

# Echoes of Eden

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## Parashat Terumah 5774

### If You Build It, I Will Come

In five words (which require considerably more to render into discernable English) the Torah commands us to create holiness. "They shall make (for) me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them".

What is this commandment? Is God without a home? Does He require shelter? Is He incapable of establishing His presence without a physical structure? Are we building a homestead for God? The second phrase of this commandment clearly states that the result of this building project is NOT that God will dwell in the new construct, but rather that God will dwell among or within us – "and I will dwell within (or among) them". God will not be changed by this building; He will not move, as it were, from homelessness to tenancy due to our largesse. The inescapable conclusion, then, is quite the opposite: The human experience has been lacking up to this point. In a spiritual sense, it is man who has been homeless, who needs to find his way back home. The commandment to build a sanctuary is an invitation to set aside a place in which we can tap into holiness.

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The word mikdash (translated as 'sanctuary') has at its root the word kadosh (holy). What is holiness? What is its source? In biblical Hebrew, kadosh (holy) means separate, out of the ordinary, different - even unique. The source of holiness is God, who is unique in every way – separate from the constraints of time, space and matter that rule human experience. In our quest to emulate

God, to transcend the limitations of the human condition, we are given the opportunity to create islands of holiness, of unique separation and otherness, in all three dimensions: Shabbat and holidays are islands of holiness in time. Laws that regulate such physical spheres as kashrut and ritual purity create islands of holiness in the material world. The commandment to create a sanctuary, a physical place of holiness, allows us to redefine our relationship to space.

When Moshe first saw the burning bush that was not consumed, he came to understand it as a symbol of transcendence. He understood that the God who spoke to him from the burning bush was beyond time, and unconstrained by the laws of physics. What he did not immediately understand was that God had invited him into a holy place, invited him to partake of the holiness. For the first time in human history, God set aside a physical space of holiness, but this was not something Moshe understood intuitively. Therefore, God had to invite Moshe in. God had to explain that man need not recoil from the place of holiness. Moshe was taught to understand the holiness of space, to acknowledge and respect it, but also to stand within it and to take part in it.

This unique place of holiness was marked for all time by the sneh (bush) that burned but was not consumed. Moshe had been tending the flocks in what was known as “the mountain of God, at Horev”; after God spoke to him from the burning bush and created this island of holiness, this place became known for all time as Sinai – a word etymologically related to the bush (sneh). On that very spot, human history was changed forever: The word of God burst forth. The revelation Moshe experienced at that spot – of the ability to communicate with a God who transcends time, space, and matter – would be repeated, for all of the Jewish People.

The sneh (bush) becomes Sinai. The content of the Revelation that occurred at that place is preserved on the Tablets of Stone, which are then placed in the Ark at the heart of the Sanctuary: The holiness of the place called Sinai is replicated in the creation of the Sanctuary, a unique place that is governed by its own laws of time, space and matter. Eventually, this same holiness will be transferred to the ultimate Sanctuary, The Beit HaMikdash - literally, the house of holiness, the

Temple in Jerusalem. At the very epicenter of holiness, the Ark that houses the Tablets given at Sinai is protected by two angelic cherubs.

And now we have come full circle. The cherubs that spread their wings over the Ark were last seen in the Garden of Eden, protecting the path to the Tree of Life that stood at the very heart of the Garden. When the world was created,

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holiness was everywhere – holiness of space, holiness of time and holiness of matter. Yet mankind turned away from holiness and instead chose sin. Exile from the Garden was exile from the holiness of space, from the proximity to God that had been possible in that holy place. At Sinai, that holiness was revealed once again. The building of the Sanctuary, and later the Beit HaMikdash, would give us the opportunity to reestablish that proximity, re-connect with that holiness and bring it into our lives. Building the Sanctuary allows us to end our exile from holiness at last.

The challenge is to take that holiness and bring it into our lives. From time immemorial, man has built great edifices; in fact, it may be said that we have an edifice complex. When we build great structures, we hope to attain a bit of immortality. Of course, we know that immortality eludes us, and all great constructs of stone and mortar will eventually crumble. The only way we can rise above the limitations of our physical existence is to build constructs of holiness, both within ourselves and in the world around us. The first step is to set aside a place of holiness, a sanctuary, in our hearts. We can begin only when we take the time and make the effort to discern what is holy and enter into it, partake of it, without the cynicism and political correctness that causes modern man to value all things equally. Some things are, in fact, better, truer, more holy than others, and these are the things – times, places, objects – that allow us to step into holiness. When we partake of holiness, we connect with what is

beyond our limited physical existence. Holiness is our connection with the Eternal, and holiness, like the burning bush, is never consumed.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2014/01/audio-and-essays-and-more-parashat.html>