

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**"T**he Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Tell the Israelites to take an offering for Me; take My offering from all whose heart moves them to give'" (Ex. 25:1-2). Our parsha marks a turning point in the relationship between the Israelites and God. Ostensibly what was new was the product: the Sanctuary, the travelling home for the Divine Presence as the people journeyed through the wilderness.

But a case could be made for saying that even more than the product was the process, summed up in the word that gives our parsha its name, Terumah, meaning, a gift, a contribution, an offering. The parsha is telling us something very profound. Giving confers dignity. Receiving does not.

Until that moment, the Israelites had been recipients. Virtually everything they had experienced had been God-given. He had redeemed them from Egypt, liberated them from slavery, led them through the wilderness, and created a path for them through the sea. When they were hungry, He gave them food. When they were thirsty, He gave them water. Apart from the battle against the Amalekites, they had done almost nothing for themselves.

Though at every physical level this was an unparalleled deliverance, the psychological effects were not good. The Israelites became dependent, expectant, irresponsible and immature. The Torah chronicles their repeated complaints. Reading them, we feel that they were an ungrateful, querulous, petulant people.

Yet, what else were they to do? They couldn't have crossed the sea by themselves. They couldn't have found food or water in the wilderness. What produced results was complaining. The people complained to Moshe. Moshe turned to God. God performed a miracle. The result was that, from the people's perspective, complaining worked.

Now, however, God gave them something else entirely. It had nothing to do with physical need and everything to do with psychological, moral and spiritual need. God gave them the opportunity to give.

One of my early memories, still blazing through the mists of forgotten time, goes back to when I was a child of perhaps six or seven years old. I was blessed with very caring, and also very protective, parents. Life

had not given them many chances, and they were determined that we, their four sons, should have some of the opportunities they were denied. My late father of blessed memory took immense pride in me, his firstborn son.

It seemed to me very important to show him my gratitude. But what could I possibly give him? Whatever I had, I had received from my mother and him. It was a completely asymmetrical relationship.

Eventually, in some shop I found a plastic model of a silver trophy. Underneath it was a plaque that read, "To the best father in the world." Today, all these years later, I cringe at the memory of that object. It was cheap, banal, almost comically absurd. What was unforgettable, though, was what he did after I had given it to him.

I can't remember what he said, or whether he even smiled. What I do remember is that he placed it on his bedside table, where it remained -- humble, trite -- for all the years that I was living at home.

He allowed me to give him something, and then showed that the gift mattered to him. In that act, he gave me dignity. He let me see that I could give even to someone who had given me all I had.

There is a strange provision of Jewish law that embodies this idea. "Even a poor person who is dependent on tzedakah (charity) is obligated to give tzedakah to another person." (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mattenot Aniyim 7:5) On the face of it, this makes no sense at all. Why should a person who depends on charity be obligated to give charity? The principle of tzedakah is surely that one who has more than they need should give to one who has less than they need. By definition, someone who is dependent on tzedakah does not have more than they need.

The truth is, however, that tzedakah is not only directed to people's physical needs but also their psychological situation. To need and receive tzedakah is, according to one of Judaism's most profound insights, inherently humiliating. As we say in Birkat ha-Mazon, "Please, O Lord our God, do not make us dependent on the gifts or loans of other people, but only on Your full, open, holy and generous hand so that we may suffer neither shame nor humiliation for ever and for all time."

Many of the laws of tzedakah reflect this fact, such that it is preferable that the giver does not know to whom they give, and the recipient does not know from

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whom they receive. According to a famous ruling of Maimonides the highest of all levels of tzedakah is, "to fortify a fellow Jew and give them a gift, a loan, form with them a partnership, or find work for them, until they are strong enough so that they do not need to ask others [for sustenance]." (Ibid., 10:7) This is not charity at all in the conventional sense. It is finding someone employment or helping them start a business. Why then should it be the highest form of tzedakah? Because it is giving someone back their dignity.

Someone who is dependent on tzedakah has physical needs, and these must be met by other people or by community as a whole. But they also have psychological needs. That is why Jewish law rules that they must give to others. Giving confers dignity, and no one should be deprived of it.

