



## The Mishkan: The Jewish Art of Building and Becoming

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In Parshat Terumah, the Israelites are commanded to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Why construct something so exquisite and detailed in the middle of a desert? And what can building something so valuable, then and now, teach us about living through uncertainty? In this episode of TEXTing IRL, **Elana Stein Hain** and Hartman research fellow **Tamara Mann Tweel** turn to the rabbinic tradition to explore how building can ground us, offering practices that shape who we become.

*This source sheet is part of the **February 16, 2026** episode of the podcast **TEXTing IRL - Ideas for Real Life**. Host **Elana Stein Hain** sits down with guests who are accomplished practitioners in their fields to explore how classic and modern Jewish texts can help us wrestle with and act with integrity in the face of the big dilemmas of our time.*

**Elana Stein Hain** is the Rosh Beit Midrash and a senior research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, where she serves as lead faculty and consults on the content of lay and professional programs.

A widely well-regarded thinker and teacher, Elana is passionate about bringing rabbinic thought into conversation with contemporary life. To this end, she hosts [TEXTing IRL](#), a bi-weekly podcast that considers issues relevant to Jewish life through the lens of classical and modern Torah texts; she also teaches [Talmud from the Balcony](#), an occasional learning seminar exposing the big ideas, questions, and issues motivating rabbinic discussions. Elana is the author of [Circumventing the Law: Rabbinic Perspectives on Legal Loopholes and Integrity](#) (Penn Press, 2024) which uses loopholes as a lens for understanding rabbinic views on law and ethics.

She earned her doctorate in Religion at Columbia University and is an alumna of the Yeshiva University Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS) as well as the Consortium in Jewish Studies and Legal Theory Graduate Fellowship at Cardozo School of Law. She also served for eight years as a clergy member on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, at both Lincoln Square Synagogue and the Jewish Center, has taught at the Wagner School at NYU, and sits on the board of Sefaria: A Living Library of Jewish Texts.

Elana is currently living in Jerusalem with her family.

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### 1. Nachmanides, Commentary, Introduction to Parshat Terumah

כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּנִים בְּפָנִים עֲשֶׂתָּהּ הַדְּבָרוֹת . . . וְיִשְׂרָאֵל קִבְּלוּ עָלֵיהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל מַה שְּׂיִצְוּם עַל יְדוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְכָרַת עִמָּהֶם בְּרִית עַל כָּל זֶה, מֵעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵם לֹו לְעַם וְהוּא לָהֶם לֹא-לֵהִים . . .

When God spoke the Ten Commandments face-to-face with Israel . . . and Israel accepted upon themselves to do all that God would command them through Moses, and God made a covenant with them on all this; starting from now, they become God's nation, and God becomes their God . . .

. . . וְסוֹד הַמִּשְׁכָּן הוּא, שֶׁיְהִי הַכְּבוֹד אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַן עַל הַר סִינַי שׁוֹכֵן עָלָיו בְּנִסְתָּר . . .

The secret of the Tabernacle is that the same divine presence that rested on Mount Sinai will rest hidden in the Mishkan.

### 2. Maimonides, *The Book of the Commandments*, Positive Mitzvot 20

וְהַמִּצְוָה הָעֲשָׂרִים הִיא שְׂצוּגְנוּ לְבָנוֹת בַּיִת עֲבוֹדָה. בּוֹ יְהִי הַהִקְרָבָה וְהַבְּעָרָת הָאֵשׁ תָּמִיד וְאֵלָיו יְהִי הַהֲלִיכָה וְהַעֲלִיָּה לְרַגְלֵי וְהַקְּבוּץ בְּכָל שָׁנָה . . .

The 20th commandment is that God commanded us to build a house of worship. There will be sacrifice and a constant, burning flame in there, and that is where people will go on pilgrimage and gathering throughout the year . . .

### 3. Rashi, commentary to Shemot (Exodus) 31:18

וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה וְגו'. אֵין מִקְדָּם וּמֵאַחַר בְּתוֹרָה – מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל קִדְּם לְצוּוֵי מְלֹאכֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמִים רַבִּים הָיָה . . . (תנחומא)

There is no chronology in the Torah. The sin of the Golden Calf was before the construction of the Tabernacle . . . (Tanhuma)

### 4. Rashi, commentary to Shemot (Exodus) 38:21

מִשְׁכָּן הָעֵדוּת. עֵדוּת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁוִתָּר לָהֶם הַקַּב"ה עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, שֶׁהָרִי הִשְׁרָה שְׁכִינָתוֹ בֵּינֵיהֶם :

"The Tabernacle of Testimony" - testimony to Israel that God forgave them for doing the Golden Calf, for God made God's presence dwell among them in the Tabernacle.