

Lessons from the Aron

The Kotzker Rebbe (1787–1859) would say, "Some people like to think that Hashem is truly everywhere. But in reality, Hashem is where you let him in."

I daven at an early Shabbos morning minyan where I bring my own siddur, Chumash, and tallis and carry them together in a bag. During Iainig last week my mind was wandering and I wasn't paying attention, then I heard something fall that startled me and caught my attention. I looked around trying to figure out where the noise came from, then realized it was my siddur that fell inside the bag. When I took out my Chumash I replaced the siddur on its edge. Now, just at the moment that I wasn't paying attention, it fell and snapped me back to reality. Hashem was speaking to me and I said to Hashem in response, "Ok, ok. I got the message - I'll pay attention."

After I got home I went into the living room to do some Shabbos reading. I sat down in my favorite chair and knew that there's a chance I might fall asleep reading. At around 10:30am I felt my eyes closing and thought to myself that if I did fall asleep I'd like to be up by 11am and not sleep too long. Sure enough I dozed off at some point. The next thing I hear is someone knocking at our front door. I got up to answer the door for a relative who stopped by to drop something off to us. When I walked back into the living room I saw the time was 11:02am. I smiled and said Thank you to Hashem for waking me up exactly when I wanted. The more we let Hashem into our lives, the more we will see, hear, and feel Him.

In our parsha, Terumah, Hashem spoke to Moshe, the individual with the closest relationship to Him, instructing Moshe what to tell B'nai Yisrael in the building of the Mishkan along with its furnishings and vessels. The central feature of the Mishkan was the Aron, which housed the *Luchos*. The pasuk says: וַעֲשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמָתַיִם וְחָצִי אַרְכּוֹ וְאֶמָּה וְחָצִי רָחְבוֹ וְאֶמָּה וְחָצִי קִמְתּוֹ – *They shall make an Ark (Aron) of acacia (Shittim) wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width; and a cubit and a half its height.* (Shemos 25:10).

The Or HaChaim suggests that Hashem, in saying *They shall make an Aron*, hints to Moshe that the Torah itself, which the Aron symbolizes, can be fulfilled only by all the Jews collectively. For there is no human being in the world who can perform all the precepts of the Torah on his own. For example, if an individual is a Kohen, he cannot fulfill all the mitzvos that are specific to a non-Kohen. And if he is a Yisrael, then he cannot fulfill the mitzvah-obligations of a Kohen. Likewise, the same situation applies to a Levi. It is only all the Jews collectively who can fulfill the entire body of the Torah's precepts.

The Ramban notes that Moshe first spoke about the Aron before the rest of the Mishkan because the word of Hashem is infinitely more important than the building where it is stored. The *Luchos* (Tablets) are the reason for the building, not vice versa.

The Ramban continues, the plural *They* at the beginning of our pasuk refers to the entire nation of B'nai Yisrael, to which Hashem commanded collectively. It is significant that only here do we find the plural; the rest of the chapter is in the singular. This indicates that all the people should participate in the making of the Aron since it is the "the most sacred item of the dwellings of



the Most High,” and also so that all of them should merit to have an attachment to the Torah. For the *Luchos* containing the Ten Commandments rest in the Aron, and the golden border around the Aron symbolizes the Crown (כתר) of the Torah according to Gemara Yoma (72b).

Along the same lines, I found it of personal interest that the Aron is first mentioned in our pasuk (25:10). Although we don't really reference the chapter numbers (*perakim*) of the Chumash to learn an idea, the Lubavitcher Rebbe does permit it if the message is relevant. I had an idea about our pasuk which is Perek 25 (כ"ה), Pasuk 10 (י'). What comes to mind is that the *Chof* (כ) can stand for כתר – the Crown of the Torah, the *Hei* (ה) with a gematria of 5 can stand for the 5 books of the Torah, the Chumash, and the *Yud* (י') of our pasuk 10 can represent the Ten Commandments which rest inside the Aron.

The Baal HaTurim explains that the word אֶרֶן is made up of the same letters as אורן (*their light*), for within it is the light of B'nai Yisrael. The word is also made up of the same letters as נורא (*awesome*), for it is awesome, like consuming fire. The Baal HaTurim says further that all of the measurements of the Aron are broken into half cubits. This teaches that anyone who studies the Torah must break his nature and humble himself.

