

Build a Sanctuary in Your Heart

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Abstract: But there is one further implication of what we've learned tonight. Every house of God -- every synagogue, church, mosque, and ashram -- is just a symbol of what God really wants. God wants to live in each one of us. God doesn't want to live in a physical sanctuary. God wants us to build a sanctuary for God within our hearts, to build a Tabernacle for God within our intellects. God does not want to dwell out there. God wants to live in here -- in you!

In the book of Exodus, God commands the Hebrews to build a *mishkan*, a portable desert sanctuary or Tabernacle. Why? What were the purposes of this Tabernacle?

One purpose surely had to do with the fact that the Hebrews could not remain at Mt. Sinai forever. They had to leave, they had to move on to the land of Israel. In some way, the Tabernacle had to serve as a reminder of Mt. Sinai and all that occurred there.

Another frequently cited explanation is that the Hebrews believed God needed a physical place to live. So another purpose of the Tabernacle was to provide God with a dwelling-place. But this can't be right. From the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 66) to King Solomon (I Kings 8), Judaism has always taught that God cannot be limited to any one place. God is everywhere.

A very interesting passage in the book of Exodus teaches us even more. We read in Exodus, chapter 25:1-9: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying 'Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him. And these are the gifts you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair; tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood; oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. Exactly as I show you -- the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings -- so shall you make it.'"

Using our imaginations, I hope we can visualize just how beautiful the Tabernacle must have been: "Full of scarlet and purple and deep blue. Woven of cloth, fashioned of fur. Shaped in sections that could be grommeted together. Light enough to carry on their journey, from place to place" (Waskow).

In addition, this Torah passage reveals the true purpose of the Tabernacle. Who sees it? Yes, everyone look closely at verse eight. "Let them make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them." The Torah doesn't say "in it" but rather "among them." So who is the Tabernacle really for: is it God? Or is it human beings? It is, of course, human beings. God has no need or desire to dwell in buildings, in Tabernacles, no matter how beautiful they may be. God commanded the Hebrews to build the Tabernacle to meet their human needs. What human needs? Having lived

all their lives as slaves, the Hebrews needed to feel they were important, they needed to know they had something to contribute. So God asked the people to bring gifts. And by asking them to bring gifts, God increased the Hebrew's sense of self-respect and self-confidence.

What other human need might be filled by the building of the Tabernacle? The building of the Tabernacle was a common goal that everyone could join in and rally around. It brought the Hebrews together. The building of the Tabernacle served to build one united community, united to meet the challenges of the trek through the desert to the land of Israel.

But there is one further implication of what we have learned tonight. Every house of God -- every synagogue, church, mosque, and ashram -- is just a symbol of what God really wants.

God wants to live in each one of us. God doesn't want to live in a physical sanctuary. God wants us to build a sanctuary for God within our hearts, to build a Tabernacle for God within our intellects. God does not want to dwell out there. God wants to live in here -- in you!

In her book, The Color Purple, author Alice Walker writes, "Have you ever found God in church? I never did. I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show. Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me. And I think all the other folks did too. They come to church to share God, not find God."

Walker is right. If God is present in this sanctuary, it's because we brought God in here with us. And now we truly understand why Exodus 25:8 was chosen to adorn our sanctuary. "Let them make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them." It is a powerful reminder that God doesn't want to live in this sanctuary. God wants to live in you!