

Eleanor, yashar koach! You've offered us a beautiful teaching in your d'var Torah this morning. I love how you're grappling with the intricately detailed minutiae of the Mishkan and drawing from it vast teachings not just about its architecture, but about God and community.

And this is a bit of a heads up - I'm going to talk about God because Eleanor talked about God, but if that doesn't work for you, you can translate that into whatever you call or however you connect to "that which is bigger than us."

Eleanor, as you sorted through why the instructions to build the Mishkan are so detailed and complicated - you surfaced a really interesting balance. You taught us that on the one hand, even though it feels a little excessive and maybe even stifling - being precise in creating the Mishkan provided our people with a place to gather in community. And how that same thoughtful precision *today* creates a space like that for us, too - to gather and be in sacred community together. And on the other hand, you pressed us to think about the kind of relationship we can have with God *unconfined* by structures and precision - a more intimate, boundless, and free-flowing encounter with something greater than ourselves. And you boldly suggested that everybody needs and deserves both.

This compelling wisdom that you shared made me think: you're right - we all do deserve both - the reliable thoughtfully built place to be in community *AND* unfettered spiritual encounter. Now, for some people, these are one and the same, but for **sure** not for all people. So how do we get that? And what does our tradition have to say about that?

It made me wonder if perhaps . . . the one impacts the other. That to be in the head-space and heart-space needed to connect with God personally, does it help to have a steady and sturdy and thoughtfully detailed Mishkanic structure around us? Or put differently, does the container make space for the uncontainable?

And I thought . . . maybe? But I wanted to test this idea.

So I took a look at one of my favorite details in Parshat Terumah's intricate description of how to build the Mishkan. "Cast four gold rings for it," the text says, and put them on two opposite sides of the Mishkan. Then, make two poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Then, insert the poles into the rings. Riveting, I know.

בְּטִבְעַת הָאָרְן יִהְיוּ הַבַּדָּיִם לֹא יִסְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ:

"The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it." A very precise, and a little bit boring, detail.

But let's picture this. The Mishkan is like a very large box that the people will carry for 40 years through the wilderness. How will they carry it? They affixed these four rings to the outside of the structure and then slid long poles through them on two opposite sides. Members of the tribe of Levi would stand at each corner, bend their knees, lift it onto their shoulders, stand up, and head out.

We might imagine that when the Mishkan came to stop, they would gently put it down, slide the poles out, tuck them away somewhere, and behold, the Mishkan! But that's not how it goes.

As we read: the poles stay exactly where they are. A small structural detail. But all-important.

In fact, the commentator Chizkuni teaches "It was at that point, (when the poles are placed in the rings) that the Holy Ark attained the pinnacle of its holiness." Why? Because this boring structural detail was what allowed the people to live their greatest, most unbounded, spiritual purpose.

See, the Mishkan is the structure that points the people toward the Promised Land, toward freedom and redemption. And the way it's constructed facilitates them reaching that spiritual height.

God tells the people that when a cloud settles on the Mishkan, the journey is paused. But when the cloud lifts, it is immediately time to go forward again. No time for fumbling around with rings and poles . . . It is always ready at a moment's notice to move toward freedom and God. This specific detail makes possible the most raw spiritual desire of the people. The container is a vehicle for the uncontainable.

So then I wondered: okay, it sounds true for the Mishkan - the steady thoughtful structure made space for connection to God and godiness. Does it work that way in other parts of life? Let's see.

Let's consider this very moment. In this carefully constructed ritual container - you have become bat mitzvah. Chanting ancient words, being called to Torah by your Hebrew name, surrounded by people who love you, wearing ritual clothing - all of this has been the precise container for something much greater and wilder happening within it. Today, you have been enveloped by a thousands of years old covenant that has lifted you into an entirely new relationship with your own faith and *maybe* with God, surpassing time and space, and placing you in the line of the holiest teachers of our tradition. *This* container has anchored the uncontainable. And indeed, you deserve both - the steady place of community gathering, and the raw unbridled face to face encounter with that which is greater than us.

