

*Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayakhel:*** **Exodus 37:1-29**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 7:21-22**
 B'rit Chadasha: **II Corinthians 9:9**

He overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside

[Exodus 37:2(b)]

Today's Meditation is Haggai 2:15-19;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Avot*, the Prayer of the Fathers

Vaya'as Betzalel et-ha-aron atzei shitim - i.e. And Betzalel built the ark out of shittim wood Exodus 37:1a.

People of earth, get ready - something wonderful beyond comprehension is about to happen! The Holy One is about to establish a tactical command center on this planet. He has invited ordinary human beings to collaborate with Him in this endeavor, and multitudes with a 'willing heart' have responded. The hearts of millions now have both an unforgettable vision of and an intense longing for the Kingdom of Heaven being established on earth – in real time, in their day. The Holy One has called and specially empowered two men – *Betzalel* and *Aholiav* - with His own genius, by actually filling them with His Own Creative Spirit. These men are suddenly exhibiting incredible levels of wisdom, understanding, design, fabrication, and craftsmanship. To Moshe He gave the blueprint and specification sheets for the command center. He is now releasing supernatural skillsets to all the volunteers. Once this beachhead and command center is established, the great invasion will begin - and the earth and its population will never be the same.

What the Holy One had commissioned us to build as his tactical command center in this realm is none other than a scale model of the courts and chambers that He inhabits in Heaven. The blueprint He laid out for us in the *Mish'kan* Discourse [recorded in Torah as Exodus 25:1 – 31:17] is thus not only intended to rock the world of a couple of million redeemed slaves who lived 4000 years ago; the pattern He gave us at Sinai is intended to become part of every redeemed soul's DNA forever. Building this tactical command center 'on earth as it is in Heaven' in our appointed time to walk upon the earth, and bequeathing it in pure, unadulterated form to the generation that follows us, is part of every redeemed son or daughter of the Covenant's life-mission. It is the great privilege – and obligation – of every one of us keep reproducing the items the Holy One included in His 'Will-be-Done,

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Kingdom-Come' pattern in each of our respective spheres of influence - our homes and family, our neighborhood, our workplaces, our communities, our nations, and everywhere the sole of our foot treads, our voices are heard, or the strokes of our keyboard are read. This is our calling. This is our mission. This is the reason we are alive.

The Camp of the Redeemed has caught the vision. Every corner of the camp is abuzz with Divinely inspired and choreographed activity. Construction is underway – and, piece by piece, the Mish'kan Blueprint is springing to life. The component parts of the exo-skeleton are pretty much complete. Now it is time for everyone's attention to turn to furnishings for the *Mish'kan's* inner chambers. First priority: building the *Aron HaKodesh* [*kedusha* infused and radiating 'ark' that will house the two tablets of testimony the Holy One gave Moshe on Mount Sinai] and its glorious golden *kaporet* [*i.e. the one-of-a-kind cover that the Holy One directed Moshe to adorn with two cherubim facing each other, with their wings outstretched and their eyes cast downward toward the ark and its contents*].

***At The Core of Your Being Is There An Aron Ha-Qodesh?
And if So, What is the Substance and Quality of its Contents?***

The first of the seven furnishings constructed by the people in real time was the *aron ha-kodesh* [*i.e. the holy ark*]. Torah starts off the 'Narrative of the Furnishings' by telling us: ***Vaya'as Betzalel et-ha-aron atzei shittim*** - *i.e. and Betzalel made the ark of acacia wood*. Wow! How does one go about building the Throne upon which the Creator of the Universe will rest? How exactly does one craft a treasure chest worthy of holding the most precious and costly artifact on earth – the stone tablets upon which the Wisdom of Heaven was inscribed for man in the very handwriting of our Maker? What an honor it was to be chosen for this task – but what a responsibility the assignment carried!