The entire account of the construction of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, is very strange indeed. King Solomon said in his address on the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem, "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). If that applied to the Temple in all its glory, how much more so of the Mishkan, a tiny, portable shrine made of beams and hangings that could be dismantled every time the people journeyed and reassembled every time they encamped. How could that possibly be a home for the God who created the universe, brought empires to their knees, performed miracles and wonders, and whose presence was almost unbearable in its intensity?

Yet, in its small but human way, I think what my father did when he put my cheap plastic gift by his bedside all those years ago was perhaps the most generous thing he did for me. And lehavdil, please forgive the comparison, this is also what God did for us when He allowed the Israelites to present Him with offerings, and then use them to make a kind of home for the Divine Presence. It was an act of immense if paradoxical generosity.

It also tells us something very profound about Judaism. God wants us to have dignity. We are not tainted by original sin. We are not incapable of good without Divine grace. Faith is not mere submission. We are God's image, His children, His ambassadors, His partners, His emissaries. He wants us not merely to

receive but also to give. And He is willing to live in the home we build for Him, however humble, however small.

This is hinted in the word that gives our parsha its name: Terumah. This is usually translated as an offering, a contribution. It really means something we lift. The paradox of giving is that when we lift something to give to another, it is we ourselves who are lifted.

I believe that what elevates us in life is not what we receive but what we give. The more of ourselves that we give, the greater we become. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

**Shabbat Shalom**

**"M**ake one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends.

The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover". (Ex 25:19-20) What is the most crucial vehicle for the transmission of our Jewish faith and traditions? Is it the Synagogue, the Study Hall, the Jewish Community Center, the charitable organizations or none of the above? Let us study the details of two of the major accoutrements of the Desert Sanctuary and perhaps we will discover the answer to our question.

The Sanctuary menorah described in this week's Torah reading, had the shape of a golden tree, whose trunk extended into six branches, three on each side, replete with stems and flowers. (Ex. 25:31-40) It was a tree, which shed light.

The ark was the repository for the tablets of stone, which contained the Ten Commandments. A golden cover (Kaporet or Parokhet) was placed over and above the ark, from which two cherubs were hammered out on either side. Rashi cites the Midrash: "They had the form of the face of a young child." (B.T. Sukkah 5b) The cherubs were formed to be looking at each other, and the Almighty communicated with Moses from between the two cherubs. (Ex. 25:10-30)

The Sages described the special qualities of these cherubs, and the way in which our Gentile captors viewed these images: Rav Katina said, "When the Israelites would ascend to Jerusalem during the three Pilgrim Festivals, the (Temple custodians) would show them the cherubs, who were embracing each other. They would say to the pilgrims, See how your love before the Almighty should be as the love of a man for a woman" Said Resh Lakish, "when the destruction (of the Temple) came about, the Gentiles entered (the sacred shrine) and said: 'These Jews, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, are involved

in such a sculpture?' They derided the Israelites, citing the verse, 'All who (formerly) respected her, came to mock her, because they saw her nakedness'. And what was her nakedness? The cherubs, embracing each other!" (B.T. Yoma 54a)

Why did our Holy Temple feature sculptures like the cherubs-in-embrace, which allowed the Romans to revile Israel as worshipping their God through pornography?

We have seen that the menorah is a golden tree, symbolically reminiscent of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The first couple was banished from the primordial Garden of Perfection, and humanity prevented from eating of the tree of eternal life, because Adam and Eve sinned by partaking of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. Our major commentator, Rashi suggests that the forbidden fruit injected within the human personality what Sigmund Freud would call the libido, substituting lust for love, illicit passion for sexual purity. That is original sin. The ultimate goal of Torah – also referred to as a "tree of life" in the Biblical Book of Proverbs as well as in our liturgy – is to re-fashion our imperfect world into the Garden of Eden, to enable a perfected humanity to finally eat the fruit of the tree of eternal life. According to Rashi's interpretation, this ultimate feat can only be achieved when sexual purity will be restored, when familial love rather than extra marital lust will be normative human behavior. Then we will have righted the wrong, done penance for the sin, which caused our existential exile in the first place.

