

Meditation Moment

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Robin Berman is a mashpia (spiritual director in the Jewish tradition. Robin gave this talk, which includes a section on how to build a portable sanctuary in one's own heart, at the Saturday morning Shabes Koydesh Service Klezmerquerque 2018. She facilitates a weekly meditation. See e-news for more info.

This week's portion of the torah, parsha TERUMAH, is about the building of a mishkan, which is a holy place. In TERUMAH people are asked that those whose hearts are so moved give acceptable gifts, such as precious metals gold, silver, copper, or special blue, purple or crimson yarn.

Gifts precious to the time and place and appropriate for the building of that holy place. which will then be used to make a portable sanctuary, a place for Gd to dwell

Two cherubim or angels are to be facing each other across the arc of the covenant where the tablets Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai dwell. These cherubim are tasked with being guardians of the mishkan.

The parsha goes on to give pages of specific details about how to create this holy sanctuary. Torah is generally brief about things, but has a lot to say about how we can build a portable holy place. Maybe because we also need specifics about how to build our own holy place and we need to know how to guard our own holy of holies.

It takes us time to gather what we need, time to even to know what's appropriate for our own holy of holies. We have to know, then we have to ask for the help we need from those whose hearts are willing and able to help us appropriately.

Those who will give us what we actually need and not what they think we are asking for. And sometimes, maybe more often than we like to believe we don't even know what we need to create a sacred holy place.

Torah implies we need willing friends and community who can contribute appropriately to us. We also need guardians who know how to protect us from ourselves.

Reb Zalman Shachter- Shalomi, may his memory be a blessing, spoke about having a few trusted friends as witnesses or truth tellers who were not afraid to tell truths that might be hard for Zalman to hear, when Reb Zalman questioned them about Zalman's behaviors.

Maybe these were his angels and maybe there is more than one cherub or angel guarding our holy place, as one on one people may be likely to try to please and might not tell you the truth, or perhaps it's something about there being strength in numbers, that truth is more likely to be spoken if more than one person is asked to be guardians or witnesses of our behaviors.

Or it could be something like the Yiddish saying, "If three people say you're a donkey, maybe it's time to buy yourself a saddle."

So having said this about a saddle I remind us that we should listen to trusted people, as there are also those who will gang up on people, which is perhaps why appropriate gifts are called for.

We have in this portion many details about what is physically needed to construct a portable holy sanctuary. The mystery or how is more elusive, until we stop to remember that at least three times a day we are asked to listen.

We're asked to say the Shema. The Shema essentially says listen Gd wrestler Gather yourself back to yourself, return to your holy of holies.

In the amidah, the central prayer of Judaism, we are asked to take the time to stop our endless doings and ramblings, to just stop. In the amidah we are asked, not just to listen, but also to receive or to hear as we listen.

Okay, so that still doesn't give us much in the way of a how to be in our holy of holies. We have a place and a time and there are practices.

A practice I learned from Dr. Joan Borysenko asks us to review our day before we go to sleep and to let our body, not our brain, dwell on things from the day that we're grateful for. To feel what our body feels is a wonderful way to increase our gratitude.

If you are comfortable close your eyes or soften them and take a minute to think of one thing you are grateful for. GIVE TIME
If you would please raise your hand when you've thought of something.

I will call you back with music after this practice, so now if you want you can take some time and notice how your BODY feels and let your BODY dwell for a few minutes, on how it feels about this thing you're grateful for.

I do this practice. It certainly has built more gratitude into my life. But some of my more stuck places still need something else.
There are these situations where someone would do that thing! You know THAT thing that derives you crazy AGAIN!

Certain people's patterns could still lead me to falling away from my holy of holies. Their behavior was not my problem. Falling away from my holy of holies that was my problem.

I wanted to dwell in my heart more. There was a study done where it was found that if you had ever been in the same place with someone for just ten minutes, even if you had not noticed that person, your heart would respond to seeing the person again. Hearts are amazing

My busy brain might have many opinions, but hearts have wisdom. I know I am in my sacred place when I live the world in my heart. So I started doing a practice I created that helped me be calm in the midst of the stress of family functions or other stressful situations.

My opinions about how things are or my opinions of others opinions of me just fly away and I just feel love for the friends or family or people I

once was stressed by. After doing this practice I experience myself as more open calm and loving. I wondered if others are experiencing me this way as well, as since I started this practice people who used to seem uncomfortable around me now come up and greet or hug me. So maybe others experience me as more open as well.

I began doing this practice when I was going to visit my mom, who I'm crazy about, and as is often the way with mothers and daughters she can quickly drive me crazy with her loving concern for my well-being.

I wanted to be and act as loving as I feel toward my mom, the whole time I was visiting her. Before the visit I started asking my heart how it felt about my mom. I didn't want her barrage of nonstop questions to get in my way. I began this practice, knowing many of our conversations would go something like this: Yes, thanks, I slept well and Yes, Mom, I ate a good breakfast. Yes, I'll wear my sweater and yes, I have on warm boots and yes I took my vitamins and yes I'll be careful crossing the street and

I found when I asked my heart how it felt about my mom my concerns about being tense and having a good trip dropped away and I was filled with an emanation of quiet love. My opinions were gone and I found myself dwelling in my holy of holies. I kept doing this practice and I had a great visit.

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So for those who are willing I'll learn this meditation, which I call: Living the world in heart. Let's start easy as lots of feelings can come up when you do this practice. Think of someone you personally know, care about and get to see. When you have a person you know and care about in mind, please raise your hand. You might want to put your hand on your heart while you do this. Then ask your heart how it feels about that person. Stay with that feeling a minute I'll call you back with music after this practice

Now let's do this again. This time think of someone you know who has values, or opinions different from your own. Please raise your hand after you think of a person who has different values or opinions. If you

want put a hand on your heart. Notice how your heart feels. Stay with your hearts feelings for a bit. I'll call you back with music.

This practice connects our minds with our bodies. During the shema I put both my hands in the shape of the Hebrew letter shin and place one on my head and one on my heart to remember and remind myself to strengthen my connection between my heart and mind.

So to build a mishkan we need time to access our inner holy of holies
We need community support and trusted friends
We already have willing hearts; we just need to listen, many times a day
We need to let our hearts hear. May we build for ourselves a portable holy sanctuary! And may we travel well! Shabbat Shalom.