

This Week in Torah *Terumah*

There is a lot of detail on how to construct the *Mishkan*, making it sound more like assembling a piece of IKEA furniture than developing a place to connect to God. Then among all of that is this verse Exodus 25:8 which states “build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” That is the reminder of the human need for a physical space, set aside for a spiritual encounter. Yet, there is some flexibility with this translation; the word “*b’tocham*” could be understood as “within them” as much as “among them.”

The RaMBaM of 12th century Spain wrote that each individual should strive to create a *mikdash m’at*, a sanctuary within them. Since the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE, we have shifted from a communal centric encounter of a physical location to an individual awareness that helps us engage. Rabbi Arthur Green of Hebrew College makes this explicit when he says: “The God I know is a divinity that I cannot perceive without acts in the human world done by human actions.” Rabbi Adin Steinholz in his book The Thirteen Petal Rose wrote: “the soul of man, in its depths, may be considered to be part of God.” We make real God’s presence in this world—both through our intellect and our actions. “Build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among/within them.”

Psychologist Lisa Miller adds to this by stating that the human brain is wired for spirituality as almost the antithesis for depression—not an absolute here, depressed people can be spiritual. She states that when there is a thinning of the cerebral cortex, people have trouble processing emotional stimuli. This is the part of the brain that deals with reasoning, planning, mood... and spiritual awareness. The thinner the cortex, the harder one’s ability to perceive and orient the world. But, Dr. Miller writes in The Awakened Brain, we can strengthen that cerebral cortex lining thru achieving awareness and then thru an awakened awareness. She writes an aside that is most interesting—the cerebral cortex is located at the back of the brain underneath the spot where a Jew rests his/her *kippah*. That’s right—the act of putting on a *kippah* can be a small step to making us more aware! Prayer, meditation, mindfulness also adds to that sense of awareness that makes us spiritually and mentally healthier. “Build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among/within them.”

In our prayer book, there is a wonderful reading by Rabbi Chaim Stern that starts off with these words: “You are with us in our prayer, our love and our doubt, in our longing to feel Your Presence and do Your will. You are the still clear voice within us...” For me, that look inward is a chance to raise my consciousness as I peer outwardly at the world. There is the fluidity of the sacred encounter that passes inward as well as outwardly. Such sentiment is also echoed in the prayerbook: “You are robed in glory and majesty; wrapping Yourself in light as a garment, spreading forth the heavens like a curtain.”

“Build Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among/within them.” Commands God. Such a spiritual structure exists within each of us.