

This week I reflect on when trees became martyrs in Umm al-Hiran, and how the light from the Temple can sustain us even today. Plus a BONUS Mishkan song.

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Sam Blustin

## Torah From The Holy Land Parshat Terumah

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### Torah: When The Trees Were Martyrs

“The political, economic and cultural welfare of the Arabs will thus always remain one of the main conditions for the well-being of the land of Israel.” Ze’ev Jabotinsky (1880-1940), *Was Wollen die Zionisten-Revisionisten*, 1926

A few weeks ago, I visited the soon to be demolished Israeli Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran, located in the Negev (southern Israel). At the time of our visit, ten houses had just been demolished, and the incident in which a Bedouin man was shot in his car, which led to his [killing a security official](#), was fresh in the air. The village, which has existed since military police moved them there in the 1950s, is an unrecognized village. Now, with a new, Jewish town set to be built on the same location, the Bedouin of the town have weeks at the most before they’re evicted (for more on the history of the Bedouin in the Negev, see [here](#)). It was in this context that I, along with T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, paid a solidarity visit.

Our main task was to plant olive trees in the courtyard surrounding the mosque alongside villagers. In all likelihood, the mosque, and consequently the trees, would be the last area to be destroyed. I thought back to the [story of Honi](#), who stumbled across an old man planting a carob tree. “Old man,” he asked, “do you expect to be alive to eat the fruit of this tree?” The old man responded, “Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees planted by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees.” Back in Umm al-Hiran, I wondered, what was the point of planting these trees, which will never bear fruit?

In Parshat Terumah, we receive the details of how the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, should be built. One particular detail stands out: The shittim, acacia wood, which was to be used for boards and walls. Where did they find acacia in the middle of the desert? Midrash Tanchuma comments:

“Ya’akov Avinu planted them when he went down to Egypt. He said to his sons: ‘My

sons, you will eventually be redeemed from here, and after you are redeemed, the Holy Blessing One will command you to make Him a Mishkan. Therefore, arise and plant cedars now, so that when He tells you to make Him a Mishkan, the cedars will be ready for you...”

Ya’akov Avinu knew that these trees would be used by the Israelites to one day build the Mishkan, but they served an additional purpose as well. These trees were a sign of hope, a promise of the coming redemption. They reminded people that even in the worst of situations, one should remain hopeful.

In Umm al-Hiran, I realized that while the physical trees may not bear fruit, the seeds of hope and humanity we planted may yet grow. By standing in solidarity with the villagers, we showed them that Jews are not just cruel oppressors, but that there are Jews who are willing to stand with them and who seek to build a joint life together. May the Holy Blessing One bless these and all of our efforts to build bridges, within and without, with plentiful fruit.

## **T’fillah: Or Chadash**

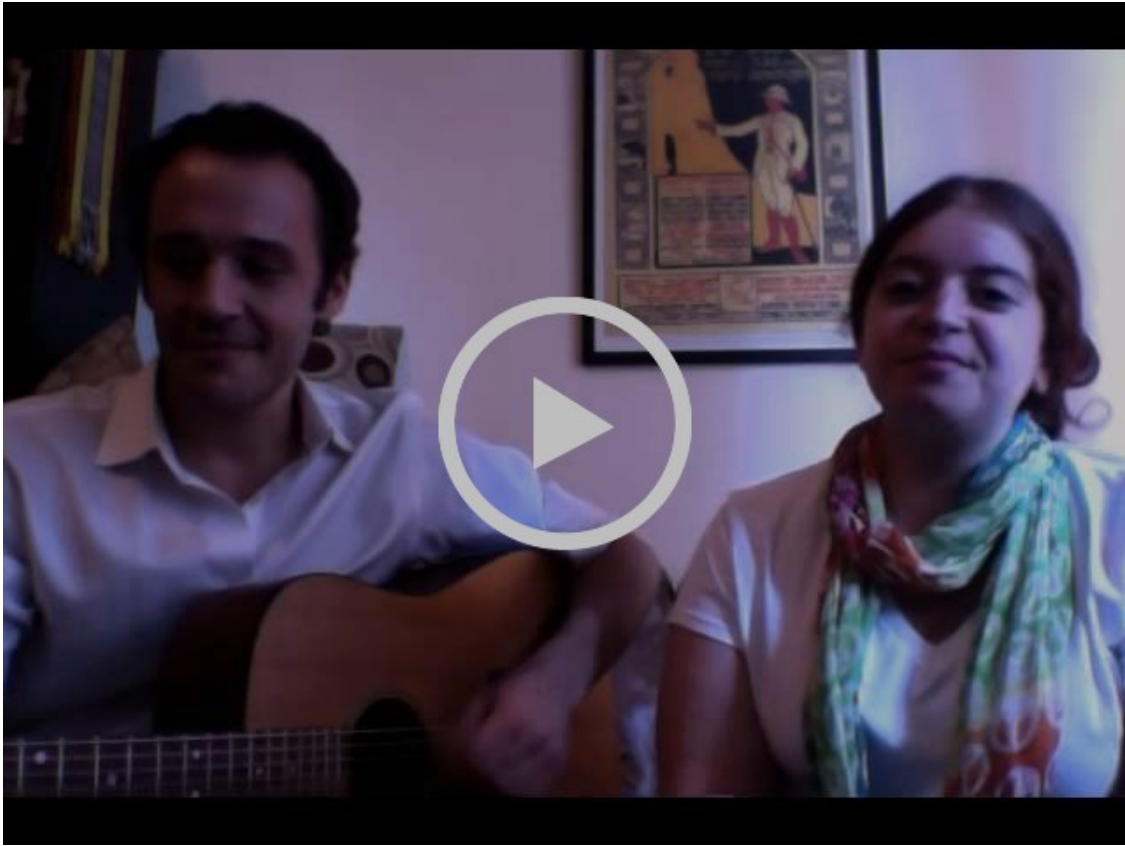
*“He made narrowing windows for the Temple” (I Kings 6:4)*

The Haftarah for Terumah parallels the parashah; both are filled with the details of a building which is to house the Divine. In the Haftarah, King Shlomo builds the Temple in an unorthodox style. Instead of the windows being narrow at the entrance and wide within to let the light in, they are built in the opposite direction, with the narrow end on the inside. Midrash Tanchuma (4:3:2) explains that it was built so that the light from the Beit HaMikdash would illuminate the entire world.

We see this idea in our morning prayers: *“Or chadash al Tzion tair, v’nizkeh chulanu mehera l’oro, May You make a new light shine over Zion, and may we all soon be worthy of its light.”* While it’s up to the Divine to shine its light, we are not powerless. What are you doing today to shine your own light into the world?

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### **Bonus: Mishkan Song!**

Check out the [Mishkan Song](#) by Eliana Light. The full version is available on her new album of Jewish ritual music, called *Eliana Sings (About Jewish Things!)*. Get the full album [here](#).





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