The ark did not just magically appear – or pop out of some mold. It had to be constructed, according to the Heavenly Blueprint, piece by piece – mortared board by mortared board, and sheet of hammered gold by sheet of hammered gold. First, Betzalel had to select from all the timbers the people had brought the best pieces of *etz shittim* – *i.e. richly resinous wood* - available. Only the best would be fitting for the container that would hold the precious tablets of testimony on which were inscribed the Holy One's words of life, health, and peace. Then Betzalel had to measure, mark, and cut each of the pieces of precious wood. Then he had to cut the mortises that would hold the pieces together. Finally he had to carefully conjoin all these pieces – not only to form the ark's four sides, but also to form the ark's bottom, or floor. It was on that bottom or floor that the holy tablets of testimony would actually rest.

Where did Betzalel do all this intricate work? It had to be a place with adequate lighting so he could see clearly enough to make the intricate cuttings and carvings. What tools did he use? There were no power tools. The tools he used would seem to us crude and primitive. He would have used a *rule* or *measuring line* of some kind. He would have used a *line* – *i.e.* a *marking tool or stylus* [there were no pencils]. He would have used a *plane* – *i.e.* a scraping tool to shave off excess wood. He would have used a *cutting tool* – probably a series of flints fitted side by side into a wood frame at uneven intervals, resembling a modern saw [see Isaiah 10:15]. He would have used some kind of *hammer*, probably made of hewn stone. He would have used an *awl*, or boring instrument. He would have used a *chisel*, probably made of bronze. And for the gold overlay he would have used a *heat source*, a *mold*, an *engraving tool* and a *polishing tool*.

Close your eyes, Beloved. Can you see all this work being done? Can you imagine the excitement in the camp? Can you imagine Moshe's sense of anticipation? Can you imagine what was going on in Betzalel's mind as he contemplated what was going to be placed in this ark, and how important this piece of furniture was going to be to his people – and to the people of the Holy One - in all subsequent generations?

Mah Atah Ro'eh – What Do You See?

In Heaven there are precious scrolls written that record the plans, designs, and decrees of the Holy One our God. If His Kingdom is to come, and His Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven, there must be something here on earth that corresponds to the scrolls. What is the earthly reflection of the scrolls? It is the tablets of testimony. Now do you see why the ark is so important? Now do you see why the thought of it stirs our hearts? The ark was designed to function as the ultimate *treasure chest* of earth. Its assigned function was to house the most valuable and essential item in the world. What was/is the most valuable and essential item in the world? It was/is the set of stone tablets upon which the Sinaitic revelation² stream were recorded for posterity. As Adam received the very breath and life force of the Holy One in the Garden, so the ark received the very Words of the Holy One at Sinai.

To the Redeemed of the Holy One, the most valuable thing in the world is never gold, silver, or bronze. It is never artwork, precious stones, jewels, or garments. It is never sheep, goats, or oxen, horses, cattle or camels. It is never carts or wagons, cars, planes or spaceships. It is never a weapons cache or a food supply. It is never a flag, a shrine, a religious symbol, or any thing made by human hands. It is not an

² Later in the Wilderness Journey, the ark would also serve as a repository for a jar of supernaturally preserved manna, and for the rod of Aharon.

idea, a concept, a philosophy, and ideology, a religion, a cause, or any other thing conceived by the human mind. It is never even our spouses or children – or for that matter our own lives. To the Redeemed of the Holy One the most important thing in the world is the Word our Creator has spoken over us. Some call us people of the Book, but that is really a misnomer. It is not really the Book that drives us. The Book could be taken from us. The Book could be confiscated and burned by the enemies of our Bridegroom-King. It has happened many times before. It will happen again. That has never stopped us, and it *will never* stop us. What cannot be taken from us, you see, are *the Words of the Book*. Those Words carry the life force and energy of the Holy One Himself. They are the representation of His Character, His Identity, and His Persona. They are part of us. They are wired into our DNA. They are to us a life force – HIS life force - whether or not we have access to – or can read them in - a ‘Holy Book’. We are the *People of the Holy One’s D’varim Chayim – Words of Life*. The *Creator of the Universe spoke over us at Sinai*. The words He spoke there declare our new identity, describe our glorious mission, and establish our destiny to collectively become the Bride and co-regent of, and faithfully administrate the government of, the Bridegroom-King of Heaven. As the Psalmist said: ***Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Torah of the Holy One.*** Psalm 119:1.

