**SALT – PARASHAT TERUMA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Teruma tells of the construction of the *Mishkan* and its various furnishings, beginning with the *aron* (ark), in which were kept the stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, which Moshe brought from the top of Mount Sinai. The *Mishkan* accompanied *Benei Yisrael* through their travels from Sinai to the Land of Israel, serving as the site of sacrificial offerings until it was replaced by the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in Jerusalem.

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (52b) teaches that when the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile and rebuilt the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, they did not build a new *aron*. Although they constructed a second Temple and new furnishings (the altars, table, *menorah*, and faucet), there was no ark throughout the Second Temple period. The Gemara makes this comment in reference to its discussion of the Yom Kippur service, when the *kohen gadol* was to place a pan of incense on the floor of the inner chamber of the *Mikdash*, underneath the two poles that were affixed to the sides of the *aron*. During the Second Commonwealth, the Gemara remarks, there was no ark, and so the incense was placed on the spot underneath what would be the area in between the two poles if the *aron* were there.

The Rashash, in his notes to Masekhet Yoma (53b), as well as the *Meshekh Chokhma* (commenting on 25:21), address the question of why a new ark was not constructed. If the Jews rebuilt the Temple and the other furnishings, why would they not also build a new *aron*?

These *Acharonim* suggested, very simply, that there was no purpose in having an ark without the tablets. As the ark’s function was to house the tablets, which were lost at the end of the First Temple period, there was no reason to construct a new *aron*. The Rashash and *Meshekh Chokhma* explain on this basis a seeming redundancy in the text here in Parashat Teruma, which was noted already by Rashi (25:21). After the Torah commands building the *aron*, it states, “You shall place in the ark the testimony which I am giving you” (25:15), referring to the stone tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved. The Torah then proceeds to command the construction of the *kaporet* – the covering over the ark – and repeats, “…and into the ark you shall place the testimony which I am giving you” (25:21). The Rashash and *Meshekh Chokhma* explain the repetition based on the principle of “*shina alav ha-Katuv le-akeiv*.” This rule, mentioned by the Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (19b), establishes that when it comes to laws relevant to the Temple and its rituals, a repeated command indicates that the instruction is indispensable for the fulfillment of the obligation in question. If, for example, the Torah mentions a certain requirement relevant to a particular kind of sacrifice only once, then the failure to meet that requirement does not invalidate the sacrifice. If, however, the Torah repeats the requirement, then the repetition indicates that this law is *me’akeiv* – indispensable for the sacrifice’s validity. Applying this rule to the placement of the tablets in the *aron*, the Rashash and *Meshekh Chokhma* explain that the Torah repeated this command to establish that the *mitzva* to have an *aron* is not fulfilled if it does not contain the tablets. Without the tablets, the ark essentially has no halakhic value. And for this reason, the Jews who rebuilt the *Beit Ha-mikdash* upon returning from the Babylonian exile did not construct a new ark.

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (*Chashukei Chemed*, Yoma 53b) raises the question of whether this discussion might be applied to the *aron kodesh* in a synagogue. He was approached by a new, small community that did not yet have funds for a *Sefer Torah*, but did have a synagogue where they conducted the public prayers. They wondered whether they were to bring an *aron* into the synagogue despite not yet having a *Sefer Torah*. Perhaps, they figured, the *aron* has intrinsic value as part of the synagogue’s “décor,” even if it does not contain a *Sefer Torah*, and so it should be included. Rav Zilberstein noted that conceivably, one might infer from the Rashash’s discussion that the *aron* indeed has intrinsic value. The Rashash’s working assumption was that the ark should have been included in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* even without the tablets, and it was only due to an inference from a verse that he determined that the *aron* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* has no value without the tablets. Perhaps, then, we might conclude that when it comes to the ark in the synagogue, regarding which there is no such inference from the Torah, it has value even without a *Sefer Torah*. However, Rav Zilberstein dismisses this argument, noting that the Rashash’s discussion pertains to the *aron* which the Torah commands building, and the Rashash thus searched for a reason why this command was not applicable in the second *Beit Ha-mikdash*. There is no corresponding obligation to have an ark in the synagogue, and its function is solely to contain the *Sefer Torah*. Hence, Rav Zilberstein writes, if, for whatever reason, a congregation does not have a *Sefer Torah*, there is no reason to have an *aron*.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Teruma describes the *aron*, the wooden, gold-plated ark that was kept in the *kodesh kodashim* – the inner chamber of the *Mishkan* (and, later, the *Beit Ha-mikdash*). After instructing how the *aron* was to be built, God commanded Moshe to place inside it “the testimony which I will give you” (25:16). The conventional understanding of this verse is that the word “*eidut*” (“testimony”) refers to the *luchot* – the stone tablets upon which God engraved the Ten Commandments, and which He gave to Moshe atop Mount Sinai. The *luchot* are called “*eidut*” because they testify to the covenant which God forged with *Benei Yisrael* at Sinai. Rashi, however, writes that the word “*eidut*” here refers to the Torah, which testifies to the fact that God commanded the *mitzvot* written therein.

Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi, in his work on Rashi’s commentary, raises a number of questions on Rashi’s understanding of the word “*eidut*” in this verse. First, the Torah later, in Parashat Pekudei (40:20), mentions Moshe’s placing the “*eidut*” into the *aron*, and there Rashi explains “*eidut*” as referring to the *luchot*. This must be the meaning of the word, Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi adds, because the *Sefer Torah* was not completed until just before Moshe’s death, thirty-nine years after the *Mishkan* was erected, and so it could not have been placed in the ark already at the time of the *Mishkan*’s construction. Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi further notes that in Sefer Devarim (31:26), Rashi cites two views from the Gemara (Bava Batra 14b) as to whether the original *Sefer Torah* was situated inside the *aron*, or on a shelf that protruded from the exterior of the *aron*. It seems difficult to understand why there Rashi cited both views, indicating that he did not conclusively side with either opinion, whereas here he writes definitively that commanded placing the *Sefer Torah* inside the ark.

Another question that has been raised regarding Rashi’s explanation of “*eidut*” in this verse relates to his comments several verses later (25:21), in which God repeats the instruction to place the “*eidut*” inside the ark. Rashi takes note of this redundancy, and he proposes that this second verse perhaps seeks to emphasize that the *kaporet* – the ark’s covering – should not be placed on the ark before the *eidut* is first placed inside. Seemingly, if Rashi follows the view that both the *luchot* and the *Sefer Torah* were kept inside the *aron*, he could have simply explained that these two verses refer to these two items, such that there is no redundancy.

To avoid these questions, some writers, including the *Taz*, in *Divrei David*, understood Rashi’s remark differently. According to their understanding, when Rashi comments that “*eidut*” means the Torah, his intention is not that the Torah was placed in the ark, but rather to explain why the *luchot* are called “testimony.” Rashi in fact followed the accepted understanding of the word “*eidut*,” as referring to the tablets – which were, in essence, the first “*Sefer Torah*,” in the sense that they were the first document of laws for us to follow. To explain why the word “*eidut*” is used in reference to the *luchot*, Rashi writes that the Torah “testifies” to the laws, and this explains also why this word is used in reference to the *luchot*, the first written set of laws which we were given.

Monday

Parashat Teruma begins with God’s command to *Benei Yisrael* to provide materials for the construction of the *Mishkan*. In issuing this command to Moshe, God adds, “In accordance with all that I show you – the form of the *Mishkan* and the form of all its furnishings – so shall you do” (25:9). Rashi, based on the Gemara (Sanhedrin 16b), comments that the words “*ve-khein ta’asu*” (“so shall you do”) imply “*le-dorot*” – that this command is relevant for all time. He proceeds to explain that the furnishings that would be built centuries later for the *Beit Ha-mikdash* were required to be built in the same form as the furnishings commanded for the *Mishkan*. (See the Ramban, who disagrees with Rashi on this point.)

Rav Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak of Alexander, in *Yismach Yisrael*, offers a deeper insight into the significance of this command’s applicability “*le-dorot*.” The purpose of the *Mishkan*, as God explicitly states, is “*ve-shakhanti be-tokham*” (25:8), that God should reside among our nation. Ideally, of course, God resides among us in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. But Rashi’s comment teaches that even “*le-dorot*,” when we are unworthy of having the clear manifestation of God’s presence in the *Mikdash*, nevertheless, we are still obliged to work to be deserving of His residence among us. Even in the absence of the *Mikdash*, we must do what we can to live in a manner that renders us worthy of the Almighty’s presence.

