

**Parshat Terumah:  
On Community**  
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Parshat Teruma describes the construction of the *mishkan* (tabernacle), which will become the central gathering place for *Bn'ei Yisrael*. The *mishkan*, along with its vessels, can be seen as a symbol for the ideal community to stand in service before God. And the *aron*, the ark which resides inside the *kadosh kodashim* (holies of holies) is the heart of the community. The Torah's instruction for the building of the *aron*, which houses the tablets of the Ten Commandments can be seen as a metaphor for striving for the ideal community. A community that is built on the ethic of harmony and moderation.

The *aron* as an allegory for the ideal community can be seen within the verses in four ways.

First, the measurements used to describe the *aron* are all in fractions:

[The *aron*] should be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and half wide (שמות כה:י) (Shemot 25:10)

The decimals are purposeful. The lack of whole numbers imply that just as the measurements are lacking, so too, we are each a little deficient. An ideal community is one where no one person is entirely perfect, entirely whole, thereby creating room for people to complete one another.

Second, the instructions to build the ark are in the plural:

they shall make me an ark (25:10) (כה:י)

As opposed to the singular tense with other instructions:

*you* shall make me a table (vs. 23)... or *you* shall make me a lampstand (vs. 31) (כה:כג) ... ועשית מנרת (כה:לא)

The ark is meant to be built by the entire community, giving everyone an equal opportunity to contribute. The Midrash Tanhuma (*Va-Yak'heil*, 8) explains: The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded all of Israel to make the ark so that no one would have an excuse for boasting over another person, saying, "I contributed more to the ark..."

An ideal community is one where we acknowledge that no one person's contribution is better than another's.

The third metaphor of an ideal community is the way the *aron* is carried. The *badim* (poles) that carried the other *keylim* (vessels), like the *shulchan* (table) and *menorah* were not permanently attached—they could be easily removed. However, the staves of the *aron* were permanently attached, never to be removed. Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994) explains: "The Ark, which symbolizes the Torah, is essentially made to be carried from place to place. Therefore the poles remained fixed to it. The Torah is not bound to any particular place. It is the 'Torah of Man' (*zot torat ha-adam*) wherever he may be. Therefore the Ark is made in such a way as to show that by its very nature it can be carried from place to place" (*He'arot le-Parshat Ha-Shavua*, Hebrew University Press, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 56).

In an ideal community, the Torah is not meant to be seen as stagnant. It moves with the people.

Finally, if one were to weigh the ark—with its double overlay of gold, inside and out, the tablets of stone, both the broken and intact, the *kruvim* (decorative angels above the ark), and the *parochet* (curtains) it must have been extremely heavy. And yet, it was carried, seamlessly, by four ark bearers. This could not have been done by natural means, and this is apparently the reason behind the Talmudic saying: "The Ark bore its bearers" (Sotah 35a). נשא ארון את נושאי.

Adherence to Torah, at times, can be burdensome. It is difficult to carry alone. However, when carried with the community, the Torah will ultimately carry you.

And so, the four ingredients for creating a moderate and inclusive community are:

- Step 1: Acknowledging that no one is perfect. We all have deficiency, and must rely on each other to make us complete.
- Step 2: No one person is better than anyone else; we all equally merit receiving and participating in Torah.
- Step 3: The Torah is not meant to be stagnant, it is meant to move with people. The very root of the word *halakha* is *halakh*, to walk.
- Step 4: When the above is embraced by community, then the burden of the Torah will be lifted, and the laws and values held within will help us soar.

It is this community, whose values align with the essence of the *aron*, that I want to be part of. A diverse community that strives to welcome all Jews, rather than bear the ark alone. A community that can recognize that we are at times deficient, thereby creating space to nourish our intellectual and spiritual curiosity. One where we know that one of us is no better than the other. One that is committed to a halakha that walks with us, while still holding steadfastly to its principles and values.



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