

Parshat Vayakhel-Pekudei
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In memory of my beloved mother, Rochelle Muller, a"h, in commemoration of her tenth yahrzeit.

On the first day of the first month of the second year after leaving Egypt, the mishkan is erected by Moses. All of the holy vessels are carefully placed in their designated spots and the work is complete. Sefer Shmot ends with the powerful image of the cloud, the Shechina or Divine Presence, covering the mishkan, signifying God's sanctification of this holy structure and His desire to dwell among His people. Yet the mishkan was a temporary sanctuary lasting only as long as Bnei Yisrael's sojourn in the desert. So how can we relate to the mishkan today? What relevance does it hold for our time?

If we wish to answer this question, we must retrace our steps back to the beginning. When Isaac brings home his new wife, Rebecca, the verse states: "And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother" (Bereishit, 24:67). Rashi quotes the midrash: "As long as Sarah was alive, a lamp burned in her tent one Sabbath eve to the next, her dough was blessed and a cloud, signifying the Divine Presence, hung over her tent. When Sarah died, these blessings ceased, but when Rebecca entered the tent, they resumed." Thus, the midrash explicitly portrays Sarah's tent as a mini-mishkan, a "mikdash me'at", complete with a lamp (Menorah), blessed dough (Shulchan) and a cloud, reminiscent of the actual cloud (Shmot 40:34), God's Presence, that covered the mishkan. And today we continue our Mother Sarah's tradition: the mishkan can be found in the Jewish home.

It is fascinating that the midrash attributes the holy elements of the home to Sarah (and Rebecca), to the woman of the home, not to the man (Abraham or Isaac). Indeed, the three special mitzvot set aside for women, the separation of challah, the observance of the laws of family purity, and the lighting of Shabbat and Yom Tov candles are all centered around the home. In the view of the sages, the mother is the "high priest" of the home, instilling the love of God in her children, teaching them the joy of keeping the mitzvot. Her role has a very physical aspect too: maintaining the home

from day to day and preparing for Shabbos and Yom Tov. Yes, the cooking and the cleaning, these are holy tasks too. Most of the time it is the woman who sets the tone and creates the atmosphere in the home. Through her hard work and devotion to her family, she is able to transform a physical home into a shelter for the Divine.

In his famous eulogy, *A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expresses this thought most beautifully, “I learned from her (my mother) very much... She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to mitzvot... The laws of Shabbat were passed on to me by my father, but the Shabbat as a living entity, as a queen, was revealed to me by my mother. The fathers *knew* much about the Shabbat, the mothers *lived* the Shabbat.”

When my mother died ten years ago, the poignant words of the Yiddish song, *A Yiddishe Mame*, resonated painfully: “How *lichtig* (light) it is when your mother is here, but how dark it is when she is taken to Olam Haba (the Next World).” It felt as if the light had suddenly been snuffed out. How could we ever celebrate Shabbos or Yom Tov again without our mother? Could there even be Shabbos or Yom Tov without Mom?

But we know that “The soul of man is the lamp of God” (Proverbs 20:27); the soul shines on eternally. So it turns out that my dear mother’s light, like the light of so many mothers everywhere, is more like the light of the Menorah, casting its glow to the far reaches of the world, even to its darkest corners, and illuminating those empty spaces with God’s love.