

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Terumah follows those of Mishpatim and Yitro. In parshat Yitro we experienced the moment of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people. In parshat Mishpatim the Torah began to fill in the details of Jewish law and life, especially as they relate to human and societal behavior and the standards of such behavior that the Torah wishes us to uphold.

In this week's parsha of Terumah, the Torah presents another challenge to human behavior – wealth, money, charity and the ability to give away what one may deem to be his or hers. The Torah demands from us the ability to donate to others, to give to great causes, to the public welfare and to be able to share with others our material possessions.

The rabbis of the Talmud stated that this is one of the major identity tests of life. Miserliness, a bad eye and an unwillingness to be able to contribute to others in need are held to be violations of Torah principles and morals. The Torah at Sinai instructed us not to steal, not to take from others what belongs to them without their explicit consent. Now the Torah raises the bar and asks us to be able to give away what we deem to be ours to others less fortunate than us or to national and religious causes that benefit us all.

All of this is implied in the request for donations to help build the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle. The Lord could have provided us with a ready built spanking new Mishkan/Tabernacle on His own. Instead He challenged us then and in every continuing generation of Jewish life to build a Mishkan/Tabernacle on our own and from our own resources. And that requires a proper view of our own wealth and what we do with it.

My beloved Talmud rebbe taught me over seventy years ago how to read the daily newspaper – how to filter out the golden nuggets of life and morality from the overwhelming amount of dross that fills the pages of our newspapers. There was an item in the newspaper about a baseball pitcher who gave up a guaranteed salary of twelve million dollars for 2011 and retired from the game because he felt in all honesty that he could no longer pitch effectively and did not wish to be paid for essentially doing nothing. This naturally goes against the grain of the vast majority of professional athletes whose greed and avarice is so

well known. That is why it made news – it was a man bites dog story. But it indicated to me that the lesson of parshat Terumah still lives in the human heart.

To be able to walk away from money not honestly earned is a Torah value. And to share and give of our wealth to others and to the building of society, to Torah education and a national home for Jews, is also a supreme Torah value. We have to build our own Mishkan/Tabernacle constantly in every generation. The Torah's attitude towards the sharing of our wealth is the key to such a form of Mishkan/Tabernacle building. ©2025 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

From here to the end of the book of Exodus the Torah describes, in painstaking detail and great length, the construction of the Mishkan, the first collective house of worship of the Jewish people. Precise instructions are given for each item – the Tabernacle itself, the frames and drapes, and the various objects it contained – including their dimensions. So for example we read: “Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim woven into them by a skilled worker. All the curtains are to be the same size—twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide... Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle—eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size—thirty cubits long and four cubits wide... Make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide...” (Ex. 26:1-16)

And so on. But why do we need to know how big the Tabernacle was? It did not function in perpetuity. Its primary use was during the wilderness years. Eventually it was replaced by the Temple, an altogether larger and more magnificent structure. What then is the eternal significance of the dimensions of this modest, portable construction?

To put the question more sharply still: is not the very idea of a specific size for the home of the Shekhinah, the Divine presence, liable to mislead? A

transcendent God cannot be contained in space. Solomon said so: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built." (1 Kings 8:27)

Isaiah said the same in the name of God Himself: "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house you will build for Me? Where will My resting place be?" Isaiah 66:1

So no physical space, however large, is big enough. On the other hand, no space is too small. So says a striking midrash: When God said to Moses, 'Make Me a tabernacle,' Moses said in amazement, 'The glory of the Holy One blessed be He fills heaven and earth, and yet He commands, Make me a tabernacle?'... God replied, 'Not as you think do I think. Twenty boards on the north, twenty on the south and eight in the west are sufficient. Indeed, I will descend and confine My presence even within one square cubit.' (Shemot Rabbah 34:1)

So what difference could it make whether the Tabernacle was large or small? Either way, it was a symbol, a focus, of the Divine presence that is everywhere, wherever human beings open their heart to God. Its dimensions should not matter.

I came across an answer in an unexpected and indirect way some years ago. I had gone to Cambridge University to take part in a conversation on religion and science. When the session was over, a member of the audience came over to me, a quiet, unassuming man, and said, "I have written a book I think you might find interesting. I'll send it to you." I did not know at the time who he was.