How did the actual construction process proceed under Betzalel? Torah does not tell us what went on in Betzalel’s mind as he did this important work. It just says:

Vayetzapeihu zahav tahor mibayit umichutz
He covered it with a layer of pure gold on the inside,

vaya'as lo zer zahav saviv
and he made a gold rim for it all around.

[Exodus 37:2]

First Betzalel had to select from all the timbers the people had brought the best pieces of shittim wood available. Only the best would be fitting for the container that would hold the precious tablets of testimony on which were inscribed the Holy One’s words of life, health, and peace. Then Betzalel had to measure, mark, and cut each of the pieces of precious wood. Then he had to cut the mortises that would hold the pieces together. Finally he had to carefully conjoin all these pieces – not only to form the ark’s four sides, but also to form the ark’s bottom, or floor. It was on that bottom or floor that the most precious gift the Redeemed Community possessed - the holy tablets inscribed by the ‘Finger of God’ - would rest. These tablets, containing the prophetic empowerments and life-instructions of the Creator Himself, served as the spiritual rudder and center of gravity of the camp of the Redeemed – as they do for us today. As the Psalmist declared: ***Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*** Psalm 119:11.

Betzalel also had to patiently mold, fashion, and affix to the aron four gold rings. It was through these rings that the carrying poles, which Betzalel carved out of shittim wood, would be placed to ready the ark for transport. How important these rings – and this method of transporting the ark – would turn out to be! Wherever the Holy One leads us in our journeys, because of the ring and pole system the ark will continue to serve as our rudder, and the instructions for living the Holy One caused to be recorded for posterity on the tablets of testimony will continue to serve as both our community’s power source and our individual and collective navigation system.

Connecting With the Ark of the Covenant That Resides Within Us All

Remember that when the Holy One introduced the *Mish’kan* Discourse He began with a declaration of His ultimate purpose. He said to Moshe: ***And have them craft/build*** [Hebrew, *asah*] ***Me a Mik’dash*** [i.e. a place flowing/pulsing in holiness] ... ***in order that I may abide*** [Hebrew, *shakan*] ***in them*** [Hebrew, *b’tochem*]. The ultimate goal of the Holy One was not that He who made the Heavens and the Earth would dwell in a physical structure made with human hands – but that He would abide in us, His chosen people. His Grand Plan for the Redemption of mankind and Creation involved Him putting on the flesh of the very species through which the Fall had come – and inspiring, empowering, and leading a willing remnant of that species to reconnect with the identity, the mission, and the glorious destiny for which He designed mankind, fashioned him out of clay, and breathed His own *breath* and *life-force* into him³.

Shaul of Tarsus wrote: ***“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*** I Corinthians 3:16. He also wrote: ***You are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they will be My people.*** II Corinthians 6:16. If this is true, and you are truly the temple of God, you must have a rich repository like the ark within you. In the deepest, most secret places of your soul – the places where desires are formed, delights are embraced, emotions are considered and released, decisions are made, plans are formed, responses and reactions to temptations, challenges, irritations, provocations, insults, and accusations are generated, each human being in covenant with the Holy One should have a beautiful and finely-

³ The Holy One stated His purpose for the creation of man in Genesis 1:26, as follows: ***Let Us make man in Our tzel*** [i.e. to be our earthly shadow], ***according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*** The Holy One then breathed His own breath and life-force into man. As Genesis 2:7 puts it: ***And Adonai Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils nish’mat chayim*** [i.e. the pant of life]; ***and man began to function as a nefesh chayim*** [i.e. a living soul, consisting of mind, will, and emotions].

crafted *treasure chest* – constantly being filled with the Living Words of the Holy One. Is what is housed in that repository in your soul pure truth from the very mouth and heart of the Holy One, Dear Reader? Or has it become mixed with and polluted by the doctrines, philosophies, ideologies, and programs movements, religions, denominations, sects, offenses, and crusades of fallen men?

