

Shabbat in the Cloud
Rabbi Michael Adam Latz
Shir Tikvah Congregation
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“At the very center of the ark, the Divine Sanctuary on earth, the Torah imagines fierce and menacing guards called *kruvim*. Placed by the Holy One at the entrance of the Garden of Eden. They are sentries with a fiery sword who prevent Adam and Eve from making their way back after they were ejected,” teaches my beloved friend and colleague, Rabbi Brent Spodek.

“The Israelites are told: “Make two cherubim of gold... they shall have their wings spread out and they shall face each other. It is from there that I will meet with you... from between the two kruvim that are on top of the Ark.”

In other words, where does the Holy One dwell? Between two beings, each one very different from the other, who are talking to each other face-to-face.” [Ibid].

But what of us who cannot turn our faces to each other as we’ve done each week? What of us who cannot see into each other’s eyes but mediated through a screen? Is God’s love absent?

Of course not!

Our parsha this week is actually a double Torah portion—Vayakhel-P'kudei. The very word—*vayakhel*—to gather, to assemble, to bring close together. Wow. What a word for this moment. What powerful Torah: The people are commanded to draw close to Moshe so he can teach them about observing Shabbat and bringing their *t’rumah*—their gifts—forth to build the Mishkan—and then he sends them away to do their work.

Moshe, it turns out, was the first Jew to spend time in the cloud. But clearly, he was not the last. So we take this Torah seriously—to gather close in spiritual solidarity and physical distance so we might bend the curve of this pandemic; together, we can be responsible and loving neighbors, so we can protect our most vulnerable.

This moment calls to each of us: Like the Israelites of the past, we bring our gifts forth to build something holy and beautiful. It doesn’t look like what we anticipated nor what

we were expected nor what many of us were trained for. We grieve the losses of physical touch, proximate intimacy, being in the same room as the people we've come to love and care for. Let us acknowledge the grief and sadness we are holding.

And this moment demands of us: to stretch and grow in ways we could not have dreamed a month ago, even a week ago.

Moshe called the Israelites forth to bring their t'rumah, their sacred gifts, to build the sanctuary for Divine love to dwell. We are their descendants, we inherit their dreams and their stories. What gifts will you bring forth to help us build our mishkan—our holy sanctuary—in the cloud?

Remember this Shabbat—Moshe went up the mountain and dwelled there in the clouds for 40 days and 40 nights and he received the 10 commandments.

Perhaps our time together in the cloud will prove just as historic and powerful.

Shabbat Shalom.