A week later the book arrived. It was called 'Just Six Numbers', subtitled 'The deep forces that shape the universe'. With a shock I discovered that the author was the then Sir Martin, now Baron Rees, Astronomer Royal, later President of the Royal Society, the oldest and most famous scientific body in the world, and Master of Trinity College Cambridge. In 2011 he won the Templeton Prize. I had been talking to Britain's most distinguished scientist.

His book was enthralling. It explained that the universe is shaped by six mathematical constants which, had they varied by a millionth or trillionth degree, would have resulted in no universe or at least no life. Had the force of gravity been slightly different, for example, the universe would either have expanded or imploded in such a way as to preclude the formation of stars or planets. Had nuclear efficiency been slightly lower the cosmos would consist only of hydrogen; no life would have emerged. Had it been slightly higher there would have been rapid stellar evolution and decay leaving no time for life to evolve. The combination of improbabilities was immense.

Torah commentators, especially the late Nechama Leibowitz, have drawn attention to the way

the terminology of the construction of the Tabernacle is the same as that used to describe God's creation of the universe. The Tabernacle was, in other words, a microcosmos, a symbolic reminder of the world God made. The fact that the Divine presence rested within it was not meant to suggest that God is here not there, in this place not that. It was meant to signal, powerfully and palpably, that God exists throughout the cosmos. It was a man-made structure to mirror and focus attention on the Divinely-created universe. It was in space what Shabbat is in time: a reminder of creation.

The dimensions of the universe are precise, mathematically exact. Had they differed in even the slightest degree the universe, or life, would not exist. Only now are scientists beginning to realise how precise, and even this knowledge will seem rudimentary to future generations. We are on the threshold of a quantum leap in our understanding of the full depth of the words: "How many are your works, Lord; in wisdom You made them all" (Ps. 104:24). The word "wisdom" here – as in the many times it occurs in the account of the making of the tabernacle – means, "precise, exact craftsmanship" (see Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, III:54).

In one other place in the Torah there is the same emphasis on precise dimensions, namely, Noah's ark: "So make yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around" (Gen. 6:14-16). The reason is similar to that in the case of the tabernacle. Noah's ark symbolised the world in its Divinely-constructed order, the order humans had ruined by their violence and corruption. God was about to destroy that world, leaving only Noah, the ark and what it contained as symbols of the vestige of order that remained, on the basis of which God would fashion a new order.

Precision matters. Order matters. The misplacement of even a few of the 3.1 billion letters in the human genome can lead to devastating genetic conditions. The famous "butterfly effect" – the beating of a butterfly's wing somewhere may cause a tsunami elsewhere, thousands of miles away – tells us that small actions can have large consequences. That is the message the Tabernacle was intended to convey.

God creates order in the natural universe. We are charged with creating order in the human universe. That means painstaking care in what we say, what we do, and what we must restrain ourselves from doing. There is a precise choreography to the moral and spiritual life as there is a precise architecture to the tabernacle. Being good, specifically being holy, is not a matter of acting as the spirit moves us. It is a matter of aligning ourselves to the Will that made the world. Law, structure, precision: of these things the cosmos is made

and without them it would cease to be. It was to signal that the same applies to human behaviour that the Torah records the precise dimensions of the Tabernacle and Noah's ark. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt'l © 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“According to the way I show you the pattern of the Sanctuary and the pattern of its vessels, so shall you make them.” (Exodus 25:9) What is the real purpose of the Sanctuary – the forerunner of the Holy Temple – and its significance to Judaism and the Jewish people? Our question is a crucial one, especially when we take note of the fact that the last five of the eleven Torah portions of the book of Exodus deal with the details and precise architectural plans of the Sanctuary and its accoutrements.

Moreover, for the desert generation, the Sanctuary was literally erected at the center of the formation of the tribes, symbolizing its place as the center of the Jewish people. Indeed, the Western Wall of the Temple, and even the Temple Mount itself, continue to inspire and excite Jews from all over the world as the foremost religious shrine of Israel reborn. Hence our understanding of the message of the Sanctuary will go a long way in helping us to understand the message of Judaism itself.

