

### FLOOR PLAN

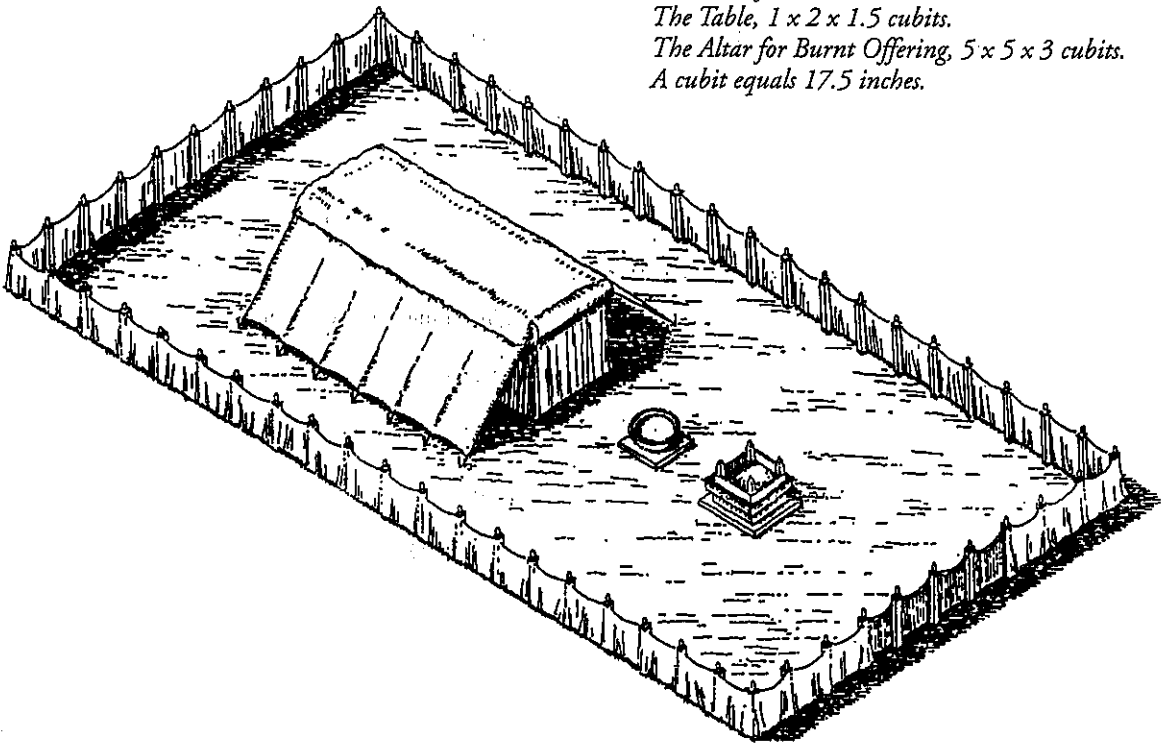
The Ark is 1.5 wide  $\times$  2.5 long  $\times$  1.5 cubits high.

The Altar for Incense, 1  $\times$  1  $\times$  2 cubits.

The Table, 1  $\times$  2  $\times$  1.5 cubits.

The Altar for Burnt Offering, 5  $\times$  5  $\times$  3 cubits.

A cubit equals 17.5 inches.



### THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is a rectangular structure comprising three zones. These are, in descending order of holiness: the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Outer Court. The structure is oriented longitudinally, on an east-west axis, with the most sacred zone in the west. An outer perimeter demarcates the sacred area. This is divided into two equal squares. The first two zones lie in one square and the Outer Court constitutes the other square. From the Ark in the Holy of Holies, God reaches out to Israel; from the Altar for Burnt Offering, the Israelites reach out to God. Each seems to be located exactly at the point of intersection of the diagonals of the squares.

