

Why the Wood?

In this week's Torah portion, Terumah, G-d meticulously describes various requirements for the objects in the tabernacle. Among these requirements is the description of the *aron*, the Ark of the covenant:

Exodus 25:10-11

שמות פרק כה פסוקים י-יא

They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height.	וַעֲשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמָתַיִם וַחֲצִי אֶרְכּוֹ וְאַמָּה וַחֲצִי רֶחְבּוֹ וְאַמָּה וַחֲצִי קִמְתּוֹ:
And you shall overlay it with pure gold; from inside and from outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make upon it a golden crown all around.	וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבִּיַּת וּמִחוּץ תַּצְבֵּנּוּ וַעֲשִׂיתָ עָלָיו זֶרֶן זָהָב סָבִיב:

Rashi, quoting from the Gemara, clarifies what it means to cover it from both the inside and the outside. Apparently, Betzalel, architect of the Tabernacle and its artifacts, made three open-faced boxes, one of gold, then one of wood, then one of gold. The opening was then covered in gold.

It seems odd that *wood* would be used in the making of the *aron*. After all, its very purpose is to hold some of the holiest objects on earth, so only gold, the purest and most prized of materials should be used in its making! Why would wood, a lowly everyday construction material, be used in the *aron*?

The Da'at Zekeinim, a medieval commentator, has the answer. The reason that wood was used in the *aron* is because gold would have been too heavy for its bearers to carry. There were people actually carrying the *aron* who would have strained under the weight of a solid-gold box. In some cases, the *aron* actually carried its bearers, but more often than not it didn't. This shows G-d's infinite compassion- He put the needs of human beings over glorifying that which is holy to the greatest degree.

R' Yisrael Salanter, z"l, understood this very well. In the last years of his life, when he was too old to supervise the matzah baking, he sent some of his best students to do it for him. When asked what stringencies should be observed, R' Salanter responded that they should be kind to the widow who cleaned between bakings. Of all the possible things that he could have cautioned them about, he told them to be careful with the feelings of a human being.

We should all strive to be so careful with the feelings of others, and remember that G-d values kindness over beauty.

Shabbat shalom.