

## Betzalel made the Aron of Shittim/Acacia wood ... He covered it with gold within and without. (37:1,2)

The *Aron Hakodesh* represents Torah and its disseminators. Torah is the lifeblood of our people. Thus, the *Aron* received special status within the framework of the *Mishkan*. It was a box constructed of wood, which was covered inside and outside with gold. All one saw was the gold. While the Torah scholar receives enormous esteem (or should) from the *ha'mon am*, general community, the wood is a reminder to him not to allow the accolades to make him lose sight of his inner essence. Humility should prevail over external praise.

*Rabbeinu Chananel* views the arrangement of gold on wood as support of *Chazal's* dictum that a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar (actually everyone), should be consistent, his inner character conforming to his outward, expressed beliefs. Spiritual hypocrisy does not sit well with the Torah scholar's mission in life. The *Bais HaLevi* derives from the *Aron's* inner-outer plating of gold an important lesson concerning how the Jewish community should treat their spiritual leadership. (I do not use the word leadership arbitrarily. Anyone who devotes himself solely to Torah study is qualified for inclusion under the rubric of spiritual leadership.) The community has a responsibility to provide for the needs of its Torah scholars. This should not be done begrudgingly, with the inane claim that "they" do not need that much. Who is to assert that they do not need a new car, new clothes, nice home? When they will work, they will have "luxuries": as long as they are learning, they should get by with "whatever." How quick we are to notice when the *rav* buys a new car, a new suit, fixes up his home. How is the *rav* able to send his children to the same camp that caters to the wealthier segment of the community? What right do the *rav* and *rebbetzin* have to take a trip to *Eretz Yisrael* to visit their children? These spoutings are the expressions of a miserable few who are troubled that someone who, for the most part, is supported by communal funds should maintain a decent lifestyle. It is, likewise, considered to be acting in poor taste when one who truly has less lives above his means, thereby catalyzing such loathsome reactions. The *talmid chacham* should not only be allowed to experience luxuries, but it should be the goal of the community that its spiritual leadership be prosperous inside their home, as well as in their outer service to the needs of the community.

The *Bais HaLevi* extends the concept of esteem with regard to the *tzedakah* we give to one in need. He observes that when one gives *tzedakah*, he is fulfilling a *mitzvah*. As such, an *ani*, poor man, becomes a *cheftza d'mitzvah*, the object of the *mitzvah*. He is no different than the *esrog* or *matzah* which do not retain sanctification after the *mitzvah*, but during the *kiyum*, fulfillment, of the *mitzvah* is the article of the *mitzvah* and, thus, accorded special respect. If the *ani* is a *cheftza d'mitzvah*, how we treat him while we are carrying out the *mitzvah* falls under the purview of *din d'Oraisa*, Torah law. Understandably, this becomes a game changer concerning how we treat the individual who asks for assistance. While we must treat all people with respect, the poor man being a *cheftza d' mitzvah* puts us in the position of playing with fire if we are not careful concerning his feelings.

The concept of *cheftza d'mitzvah* in association with the esteem we must give someone who is already down due to his economic hardship takes on a new perspective, especially among those whose desire to fulfill a *mitzvah* supersedes the love and respect we must have for all Jews. The following vignette was related by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl.*

A Jew in Bnei Brak was very short; in fact, some might have considered him to be a midget. When a certain *Yerushalmi Yid* first saw him, he became overly excited at the *mitzvah* which had just fallen into his lap. When one sees a person with a dark, very red, or albino complexion; or a person who is bent over due to obesity; a midget; a person with many warts; a person with hair that clings to each other, he should recite the *brachah: Meshaneh ha'brios*, "Who makes creatures different." [This *brachah* acknowledges the diversity of Hashem's creations, which, in and of itself, demonstrates that we are not all uniform creations, but created by design by Hashem.] Clearly, one does not recite this blessing if it will prove offensive to the subject of the *brachah*. Yet, this unthinking *chassid shoteh*, pious fool (a term used to describe one who is foolish in his acts of piety, rather than balancing his observance and piety by adding a little common sense) applied the *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch* that, when one makes a blessing, he should hold the article which he is blessing in his right hand. The fellow took hold of the poor midget, raised him a *tefach* (approximately three inches) off the ground, and, with great *kavanah*, intention/devotion, loudly recited the *brachah*.

Anyone with a modicum of common sense and decency understands that this pious Jew destroyed whatever self-esteem this man had. *Rav Galinsky* sums it up: *Chazal (Chagigah 15a)* teach that every individual has a *chelek*, portion, in *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*. A *tzaddik*, righteous person, merits his portion and that of his fellow in *Gan Eden* (the portion which his fellow lost as a result of his transgressions). A *rasha*, wicked person, receives his share of *Gehinnom* and that of his fellow (who was careful not to warrant his portion of *Gehinnom*). "I have no doubt," *Rav Galinsky* said, "that the midget (who is no longer alive) received his share of *Gan Eden* and also the share that would have otherwise gone to the "pious" Jew.