

## Betzalel made the Aron of Shittim wood, two and a half amos its length, an amah and a half its width. (37:1)

One of the miracles that occurred both in the *Mishkan* and in the *Bais Hamikdash* was: *Makom ha'Aron ein min ha'middah*; "The place occupied by the Aron HaKodesh was not included in its measurement." This means that the Aron did not take up any space. The Kodesh HaKedoshim, Holy of Holies, was ten amos, cubits, by ten amos. The Aron was two and a half amos by one and a half amah by one and a half amah. When the Aron was brought into the Kodesh HaKedoshim and the space from its width and length was measured, every side of it allowed for a space of five amos. This was a special miracle in which a room that was 10x10, yet contained a "box" that was 2½ by 1½, still allowed for 5 amos of space on each side (a total of 10 amos, which was the size of the room). In other words, the Aron did not take up any space. Bearing this in mind, the commentators ask a compelling question: What is of greater spiritual significance: the Aron or the Luchos, Tablets, which were inside of it? – Or, alternatively, which one possesses a greater degree of kedushah, holiness: the Aron or the Luchos? Certainly, the response to this question is: the Luchos. They are the reason and purpose for the Aron. So, if the Aron did not occupy any space, then surely the Luchos, which maintained a higher degree of kedushah, should not have occupied any space. We know, however, that this is not true, for Chazal teach that the Luchos took up just about every inch of space within the Aron. [There is a dispute whether there remained one tefach, handbreadth, for the Sefer Torah.] Why did the Aron "deserve" a miracle, whereas the Luchos did not?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, cites a powerful explanation. Chazal teach that the Aron serves as a metaphor for the *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. The following *pasuk* reflects an example, *Mibayis u'mibachutz tetzapenu*, "From within and without, it should be covered with gold" (*Shemos* 25:11). (The Aron was actually comprised of three units, an outer gold shell, which contained an inner wooden box that contained within it another gold box.) This teaches us that the Torah scholar must be *tocho k'baro*, his external self must express his true inner essence.

Having said this, let us analogize the *talmid chacham* to the Aron. The Torah scholar is wholly devoted to Torah; his entire essence is subsumed by it. Thus, the Torah scholar (aptly compared to the Aron) takes up no space. He views himself as a nonentity, as nothing – so great is his humility. The Torah within him, however, takes up every bit of him. No area within the Torah scholar is devoid of Torah. This is the definition of *kulo Torah*, all (of him is filled with) Torah. The more Torah, the less "himself."

Horav Eliyahu Mishkovsky, zl, was the distinguished Rav of Kfar Chassidim. Ten years before the saintly Rav left this world, he was taken gravely ill. It became so serious that when he lay comatose in Haifa's Rambam Hospital, the physician in charge of his care declared, "We are done. There is no more we can do." He despaired of seeing the Rav regain consciousness and be cured. On *Erev Yom Kippur*, Horav Chaim Greinman visited and related that he had spoken with a top neurologist

at Hadassah Hospital in Yerushalayim concerning the *Rav's* diagnosis. The neurologist claimed that if the *Rav* would survive the ambulance trip from Rambam to Hadassah, he felt that he could save him.

After some discussion, the decision was made to make the move. The comatose patient was driven in an ambulance (outfitted with the necessary therapeutic accouterments for keeping him alive) by two EMS technicians, accompanied by *Rav* Greinman and *Rav* David Mishkovsky, the patient's brother. In midst of the journey (somewhere between Haifa and Yerushalayim) *Rav* Eliyahu opened his eyes, looked at *Rav* Chaim and said, "*Nu, Rav Chaim, tell me a chiddush, original Torah thought.*" Understandably, *Rav* Chaim was in a state of shock and could not speak. *Rav* Eliyahu asked again, "*Rav Chaim, I asked you for a chiddush.*" The patient was totally oblivious to his condition and his surroundings. After asking one more time for a *chiddush* and receiving no response, he said, "Fine, so I will say a *chiddush*," which he proceeded to do. After a few minutes of reciting a passage of *Talmud*, a question, an answer, a logical conclusion, followed by a penetrating analysis, the patient closed his eyes and lay his head down. Was this a miracle? Probably. Was this a manifestation of a person who was *kulo Torah*? – Certainly.

*Chazal* (*Horayos* 13a) teach: Shlomo *Hamelech* writes (*Mishlei* 3:15) concerning the Torah, *Yekarah hee miPeninim*, "It is more precious than pearls." This means that the Torah (of a Torah scholar) is more precious (precedes) than even a *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, who enters the innermost chamber (*Kodesh HaKedoshim lifnai v'lifnim*) in the *Bais Hamikdash*. This refers to the *halachah* that a *mamzer talmid chacham*, Torah scholar of illegitimate pedigree, takes precedence even over a *Kohen Gadol*. Torah is the greatest honorarium. *Rav* Karlinstein quotes the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, who explains why Torah is more precious than pearls. The *Kohen Gadol* is the only one who is permitted to enter the Holy of Holies on the holiest day of the year – *Yom Kippur*. While he is there, he performs the *Ketores*, Incense, service which consists of placing a pan with burning coals on the floor of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim* as he stands *bein haBadim*, between the Poles, that jutted out of the *Aron*. During the Second *Bais Hamikdash*, when the *Aron* was no longer extant, he placed the pan with the coals on the *Even Shesiyah*, foundation stone, which took the place of the *Aron*, for this Priestly service.

The *Kohen* was permitted to stand only between the *Badim* – no more. He could go no further. The *talmid chacham*, by virtue of his study, enters into the *Aron HaKodesh* by clinging to the Torah; he becomes one with the Torah. Indeed, he resides within the *Aron HaKodesh*. This is the precious achievement of a *talmid chacham*, something for which even the *Kohen Gadol* cannot aspire – unless he is a *talmid chacham*.

In order to explicate the concept of *kulo Torah*, I cite from *Horav* Pinchas Teitz's introduction to his 1989 edition of *Tzafnas Paaneach – Bava Metzia*, where he renders a personal appreciation of the venerable *Rogatchover Gaon, zl*. "It is not within the power of a man's pen to describe the gigantic character of the genius of the ages, the *Rogatchover*... In his entire perception and his entire being, there was only Torah. The Torah filled the cosmos he inhabited. This does not mean

that he was cut off from the world of action – he knew and understood all the events and problems of the world and all that was happening with a profound, clear knowledge – but his approach was to examine everything through the Torah. In every case, he tried to penetrate to the *halachic* essence... In all events of the world, he saw only Jewish laws... We think of three dimensions for physical matter: length, width and height. He innovated that everything has a fourth dimension, the dimension of *halachah* that is found in everything... He was unable to distract himself from concentrating on the Torah for even a moment. The Torah was always before his eyes... He could see what he had learned – not just remember it. There was never a hint of sadness on his countenance, and, even when he endured pain, an expression of joy and contentment never left his face." *Kulo Torah*.