The Roman conquerors missed the point of the cherub symbolism. Our Sages insist that "they had the form of the face of a young child", symbolizing purity, innocence, and whole-heartedness. The physical embrace of such male-female winged beings -with the pure faces of children – express love without lust, sexual unity which enhances family rather than sexual depravity which destroys family.

Undoubtedly, the family – that which has such powerful potential for creative supportiveness and spiritual continuity – can tragically degenerate into crippling destructiveness and pathological dysfunction. I heard it said in the name of the great Hassidic sage Rav Aharon Karliner that it is difficult to see the compassion with which God created the world – unless you take into account the fact that Adam and Eve were born without parents. Nevertheless, our religious tradition holds great store in the importance and ultimate potential of family as the matrix from which a perfected society will one day emerge – and therefore our Sabbath, festival, life-cycle and family purity rituals laws and customs, all aim to protect, strengthen and deepen the most positive family ties and relationships.

Dysfunctional family – Adam and Eve blaming each other for their own weaknesses – produces the first murder (Cain and Abel); unified family, – when the

hearts of the parents turn to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents – will herald national and world redemption. Family depraved banished humanity from Eden; family redeemed will return us to Eden and the tree of life.

The sacred objects of the desert Sanctuary teach us that the most important vehicle for the transmission of our tradition is the family. Only by nurturing family purity and unity will we succeed in protecting Torah and properly utilizing it to perfect all of society. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

One of the greatest problems that has dogged religious life throughout the centuries is the place of material wealth and money in the structure of religious life. It is obvious to all that wealth corrupts and sullies noble programs and plans. The question boils down to the eternal issue as to whether the noble ends -- Jewish education, synagogue worship, social charitable endeavors -- justify the means, as the process often borders on the unethical procurement of money.

Monetary scandals have plagued all religious projects and ambitions from time immemorial. The fact that the goal trying to be achieved is so noble and morally necessary, makes the temptation to deviate from correct probity and proper behavior in fund raising and monetary conduct all the more tempting. Unfortunately, the history of religion is littered with monetary scandals driven by poor decisions.

The prophets of Israel decried this situation during First Temple times, but apparently to little avail. Religion sadly has a tendency to transform itself into a business, a commercial enterprise. And this always leads to the desecration of God's name and catastrophic disasters. Many commentaries and scholars have stated that this monetary corruption was the real basis for the destruction of the Temples themselves, and the continued cessation of Temple service even until our very day. Even buildings and programs conceived in holiness and founded by the most righteous of people are susceptible, over time, to fall into the trap of monetary scandal. I need not and will not enumerate specific examples of this weakness, but all of us are aware of their existence and sad influence.

Yet, despite all of this, these dangers are almost inevitable. This week's Torah reading combines the ideas of holy service to God with the necessity of fund raising and material wealth. The Torah apparently is of the opinion that the benefits of channeling and using money for noble good outweighs the dangers inherent in combining religion with wealth and money. In fact, this is the pattern of the Torah in all matters of everyday life, events and society.

Judaism does not allow for excess ascetism or hermit-like lifestyles. We are always somehow to be engaged in this world, tawdry and flawed as it may be. Yet the challenge is to somehow remain a holy people, a kingdom of priests, while dealing with these challenges that mark our daily lives and society. The holy tabernacle/mishkan is to be constructed through heartfelt donations of material wealth and personal volunteerism. Though religion and faith are corrupted by monetary issues, wealth applied correctly and through a generous hand can enhance and even ennoble religion.

Moshe was shown a coin of fire in Heaven. It could burn and destroy, but it could also warm and light the way. The word Terumah itself, in its literal sense, means to uplift and raise. Wealth properly used and applied can be the engine that propels all holy endeavors forward. As it was in the time of Moshe, so, too, does it remain one of the greatest challenges in Jewish life. ©2020 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**F**rom a strictly halakhic perspective, the kindling of the menorah is not an act of serving God. No doubt the menorah is a holy object, but still the Talmud concludes that "lighting [it] is not considered a service." (Yoma 24b)

Perhaps this means that the lighting of the menorah creates a holy atmosphere that serves as a backdrop to the actual Temple service where we approach God. This is accomplished through its representation of three major themes in human experience--- creation, revelation and redemption.

