

Today's sanctuary...

Terumah 5782/2022

Following the incredibly powerful moment of revelation at Sinai, and then the establishment of societal laws that would guide the Jewish people in their new found freedom, God commands the Jewish people to build a sanctuary. This physical place is set to become the focal point of God's relationship and ongoing conversation with the Jewish people, a place where He can dwell in the midst of the people¹ and as the Chizkuni notes, a place that is designated for meetings at the right time, appointments that neither party will miss².

But what happens when that place no longer exists? How do we continue those meetings, those valuable appointments?

The Talmud tells us that the synagogue would become the *mikdash me'at* the smaller version of the sanctuary, a place where the timeless meetings can continue³. While the synagogue existed prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, it found itself a promotion, becoming the focal point of not only community but the ongoing covenant and conversation between the Jewish people and God⁴.

Suddenly there was a democratisation of access to God, prayer would replace the sacrificial rites, and everyone had the ability to partake and commune. How did the communal meeting place, hold up to the original vision of the Godly meeting place?

It seems from the development of halakha that rules needed to be established to ensure that it maintained a level of decorum and holiness⁴. This has been an ongoing challenge for communities since. People feel at home in the shul, it is central to many of their Jewish experience, and as such we often forget that we are in a place that is meant to replicate the residence of the Almighty.

In a sermon on Parashat Yitro, I asked how one creates a personal moment of divine revelation thousands of years after the Sinaitic experience. Remember, this was the moment that established faith and transmission of that faith for generations. It was the proof moment of Moses' authority, and the genesis moment of our relationship with God⁵. I responded by saying that our shul experience is meant to be that revelation experience in the modern world. We are meant to live and breath the holiness that exists in that space, we are meant to hear the angelic call of Holy! Holy! Holy! But we can only hear it if we help imbue the space with holiness ourselves.

We are a people who have been bestowed a gift of creating holiness in the mundane. We can take the wood, bricks, mortar, fabrics, and we can build a building, or we can build holiness. We have the power to breath holiness into a space if we want to. We have the power to maintain and build on a conversation with the Almighty every time we enter the synagogue, to gain revelation, and to go out and uplift the world around us.

It is a gift, and one not to be squandered.

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**