

After the serious crime of the golden calf, the people of Israel are going to get a dwelling place for G-d. HOWEVER, If the Creator is everywhere, how can He have - or why should they need – a “mishkan,” a dwelling place for the Almighty? How do elemental, primary human experiences fuel man’s religious impulses? Can the mishkan or the memory of the mishkan help us?

The Mishkan would be built to impress, it will be a sacred, movable, place.

This time, it will not be by man’s design like the golden calf, but built according to a very detailed set of construction documents from the architectural firm “Divine Design LLC, offices conveniently located on Mt. Sinai.”

Artist and contractor par excellence, בצלאל בן אורי בן חור, Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, was hired to perform the work.

וימלא אותנו רוח אלוהים בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה ולחשוב מחשבות לעשות בזהב ובכסף ובנחושת

“With the spirit of G-d, insight, wisdom, and knowledge with his talent for craftsmanship, to work them out in gold, silver, and copper.”

This beautiful mishkan was designed to command Israel’s attention in ways the soul of man would be touched.

Bezalel’s name is synonymous with excellence in the arts. Today his name is the name of the leading art institute in Israel. As talented and skilled as he was, Bazalel receives very very very detailed instructions.

But how is man moved or touched, by that which is greater than man? Is there a tangible, material thing that man can build to inspire, to bring mankind intimately close to the Creator? Why such detailed instructions?

Modern Theologians, anthropologists, philosophers and rabbis including Sir James George Frazer, Martin Buber, Rabbi A.J. Heschel, Hillel Zeitlin (Jewish theologian and martyr at the Warsaw ghetto), and Rudolf Otto grapple with who and where is holy and moves human beings.

In Otto’s book, *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto writes about the **numinous**, the experience that is the underpinning of all religion. It is a mix of FEAR, trembling, absolute unapproachability, majesty, vitality, and fascination, all rolled into one.

Otto writes: “The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its “profane,” non-religious mood of everyday experience.”

Does the mishkan help us get to that inexpressible mystery? Maimonides may suggest that the mishkan is an aid to weak humankind, providing a tangible godly presence for humankind after the golden calf. The Omnipresent Creator doesn’t need a mishkan, but perhaps we need a crutch to perceive or feel the

קדוש ברוך הוא

To borrow thinking from Spinoza and more recently from Rabbi Arthur Green, G-d's dwelling place IS EVERYWHERE, in everything,

There is evidence everywhere and in everything of the Creator's presence for which we do not receive detailed blueprints. G-d's presence is in the evolving natural world and universe.

We can't lose sight of the fact that the building blocks of the mishkan are ALL parts of G-d's evolving natural and visible world: gold, silver, and copper, the spices, the oils, the wood. They are used by Bazalel per the instructions to exude feelings of the sacred in the mishkan.

Really? Or is the detailed design of the mishkan perhaps a divinely inspired sense of theological humor and cynicism as if to say "Do you folks really need a special hut in order to be in relationship with me?" My universe IS a sanctuary for all of you! Express your wonder and awe, and take care of it while you occupy it."

That golden calf which prompted the construction of the mishkan, is nowhere near as wondrous as a real, living, breathing calf. Furthermore, the mishkan can't beat the wonders of Nature and creation.

We all truly sense the numinous, the sacred, or the holy when we stand on a seashore watching a sunrise or sunset (*or both sunrise sunset...according to Fiddler on the Roof*), view a flower blooming in the desert - perhaps even near that same mishkan, or see and meet a newborn baby. For all of the universe, the **קדוש ברוך הוא** did not supply us with construction documents, just the opportunity to be in relationship with Him.

Shabbat Shalom