



# Sermon Tidbits

FEBRUARY 23, 2009

## Parashat Terumah

### It Takes a Nation

#### **Ve'asu aron - "And you shall make an Ark" (Exodus 22:10)**

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Building the Ark of the Covenant was a difficult and challenging task. Combining crafts of metallurgy, carpentry, design and sculpture, the people who actually built the vessel marshaled unique and specific talents to bring a complicated project to completion. Yet, the Torah states that when God commanded Moses to build the Ark, God did not name any specific craftsman or artisan by name, but rather told Moses "and you shall make an Ark." The Midrash (Tanchuma Vayakhel 8) notes that the Torah utilizes the plural *ve'asu*, "and you (plural) shall make," connoting a communal responsibility. Why did God issue this command in such a broad manner? "God commanded all of Israel to make [the Ark], so that no one of them would be able to claim against his friend, I gave a great deal of money, therefore I...have a greater part in [the Ark] than you, for you gave nothing." Thus, the Ark belonged to every Jew, and each of us built it.

This collective construction of the Ark reminds us that some tasks are so important that they are the responsibility of the larger community. Today, the Jewish people continue to share communal responsibilities, such as standing up for the State of Israel.

The State of Israel faces numerous threats from hostile forces throughout the Middle East. As Americans and as Jews we have a responsibility to help protect and defend Israel's physical, financial and political viability. In America, the most effective way to defend Israel is by becoming active in the political process. While it is easy to assume that there are experts who speak to members of Congress about the U.S.-Israel relationship, we must remember that Congressmen are primarily responsible to their local constituents. Therefore, we are the ones who must take the time to learn about the critical issues and make the commitment to building relationships with our elected officials.

In the desert the Israelites turned to the expert artisans for the Ark's final construction, yet the presence of experts did not absolve them of their own obligation to participate. Similarly, here in America many individuals feel that they lack the skills or knowledge to advocate on behalf of Israel. However, the presence of professionals does not absolve us of our responsibility either. Every American can help shape policy by getting involved in the political process. While we turn to experts for their guidance and direction, our most effective tool in our advocacy on Israel's behalf is our devotion and passion for her safety and well-being. ■

### Imported Goods

#### **V'orot techashim va'atzei shittim - "...and sealskins and acacia wood (Exodus 25:5)**

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Among the long list of valuable items required of the Israelites to construct the Tabernacle was acacia wood. While we know that they acquired precious metals and stones in Egypt, where did they find the wood of acacia trees, a plant not known to grow in the desert? Rashi (on verse five) explains that they imported the wood to the desert themselves, "Our forefather Jacob saw with divine inspiration that the Jews would one day need to build a tabernacle in the desert. He brought saplings to Egypt and planted them there, and commanded his children to take them...when they left

Egypt.” Using foresight and divine inspiration the Children of Israel realized that to meet their needs they would need to import the materials which they could not procure along the way.

The diligence of the Children of Israel allowed them to complete their task of constructing the Tabernacle with imported materials. Today, the State of Israel follows their example by working with the United States to import vital supplies which help ensure the Jewish State’s qualitative military edge.

For decades Israel has imported American military hardware which has helped protect the Jewish State and defend American values in the region. Today, in the post-9/11 world, the United States and Israel are working more closely together than ever before to defeat the common threats of radicalism and terrorism on the battlefield and at home. Israel’s ability to import American supplies to defeat these threats, much like the ancient Israelites ability to import acacia wood, depends on foresight and diligence. As Americans we must use these attributes to ensure the annual passage by the U.S. government of the foreign aid bill. This bill provides Israel with the funds to purchase and import the American arms necessary to protect the nation. Implementation of a 2007 U.S.-Israeli security agreement, which pledges to provide Israel with \$30 billion in military assistance during the next decade, is vital to ensuring that Israel can prevail over those adversaries that threaten the Jewish state and work to undermine U.S. interests in the region. For more information on U.S. foreign aid to Israel click [here](#).

Israel’s ability to obtain the aid necessary to ensure her qualitative military edge, like the efforts of the Israelites in the desert, depends on proactive measures. As their imports built the Tabernacle of the past, modern imports will continue to save Israeli lives in the future. ■

## Face to Face

### U’peneihem ish el achiv – “with their faces one to another...” (Exodus 25:20)

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The Talmud (Baba Batra 99a) describes the miraculous nature of the cherubs which sat above the Ark. “How were they situated? When Israel fulfilled the wishes of God [they would face each other], and when Israel would not fulfill the wishes of God [they would miraculously turn away from each other].” The cherubs represented the nature of the relationship between God and Israel, and the nature of every good relationship: face to face. Ba’al Haturim comments (on verse 18) that these cherubs stood face to face, “like two friends discussing words of the Torah.”

Standing face to face implies seeing the person standing opposite you as an equal and giving him the stature and status that he requires to stand tall. Israel’s recent election demonstrates that Israel is looking for peace, and wishes to stand “face to face” with the Palestinian people.

While, the final composition of the next Israeli government remains unclear, what is clear is the commitment of the State of Israel to a two state solution. The leaders of Israel’s most prominent political parties have said they are committed to continuing negotiations with the Palestinians. Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been asked by President Shimon Peres to form a government, has said he wants to “promote a genuine peace process to strengthen security, to accelerate economic development among the Palestinians, and to intensify regional cooperation with Jordan and Egypt in parallel with the peace process.”

This attitude is in keeping with the position of previous Israeli governments who have worked to meet the needs of the Palestinian people in order to increase their standard of living and give the Palestinian Authority the credibility necessary to stand “face to face” with the Israelis at the negotiating table. For more information on Israeli steps to help bolster the Palestinian economy click [here](#).

Israelis and Palestinians, like the cherubs on the Ark, have the right to stand “face to face” with their neighbors. Israel’s new government, like the governments before it, will be committed to improving the lives of ordinary Palestinians and creating an environment which will ultimately lead to peace. ■