



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Terumah

Adar 5783 / February 2023

The Torah in Our Ark

By Rabbi Joshua Lookstein

One of the many repetitive elements of the next five *parshiot* occurs in *Parshat Terumah* five *pesukim* apart from each other. וַנִּתַּן אֶל־הָאָרוֹן אֶת הַעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתַּן אֵלֶיךָ. *You shall put in the ark the testimony [the Torah/the Two Tablets] that I will give you.* (Shemot 25:16) Verse 21 repeats the same words, with slight adjustments. For context, the first instance is right after the *aron* (ark) is described, and the second is right after the *parochet* (the curtain) is described. So why repeat the words? Both placements make sense. Either say it after the ark or say it after the *parochet*! But it certainly doesn't need to be written twice. Or does it? This question is asked by Rashi and several other commentaries.

The *Or Hachayim Hakadosh*, Rabbi Chaim Ibn Attar, an 18th-century scholar whose commentary on the Torah was based on his weekly learning with his daughters (or so I read), gives four explanations for the repetition. While it is true that providing multiple explanations is often an indication of a deficiency in each answer, each of these understandings adds an important takeaway for an individual's relationship to the Torah. First, the four explanations:

1. Though putting it in the *aron* is mentioned before the *parochet*, it will actually happen after the *parochet* is in place. The repetition of the word *netina* (literally "to give" but here it really means "to put in") indicates that the Torah should be put in and it should never leave. **It should be firmly in the *aron* forever.**
2. Similar to the first explanation, the Torah is put in after the *parochet* is in place (the earlier mention just informs us *what goes into* the *aron*) to emphasize that **the receptacle for the Torah must be entirely complete before the Torah is placed inside.**
3. Again, the Torah is put in after the *parochet* is in place, but the Torah is mentioned earlier to indicate that despite it going in after the *parochet* is in place, **one shouldn't think that the *parochet* is more important.**
4. The repetition doesn't indicate when the object is placed inside but rather what the object is. Two *pesukim* for two sets of Tablets - **the broken ones and the whole ones** - which, as the *gemara* in *Masechet Menachot* says, **were both placed in the *aron*.**

Now, the takeaways:

1. The Torah we learn, the Torah we live by, must be firmly placed inside of us, in a way that will make it hard for it to leave. Attaining - and retaining - Torah isn't easy. It is best achieved through a day school education, ideally followed by an immersive year of learning in Israel, and it requires active, practical, and consistent reinforcement at home.
2. In order to be ready to receive the Torah, to be complete, one's character must be strong. *Derech erez kadma l'Torah*, as my father translates it: *Menschliness* before Godliness. The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, prior to *davening* in the morning, would say: "I am prepared and ready to accept upon myself the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself." It is certainly true that learning Torah can lead to strength in character but it can also lead to a distortion of Torah and mistaken priorities - running to do a *mitzvah* but knocking people over on the way, so to speak. Torah built on a foundation of *menschlichkeit* will inevitably strengthen both the Torah and the *menschlichkeit*.
3. It is important to make sure to always prioritize the *ikar* and not the *tafel*, the primary and not the secondary, the substance rather than the form. Form is important. *Zeh Keili v'anvehu*, this is my God and I will beautify Him. It's important to make the Torah beautiful but sometimes we get preoccupied with the beauty and, in the process, we minimize the Torah.
4. The presence of the broken Tablets alongside the whole Tablets reminds us that "broken" is holy too (this idea has been said by many). Whether it is our own imperfections, our children's imperfections, our relatives' imperfections, or a friend in a state of brokenness, our obligation is patience, understanding, care, and a sense of service to those around us.

Two *pesukim*, four explanations from the Or Hachayim Hakadosh, and four applications—at least!—to our lives. If we prepare ourselves properly, exert the needed effort, and keep our eyes on the goal, the Torah can have a lasting impact on our lives and the lives of others.

Josh and Georgie Lookstein will be celebrating a decade of living in Scarsdale this coming June. Georgie is still the same age she was when they moved. Her years have clearly gone to Josh. They have booked a date for Trudy's Bat Mitzvah, God-willing, at the beginning of 2025, and will now obsess over that for the next 2 years. Excuse us if we seem distracted when you speak to us.

Reserve a favorite parsha • Celebrate a family simcha • Honor a legacy

Sign-up [HERE](#) or contact Jordan Bryk jordan.bryk@gmail.com or Jeff Berger jsberger@gmail.com



The Collective Conversation is a project of the
Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

Learning and Growing Together as a Community • Learning as Legacy

[Click here](#) to see past issues of *The Collective Conversation*