Nahmanides, noting that the commandment to build the Sanctuary directly follows the revelation at Sinai (the portion of Mishpatim is a continuation of the Ten Commandments, according to the Midrash), maintains that the very function of the Sanctuary was to continue the revelation, to build a central temple from which the divine voice would continue to emanate and direct the Israelites. Therefore, the very first aspect of the Sanctuary that the Bible describes is the ark, (aron), repository of the sacred tablets of stone, over which is the kapporet with its two cherubs. The Torah testifies in the name of God: “And I shall meet with you there, and I shall tell you from above the kapporet, from between the two cherubs, which is on top of the ark of testimony, everything which I will command you [to communicate] to the children of Israel.” (Exodus 25:22)

Moses even reiterates this notion of an ongoing revelation when he reviews the historical event at Sinai in his farewell speech to the Israelites: “God spoke these words to your entire assemblage from on the mountain amidst the fire, the cloud and the fog, a great voice which never ceases.” (Deuteronomy 5:19 and Onkelos ad loc).

This is likewise emphasized in our classical blessing over the Torah: “Blessed are You... Who has chosen us from all the nations and has given [past tense] us His Torah. Blessed are You O Lord who gives

[present tense] the Torah.” (Siddur, Morning Service)

The place where the revelation continued was originally between the cherubs above the ark of the Sanctuary; it therefore is quite logical that throughout the Second Temple – in the absence of the sacred tablets and the gift of prophecy – the Great Sanhedrin, sage interpreters of God's word for every generation, sat within the Holy Temple in the office of the “hewn stone” or the “decisions” (the Hebrew word “gazit” means to cut or decide, to chisel a stone or to decisively cut through a problem). It is after all the function of the Oral Torah to keep God's word alive and relevant in every time and in every situation. Apparently Nahmanides would insist that the main purpose of the Sanctuary was to teach and inspire Israel and humanity with the eternal word of the divine. From this perspective, after the destruction of the Second Temple, it is the synagogues and the study houses – our central institutions of Torah reading, learning and interpretation – which are the legitimate heirs to the Sanctuary.

The mystical and Hassidic interpretations see in the Sanctuary another purpose altogether: the building of a home in which the Almighty and Israel (and ultimately, all of humanity) will dwell together. The revelation at Sinai symbolizes the betrothal-engagement between God and Israel, with the marriage contract being the tablets of stone, the biblical laws. The commandment to erect a Sanctuary enjoins us to build the nuptial house in which the Almighty “bridegroom” unites with His bride – Israel.

Hence, the accoutrements of the Sanctuary are an ark-closet (repository for the tablets), a menoracandelabrum and a table for the shewbread – the usual furnishings of a home – as well as an altar. Everyone knows that it is impossible to establish a family without every member being willing to sacrifice for another: each spouse for his or her partner, parents for children, and even children for the family unit. And if the Almighty created a world – albeit an incomplete, imperfect one – in which humanity can dwell, we Jews must create a more perfect Sanctuary so that God will feel more comfortable with us and be enabled to dwell in our midst here on earth.

From this perspective, the heir to the destroyed Holy Temples is the Jewish home, wherever it may be. It is because Judaism sees the home as the “mother of all religious institutions” that home-centered family ritual celebrations bear a striking parallel to the religious ritual of the Jerusalem Temple even to this day. The most obvious example of this is that mystical and magical evening known as the Passover Seder, modeled upon the Pascal meal in Jerusalem during Temple times, when every parent becomes a teacher whose primary task is to convey – through songs, stories, explication of biblical passages and special foods – the most seminal experience in Jewish history: the Exodus from

our Egyptian servitude.

And every Shabbat and festival meal is a mini-Passover Seder. Even before the Friday sun begins to set, the mother of the family kindles the Shabbat lights, reminiscent of the priests' first task each day: to light the menorah. The blessing over the Kiddush wine reminds us of the wine libations accompanying most sacrifices, and the carefully braided challot, loaves of bread, symbolize the twelve loaves of shewbread which were changed in the Temple every Friday just before dusk. Parents bless their children with the same priestly benediction with which the High Priest blessed the congregation in the Temple, and the ritual washing of the hands before partaking of the challa parallels the hand ablutions of the priests before engaging in Temple service.