The menorah brings us back to the creation story, where the first creation was light. (Genesis 1:3) In the center of the Garden of Eden were the tree of knowledge and tree of life. The menorah looks like a tree. It is adorned with flowers, knobs and cups. The flowers represent the buds that spring forth fruit; the knobs are shaped like a round fruit; and the cups are symbolic of vessels into which nectar is poured. (Menahot 28a) As Eden was a society of peace, so the menorah sets the tone for what hopefully would be an experience of inner peace as we serve God in the sanctuary. Its lighting accentuates the powerful beauty of the tree; it ignites serenity within us.

The menorah resonates with the image of Sinai as well. It brings us back to the moment when the Torah was given where light was abundant. (Exodus 19:16) The three branches on each side are associated with worldly knowledge. Yet, the wicks in each of these branches turn toward the inner shaft -

teaching the idea that everything has its source in Torah. The lighting of these wicks focus our energy on our primary means of connecting to God -- love of the light of Torah. (Mishlei 6:23)

The menorah may also allude to the Messianic world. Not only do the wicks point inward, the flames reach toward heaven, reminding us of our mission to be a light to the nations of the world. (Isaiah 42:6) From this perspective, when viewing the lighting of the menorah our thoughts focus on the fact that the tabernacle experience should encourage us to fix the world, bringing it to ultimate redemption.

These ideas should speak to us today. Upon entering a synagogue and seeing the eternal light, it ought to echo inner peace, love of Torah, and a striving toward perfection. When creation, revelation and redemption converge in the synagogue we can't help but feel spiritually drawn to God. ©2020 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 S. LEVIN**

## Table of the Show Breads

**P**arashat Terumah contains the command to Moshe and the B'nei Yisrael to build a bayit (a house) for Hashem on Earth (the Mishkan and later the Beit HaMikdash) and to furnish that bayit with several important and symbolic pieces of furniture. One of the pieces was the Shulchan, the table on which were placed the Showbreads.

The Torah informs us, "And you shall make a table of shittim wood two cubits for its length, one cubit its width, and one-and-a-half cubits tall. And you will overlay it with pure gold and make a circlet of gold around it. And you shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth all around it and you shall make a circlet of gold around its rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold and you will put the rings on the four corners which its feet form. Opposite the rim will be the rings, for housings for the poles for carrying the table. And you will make the poles of shittim wood and overlay them with gold and the table will be carried by them. And you will make its dishes, its spoons, its pillars, and its ventilati ontubes by which it will be covered, and you will make them with pure gold. And you will place on the table showbread before Me continuously."

The breads of the Shulchan are not discussed here since the purpose of this section of the Torah was only to list and describe the objects that were placed in the bayit. One must remember that the breads that were placed on the Shulchan did not serve Hashem at all. No portion of that bread was offered to Hashem as it was eaten entirely by the Kohanim. It is true that the frankincense was burned afterwards to Hashem as a

reminder of those breads, but the bread itself was never offered to Hashem. What then was the purpose of the Shulchan for the bayit? HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch indicates that the Shulchan was a symbol of the wealth and blessing of Hashem to the B'nei Yisrael. The word for table, shulchan, comes from the word shalach, meaning to send or to present. "It is symbolically used for nourishment, food, material abundance, and well-being, wealth, and comfort." Its purpose was to hold the bread and the incense, the sweet smell of which gave comfort and a feeling of satisfaction.