Watching As Atonement Assumes A Physical Form Before Our Eyes

If watching the building the ark of the Covenant stirred our ancestors' hearts, what must the task of forming and shaping and constructing the beautiful witness of eternal atonement – often called the 'mercy seat' - have been like? We are told that Betzalel "***made the cover [Hebrew *kaporet*] of pure gold; two and a half cubits was its length and a cubit and a half its width. He made two cherubim of beaten gold; he made them of one piece at the two ends of the mercy seat.*** Exodus 36:6-7.

In case you haven't noticed, or thought about it, Dear Reader, ***that is a lot of gold!*** Two and a half cubits [i.e. the length] is about 45 inches. That means about 3.75 feet long. One and a half cubits [i.e. the width] is about 27 inches. That is 2 ¼ feet long. So this required a slab of gold a minimum of almost 8 ½ square feet in area – not factoring in either the *thickness of the cover itself* or *the gold used to form the two spread-winged cherubim that faced each other upon the beautiful kaporet.*

***The cherubim spread out their wings above,
and covered the mercy seat with their wings.
They faced one another;
the faces of the cherubim were set toward the mercy seat.***
[Exodus 36:6-9]

This molded piece of gold in the shape of facing *cherubim*, where the blood of atonement would be sprinkled year after year, represented the highest hope of the Covenant, the meeting of the greatest need of all mankind. What is that need? The need for Divine mercy, Divine forgiveness, Divine covering, Divine atonement, and Divine purification. The *kaporet* is the piece de resistance of the entire 'on earth as it is in Heaven' vision. Think about it. In Genesis 3:24, what are we told was set in place by the Holy One at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to guard the 'way to the tree of life'? Torah tells us the Holy One ***placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.*** The *cherubim* on the *kaporet* testify that *there is a way to return to the Garden of Eden and the tree of life.* They testify as well – if we are listening - that atonement has been made for the sin of mankind, and the pathway back to the Garden, the Tree of Life, and intimate, unencumbered, Garden-like communion with the Holy One, is set out in the tablets of Testimony that reside in the ark. This is the message of '*Yom Kippur in a Box*'.

The time is right for this revelation. We have, at this point in Torah, finally learned that the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov is *a Compassionate and Loving and Covenant-Faithful and Sin-Cleansing and Life-Restoring God.* We have learned that although we – like Adam and Chava – have been caught red-handed in disgusting thoughts, conversations, and behaviors our Creator nevertheless looks upon us with *compassion*, and with *love*, and with a depth of

unshakeable *covenant-faithfulness* which we cannot even fathom, much less ever hope to reciprocate.

How have we have learned these things? We have learned these things by *experiencing them both personally and corporately*. Over the past two *parshot* of Torah we have experienced what it feels like to be gloriously *forgiven, redeemed, and restored* by the very Betrothed Bridegroom we so cavalierly abandoned in favor of pursuing our own ideas, indulging our own physical urges and appetites, and deifying our own wills.

We are indeed finally ready to talk about atonement now - because *we not only know we have sinned much - but we know we have also been forgiven much*.

