

WHERE HEAVEN MEETS EARTH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits in length, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits in height. Overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside, and make a border of gold on around it. (Shemos 25:10-11)

That the Aron HaKodesh existed is not a question for anyone who believes in the Bible. It was special to the Jewish people that is clear. Belief that it had mystical powers associated with it depends upon the person. After all, from where can such a box derive its power?

That's a good question, if the Holy Ark was merely a box. However, the truth is, nothing in Creation is only what it seems to be down here. Even a blade of grass has an angel in Heaven responsible for its growth, and the existence of mountains and rivers depends upon the ability of their "angels" to receive Heavenly sustenance on their behalf. Certainly the Ark had special angels overlooking its existence channeling Divine light its way.

Indeed, the power of the Ark lay in the fact that it had not one angel acting on its behalf, but its very construction was in order to create many high level spiritual roots, as the Arizal explains:

There were actually three arks, one inside the other, since there are three Names of Elokim in Zehr Anpin of Atzilus, corresponding to Binah, Gevurah, and Malchus. (Likutei Torah, Terumah)

As we have discussed in the past, there are five levels of reality. From the bottom up, there is: Asiyah, Yetzirah, Beriyah, Atzilus, and Adam Kadmon. Our world exists in the lowest, but the World-to-Come corresponds to the level of Beriyah and higher. Each level is comprised of the same five levels, but they can also be described in terms of ten sefiros - Keser to Malchus - or as five partzufim: Arich Anpin, Abba, Imma, Zehr Anpin, and Nukveh.

However, Zehr Anpin has its own identical system, which can be viewed, likewise, as ten sefiros. Thus, we are referring to the Binah, Gevurah, and Malchus of Zehr Anpin way up in Atzilus, all of which are situated on the "left side" of the system, which is associated with the trait of Gevurah, the source of tzimtzum, the constriction of G-d's light with Divine judgment.

The Name of G-d, Elokim, is also associated with Gevurah, and therefore is associated with these three sefiros. Thus, the first gold layer corresponded to the sefirah of Malchus, the wood part to Gevurah, and the inner gold layer corresponded to the Binah in Zehr Anpin of Atzilus.

The Arizal further explained:

The numerical value of these is 258, the numerical value of "Charan." Betzalel made three arks corresponding to these three Names.

The gematria of Elokim is 86, so three such names total 258, which happens to be the numerical value of Charan, the name of the city from which Avraham made aliyah. It was in the city of Charan, at the age of seventy, that G-d first approached Avraham and commanded him to travel to what was at that time Eretz Canaan.

Thus, even though it was in Ur Kasdim, where Avraham had been born, that he had been willing to sacrifice his life in order to back up his belief in the one, true Creator, it wasn't until Charan that G-d broke "radio silence" and directly connected to the father of the Jewish people.

"Lech-lecha" was the official beginning of the relationship that resulted in the eventual creation of the Jewish nation, and the softening of G-d's position with respect to mankind as a whole. For, had Avraham not come along, Creation would have ceased to justify its existence, just as in Noach's time. Avraham, mitigated the Gevurah of "Charan," just as the Ark was constructed to do.

SHABBOS DAY:

There I will be met by you, and I will speak regarding all which I will command you concerning the Children of Israel, from above the cover between the two cherubim, which are upon the Ark of the Testimony. (Shemos 25:2)

The quote continues:

Since the top of the supernal tree is Binah and its bottom is Malchus, the inner and outer arks were made of gold, whereas the middle ark, corresponding to Gevurah, was made of wood.

Even the materials of this world allude to something in the Sefiros, and they affect us the way they do because of that spiritual connection. Whether we are conscious of it or not, gold represents an eternal quality because of its root in the Sefiros. Likewise, wood seems far more down to earth, more humble, more frail, a good material to counteract the strong effects of Gevurah.

To what does the "tree" refer? If you set up the letters of G-d's Four- Letter Name vertically, the Malchus plays the role of the ground, the Vav appears to grow out of it like a tree trunk, and the Binah above it is like the branches and leaves of the tree. Thus, the middle ark, made of wood, corresponds to the middle section, the trunk.

Continues the Arizal:

You should also know that the Shechinah in Atzilus becomes vested in Keser [of Beriyah], and these are the three arks: Akasriel in Beriyah, Metatron in Yetzirah, and Sandalfon in Asiyah. These three names are names of angels; it is customary not to pronounce names of angels.