Another significant lesson of the Shulchan can be found in the misgeret, the "circlet" of pure gold which surrounded the Shulchan. This was one of three objects in the bayit that had a circlet which represented a boundary. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin brings the Gemara in Yoma (82) which states: "there are three circlets, one for the Aron Kodesh, one for the altar, and one for the table." The circlet for the aron signified the crown for the Torah, the "circlet" of the mizbei'ach was for the crown for the Kohanim, and the shulchan was the crown of Kingship. The message here is two-fold. Firstly, the Gemara in Sanhedrin tells us that "audacity is a king without a crown." The crown on a king limits him for it reminds him that there is a true King Who reigns over him and his own powers are limited to those granted him by the true King, Hashem. Secondly, this same reminder is brought home by the fact that kingship is a partnership between the King, the Torah, and the Kohein. The King is in power only so long as he adheres to the Torah of Hashem and the advice of Hashem through the Kohanim and the N'vi'im. We read in M'lachim Aleph and Bet (Kings 1 and 2) of the often disastrous period of the kings of Yisrael when even the best of the kings faltered when they lost track of that lesson of the Shulchan.

The Ramban tells us that the secret of the Shulchan is that "since the time that the world came into existence, Hashem's blessing did not create something from nothing; instead, the world follows its natural course, for it is written, "And Hashem saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good." The Ramban explains that since the world was already "finished" the blessing then must descend on what is already there and increases it. He compares this with the act of Eliyahu in M'lachim Aleph (17) when he first asks a poor lady what she has in the house and then tells her that Hashem will make that increase enough that she will have enough for her, her son, and Eliyahu until Hashem makes it rain a year from that time. The Ramban, through this explanation, informs us that the bread that was placed on the Shulchan was the object that Hashem would use in order to bring blessings of food and abundance on the entire B'nei Yisrael.

There is a beautiful message given to each of

us as we concentrate on this last message of the Ramban. Hashem created the world ex nihilo but after the six days of that creation uses that which already exists to bless the world. Just as the breads that were placed on the Shulchan then became the foundation of Hashem's blessing to us, that which we now offer Hashem each day becomes the source of Hashem's blessing for us. We find indications of this concept within many of the areas of advice that have been passed down to us as part of our tradition. We are told that when a woman who is suffering because she is childless prays for another woman who is childless, Hashem answers her own suffering first. When a person is poor and needs money but is still careful to give from his meager funds to help another poor person, Hashem blesses him with his needs also. But there is still more. Hashem has blessed each of us with certain abilities which enable us to feel a sense of worth. Those abilities are different for each of. As we offer our service to Hashem using that unique ability that Hashem has given us, Hashem then can use that unique offering to bless the entire world. It is only by each of us offering that which only we can offer Hashem, that Hashem can give the world its full and complete blessing. No offering is too small or unimportant for each serves its own purpose. Our challenge is discovering that which we can offer Hashem and then working to improve that quality within us so that our service to Hashem can utilize that quality to its fullest potential. May we each learn to recognize our potential and how best to serve Hashem with that potential to increase the blessings that He gives to the Jewish people and through them to the world. ©2020 Rabbi D.S. Levin

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Aron Hakodesh

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**W**hen one refers to the "Holy Ark" (*Aron Hakodesh*) we generally are speaking about the Ark that houses the Torah in the front of every Synagogue. Ostensibly this Ark can only be used for this lofty purpose and must be treated with dignity. Thus, one is not permitted to house other items there.

Are we allowed to house in an *Aron Kodesh*, *Chumashim* (bibles) or *Siddurim* (prayer books) or a scroll of the *Haftorot* or Torahs that have become unusable? It would seem that since these have less holiness than the Torah itself, it should be forbidden.

However, there are arguments which would permit this.

1. Since the *Siddurim* and *Chumashim* etc. are in the Aron with the Torah, they do not diminish its holiness. (this explanation would come into question when we customarily remove all the Torah on *Simchat Torah* and *Hoshannah Raabah*)

2. The leaders of the community who originally built the Aron had this use of storing holy objects and books in mind as well.

3. Since Today we also decorate the Torahs with additional ornaments and cloths, the Aron Kadesh has become a lesser utensil (*Tashmish Detashmish*) and therefore it would be permitted.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the above three reasons, there are still those who only allow the Torahs to be stored in the *Aron Kodesh* and nothing else.

