

## **This Week in Torah *Pekudei***

It is moving in day! As the book of Exodus ends, the Presence of God enters and fills the *Mishkan*. The Omnipresence intensifies for a greater awareness of the Holy in that realm. And the last line of the book states it this way: “For over the Tabernacle a cloud of GOD rested by day, and fire would appear in the cloud by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.”

Yet, the *Mishkan* is no longer. When the Israelites settled in the land, it found a permanent presence in Jerusalem. In 586 BCE, it was destroyed. Then about 75 years later, it was being rebuilt and a clear glorification process began around 100 BCE. That second Temple in all its grandeur was destroyed in the year 70 CE. All that exists of the Holy Temple is a western retaining wall... and the stories found in sacred texts. In the Talmud, it is recorded that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai said that the dining room table is now the altar for God. As we eat, we should perceive this as the place where our spiritual intensity should increase. Over the years, this expounded into a principle called a *Mikdash Me’at*—creating a sanctuary within the self. Our awareness was the realization of an existential encounter with all that is sacred.

Originally the *Mishkan* was portable, carried by members of the Levite tribe as our ancestors wandered. Now it is portable again—in the hearts, the souls and the minds of those who are faithful.

The power to do this is found in our faith. But it is not a revelation which appears ex-nihilo. It requires practice and conditioning. In Talmud’s Tractate Chagigah, it is practiced by enforcing one’s decisions to set aside certain things for specific purposes. If an article of clothing was to be used just for Shabbat, then that must be honored. To wear it during ordinary times removes the sanctity label that was attached to it. In Tractate Sotah, failure to wash one’s hands before eating bread is compared to the lustful transgression of visiting a brothel. The upshot is that one must be deliberate in actions and mindful of their intentionality.

Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum was a rabbi and a mystic who lived in Hungary between the years 1759-1840. He made his living selling amulets to keep people focused on the sanctity of the living of their days. His intense messianic fervor led him to believe that

we need to live our days embracing the spiritual awareness of the possibility of redemption, which could be around the next corner. In his book, *Yismach Moshe*, he believed that strict observance to ritual practice as well as the commitment to study helps to keep us focused and prepared. He noted that in the verse cited earlier: “For over the Tabernacle a cloud of God rested by day, and fire would appear in the cloud by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys” that for us, the fire was the memory of *mishkan* but the cloud was the centrality of the Torah. Study Torah and the *mishkan* can be built again.

Where does this leave us? In the Talmud’s Tractate Shabbat, we read that the study of Torah is equal to all the *mitzvot* because it leads to them all. For us, that studying conditions us to be more spiritually present and aware so that we can yearn for something sacred which we can find just around the corner. Like many of you, I am not one who believes in the coming of a Messiah as Rabbi Teitelbaum did, but I do believe that redemption can come from within as we discover the awe and a majesty of a world filled with the Presence of God.