

TEACHING LIMITS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In this week's Parsha, Moshe instructed the Bnai Yisroel in the design and construction of the Mishkan. The building of the Mishkan was in direct response to the sin of the Golden Calf. So long as the Jews had not sinned, G-d's constant caring and direction was open and overt. However, once the Jews lost faith in G-d's and worshipped the Golden Calf, G-d secreted His control over the universe within the laws of nature.

Before the sin of the Golden Calf G-d's reality was self-evident and obvious, similar to the way it was in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Chava sinned. After the sin of the Golden Calf the nation had to work and sacrifice in order to reveal G-d's presence, similar to the way it was after Adam and Chava sinned. After the Jews repented for the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d consented to partially reveal Himself within the midst of the people. However, the manner of His revelation would be limited to within the structure and service of the Mishkan. "â€|Make Me a sanctuary so that I can dwell in their midst." (25:8)

Many of the commentaries explain that the Mishkan's stated purpose, "So that I can dwell in their midst," really means, "in their hearts." As it says, "In my heart I will build a Mishkan, for the sake of the glory of His honor." G-d originally intended that there not be a Mishkan or a Bais Hamikdash. G-d wanted that every person's actions would radiate the awareness of His presence in all instances, without the need of a Mishkan. (Sforno) Once the Jews lost their capacity to personally reflect G-d's presence, the Mishkan replaced what we should have each been. Therefore, our capacity to recognize and display G-dliness must be symbolically represented through the various components of the Mishkan described in Terumah and Tizaveh.

In this week's Parsha, the basic structure of the Mishkan, as well as the Aron (Ark), the Shulchan (Table), the Menorah, and the Mizbeach (Alter) are described. These constituted the primary vessels needed for the daily functioning of the Mishkan. These were the primary tools needed to reveal G-dliness in the universe. Each of these vessels is related to ourselves and our lives, and provides direction for integrating and evincing G-d within the family and society. Let us explore some of the Aron's symbolism.

The Aron:

The "box" containing the Luchos and the Broken Luchos were kept, was constructed of three concentric boxes. The outer and inner boxes were made from pure gold, and the inner middle box

was made from acacia wood. The assembled boxes were covered with a single pure gold cover, the Kapores, upon which the two Cherubim stood. Around the perimeter of the outer gold box was a rim that acted as a raised border to contain the Kapores. The Torah describes this rim as a "crown." The Cherubim were winged figures, one adorned with the face of a boy and the other with the face of a girl. Permanently attached to the sides of the outer golden box were two Badim - carrying poles. (see page 447, note 17-22, Stone Edition)

Occupying the holiest place in the Mishkan, the Aron was the focal point of the Mishkan. "I will commune with you there speaking to youâ€¦ from between the two Cherubimâ€¦" (25:22) The key function of the Aron appears to be how G-d communicated with us and how we were to communicate with Him. Note that on the one hand all prophecy emanated from between the Cherubim. (Rashi 25:22) On the other hand, all of our prayers are directed toward the Holy of Holies and the space between the Cherubim.

The Aron symbolized our most prized human characteristic, our intellectual capacity to understand G-d, and our ability to communicate that understanding to others. As humans, we are the only creatures endowed with the ability to willfully communicate with G-d. All other creatures have an intrinsic awareness of G-d, but they are incapable of willfully expressing that awareness. With our capacity to understand and communicate, we are able to willfully acknowledge G-d's constancy and dominion. This is consistent with our place and purpose in nature. Nature as a whole manifests G-d's hidden presence. Our job is to reveal G-d's presence. Therefore, all other creations silently reflect G-d's presence through the manner of their existence. We, on the other hand, must actively reveal G-d's presence by communicating our understanding through our words and our actions.

The most effective way for recognizing G-d's hidden presence is to develop an ongoing relationship with G-d. The more intimate our relationship, the greater will be our awareness and understanding. Note: The Torah uses the word "to know" to describe the most intimate relationship between a husband and wife. As is true with all relationships, there must be communication between G-d and us. The more intimate the relationship, the greater the need for communication. Likewise, the more we communicate with G-d, the more intimate our relationship with Him will be.

It is extremely significant that G-d chose to "speak" to us from between the two Cherubim who were molded with the faces of a boy and a girl. There are few experiences as revealing of G-d's profound interaction in the laws of nature as having and raising children. First of all, the actual process of childbirth is miraculous. During childbirth a mother is at the complete mercy of the laws of nature and G-d. A woman is completely dependent upon G-d's participation in the miracle of birth. Regardless of the significant advances in medicine, the birth of child reveals G-d's presence in the world. As the famous expression goes, "There is no atheist in the delivery room." However, our real participation in the miracle of birth, is after the child is born. Cell division and DNA are G-d's domain; child rearing and education are our domain.

This week's Parsha clearly tells us that the greatest potential for revealing G-d in the world is through our children. By raising children in an environment that is filled with devotion to G-d and His Torah, we guarantee society's continued awareness and understanding of G-d. It is through our children and future generations that G-d communicates with society. Likewise, it is through the manner in which we raise our children and future generations that we communicate with G-d. If we value our relationship with G-d we will do everything possible to share Him with our children.

Sharing G-d with our children involves two basic approaches. 1. The teaching of Torah. 2. The teaching of Halacha - Jewish law. It isn't enough to simply learn Torah. Torah must be experienced, and the experience of Torah can only be explored through the limits of Halacha. Torah study without imposed limitations, demands, or expectations is nothing more than an intellectual exercise in the theoretical existence of the Divine. Torah study alone will not create an intimacy with G-d that transcends place and time. If we are to share G-d with our children, we must share our relationship with G-d. Therefore, we must do everything possible to teach them Torah through the experience and limitations of Halacha that constitutes our relationship with G-d.

A few years ago, Rabbi Matis Sklar Shlita explained that the "crown" around the top of the Kapores represents the limits that the Torah imposes on our lives through Halacha. Likewise, my Father Shlita explained that the family unit is the syringe that G-d created in order to inject proper values (revealing His presence) into humanity. The Aron represents the Torah. The Cherubim represent our children and the family unit. The "crown" represents the limitations of Halacha. Our responsibility is to communicate our awareness of G-d to our children by the way we integrate the limitations of His law in our life. In so doing we create generations of teachers who will fulfill G-d's promise to Avraham, "And through you and your children will be blessed all the nations of the earth."

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