The cubit measurements of the Aron are given in fractional figures ($2\frac{1}{2}L \times 1\frac{1}{2}W \times 1\frac{1}{2}D$) rather than in whole figures, according to Rabbi Nosson ben Shimon Hakohen Adler, to remind Torah scholars that even they still have not attained perfection and “wholeness” in their knowledge. Rabbi Azaryah Figo, the 17th century author of *Binah L'itim*, would say that the depth of the Aron was less than its length to teach us that the Torah is not so deep as to be inaccessible.

Rabbeinu Bachya gives a rational approach to the measurements of the Aron. It is possible to explain the words *They shall make an Aron* as an instruction that the Aron and its lid with the *keruvim* (cherubs) were to symbolize the three parts the human being is made of – the body, soul, and intellect. The wooden part of the Aron represents the body of man – the four rings represent the four basic materials that the body consists of. These materials are what keep him alive and functioning. The two poles correspond to the two “strings” which run through man's body – the spine (vertebrae) and the spinal cord inside it. The two *Luchos* which were housed inside the Aron represent two special organs within man's body which enable him to understand the wisdom of the Torah – the brain and the heart. The two *keruvim* represent the soul and the intelligence – the former being feminine the latter being masculine.

A friend of mine shared with me an amazing explanation of the Aron from the sefer *Panim Yafos* by Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (1731–1805) who writes that the entire construction of the Aron alludes to the great forefathers of Klal Yisrael: The two *keruvim* (cherubs) allude to Avraham and Yitzchak because two times the gematria of כרוב (228) equals 456, the same gematria as אברהם יצחק. The Aron itself alludes to Yaakov, who said – מה נורא המקום הזה – *How awesome is this place* and the letters of נורא are the same as ארון. The four walls of the Aron represent the twelve tribes, who traveled in a four-sided formation. The two poles for carrying the Aron allude to the two leaders who “carried” the nation – Moshe and Aharon. Finally, the לוחות הברית inside the Aron allude to Yosef, who is known as שומר הברית since he was the standard bearer for morality in the face of seduction.



Rav Moshe Feinstein in Darash Moshe teaches that the Aron was not included in the measurements of the Beis HaMikdash (Yoma 21a) – because of its spiritual nature, it did not occupy physical space. Now if this miracle was done for the Aron, which functioned solely as a repository for the Torah and the *Luchos*, why was the miracle not done for the Torah and *Luchos* themselves with their much greater degree of sanctity?

Rav Moshe sees a lesson for each of us that every Yid must endeavor to make himself like the Aron and to fill himself completely with Torah. Therefore, if he does not learn to the utmost of his capability, he will leave an empty space in his personal “Aron,” which should have contained the entire Torah. Once he has learned to his capacity, however, he must strive to make himself humble as if he does not occupy any space in the world. He should realize that since his essence is entirely spiritual he therefore has no connection with the dimensions of the physical world.

The Noam Elimelech states that Hashem created this world *yeish mei'ayin* – that *yeish* (substance, something) sprung from *ayin* (nothingness). The Tzaddik comes along and does the reverse: from reality, from *yeish*, he makes *ayin*, nothing. From the physical, he elevates it to bring out the spiritual, nullifying the physical, earthly matter. The Upper Worlds are drawn down by the Tzaddik while he uplifts the lower worlds, unifying them into one by his actions.

There is a story told of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (the Noam Elimelech) and his brother the Rebbe Reb Zusha of Anipoli who both wandered the world on foot in self-imposed exile. Late one evening, the brothers arrived in the town of Lodmir. Seeing a light on in a well-appointed home they knocked on the door and asked for a place to stay the night. The wealthy resident sent them off practically slamming the door in their face. The brothers then arrived at the home of Reb Aharon, a simple man who welcomed them warmly in his meager residence.

Years later, the brothers visited Lodmir once again. Except this time, they were not disguised as beggars in exile, but were official and prestigious guests of the community and came with a coachman, horses, and luggage. A wealthy man invited them to stay at his home, so they sent their coachman, horses, and luggage to the man's house, but they went to stay with Reb Aharon again. The wealthy man came to find them and complain why he's not hosting them.

