**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TERUMA**

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Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Teruma instructs that the *aron*, the most sacred article in the *Mishkan*, was to be made of acacia wood and plated with gold inside and out (25:10-11). The *Da’at Zekeinim* comments that seemingly, it would have been fitting for the *aron* to be made entirely from gold, given its special status of significance. However, God commanded to make it from wood, and only plated with gold, out of concern for the *Leviyim* who would be carrying the ark on their shoulders as *Benei Yisrael* journeyed through the wilderness. A metal structure would have been too heavy for them to carry, and so God instructed that the ark should be made from wood, instead.

The *Da’at Zekeinim* then questions this theory, however, noting the Gemara’s famous comment in Masekhet Sota (35a), “*aron nosei et nos’av*” – the *aron* did not need to be carried. The Gemara tells that the ark actually had the miraculous power to “carry” those who appeared to be carrying it, and did not need to be physically transported. While the precise meaning of this statement is not altogether clear, the Gemara here claims that the *aron* did not require the physical strength of those assigned to transport it, as it traveled in supernatural fashion. (Indeed, the context of the Gemara’s remark is the tragic story of Uza, who was killed for rushing to support the *aron* when it appeared to be falling, instead of trusting that the *aron* was capable of supporting itself.) As such, it seems difficult to posit that the ark was not made from metal in order not to overburden the *Leviyim*.

The Tolna Rebbe suggested a creative way of reconciling this theory with the notion of “*aron nosei et nos’av*.” Perhaps, he explained, God did not want the *aron* to *seem* too heavy to transport. Although the *Leviyim* did not actually have to carry the *aron*, as it carried itself, nevertheless, the very sight of a large metal chest which would have to be lifted and transported might have intimidated the *Leviyim* and discouraged them. The concern was not the practical issue of carrying a metal ark, but rather the deleterious emotional impact that such a sight would have upon the *Leviyim*.

The Tolna Rebbe applied the message of this concept to the area of education, and to religious life generally. Presenting a challenge that seems daunting and overbearing, even if in truth it isn’t, could have a negative effect upon a child or student, and even upon ourselves. We need to strike a delicate balance between embracing challenge, on the one hand, and on the other, avoiding commitments that are intimidating and thus discourage us from trying. If the burden appears too heavy bear, then even if it isn’t, the specter of lifting it causes despair and perhaps even resentment. God chose to forego on the standard of glory befitting the ark, the symbol of His presence among *Benei Yisrael*, in order to avoid discouraging the *Leviyim*. We, too, must try to avoid discouraging our children, our students and ourselves by making the burden of Torah appear too heavy to bear.

Sunday

Among the materials needed for the *Mishkan* were “*orot eilim me’odamim*” – reddened rams’ skins (25:5), which were used as a covering for the *Mishkan* (26:14). Rashi interprets the term “*me’odamim*” to mean that the skins were dyed red after the rams were slaughtered and skinned. This interpretation is in contrast to the view of the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbat 7:2), which writes, “*Hayu mesharbetin ba-beheima*,” which is commonly interpreted to mean that the animals were beaten before they were slaughtered until they bled internally. The internal bleeding had the effect of coloring the skins, and this is how the skins were dyed red.

To explain why Rashi did not follow the Yerushalmi’s interpretation, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, in his *Ta’ama Di-kra*, suggests that the issue hinges on a debate among the *Tanna’im*. The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (42b) cites two views as to whether the dyeing of the fabrics for the *bigdei kehuna* (priestly garments) had to be performed *lishmah* – with the specific intent for the *mitzva*. According to one view, the person who performed the dyeing had to have in mind at the time of the act that this was done for the specific purpose of the *bigdei kehuna*. It stands to reason, Rav Kanievsky surmises, that this view would likewise require *lishmah* for the coloring of the rams’ skins used to cover the *Mishkan*. (Indeed, the Gemara applies this debate to the question of whether the *tekhelet* dye must be applied to *tzitzit* strings with specific intent for the *mitzva*, clearly indicating that this debate is not limited to the specific context of *bigdei kehuna*.) If so, then this debate might directly affect the question of how the rams’ skins were dyed. Rav Ovadya of Bartenura, in his Torah commentary, cites a version of the Yerushalmi stating that the rams had to be beaten when they were very young, presumably because the skins would otherwise not become permanently red. Now the term “*eilim*” refers specifically to adult rams (as Rav Kanievsky cites from the Mishna at the beginning of Masekhet Para). According to the Yerushalmi, then, the rams’ skins used in the *Mishkan* had to have been dyed sometime before the command for the *Mishkan* was issued. After all, the beating had to have been done when the rams were young, and the materials were all donated in the two days following Moshe’s command to the people to supply materials for the *Mishkan* (as we read in Parashat Vayakhel). As such, the “dyeing” could not possibly have been performed *lishmah* – for the same of the *Mishkan* – because the command had not yet been given. Hence, the Yerushalmi necessarily worked off the assumption that the dyeing does not have to be performed *lishmah.* Rashi, it seems, embraced the position that dyeing indeed must be done *lishmah* (which is, in fact, the accepted position with regard to *tzitzit* – see Rambam, Hilkhot Tzitzit 2:3). Therefore, he was compelled to explain that the rams’ skins were dyed after they were removed from the animals, and not in the method described by the Yerushalmi.