The Rebbe of Alexander references in this context Rashi’s famous comments (Bamidbar 8:4), citing the Midrash, that the *menorah* for the *Mishkan* was made miraculously, on its own. Moshe and his team of artisans were unable to produce the *menorah* according to God’s specifications, and so it was made supernaturally. The message conveyed by the Midrash, the Rebbe of Alexander explains, is that building the *Mishkan* was not possible without God’s direct involvement – and this is true, the Rebbe remarked, also “*le-dorot*,” of the “*Mishkan*” that we are to strive to build in our own lives, even today. Living in a manner that makes us worthy of the divine presence is a difficult challenge. The standards are high and demanding, and we can easily become discouraged and fall into despair. The command of “*le-dorot*,” to build a “Sanctuary” in every generation, in every stage of life and under every set of circumstances, comes with the guarantee that God will assist us in this lofty endeavor just as He assisted our ancestors to build the *Mishkan* at Sinai. When we find ourselves intimidated or overwhelmed by the challenges involved in Torah observance, we must be reassured by the promise of “*le-dorot*,” and recognize that we need to do the best we can in building our “*Mishkan*” and trust that God will then step in to help us.

Tuesday

In the beginning of Parashat Teruma, we read the list of the materials which God commanded *Benei Yisrael* to donate for the construction of the *Mishkan* and its various furnishings. These included two kinds of precious stones – “*avnei shoham*” and “*avnei miluim*” (25:7). As we read later, in Parashat Tetzaveh, two “*avnei shoham*” were affixed to the shoulder straps of the *eifod* – the *kohein gadol*’s apron (28:9), and twelve other stones were affixed to the *choshen* – the *kohein gadol*’s breastplate (28:17-20). The Torah uses the verb *m.l.a.* in reference to the placement of the stones on the breastplate (“*u-mileita va miluat even*” – 28:17), and they are thus called “*avnei miluim*.”

The commentators disagree, however, in explaining the meaning of the word “*miluim*” and of the usage of the verb *m.l.a.* in this context. Rashi (here in Parashat Teruma) explains that “*miluim*” refers to the way the stones “filled” the depressions in the *choshen*. According to Rashi, the *choshen* was made with twelve such depressions, and the precious stones filled the spaces, and for this reason, these stones are called “*avnei miluim*,” which means “filling stones.” Rashi explains on this basis the Torah’s description of “*mishbetzot*” (28:13) on the *choshen*, referring, in Rashi’s view, to the depressions in the *choshen* that were filled by the stones.

The Ramban disputes Rashi’s explanation, advancing several arguments. One question he raises is that the stones on the *eifod*, too, are described as being surrounded by “*mishbetzot*,” which would mean, according to Rashi, that these stones were likewise inserted in depressions that they “filled.” If this were the case, the Ramban argues, then there should be no reason why the stones of the *choshen* would be called “*avnei miluim*,” referring to their “filling” the depressions in the *choshen*, but the stones of the *eifod* would not be given this name. Instead of naming two separate categories – “*avnei shoham*” and “*avnei miluim*,” the Torah should have simply mentioned “*avnei miluim*,” which would include both kinds of stones.

The Ramban therefore contends that the term “*miluim*” refers to the requirement that stones of the *choshen* be whole and complete. The Gemara in Masekhet Sota (48b) establishes that unlike the stones of the *eifod*, which were chiseled to form the names of the tribes of Israel, the stones of the *choshen* were not etched with an instrument, and instead, the *shamir* worm was used to engrave the names. This is inferred from the word “*be-miluotam*” used in reference to the engraving of the stones of the *choshen* (28:20), which the Gemara understands as implying “wholeness,” to the exclusion of chiseling. (The Ramban also maintains that there were no depressions in the *choshen* that were filled by the stones, and the stones were held in place by prongs.)