The salt in which we dip the challa before reciting the blessing over bread is based upon the biblical decree, "You shall place salt on all of your sacrifices" (Lev. 2:13), since salt, which is an external preservative, is symbolic of the indestructibility of God's covenant with Israel. The songs that are sung and the Torah that is taught during a Friday night meal will hopefully further serve to transport the family participants to the singing of the Levites and the teachings of the priests in the Holy Temple. Such a Shabbat meal links the generations, making everyone feel part of the eternal people participating in an eternal conversation with the divine.

I believe that both views, the Sanctuary as continuing revelation, and the Sanctuary as the nuptial home between God and Israel, together express the fundamental significance of our Holy Temple. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah informs us that the Aron (Ark; Exodus 25:11), the Shulchan (Table; 25:24), and the Mizbe'ach Miktar Ketoret (Incense Altar; 30:3) were all decorated with rims. Why is this so?

Each of these appurtenances may correspond to different roles of important personalities (Yoma 72b). The Ark relates to the Torah scholar, as the holy tablets were contained in the Ark itself. The Table symbolizes the prosperity of our people, best represented by the ruler. And the Altar recalls the priest as he offered incense upon it.

Each of these individuals plays an important role, and each has a distinct challenge. The Torah scholar must prevent his knowledge from leading to arrogance, to feeling superior over other less learned Jews. The king, the most influential of individuals, must never use his power to take advantage of his

constituents. And the priest should never permit his religious position to be used as a platform to abuse others.

It is no wonder that the Hebrew word for rim – a border that delineates and protects – is zer. On the one hand, zer comes from the word zar, which means "alien." In other words, the Torah scholar, king, or priest could pervert their important roles, thus alienating themselves from God's way.

But as Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein of Sochaczew writes in his Shem mi'Shmuel, zer also intersects with the word nazir. The Nazirite achieves elevated spirituality by dedicating his life entirely to the service of God, following His ways, bringing righteousness and justice into the world (Genesis 18:19).

Thus, the goal of the Torah scholar, the king, and the priest is to direct all energy to holiness, to ensure that the rim at the top of these objects is manifest in the spirit of the nazir. In this sense, the rim around the holy objects can be viewed as a crown, nobly turning to God.

Note that, in Ethics of the Sages, the rabbis speak of three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of the kingship, and the crown of priesthood. Not coincidentally, they correspond to the Ark, the Table, and the Altar in the Tabernacle. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the rabbis conclude that the most important crown is the crown of a shem tov (good name); in their words, "but the crown of a good name is greater than them all" (Ethics of the Sages 4:13).

Our leaders' challenge is to infuse the three objects in the Tabernacle, representative of these three major roles in Judaism, with the critical dimension of a good name. In Shem mi'Shmuel's words: "Each of these three great gifts to the community of Israel – Torah, kingship, and the priesthood – needs special attention to ensure that they are used only for holy, rather than self-seeking purposes. The crown on the Ark, Table, and Altar represent this constant need." © 2025 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Precious Stones

Among the gifts that were brought by the B'nei Yisrael willingly to build the temporary, portable Temple of the desert, the Mishkan, were the precious stones used for the eiphod and the choshen. These consisted of the Avnei Shoham, the Shoham stones and the Avnei Miluim, the filling stones. Both sets of stones were used in the clothes of the Kohen Gadol, the chief priest, and are mentioned in more detail in next week's parasha, which discusses the special clothes worn by the Kohanim when performing their service to Hashem in the Temple. In our parasha,

they are only mentioned because they were part of the gifts that were brought to the Temple to enable it to be built and to function in its service. The Torah here only states, "Shoham stones and filling stones, for the Eiphod and the Choshen."

HaAmeck Davar explains that there is a difference here in the order of the words as compared to many other places in the Torah and the Talmud where it lists the Choshen first and the Eiphod second. He explains that the difference has to do with the order in which they were to be made and which was placed on the Kohein first. The Eiphod was a tunic or vest that was worn underneath the Choshen, which was a breastplate. Since the tunic was placed on the Kohein Gadol first, here it is mentioned first. The Choshen, breastplate, was placed over the Kohein's Eiphod, so here it is mentioned secondly. In other places in the Torah and Talmud, the importance of the Eiphod and the Choshen was the consideration for their order. The Eiphod only had one purpose and that was a separation between the Kohein Gadol and the Choshen. The Choshen had several different purposes, and was therefore more important, and for that reason, was listed first.

