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of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Terumah
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The Ins and Outs of Torah

**By Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky, Director of Community Learning and
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The Aron, the holy Ark, was the central feature of the Mishkan. It was there that God's presence rested, and from there His voice was heard (Shemos 25:22). Within the Aron were housed the Tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved. The Aron thus represents the Torah, the means by which man becomes worthy of receiving the Divine presence.

Of what material was the Aron constructed? The Sages teach that it was actually three separate boxes which fit one inside the other. The innermost and outermost boxes were made of gold, and the middle one was made of wood (Rashi 25:11).

There are several questions that can be asked. Gold is the most precious material people commonly have, so we can readily understand that because of its importance it should be used for the Aron. But why use wood? Would not the use of wood detract from the prestige of the Aron? And if there is some reason that we should use wood, why is it covered on all sides and cannot be seen?

These questions become more acute when we realize that the Torah does not refer to the Aron as a golden Aron, albeit with a wooden core. Instead the Torah calls it a wooden Aron, with a mere overlay of gold (25:10-11). Why should the Aron be identified as wooden, when gold is more valuable, and when the wooden component of the Aron is completely covered over and cannot be seen?

Maharal (Gur Aryeh ibid.) answers that even though wood is less precious, it nevertheless symbolizes the essence of Torah, as the verse states, "It is a tree of life for those who grasp it

tightly" (Mishlei 3:18). Just as a tree is rooted into the ground and through these roots the tree has life, so too the Torah is "rooted" into Hashem, who is the true source of life, and through these "roots" all who "grasp [onto Torah] tightly" have life. The gold boxes symbolize another aspect of Torah, namely that through Torah one can attain wealth and honor, as it is stated, "At its left side is wealth and honor" (Mishlei 3:16).

Accordingly, the gold boxes overlay the wooden box because they signify a more external aspect of Torah, one that is more readily seen. This is the aspect of wealth and honor, the rewards for Torah in this world. The wooden box is within the gold boxes, and is taken to represent the Aron as a whole, because it signifies an aspect that both lies at the essence of Torah and is hidden from people. This is the aspect that one becomes connected to God through Torah and can thus partake of the eternal life of the World to Come.

When we are first drawn to Torah, it is usually the external "gold" of it that we see. We understand how the Torah can help us in our lives in this world. Whether it is in giving us a sense of purpose or direction, whether it is in helping us become a better parent/spouse /child, whether it is in helping us become a more fulfilled person - we understand the value of Torah in terms of our needs in this world. But as we grow, we come to understand that the value of Torah is actually in more than all this - it is in the inner "wood," the hidden connection to God that ultimately transforms us into becoming more like Him and less this worldly. Through this connection we ultimately attain the eternal life of the World to Come.

About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org.

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