

Parshat Trumah, *Ma Nishma*, Leffell School Newsletter, Fall 2020

When I need a little boost these days, I think of our seniors in Poland and Israel, walking together through Jewish history. Hearing from them as they connect something they are seeing with a concept they learned at school is a highlight of my winter. I imagine them carrying a suitcase filled with lessons, traditions and values that we have given them. I know that we are tasked, as a community, to fill it with quality goods, instead of just “baggage.”

Having values that we can carry with us is part and parcel (pun intended) of our tradition, tracing back to the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle which traveled with us through the wilderness. In this week’s *Parshat Trumah*, we learn of the commandment to build a sanctuary for God to dwell among us. In the midst of the instructions about what will lie within the *Mishkan* is one powerful but unusual detail. The poles on the *aron*, the ark at the center of the *Mishkan*, should stay attached to the *aron* forever. They should never be removed.



Shmot 25: 13 And you shall make poles of acacia wood and you shall overlay them with gold. *14* And you shall bring the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. *15* The poles of the ark shall be in the rings; they shall not be removed from it.

Why does the Torah bother with this detail? What is so important about the poles that they are worth mentioning? And further, as the Chassidic Master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev asks, “why did the Torah add this restrictive clause just to the poles used to carry the ark, and not to the poles

used to carry the Table, for instance?”

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak sees this commandment--directed for the carrying of the ark only-- as conveying the essential nature of the Torah and the life which it demands of us.

“The holy ark represented the totality of all the commandments [as it contained the Tablets within it]. In order to symbolize the concept that Torah is indispensable to the Jewish people at any time day or night, Sabbath or weekday, the poles which served as the supports for carrying the ark on the shoulders of the priests, therefore had to remain firmly attached to the rings that enabled them to perform their function.” (Kedushat Levi, *Shmot 25: 15*)

In other words, the ark had to be ready to be lifted at any moment. It had to be easily transportable, like the Torah itself.

In his book *Burnt Book*, French psychoanalyst Marc Alain Ouaknin suggests this as one of the central conditions for the ark. The poles must stay in the ark because the Torah itself has to move. It must be transportable, ever ready to be lifted and carried to the next part of our journey. The Torah must move with us, wherever we go.

This idea might offer us a useful measure of a Jewish education. Are we giving our students Torah that is transportable? Are we leaving the poles in the ark for them? Are we helping them to find ways of carrying their own traditions forward? I picture our seniors, carrying the Torah we have taught them through Poland, Israel and into the rest of their lives. If they put down the “suitcase” of holy experiences-- or their own ark of the Covenant-- for a moment or two, may we make it easy to pick up again. And may we fill it with experiences that inspire them to pick it up often, again and again throughout their lives. Shabbat Shalom.