The Ohr HaChaim asks a different question concerning the order of the stones. He asks why the Avnei Shoham and the Avnei Miluim were listed last of the other eleven items that were to be donated to the Temple. He states that these stones should have been listed before even the gold and silver since they are more precious than gold and silver. These were valuable stones, not only because of their intrinsic value, but because each stone of the Avnei Miluim represented an individual tribe, and the two stones of the Avnei Shoham each represented six of the tribes. Their names were carved into the stones by special artists who did not engrave them in the stones in the usual manner of engravers, but, according to the Ramban, utilized the shamir, the same "worm" that was used to cut the stones of the Temple.

One answer given by the Ohr HaChaim for their listing at the end of the list of gifts brought to the Temple involves a Midrash which tells that the leaders of each of the tribes had waited to bring their gifts until the people of each tribe had finished donating. They each believed that there would be a shortfall in the donations and they were prepared to make up any shortage. When the donations were brought, there was no shortfall, so the leaders stepped in and requested that they be allowed to bring the precious stones for the Choshen and the Eiphod. Since they were brought after the other eleven items had already been brought, Hashem punished the leaders by taking out a letter from their listing (the word n'siim, the princes, was written without the letter yud) and the precious stones were listed last. The Ohr HaChaim gives another reason for listing these stones last. Every other gift

became Holy once it was designated as a gift to the Temple. That means that no one could benefit from using the object for any other purpose. If one accidentally used one of these donations, he would have to pay back the cost of the item and an additional fine. This was not true of the clothes of the Kohanim, which were not restricted from receiving benefit. Since these stones were used in the clothes of the Kohein Gadol, they were not restricted from receiving benefit.

A third reason brought by the Ohr HaChaim for listing the stones last involves a Midrash that states that the stones were brought by the ananim, the Holy clouds that accompanied the B'nei Yisrael in the desert. Thus, these "gifts" did not involve any real effort or cost to the princes of each tribe. They did not suffer the consequences of their delay, either by having to exert greater effort to locate these precious stones or by having to spend an exorbitant amount of money from their own pockets. Perhaps for this reason, they also donated more to the Temple besides these stones. Those gifts can be found in Parashat Naso in Sefer Bamidbar.

The Chavel translation of the Ramban describes the Avnei Shoham as onyx stones and the Avnei Miluim as setting stones. The Ramban explains that gold settings were placed on the Choshen and the stones were used to fill those settings. Rashi explains that these gold settings actually surrounded the stone with sufficient depth that the stone was surrounded by the gold setting. The Ramban explains a problem that he had with this explanation. He did not feel that the fact that they were surrounded by gold was the reason for their name, as the two onyx stones of the Eiphod also were set in gold. He also questioned the name given these stones here as Avnei Miluim, as this was only the donation period, and these stones would not be set into their gold settings until much later when the Kohein Gadol's special clothes were prepared.

The Ramban also disagreed with Rashi's description given concerning the filled stones, namely that they were surrounded by the gold setting. The Ramban described the settings as a three-pronged setting that enabled the stone to be seen in its entirety, "in order that they be seen from all angles, and that their beauty and splendor should not be hidden in the indentations." There were "chains" attached to the two rings at the top of the Choshen which then were attached to the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the Eiphod. The Ramban questions Rashi on how his encasement of the stones in gold would enable these chains to be attached.

We are in an unusual time in Jewish history. Though some disagree, it appears that the two-thousand-year exile has at least begun to reach its end. The diaspora, however, will not be over until the building of the Third Temple and the restoration of the Kohanim who will serve in it. May we be deserving of

the privilege to see the rebuilding of the Temple and the Kohein Gadol wear these precious stones in his service to Hashem. © 2025 Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

The Holy Ark

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When people nowadays refer to the *aron kodesh* (the holy ark), they are generally speaking about the ark in the front of the *shul*, which houses the Torah scrolls. This ark is considered a *tashmish kedusha*, something that serves a holy object and thus is holy itself. Therefore, other items should not be stored in the ark. Additionally, even if an old ark is replaced by a newer one, the old one retains its holiness and should be treated accordingly.

