

**D'var Torah by Rabbi Adam Scheldt  
on our striving to personify the "Mishkan"  
Shabbat services, March 29, 2025**

When this torah portion rolls around, I am always little torn about what to talk about.

Occasionally it actually coincides with Fashion Week in either NY, London, Paris or Milan. In which case, ya got the perfect hook to talk about the priestly garments that appear in this week's reading. And if you're going to do that, then you can play with the whole idea of that cliché that the clothes make the man. You have the opportunity to talk about appearances, the outside vs the inside, sermon about the psychology of masking... from there we could even start to dip into social anxiety, and all that good stuff. Love that.

But we also have the Mishkan, which gets finished this week. Essentially, that means that God's traveling home amongst the ancient Israelites is complete. God's mobile home, or as I have called it in years gone by, the holiest of holy winnebagos. Reverent or not, whatever you want to call it, It's completed in this week's portion. It is ready for God to move in and in this torah portion, God does. We have the giant pillar of cloud that descends upon the Mishkan to represent God's presence there.

And that's what I actually want to dig into today. When we look at the completion of the Mishkan, we see a lot of stuff going on. It's completion is a technical masterpiece requiring extensive work from a huge number of folks a lot of resources a lot of effort a lot of ingenuity and a lot of care. That's what we see as a reader.

Now, if we were to see it, literally, as if we were there, as if we were an ancient Israelite actually looking at the tent of meeting, we would see artistry. We would see beauty. We would see accomplishment. Right? When you work hard on something and then take a step back and look at it you have a feeling of accomplishment. The beauty of the work you just completed is more beautiful because you did it, and I would imagine that this would've been true for the

ancient Israelites. Their artisans did their absolute best. Their tradesmen did their absolute best. And the result was a portable home for the Divine.

So much effort went in to creating a place for God to dwell. And how could it not? If you stop to think, about your own definition of God, it becomes very easy to imagine the gravity and enormity of what the ancient Israelites did in their constructing and building. God's temporary home required a lot.

And this is was the hook for me. All the effort that went into God's temporary home. Temporary. The mishkan, of course is the mobile predecessor to the first temple, which of course preceded the second temple—after which the rabbis, over the course of roughly a thousand years, made some very interesting allusions. They're sometimes pretty subtle, other times a bit more overt, but you can find many allusions in rabbinic texts ranging from the Talmud—scattered throughout tractate Brachot—and elsewhere in several midrashim and some Kabalistic texts, this notion that we are temples. Once God's home is destroyed, the idea that each of us is a holy vessel in which some manner or aspect of the Divine may dwell—effectively that we (and our actions) have replaced the Temple.

Stick with me. Let's back track a bit so you can see where my mind is going. So, if we are the Temple, then effectively we replaced the Temple. The Temple effectively was, or replaced the Mishkan. Each effectively is a dwelling place for God. Alright? So, back to this week's portion. A lot of work went into making a place that was fit for the Divine presence. A LOT. We already took a little look at that, and we read it this week. It was well build and designed and it was beautiful.

We could say the same for the Temples. A lot of work, a lot of craftsmanship.

But what about us? Now, I'm not asking about how well we are all built how beautiful we are. This isn't a question about our looks or how attractive we each are. It is, however, a question about effort. More specifically it is a question about our own internal efforts for and within ourselves. To be more specific,

perhaps the better question would be to ask what do we each do to merit being a dwelling place for the divine?

When phrased like that we start to take a look at our thoughts and the actions they lead to. We start to look at the effects that we have on our own lives and the lives around us. And sure, to an extent, we probably do take a look at our health and our appearance. But when we begin to look at what we ourselves are doing to merit being a home for God, we're really looking within.

Now, I don't expect that any one of us really wants to be a literal dwelling place for the divine in the way that the Tent of Meeting is in this week's torah portion. I don't believe that anyone really wants a giant cloud infused with God to descend upon them and follow them wherever they go. It might make you famous, but it would also make a trip to Wegman's really unpleasant for everyone.

Can you really imagine that though? Anyone who has done the hard work on themselves. Who has engaged in the really hard work of inner healing, of overcoming insecurities and shortcomings, who has engaged a process of self actualization, and done it all with success—all those people get the big cloud. Like a giant gold star saying, "yay you did it!" And if you don't have the big cloud then you know that you still have some work to do on yourself. Thankfully, that's not how things play out.

If we ourselves do the work to become a Mishkan of our own, it's our business. Now here, this is the point at which I really started to go down the rabbit hole with all this. I started thinking about the idea of what it would mean for each of us to be aware of God's presence within us, what would that do, what would that be? How would we actually know? And honestly, what would it mean for folks who weren't part of the club? And the thoughts just kept rolling. Fortunately for all of you, I am not the kind of rabbi who likes to keep everyone sitting here listening to me talk for hours while I carefully thread the needle and take us all through my thoughts on a Torah portion.

So here's what I want to impart. And I want to boil this all this down. Most folks who have a belief in God tend to have a positive belief in God. Regardless of how

**you define God—whether god is completely abstract or entirely personified—God tends to be a good thing. This week’s text teaches us that, with work it is possible to build a home for God. The rabbis teach that we ourselves, in a sense, are like that very home. But what I want to share with you all is that in order to be a home for the truest goodness the universe has to offer, we all gotta do some work. We have to be the builders of good and worthy identities, the craftsmen of our own lives and artists of even better communities. Truly becoming a literal dwelling place for divinity may never happen for any of us, but as Pirkei Avot teaches us “You are not expected to complete the work, but neither are you permitted to abandon it.”**

**And I think that right now, when you look around at our country and many other parts of the world, it is very very apparent that each of us has some significant work to do. When folks come to me and share their fears—fears largely based in the fact that they are powerless to stop the chaos and change swirling around them. I tell them to look within. Now is the time to heal your wounds and build, craft, and create YOU. Because when you are solid, when you are good, when your soul shines bright with beauty, you are ready and capable to put those fears in their place and march forward with Divine presence.**

**Let’s all get to work. Its time to build a mishkan. Shabbat shalom.**