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### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"P**lace the cover on top of the ark, and into the ark you shall place the testimony (tablets) that I will give you." (Shmos 25:21) At first glance, this posuk seems to be asking the impossible of Moshe Rabbeinu. It appears that after the cover with the cheruvim is on the Aron, Moshe should insert the luchos into the ark. Rashi acknowledges that he doesn't understand what the point is, since the verses already said that the luchos were put into ark earlier. He suggests that the posuk means you should put the cover on the ark after you have put the tablets in, which is what we find elsewhere.

The Ramban, however, offers a different take. He says that were this a commandment, it would sound like the plan was to put the luchos in after the cover was put on top. Further, the next posuk says, "I will speak to you from between the Cheruvim which are on the cover of the Aron." Why does it need to mention that the cover is on the ark? We know that.

Rather, he explains, the point was as follows: There was a commandment for these angelic figures to be placed on the cover of the ark and for them to have upraised wings arching over it. What the Torah does NOT tell us is the reason or purpose of these cheruvim or what they do for the Mishkan.

Therefore, the Torah specifies that the cheruvim spread their wings over the ark for into it shall you place the luchos. In other words, the fact that the luchos were there, and that Hashem would speak to Moshe from that space, made it necessary for the cheruvim to be there. They would act as a seat of honor for the Shechina, Hashem's countenance, and be like the Heavenly chariot (Merkava) Yechezkel saw, upon which Hashem's splendor "rode".

The cheruvim were made to look like people. This teaches us that we are also supposed to become like the Merkava of Hashem and constantly seek to ensure that He has an honorable place atop our lives. That is to say, when someone views a Jewish person's life, they should recognize the holiness and majesty of Hashem in it. To do that, we must constantly infuse ourselves with Torah and Mitzvos, represented by the 'testimony' inside the aron under the cheruvim.

With this in mind, we can now find a new lesson from the wording of the pesukim. How is it possible to put the luchos into the ark once the cover is upon it? You may not be able to do that physically, but metaphysically, when the cheruvim represent us, we can continue to keep putting Torah into our hearts and absorbing its lessons and ways. Through that we will become and remain a fitting chariot for Hashem Yisbarach.

*A woman saw two young children standing outside a department store, gazing longingly into the window. Thinking they might be lost, she asked if they needed help.*

*"My sister and I are orphans," said the little boy. "Our parents passed away and we have no one to buy us clothes. Our joy comes from staring through the window and imagining that we had them."*

*Shaken to the core, the woman took them inside and, department by department, bought them an entire new wardrobe. As they left the store with bulging bags, the girl innocently asked the woman, "Are you G-d?"*

*Stunned, the woman didn't know what to respond. Finally, with a lump in her throat she muttered, "I'm not G-d; I'm just one of His children."*

*"Ah," said the little girl with a smile. "I KNEW you had to be related." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### RABBI NAFTALI REICH

## Legacy

**W**hat is the point of asking someone to do the impossible? What is to be gained by having a person make the attempt and fail? In bringing up our children, we are always careful to demand of them only what they can realistically accomplish. Otherwise, we would be setting them up for failure. Yet in this week's parashah, we find that Hashem does exactly the opposite.

"And you shall make a menorah of pure gold, hammered," Hashem told Moses, "the menorah will be made." The Midrash observes that at first Moses was commanded "to make a menorah," but much as he tried, he was unable to produce it according to the Torah's specifications. Finally, Hashem told him to throw the gold into the fire and "the menorah will be made" by itself -- miraculously.

We can safely assume that Moses, the greatest man who ever lived, made the most valiant attempt to fulfill the commandment of making a menorah, that he exerted himself to the full extent of his considerable talents and abilities. And yet he failed. Surely, then, it was not humanly possible to create such a menorah by any means short of a miracle. If so, why did Hashem command Moses to produce a menorah when He knew failure was guaranteed? Why didn't Hashem produce the menorah miraculously right from the beginning?