The question arises: May we use the ark to store *Chumashim*, *Siddurim*, *Haftarah* scrolls (written on parchment), or Torah scrolls that have become unusable? It would seem that since all of these are of less holiness than a Torah scroll, such storage should be forbidden, as it would detract from the holiness of the ark.

However, a number of reasons have been adduced to permit this:

1. Since the Torah scroll is resting in the ark as well, the holiness of the ark is not diminished by these additional items. (If this explanation is correct, there is a problem when we remove all the Torah scrolls from the ark, as we do on Simchat Torah and (in some places) Hoshana Rabbah.)

2. The people who originally built the ark had in mind that it would be used for storing other holy objects besides Torah scrolls.

3. Since we customarily cover Torah scrolls with ornamental mantles, the ark is further removed from the scrolls' holiness. It is now a *tashmish detashmish*, something that serves an item that itself serves a holy object. Therefore, placing other holy items in the ark does not detract from its holiness.

Notwithstanding the above three reasons, there are still those who insist that Torah scrolls alone, and nothing else, may be stored in the *aron kodesh*. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And you shall make staves of acacia wood, and cover them with gold. (Shmos 25:13) Parshas Teruma introuces us to Hashem's plan for the creation of the Mishkan, where His Shechina would dwell in the midst of the Jewish People. Each item was explained in detail, the way Hashem wanted it made.

One item to be made was the Aron, the chest in which the luchos would be placed. It was made of acacia wood and coated inside and out with gold. On it were four rings, into which were placed the staves

referred to in our verse, and these would serve as the means of carrying the Aron, also called the Ark. The staves of the Ark, which were used to transport it, were placed into the rings and were never to leave them. They would remain connected to the Ark for all time. Though they were not formed as part of it, they were integral to it.

Chazal have compared the staves of the Aron to the supporters of Torah. Through their decision to financially support Torah and its study, they become connected to that Torah for eternity. This indicates the high regard we should have for those who support Torah, and this is an opportunity for those who may not be able to learn as much as should or would like to, to still have that share in Torah.

Just as Yissachar and Zevulun are looked at as one unit, and the badim which were used to lift the aron were considered part of it, so too are all "tomchei Torah," Torah supporters, making an eternal connection to the Torah. There is one important caveat though.

The staves were not simply made of gold. Rather, they were made of the same wood which the aron was constructed from, and then coated in gold. This teaches us that the supporters of Torah do not merit this closeness merely by having given money, and giving money alone is not enough to be considered a supporter of Torah.

There must also be an underlying appreciation for the Torah, and a respect for those who toil in it. There must be a firm commitment to following Hashem's will, not our own. The wood used was "atzei shitim." The word shita is used to describe opinions and values in Torah, and these staves had to have that stability and unwavering dedication as their backbone.

The true supporters of Torah are those who recognize the value of Torah, and seek to elevate it. When they give money for it, they realize that they are the real beneficiaries, as they are getting so much more than they give. Just as the Parsha begins with, "Take for Me a tribute," and refers to the donations as "taking," so, too, are those who donate to Torah causes, taking and acquiring for themselves something worth much more than money.

Those who think the Torah "needs" them, and that it is THEIR money supporting Torah, without which it would not remain, are fooling themselves. Such people will never be able to properly support Torah, nor recognize that its value is greater than all the gold and gems in the world.

A town was celebrating the completion of a new Sefer Torah, and they held a contest to see who could make the most beautiful mantel for it. Many artists created fabulous pieces, and one woman's Torah cover was chosen to adorn the Torah during its procession to the shul where it would reside.

When they tried to put the mantel on, however,

it didn't fit! The cover was too small for the Torah. They realized they would have to choose a different cover.

The woman who'd made it was beside herself, until she exclaimed, "I know! If you just cut the Torah down a bit, it will fit into the mantle!" Sadly, she missed the point of why we adorn Torahs. ©2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Drasha

The winged seraphs that rest atop the Aron Kodesh in the Holy of Holies are known as the cherubim.

