

Some Thoughts As We Enter Our New Building

“...and you shall sanctify it and all its vessels, and it shall be *kodesh*.” (Shemot 39:9, God to Moses, in reference to the dedication of the *Mishkan*, the first place of worship that served our people in the desert).

Wasn't the *Mishkan* already sacred, having been built following Divine instruction?

I think the Torah may be teaching us a major point on the very definition of *kedusha* - sanctity. God, by definition, is *kadosh* - separate, unique, and completely identified with sanctity. But God expects us to do our share in making the world and our lives *kadosh* as well. Moses' action - itself a mitzva, a holy commandment ordered by God - was to act and sanctify the Tabernacle. By doing this, Moses showed that we all have the ability and are expected to sanctify the world around us. The *Mishkan* was the prototype for our future houses of worship and a reflection of Hashem's very creation of the world. Shuls and the world may both have intrinsic *kedusha*, holiness and sanctity, but the *kedusha* does not count for a lot without human involvement. Unlike non-Jewish approaches to holiness (Rudolf Otto's idea of the "numinous" come to mind, as well as some Eastern religious ideas), the Jewish idea of holiness and sanctity is not otherworldly, heavenly or separate from human endeavor. On the contrary, it is very much centered in this world through our actions. Thus Moses had to add his human efforts to fully make the *mishkan* holy. And this was truly God's instruction and wish.

As we begin the next phase of our communal life in our new home, we celebrate the achievement of many of you who have worked so hard and contributed so much for the growth of Darchei Noam. But the challenges continue. We now have to ask ourselves how to make a space we have designated as sacred truly so. The presence of the *Sifrei Torah* creates the initial sanctity. Our commitment to Halacha and following the Word of Hashem reinforce that sanctity as well as our identity as a Modern Orthodox Shul. But ultimately, how we act in living out

these commitments will determine whether our building is truly a *Makom Kadosh*, a Holy Space. Through Torah learning, acts of *chesed* and *tzedaka*, passionate *tfila*, and sacred Jewish community building, we can attain the *kedusha* modeled for us by Moses when he sanctified the *Mishkan*. By pooling our individual Jewish journeys in shul, we turn our space into a *Mikdash Me'at*, a representation of the Place where God's presence met the Jewish people.

I am so delighted and proud we have reached this point in our communal lives. I offer as a blessing, the *bracha* Moses gave upon the completion of the *Mishkan*:

“May it be God's will that the Shechina – the Holy Presence - rest upon the work of your hands!”

Shabbat Shalom and Mazal Tov to us all!

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