

Parshat Terumah 5778

Rabbi Yochanan said:

“There are three crowns: [i.e. three of the vessels in the mishkan are fitted with a *zar* – crown] ...

that of the altar – Aharon merited and took it;

that of the shulchan – David merited and took it;

that of the aron is still there – anyone who wants to take it can come and take it (Yoma 72b).

The Netziv throughout his commentary on Chumash Haamek Davar, assumes that each of the major vessels in the mishkan has a specific purpose, based on this gemara.

- The aron represents Torah, which is there for anyone to use.
- The (external copper) altar represents avodah – the ritual service (this one is not in the above list as it didn't have a crown).
- The shulchan (table) represents royalty, exemplified by David.
- The (inner golden) altar represents the priesthood, which is headed by Aharon.

He uses this symbolism to explain many of the subtle differences that we see between the descriptions of the vessels. One of the important differences concerns the poles that were used to carry the vessels. Included in the commands to make each of these four vessels which appear in this and next week's sedra, there is also a command to make poles. For the aron and copper altar, it additionally commands that the poles be put into the rings that are attached to the vessels; but there is no such command for the shulchan or the golden altar.

This is no mere coincidence, because in Vayakhel, where it sets out the account of the work actually done, it again states that they made poles

for each of these four vessels, and that they put the poles of the aron and copper altar into the rings (but not the shulchan or golden altar).

And in Pekudei, where it lists all the vessels that they brought to Moshe, it says that they brought “the aron of the testimony and its poles...the copper altar...and its poles” but doesn't even mention the poles of the other vessels.

How does this relate to their symbolism?

Royalty and priesthood, represented by the shulchan and the golden altar, are only fully operational when we are firmly established in Eretz Yisrael with the Beis Hamikdash in operation.

However Torah, represented by the aron, and avodah, represented by the copper altar, are essential elements of the Jewish nation, which we take with us wherever we go.

Torah is clearly something that we involve ourselves in every day of our lives, wherever we are.

And avodah, although its primary fulfilment is the service in the Beis Hamikdash, has another form – tefilla, which is called *avodah shebelev* – service of the heart. Again this is something that we do wherever we are.

Hence the Chumash emphasises the poles for both of these vessels, which metaphorically we use to carry them around with us.

And as an additional hint of the ubiquity and centrality of Torah, the Chumash adds a postscript to the description of the aron. After saying that the poles should be put in the rings, it adds: “the poles shall remain in the rings of the aron – they shall not be removed from it”.