

And into the Aron you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you. (25:21)

This *pasuk* (21) seems redundant. In *pasuk* 16, the Torah writes, “You shall place in the *Aron* the Testimonial Tablets that I shall give you.” Two *pesukim* – same message. *Rashi* explains that we derive from this redundancy that it was prohibited to place the *Kapores*, Cover, on the *Aron* unless the *Luchos* were already in there. There is no such thing as an empty *Aron* in the Sanctuary. If there are no *Luchos*, the *Aron* is incomplete; hence, no *Kapores* is placed over it. *Chezkuni* explains that the first *pasuk* refers to the first *Luchos*, while the second *pasuk* refers to the second *Luchos*, which were fashioned by Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

In his commentary to *Bava Basra* 14:b, *Rashi* writes that the second *Luchos* were placed above the first *Luchos*. Others contend that they were on the side, because the first *Luchos*, having been fashioned by Hashem, had greater sanctity than their replacement. *Malbim* explains that *Rashi*'s dispensation is due to the fact that the letters flew off the Tablets prior to Moshe shattering them. (If, indeed, the letters had been there): A) How could Moshe shatter them? One does not break something that Hashem creates. B) It would be impossible to break something that Hashem made. As such, their intrinsic *kedushah* was diminished, allowing for them to be placed beneath the second *Luchos*.

The idea of the second *Luchos* being placed on top of the first set of *Luchos* finds purchase in the message that the “new” must be built on the foundation/principles of the old/past. The basis for the second *Luchos*, which Moshe crafted, was the original *Luchos* which Hashem formed. Even the shards of the old can teach us something. We do not discard the past, but we can build on it. The lessons and examples we receive from the past are invaluable for incorporating into the present. Otherwise, our future might leave much to be desired.

Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvos Asei* 20) identifies *V'asu Li Mikdash*, “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary” (25:8), as the source for the *mitzvah* of building the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash*. He says that this *mitzvah* includes all of the *klei HaMishkan*, vessels, used in the Sanctuary. He lists seven vessels, which include: two *Mizbeichos*, Altars; the ramp; the *Kyor* for washing the *Kohanim*'s hands and feet, with the base upon which it was placed; the *Shulchan* and *Menorah*. Noticeably, the *Aron* is not included. The *Aron* symbolizes the Torah which is contained within it. One would have expected it to be included among the vessels of the Sanctuary.

The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, quotes his brother, *Horav Moshe*, *zl*, who explains that the above-mentioned vessels play a role in the functioning of the Sanctuary. The *avodah*, service, in the *Bais Hamikdash* is executed through the agency of these vessels. The *Aron HaKodesh* is not involved in any given *avodah*. It is present to serve as the repository for the *Luchos/Torah*. As such, it is different from the other vessels which are intrinsic to the Sanctuary. They serve the *Mikdash* and are, therefore, included in the *mitzvah* of *V'asu Li Mikdash*. The *Aron* serves the *Luchos*, superseding the other

vessels.

The Torah holds a central role in the life of a Jew. It is not only the foundational text of Jewish law; it is our ethical and moral guide. Indeed, it preceded the creation of the world. We conform to the Torah's teachings and principles – not vice versa. Without the Torah, we are no different than any other human specie. Thus, it is no wonder that the *Luchos* and the *Sefer Torah* (scroll) stand above all else. Jews throughout the world would rather die than deface a Torah scroll. They would risk their lives to save a scroll. The Nazis who murdered six million of our brothers and sisters understood the significance of the Torah. Sadly, some Jews are so distant, so indifferent, so alienated, so angry, that the Torah's pre-eminence eludes them.

The Nazis hunted for Torah scrolls, knowing that to defame them would be adding indignity to whatever pride the Jews had. One who reads the stories of the Jewish heroes who, despite the most heinous persecution and death, remained steadfastly committed to *Yiddishkeit* will invariably discover hundreds of recorded incidents in which *Yidden* were prepared to undergo the most brutal suffering just to hold on to and spare the Torah any indignity. They knew that, ultimately, their actions would result in an untimely, miserable death for them. In the end, the Torah would be destroyed, but they would not abandon the Torah.

Those sent on transports to Auschwitz were not permitted to take any religious articles, such as *sefarim*, with them. One Jew stubbornly refused to part with his *Sefer Torah*. He held onto it even as he was herded into the cattle car for transport to Auschwitz. The enemy ignored him – at least he was not smuggling anything. When they arrived in the infamous death camp, the Jews were instructed in no uncertain terms that they must leave all of their possessions on the train. This Jew was the first to exit the train, his *Sefer Torah* ensconced in his arms, held close to his chest. He was not parting with his Torah. The Nazis cursed, reviled and beat him mercilessly, but he would not let go of his Torah.

At this point, a Nazi officer came over and pointed his gun at the man's heart and said, "Let go of the scroll, or I will shoot you dead right now!" The man was not frightened. He ignored the Nazi. He was prepared to die holding his Torah. The Nazis looked at him as if he had lost his mind and left him alone. He held on to his Torah all the way to the gas chambers, where he died holding on to his beloved scroll.

A Jew who had years earlier severed his relationship with *mitzvah* observance watched all of this and was moved to the point that he exclaimed, "I now understand the Orthodox fanatics. Their love of Torah supersedes their life. They will not deviate one iota from the Torah, because of their love for it. I ask forgiveness from Hashem and, from this day on, I accept upon myself to return to *mitzvah* observance with deep-rooted pride, love and devotion."