

Parashat Terumah 5776, 2016

Tefillah: Soon in the Beit Hamikdash!

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the *mitzvah* to build the *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark):

They [i.e. the Jewish people] shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. (*Sefer Shemot* 25:10, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining and brackets my own)

The Hebrew original of the words in this commandment, “they shall make an ark of acacia wood,” (“*v’asu aron atzai shittim*”) is stated in the plural. Subsequently, however, each of the *pasukim* (verses) pertaining to the Holy Ark’s construction are written in the singular (25:11-17). This leads one to ask, “Why is the overall *mitzvah* of constructing the *Aron Kodesh* written in the plural construct, whereas all of the details pertaining thereto are composed in the singular?” The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) quoted the *Mechilta*, the halachic *Midrash* to *Sefer Shemot*, in his answer to our question, “[The details of the Holy Ark’s construction are written in the singular,] since Moshe [as an individual] had the status of the entire Jewish people.” (This and the following translations, brackets and underlining my own)

The Ramban continued his response with a fascinating insight based upon *Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 34:2:

And it is possible that the text deployed the singular grammatical construct in order to suggest that the entire people were joined together, as if one, in the building of the *Aron Kodesh*, since it was “the holy place of the dwellings of the Most High,” (*Sefer Tehillim* 46:5) and everyone strongly desired to have [a portion in] the Torah [which was represented by their involvement in the *Aron Kodesh*'s construction.]

The statement, “the entire people were joined together, as if one,” is highly reminiscent of the famous *pasuk* (verse) that preceded *Kabbalat ha-Torah* (the Receiving of the Torah): “They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain [Mt. Sinai].” Rashi (1040-1105) noted that the expression, “and Israel encamped,” is found in the singular construct rather than the plural, which we would have expected. He offered the following *Midrash Mechilta*-based explanation: “Heb. יִשְׂרָאֵל, [the singular form, denoting that they encamped there] as one man with one heart [for the purpose of receiving the Torah.]” In light of this interpretation, it appears that the universal participation of our forebears in the construction of the *Aron Kodesh* was nothing less than a reenactment of *Kabbalat ha-Torah*, and a rededication to the Torah and its *Mitzvot*. This, I believe, was clearly demonstrated by their singular and united dedication to providing the Torah and the *Luchot ha-Brit* (Tablets of the Covenant) with their divinely prescribed holy vessel, the *Aron Kodesh*.

The Ramban also noted that personal choice was the driving force behind our nascent nation’s involvement in the construction of the Holy Ark:

One manner of participation in this process may have been the individual's donation of a golden vessel for the *Aron Kodesh*. Alternately, someone may have chosen to directly help Betzalel in his task [of designing and fabricating the Holy Ark]. Then, too, someone may have had special intention [to connect himself/herself to the process of creating the *Aron Kodesh* – even though they did not actually do anything financially or physically.]

This volitional and individual mode of participation in building the *Aron Kodesh* parallels the highly personal nature of the *tefillah* (prayer) that took place within the *Mishkan*, and later on in the *Beit Hamikdash*. My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993) beautifully explicated this point in one of his public *drashot*:

The *Beit ha-Mikdash* as a locus for prayer is one of Judaism's central themes. Even though the Talmud tells us that *tefillah* corresponds to *korbanot* (offerings), there is a fundamental distinction between the two. *Korbanot* may be offered through a proxy, while *tefillah* may not. The difference lies in the fact that the efficacy of a sacrifice is a function of compliance with its halachic norms. If *Halachah* is followed, G-d will accept the sacrifice. On the other hand, *tefillah* must include a personal experience of closeness to G-d. This experience cannot be fulfilled by proxy. Since Judaism defines *tefillah* as standing in the presence of the king, prayer presupposes closeness to G-d. (*Darosh Darash Yosef: Discourses of Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah*, Rabbi Avishai C. David, editor, page 175, underlining my own)

With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may each of us be *zocheh* (merit) to stand before Him in heartfelt prayer in His soon to be rebuilt *Beit Hamikdash*. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom,

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.