

In this week's parsha, God gives Moses the instructions for building a sanctuary, called a mishkan translated as tabernacle.

The tabernacle is a structure that serves the purpose of worship. There, the kohanim will offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Sacrifice preceded prayer as the form of worship, and the tabernacle preceded the Temple as the site for this worship.

The instructions for the construction of the tabernacle led me to reflect on our own house of worship.

As all of us know, we are more likely than not to depart from this house of worship within two years. I've had many conversations with congregants about what this means. Most of the people I've spoken with understand that a merger is necessary, but that doesn't remove the sadness they feel about leaving our sacred space. That doesn't take into account what will become of the sacred space once we've departed from this site. The likelihood of this site serving as another synagogue is remote.

Understandably, this is a cause for grief. Over the decades, we've invested our hopes, aspirations, fears, and desires in this sacred space. We've experienced simchas and moments of devastation. In order to move forward, we will have to process the grief that leaving such a space necessarily entails.

We will grieve; we must grieve, but we also must be careful not to get stuck in grief, and here, too, our parsha has a message for us. What made the tabernacle remarkable – and what distinguished it from the Temple that succeeded it – was its portability. The whole purpose of the Tabernacle was, in fact, to allow for mobility. Inherent in the instructions that Moses receives is the building up and breaking down of the sacred space. As Israel moves, so too does the Tabernacle.

We may take some comfort in knowing this about the Tabernacle because it puts into perspective what the nature of our holy space is.

The synagogue as an institution arose parallel to the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was primarily a feature of Diaspora life. For example, the synagogue in Alexandria in Egypt was especially prominent around the turn of the Common Era, demarcated by the year 0. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the synagogue took on the role that it has held until today as a local structure for gathering, prayer, and study.

I refer to it as a synagogue, but others call the edifice a temple. In fact, one of the primary differences early on between Reform and Conservative Judaism was that Reform Judaism insisted on referring to its Houses of Worship as Temples. Conservative Judaism preferred the Greek term, synagogue. Why is this significant? By calling a house of worship a Temple, we imply that the Temple that stood in Jerusalem has been replaced. One of the primary tenets of our faith, however, is that the Temple will be rebuilt. To be sure, no viable plan has been put forth for rebuilding the Temple, even in a day when Jerusalem is under Jewish sovereignty. One

can understand the thinking that motivates calling a house of worship a Temple. What I think is missed in that is the sense of yearning that is involved in believing that the Temple will be rebuilt. That sense of longing has been a key feature of our religious life for millennia, during times when it was less likely than our own for such plans to be actualized.

Why is this significant? Because as we consider our departure from this sacred space, we have to remember that the synagogue is not meant to be a permanent home. Unlike the Tabernacle, it is set in one location, but also unlike the Temple, it is not intended to be God's abode on earth. One way that we can manage the sense of loss and grief that leaving our sacred space entails is by attaching these feelings to the larger religious feelings of loss and grief that surround the destruction of our Temple in Jerusalem. In other words, if leaving a synagogue produces within us pain, then how much more must the pain have been for our ancestors when they saw the Temple in ruins.

We also must remember that the synagogue is more a means to an end than an end in itself. The two features that constitute the synagogue are the congregation and the Torah scrolls. Without either of these features the synagogue is just another building. Yet the congregation and the Torah scrolls, like the Tabernacle are moveable, and both will go to Woodbury when we leave this space in about two years.

That gives us another clue for how to manage the grief that we naturally feel about leaving the site of the Jericho Jewish Center. *We must focus our attention even more intently on the people*

*around us that constitute the congregation and the Torah scroll and its contents, which serve as an eternal guide for us.*

What I am seeking to do in this sermon is both affirm the natural feelings of grief that all of us feel knowing that we will depart from our sacred space and provide avenues for productively channeling that grief so that we do not become permanent mourners.

The Tabernacle served a crucial function in its time. It unified the people around one site for sacrifice. It introduced the concept of holy space – the complement to the holy time of the Sabbath. It provided a place for God and the Jewish people to meet. Finally, it served as the avenue for worshipping God. Yet, it was succeeded by the Temple, and the Temple enshrined Jerusalem in the consciousness of the Jewish people eternally.

We will move about five miles away and inhabit a new house of worship. We must take the memories, sentiments, dreams, desires, and troubles that have filled the sanctuary at the Jericho Jewish Center and transport them with us. The sanctuary has, up to this point, contained all of these intangible elements that are crucial to our experience as Jews. No two sanctuaries are identical, but they do share common features, and we should rest assured that the sanctuary we will inhabit in the future will also provide us with the comfort and connection that our sanctuary here has provided us with for decades.