These cherubs, the Midrash explains, have the faces of innocent children -- a young girl and boy. The Aron Kodesh contains the most sacred of our physical entities, -- the Luchos (Ten Commandments). In the sacred box lay both the Tablets that Moshe carved and the shattered pieces of the G-d written ones that Moshe smashed upon seeing the Golden Calf.

The two cherubs sit atop of a lot of history. They also protect a lot of sanctity. So they must be endowed with great spiritual symbolism. Yet this is not the first reference to cherubim in the Torah. In fact cherubim are mentioned at the onset of creation where they did not sit innocently upon an Aron Kodesh. They stood guard to block Adam and Chava (Eve) from re-entering the Garden of Eden after their expulsion. "Hashem placed the cherubim and the flame of the ever-turning sword to guard the entrance of Gan Eden." (Genesis 3:34)

The apparent contrast is striking. How is it possible that the very same beings who guard the sanctity, chastity, and purity symbolized by the Aron Kodesh could be flashing fiery swords at the gates of Eden? Is a cherub an image of peace, love, and tranquillity or is it the symbol of destruction and mayhem? It should not represent both -- unless the Torah is telling us something. And it is.

A Miami rabbi was lecturing to a group of senior citizens about the life of the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen of Radin. "This great sage," he explained, "impacted the lives of thousands of Jewish souls with his simple, down-to-earth approach. He published scores of books that applied to everyday living and mastered the art of the parable, imbuing profound Jewish concepts with simple tales."

The rabbi proceeded to recount a tale that had circulated in the halls of yeshivos the world over. "Once the Chofetz Chaim was informed that a particular boy in his yeshiva was smoking on Shabbos. The Mashgiach (dean of ethics) of the Yeshiva decided that the boy must be ousted from the school. However, the Chofetz Chaim asked to speak to the young man before the eviction was completed. "The young man entered the Chofetz Chaim's study. He was there for only about 15 minutes, and no one knows what the Chofetz Chaim told him, but the story as I heard it," the rabbi from

Miami exclaimed, "is that not only did the boy decide to remain a Shabbos observer the rest of his life, he also became a strong supporter of Torah institutions."

The speech ended. The crowd shuffled out. But one elderly man remained fixed in his chair. His face was ashen and his eyes were focused directly at the Rabbi. Slowly he got up and approached the lectern. "Where did you hear that story?" he demanded. "Do you know who that boy was?"

The Rabbi shook his head in nervous innocence. "No," he stammered. He could not imagine where the conversation was leading.

"It was me!" cried the old man. "And you know what the Chofetz Chaim told me?"

Again the Rabbi, not knowing what to say, shook his head with nervous ignorance. "I have no idea," he pleaded. "Honestly, I have no idea. What did the Chofetz Chaim say?"

The man smiled. "The Chofetz Chaim said absolutely nothing." As his mind raced back more than half a century the old man repeated the words again. "Absolutely nothing just held my hand -- the one that held the cigarettes -- and began to cry. Then the Chofetz Chaim slowly began to whisper the words 'Shabbos, Shabbos' over and over in a sad singsong. And the words mingled with the tears that were dripping on my hand that had held a cigarette just hours earlier.

"He sat there without looking at me. Crying. He felt the pain of the Shabbos. And I felt his pain, too. Just being there with him for those 15 minutes changed the hand that held the cigarette to the hand that would hold up the Torah."

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l used to comment that the same cherubim that held swords as they stood guard at the gates of Eden are not doomed to that position. They can change drastically when they are placed upon an Aron Kodesh. When they are on top of the Aron, they guard it and cherish it. Young children are affected by their whereabouts. Place them as a guards and they will brandish swords. Put them with the Aron Kodesh -- let them feel the sanctity and they will become the cherubim we all cherish and aspire to emulate. ©2025 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

It was breathtakingly beautiful, but ordinary human eyes never feasted on it. Secluded in the Holy of Holies, the holy Ark of the Torah was visited only once a year -- by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. Nevertheless, the Arks glittering beauty, transcendent holiness and aura of mystery loom large in history and legend.

The Ark sits at the very core of Judaism. It is the eternal depository of the Tablets that Moses received directly from Hashem on Mount Sinai, and as such, it is the ultimate symbol of the power and glory of

the Torah. It is the crown jewel of the Temple, a spectacular vision of pure gleaming gold adorned with two golden winged cherubs. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Ark is popularly known as "the golden Ark."