Again, this is to show how the reality of the Ark was spiritually bound-up with the upper worlds, and to what extent. This was only true about the Ark that Moshe had Betzalel built, and which was hidden before the destruction of the First Temple. Moshe Rabbeinu was infused with the Ohr HaGanuz, and the people who were chosen to build the vessels to be used in the Mishkan were also imbued with a similar light from G-d Himself.

It is no coincidence that the Ark of that time was hidden and remains hidden until this very day, in spite of efforts to find it. It doesn't matter what the reason is, we still don't have it in our hands. G-d has many ways of accomplishing this, and when the time comes for the Ark to be revealed, for us to be able to access the kedushah to which the original Ark is attached, the means will also exist to do so.

Furthermore:

The word Aron has the same total numerical value of Akasriel (662), Metatron (314), and Sandalfon (280).

Though the letter Aleph normally has the numerical value of one, it can also represent 1,000 as well, just as Heh can represent 5,000. Hence, the Jewish year is Heh-Tav-Shin-Samech-Vav, or 5,766. However, since a millennium changes only once in 1,000 years, and we don't have to be concerned that a person will forget which millennium it is, we drop the Heh from the group.

Therefore, "aron" is $1000+200+6+50$, or 1,256, which is all the total of $662+314+280$. Hence, even though the word "aron" is appropriate for the "box" that was constructed to contain the tablets, it has dual meaning in this case, alluded to by the gematria of the word.

Explains the Arizal:

Now, even though we said that the Ark embodies the three Names of Elokim . . .

. . . implying strict judgment . . .

. . . nevertheless, in times of Divine favor the Name Hovayah and its expansions . . .

Each of the four letters of the Shem Hovayah, the Tetragrammaton Name, can be expanded by spelling them as they sound. For example, Yud is always Yud- Vav-Dalet, but Heh can be spelled: Heh-Heh, Heh-Aleph, or Heh-Yud. Likewise, Vav can be written either Vav-Vav, or Vav-Aleph-Vav. When put together, the various different combinations of expanded letters yield different gematrios, four of which correspond to Atzilus (72), Beriyah (63), Yetzirah (45), and Asiyah (52).

. . . shine into these Names, transforming G-d's attribute of justice into that of mercy.

Combined, they total 232, and when you add 26 for the unexpanded Shem Hovayah, the total is 258, the total of the three Elokims mentioned earlier. Thus, the former "sweetens" the latter, turning the strict judgment of Elokim into the mercy of Hovayah; this was the role of the Aron HaKodesh.

There is much more, but it only gets more Kabbalistic. However, this much suffices at least to transmit why the Aron HaKodesh was a vehicle to reach high levels of spirituality, and from it drew its mystical "power."

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Tell the Children of Israel that anyone who desires to bring to Me an elevated-offering should do so. (Shemos 25:2)

There are experiences and then there are experiences. Most of life's experiences come and go, barely noticed, to such an extent that we can wonder later on whether or not they were even real. Unfortunately, a lot of life is like that, which is what prompts many people to say later on in life, "Where did all the time go?"

However, occasionally there are the amazing experiences, the ones that are so dramatic that they can even change the course of our lives, for better or for worst. The negative ones we wish never happened, and we try hard to erase them from our memories. The positive ones we try as hard as possible to hold on to as long as we can, by taking pictures, videos, and even purchasing mementos.

Har Sinai and the giving of Torah was such an experience, and much more. The only other experience that could have topped it was Creation itself, but we weren't there for that. But, we were there at Mattan Torah, and as a result, our lives and the destiny of mankind was dramatically changed.

However, we could not stay there forever. The Jewish people were destined to move on to Eretz Yisroel, but as a continuation of the Sinai experience, not as a different independent experience. Thus, the issue became, how does a nation "package" the Sinai event in such a way as to not denigrate or even minimize it, and yet make it "portable" enough to bring it to Eretz Yisroel for good?

The answer, of course, is this week's parshah, and the construction of the Mishkan. Whatever the Mishkan was, or whatever it contained, or whatever went inside of it, it was, ultimately, the Sinai experience extended. That's why it had to be built directly after the giving of Torah, and at the foot of Mt. Sinai, like a sculptor who fashions his design while having his subject in full view before him with which to compare the accuracy of his handiwork. That is why it was built with "elevated offerings."

Therefore, to understand Mattan Torah on its deepest level available to man is to understand what, ultimately, the Mishkan was meant to be. So, other than being the spot where G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah, what was Har Sinai?

