

Building the Mishkan
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Shavuot 2015 Sermon Slam

Once or twice a year, Joey Baron provides a *derashah* on Shabbat at Temple Aliyah. If you can go, I highly recommend attending. Joey is a great thinker, and an excellent speaker – but he has one special gift which I think I can describe, but which I cannot emulate. He will get up from his seat, walk up to the *bimah*, stand behind the pulpit, and before he has begun to speak he has given everyone in the congregation permission to smile.

I don't know when Joey will speak next – I don't even know how to find out who is speaking week by week – so maybe you should just attend regularly on the chance that he will speak.

The last time I heard him, the portion was Behar. I remember that Joey posed this question: “Why do so many verses in the Torah describe the details of the building of the Mishkan?” Anyone who has read the portion – or one of a few other portions in the last third of Exodus – has probably had a similar thought. There is wonderful stuff in Exodus, it is full of drama – and then you get to this. Particularly if you are preparing a *derashah*, it can be frustrating. There are only so many things that you can say about tanned hides, dolphin skins, and acacia wood.

A traditional approach involves noting the proximity of two verses which provide the mitzvah that we not work on Shabbat. The word used for work in those verses is the same as the word used for the many tasks that will be undertaken when building the Mishkan. Consequently, there are a number of *derashot* that categorize what we should not do on Shabbat based on the many things that we are asked to do when building the Mishkan.

There are many good things that one can learn by taking this approach, but I probably paid too much attention while I was in grammar school – I tend to shy away from double negatives. I love Shabbat, but it is only one day out of the week. Surely what we do on the other six days of the week is as important as what we don't do on Shabbat.

I don't have time to do this justice in my five minutes here, but I'd like to close with this observation – you will begin your week differently on Monday morning if you take a moment to ask yourself this: what will you do this week that will help in

the building of the Mishkan? What will you do that will help build a space for community, a space where that community can safely think, talk, work, and meet the One who creates us, and the One who is still leading us from the straits of Egypt?