The Maharal of Prague, in his *Gur Aryeh*, suggests defending Rashi’s understanding by distinguishing between the stones on the *eifod* and the stones on the *choshen*. Although both sets of stones were set in depressions, the stones of the *choshen* needed to fill the spaces allotted to them. Practically speaking, this meant that the stones of the *choshen* were to be the precise size to fill the entire space, without protruding – a requirement which did not apply to the stones of the *eifod*. This is why the Torah formulates the command to set the stones in the *choshen* with the verb *m.l.a.* – “*u-mileita va miluat even*” – in order to emphasize that the stones must fit precisely in their spaces. And, the Maharal explains, this is why here in Parashat Teruma, when God lists the materials needed for the *Mishkan*, He describes these stones with the term “*avnei miluim*.” God was instructing *Benei Yisrael* to supply twelve stones precisely the size needed to fill the spaces made for them in the breastplate, no bigger or smaller. As here God was listing the necessary materials, He specified that these stones were to be “*avnei miluim*” so the people would know the exact required size of the stones that were needed.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the term “*avnei miluim*” which the Torah uses in Parashat Teruma (25:7) in reference to the twelve precious stones which were set upon the *choshen*, the *kohein gadol*’s breastplate. As we saw, different explanations are given for the meaning of “*miluim*” in this context, and why the stones on the *choshen* (breastplate) were given this name.

The Maharal of Prague, in his *Gur Aryeh*, offers two explanations. After noting Rashi’s view, that “*miluim*” means “filling” and refers to these stones’ “filling” the depressions in the *choshen* in which they were set, the Maharal proceeds to propose that these stones are described as “filling” for a different reason – because they “filled” the *choshen*. The *choshen* was quite small – just a square *zeret*, the span from the pinky to the thumb (Shemot 28:16) – and it was almost entirely covered by the twelve precious stones. According the Maharal, this is the meaning of the word “*miluim*” – that these stones filled the surface of the *choshen*. He adds that this explains why the two stones set on the shoulder straps of the *kohein gadol*’s *eifod* (apron) are not called “*avnei miluim*,” as they were only two stones and thus did not fill the surface of the straps. This interpretation of the term “*avnei miluim*” is also cited by Ibn Ezra (*Peirush Ha-katzar*).

The Maharal then offers an entirely different approach, suggesting that the stones of the *choshen* are called “*avnei miluim*” because they “completed” the breastplate, in the sense that they adorned it. Just as a diamond “completes” a ring, the Maharal explains, the stones of the breastplate “completed” it by turning it into a beautiful, ornate accessory. The term “*avnei miluim*” is not used in reference to the stones of the *eifod*, the Maharal explains, because the *eifod* was a garment, as opposed to the *choshen*, which was worn exclusively as jewelry, for adornment. The stones on the shoulder straps certainly enhanced the *eifod*, but it was “complete” as a functional garment even without them. The *choshen*, however, which was worn as jewelry, was “completed” by the beautiful stones, and so they are called “*avnei miluim*.” The Maharal notes that Onkelos translates “*avnei miluim*” as “*avnei* ***ashlamuta***,” which could be understood to mean “perfecting stones,” referring to the fact that these stones completed the *choshen*.

Ibn Ezra cites a theory that the stones of the *choshen* are called “*avnei miluim*” because they were placed in between the folds of the breastplate. The Torah (28:16) describes the *choshen* as having been “*kaful*” – “folded.” According to the theory mentioned by Ibn Ezra, the stones were placed inside the fold, effectively “filling” the space, and for this reason they are given the name “*avnei miluim*.”

Thursday

We read in Parashat Teruma of the *mizbei’ach*, the wooden, copper-plated altar which was situated in the courtyard outside the *Mishkan* (and, later, outside the *Beit Ha-mikdash*), and upon which the sacrifices were offered. (A second altar, used for incense, was situated inside the *Mishkan*.) The Torah commands building “horns,” or protrusions, on the altar’s four corners (27:2).

Explaining the significance of these protrusions, the *Midrash Tanchuma* (Teruma, 10) comments that God required this feature on the altar “in order to atone for the nation which I have exalted with four ‘horns’.” The Midrash proceeds to cite verses which use the word “*keren*” (“horn”) as an expression of pride and stature in reference to *Am Yisrael* generally (Tehillim 148:14), to the Torah (3:4), to the *kohanim* (Tehillim 92:11), and Jewish kingship (Shemot 34:29). The four “*karnot*” (“horns”) on the altar thus allude to these four aspects of our nation’s special stature in which we take pride.

