

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**s soon as we read the opening lines of Terumah we begin the massive shift from the intense drama of the exodus with its signs and wonders and epic events, to the long, detailed narrative of how the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that they carried with them through the desert.

By any standards it is a part of the Torah that cries out for explanation. The first thing that strikes us is the sheer length of the account: one third of the book of Shemot, five parshiyot -- Terumah, Tetsaveh, half of Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei, interrupted only by the story of the golden calf.

This becomes even more perplexing when we compare it with another act of creation, namely God's creation of the universe. That story is told with the utmost brevity: a mere thirty four verses. Why take some fifteen times as long to tell the story of the Sanctuary?

The question becomes harder still when we recall that the mishkan was not a permanent feature of the spiritual life of the children of Israel. It was specifically designed to be carried on their journey through the wilderness. Later, in the days of Solomon, it would be replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. What enduring message are we supposed to learn from a construction that was not designed to endure?

Even more puzzling is that fact that the story is part of the book of Shemot. Shemot is about the birth of a nation. Hence Egypt, slavery, Pharaoh, the plagues, the exodus, the journey through the sea and the covenant at Mount Sinai. All these things would become part of the people's collective memory. But the Sanctuary, where sacrifices were offered, surely belongs to Vayikra, otherwise known as Torat Kohanim, Leviticus, the book of priestly things. It seems to have no connection with Exodus whatsoever.

The answer, I believe, is profound.

The transition from Bereishit to Shemot, Genesis to Exodus, is about the change from family to nation. When the Israelites entered Egypt they were a single extended family. By the time they left they had become a sizeable people, divided into twelve tribes plus an amorphous collection of fellow travellers known as the *erev rav*, the "mixed multitude."

What united them was a fate. They were the people whom the Egyptians distrusted and enslaved.

The Israelites had a common enemy. Beyond that they had a memory of the patriarchs and their God. They shared a past. What was to prove difficult, almost impossible, was to get them to share responsibility for the future.

Everything we read in Shemot tells us that, as is so often the case among people long deprived of freedom, they were passive and they were easily moved to complain. The two often go together. They expected someone else, Moses or God himself, to provide them with food and water, lead them to safety, and take them to the promised land.

At every setback, they complained. They complained when Moses' first intervention failed: "May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." (Ex. 5:21)

At the Red Sea they complained again: "They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!'" (Ex. 14:11-12)

After the division of the Red Sea, the Torah says: "When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and believed in him and in Moses his servant" (Ex. 14:31). But after a mere three days they were complaining again. There was no water. Then there was water but it was bitter. Then there was no food.

"The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'" (Ex. 16:3)

Soon Moses himself is saying: "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." (Ex. 17:4)

By now God has performed signs and wonders on the people's behalf, taken them out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, given them water from a rock and manna from heaven, and still they do not cohere as a nation. They are a group of individuals, unwilling or unable to take responsibility, to act collectively rather than complain.

And now God does the single greatest act in history. He appears in a revelation at Mount Sinai, the

only time in history that God has appeared to an entire people, and the people tremble. There never was anything like it before; there never will be again.

How long does this last? A mere forty days. Then the people make a golden calf.

If miracles, the division of the sea and the revelation at Mount Sinai fail to transform the Israelites, what will? There are no greater miracles than these.

That is when God does the single most unexpected thing. He says to Moses: speak to the people and tell them to contribute, to give something of their own, be it gold or silver or bronze, be it wool or animal skin, be it oil or incense, or their skill or their time, and get them to build something together -- a symbolic home for my presence, a Tabernacle. It doesn't need to be large or grand or permanent. Get them to make something, to become builders. Get them to give.

Moses does. And the people respond. They respond so generously that Moses is told, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done" (Ex. 36:5), and Moses has to say, Stop.

During the whole time the Tabernacle was being constructed, there were no complaints, no rebellions, no dissension. What all the signs and wonders failed to do, the construction of the Tabernacle succeeded in doing. It transformed the people. It turned them into a cohesive group. It gave them a sense of responsibility and identity.

Seen in this context, the story of the Tabernacle was the essential element in the birth of a nation. No wonder it is told at length; no surprise that it belongs to the book of Exodus; and there is nothing ephemeral about it. The Tabernacle did not last forever, but the lesson it taught did.

It is not what God does for us that transforms us, but what we do for God. A free society is best symbolized by the Tabernacle. It is the home we build together. It is only by becoming builders that we turn from subjects to citizens. We have to earn our freedom by what we give. It cannot be given to us as an unearned gift. It is what we do, not what is done to us, that makes us free. That is a lesson as true today as it was then. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"A**nd you shall make two cherubs of gold; of beaten work shall you make them, at two ends of the ark cover." (Exodus 25:16) Among the most famous ornaments of the Sanctuary are the two cherubs, golden figures, each with the face of a child and wings extended heavenwards, which adorned the ends of the ark cover and protected the holy tablets of testimony. There were cherubs in the desert Sanctuary built by Moses, and there were cherubs in the Holy

Temple built by King Solomon one thousand years later. However, in the Sanctuary the cherubs are described as facing each other, while in the Holy Temple they are described as facing the wall of the Temple, inward, away from each other (ii Chronicles 3:7).

R. Yohanan, a Talmudic sage, explains: "In one case [our portion of Teruma with the cherubs facing each other] Israel is doing the will of God, and in the other case [facing the wall of the Temple] Israel is not doing the will of God." (Bava Batra 99a)

Rashbam explains in his Talmudic interpretation that in effect, the very same ornamental piece of sculpture in the form of two cherubs was present in both sacred places, the Sanctuary as well as the Holy Temple. A miracle, or divine intervention, was involved in the direction in which the cherubs faced. Whenever the Israelites acted in accordance with the Divine Will, the cherubs would face each other, and whenever the Israelites did not act in accordance with the Divine Will, the cherubs would face the Temple wall. The behavior of the nation of Israel literally animated the sculptured cherubs. Unfortunately, it was during the reign of King Solomon that the Israelites began to backslide.

The Netziv has difficulty with the notion that the change in direction was determined by the behavior of the Israelites. After all, King Solomon is described as having produced cherubs for the Temple which were specifically made facing the wall, differing from the cherubs which had been produced by Moses and Bezalel.

Hence, the famed rosh yeshiva of Volozhin suggests that the Talmudic phrase "when Israel is doing the will of God" refers to the historical period of the desert Sanctuary and "when Israel is not doing the will of God" refers to the historical period of Solomon's Temple.

This period or era description, insists the Netziv, harks back to the famous Talmudic debate between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon bar Yochai regarding the role of Torah study in our lives. In Deuteronomy the following verse appears: "If you will listen, yes listen to my commandments... I will give you rain for your land at the right season, the autumn rains and the spring rains, that you may gather in your grain." (Deuteronomy 11:14)

The sages ask, why do we need the words "...so that you may gather in your grain?" Does the Bible have to state the obvious?

R. Yishmael teaches that the verse in question comes to limit the command of God to Joshua: "This book of Torah shall not depart out of your mouth. You shall meditate therein by day and by night." (Joshua 1:8)

Since one could logically conclude that the Almighty is commanding us to devote all our time to Torah and no time at all to a worldly occupation, the seemingly superfluous phrase in Deuteronomy becomes crucially important; it is underscoring the importance of a person "gathering their grain," engaging in agriculture (or any worldly occupation) at the same time as studying

Torah.

R. Shimon bar Yochai disagrees vehemently.

"If a person is to plough in the ploughing season, sow in the sowing season, reap in the reaping season, thresh in the threshing season... what is to become of Torah? The fact is that when Israel does the will of God, the work of Israel will be done by others... and when Israel does not do the will of God, then they will have to break their own backs, as it says, 'so that you gather in your grain.'" (Berakhot 35a)

The Netziv, in an ingenious fashion and very much in accord with Lithuanian yeshiva ideology, links this dispute with the direction of the cherubs. We must remember that the desert generation had their nutritional needs taken care of by the manna and their shelter needs taken care of by the sukkot (divine tents of glory). They lived a kind of primordial kollel existence, free to devote themselves completely to the study of Torah. They lived a life of "doing the will of God" as understood by R. Shimon bar Yochai, and therefore the cherubs of Moses' desert sanctuary faced each other.

The period of the Holy Temple was one in which the Israelites had already entered the Land of Israel and were deeply involved in the agricultural pursuits of extracting subsistence, and vital natural resources, from the land. They worked very hard, and even if they remained devoutly committed to God and to Torah, they were in the R. Shimon bar Yochai category of "not doing the will of God." Hence, the cherubs of King Solomon's Temple faced the wall.

The Netziv was the great Talmudic scholar who headed the yeshiva of Volozhin. To him, the study of Torah was life and life was the study of Torah. It is no wonder that he would interpret "doing the will of God" as exclusive involvement in the study of Torah.

I would like to suggest a third interpretation of the Talmudic explanation of the cherubs' direction. After all, the great Netziv notwithstanding, it was the Divine Will that the Israelites leave the cocoon of the desert and enter history and the world by tackling the real problems of settling a land, replete with devastating wars, back-breaking labor and sociopolitical decision making. Torah study is meant to give direction to our personal and material lives, but not to substitute for them. (Indeed, the normative law within the Talmud itself (Berakhot 35a), as decided by both Rava and Abaye, is in accordance with R. Yishmael and not R. Shimon bar Yochai).

Hence, I would interpret the Talmudic statement as indeed contrasting the desert period with the First Temple period, but with an added nuance. The cherubs' facing each other was not a result of Israel's doing the will of God; it is rather the definition, a pointing of the way, as to how to best accomplish the will of God. We truly accomplish God's will not when our sights are centered on the Temple walls, no matter how sacred they may be, but rather when our sights are centered on other people, whom we must help, support and uplift.

The cherubs protected the Torah, the tablets of testimony within the holy ark. They were of human form with wings, their faces reflecting childlike innocence and purity. Undoubtedly, our children are the protectors and preservers of Torah. For them to do so, warns R. Yohanan, it is not enough that they face the Temple Sanctuary, they must first and foremost face each other. They must be sensitive to the needs and welfare of every other individual. Only in facing each other, even more than in facing the Temple, do they accomplish God's will!

The figures who protect the Torah throughout the generations are not merely the children, who study. They are also the rabbis, scholars, and educators; the Torah leaders and Torah decisors of every generation. The symbol of cherubs teaches us that it is not sufficient that these important Torah personalities face the Temple. They must face the people. They must feel the angst and hear the cries of their fellow Jews, in order that the Torah which they teach be sensitive and relevant, and truly express a tree of life "whose paths are paths of sweetness and whose every road is peace" (Proverbs 3:17).

Moreover, the Torah scholars must face each other as well! Facing each other means recognizing each other's authority, knowledge and honest motivation to protect the Torah, even when one must respectfully disagree with the other's opinion. All too often Torah scholars, winged cherubs soaring towards the heights of divine understanding, lack the breadth of vision and perspective to look at each other with respect. They erect linguistic, cultural, psychological or political barriers. They succumb to Ashkenazi or Sephardi prejudices, yield to Hassidic or Lithuanian stereotypes. R. Yohanan warns that scholars, even those whose steady gaze is never averted from the Holy Temple and the sacred texts, may not be fully doing the will of heaven if they do not look at each other!

Political leaders in Israel are also in the category of the cherubs, charged with protecting the holy ark and the tablets of testimony within it. King Solomon was aware of this challenge. He was almost obsessed with creating a magnificent edifice, a holy temple to God. His gaze was set on the Temple, but in the process, he neglected to look with sensitivity upon the masses of Jews. His heavy taxation laid the groundwork for the split between the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judea, even though the revolution did not take effect until his son Rehoboam's reign. His cherubs may have faced the wall of the Temple, but they did not face each other. This is a warning to every Jewish leader of the beginning of the end.

The cherubs protect the Torah, but only when they face each other in sensitivity, love and respect.

*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 and available for purchase at*

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## RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"l

### Wein Online

In an environment of financial crisis and reduced philanthropy the call for donations issued by Moshe in this week's parsha is timely if not in essence very challenging.

There are many reasons why people do or don't contribute to charities and educational and social causes. Moshe does not offer any convincing reasons for the necessity of his appeal for monetary help.

He represents that it is God's wish that the people of Israel become a nation of donors, each person according to the donative instinct that resides within his or her heart.

The Lord phrases His appeal as being a donation symbolically to God Himself. "Let them take for Me" is the sentence that is used to justify this appeal for donations from the people. Apparently, donations are given because of our relations to our Creator and not only because of the justice of causes that require our help.

Charity is a commandment of the Torah. It may be a commandment that we can empathize with and claim to understand and appreciate but at the very root of this commandment is the bald fact that we are bidden to imitate our Creator, and our definition of God is one of goodness and charity.

We are told in the Torah that God is with the widow and the orphans even though we are ignorant as to why He made them widows and orphans. But that is our duty to also pursue goodness and charity as the Lord commands us to do. At the very end of the day, charity is an inexplicable commandment. The reason that there is so much charity in the world is that there is, somewhere deep within our consciences and souls, a streak of human kindness and goodness. We really wish to be charitable people.

That is why the Torah is convinced that everyone will contribute according to the donative intent of one's own heart and being. It is within the nature of all to be charitable. Since we have freedom of will and choice, we can overcome our inner instincts of goodness and become miserly and even cruel towards others and to ourselves as well. Just as there are very base instincts that lurk within us, and we possess within ourselves the freedom to overcome and deny them, so too does this power of freedom of will and choice allow us to sublimate our good and charitable instincts. There is a well-known statement of the rabbis that many people regret being put upon for a charitable contribution and yet feel a deep satisfaction within themselves after they have in fact made that contribution. It is that deep instinct towards being charitable that engenders satisfaction within a person after having done a charitable deed or having

made a charitable contribution.

The Torah wishes to encourage our charitable instinct. It resorts to making what is essentially a voluntary act one that becomes mandatory. It is a mechanism to allow the good within us to burst forth. The holy institutions of Israel can only be constructed with the charitable instincts of the Jewish people. © 2009 Rabbi B. Wein zt"l - 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

### Migdal Ohr

"In the rings of the ark shall the staves be; and not removed from it." (Shemos 25:15) A number of the vessels of the Mishkan had rings into which poles were inserted so they might be carried. Only the Aron, in which rested the Luchos, had a special commandment that the staves never be removed. If one removes them, he is liable not only for violating a positive command, but he has violated a negative one as well. What was unique about these poles that they had to remain attached always?

The Chizkuni gives a practical suggestion, aside from the fact that due to its sanctity, Hashem didn't want them removed. He says that there was no reason to remove them as they were not in anyone's way. The altar was situated in the courtyard, where people were moving around, and its staves would make people walk around them. Therefore, they were only inserted when it was time to move it.

The poles of the aron, however, which was situated in the Kodesh Kedoshim, would only affect the Kohain Gadol a few times, only on one day a year. Therefore, there was no reason to remove them, and based on its holiness, the aron was left as it was.

However, there's also another interesting difference between the aron and the other vessels. The purpose of the various rings and staves was to carry the vessels. Regarding the aron, Chazal tell us that though the Kohanim appeared to carry it, in actuality, the ark carried those "who carried it." In essence, these poles were not truly for carrying the aron at all, but to enable those men to be carried.

The deeper lesson and meaning behind this, relates to our connection to Torah and the aron which represents it. Torah is a gift from Hashem to us. Through it, we are able to come close to Him, and begin to understand what Hashem wants from us. The supporters of Torah are supported by it, and it is the source of their financial blessing.

More than that, Torah is our support and enables us to carry on with life in the face of the vicissitudes (instability) it brings us. Torah is our constant, and helps us set our paths by it. When the Jews in Egypt were unable to hear Moshe's announcement that their

redemption was at hand because of shortness of breath and hard labor, the Ohr Chaim teaches us something astounding.

He says, "Perhaps it was because they weren't [yet] b'nai Torah, so they were called "short of spirit," because Torah broadens a person's heart." What this means is that Torah enables us to be calm and cope with things we couldn't otherwise. It truly carries those who "carry it" inside them. This, then, explains why the aron must always be ready to carry – so it can uplift and carry us forward through any situation.

*In Czarist Russia, a man had to visit the capital city, but was afraid. The rampant anti-Semitism was even harsher in large cities and he feared for his life. Though he would wear a hat and not appear overtly Jewish, he feared he would be beaten, or worse.*

*He went to his Rebbe, and asked for protection. "Hashem is with His children at all times, you need not be afraid," said the Rabbi. "But, Rebbe," pleaded the man, "I need extra protection, you must help me." The sage said nothing but rose and went into his private study, returning with a small velvet pouch. From it, he pulled a small, burnished gold disc, which looked like a small shield. "Carry this with you, and remember that Hashem is your protector."*

*The man was overjoyed and carefully put the pouch into his pocket. His trip to the capital was not only safe, but the extra confidence he had made it more successful than he had imagined. Upon his return, he thanked the Rebbe for the shield. "This worked so well," said the traveler, "where did you acquire it?"*

*"It was Hashem who protected you, my child," said the Rebbe. "As for this," he said, reattaching the disc to the front of his pocket watch, "I bought it from Mendel the watchmaker." © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr*

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### The Holy Ark

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**W**hen 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 de-tashmish*, 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 DAVID LEVIN

### Whose Heart

### Will Motivate Him

**P**arashat Terumah begins with the commandment given to the B'nei Yisrael to build a dwelling place for Hashem on earth. But before that building could be built, the people were commanded to bring donations of the different materials that would be used to build this dwelling place. A condition was placed on this donation; it should be willingly brought from the heart.

The Terumah (donation) was for the purpose of building the Mishkan. The problem that we encounter is that the command to build the Mishkan, according to several commentators, took place after the Golden Calf which occurs two parshiot later. The order of the Torah is Parashat Terumah (describing the commanding of the way to build the Mishkan and the objects to be placed inside it), Parashat Tetzaveh (describing the commandments for the clothes worn by the Priests [Kohanim]), Parashat Ki Tisa (describing many commandments but also the episode of the Golden Calf), followed by Parashat Vayakhel (the building of the Mishkan and the objects inside it), and Parashat Pekudei (describing the making of the garments of the Kohanim). HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains the change in the sequence of the parshiot. While the Torah, on occasion is not in perfect sequential order, when the sequence is breached, our Rabbis seek to find a reason for that breach. Here, Rav Sorotzkin uses the principle that Hashem always gives us the *refuah* (cure) before the *makeh* (illness). The illness was the Golden Calf, and the cure for that illness was to be Hashem's dwelling place on earth in the Mishkan.

The Ramban explains that the purpose of the Mishkan was to establish for Hashem a place on earth where He could continue to speak to Moshe and the

B'nei Yisrael as He did on Har Sinai. Whereas, at Sinai the conversation was visible to the people, here, in the Mishkan, Hashem's temporary Temple that accompanied the people in the desert, this conversation would occur in a concealed manner. "Thus (the B'nei) Yisrael always had with them in the Tabernacle (Mishkan) the Glory which appeared to them on Har Sinai." The Ramban continues, "And Scripture so states: 'where I will meet with you, to speak there unto you; and it shall be sanctified by My glory,' for there [in the Tabernacle] will be the appointed place for the Divine utterance, 'and it shall be sanctified by My glory.'"

The Torah states: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him, you shall take My portion.'" While each donation is made by the individual, the "gift" is given as a community donation. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains, "Nothing is to be given directly to Hashem, but the gifts of each individual are to be given to the community, for the Divine purposes. This implies that it is not the individual, but the community, who has to erect the institutions for Hashem's purposes, and it is not for single givers, but for the community, that these arrangements have to be established."

The term associated with this donation is "asher yidvenu libo, whose heart will motivate him." HaAmeK Davar states that this phrase indicates a willing donation, whereas the next phrase, "tikchu et terumati, you shall take My portion," implies that the community should take the donation from him even against his will. HaAmeK Davar explains that, in the beginning, there were people who only donated because they heard that their donation would be taken from them without their consent if donations were not forthcoming. However, once they saw that others were donating freely, they repented in their hearts, and at that point they willingly paid their pledge.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the command "they shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him," indicates that there were two sides to the giving of the various donations: (1) the one donating any item gave from his heart to Hashem, and (2) the one who took that portion from him for Hashem. Both the giver and the receiver performed their part in Hashem's name. There is also the concept that those who took the threads and wove them into cloth, those that cut the wood to form the different objects like the Aron Kodesh which would then be covered in gold, those that created and designed the Menorah or the Shulchan for the showbreads, and all of the workers who carved or sculpted the poles, all did so in Hashem's Name.

The Ohr HaChaim asks why the phrase, "Vayikchu li terumah, and they shall take to Me a portion," contains the Hebrew Letter "vav" which usually indicates "and." He explains that there are three types of donations, two of which were financial (shekalim), and

the third (material) for the actual structure of the Mishkan. The reference to "Vayikchu" involved the shekalim that were donated, which the Ohr HaChaim connects to the half-shekel requirement from every adult male. This half-shekel could be taken by the courts even without his consent. The Ohr HaChaim explains that the "vav" introduced in this phrase indicated that before this donation could fit the category of an obligatory gift, which could be taken even against one's will, one could make this a donation from one's heart, "from every man whose heart will motivate him."

The Netziv adds that Rashi explains that when the Torah states "they shall take to Me a portion," the term "to Me" is really "to My name." The Netziv explains that the donors included those who donated willingly and those that donated reluctantly, as they feared that it would be taken from them anyway. For those who donated reluctantly, the Torah states, "they shall take to Me a portion." For the righteous ones who gave lovingly from their hearts, the Torah means, "to My name." These righteous individuals were credited with having given in Hashem's Holy Name.

Today we no longer have a true Machazit HaShekel, the half-shekel which was our obligatory donation each year to the upkeep of the Temple. (Nor do we collect donations to build the Temple.) All of our donations might be said to be voluntary. But there are many different motives that influence our donations, especially those to our Synagogue. We are reminded in our parasha that our donations should be from the heart, for only then can our donations be in Hashem's Holy Name. May we strive to reach that level that all our donations come only from the heart. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

### **Reflections**

**T**he aron habris, the holy ark described in the parshah, was essentially a wooden box set into a golden one, with another golden one set inside it (Yoma 72b).

The Gemara (ibid) sees in the aron, which contains the luchos, shivrei luchos and a Torah scroll, a metaphor for the coherence of conscience and behavior that defines a true scholar. "A talmid chacham," Rava teaches there, "who isn't tocho kiboro," -- whose inside [essence] isn't like his outside [the image yielded by his behavior] -- "isn't a talmid chacham."

My revered rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, noted that the Gemara's wording is pointed. We are not exhorted to bring our "outsides" into line with our "insides" -- to first achieve purity of heart and then display its signifiers -- but rather the other way around. We do right to first emulate the comportment and behavior of those more spiritually accomplished than we are -- to present an image of observance and propriety - - even if our souls may not be as pure as our clothing

and actions seem to declare.

That is because, in the Sefer Hachinuch's words, "A person is affected by his actions" and demeanor. How we dress, speak and act can change who we are.

Achieving coherence of appearance and heart must be the ultimate goal for us all. But we shouldn't feel hypocritical or despondent if, in the process of reaching that goal, we show the world a better image of ourselves than we deserve. What matters is only that we are working to bring our inner selves into line with our outer ones.

What's more, according to a Midrash brought by Rashi on the posuk uvicheit yechemasni imi (Tehillim 51:7), Dovid Hamelech lamented the fact that when his parents conceived him, their intent was basically selfish (a thought reflected as well in his words *ki avi vi'imi azovuni*, Tehillim 27:10). And yet, Dovid's father was Yishai, who, the Gemara (Shabbos 55b) says was one of the humans who never sinned!

The inescapable conclusion is that self-interest isn't sin. The essential sense of self is inherent in being human, and no contradiction to righteousness.

That, too, is reflected in the aron. It was gold within and without, yes, but there was wood (perhaps hinting to the eitz hadaas) between the golden layers. One's *toch* and *bar* can be pure and consistent, but there is always a self in the middle. And that's inherent in being human. © 2026 Rabbi A. Shafran and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

### **RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**M**iami Beach in the first half of the 20th century was very different from the city we know and love today. The founders and early developers of Miami Beach (e.g. Carl Fisher) only sold to gentiles. In those days, Jews were not permitted to own property or live above Fifth Street, nor were Jews welcome in any of the oceanfront hotels.

This sort of discrimination was not uncommon; blacks were also not permitted to live in Miami Beach, and in fact were prohibited from even being in Miami Beach past sundown without a work permit. Although these covenantal restrictions were officially lifted in 1949, this attitude persisted for decades with many hotels having signs that said, "No dogs, no blacks, no Jews" and "Always a view, never a Jew."

Murray "Moshe Chaim" Berkowitz, a survivor of the German Nazi hell known as Auschwitz, came to Miami Beach in the 1950s and over the next few decades owned and operated a series of hotels that catered to a Jewish clientele. He was a driving force in the development of the Miami Beach Jewish community, including the founding of Talmudic College of Florida in 1974 (which I currently run). He served as chairman of the school's board until his passing in 1997, and the school was renamed in his honor: Talmudic University -

- Yeshiva V'Kollel Beis Moshe Chaim.

Mr. Berkowitz had a very special connection with Nobel Laureate Eli Wiesel. They had grown up on the same street in Sighet, a small town in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, and had lived only a few doors down from each other.

After being liberated from Buchenwald by the allies in 1945, Eli Wiesel moved to France, studied at the Sorbonne, and became a journalist. He then wrote his famous trilogy: *Night* (1961 -- dealing with death, God, and the loss of innocence), *Dawn* (1962 -- exploring survival and aftermath), and *Day* (1963 -- exploring the emotional and spiritual burden of those who survived the Holocaust). In 1986, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, with the committee calling him a "messenger to mankind."

He was awarded a Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, from Talmudic University in 1979 and was that year's guest speaker for the school's annual Scholarship Dinner. During his speech he told the following story: As the allies were drawing in ever closer, it became clear that the Germans were losing the war. Seeing the writing on the wall, the Nazi guards at Buchenwald began trying to ingratiate themselves to the inmates. Sensing this cosmic shift, the prisoners debated how to respond.

They were divided into three groups: The first group wanted revenge; to murder all the Nazis -- as recompense for the atrocities, for the loss of their families, etc. They felt that retaliation was the only meaningful response. Remarkably, they felt this way without any weapons and almost no physical strength. The second group wanted only to get away; leave Germany, forget what happened, rebuild their lives, and never set foot on German soil again. They argued that nothing good could come from staying and that survival itself was the only response -- not any political or moral struggle. The third group, the one Wiesel identified with, believed the central duty after liberation was to remember and to let the world know what happened. In their view, the task was not revenge or mere survival, but bearing witness: Telling the world about what happened, defending human rights, and trying to prevent future genocides.

He went on, saying how when the American Third Army freed Buchenwald, "there was no joy in our heart -- only pain," and that the survivors "did not sing; we did not celebrate." Previous discussions about what to do were put on hold as they were far more interested in the tables of food that were being laid out. He then added that the first thing they did was gather and pray the afternoon *Mincha* service "and we had just enough strength to recite the *Kaddish*." *Kaddish* is the prayer that is said memorializing the dead. They wanted to bring the past into the present and remember those they had lost.

Dr. Victor Frankl, another Holocaust survivor, was a medical doctor (he was both a neurologist and a psychiatrist) who became one of the most famous

thinkers of the 20th century. Today he is remembered for being a leading psychotherapist who, after the Holocaust, founded the concept of logo-therapy; therapy focused on finding meaning in life. Unsurprisingly, his most famous work is titled *Man's Search for Meaning*, which has been translated into fifty languages and has sold over sixteen million copies.

In his book, Frankl describes his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps, but more than his travails, he writes as a psychologist about what provided him with the strength to survive. He writes that prisoners who gave up on life and hope for a future were inevitably the first to die. They died more from the lack of something to live for than the lack of something to eat. By contrast, Frankl kept himself alive by thinking of his wife, and dreaming of lecturing about how his experiences reinforced what was already a central part of his thesis before entering the camps -- that the primary motivational force of every person is a search for meaning.

Shortly after arriving at Auschwitz, Frankl was stripped of his most precious possession -- a manuscript that was his life's work, which he had hidden in his coat pocket and viewed as his "mental child." Realizing that the odds of his survival were small, "no more than one in twenty-eight," he had what he describes as "perhaps his deepest experience in the concentration camps."

"I had to undergo and overcome the loss of my mental child. And now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a mental child of my own. So I found myself confronted with the question whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of meaning.

"When I arrived I had to surrender my clothes and, in turn, I inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had already been sent to the gas chamber [...]. Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat one single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, the Shema Yisroel.

"How should I have interpreted such a 'coincidence' other than as a challenge to live my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?" This little scrap of paper providentially coming into his possession became the cornerstone of the rest of his life.

This is reminiscent of another remarkable incident that, for space considerations, I will reduce to the essential facts. One of the most well-known builders of Jewish schools and communities in the 20th century was Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman aka "the Ponevezer Rov." Shortly after the war, Rabbi Kahaneman travelled to Europe to gather Jewish orphans and take them home to Israel.

In one orphanage, the priest in charge told Rabbi Kahaneman that there were no Jewish children there. Undeterred, Rabbi Kahaneman stood in front of all the orphans and called out in a booming voice the Shema

prayer and immediately young children, who'd last heard those holy words years before as their parents tucked them into bed each night, began crying and calling out "Mama! Mama!" Rabbi Kahaneman triumphed and reclaimed many orphans and brought them to Israel. Their remembrance of this essential prayer ultimately led them to new lives in Israel where they could reclaim their Jewish ancestry.

We find an astonishing parallel to these stories in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 63b). After the massacre of the Jewish population by the Roman army around 70 CE, when they sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Holy Temple, those who were left began to die of starvation. The Talmud records that "Elijah the Righteous" met a starving orphaned child who had lost his very large family and asked him if he wanted Elijah to give him the secret to living. "Sure," replied the child. Elijah then told him to recite the Shema prayer every day. For Jews tortured and massacred for three millennia, the last words on their lips has been the Shema prayer.

According to the Talmud (Pesachim 56a), the Shema prayer was the answer of the twelve tribes to their father Jacob who was worried that after his death they might abandon the ways of the patriarchs. In other words, the Shema was a testament to their commitment to promoting the unity of the Almighty as their father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had done. Bringing forth this message to new generations is the key to honoring the past and creating a mission for the future.

Elijah the Righteous (as well as Eli Wiesel and Victor Frankl) understood that the biggest issue facing someone who has lost everything is the dispossession of all; the will to live. A person needs to understand that the only meaningful response to surviving catastrophes is to bring the past into the present. In this way the past isn't lost and the future feels possible. This mission gives a survivor a reason to live -- to preserve the past and keep it alive for future generations.

We have run out of space for this week, so I will leave you with something to think about. The Malbim, an acronym for Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (1809-1879), was a very influential figure in the 19th century and is well-known for his works on biblical commentary. He quotes in his work *Eretz Chemda*, a "midrash pliah - - baffling teaching." This week's Torah portion begins with the Almighty commanding the Israelites to build a Tabernacle, and the Midrash attributes this command; "as is written, Shema Yisroel (Hear O Israel)." Malbim asks, "What is going on here, how are these two concepts (the building of the Tabernacle and the Shema prayer) related?" (Look for the answer in next year's edition of *Shabbat Shalom* on Parshat Terumah!) © 2026 Rabbi Y. Zweig & [shabbatshalom.org](http://shabbatshalom.org)

