

T'rumah 5784
Cozy in the Mikdash
(A Story for Cozy Shabbat)
Rabbi Betsy Forester

"I am lonely," said God.

All of the angels jumped to attention. "Lonely! Lonely! Lonely is the Lord of Hosts! But God, isn't the whole world full of your Glory?"

"Look", said one angel, pointing down at the sun and moon, "the sun shines Your glory by day and the moon by night!"

"And look," said another, "the oceans roar their praise to You and even the wind sings!"

An artsy sort of angel said, "Oh, and the music, and painting, and dance—so much beauty! You put so many feelings in motion on earth. And here, we angels are filled with Your goodness. God, how can You be lonely?"

"Quiet!" ordered the Line Leader of the Angels. "Let us listen. God," she asked, "please tell us, why do You feel lonely?"

"Okay." said God. "Just a few weeks ago, I led Israelites out of Egypt."

"We remember!" cried the angels. "You split the Sea for them! And they danced and sang to you on the other side. We saw it happen."

"And I brought them to my holy mountain and gave them my teaching, my Torah," said God. "And I wanted them to love it so much."

"Of *course* they love your Torah! " cried the angels.

"Well, we'll see," said God. "It will take a long time for them to figure out what it all means. But what if they lose patience and forget about it? Since I made them free, what if they forget about me and my Torah?"

God wanted to cry. The whole sky turned gray and the angels shivered with cold.

"We can't let them forget You, God. We have to make a plan."

So the angels got together to think about how to help the people be close to God.

“What if you were to build yourself a house down there, a palace, maybe? And you can have parties there with all the people.”

“Hmmn, a house,” said God. “What an interesting idea. I like it. But down there in the desert, a house may not be practical. I mean, they’re on their way to Canaan—the Land of Israel—and a house would get left behind. It would be a waste of time to build it.”

“What if it were a portable house?” piped up a clever young angel.

“A house that moves: that’s a great idea!” God exclaimed, “and I will ask *them* to build it for me. That’s it: I will ask the people to build me a portable house.”

“Will it have beds and toilets and a ball pit in the living room?” asked another young angel.”

“No, those things haven’t been invented yet. Also, I don’t want to confuse people. I don’t want them to think I’m a person like them. I want them to feel how I am special, how I am holy, how I can help them in special ways. I want people to want to be their best when they feel close to me.”

“Why do You want people to be their best?” asked a teenage angel.

“Because I love them so much,” said God.

So God gave instructions for the Israelites—our ancestors—to build God a special kind of house—a portable house—one that they could carry around the desert. It would be a Mikdash—a holy place—where people could meet God, and bring God gifts, and where they could feel God’s presence in their wandering neighborhood of traveling tents.

And the Mikdash was so beautiful. It had lots of gold, silver and copper, and there were fancy curtains in blues, purples, and reds, and exotic skins and woods and the best oil, and precious stones sewn onto the uniforms of the priests who worked there. There was an Aron Kodesh—a holy ark—with the Tablets of the Law inside, and golden angel statues on top. That made the angels in our story very happy. People would look at the angel statues and want to hear all the good words in the Torah. And they wanted to say something pure from their hearts.

The Israelites carried the Mikdash, God's special house, in their midst and camped around it in the desert.

Many years went by. The Israelites left the desert and went up to Canaan, the Land of Israel. They settled there, and the Mikdash was no longer in their midst. In time, they built a new one, much bigger and not portable, and they called it Beit HaMikdash. And in time, that, too, was no more.

One day, a group of Talmud Torah students were learning about the Mikdash in the desert. They read about it in Hebrew. "ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם," they read, "God said: 'Make me a mikdash.'"

"Why don't we have it any more?" "Why didn't they build a new one? Why don't we build one now?" They wanted to know.

Their teacher, being wise (and not wanting to get into politics), answered, "We do have a mikdash. It's right here. And a mile or so from here there is another, and another, and another still. Even now, we follow God's command to all the people to build a Mikdash. We build them wherever we live. And we have given them special names. We call this one Beth Israel Center.

One student, who happened to be wearing pajamas, asked their teacher, "Do you think that God minds if we wear pajamas in our mikdash?"

"I think that God wants you to feel cozy in the mikdash," said the teacher, who also happened to be wearing pajamas at shul day. "That is why our Rabbis taught us that every Jewish home should be a mikdash, a place where good and holy things happen." A shul is a mikdash, and a home is a mikdash, too.

"Do you mean my house, where I live with my parents and my baby brother and our cat, is holy?" asked another student.

God was listening closely and God smiled when the teacher answered.

"Buildings can never be holy all by themselves," the teacher said. Buildings are only holy when the people inside them try their best to do good things and wish good things for others. And buildings are holy when people who spend time in them then go out and help make life better for others."

“Wait a minute,” a student named Sam asked, “if my home is a mikdash, why do I come here?”

“This is a very holy place,” said the teacher. “Look around. See all of the people who came here today to celebrate Shabbat together. Some read out loud from the holy Torah today. Many talked to God here and many talked to each other. Soon we will make Kiddush and eat Shabbat lunch together. And hopefully when we go home, to the mikdash of our homes, we will want to keep learning and doing mitzvot.”

“What is the most important mikdash in the world?” another student, Davie, wanted to know.

Their teacher smiled as she answered, “The most important mikdash is not a shul and it’s not a house.”

“What is it then? Where is it? Can we see it?” Everyone wanted to know.

“Look at the friends sitting all around you. Then close your eyes and look into your own self.” The most important mikdash in the world lies inside each person.”

“But I am not a mikdash,” I am “Jennie!” said a student named Jennie. “And I am Max,” said a student named Max,” and before long every student was calling out their name and saying they had all kinds of good things in their bodies, but no house.

“Well, said the teacher, that’s why God made another name for the Mikdash. God also calls it a *Mishkan*—a dwelling place.” A Mishkan is where God dwells. And you can be a Mishkan. God can dwell inside the very best parts of what make you. But only you can open the door.”

“I want to be a mishkan,” some of the students said. (Others were just getting hungry.) But then one started singing a song they had learned from the Rabbi that week, and soon the song caught on until everyone was singing:

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true
And with thanksgiving I’ll be a living sanctuary for You.

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם
ואנחנו נברך י-ה מעתה ועד עולם.