



# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות  
פרשת תרומה

SERIES 2: ISSUE 19

### THE HIDDEN MESSAGE OF THE ARON

#### Chapter 25

**10)** *They shall make an Aron out of shittim wood. Its length shall be two and a half amos, its width one and a half amos and its height one and a half amos.*

(י) וַעֲשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמַתִּים וְחֻצֵי אַרְכּוֹ וְאִמּוֹ וְחֻצֵי רַחְבּוֹ וְאִמּוֹ וְחֻצֵי קִמְתּוֹ.

**11)** *You shall cover it with pure gold; you shall cover it on the inside and on the outside, and you shall make on it a gold crown all around.*

(יא) וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ וְהִצַּפְנֹנָה וְעָשִׂיתָ עָלָיו יָר זָהָב סָבִיב.

#### Consider the following questions:

1. What is the significance of the precise measurements of the Aron?
2. Why does the Aron consist of a layer of wood sandwiched between two layers of gold?
3. Why is the wooden layer considered the main part of the Aron (as it says, *make an Aron out of shittim wood*) while the gold layers are only secondary (as it says, *you shall cover it with pure gold*)?
4. Why should any part of the Aron be made of wood? Let it all be made of precious gold.

There is no doubt that all the details of the Mishkan and its measurements contain secret meanings far beyond human understanding. Nevertheless, Hashem has also left us room to find hints in the text to ideas that are within our understanding. In this vein, we need to understand the significance of the measurements of the Aron and why it consisted of three separate layers, a central layer of wood surrounded inside and out by a layer of gold.

There are three main categories of people who are dedicated to Torah learning: (1) Those whose main intention is for the sake of the honor and riches that they hope to attain in this world. (2) Those whose main intention is for the sake of the spiritual riches of the World to Come. (3) Those who learn Torah because it is a "tree of life" (עֵץ חַיִּים) as *Mishlei* 3:18 says, through which they are able to draw close to Hashem. All those who strive to fill themselves with Torah are comparable to the Aron that holds the Torah, so all three categories of those who learn Torah are represented by the three layers of the Aron. **[This answers Question 2.]**

The middle, main layer, which is made of *shittim* wood (עֵץ), represents the עֵץ חַיִּים through which the third category of people attach themselves to Hashem, Who is the Life-force of the world עוֹלָמִים (חַי). This is hinted at in the fact that the gematria of עֵץ שִׁטִּים (*shittim* wood) and of חַי עוֹלָמִים both add up to 34 according to the *mispar katan* (lit., small number) system of calculation. (In this method, all multiples of ten are ignored.

So for example, the calculation for עֲצֵי שֹׁטִיִּם is: ע = 7, צ = 9, י = 1, ש = 3, ט = 9, י = 1, ם = 4 for a total of 34.)

The outer layer of gold represents the riches and honor of this world (Category 1), while the inner layer of gold represents the benefits of the World to Come (Category 2). Neither of these should be one's primary motivation for learning Torah, however – although our verse's statement that *You shall cover it with pure gold ... on the inside and on the outside* indicates that you will certainly receive these rewards as well. **[This answers Questions 3 and 4.]**

The ending of the verse, *and you shall make on it a gold crown*, tells us that you will attain honor as well. In addition, this gold crown of honor will be all around you, i.e., protecting you in this world and the World to Come, as Mishlei 4:9 says: *The Torah will give you an accompaniment of grace, and a crown of splendor will protect you*. This alludes to the fact that the Crown of Torah is totally different from the splendid gold crown of a king, which requires guards to prevent it from being stolen. The “crown of splendor” of the Torah will achieve precisely the opposite: it will protect you from harm.

Also according to *Sefer Mishlei* (verses 3:16 and 9:11), whoever clings to the Torah, the tree of life, will have length of days in the World to Come and in this world as well. The Torah hints at this through the measurements of the *Aron*. It says (verse 10), *its length shall be two and a half amos* (cubits), which equals 15 *tefachim* (handbreadths). Fifteen is the *gematria* of the Divine Name ה'י with which God created both this world and the World to Come, as it says, *Because with ה'י Hashem shaped the worlds* (*Yeshayahu 26:4*).

Verse 10 may accordingly be understood as hinting that the person attached to Torah (represented by the *Aron*) shall have “length of days” in both *Olam Hazeih* and *Olam Haba*. The verse continues, *its width, one and a half amos, and its height, one and a half amos* – totaling 18 *tefachim* (9 in the width and 9 in the height) – the same as the *gematria* of the word חי, which means “life”. This is hinting that a person will have life both in his body (represented by the *Aron*'s width) and his soul (represented by its height). Taken as a whole, the thrust of the verse is thus that the length of a person's existence in this world and the Next will be one of full life both in body and in soul. This is the truth that the Torah is hinting at in the *Aron*'s measurements. **[This answers Question 1.]**

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### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.

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