

Shabbat Shalom!

In this week's parsha, Trumah, the Israelites are still in the desert when God tells Moses to instruct them to gather materials to make a dwelling place for God, called a Mishkan. There is a lot of detailed information about how exactly to create the Mishkan. Precious metals, skins, and acacia wood are to be put together into a holy dwelling place for God. The Torah refers to this structure as both a Mishkan, meaning dwelling place, and a Mikdash, meaning holy place.

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם

This verse from parsha Trumah uses the word Mikdash. The verse says v'shachanti betocham, which means, "that I may dwell in THEM". It would seem like it would make more sense to say "in it.." because it is a structure, but the verse uses "in them" What could God mean by "them"? This could mean that we need to create holy places or sanctuaries in our lives or ourselves.

When I think of the word sanctuary, I think of a place to relax and feel safe in. We are all living through a pandemic, so the world may not feel like a sanctuary right now. We've had to create our own sanctuaries for us just like the Israelites made a sanctuary for God. We all need a sanctuary to dwell in sometimes.

In parsha Trumah, God describes consecutive layers of precious metals with gold in the center where the ark, tablets, and God will dwell. God also describes cloth, skins, and acacia wood to build the frame of the Mishkan. These are all like the rules and precautions we do to keep everyone safe. Every small thing we do builds up to a place where we can be safe.

A sanctuary can come in many forms, whether it's a physical space, an entire day, or just a brief moment to relax. But a sanctuary, or a holy place, can also be a place where we feel the presence of God dwelling, in whatever way that feels to you. Time can also be a sanctuary - like Shabbat. When we can take time off from distractions and work, to take care of ourselves, both mentally and physically. Sometimes it feels like we fill every possible moment in the day by checking the news or the covid cases because we want to know what is happening, and that's ok. But sometimes we need a break from what's happening around us.

When we value work all the time, it's hard to imagine that rest can be beneficial when society deems it lazy. To an extent, I think that rest is a sanctuary itself. I've noticed that I spend too much of the day distancing myself from just spacing out because it's easier to distract my mind with pretty much anything else rather than have a moment when I don't know what to do. But I've noticed that when I'm stressed or anxious, I can't really rest in the way that feels like an empty moment in time. But when my mind feels safe enough to rest and not think about the world around me, that feels like a sanctuary. A place where rest doesn't feel like laziness, but instead like a holy place I build for myself, even if it's just a minute or two in the middle of a busy day.

The Israelites 40 year journey through the desert is a lot like this pandemic. Sometimes it might feel like we are wandering through a desert, not sure what will happen next, but if you are lost in a desert, the only way out is to keep walking. The Torah is teaching us that in this desert, we need a sanctuary, a holy place, a mikdash, a mishkan, where we can find safety and be happy. I hope that we can all find places of sanctuary as we walk through the desert. Thank you.