

Temple Israel
Rabbi Adam Grossman
Summer, 2009”
“Travelling”

The summer is an amazing time. I know that the Memphis heat can be brutal, but the summer affords many of us the opportunity to travel. Whether this is a major vacation, an overnight excursion, or just a day trip, these summer travels give us the chance to explore the world and get much needed relaxation.

Yet, in traveling quite a bit over the last few weeks to Jacobs’ camp and to visit family, I realized that traveling, while nice, does not fully provide “relaxation.” This is not only because Amy and I are traveling with a two year old and nine month old, which definitely does not make it easier, but no matter where we go, coming home is always much better than leaving.

This is not to say we do not have a good time during our trips, but something about sleeping in our bed, using our bathroom, and changing channels with our remote reminds me of the simple pleasures home affords us.

Being home is more than a bed, a toilet and a remote control; for many of us it can be a comforting place where stresses seem to diminish and life seems much simpler.

As we begin Devarim this week with Moses’ speech, the Israelites have traveled the desert for the last forty years without a permanent place to call home. While the Israelites’ human needs of food, water and shelter were met, an emotional and physical safe-haven was not a possibility. Now, after traversing the land as nomads their opportunity to establish permanent settlements is finally upon them. Yet, no matter whether the Israelites trek through the desert or build permanent houses the idea of creating a stable home can be achieved.

When building a home various adjectives might come to mind. A real estate listing might tell us with words such as spacious, quaint, and updated, that a home is a space. Thales, a sage of ancient Greece, suggested that a home is the place where a person has the most leisure and respite from business.

However, a home is more than a definition explaining it as a physical space or the opposite of work. A home is the place where we find refuge, security, and love. It is our space to sit back and enjoy the comforts of life, to be with those we admire, and to be thankful for the blessings that occur every day in our life. It is truly the epitome of the cliché that decorates so many country kitchens, “Home Is Where the Heart Is.”

Creating a place where our hearts exist challenges us to build a home that is a holy space, a sanctuary, and a place where we can come into contact with God. While physical structures might aid in this connection, the home begins within our self. In thinking about this concept, Psalm 15 comments on the characteristics needed to fashion our holy spaces:

Who may abide in Your house, Adonai?
Who may dwell in Your holy mountain?
Those who are upright, who do justly,
All whose hearts are true.
Who do not slander others, not wrong them,
Nor bring shame upon their kin.
Who give their word and, come what may, do not retract it.
Who do not exploit others, who never take bribes.
Those who live in this way shall never be shaken.

By engaging in the directives outlined in Psalm 15, we have the opportunity to transform physical structures such as our house, our office, and our gym, into our personal Temple, into our own holy spaces.

As modern Jews looking back on history, we know that while in Devarim the Israelites begin to build their permanent lives in Eretz Yisrael, we also know that these “permanent” houses were only temporary. We know this because the Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans would ultimately destroy these dwellings. This coming week we memorialize this devastation with Tisha B’Av. Yet while the structures might have been demolished, their homes were not destroyed. Instead the Israelites continued to create holy spaces that concentrated on doing justly, not wronging others and giving their word, thus laying the foundation for our thriving Judaism. So as we remember the Israelites in Deuteronomy and on Tisha B’Av this coming Wednesday evening, may we continue to build homes in our lives that help Judaism and holiness to flourish.