It should be noted, incidentally, that the *Penei Moshe* commentary to the Yerushalmi explains the phrase “*Hayu mesharbetin ba-beheima*” differently. He writes that the rams were not beaten, but were rather marked with permanent ink as a sign of their designation for the *Mishkan*. Rav Menachem Kasher, in [*Torah Sheleima*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=51491&st=&pgnum=214&hilite=), addresses this issue at length and dismisses the notion that *Benei Yisrael* were required to beat the rams to cause internal bleeding, something which would certainly strike us as a cruel and bizarre method of dyeing skins.

Monday

Parashat Teruma begins with God’s command to *Benei Yisrael* to donate the materials that were needed for the *Mishkan* and the priestly vestments, including *tachash* skins (25:5). As we read later (26:14), these skins were used to form the outermost covering over the *Mishkan*. Rashi, citing the Gemara (Shabbat 28b), comments that the *tachash* was a supernatural creature that sported a dazzling array of colors on its feathers. Onkelos, as Rashi notes, translates the word “*tachash*” as “*sasgona*,” which refers to the fact that this animal “*sas u-mitpa’er*” – rejoiced and took pride in its colorful appearance.

What is the significance of the special “joy” and “pride” of the *tachash*, whose skins were used to cover the *Mishkan*?

The *tachash* skins differed from the other materials in the *Mishkan* in that they did not require dyeing; their color was part of the fabric. Most of the skins and threads used for the *Mishkan* and the *bigdei kehuna* were dyed to appear colorful, whereas the *tachash* skins were naturally colorful and did not have to be treated. Symbolically, perhaps, this distinction signifies the difference between the struggle to acquire positive traits and habits, and having them naturally embedded within our characters. The other materials set the model of working to extend beyond our natural tendencies, wrestling with our instincts to embrace the qualities that we know we should possess. The *tachash* skins, by contrast, represent the joy and satisfaction of being naturally drawn to do the right thing, of having positive behaviors and character traits as part of parcel of our beings, such that we are naturally drawn towards the proper decisions and modes of conduct.

Significantly, the *tachash* skins are the outermost covering over the *Mishkan*, placed on top of all the other materials. The level of “*sas u-mitpa’er*,” of being naturally “colorful,” without having to “import” positive qualities from outside our characters, represents the final stage, the culmination of a long, grueling process of growth and struggle. Only after we fully construct our “*Mishkan*,” our personal, internal sanctuaries, can we begin to lay claim to this feature of the *tachash*, to the incorporation of the full range of “colors,” of Torah values, into our being, their being naturally embedded within our personalities. We must first work, toil, labor and struggle to “dye” our “materials,” to “color” ourselves with the kind of conduct and habits the Torah demands, hoping, yearning and striving for the time when we reach the highest point, the level of the *tachash*, where these qualities become second nature and part and parcel of our beings.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Teruma of God’s commands to *Benei Yisrael* concerning the *Mishkan*. In introducing the lengthy series of detailed commands, God tells Moshe that *Benei Yisrael* are to construct the *Mishkan* and its furnishings “*ke-khol asher ani mareh otekha*” – “in accordance with all that I show you” (25:9).

The *Sefat Emet* notes a grammatical irregularity in this phrase, namely, that the word “*otekha*” is normally used in reference to a direct object, not an indirect object. Accordingly, the phrase “*mareh otekha*” technically means not that God will show something to Moshe, but rather that He will show Moshe to somebody. If God was saying that He will show to Moshe the information he must convey to *Benei Yisrael* concerning the *Mishkan*’s construction, He should have said, “*mareh lekha*” – which would mean that God shows something to Moshe. The fact that God said “*mareh otekha*,” the *Sefat Emet* writes, implies that God would show Moshe to somebody – presumably, to *Benei Yisrael*. This idiosyncrasy led the *Sefat Emet* to a novel Chassidic reading of the verse, claiming that God somehow engraved the form of the *Mishkan* upon Moshe’s image. In order for *Benei Yisrael* to understand how to construct the *Mishkan*, the *Sefat Emet* writes, they needed to look upon Moshe, and the sight of their righteous leader would inspire them with the knowledge they needed. Thus, God said He would “show” Moshe to the people in order to convey to them the information for building the *Mishkan*.

