

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Meir ben Avraham Elimelach. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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8 ADAR 1

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 Hamikdosh: "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 Hamikdosh 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



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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.



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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 (ויקח) 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.

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