

From *Spiritual Surgery*, Rabbi Eva Robbins (Pp. 79-84)

The Mishkan represents this dynamic, multi-valenced layer of meaning. Each element, or sacred vessel within it, was understood by Chazal, and later by Biblical commentators, as transmitting important religious values, and paradigmatic images of the cosmos, the Divine Creation. Whether understood or not, something was communicated that offered solace or connection to the Divine. In fact R. Abravanel reinforces the importance of this endeavor, study carefully every detail... understand its allegorical meaning. The following Midrash is an example of the rabbinic understanding of some of the sacred vessels:

"The golden candlestick has seven corresponding to the seven lights in the world, which are the seven stars. In the year there are seven holy days, in man there are seven gates, two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and one mouth... The soul is within the body corresponding to the altar of incense which is within the Tabernacle. The Table is in the north corresponding to the Garden of Eden in which all sorts of pleasures are kept for candlestick the Righteous. is in the The south corresponding to the World to Come in which there is but the light of the Shechinah (the Presence of God). There were two altars, one of gold corresponding to the soul of man and one of brass corresponding to the body of man... Just as the body eats, even so does the brazen altar whose offerings were food. And just as the souls do not enjoy anything but scent, even so nothing was offered on the golden altar but sweet incense, a thing, which is done..."

This is an example of the creative and innovative understanding of the symbolic meaning of these vessels. Now let's take a look at each of the components through the eyes of some of our commentators in the order they are commanded by God to Moses.

MATERIALS

GOLD, SILVER, COPPER - (Zahav, Kesef and N'choshet), these were precious metals and symbolically considered signs of future disasters, for the people: gold- Bavel (Baby Ionia), silver - Persia, and copper Greece. The Holy spaces tended to have gold while the public spaces used predominantly copper.

For Hirsch, "...metals offer themselves, more than anything else, for allegorical expressions of our moral relations to our calling... the properties... we should have towards our duty in general. He points out that copper would represent the ignoble

nature; silver, the one who is ready to be ennobled by purification; and gold, the most complete sense of purity and goodness.

Gold, the most precious of them all, was used for the Ark with the K'ruvim, the rings and staves, the Menorah, and the Table with their implements, the beams with rings, and the pillars of the partition, the entrance screen with their hooks, belts and caps. Gold was often seen as fit for royalty and associated with success, achievement, triumph, prosperity, luxury and affluence. It transmitted great wealth and beauty, "...The Torah's beauty will be reflected through the Ark." The Ark, its cover, the Table, its implements, the Menorah, and the Incense Altar were specifically made of pure (Tahor) gold as opposed to the regular gold for the other items.

Pure gold was more refined and had no other elements in it. Unlike silver and copper, gold does not reflect light but holds the light within itself. Therefore it held the most integrity as a metal and was not impacted from the outside, like the silver and copper, which could be used for mirrors because of its capacity to reflect. Gold is symbolic of the warmth and the illumination of the sun. In fact, Louis XIV of France created a palace in Versailles gilded in gold from top to bottom, and ultimately, called himself the Sun King.

Philo points out that gold is immune to rust and when it is stretched and beaten, down to its thinnest, it is incredibly strong and therefore long lasting. It symbolized the 'highest nature' and lined the Ark, inside and out, as well as on the top. It "weaves everything else into a harmonious whole. He states, "Gold is used allegorically for the human and represents the soul. Virtue is like gold, and it is something that adorns a person's movement and behavior...virtuous life is golden both for thoughts and deeds.

Aviva Zornberg sees it representing fire, motion, infinite transformation.." therefore fitting for the K'ruvim and the Ark, "framing the sacred space, the hollow out of which God will speak."

For **R. Benno Jacob** gold is the noblest, purest and most indestructible and therefore ranked first in the metals it is also associated with wisdom, understanding and enlightenment and therefore was fitting for the Ark, which housed the tablets and the laws, an essential source of Judaism's wisdom.

Silver was used for the sockets, which supported the planks of the walls, and for the hooks, belts and caps of the pillars of the walls of the Courtyard. It was the only material that came as a mandatory donation of the 'Half-Shekel.' Therefore, it

symbolized the unity of the people and the tremendous support, both emotionally and physically, that held the Mishkan up.

Silver shimmers like the celestial orbs and therefore could be associated with cycles of the moon. **Hirsch** says, "Gold, this is the sun; silver, this is the moon; copper, this is the west... Judaism is aligned with the feminine, because it ebbs and flows. The moon is like the female menstrual cycles and therefore a symbol of Shechinah, the indwelling presence of the Divine in physicality **Ramban** states ",,For I will meet with you there, cause My Shechinah to dwell upon them and will speak with you."

Copper was used for the Altar of animal offerings, and implements. It was used for the Laver, hooks for the second covering, sockets for the entrance screen and for the courtyard curtains, as well as the mallets and pegs, to secure the coverings. Copper is a conductor of energy, heat and electricity and its use goes back 10,000 years, as one of the oldest metals. The Egyptians used it for religious items and jewelry. It has been known to have great healing capacity helping the flow of blood and removing toxins, which symbolically supported the priests' work, particularly with the blood. In fact one can purchase compression bands with copper to be worn to heal parts of the body such as wrists, knees, elbows, etc. It is malleable, stretchable and easily shaped and hammered, which would make it a very good metal to cover the wood of the Altar and its horns. The Hebrew, Nachoshet, was reminiscent of the serpent in the Garden, called Nachash, who symbolized sin, in this case the sin of the Molten Calf, so its use was both a reminder to the people of their sin and also represented the healing that was always available.