## *Terumah - Indwelling*

*Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben, Ph.D.*

### *A YEAR WITH MORDECAI KAPLAN*

*Exodus 25:1 - 27:19*

*“And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” - Exodus 25:8*

#### ***P’shat – Explanation***

This sentence is as interesting for what it doesn’t say as for what it does. When read carefully, the language seems counter-intuitive. God does not say, “Make me a sanctuary that I might dwell within *it*” (meaning the sanctuary), as one might expect, but instead says, “that I might dwell *among them*.” Generally, we think of spaces as physical locations where we participate in specific activities. From this vantage point, it would seem to make sense for God to command the Israelites to create a sanctuary or religious space in which God can dwell—the very reason why synagogues, churches and mosques are often referred to as “houses of God.”

Yet in Jewish theology, no one physical space could ever contain the God of the entire universe. And so, here in Exodus, God does not command the Israelites to build a sanctuary as a place for God to “live.” Instead, God commands the people to build a sanctuary as a spiritual center where the people can gather together as a community and God may dwell “within them.”

So it can be that through the creation of a community of kindred spirits—a people drawn together by common history, values, rituals, customs, sacred festivals and, most importantly, shared covenant—that the Divine becomes manifest among them.

### ***D'rash – Kaplan's Insight***

*"Thus the presence of the multitude in public worship creates an atmosphere that profoundly influences the individual participant. It stirs in him emotions of gratitude and confidence that he could not experience in isolation. He knows his life to be part of a larger life, a wave of an ocean of being. This is first-hand experience of that larger life which is God." – Mordecai M. Kaplan*

Kaplan recognized that the communal act of public worship connects each of us individually to something sacred beyond ourselves—possibly a first-hand experience of God's presence. There is power in gathering as a religious community to worship that simply cannot be duplicated when praying alone. No personal meditation, however meaningful, can transcend the experience of being part of communal worship that stretches both horizontally and vertically back thousands of years to the ancient biblical beginnings of our people and the creation of the universe itself.

While Kaplan is perhaps best known for his articulation of Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, he took the idea of the power of community and peoplehood to be the source of meaning in communal life even further. What gives Jews our sense of religious identity is not primarily belief, he said, but rather our fundamental sense of belonging to the Jewish people itself.

In this light, he offers us a contemporary reflection of "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I might dwell among them." God's true "sanctuary" is found wherever people gather, motivated by a sense of belonging to a people and to something greater than themselves, in hopes of bringing godliness and holiness into the world.

## *D'rash* – A Personal Reflection

### The Power of Community

By my tenth year of my serving Kehillat Israel in Pacific Palisades, California, our community had grown considerably too large to fit into our original spiritual space. We now had the sacred obligation—and opportunity—to build a brand new synagogue structure on the same site as the original structure the congregation had built with its own hands thirty years earlier.

It was a very exciting time in the life of our synagogue. The entire community participated in the process of envisioning our future together. We contemplated how the physical space in which we would worship could best reflect the Reconstructionist dedication to embracing and fostering community as the core value around which our Jewish lives are centered.

The end result was both innovative and visually powerful. As one enters the sanctuary, our communal space, the floor itself gently slopes upward until the one entering is standing on the main sanctuary floor, which is higher than the floor level at the entry door. In this way, everyone makes a literal *aliyah*, a “going up,” simply by entering into our sacred space. All seating is in the round, with pews that rise from the floor like an intimate amphitheater, so that the clergy are not elevated above the congregation and people see one another at all times. In this way the entire sanctuary becomes the *bimah* which we have all physically ascended and where we sit and worship together as one community. The sanctuary design thus embodies a profound message: Day to day, whether we are here for a service, holiday celebration, lecture, or concert, we are sharing spiritual experiences in sacred space together.

Today, our synagogue consciously embodies the Torah and Kaplan’s teaching that being in community is perhaps the most powerful way each of us can experience the presence of God.

Reinforcing this idea, a dedication plaque affixed at the synagogue's street entrance contains the same quotation from Exodus that I chose for this commentary, reminding all who enter that God's presence can be found within our synagogue, not because the building itself is beautiful (which it is), but because of what happens when we gather for the sacred work of the soul together.