For the last two years on Mitzvah Day our congregation has worked for habitat for humanity building houses.

HOW DO YOU BUILD A HOUSE?

HOW DO YOU BUILD A HOME?

I learned something very important in my work with habitat – people observe that they could build many more homes and perhaps much more cost effectively if they used pre-fab materials, hired labors and made better use of power tools. Their answer is the verse from Psalms, establish the work of our hands that it may long endure. Every hammer strike is a prayer, every wall raised by teams of workers is a blessing, every home built through their own sweat and labor is a sermon. They are not building houses they are building homes and homes like the people that will live in them must be built brick by brick with heart and soul.

This week's Torah portion is the final act in a building effort that began at the foot of mount Sinai after the giving of the 10 commandments. God instructs the Israelites *v'asuli mikdahs vshohanti btocham*. Build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among you. For 20 chapters Moses gives detailed instructions on how to build the sanctuary and all of its furnishing and the Israelites build them.

Its an incredible testament to Moses' leadership and the commitment of the whole Israelite community. Everyone participates, each out of obligation, making a ½ shekel contribution to the building fund and then each as they are so moved to do more, giving of themselves, their possessions, there skills, their labor and their willing hearts.

As they do this there is an underling nagging question that must be wondering about – can human beings really build something that will matter to God? Can we really make with our own hands a place that would be not only worthy of God's presence but a place in which God would actually dwell? Can we build not just a house but a home for God?

It's a timely question because the last time the Israelites got together to build something, it didn't go so well for them – that incident was the Golden Calf. Not only did God not dwell in it, but it was an affront to the very essence of God and he destroyed 250 of the most active leaders and builders of the endeavor.

Moses will not have that happen on his watch – he follows God's instructions like the assembly book for a piece of Ikea furniture – every piece has a place and it all must come together just so, nothing leftover, no one left out, you can't make up your own rules or methods. Its God's way or no way.

The great test comes at the end of this double parsha and the very end of the book of Exodus. When they had completed their labors, the whole community stood back and Moses raised his arms and blessed them, According to the Midrash, he said to them, "May it be God's will that He rest His presence on the works of our hands. May the grace

of God be upon us, and may He establish the work of our hands." A cloud descended from the heavens, not a normal cloud but a cloud created *ex nihilio* out of nothingness and descended on the tent filling it with God's presence. At night the cloud became a fire, burning so brightly that all of Israel could see it and know that God was in that place that God was in the home they had built with their own hands and hearts and souls.

So we have our answer right, can human beings build something that matters to God – it would appear by the cloud and the fire to be a clear yes. But a second questions they arises – there is always another question – why? Why did God find this labor so pleasing? Was it simply because we followed directions? Was it such a beautiful façade that God liked God's new digs?

The answer is explained best by a story – as most answers are.

The king and the beautiful bird

It was not about the bird, nor was it about the ark or the sanctuary, they have no worth except that given to them by the people in pursuit of a higher goal – the pursuit of God's favor – the pursuit of holiness..

The Talmud tells us that our homes are to be a Mikdash ma'at – a smaller version of the biblical sanctuary – a place where God's presence fills every corner and space night and day. Is God present in your home? Have you built a place worthy of God's blessing? In three weeks the prophet Elijah will come to every home during Passover, he'll let himself in and steal a sip of wine, but in some homes Elijah will stay for the night – would he stay in your's?

A midrash explains that Elijah will stay in the home where the people live the words found inside the mezuzah on the door, a home where they love God with all there heart soul and might. And how best do we love God, we love God by loving that thing that God loves most of all, human beings by loving each other with all our heart, soul and might – it is such a house that is truly a home a mikdash m'at a place worthy of God presence.

MAKE YORU HOUSE A HOME
Outline Version

- For the last two years on Mitzvah Day our congregation has worked for habitat for humanity building houses.
    - HOW DO YOU BUILD A HOUSE?
    - HOW DO YOU BUILD A HOME?

- Could build faster – but the verse "Establish the work of my hands that it may long endure".
    - Every hammer strike a prayer
    - Every wall a blessing
    - Every home a sermon
    - they are not building HOUSES they are building HOMES
        - Homes like people are not prefab but have a heart and soul

- This week's parsha final act of a great home building effort.
    - God instructs the Israelites *v'asuli mikdahs vshohanti btocham*. Build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among you.
    - Great detail
    - Testament to Moses' leadership
        - Everyone participates
            - ½ shekel
            - Each according to skill and ability
            - They build it just as God instructed

- Nagging questions
    - Can human beings really build something that will matter to God?
    - Can we really make with our own hands a place that would be not only worthy of God's presence but a place in which God would actually dwell?
    - Can we build not just a house but a home for God?

- Last time they build something Golden Calf
    - Didn't end well

- The great test comes at the end, when they finish the work:
    - The whole community stood back and Moses raised his arms and blessed them, According to the Midrash, he said to them, "May it be God's will that He rest His presence on the works of our hands. May the grace of God be upon us, and may He establish the work of our hands."
    - A cloud descended from the heavens, not a normal cloud but a cloud created *ex nihilio* out of nothingness and descended on the tent filling it with God's presence. At night the cloud became a fire, burning so brightly that all of Israel could see it and know that
    - God was indeed in that place that they had built *bchol levav'cha, bcol nafeshcha, b'col modecha* their own hearts and hands and souls.

- But why? Why does this place they built matter to God?
    - Was it because they followed the instructions?
    - Because it looked beautiful
    - Was made with the finest Gold and silver and materials?

- The answer is explained best by a story – as most answers are.
    - **The king and the beautiful bird**

- God dwells within in not because of the outward beauty of the sanctuary but because of the collective beauty of the people working together to build it.

- The Talmud tells us that our homes are to be a Mikdash ma'at – a smaller version of the biblical sanctuary – a place where God's presence fills every nook and crany night and day.

- Is God present in your home?
- Have you built a place worthy of God's blessing?

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Make your home a sanctuary, do holy things there, speak only words of holiness within its walls, love each other with you whole heart, soul and might – make your house a home for God and it will be a home for all who enter.