So seems to be the case for other rituals, too. In the precise structure of a Jewish wedding, a contract is signed, rings of value are exchanged, a glass is broken. All to hold what is *actually* happening inside of it - a swirling passionate expression of love that transforms two people into a family and, according to our tradition, establishes a union between them and God. It's quite magical, really.

Even the rituals of a funeral reflect the wisdom of the Mishkan. Certain Psalms recited, precise rituals of burial as a loved one is accompanied to their resting place, and a structured space for sharing memories in shiva. A

steady and stable container so that the uncontainable - utmost grief and the need to touch what is eternal - might be unleashed there.

And is it also so when it comes to non-ritual life?

For example, in our justice work here at CBE. We take action on all manner of issues that are very personal and very emotional. When we're marching in the street to protect our democracy, or we're standing outside a building in vigil for the ICE detainees inside, or we're on the ground in Sunset Park where our immigrant neighbors are most in danger . . . these are sensitive times full of emotion and risk and pain where our love for our neighbor is boundlessly flowing. Or when we learn, as we did this week, that a particular hospital has decided to end their program supporting trans youth - that bubbles inside of us deep feelings of outrage and sadness. What do we do with the unmitigated passion, the uncontainable, that flows through us? Well, in fact, we create a container for it that is steady and sturdy and precise enough to be a conduit such that our emotion might be channeled into holy action. We create strong precise covenants, like: We will always act out of love. We will only act with non-violence. Our actions will reflect our Jewish values. We will build patient trusting relationships with our interfaith partners. We affix the rings to the side of the Mishkan and place the poles inside of them. A carefully thought out container that can hold the uncontainable.

Without the container - chaos. But with it, world-changing potential power. With it, all manner of journey, of creativity and imagination, of encounter and redemption, and as you talked about this morning, all manner of real and raw relationship with God, is possible.

So all that idea-testing made me think: Maybe feeling part of a thoughtfully built structure that is, as you called it this morning, safe and welcoming, is a vehicle for being able to connect with God. It's not the only way, and lots of people have relationships with God on their own terms, and some people love the community but don't need a relationship with God, but it does seem to be one way to open the possibility for an intimate encounter with

God - whether a person is within the safe and welcoming walls, out in nature, or in their home. Which means, Eleanor, that we all have a job to do.

If we believe, as you taught, that every person deserves access to both the container and the uncontainable, then it is on all of us to create the container - the Mishkan - right here. To work together to make sure that our container, this community, is one that is thoughtfully structured so that every person feels, as you said: safe and welcome.

As you know, we try to do that here at CBE, no matter a person's background or abilities or practice or anything - it's so important to us that everyone does feel safe and welcome. But it's not something that happens on its own. Like the details of the Mishkan, it's a set of decisions - it's something that we work at. And now that you are an adult member of the Jewish community - this becomes a sacred responsibility that you share equally with the other adults in this congregation. To help make sure that every person feels seen and cared for, welcome here and home here, in this sturdy intentional Mishkan. Because to feel that, to have that, could open up a world, a universe, multiple universes, of possibility - to experience God and hope and abundant love and profound spiritual encounter.

I want to end with a short midrash. There's a beautiful teaching on this parsha by a Chassidic commentator in the 18th century, the Maggid of Kozhnitz. He teaches that the Temple in Jerusalem, which is not unlike the Mishkan, is different from most houses. In most houses, he explains, the windows are structured to draw sunlight in from the outside to illuminate the home. But in the Temple, the windows were built to draw the light that comes from inside of it to the outside so *that* light can illuminate the entire world. With no natural light source and no electricity in the ancient Temple - what is that light? It's the same light we've been talking about here. It is divine light, humanity's light, primordial light, the light of passion and creativity and love and redemption and encounter - the "uncontainable" made manifest.

Eleanor, I think you unleashed a bit of that light into the world this morning with your teaching and with your presence. Yashar koach - I know that we are all looking forward to seeing the ways you will continue to bring light to this Mishkan, this congregation, far into the future. Mazal tov and Shabbat shalom.