



## Terumah – Mishkan and Menucha

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

*And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst (Exodus 25:8)*

The *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) was a national endeavor. It was not a project undertaken and underwritten solely by the wealthy, it was a result of the collective effort and generosity of the entire Jewish people. It was this inclusivity that allowed this structure to become the House of God. It was not the precious gold and silver, nor was it the incredible workmanship that made this *Mishkan* into the domicile of the Divine; it was the collective energy, it was the national cohesion created by undertaking this sacred task as one people with one heart which allowed the Divine to rest in this special place. The strength of our people is found in our unity. The strength of *Am Yisroel* is most present and pronounced when we look out for one another and find ways to build bonds and bridges of understanding and empathy.

This month of February is North American Inclusion Month (NAIM), a month where must take a step back and make sure that our communities are inclusive and embracing of all people with all types of challenges and differences. This month offers us the opportunity to create a *Mishkan* of inclusion and acceptance within our midst.

I would like to share with you a powerful experience I had just a few months ago. I was invited by *Menucha* (an incredible organization in Baltimore which is dedicated to helping children with special needs and their families) to be a scholar in residence for their annual Shabbaton. This Shabbos was for the parents and their special needs child. I was tasked with providing some Torah and inspiration for the Shabbaton attendees. There are some experiences which forever change your life and the way you see the world; this was one of them. I had the opportunity to meet these special children. And when I use the word “special” I am not using it as a euphemism for “challenged,” I mean truly special. I saw children who exuded the purest and holiest of love. I saw children who looked at the world and other people through a lens of unadulterated goodness and *simcha*. I met children who were limited physically and cognitively but possessed an unlimited capacity for warmth, care, empathy and the truest happiness I have ever seen. And I met their parents. These parents are a special breed. I saw for just a couple of hours the care, attention and love these parents provide. I saw a brand of fierce parental commitment that I have never witnessed beforehand. I love my own children very much, but there was something different here. There was a bond that I cannot explain, there was a connection that I cannot put into words. To the onlooker it may have looked as if it was a one-sided relationship: the parent giving and the child receiving. But it was clear that these parents felt the love emoted by their children and the unique and synergistic bond between parent and child grew stronger every moment. I felt that I was at a convention of the righteous. I met the volunteers, a group of young women and men from our community who display patience, compassion and empathy beyond their years. In a time when we struggle to keep our children engaged, I realized that we must push our youth to get more involved in chessed and helping others to cement their bond to our people and Torah. I have never witnessed love, commitment and acceptance as I felt over that Shabbos. I thank Rabbi Aryeh Richter, Executive Director of *Menucha* for all his incredible work and for inviting me for Shabbos. I want to thank the children and parents of *Menucha*. I want to thank the parents for teaching me what it truly means to be a parent. Thank you for showing me what it truly means to love a child, not because of what you think they can or will accomplish but because of who they are. I want to thank the children of *Menucha*. Thank you for allowing me into your world of purity and holiness. Thank you for allowing me to bask in your simple and pure goodness. Thank you for wishing me “ah gut Shabbos” with such meaning and for your beautiful smiles that could light up the darkest of places. Thank you for making me part of your extended family for that one, magnificent Shabbos. Thank you for allowing me to reside in your *Mishkan*. I came to inspire and had the privilege to leave truly inspired.