"And they shall make an Aron of shittim wood." (25:10)

Bnei Yisrael were enjoined to build the *Aron Hakodesh* prior to the *Mishkan* itself. Why was this? *Horav M. Gifter, Shlita.* suggests the following reason for this. The *Aron*, which held the *Torah*, represents the *Torah* as the foundation of our people. Because we have the *Torah*, Hashem chooses to rest the Divine Presence in our midst. Consequently, we must orient our priorities in accordance with the *Torah*.

Horav Gifter notes that the *Aron* was built even prior to the *Mizbayach,* Altar. The *Mizbayach* denotes sacrifice and its derivative, *mesiras nefesh,* self-sacrifice for Hashem and His *mitzvos*. He explains that only through *Torah* can the parameters of *mesiras nefesh* be clearly defined. The clarity of vision which evolves from total *Torah* study and scholarship structures one's perspective concerning self- sacrifice. Without *Torah's* guidance, intelligence and reason give way to the irrational and absurd. Thus, self-sacrifice can become an act of murder and destruction.

This idea may be extended to all areas of endeavor. The *Torah* perspective must guide all of activity, even concerning *mitzvos* which are "humanitarian" in nature. *Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, z.l.*, used to explain the *Mishnah* in *Peah*, which crowns *Torah* study above all *mitzvos*, including wonderful acts of lovingkindness. The *Mishnah* enumerates many noble *mitzvos*, such as honoring parents, doing acts of kindness, coming to the *Bais Hamedrash* on time, and visiting the sick. It ends with the phrase okuf sdbf vru, sunk,u *"and Torah study is "equal" to all."* The word sdbf, actually is translated as "opposite" rather than equal.

In light of this, *Horav* Katz explains that every *mitzvah* must be "held up" opposite and performed in light of the *Torah*. *Torah* must mold the personality and total perspective of a Jew. His philosophy of life must coincide with the *Torah's* philosophy of life! Only then does he satisfy the mandate of okuf sdbf vru, sunk,u.