But that is not how the Torah describes it. "And they shall make an Ark of cedarwood," the Torah declares. Then the Torah goes on to describe how this Ark is to be constructed. A wooden ark is placed inside a golden ark. Then a second golden ark is placed inside the wooden ark. The rim is then covered with gold, effectively encapsulating the wooden ark entirely in gold. The Talmud explains that this is meant to signify that a true Torah scholar is equally pure within and without.

A number of questions immediately come to mind. Why does the Torah describe it as "an Ark of cedarwood" when, in fact, not a speck of wood is visible? Why isn't the popular "golden Ark" a more appropriate description? Furthermore, if the ark is meant to symbolize the absolute integrity of the Torah scholar, his total purity within and without, why is a layer of wood interposed between the two layers of gold? Wouldn't total purity mandate that the Ark be solid gold through and through rather than a gold veneer on a wooden base?

The commentators explain that gold and wood represent two distinct aspects of the human personality. Gold represents the sublime and ethereal aspect, spirituality in its purest form. The golden side of the human personality soars above the mundane world and reaches out for the divine. Wood, on the other hand, represents the human connectedness with the earth, the prosaic, the mundane. Just as a tree is rooted in the soil, so is a person rooted in the physical world and the society of other people.

The ideal Torah scholar is more than just a golden ethereal spirit passing through the world in blissful oblivion of the realities of human struggle. At his core, he must have a heart of wood, rooted in this world and supremely sensitive to the physical needs of other people. This then is the Jewish paragon, not a monastic recluse nor a sensualist but a person imbued within and without with the true spirit of Torah yet rooted in human society, reaching out with yearning to the divine and with kindness and compassion to the mundane.

In this vein, perhaps we can detect a further symbolism in the choice of wood for the essence of the Ark. Gold, for all its beauty, is static; it does not grow. It is stuff of which angels are made. Wood, however, is alive and always grows. The Torah clothes a person in golden garments, and at his core it imbues him with the vitality of wood so that he can flourish and grow as a person for his entire life.

A young man went to bid his wise old grandfather farewell before embarking on a long journey.

"And where are you going my child?" asked the old man.

"I am going to see a very great sage," he replied, mentioning the name of a famous luminary. "I always wanted to see what an angel looks like."

The old man smiled. "Then you are making a mistake. The sage you mentioned is not an angel. He is the ultimate of what a man can be, and believe me, that is greater than an angel."

In our own lives, we must retain our perspectives as we strive to be more spiritual. The Torah does not want us to achieve spirituality by withdrawing from the world and isolating ourselves from the society around us. On the contrary, the Torah wants us to retain a powerful connection with the hustling, bustling world around us and to imbue it to the best of our abilities with the spirit and sanctity of the Torah. If we can clothe ourselves within and without with the golden garments of the Torah yet retain a deep-rooted vitality in our hearts, we can indeed enjoy the best of both worlds. ©2009 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Terumah is the beginning of the building of the Mishkan, where G-d would dwell among the Jews as they traveled in the desert. To build the Mishkan materials had to be collected, and G-d commanded the Jews to collect several types. After listing the need for metals, wools, hairs, skins, and wood, the Torah tells us that they collected "oil for illumination" and "spices for the anointment oil and incense". Why does the Torah suddenly need to tell us what the materials were to be used for, when it hadn't discussed it thus far?

One possible answer is that there are two differences between the characteristics of the other materials and those of the oil and spices. Firstly, while the other materials were important, they required no effort in producing, while the oil and spices had to be manufactured and maintained. Those people that didn't have the precious stones to donate to the building of the Mishkan still had the opportunity to contribute with their efforts instead! Secondly, both the oil and the spices are of the most 'giving' materials used in the Mishkan; The oil was used to light the Menorah, which gives off light to everything around it, and the spices give off a beautiful smell to its surroundings. The message is clear... The most beautiful and giving things in life are those that require our active effort. Spices smell and oil illuminates BECAUSE someone took the time and effort to make them. The same can be said today... Being a good person and a good Jew is beautiful and rewarding to ourselves and to others, but only BECAUSE we take the time and effort to understand and cultivate it. ©2011

Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

