

Weekly Teaching

March 15, 2019

This week's teaching was a collaborative effort with Rev. Dr. Heather Wright. Heather and I regularly teach together and contribute a joint column periodically for the Greenwich Sentinel on behalf of Temple Shalom and the Center for Hope and Renewal.

Shabbat Shalom & L'Shanah Tovah!

Rabbi Mitch

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Where Do We Encounter God?

By Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz and the Rev. Heather Wright

“When Moses had finished the work, the Cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of God filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the Cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of God filled the Tabernacle. When the Cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on their various journeys; but if the Cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift. For over the Tabernacle, a Cloud of God rested by day, and Fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the House of Israel throughout their journeys.” (Exodus 40:34-38)

Both of our traditions see the invitation of faith as inviting God to dwell within us and find that in our relationship with God through prayer, devotion and service, and in relationship to one another as we honor the image of God in all God's children.

Rabbi Mitch:

During the Israelites' 40 years of wandering within the Wilderness, Moses would pitch the Tent of Meeting outside the camp, and the Pillar of Cloud would descend as God spoke face-to-face with Moses in the tent. When the Israelites saw the Pillar of Cloud at the entrance to the tent, they would rise and bow low, knowing that God's presence was within.

Rabbinic commentary, over the many centuries, commonly notes that the “Cloud” — especially in its form of Fire — was often how we experience God within the flames.

In Genesis 15:17, Abraham receives his covenant from God via the flames. Moses hears God's voice amidst the flames of the Burning Bush. (Exodus 3:2). And, the collective totality of Israel experienced God's revelation at Mount Sinai amidst the thunder and lightning, and the thick Cloud. (Exodus 19:16)

Fire is a very concrete symbol of our awe, and a cloud signifies to us our perception of “heaven”. Today, we are still able to perceive God's Divine Sheltering Presence amidst the Pillars of Cloud and Fire.

Judaism would note that God dwells within whenever we manage to let “God in”. Prayer opens up our awareness and reminds us to let “God dwell within our midst.”

Rev. Wright:

When the glory of the Lord entered the tabernacle, it is the climax of Israel's story of deliverance. From then on, the Israelites march through the desert and through history, with the Lord *tenting* among them and leading them to the land of fulfilled promises. That word tent or tabernacle comes up again in the Christian Scriptures. In John 1:15, we read the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. The verb "dwell" can also be translated tent or tabernacle. It connects back with the Tent of Meeting filled with God's glory. For Christians, Jesus is the Word dwelling among us, in flesh, God's glory among us.

God's glory comes to us in Jesus but Jesus gives the Holy Spirit as a mark of the glory within us. How do we know that? *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body"* (1Corinthians 6:19-20). Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

All of us, regardless of age or gender, struggle with our own bodies. Do you know anyone who says, "I love everything about my body"? But what if we said, "God you gave me this body to inhabit the earth and to reveal God's glory to others." This change of perspective has implications for your body and mine. If we are ones who bear God's glory, it changes how we view others. We realize that we all are created equally in the image of God. I have to ask, how am I glorifying God in my body or others in their bodies?