

Dear Chavraya,

At our Thursday morning learning of the weekly Torah portion at JP Licks, to which all are welcome, Robbie and Bennett shared with us this week an experience from their recent trip to Israel. In Jerusalem, in the old city, they visited with their young niece a museum/organization whose mission is to be ready with all necessary knowledge and implements for the third Temple, which they believe will descend from the Heavens. Beyond the horrifying cataclysmic social and political implications of such belief, they have enervated of its essence the very mitzvah they seek to fulfill.

The building of a sanctuary to God is an active mitzvah incumbent, in fact, on all of us, not one whose fulfillment is to be passively awaited. Emphasizing the physical structure quickly becomes idolatrous. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'rumah*, we are told, *v'asu li mikdash v'shochanti b'tocham/they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among/within them*. If the commandments are eternal, as emphasized particularly by Chassidic commentators, not limited to one time or place, then how are we to fulfill the mitzvah of building the sanctuary? If the mitzvah was to be fulfilled only in the material realm, then even those who lived in the time that the Beis Hamikdosh stood could not fulfill the mitzvah of building it. Rebbe Yakov Yosef of Polnoye, the *Toldos*, foremost disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, explains that only those who lived and labored as builders in the generation of Solomon could then have fulfilled the mitzvah.

The Beis Hamikdosh was for the rabbis a symbolic representation of the entire world. Echoing the Talmudic teaching that one who saves a single life saves an entire world, and tragically so too its obverse, the *Toldos* speaks of every human being as a world in microcosm, *olam katan*, "in whom there is a holy house and sanctuary." The Kotzker rebbe emphasizes the responsibility of each one to build her or his sanctuary. He says that the word *b'tocham/among/within them*, referring to the place of God's dwelling, rather than *b'tochu/within it* (the sanctuary), *is to teach you that every person is obligated to build the Mishkan in her or his heart....*

As the Torah gives detailed instruction for the building of the sanctuary and all of its vessels, our task is to recognize the symbolic meaning in the instructions, and to draw on them in our efforts to make of our own bodies a holy dwelling. What shall be our menorah within, shining the light of our souls out into the world? What shall be our inner altar, a symbol of reconciliation and peace, made without recourse to steel, the sword so easily fashioned? And what shall be the offerings of our hearts by which we draw near to God and to others?

Shabbos is a sanctuary in time. In the making of Shabbos we learn to fashion our lives to be lived as a sanctuary, inviting through our deeds the presence of God to dwell within. From the sacred space of a day we learn to live in the sacred space of each day. Not of cataclysm, but of mitzvah gently fulfilled, through every person openhearted to the other, God shall say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor