

# INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

FEBRUARY 20, 2021

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Nomi Leah bat Michal.  
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 19

8 ADAR

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TERUMAH

## No Knock on Wood

**They shall make an Aron of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half wide and a cubit and a half high. You shall cover it with pure gold, from inside and from outside you shall cover it... (25:10-11)**

In this week's *parsha* we are introduced to the creation of the Mishkan and the majority of its vessels. Rashi (25:11) explains that Betzalel made three boxes ("arks") two golden and one wooden. He placed the wooden one inside the larger gold box and the smaller gold box he placed into the wooden one. The inner gold box had an upper overlaid gold rim that covered the wooden box so in this way the Aron was actually completely covered inside and outside with gold.

Ibn Ezra (ad loc) asks, "Once they were making boxes out of gold why was it necessary to have a box made out of wood?" Ibn Ezra points out that, aside from the Menorah, everything else was crafted out of wood and coated with a thin layer of gold. While Rashi is following the opinion in the Gemara (*Yoma* 72b), Ibn Ezra finds this understanding of the Aron's construction untenable.

Ibn Ezra's question seems to be compelling. What possible reason could there be to fashion a box out of wood and then place it within two gold boxes? In fact, the Gemara has a principle that governs the attitude toward the different components needed for the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash: "In a place of wealth there is no poverty." If a knife became chipped it wasn't repaired; it was reformed. The Kohanim's clothes weren't patched; they were shredded to be used for wicks. The Gemara (*Yoma* 39a) specifically points out that wooden vessels weren't used for any of the services in the

Beis Hamikdash and Maimonides rules that wooden vessels were prohibited to be used (*Yad Hilchos Beis Habechira* 1:18). Ibn Ezra seems to be right; what purpose is there in having a wooden box inside a gold one?

While it's true that gold is much more valuable and brings greater honor to the service, there is at least one area that wood supersedes gold. In the order of creation, gold is an inanimate and inert object, while wood is sourced from a living and growing organism – trees. However, even more significantly, trees represent the exercise of free will in this world.

Hashem originally ordered the earth to create trees that tasted like the fruit they produced, but the earth refused to cooperate (see *Bereishis* 1:11 and Rashi ad loc). The earth reasoned that if the trees tasted like the fruit then the trees themselves would be consumed and unable to produce fruit. Hashem punishes the earth for its disobedience when Adam himself sinned by exercising his own free will. Man, who is fashioned from the earth, has the same attribute: the ability to choose whether or not to listen to Hashem.

Thus, the trees are the true representation of man's potential. Without the ability to choose man would be unable to grow and refine himself. This is actually the purpose of all of creation. In fact, without man's ability to choose there is no place for Hashem in this world, as it were, for it is only through man that



Hashem's presence is revealed. This is why the Torah compares man to a tree of the field (*Devarim* 20:19) in the section where it prohibits destroying trees that produce fruit (a clear allusion to the sins of both the earth and of man).

Therefore, the wooden box of the Aron is actually most appropriate to be at the center of the holiest vessel and located in the holy of holies, for it represents the entire purpose of creation, and man's role within creation.

### Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha* we find, among other things, the 15 different materials used to create the Mishkan. There are many interesting aspects to these materials: what they are and what they represent, and we will endeavor to explain that in a future *Did You Know*. However, for this column, we thought we would examine the significance of the number fifteen.

The Me'em Lo'ez (*Terumah* 1, pg. 24) paralleled these 15 to the 15 levels of "journey" it would take to reach Hashem, as explained in the Gemara (*Chagigah* 13a).

The Gemara explains that there are seven heavens (which is where the term seventh heaven comes from) and an equal distance between each heaven, with a level between earth and the first heaven and another between the last heaven and the Throne of Glory of Hashem— →

# Give or Get

***Speak to Bnei Yisroel and they shall take to me a portion from every man whose heart will motivate him you shall take my portion (25:2).***

The *parsha* begins with the gift that, oddly enough, was “taken” from Bnei Yisroel; the *machatzis hashekel* (half-*shekel*) obligatory contribution. Rashi (30:15) explains that the *machatzis hashekel* being discussed was used twice to count Bnei Yisroel. The first time was at the beginning of the contributions to the Mishkan, and those half-*shekels* were made into the sockets for the beams of the Mishkan. The second counting was made at the time of the Mishkan’s erection, and those half-*shekels* funded the acquisition of the animals that were to be offered on behalf of the community – the communal offerings.

