

As the Parshiyot of Vayakhel and Pekudei remind us, the layout of the Mishkan was distinctly split, with an outdoor courtyard and an inner sanctuary, each endowed with a unique character. All of the vessels and implements of the outer courtyard -- the Kiyor, the outer Mizbeach, the sockets of the posts, and the pegs that stabilized the curtains -- were made of copper, while all of the vessels of the inner sanctuary -- the Aron, the Menorah, the Shulchan, and the inner Mizbeach -- were made of gold. Most of the daily activity occurred in the outer courtyard, with only a few select services, such as the twice-daily incense and Menorah lighting, performed indoors. The Talmud describes the outer courtyard as loud, busy, and crowded, while the service in the inner sanctuary was performed by a solitary Kohen privately and quietly, in a state the Talmud (Yoma 44a) calls “בַּחֲשָׁאֵי.” Stepping into a tranquil space that was entirely removed from the rest of the world, the Kohen performing the indoor service experienced an intimate encounter with the Divine on a level that is likely difficult for us to comprehend, and which differed vastly from the plethora of bleating animals, heavy commotion, and packed crowds that existed outside just a few feet away.

The dichotomous layout of the Mishkan serves as a timeless template for our own Divine service, teaching us the need to engage in both inner and outer worship alike. Like the Mishkan, the majority of our life's spiritual work must be spent becoming dirty in the tumultuous outdoor courtyard of this world. Striving to fix this world -- in whatever form that takes -- is rarely tranquil, quiet, or inspiring in the moment. People who are coordinating box-packing events for the hungry, for example, never look particularly peaceful. Dripping in sweat, firing out directions on their walkie-talkies, and anxiously running back and forth to check inventory, they are doing whatever needs to get done to fulfill this holy service. At these moments, G-d does not want us to be “spiritual.” G-d wants us to be fully immersed in the work itself, rolling up our sleeves, attending to the grimy tasks, and taking care of His starving children. The same is true of any profession -- whether in the office, the classroom, or the courtroom -- the attempt to earn an honest living and sanctify His name constitutes a lofty form of Divine Service, and we must be fully invested in it as such, even if it doesn't feel particularly elevating at the moment.

At the same time, however, it is critically important that our Divine service also include moments of quiet, inner service. G-d desires us to serve Him not only with strong action, but also with a mindful heart, what the Talmud calls Avodah SheB'Lev. Like the indoor sanctuary service, this type of Divine service is most powerfully experienced alone, quietly, and contemplatively. No matter how busy we may be, our souls deeply crave moments of solitude, reflection, and connection, in which we disconnect from all of the hustle bustle, and connect to the Source of all our powers. It would seem that there is no greater opportunity for this type of service than the daily Tefillot. Indeed, the Talmud teaches (Berachot 30) that when we approach Tefillah, we should direct our attention towards the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies. While rote and mindless chanting does little to elevate a person, thoughtful immersion into the experience of Tefillah can be life-changing. In stopping to pray three times each day, we

pause our busy life and leave this world behind, just like the Kohen entering the sanctuary. Like a refueling station, sincere Tefillah refocuses us on the true Source of our powers and broadens our perspective well beyond the myopic focus of our day, leaving us hopeful and encouraged to re-enter the battleground of life for the remainder of our day. In addition to Tefillah, there are numerous other opportunities Jews can find to perform the inner service, reflecting on their relationships with G-d, the world, and themselves.

Ultimately, the entire Mishkan was a single entity. Both forms of Divine service -- the inner and the outer -- are beloved to G-d, and deeply enriching to our own lives. The requirement of keeping the sanctuary doors open during the daily morning Tamid sacrifice (Tamid 30) represents that these two forms of service are interconnected and mutually-enhancing: the more we do to improve the external world, the more meaningful our private connection will be with G-d; and the more we focus on connecting intimately with G-d, the more we will find empowerment to continue to serve Him in the outside world. As shuls begin to explore whether to return inside or remain outside, let us remind ourselves of the critical need to serve G-d with body and soul in every possible way.