

Message from the Haftara

Rabbi Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva

Ohr Torah Stone Institutions

The Sanctuary as a Beacon

T'RUMA

Parshat T'ruma details the design of the Mishkan, while its haftara describes the construction of the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem by King Shlomo. Yet these architectural descriptions are not merely technical records of sacred design. They offer a vision of what a holy space is meant to accomplish.

The Temple in Jerusalem was far more than just a site of prayer and sacrifice. It was a living center of national and spiritual life, a place where men and women fostered their relationship with God in diverse and meaningful ways. When we recognize the full range of the Beit Hamikdash's roles, we better understand the significance and responsibilities of our own Batei Knesset, which have succeeded the Temple as epicenters of Jewish life.

Rabbinic sources reveal a strikingly multifaceted institution. In addition to being a site of worship, the Beit HaMikdash was a place of learning and teaching for adults and youth

(Tosefta Sanhedrin 2:6 and Bavli Pesachim 26a), a center of charitable distribution and social responsibility (Mishna Sh'kalim 5:6 and Rambam Sanhedrin chs. 1 and 3), and a model of socially and environmentally conscious institutional management (Mishna Midot 3:2). The Temple was not isolated from daily life; it enhanced it.

Our synagogues also have the potential to fill these roles. They host shiurim, provide space and resources for independent learning, and have the capacity to coordinate educational initiatives with local families and schools. They organize tzedaka campaigns, provide a forum for communal mediation, and collaborate on community-wide initiatives supporting important social and environmental causes. Like the Beit HaMikdash, synagogues too can be engines of education, responsibility, and moral leadership in addition to mere houses of prayer.

Crucially, the Temple was also the site of life cycle events such as marriages and bereavements. There were two special offices ensconced in the eastern wall of the Temple where residents of Jerusalem could come and extend words of condolence to mourners or bestow congratulations and blessings to brides and grooms (Sof'rim 19). These offices positioned the Temple as a spiritual anchor not

only for national worship, but for private joy and grief, sanctifying the rhythms of daily life.

This legacy also lives on in our synagogues: marriages are marked by an *aufruf*, where the groom is called up to the Torah. The Maharil (15th century) recounts a custom in which the community would dance the bride and groom home from the synagogue after Shabbat services. And when a community suffers loss, the whole congregation pauses its prayers at the start of Shabbat to offer words of comfort to the recently bereaved. These are not incidental traditions, they are echoes of the role originally filled by the Temple, affirming that the Jewish life cycle is not merely social rhythm, but a framework through which we connect with God.

There is a verse in our haftara that beautifully captures this vision: “And for the house he [Shlomo] made windows wide without, and narrow within” (Melachim Alef 6:4). In most ancient buildings, windows were designed to draw light inward. But here, the architectural design was the opposite. God, after all, does not require illumination. The role of the windows was to allow the divine light to radiate outward.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 31), explains the metaphor more explicitly. The role of the Beit HaMikdash is to channel the radiant values of the

Torah into the world. Its light was not meant to remain contained within the sacred walls, it is meant to project morality and divine vision to the world.

So too with the Jewish people. Our calling is not merely to take in and reflect surrounding culture, but rather to shape it, to serve as a light unto the nations by embodying and promulgating the Torah’s divine values.

Viewed through this lens, the synagogue as a *mikdash me’at* must embody this idea, modeling for our communities principles of sanctity, justice, and social responsibility. When our *batei kneset* embrace this mission, they become more than just meeting places and prayer houses. They become beacons of light.

And when that light radiates outward, illuminating homes, communities, society, and the world, we are continuing the sacred work of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash: bringing God’s presence into the world and serving as a light unto the nations. 