A similar question arises earlier in the parashah, where we find an interesting paradox. The Torah commands that the Holy Ark be carried by long wooden rods inserted through golden rings in its sides, and that these rods never be removed; other Tabernacle furnishings were also carried by similar means, but there is no prohibition against removing the rods. Why was it so important that the rods of the Holy Ark never be removed? After all, our Sages tell us that the Holy Ark traveled under its own power and actually carried its bearers with it. The act of carrying was only an illusion. In real terms, however, the bearers of the Holy Ark contributed nothing to its transportation, and yet, here in particular, special emphasis is placed on keeping the rods of the bearers in place. Why is this so?

The commentators explain that a profound lesson is being taught here. Every person in the world is obligated to accomplish as much good as he possibly can. He is obligated to provide for his family, help those less fortunate than himself, support institutions of Torah and charity. This is called *hishtadlus*. Although a person knows that in the final analysis Hashem controls the world and everything that happens in it, he should not say, "Why should I bother when it is all up to Hashem anyway?" Hashem wants all people to exert themselves to the full extent of their abilities, as if it were all up to them. Then -- and only then -- does Hashem reward their efforts.

True, the Holy Ark carried itself, and it is for this very reason that the rods must never be removed. Don't delude yourself, says the Torah, into thinking you don't need to lift up the rods because it won't make a difference anyway. The omnipresent rods are there to remind you that you are always obligated to do your utmost -- no matter what.

For this same reason, Hashem commanded Moses to make the menorah, even though He knew it was impossible. Again we are being taught the same lesson. A person is required to try to the best of his ability, regardless of whether he can assume that his efforts will be crowned with success. Moses was rewarded for all his exertions in the attempt to make the menorah, even though in the end it took a miracle to produce it.

In our own lives, we too are sometimes overwhelmed by the daunting tasks that face us, whether in our private lives, the workplace or our obligations to the community. We sometimes cannot see how we will ever achieve success, and therefore, we become discouraged and lose heart. Let us draw on the lessons of the golden menorah and the Holy Ark. Let us reflect on the deeper truths of existence, that success and failure are never in our own power, that all we can do is try. And let us pray to Hashem that He look kindly upon our sincere efforts and bless them with success -- even if it takes a miracle. ©2020 Rabbi N.

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**RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND**

## RavFrand

*Transcribed by David Twersky*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman*

**A**mong the various physical components of the Mishkan, there were two Keruvim on top of the Aron (Ark) with child-like faces. One of the Keruvim was male in form and the other was female in form. In the Gemara in Yoma 54, Reish Lakish says that when the Romans came in to destroy the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple), they saw the Keruvim embracing one another. The Gemara in fact says that the Romans mocked the Jews for this. They thought the Jews were perverted. "Here in their Holy Temple, they have a statue of a man and a woman embracing!"

The Ramban and Ritva in Tractate Yoma ask a question: The Gemara [Bava Basra 99a] relates that a miraculous phenomenon occurred with the Keruvim in the Bais HaMikdash. During a time when Bnei Yisrael were fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent, the Keruvim embraced one another; however, during times when Bnei Yisrael were not fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent, the Keruvim faced away from each other. The aforementioned Rishonim ask a strong question: The Romans came in to destroy the Beis HaMikdash during terrible years for the Jewish people. Jews were not keeping "the Will of the Omnipresent." They were not doing what they were supposed to be doing.

These Rishonim therefore ask: How was it that the Romans came in and found that the male-female Keruvim were locked in an embrace? There is no greater "time when Bnei Yisrael were not fulfilling the Will of the Omnipresent" than this moment!

They cite an answer in the name of the Ri Migash (Rav Yosef ibn Migash): A miracle was performed at that moment, to cause embarrassment to the Jewish people.

Another answer is said over in the name of several of the great Chassidic leaders, including the Bnei Yissacher [Rav Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Munkatch] and the Ohev Yisrael [Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta]. It is a very interesting answer. I will cite the teaching of a Chazal they quote, and then I will try to put this answer into understandable terms.

This is an example of Chayav adam lifkod es ishto kodem she'yeitzei l'derech (A husband is duty-bound to "visit" his wife before setting out on a journey).

