

They shall place upon it a tachash – hide covering, and spread a cloth entirely of turquoise wool over it. (4:6)

The *Ramban* observes that in the case of the other *klei haMishkan*, vessels of the *Mishkan*, they were first covered with wool and then covered over with the *tachash* – hide. The *Aron HaKodesh* was singular in that it was first covered with the *tachash* – hide and then was covered with the *techeiles*, turquoise wool. *Chazal* describe *techeiles* as having a color similar to that of the sea, similar to the sky which symbolizes the purity of Heaven. Thus, (according to *Ramban*) it was placed above the *tachash* – to call attention to the purity and sanctity of the *Aron/Torah*.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, offers another perspective on the *Aron's* distinction vis-à-vis its coverings. *Techeiles* and *tachash* represent distinct concepts. The blue color of *techeiles* makes people think of Heaven, the place of Hashem's *Kisei HaKavod*, Throne of Glory. Thus, *techeiles* denotes faith in Hashem. *Tachash*, on the other hand, focuses on material/physical beauty (the *tachash* – hide-was unusually beautiful) which encourages us to enhance our *mitzvah* observance by cloaking them in physical beauty. [Understandably, we perform *mitzvos* because they are the *tzivui Hashem*, command of G-d, but people will find *mitzvah* observance more attractive and desirable if the *mitzvah* involves an element of aesthetic beauty. We perform *mitzvos* due to our commitment rooted in faith in Hashem. This does not mean that we cannot enhance our performance.]

Thus, the uppermost cover of the *Aron*, which is visible to the eye, should be *techeiles*, which calls to mind unarguable, accomplished faith in Hashem. This sets the standard and tone for how we are to view *mitzvos*. Only then can we cover the other vessels – the other *mitzvos* – with *tachash* – hide, representing beauty and enhancement of *mitzvos* which make their performance more inviting.

Horav Zev Weinberg, zl, takes a basic approach to the variation of the covers between the *Aron* and other vessels. The *Aron* is the receptacle in which the Torah is housed. The Torah is our spiritual guide. As such, its inner beauty, the beauty of the *mitzvos*, the beauty of living as a Jew, is what should be emphasized – not externals. *Techeiles* personifies a beauty of sorts – a beauty of purity of action, of deed, of service to Hashem. The Torah's greatness lies in its inner aesthetics, not in its external beauty. When we feel the need to couch Torah in external elegance, we diminish its inner sublimity. Torah's radiance shines from within. Does one *daven* better, with greater and more intense fervor, in a magnificent, spacious and elegant appealing *shul*? How many of us grew up *davening* in *shtieblach* that were situated in old, dark basements and storefronts? Those of us who have been *davening* in hot (in the summer) and cold (in the winter) tents (during the pandemic) have neither felt shortchanged, nor our *davening* lacking. On the other hand, this does not mean that beauty is denigrated. The significance of the *Kohanim's* vessel's, the *Klei haMishkan* was not diminished by showing their beauty. Torah, however, requires the motif to project its majesty.

We have been in exile for too long. As a result of our persecution, poverty, always being on the run, we have neglected the aesthetics in our service to Hashem. The world has not wanted to see Jews who dress better than they do, have nicer homes and cars than they do, and have places of worship which are tributes to the finest, most talented architects. We have been instructed to keep our collective heads low and our mouths silent. Today, *baruch Hashem*, the Jewish community is thriving and, in some instances, has lost sight of its age-old parameters. While the pursuit of a pleasant, aesthetically-pleasing environment is wonderful and can, in some instances, enhance our service to Hashem, we should not allow ourselves to fall into the abyss of excessive emphasis on external grandeur. This will ultimately do harm to the inner dimension of our service.

A *shul* is a house of worship because of the prayers and supplications that are rendered there. Just because it looks like a *shul* does not make it a place of worship. Physical structure can expand one's spiritual consciousness, but if his focus is on the scenery, his prayers will lose their urgency and intensity. Thus, the colors of the *tachash* – hide overlapped the pure color of *techeiles*. Modesty and purity have a greater impact on inspiring, heartfelt prayer than large, imposing, art-deco edifices.