

YOU NEED A PARTNER

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And you will make an Ark of acacia wood, two and one-half cubits long, one and one-half cubits wide, and one and one-half cubits tall." [25:10]

The Pnei Yosef points out that this command, "you will make an Ark," is delivered using the plural form of "you." With all the other vessels, we see the singular form -- "you will make a cover" [25:17], "you will make two cherubs" [25:18], "you will make a table" [25:23], "you will make a Menorah of pure gold" [25:31], etc. All of these are given in the singular form, whereas the command to make the Ark is given in the plural. Why is the Ark the exception to the rule?

In Koheles (Ecclesiastes) 9:11, King Solomon says that he learned "bread does not come to the wise." In the Chapters of the Fathers, it says both that "if there is no flour, there is no Torah" [3:17], and that "one who increases his business does not become wise." [2:6] Acquiring the wisdom of Torah and doing good business are [usually] contradictory. You have those who do well in one area, and those who do well in the other, and without both types Torah could not flourish.

What works is the Yissocher-Zevulun model. Our tradition teaches that the descendants of Yaakov's son Yissocher sat and learned Torah, while the descendants of Zevulun became successful merchants. The tribe of Zevulun supported the tribe of Yissocher, and thus both shared in the merit of Torah learning.

After eating many types of foods, Jewish law indicates that one should make a blessing to G-d "who created many souls and their needs" -- because, says the Pnei Yosef, every soul lacks different things. This one may lack income, while this one lacks Torah. And the purpose of all Creation is "to enliven with it every living being" -- when two work in partnership, both flourish.

The Medrash says that the Ark represents the Torah, which was placed inside it. It is appropriate, then, that the Torah says "you will make an Ark" in the plural form -- to hint that in order to have Torah, one needs a partnership!

Good Shabbos,
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