstein

Megan Kagel

Alana Knaster

Maya Menon

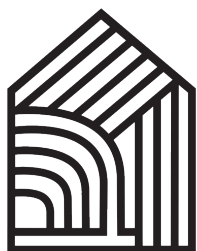
Sarah Nichols

Louie Raffloer

Cynthia Lynn Schumacher

Julie Siegel

David Sims



TEMPLE

**BETH AM**