The *Sefat Emet*’s intent, it would seem, is that there were two bodies of information that needed to be taught to the people regarding the *Mishkan*. First, they needed the technical information about the way it was to be constructed and used, the nitty-gritty details and specifications that had to be meticulously followed. But in addition, they needed to know the *Mishkan*’s general aims and goals, how God’s presence within it must affect and inform the people’s behavior, and what it ought to inspire them to be and achieve. Correspondingly, Moshe was assigned two roles. The first, as the simple meaning of the verse suggests, he was to convey to the people God’s detailed instructions. But the *Sefat Emet* draws our attention to the fact that this was not all. Moshe was to also convey to the people what it means to live in God’s presence, how the *Shekhina*’s residence among the people was to transform and uplift them. This information was conveyed primarily not through verbal communication, not via the spoken word, but rather by personal example. God showed Moshe how to build the *Mishkan* – and also showed the people Moshe, the living example of how to conduct oneself in the presence of the Almighty.

The way we conduct ourselves sets an example for those around us and has a profound effect upon them, often in ways we cannot readily discern. The *Sefat Emet*’s insight perhaps challenges us all to “engrave” the *Mishkan* upon our beings, to develop our characters and refine our conduct to the point where we become living examples of the *Mishkan*, of the ideals of Torah and holiness. The most effective way to teach people about what it means to live in God’s presence, with an awareness of God and of our obligations towards Him, is through personal example, becoming living embodiments of *kedusha* and all that it entails.

Wednesday

One of the materials which were used for the construction of the *Mishkan* was *shittim* wood, from which *Benei Yisrael* made the planks and beams that constituted the essential structure of the *Mishkan*, as well as the *aron*, the *shulchan* and the outdoor *mizbei’ach*.

Chizkuni, commenting on Parashat Teruma (25:5), asserts that *shittim* wood is an especially lightweight species of wood. He proves this point from Sefer Bamidbar (4:31-32), where we read that the *nesi’im* (tribal leaders) donated twelve wagons for the *Leviyim* to use in transporting the *Mishkan*. Eight of these wagons, the Torah tells, were used by the Merari family of Levites, who, as we know from earlier in Sefer Bamidbar (3:35-36), transported all the planks, pillars and beams of the *Mishkan*. If just eight wagons sufficed for all these, Chizkuni claims, then the wood must have been particularly lightweight. A total of 48 planks were used for the *Mishkan*, and they were quite large – ten *amot* long, 1.5 *ama* wide, and one *ama* thick. This is in addition to the sixteen wooden beams that ran across the length of the *Mishkan*. The fact that they were all transported in eight wagons would seem to prove that the wood was especially lightweight.

Further proof to Chizkuni’s theory may be drawn from the Gemara’s discussion in Masekhet Nedarim (38a), where the Gemara cites a tradition that Moshe was a man of considerable physical strength. To prove this claim, the Gemara notes that Moshe is said to have single-handedly spread the cloths of the *Mishkan* over the wooden planks to erect the *Mishkan* (“*Va-yifros et ha-ohel al ha-Mishkan*” – Shemot 40:19). The Gemara then dismisses this proof, suggesting that the cloths, even though they were quite large, were not necessarily heavy. Ultimately, the Gemara proves this point from the fact that Moshe was capable of throwing the two large stone tablets at the time of the sin of the golden calf. Seemingly, as the Rosh noted in his commentary to Masekhet Nedarim, the Gemara could have drawn proof from the Torah’s description of Moshe lifting the large wooden planks of the *Mishkan* to put them in place (“*va-yasem et kerashav*” – 40:18). In light of Chizkuni’s comments, however, we may easily answer that since the wood was much lighter than ordinary wood, it did not require special strength to lift the planks, and thus this job which Moshe completed does not indicate that he possessed exceptional physical might.