Next Project: The Table

After completing the *aron* and the *kaporet*, Ruach Elohim turned the attention of Betzalel, Aholiav, and their excited band of inspired craftsmen to the task of replicating the *beautiful shulchan* [table] that Moshe had seen in the ‘Holy Place’ as he was touring the Holy One’s Beauty Realm. The original, which Moshe had seen, was the repository for the ‘Bread of Heaven’. The earthly replica that Betzalel and crew were assigned to build, the Holy One had made it clear, was to be *two cubits* [i.e. about 36 inches] long, *one cubit* [i.e. about 18 inches] wide, and *one and a half cubits* [i.e. about 24 inches] high. The bread that it was being designed to hold would be unleavened – corresponding to, and reminding everyone of, the themes of the annual Divine Appointment of *Chag ha-Matzah* [the ‘Feast’ of Unleavened Bread’].

Just like the *aron*, the table was to be formed of wood. Special pieces of fresh cut *shittim* lumber had to be carefully selected. Then Betzalel had to cut the pieces to size and plane them to smoothness. The made-to-order boards then had to be mortised together with tender, loving care – exactly according to the pattern Moshe was shown in the Heavenlies. The finest nuggets of gold remaining after the stunning, full talent *kaporet project* then had to be hammered thin and cut into form fitting overlay sheets.

Imagine the melody from the song of the Sea being hummed by the workers. Imagine the excited conversations. Imagine the excitement of seeing the project of a lifetime – indeed, of all time – coming together, piece-by-piece, before your eyes! Who wants to design the rings that will be attached to the table for transportation? All we have been told is that they are to be made of gold and that they are to be affixed to the table in a position that will support the weight of the structure as it is being carried. The size of the rings, and any decoration? That was up to the craftsmen. So was the design and styling of the golden bread molds,

trays, and utensils that would be used with the Table. The basic design elements were established by the Heavenly blueprint; but the artistry in the finishing details was all left up to us. The idea is to bring Heaven to earth; and the Beauty Realm into the Fleshly Realm. Best consult the *Ruach Elohim* – not just come up with an impressive design that one saw once in a palace or storehouse in Egypt!

Questions for Today's Study

1. All the directions that Betzalel was given for the ark were the physical dimensions of the box, the quantity of gold to be used in molding the cover, and the basic idea of having the top made of two gold cherubim with wings touching. How do you think he decided the rest of the details - such as how the boards would be fitted together and what the cherubim's features and wings and faces would look like?

2. In the Haftarah verses for today Hiram of Tyre is doing pretty much the same thing Betzalel and Aholiav were anointed to do with regard to the *Mish'kan* – except that much of what Hiram [the master of Phoenician architecture] builds is *not part of the blueprint given to Moshe on Har Sineh*, but is Phoenician-style decoration of the Temple of Shlomo.

[A] List the items Hiram crafted/constructed in the order the writer of I Kings indicates he made them;

[B] What things were included in the Temple that weren't in the Tabernacle?

[C] What were the *Jachin* and *Boaz*? [The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols and Smith's Bible Dictionary are likely sources for this information].

[D] Did the Holy One command the addition of these things?

[E] Why do you think Shlomo allowed Hiram to incorporate these Phoenician symbols into the Temple of the Holy One?

3. The Apostolic Scripture reading I have chosen for today is a verse from Shaul's instructions to the Believing Community at Corinth. Shaul says:

As it is written:

***"He has dispersed abroad; He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever."***

[A] What verse from Psalms does Shaul quote from in this verse?

[B] What is the Hebrew word translated as 'righteousness' in the Psalm that Shaul quotes to the Corinthians? What is the first usage in Torah of that Hebrew word? And what do you think that word means?

*May Messiah continue to construct His Mish'kan in us
according to His most excellent craftsmanship and skill.
May we each be mansions in His Father's House.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Haggai 2:15-19

*Now, please consider from this day and backward,
before a stone was laid on a stone in the temple of the Holy One.
Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures,
there were only ten.
When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty,
there were only twenty.*

***I struck you with blight, mildew, and hail
in all the work of your hands;
yet you didn't turn to me,' says the Holy One.***

***'Consider, please, from this day and backward,
from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month,
since the day that the foundation of the Holy One's temple was laid,
consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn?
Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree
haven't brought forth.
From this day will I bless you.'"***