



You Are The Tabernacle

In Parshat Trumah the Torah states “And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I shall dwell in it” (Ex. 25:8). This verse is one that all Jewish people should consider when they are at home and when they are in a sanctuary. Our sanctuary today is the synagogue and the synagogue is an extension of the Tabernacle. It is a place that we beautify both inside and outside and we feel G-d’s presence within it.

Just as G-d brought his holiness from the high heaven down to a tent in a desert, we should try to bring that holiness into the world through our prayers in synagogue. This is hinted at in a Gemara which states that Betzalel, the head craftsman who built the Tabernacle and its holy objects, knew how to join the letters with which heavens and earth were created” (Brachot 55a).

Rabbi David Fohrman suggests that the Hebrew name Betzalel is actually shorthand for “*Betzelem Elokim*,” as he represents the quintessential person who brought G-d into the world through the Tabernacle. There is also a mystical tradition that Betzalel used the letters of the names of G-d, which were used to create the world as tools to build the Tabernacle (see Tikunei Zohar, Introduction 13a).

Kalonymus Kalman Halevi Epstein, the author of the Hasidic Bible commentary *Maor va-Shemesh*, thought the “Tabernacle is in the image of the creation of the heavens and the earth” because both the Tabernacle and the world were created with the intention of “revealing the majesty of G-d on all.” Just as G-d constricted himself so that his holiness could be felt on earth, the Tabernacle was a way to bring G-d's presence into the desert. The Tabernacle made a space for G-d in our world.

Similarly, *Maor va-Shemesh* hints, we create an analogous space for G-d’s presence in the world when we invoke G-d’s names in blessings. There are so many elements that help us feel G-d’s presence at Lincoln Square Synagogue. We enjoy the meaningful sermons from the clergy, the beautiful davening led by the Chazan and the external beauty of the synagogue. Each person within the community enables us to feel G-d’s presence not only through their prayers, but through their generosity and actions, as well.

That is reinforced by the verse: “take for Me an offering; of every man whose heart maketh him willing ye shall take My offering” for the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:2). Chaim Halberstam of Sanz, author of the *Divrei Chaim*, tells us that “and only when each person contributes from what is in his heart, according to the measure a person makes himself a vessel with G-d’s attributes and by distancing from materialism, to that degree G-d will reveal himself” to that person.

While the *Maor va-Shemesh* emphasized G-d's constriction of Himself so that His presence could be felt in the world, the *Divrei Chaim* thought a lesson of the Tabernacle is that human beings are called to constrict ourselves by distancing ourselves from our desires and from materialistic values. The 613 commandments help distance us from materialism, so we can receive G-d's holiness.

G-d is not only in the synagogue: He also dwells with us in our homes. Therefore, our homes should be a place of love, kindness, *chesed*, justice, Torah and *mitzvot*. We can think about all of the *mitzvot* that we perform in the home from this perspective. Even the outside entrance of the home is holy and different. The outside entrance has a mezuzah, reminding us that the minute we enter our home, it is a place for G-d.

Every interaction in our home is a reflection of the fact that G-d is with us at all times. Of course, many of the elements of Shabbat and Kashrut are also done in the home. Although each of our homes has our own personal touches, G-d reminds us that there are very specific ways to build the Tabernacle and specific elements that must be used in our homes as well. Similarly, we must follow the specific Torah commandments in the way that G-d intended. Within that, we can still find personal meaning and create our own beauty.

We are fortunate that some of the most important of the commandments are for the needs of our community and charity. As Rabbi Sacks pointed out in his essay "The Home We Build Together," an aim of the command to build a Tabernacle was that after the dehumanizing slavery of Egypt, the Jews should build something together with the assistance of G-d. "Hence the basic principle of Judaism, that we are called on to become co-creators with G-d."

Feeling G-d's presence and creating a sanctuary for G-d is a communal process. G-d instructs all of Israel to work together to make this happen. As such, each one of us contributes to vibrant and meaningful synagogue and Jewish home experiences for all.