(See Rav Avraham Albert’s [*Birkat Avraham*, Parashat Teruma](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=42881&st=&pgnum=142&hilite=))

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted the claim advanced by Chizkuni, in his commentary to Parashat Teruma (25:5), that the *shittim* wood, from which the planks, beams and other parts of the *Mishkan* were made, was especially lightweight. Rashi, in two places, appears to disagree. In Parashat Pekudei (39:33), the Torah tells that after all the components of the *Mishkan* were completed, the artisans brought them all to Moshe. Rashi, citing the *Midrash Tanchuma*, explains:

[They brought it all to Moshe] because they were unable to erect it. Since Moshe did not perform any of the work for the *Mishkan*, the Almighty left the erecting for him, as no person was able to erect it **due to the heavy weight of the planks**, as no person had the strength to stand them up straight, yet Moshe stood them up.

Moshe said before the Almighty: “How can they be erected by a human being?”

He said to him: “Work on it yourself, and it will seem as though you are erecting it, but it will be erected and stand by itself.”

According to Rashi, it seems, the planks were very heavy and nobody was strong enough to put them in their proper position without God’s supernatural assistance.

It should be noted that although Rashi cites this account from the *Tanchuma*, the *Tanchuma* does not actually mention that the planks were too heavy for a person to make them stand. Rather, the *Tanchuma* comments that Moshe said to God, “Master of the world, **I do not know how to erect it**.” Moshe’s dilemma, according to this account, was not necessarily the weight of the planks, but rather the lack of knowledge needed to erect the *Mishkan*. Rashi, however, understood the *Tanchuma* to mean that the planks were very heavy.

Rashi makes a similar remark in his commentary to the Talmud. The Mishna in Masekhet Shabbat (96a) cites the majority view among the *Tanna’im* that throwing an item on Shabbat from one private domain to another through a public domain does not constitute a Torah violation. Although transferring an object on Shabbat in this fashion – from one private domain to another, through a public domain – indeed constitutes a Torah violation, throwing does not. The reason, the Mishna explains, is that the model of the Shabbat prohibition against transferring objects from one domain to another is the transportation of the planks used for the *Mishkan*. The planks were transferred from one wagon to another through the public domain, the Mishna comments, but they were not thrown from one wagon to another, and therefore throwing is not forbidden (on the level of Torah law). Rashi explains that the planks could not be thrown, due to their weight. Consistent with his view in his Torah commentary, and contrary to the opinion of Chizkuni, Rashi here expresses the position that the *shittim* was a weighty species of wood, and thus the planks of the *Mishkan* were very heavy.

Interestingly, some have suggested emending the text of Rashi’s commentary, such that the word “*kovdan*” (“their weight”) reads “*kevodan*” – “their honor.” According to this text, Rashi follows the explanation presented by the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbat 11:5) that the planks of the *Mishkan* were not thrown because this would be disrespectful. The standard version of the text, however, has the word “*kovdan*,” according to which Rashi refers to the heavy weight of the planks, consistent with his remarks in his Torah commentary, as discussed.

(See Rav Avraham Albert’s [*Birkat Avraham*, Parashat Teruma](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=42881&st=&pgnum=142&hilite=))

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Teruma (25:11) requires building the *aron* (ark) from *shittim* wood and plating it with gold both inside and out: “*mi-bayit u-mi’chutz tetzapenu*.”

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (72b), in a famous remark, notes the symbolic significance of the interior and exterior gold plating: “Any Torah scholar whose interior does not correspond to his exterior is not a Torah scholar.” The ark, which contained the original Torah scroll, needed to be constructed in such a way that its interior matched its exterior, both plated with gold. Similarly, Torah scholars must be the same inside and out; rather than just appear “golden” – scholarly and pious – they must be “golden” on the inside. Their impressive image must accurately reflect the kind of people they truly are.

Developing this point a bit further, there seems to be no reason, at first glance, for the Torah to require plating the interior of the *aron* with gold. After all, nobody sees the inside of the ark. Only the exterior is visible, and we would thus expect the Torah to demand only that the exterior be plated with gold to bring glory to this sacred article. The fact that the Torah requires gold even on the interior proves that the external appearance is not the only important factor. The ark must be “golden” even in places which are not exposed to the human eye. And this, perhaps, is the point of comparison noted by the Gemara between the *aron* and people. Too often, our efforts at self-growth are focused on our image, on the way we appear to others, on ensuring to act in a way that will earn us the admiration, approval and respect of the people around us. *Chazal* here remind us that this is not what self-growth is about. Certainly, just as the *aron* was golden on the outside, we must work to maintain an appropriate public image. But our efforts must also include tending to our “interior,” to refining the aspects of our characters and our lives that are not visible to anyone else. Even when nobody sees us, we must conduct ourselves in an appropriate manner and recognize, in the Mishna’s famous words, “what is above you – a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds are being written in a book” (Avot 2:1).