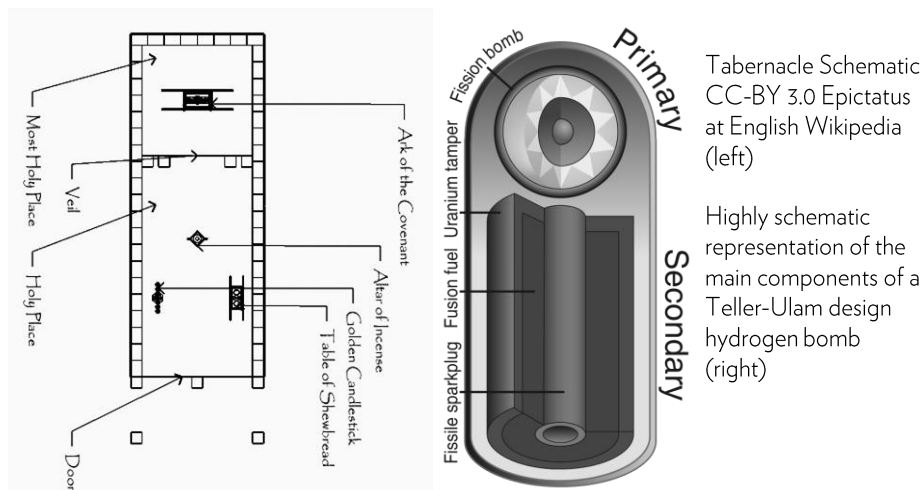


as a sea wake: Mike was a temple, tragically solomonic, invoking the powers that fire the sun.”



Tabernacle Schematic
CC-BY 3.0 Epictatus
at English Wikipedia
(left)

Highly schematic
representation of the
main components of a
Teller-Ulam design
hydrogen bomb
(right)

Taking Rhodes metaphor further, we can see the structure of the Mishkan-sanctuary of the later chapters of Exodus echoed in the image of Mike, reproduced above: The lead lining stands in place of the courtyard curtains, the radiation channel and secondary fusion core in place of the courtyard itself, the fission spark plug in place of the bronze altar, and the fission core in place of the sanctum. Finally, the plutonium charge lies at the center of the sanctum powering it all, a replacement—*lehavdil*—for the Ark of the Covenant itself.

The architecture of progressive holiness, in which one approaches the source of tremendous mystery and power through stages, moving from foyer, to sanctuary, to raised altar, to the source of power hidden from view by a curtain is reflected in synagogue architecture today, just as it was in the Polish synagogues of Ulam’s childhood and the Hungarian ones of Teller’s. The image in which their design of massive power is shaped has been stripped of its traditional and ritual value. As Teller, said of his Jewish upbringing: “The idea of God that I absorbed was that it would be wonderful if He existed: We needed Him desperately but had not seen Him in many thousands of years.” This is the problem of religion in modernity: How do we turn away from the bomb, and return to the sanctuary? How do we invoke the presence of God in a world in which so many feel the absence of the Divine so profoundly?

Shabbat Hahodesh
Vayak-hel–Pekudei 5781

שבת החודש
ויקהל–פקודי תשפ"א



Holy Bling

Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky, Dean of Albert A. List College of Jewish Studies and the Gershon Kekst Graduate School; Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor of Bible, JTS

I loved rummaging through my grandmother’s jewelry. To my child’s eye, her jewelry box was a treasure chest filled with sparkling gems, pearls, and gold. All “paste,” I learned, but to me they were the crown jewels.

I would drape myself with necklaces and stack rings on my fingers and bracelets on my wrists. I did not follow the rule that one should always remove an item of jewelry so as not to appear over-laden. I loved a full-on blast of bling.

Like my grandmother’s jewelry box, the Mishkan—Israel’s portable sanctuary—was a treasure chest. Parashat Vayak-hel-Pekudei describes the colorful fabrics, rich woods, and precious metals that comprise the Mishkan, its furnishings, and the costumes of the priests who served within it.

The Mishkan must have shimmered with its purple, red, and blue hues, sparkled with its emeralds and sapphires, and glowed with its gold, silver, and copper. It was a full-on blast of bling. It must have been beautiful.

Beauty is essential to all religious life. Exodus 15:2 declares: “This is my God and I will glorify God.” From this verse, develops the idea of *hiddur mitzvah*—the idea that beauty enhances ritual observance.

The Talmud interprets this concretely and specifies that the silks that wrap our Torah scrolls, the fringes worn on our garments, the shofarot

we blow, the sukkot we sit in should be beautiful (BT Shabbat 133b). The physical beauty of these objects reflects the glory of God.

The Mishkan radiates *hiddur mitzvah*. Its grand, overwhelming beauty is a physical testimony of God's glory. I imagine that a worshipper who enters the Mishkan is struck by its beauty, and spontaneously shouts out the words of Psalm 24: "Who is the sovereign of glory? The Lord of Hosts is the sovereign of glory!"

There may be times when God chooses to dwell in something as mundane as a small desert bush (Exod. 3:2), but God's bejeweled and bedazzled house reflects God's fullest magnificence and communicates Israel's awed awareness of it.

Yet, the beauty of the Mishkan does more than reflect God's glory. The Mishkan is a product of Bezalel and Oholiab and of other artisans who are endowed with the skill and creativity to design and craft its woven curtains, carved furnishings, and hammered ornaments (Exod. 35:30–36:1).

As such, the Mishkan is a work of art whose beauty reflects the glory of the human spirit and is a testimony to human creativity and artistry.

Beauty is essential to religious life because it reflects and celebrates God's glory and because it reflects and celebrates the glory of the human spirit and its capacity to make beauty and art.

Beauty is manifest in many forms. Visual beauty—displayed in the Mishkan's spectacular details—is particularly powerful. Visual artists—painters, crafters, dancers, architects, directors, fashion designers—manipulate materials that effectively communicate their wondrous ability to imagine and create new objects and whole worlds.

But there are other manifestations of beauty that are equally powerful, although less tangible than visual beauty. There is the transformative beauty of music and of written and spoken language, the elegant beauty of logic, and the profound beauty of deep emotion.

We see and need all forms of beauty in religious life. We need golden lampstands and crimson cloths. We need drums and lyres. We need psalms and talmudic arguments.

We need it all to worship our God who infuses our world with beauty. We need it all to express our human spirit and to celebrate our capacity to create beauty.

Right now, I crave beauty. I have not been to a museum or to the theater in a year because of COVID. Without Shabbat dinners and festive occasions, there is no reason to dress up and wear my grandmother's jewelry. Unable to travel far, I have seen limited natural beauty.

But the beauty I have seen, heard, and experienced has helped me through this time. It has fed my spirit and has inspired me to see beyond the constrained darkness of the moment, to see the beauty in God's world and the beauty in the worlds we humans create.

We need beauty to express the glory of our creator and the glory of our creativity. We need a world that sparkles and shimmers, that hums and sings, that's crafted and elegant. And sometimes we need a world with a full-on blast of bling.

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דבר אחר | A Different Perspective



The Sanctuary and the Bomb

Rabbi Marcus Mordecai Schwartz, Assistant Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics, JTS

The US gave the codename "Ivy Mike" to its first full-scale experimental thermonuclear device. Designed by two of the century's most significant nuclear scientists: Stanislaw Ulam and Edward Teller, Mike's design was a strangely beautiful one. As historian Richard Rhodes wrote in *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*: "Steel, lead, waxy polyethylene, purple-black uranium, gold leaf, copper, stainless steel, plutonium, a breath of tritium, silvery deuterium effervescent