Obviously, we must try to explain the Torah’s characterization of a gift that was actually taken. How are we to understand this? Furthermore, Bal Haturim (25:2) comments that Hashem asked Moshe to appease Bnei Yisroel for this command was going to cost them money. Yet the Torah doesn’t tell us what the appeasement was; what in fact did Moshe tell Bnei Yisroel to ease their discomfort at having to give a contribution?

Later in the Torah (*Bamidbar* 16:14-15), during the dispute with Korach and his rabble rousers, Moshe makes a very illuminating request from Hashem. He asks that as a sign that Hashem is displeased with those who joined Korach’s rebellion, Hashem should refuse their share of the communal offerings. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the portion of each communal offering that is owned by those who joined the rebellion should not be consumed by the fire on the altar.

We see a remarkable new understanding of a communal offering. In general, one would think that each animal is wholly owned by the community. However, from this story, we see that each animal is actually made up of tiny portions that are owned by the people who contributed to the communal offerings. Therefore, Moshe asked that the parts of the animal that represented the share of those in the rebellion should be rejected by the altar.

From here, we can understand our *parsha*. Moshe is telling Bnei Yisroel that they will retain ownership through their contribution. They didn’t give a contribution; they spent their money on animals and each person retained a tiny portion of each sacrifice. They didn’t lose their money; they acquired an ownership stake in each of the animals. Thus, they didn’t make a donation, but rather purchased something to be used for the service of Hashem – a far more comfortable notion.

Here, the Torah is not using the phrase “to take” to imply that something was taken from Bnei Yisroel, quite the opposite, throughout the Torah we find the word to take (יָרַקָה) to be used in the sense of acquisition. Bnei Yisroel were spending their money and acquiring something for the service of Hashem. This also means that even as a communal offering no one lost his own personal identity. This is a most empowering understanding of how we view ourselves as a nation. We don’t sacrifice on behalf of the greater whole; we merge our identities and at the same time remain distinctly individual in the service of Hashem.

equating to 15 levels. The Gemara also says that traveling just one level would be a 500 year journey, and since they’re all equal, it would be a 7,500 year journey. But how many miles is that? The Gemara (*Pesachim* 93b) explains that one day’s worth of traveling is 10 “*parsangs*,” or as Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (*The Living Torah, Bereishis* 30:36) calculates it, approximately 34 miles.

Now, if we do some simple multiplication, this would mean that a year’s worth of traveling is 12,410 miles, and 500 years’ worth is 6,205,000 miles. This is just one level, so the total distance between the Earth and Hashem’s throne is actually 93,075,000 miles. While this might seem like a totally inconsequential and random fact, it’s actually quite fascinating that this very number is the sun’s exact distance from us, at least part of the time, as it changes a bit.

The science behind the distance is simple. The distance between us and the sun changes back and forth about 3 million miles throughout the year as we are traveling in an oval around it, not a circle. Now, this is not what causes our seasons— quite the contrary. For those living in the northern hemisphere, we are actually the farthest (91,401,983 miles) from the sun during our summer, and closest (94,507,803 miles) during the winter. What actually causes seasons, isn’t proximity to the sun, it is the amount of sunlight we get, which increases or decreases depending on our tilt towards the sun. While 3 million miles might seem like a lot, astronomically speaking, it’s quite short.

So what does this mean? Is there any significance to the sun representing the Throne of Glory? It’s hard to say exactly, but it’s pretty neat, nonetheless.

Other parallelisms that the Me’em Lo’ez makes is that these 15 materials allude to:

- the 15 words in the Priestly Blessing
- the 15 Psalms that Dovid Hamelech said which make up our *Shir Hamaalos*
- the 15 steps in the courtyard of the Beis Hamikdosh representing these fifteen levels of ascension
- the 15 words of affirmation in the prayer *Emes Veyatziv*, right after *Shema*.



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