The brothers responded, “But you are hosting us! At least that part of us that you desire to host. Last time we were here without a coachman, horses, or luggage and you turned us away from your door. Nothing about us personally has changed, so it is not us you want in your home now, but our employee and possessions. Take them and we will stay here with Reb Aharon.”

The true goal of the Torah is to enable a Yid to attain a state of *d'veikus baHashem* (attachment to Hashem). The Aron embodies the G-dly wisdom of the Torah whose primary function is to enable a Yid to attain this *d'veikus*. This is reflected in the *keruvim*, which symbolized the intimate bond between Hashem and B'nai Yisrael.

Man is therefore provided with the opportunity to relate, in some measure, to the Heavenly Abode of Hashem Himself explains the Nesivos Shalom. Hashem desired for His *Shechinah* (Presence) to be accorded a dwelling place in the lower realms, this world. But how is this possible? The Mishkan was fashioned in a manner in which its every detail corresponded to the



oros (lights) of the Upper Worlds. The Mishkan was instrumental in bringing the radiance of the *Shechinah* down to the earthly realm, this world, which was the goal of Creation.

In a manner reminiscent of the Mishkan, the Torah also serves as a model for the Heavenly Abode – every word, letter, and detail in the Torah corresponds to another aspect of Hashem's dwelling place Above. Equal weight and sanctity is granted to every detail of the Torah; a sefer Torah that is missing even a single letter is deemed *passul* (disqualified for use).

What is paramount, asserts the Nesivos Shalom, is simply the notion of *emunah* – faith in the boundless spiritual wealth contained in every word and letter of the Torah, each of which alludes to the loftiest and most exalted spiritual lights of the Upper Worlds. This *emunah* is a means by which to draw down from the sanctity of Above to this world below. When a Yid learns Torah with the belief in its infinite sanctity he enables these *oros* (lights) to shine on him from Above. Thus, the Torah itself is a vehicle for the transmission to below of the exalted sanctity from Above.

The Daat Zekenim teaches that if inert objects (Aron, *Luchos*, and Torah) deserve such treatment with respect, how much more so do the Torah scholars who are living bearers of the Torah's wisdom deserve to be treated with respect and be given honor by each one of us.

Rabbi Yitzchak Dinas lived in Russia and generously supported Torah scholars and yeshivas. He had two daughters who eventually married men who both became *gedolim* – the Gaon Rav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, the Rosh Yeshivah of Telz, and his brother, who served as the Rosh Mesivta in Telz. How did Rav Yitzchak merit such illustrious sons-in-law?

This story illustrates why: One winter day, Rav Elchonon Wasserman knocked on Rav Yitzchak's door to collect money for his yeshivah. However, since his coat and boots were wet and muddy from the melting snow, Rav Elchonon knocked on the back door to avoid tracking mud inside the house. When Rav Yitzchak saw that Rav Elchonon had entered the house through the kitchen service entrance, he became agitated and upset. He said, "You're ruining the *chinuch* (education) of my daughters! All the *chinuch* that I have invested in them will be lost in one minute!" Rav Elchonon responded in surprise, "What did I do to ruin your daughters' *chinuch*?"

Rav Yitzchak answered in a pained voice, "For years, I've tried to emphasize to my daughters that all the wealth in the world is not worth anything without Torah. And now a Rosh Yeshivah enters my house and my daughters see exactly the opposite – as if the beauty of the house is worth more than Kavod HaTorah!"

Rav Yitzchak then insisted that Rav Elchonon accompany him and his daughters to the beautifully furnished living room with white carpeting and offered him a fancy chair which was soon stained with mud and snow from Rav Elchonon's coat and boots. Rav Yitzchak then finally felt at ease and gave Rav Elchonon a generous contribution demonstrating his priorities in life.

Imagine keeping a set time to learn every day – even just one minute. How would that feel?

Can you envision investing in Torah causes with the same passion as financial investments?

Shabbat Shalom and wishing that the spiritual *oros* (lights) from Above shine down upon you.