What connection might there be between the altar and our nation’s “horns,” our unique stature?

Rav Shmuel Borenstein of Sochatchov, in *Sheim Mi-Shmuel*, explains that the purpose of a sacrifice is to bring a person to a sense of humble submission before God. Indeed, as the *Sheim Mi-Shmuel* cites, King David famously pronounces in the Psalm composed after being confronted by the prophet following his sin with Batsheva, “The [ultimate] sacrifices to God are a broken spirit” (Tehillim 51:19). The sacrifices placed on the altar are expressions of the “broken spirit” which we are to experience as a result of our failings and misdeeds. The *Sheim Mi-Shmuel* understands the Midrash to mean that the “horns” on the corners of the altar are intended to temper this feeling of “brokenness” with a sense of pride. At the time we offer sacrifices, expressing our feelings of remorse, guilt and shame, we are shown the “horns,” which urge us to feel proud of our accomplishments. The “broken spirit” engendered by the experience of a sacrifice can become paralyzing and debilitating unless it is counterbalanced by a healthy sense of satisfaction in our service of God. The “horns” on the altar convey the crucial message that our “sacrifices,” our “broken spirits,” our genuine feelings of remorse for our wrongdoing, must be accompanied by feelings of pride, so that our repentance will lead not to incapacitating anguish, but rather to a firm, confidence resolve to grow and improve.

Friday

We read in Parashat Teruma that the planks from which the *Mishkan* was constructed were to be “*atzei shittim omedim*” – literally, “standing acacia wood” (26:15). The Gemara in Masekhet Sukka (45b) cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as interpreting the word “*omedim*” (“standing”) to mean “*she-omedim derekh gedilatan*” – “that they stand the way they grew.” As Rashi explains, the planks were to stand upright, “the bottom down, and the top up.” Rabbi Shimon applies this requirement regarding the planks of the *Mishkan* to all *mitzvot*, establishing that all *mitzva* objects must be upright, in their natural position, during the *mitzva* act. Accordingly, the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 651:2) rules that when one holds the four species on Sukkot, he must hold them such that the top is upward, and the bottom is downward. The *Mishna Berura* adds that even after the fact, if one waved the four species with one of them positioned upside-down, he has not fulfilled the *mitzva*, and must repeat the act, holding all four species properly. Later, the *Mishna Berura* clarifies that although the *etrog* hangs from the tree with its head drooping, falling lower than the end at which it is connected to the tree, nevertheless, we hold it upright, with its head faced upward, as this is how it grows. It is only due to the weight of the fruit as it develops that it falls forward, with its head lower than its stem.

[Rav Dr. Norman Lamm](https://archives.yu.edu/gsdl/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASHcab4.dir/doc.pdf) offers a symbolic explanation for the broader significance underlying this *halakha* of *derekh gedilatan*, that *mitzva* objects must be placed in their natural position, with the top up and the bottom down:

…just as the Shittim wood must be in an upright and natural position, so must Judaism, which is symbolized by that wood, be practiced in a natural manner. And, “a natural manner,” in this sense, means that first things come first. It means that major values are to be given first consideration; it means that the major portions of Judaism are not to be subordinated to the minor and less significant elements…

It means not deceiving ourselves and believing that we are “good Jews” when we practice the minimum… It means not deluding ourselves and not fooling ourselves…

We are to apply the Torah to our lives with the “top up” and the “bottom down” – meaning, granting priority to the Torah’s highest priorities. Our priority scale must reflect that of the Torah. Certainly, we are bound by all our laws and traditions, but we must carefully determine which aspects of Torah life are to be prioritized over others, which are to be emphasized more, and which less. Rav Lamm here criticizes those who feel content taking relatively minor elements of Jewish practice and devoting a great deal of time and attention to them, at the expense of other, more fundamental, aspects of Torah practice. (He emphasizes the particular phenomenon of Jews overemphasizing the recitation of *kaddish* and other customs relevant to bereavement and memorializing the deceased, while neglecting other, far more basic, religious obligations.) As we endeavor to construct our “*Mishkan*” and build our religious lives, we must ensure that our priorities are always properly arranged, that we emphasize that which deserves emphasis, without neglecting the primary in favor of the secondary.

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