It was an interface between Heaven and earth.

Normally, Heaven and Earth represent two very different and separate domains. So distinct and separate, in fact, that so much of mankind lives as if Heaven doesn't exist, and history runs as if Heaven has forgotten about us altogether. However, for a brief moment in time, Heaven came down

in the direction of earth, and came close enough that man could have a personal experience of the Divine.

However, once the Jewish people moved on, the fiery cloud over the mountain ascended, and today we don't even know which mountain is the real Har Sinai. Does that mean the experience of Har Sinai ended then and there? No, especially since the tablets that Moshe descended with remain in the Ark to this very day, wherever they may be. And, when the time comes for us to know first hand once again, what it is like for Heaven and Earth to touch, we will find both, the Ark and the rest of the contents of the Mishkan, and also the aspect of the Sinai experience they were created to embody.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Let them make Me a sanctuary, so I can dwell among them. (Shemos 25:8)

I try not to express political opinions in Perceptions. I have my own website to do that. However, sometimes the two overlap each other, and the timing of each makes it hard not to make the point.

Last night, after Shabbos went out and I sat down to check my email, I also scanned the news. The News, in general, is not one of my obsessions, and quite frankly, today it is the source of so many people's depressions. However, being focused as I am on the events of the "End-of-Days," I feel a need to peek to see what is going on, only for the sake of trying to read Hashgochah Pratis.

The main story included a picture of the so-called Palestinian Prime Minister with his face in his hands, looking exasperated. The paragraph below it explained why: Hamas, the Palestinian "government" WE allowed to be elected, maintained its position of ignoring all previous peace agreements made with Israel, calling instead for the destruction of the State of Israel.

As I sat there pondering the hopelessness of the situation, I received a phone call from my friend who lives in an area here in Israel that just a year ago, would have been considered prime real estate outside of the Jerusalem area. I was there. Other than the view of Ramallah, it is a breath-taking place to be, and the houses that have gone up are lovely.

However, today he is panicking. He had made aliyah, like so many others, and had invested in Jewish land, even choosing to be one of the brave souls to live in a less protected area, helping to strengthen the Jewish claim for Jewish soil. With his family, he turned his back on at least one aspect of exile, the Diaspora, and settled in the place of his dreams, the land of our Forefathers.

Rumors are floating around that his dream home is slated to become part of the ongoing Israeli nightmare, G-d forbid. Originally, he had cried for those who had already lost their homes and life's investments. Now, the situation that he feared about and fought against on behalf of others, he is now forced to do so for himself.

It is so sad. Of course, it is sad about my friend and his need to fear about his future. More sad is the fact that so few of his brothers will ever know about him, or other heroic Jews in the same

predicament. And, the farther you go away from the borders of Eretz Yisroel, the less they will know, and the less they will care. It may not even occur to Jews of the Diaspora that the situation going on today has no Jewish logic whatsoever.

The people behind all of this mishugas are counting on that. They have their agenda and they have their method for carrying it out, and clearly it has little to do with what most Jews had in mind when the Jewish state was originally founded. The risks they are taking are monumental, many of them proving to have been bad ones, but they steam ahead nevertheless, confident that no one from their own people, here or abroad can do anything to stop them.

We are so fractured, even within the groups that almost see eye-to-eye, that the Erev Rav counts on that to cover their tracks down a slippery path to an eventual final showdown with the rest of mankind.

One of the most important aspects of the Mishkan and everything inside of it was that is was the organizing principle of the multi-million person Jewish camp. As long as the Mishkan was there, though there were twelve tribes there was only one G-d, and only one way to serve Him. We were united in a common cause.

If you want to get a taste of what it means to be Mishkan-less, which in modern-day terms means Temple-less, take a look at the Jewish people today. Aside from being mostly assimilated, we are so spread apart physically and ideologically. We are old and weak, so-much-so that the Erev Rav had little trouble wresting power away from us.

It is almost Purim, and I will end, one week in advance of Shabbos Zachor, with a page from Megillas Esther: "Tucked away and distant from the action," Mordechai chided Esther, "you may feel secure and unaffected. It's a mistake, for, G-d may have put you here to save your people, and if you don't, eventually it will chase after you!"

For all you know, this may simply be G-d's way of calling out, "Who is for G-d, come to Me!"

The last time we made the mistake of letting only the tribe of Levi respond to the call. This time, let's answer it too.

*Have a great Shabbos,
PW*

Text

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