The reason the Keruvim were in this embrace at this time was because this was -- as it were -- a "goodbye embrace." Yes, it was a time when the Jews were not fulfilling the Will of the Almighty. But now, the Ribono shel Olam was going to leave us for what has become 2,000 years. When you are about to leave someone that you love, you kiss them good-bye. Therefore, in spite of the fact that it was a time where



"they did not do G-d's Will," nevertheless, they embraced for that final moment. This was that good-bye kiss which the historical moment demanded. Despite the fact that the Jews had reached this very low level, nevertheless -- "A husband is duty-bound to "visit" his wife before setting out on a journey."

I saw a third answer to this question in a sefer called Shabbos u'Moadim, which has somewhat of a different take on this situation. The Medrash [Vayikra Rabbah, Parshas Emor] cites a situation where one sees a Jew who is being brought to his death -- being stoned. A voice calls out: "Why is this happening to you?" The response: "It is because I circumcised my son." (I am paying for my life for fulfilling the mitzvah at a time when there was a governmental decree against circumcision.) A voice calls out (to another person): "Why are you being burnt at the stake?" The response: "It is because I observed the Sabbath." Again, "Why are you going out to be beheaded?" "It is because I ate matzah." "Why are you being beaten by the whip?" It is because I made a Succah; I took a Lulav, I put on Tefillin, or I wore Techeilles. It is because I fulfilled the Will of Father in Heaven."

Through the centuries and through the millennia, the Jews have had this capacity that even if it cost them their lives, they still felt it necessary to cling to the Almighty and to His mitzvos. They still felt connected to Him. I once heard something which is so mind-boggling to me that it is hard to say over: The Chossid Yavetz (he was part of the expulsions from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century) on Pirkei Avos writes that there was a woman who lost virtually her entire family. She had only one son remaining. She hired a ship to take her and her son away from Portugal. The shipmen took her to an island, killed her son, and left her abandoned there. The woman was heard praying, "Almighty, You are trying to push me away, but I won't give up my love for You."

It is mind-boggling that no matter what has happened to Jews, they still felt this connection to the Ribono shel Olam. If you remember from Succos, the alphabetic Hoshanna of "Om ani chomah" contains for the phrases beginning with the letters hay, vov, zayin, ches, the following expressions: "Ha'Harugah alecha" (murdered for Your sake); V'nechsheves k'tzon tivcha (and regarded like a sheep for slaughter); Zeruya bein mach'iseha (scattered among her provocateurs) but nevertheless -- in spite of all of the above -- Chavukah u'devukah Bach (she hugs and cleaves to You).

Rav Meir Shapiro says that this is the interpretation (albeit not the simple "pshat") of the pasuk "Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?" [Devorim 4:33]. Rav Meir Shapiro interprets the pasuk as expressing amazement that Klal Yisrael has heard G-d speak to them from the fires of persecution and oppression by their enemies, and have

yet kept their devotion to Him.

This, he says, is what happened over here with the Keruvim. Yes, the Ribono shel Olam was kicking us out. Nevertheless, He was kissing us goodbye. The Keruvim, who were locked in their final embrace, symbolized this. © 2020 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Terumah begins the detailed account of how the Jews were to construct the Mishkan, the temporary structure that was to house G-d's presence throughout their travels. The details span five Parshiot (Torah readings), with only the story of the golden calf interrupting this narrative. In contrast to the story of creation, which only required 34 Pessukim (verses) to communicate, why would the Torah interrupt the many stories in Sefer Shemot (Exodus) dealing with the birth of a nation to convey such minute details about the construction of a temporary home for G-d's presence?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that what united the Jews as a people was their collective past as well as their struggle to be freed from slavery. However, once they were free, they were lost because they lacked a common goal, which led them to bicker, complain, and even build a golden calf. What solved all this was asking everyone to donate and to give together. The project doesn't have to be prominent or even permanent, but the fact that people were able to give generously and as one brought them together and generated harmony.

Amazingly, working together and allowing for individual contributions were more effective in uniting people than the earlier grand miracles. While the Mishkan did not last forever, the lesson it taught us did: Encouraging individual contributions enhances the group even more than it enhances the individual. © 2020 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

