

Your Home is your Sanctuary

“Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them”

Exodus 25:8

The Torah focuses extensively on creating a *mishkan*, a dwelling place for the Ten Commandments, as well as the construction of the holy, sacred Temple in Jerusalem. It provides detail about size, structure, color, and ornamentation. The Hebrews carried the portable ark through the wilderness. Centuries later, King Solomon finished the actual building. But only the High Priests could enter the inner sanctuary. Others made pilgrimages three times a year to bring sacrifices, standing outside the inner walls while the Priests took the offerings to present to the Holy One. That was their way of worship.

When the Temple was destroyed, gradually, synagogues became houses of worship. Anyone could now find a building that housed a Torah, employed a rabbi, and had sacred literature to study. Today, there are thousands of synagogues all over the world. Some have daily worshippers, most fill up more on Shabbat, and on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it can be standing room only.

Coming into a sanctuary gives us a sense of peace and community. But where is the heart of our connection to the Divine? In ancient times, there was an inner sanctuary that was only physically accessible to High Priests. Now, it becomes important to find our own inner connection. A building can provide a sense of atmosphere. But it is the inner heart of every person that makes the true sense of warmth.

Now is the time to find the spiritual connection inside; not inside a physical structure, but inside ourselves. The community will connect with the help of technology. But we must also find the way to create our own spiritual connection. Perhaps we can make the environment in our personal homes help ignite that spirit. For some, candles, artwork, and religious symbols could help decorate that environment, and feel like a personal sanctuary. For some, it might be the presence of family or friends in the same room, or even over a computer screen. Many will want to take some quiet time before or after the recorded service, contemplating the previous year and the next year, meditating on the hopes, dreams, expectations, and potential surprises the world offers. We take time to remember the blessings and the challenges, while trying to feel blessed by both. On Yom Kippur morning, we read:

“Surely this Teaching is not confusing or beyond your reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, ‘Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and teach it to us?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and teach it to us?’ No. This is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart.” (Deuteronomy 31)

We have many blessings and many challenges. This year, we are challenged to truly make our home a sanctuary. Let us see the Divine before our eyes, in our homes, and in our hearts. Starting from such holy hearts, holy homes, and holy minds, together, we will make it a very sweet New Year.

L’shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon