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Ark – Tebah vs Aron

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This study was inspired by a shiur given by Rabbi David Fohrman. Much of this paper represents his words. My intent is to provide a bit more depth and to expand the concepts that Rabbi Fohrman presented. In this study I would like to examine the amazing connections between *Noach’s ark* (Tebah) and the *ark of the covenant* (Aron). These two structures have different Hebrew names. Noach’s ark is called a **Tebah[[1]](#footnote-1)** - תֵּבַת, while the ark of the covenant is called an **Aron** - אֲרוֹן, but in English we use the same word – ark - to denote both structures.[[2]](#footnote-2) They’re both arks:[[3]](#footnote-3) The ark of the covenant[[4]](#footnote-4) and Noach’s ark.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Zohar says that the tebah and the aron are the same thing via a Gezerah shevah. A gezeira shava is a tradition of a known rule applying to a new case based upon an identical word or phrase in both cases. For example, the Torah first uses the word Brit – covenant, for the first time in:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 6:18*** *But I will establish My covenant with thee; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.*

This is its essence! The concept of Brit was created specifically related to the tebah, to Noach’s ark. We see a similar usage for the ark of the covenant in:

***Bamidbar (Numbers) 10:33*** *And they set forward from the mount of HaShem three days' journey; and the ark* וַאֲרוֹן *of the covenant of HaShem* בְּרִית-יְהוָה *went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting-place for them.*

The wording of Genesis 6:18 says explicitly that Noach *could not* go into the ark *until* that covenant was established.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus the ark, the tebah, was an ark (tebah) of the covenant!

According to the Talmud, the space occupied by the aron (ark of the covenant) did not take up space. What does that mean? The Holy of Holies of the Mishkan[[7]](#footnote-7) was 10 cubits wide, and the ark, which stood in the center, had a length of 2.5 cubits. Yet, when measuring from the sides of the ark to the wall, one would find five cubits on each side.[[8]](#footnote-8) This paradox was entirely miraculous, something we cannot even wrap our heads around; the ark both taking up space and not taking up space at the same time.

Just as the aron was dimensionless, so also was the tebah (Noach’s ark) dimensionless, according to the Zohar. So, there was room for the animals, their food, Noach and his family, and their food.

Noach created the tebah through the powers of speech. The gematria of the dimensions of the tebah testifies to this fact:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 6:15*** *And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.*

The dimensions of the ark were 300 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits. The gematria of these dimensions is: **ל** - lamed (3), **ש** - shin (300), **נ** - nun (50) = lashon.[[9]](#footnote-9) Noach created the ark with the power of speech.

Now, lets look into the comparisons between Noach’s ark and the ark of the covenant.

# The Word

Tebah also means ‘word’, according to the Baal Shem Tov. This is an astounding connection to the aron which contained the luchot, the tablets of the covenant. The Torah teaches us that the Ten Commandments were on two tablets (Luchot HaBrit[[10]](#footnote-10)). The luchot summarized the Torah and are the words of HaShem. The Baal Shem Tov[[11]](#footnote-11) taught that the word for “ark” in Hebrew is “tebah” which is a homonym for “word.” A Jew must lock himself inside the “words” of Torah and prayer.

**“Make a Tzohar, light in the Tebah / Ark” – The Baal Shem Tov taught, “the ark” are the words of Torah and prayer; and “light” is saying them with warmth and heartfulness.**

*The Baal Shem Tov On Davening / Prayer/ing*

Make a light / Tzahor,” for the Tebah (ark) and complete it (on its roof) to the width of an Ama” (app. 3 feet).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Tzohar means light, and Teiva means (also) word.

Says the Holy Baal Shem, “Make your words of Torah and Teffilah (prayer) bright. For within every letter there are universes, souls and Divine energy.

And these universes and souls, elevate and connect, and unify with Divine energy – then afterwards they connect with the letters of the word, and they become an ark, and afterwards combinations (Yechudim) of Divine energy occur.

And a person should include his soul in each level mentioned – and then all the universes unite as one.

They elevate and a great pleasure and rejoicing occurs above.

This is the meaning that, the Teivah should have an upper, middle and lower floor – there are the worlds, angels, and Divine energy.

Every word you say, you must hear (yourself) – for the Divine presence (the Shechina) is the world of speech – – it takes much faith to believe this.

When we pray, we must put all our energy in every letter we say.

We should have in mind that the letters connect.

Now if a physical union is pleasurable – infinitely more so a spiritual.

We should then elevate ourselves to the point where we are in the mystical realm of Beriah.

We can’t even hear the words, only our thoughts, and then we get to the point of Atzilus.

Every word has three stories – universes, souls and Divine energy.

The bottom level are the universes which we connect to the soul, which then get connected to the Divine energy – we must have faith, that this is what we accomplish in every word of prayer.

Make a portal from the word – to see from one end to the other end of the world.

“Make your words bright” – when a Jew speaks, he must make sure that before he speaks he thinks (so his word will be illuminated.)

When you pray, pray to the Divine within the letters.

Request that the Divine in the letters cause you to pray a sincere prayer. Through this, all the harsh judgment will be sweetened to mercy.

Every word includes in it every universe.

Every word is like a spiritual person, and one must place all one’s energy into the word – otherwise it creates sort of a spiritual man, missing a limb or two.

Every word contains universes – and if one places one’s entire energy into saying the words, then these universes are enlightened – and bestow.

The breath below rises, to the breath above (I think this means our souls beyond…) which then gives us breath below.

The Baal Shem Tov’s soul told him, that all that was bestowed upon him, was not for the incredible knowledge he learned, but the tremendous devotion in prayer.

The Baal Shem Tov said, though one should pray with the fire of their soul, they must do so with a broken humble-heart.

For once his disciples were all praying with fiery passion, but an accusatory decree in heaven arose, as they lacked humility – but as one person had humility, it saved them.

One can read the Torah making mistakes, but knowing its light – as one cherishes the Torah, this brings G-d joy.

This is like a parent who though his young son is stumbling over the words, but he is so happy to listen, and fulfil his requests.

When one awakens, one must be careful to say nothing (certainly superfluous…) for the world is created as is known through (Divine) thought, speech and action.

Now of-course thought was the first – just as the Torah commands one to honor the eldest son, for he receives the greatest portion from the father and transfers this to his siblings (perhaps this means latent soul talents…) similar, all comes from our first thoughts.

Whatever one sees, one should connect it to G-d, when one sees love, remind yourself of your love for G-d – if one sees fear remind yourself of your fear of G-d – even when going to the bathroom, you can say, “I separate the evil from the good” – this is Yechudim.

When a person goes to do a Mitzvah they must run. You see… when we get to heaven, every Mitzvah we did – everything we do, creates a soul and a body – the intent is the soul, and the body is the deed. So this person who tarries, perhaps shmoozing along… then in heaven, is forced to crawl a narrow bridge over a raging river – firstly it is very scary – but then the angels he created – that were looking forward to his creation – for from his intent, the angel’s soul was born, and from his future action, the body – it blocks the way… and the extra time spent on the bridge, is for it painful.

# Both Provided Atonement[[13]](#footnote-13)

The Midrash[[14]](#footnote-14) finds it significant that Noach did not enter the ark to escape from the flood until God instructed him to do so,[[15]](#footnote-15) and did not exit the ark after the flood until God instructed him to do so:[[16]](#footnote-16) “He entered the ark with permission, and left with permission”.

Commenting on the significance of Noach’s leaving the ark only with God’s permission, Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg writes in his Yalkut Yehuda that Noach could not leave the ark before receiving God’s authorization because his sojourn in the ark served as a means of atonement. Elsewhere,[[17]](#footnote-17) the Midrash comments that the ark “purified” Noach, comparing the ark to the process of purification that a Metzora must undergo before he can return to his city. This comparison clearly indicates that Noach, while having resisted the sinful influences of his contemporaries, was nevertheless guilty of certain misdeeds for which he required atonement, just as a Metzora’s condition, as understood by Chazal, resulted from certain transgressions. The grueling experience of living in the ark with the world’s animals, the Midrash teaches, was Noach’s means of attaining atonement so he could be worthy of being saved from the flood. Accordingly, Rav Ginsburg writes, Noach had to endure the cramped, harsh conditions of the ark even after the floodwaters subsided until God determined that his process of atonement had been completed. For this reason, he waited until God’s explicit command to exit the ark before leaving, as only God could determine when he had satisfactorily completed his atonement process.

Extending this notion further, we might suggest that Noach waited to enter the ark for the same reason. Although he may have been eager to achieve atonement, he was not entitled to begin this process before the time God determined this was to occur. Just as Noach could not complete his atonement process before receiving God’s instruction, he likewise could not begin his atonement process before receiving God’s instruction.

If so, then the Midrash emphasizes that we are not entitled to determine on our own the proper way to attain closeness to the Almighty. No matter how sincere we might be in our desire to draw close to God and to serve Him, we must “wait” to receive His command; we need to follow His guidance and instructions for how to serve Him, as conveyed to us through our Torah tradition. Just as Noach could not decide on his own when and how to experience the “purification” provided by the ark, similarly, we must not try to decide on our own how to achieve purification, sanctity, and closeness with our Creator, and must instead faithfully abide by His commands and the dictates of the halakhic system.

When we look at the requirements for Yom HaKippurim and its atonements, we see much the same situation. Just as Noach entered and exited the Tea once in a year, so also did the Kohen Gadol enter the Holy of Holies only once a year. Just as Noach had to wait for HaShem’s command to enter and leave, so also did the Kohen Gadol have to wait for HaShem’s appointed time[[18]](#footnote-18) of Yom HaKippurim.

Later on, we will see the that the Torah also connects these two structures with the Hebrew word: *cover* - כָפַרְתָּ. Now the root of kaporet is Kappara, which is the Hebrew word normally associated with atonement, which is also a covering.

# Sleeping Is Not Allowed

R. Levi said: The whole twelve months that Noach was in the ark, neither he nor his family tasted sleep because they were responsible for feeding the animals. R. Abba b. Kahana said: He brought branches for the elephants... Now some ate in the second hour of the night and some in the third hour of the day, hence you know that Noach did not taste a bit of sleep. R. Yochanan said: One time, when Noach was late in feeding the lion, the lion bit him, and he went away limping. Tanchuma, Noach.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The Kohen Gadol had a hard day of work on Yom Kippurim. The avodah, the special Yom Kippurim Temple service, was intricate and difficult, and had to be performed after the Kohen Gadol was forced to stay up all night. He was kept up to avoid the possibility of a seminal emission, which would disqualify him from working on Yom Kippurim. The Gemara relates how the important people of Jerusalem would also stay up making noise through the night, to make it difficult for the high priest to doze off.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The idea of staying up through the night on Yom Kippurim had special significance beyond the Temple as well. "Abba Shaul taught, even in the countryside they would do so", to commemorate what happened in the Temple. The Shulchan Aruch[[21]](#footnote-21) quotes a custom to stay up most or all of the night of Yom Kippurim singing praises to HaShem,[[22]](#footnote-22) a custom that was observed by Rav Soloveitchik.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, like many a custom of great piety, it is not for everybody, to say the least.

# Space Unlimited

It is interesting to note that the Tebah’s dimensions were too small to accommodate Noach’s family, the animals, and the for an entire year. The people fit in, the various creatures fit in, and there was ample room for the provisions. The denizens of the Tebahexisted “above” the world. They were spending the year in a privileged state, alone with their Creator, when anything is possible.

Just as Noach’s Tebah defied the laws of space and time, so also, in the same way, the Aron took up no space within the Beit HaMikdash. The Beit HaMikdash, the Holy of Holies, and the Aron, defied space and time.

***Megillah 10b*** *R. Levi further said: We have a tradition from our ancestors that the ark took up no room.[[24]](#footnote-24) It has been taught to the same effect: ‘The ark which Moses made had round it an [empty] space of ten cubits on every side’. Now it is written, And in front of the Sanctuary was twenty cubits in length [and twenty cubits in breadth],[[25]](#footnote-25) and it is also written, And the wing of the one cherub was ten cubits and the wing of the other cherub was ten cubits.[[26]](#footnote-26) Where then was the ark itself? We must therefore conclude that it stood by a miracle [without occupying any room].[[27]](#footnote-27)*

***Yoma 21a*** *Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: When the Israelites come up to the festivals, they stand pressed together,[[28]](#footnote-28) but they prostrate themselves, with wide spaces [between them], and they extend eleven cubits behind the back wall of the Holy of Holies.[[29]](#footnote-29) What does that mean? — It means that although they extended eleven cubits behind the back wall of the Holy of Holies, standing pressed together, yet when they prostrated themselves, they prostrated themselves with wide spaces [between them]. This is one of the ten miracles which were wrought in the Temple…*

***Baba Batra 99a*** *[The space] below[[30]](#footnote-30) [was] as [that] above. As [the space] above[[31]](#footnote-31) served no [material] purpose.[[32]](#footnote-32) so [the space] below served no [material] purpose.[[33]](#footnote-33) This supports R. Levi; for R. Levi — others say. R. Johanan — said:[[34]](#footnote-34) We have this as a tradition from our fathers [that] the place of the Ark and the Cherubim is not included in the measured [space]. So, indeed, it has been taught:[[35]](#footnote-35) The Ark which Moses made had a free space of ten cubits on every side.[[36]](#footnote-36)*

The laws of nature, of time, and space, have no hold over those who have a bond with HaShem.

# Perfect Preservation

The wording used by Rashi: “a covenant is necessary”, and by the Midrash: “you need a covenant”, fits very well, as in order to get into the ark[[37]](#footnote-37) without being killed first, God must suspend natural law.[[38]](#footnote-38) Similarly, in order for the food not to spoil even a year after being harvested,[[39]](#footnote-39) the laws of nature that insist on spoilage must be put on hold. God had decreed, when He created the world, that His natural law would not be suspended, that He would always work within it, even for “miracles”, but had also made a covenant with His creation that it would not be negated, so something had to give. The covenant took precedence, thereby requiring that natural law be suspended; Noach “needed” the covenant to trump natural law in order to enter the ark and have enough food for his family and the animals.[[40]](#footnote-40)

God also made a promise regarding all the food that Noach brought along for provisions. It consisted of fruit, vegetables, and grain, which would have to satisfy their needs for twelve months, and there was always a danger that much of it would rot and be spoiled. Even today [in the author's time] we see that when people are at sea for several months, their biscuit becomes moldy, and their water becomes so putrid that it is no longer drinkable. God therefore promised Noach that his provisions would remain fresh and usable.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The food lasted for an entire year. It remained fresh, just like the showbread, Lechem HaPanim*,* in the Beit HaMikdash. There was no odor arising from the animals. Odor stems from filth and death. There was none in the Tebah.

**The Tebah Was Like the Beit HaMikdash**

The Tebah was 30 cubits tall… And so was the first Beit HaMikdash. The dimensions of the Tebah were not meant to provide room for all that it contained. They parallel those of the Beit HaMikdash. It was called a Tebah. The word Tebah is spelled *tav, yud, beit, heh*. When you rearrange the letters, it spells the word Habayit, the House. It was a boat, but its role was that of a Beit HaMikdash.

Adam HaRishon was intended to be the one who would bring all of creation back to its creator. When he failed and Adam’s world was destroyed, Noach took it upon himself to accomplish what Adam failed to accomplish. He built the Tebah, his Beit HaMikdash, he performed his priestly duties of what amounted to sustaining the entire world.

# Verbal Tallies

The first thing that captures our attention are some unusual phrase, “inside and outside” - מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ. This phrase is only used in two places[[42]](#footnote-42) in the Tanach. The phrase “*inside and outside*” appears only in connection with these two arks.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 6:14*** *Make thee an ark* (Tebah –תֵּבַת) *of gopher wood; with rooms shalt thou make the ark, and shalt cover* (וְכָפַרְתָּ) *it inside and outside* (מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ) *with pitch.*

***Shemot (Exodus) 25:10-11*** *And they shall make an ark* (Aron - אֲרוֹן) *of acacia-wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside* (מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ) *shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.*

It does seem that the structures have something in common – at least in their appearance, they do seem to be mirror images of one another.

The Aron, ark of the covenant, is made of *wood*, and it is overlaid, *inside and outside*, with gold. It presents itself as this really shiny box, glistening with shiny, precious material.

The Tebah, Noach’s ark, is also made of *wood*, covered, *inside and outside,* with pitch, a substance that is really the very opposite of gold.

Gold is bright and shiny; it reflects light. Pitch is dark; it absorbs light. Gold is smooth; pitch is sticky. Gold is odorless; pitch is pungent. Gold is precious; pitch is almost worthless.

The Aron serves as the chariot of the Shechinah, The Ever-Living One,[[43]](#footnote-43) while the Tebah serves as the dwelling place of every living creature.[[44]](#footnote-44)

The Aron contained food in the form of a jar of manna. The Tebah contained the food for man and every living creature.

Inside the gold box was Torah in the form of the two sapphire tablets,[[45]](#footnote-45) and the Torah scroll that Moshe wrote.[[46]](#footnote-46) Outside the Tebah was water above and below; water which is the metaphor for Torah.[[47]](#footnote-47)

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 66:1*** *SO GOD GIVE THEE OF THE DEW OF HEAVEN, etc.[[48]](#footnote-48) It is written, My root was spread out to the waters, etc.[[49]](#footnote-49) Job said: Because my doors stood wide open,’ when everyone reaped withered ears, I reaped ears full of sap. What is the proof? ‘My root was spread out to the waters,’[[50]](#footnote-50) and the dew lay all night on my branch. Even so said Jacob: Because I occupied myself with the study of the Torah, which is compared to water,[[51]](#footnote-51) I was privileged to be blessed with dew, as it says, SO GOD GIVE THEE OF THE DEW OF HEAVEN, etc.*

The Aron had Torah *inside* and the Tebah had Torah *outside*. This is poignantly brought home by the Zohar based on this pasuk from the Torah:

***Zohar I:117a to Bereshit (Genesis) 7:1*** *In the 600th year of Noach’s life... all the fountains of the great deep burst forth and the windows of the heavens were opened.*

The Zohar[[52]](#footnote-52) reads this verse as an allusion to the following: “After six hundred years of the sixth millennium (the year 5600, corresponding to the civil year of 1840) the gates of wisdom above and the fountains of wisdom below will be opened, and the world will be prepared to enter the seventh millennium, just as man prepares on the sixth day (Friday) when the sun is about to set-to enter the Shabbat… ”

The “gates of wisdom above” (i.e., the “windows of heaven”) refer to the **wisdom of the Torah**, specifically the insights of pnimiyut haTorah (the inner, mystical teachings of the Torah), while the “fountains of wisdom below” (i.e., the “fountains of the great deep”) refer to worldly wisdom and science.

We see indeed that the date mentioned marks a period of an increased manifestation of pnimiyut haTorah, as well as the beginning of an unprecedented development of worldly sciences.

The Torah also connects these two structures with the Hebrew word: *cover* - כָפַרְתָּ.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 6:14*** *Make thee an ark of gopher wood; with rooms shalt thou make the ark, and shalt cover it* (וְכָפַרְתָּ) *inside and outside with pitch.*

***Shemot (Exodus) 25:17*** *And thou shalt make an ark-cover* (כַפֹּרֶת) *of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.*

So, that word for ‘cover it’ – vechafarta וְכָפַרְתָּ – is spelled kuf, pei, reish, tav. That exact sequence of letters, kuf pei reish tav, appears in only one other context in the entire Torah: In connection with HaShem’s ark of the covenant. Kuf, pei, reish, tav, just happens to spell kaporet - כַפֹּרֶת, the word the Torah uses for the solid gold covering that you’d lay on top of the Aron in the Tabernacle to cover it.

# What Does it Mean?

Two wooden boxes covered *inside and outside* mibayit umichutz - מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ. Overlays that are exact opposites, gold vs. pitch, of one another. Both have a covering called Kaporet - כַפֹּרֶת,[[53]](#footnote-53) Vechafarta - וְכָפַרְתָּ.

What could possibly explain them? Why would the ark of Noach be connected, in some essential way, with the ark of HaShem, of all things?

Sure, in English, they are both arks. But they are so different: One ark saves humanity from destruction during a flood. The other houses the ten commandments in HaShem’s holy sanctuary. The two roles seem as far apart from one another as you could possibly imagine. Why would they be related to each other?

**A Clue**

We saw that the two arks seem to be mirror images of one another with respect to their overlays, pitch and gold being quite the opposite of one another. Maybe these two arks really are mirrors of one another, in terms of their function, not just their appearance. What could that mean? Well, think about HaShem and think about mankind. Could it be that each ark helps one of these beings, live in the other’s world?

Let’s start with HaShem. Our world isn’t really His place. The creator of a system obviously lives outside the system. So, if HaShem is our Creator, that means HaShem lives in His own realm, beyond space and time. Yes, He understands what is going on in this world, sees it, can influence it, and even make signs and miracles happen here, but still, this world is not His place. There is, however, an exception to this: The Tabernacle, and the ark within the Tabernacle. You see, the Torah speaks of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, as a home for HaShem in this world. And the ark with in the Mishkan seems to have a special role with respect to this. The Torah tells us that the ark is where the Presence of HaShem would reside, it would hover in a cloud over the kaporet, over the covering for the ark. So maybe the ark is a vessel designed to facilitate HaShem’s existence in an environment that is otherwise the world of humans.

Think about us in HaShem’s World. We don’t live in HaShem’s world. But what, if suddenly, we had to? Did it ever strike you as odd that the Torah’s description of the world before creation sounds a great deal like a flood? There is a spirit, or a wind from HaShem that’s hovering over this water, this water that’s all over the place. Put all those elements together, what does it look like? It is a vast water world, dark and wind, there’d be waves crashing all over the place. It would be like a flood.

HaShem’s World, beyond space and time, is spoken of as it were a dark, water world, it seems to me that we can infer something really interesting about the nature of the flood in Noach’s time. When the floodwaters inundated the earth, the world was being undone. It was as if the world was returning to its original pre-created state. What is that ‘pre-Created state’? That would be HaShem’s world.

Noach’s moment on the world stage was a moment when humans, to survive, suddenly needed to somehow make it in HaShem’s World. And the ark that HaShem instructed Noach to build? It was the vehicle through which this could happen. These two arks really do mirror each other. Noach’s ark allowed humans to exist, safely in an environment approximating HaShem’s own world. And the ark of the Tabernacle allowed HaShem to reside ‘safely’ in mankind’s world, without our world being utterly overturned in the process.

A chiasm, or an ATBASH structure, is an ‘arrow-like’ literary structure where the first element in a given section of text, mirrors the last; the second to first mirrors second to last element; third to first mirrors third to last, and so on. And, that’s exactly, I think, what we have with these two arks. If you look at the way Noach’s ark is described in Genesis, and the way HaShem’s ark is described in Exodus, you actually begin to see this arrow-like structure emerging. And maybe the easiest way for me to show it to you, is to actually begin with a point we made earlier: The fact that both arks were overlaid with another substance, mibayit umichutzמבית ומחוץ*,* in the words of the text, both inside and outside they were overlaid. Let’s start right there. That’s going to be element number one in our chiasm.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Noach’s Ark vs. The Ark of the Covenant – HaShem’s ark.** | | | | | | |
| Edges - קֵץ  Faces – מִפְּנֵיהֶם  Gen. 6:13 | Cover - וְכָפַרְתָּ  Gen. 6:14 | Inside and outside - מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ.  Gen. 6:14 | Length, width, and height.  Gen. 6:15 | Shape will become clear.  Gen. 6:15 | forty days and forty nights.  Gen. 7:12 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Teruma - וַתָּרָם  Gen. 7:17 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | **This is the focal point.**  That which was lifted up. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Teruma - תְּרוּמָה  Exo 25:2 |
| Edges – מִקָּצָה  Exo. 25:19  Faces - וּפְנֵיהֶם  Exo. 25:20 | Cover - כַפֹּרֶת  Exo. 25:17 | Inside and outside - מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ.  Exo. 25:11 | Length, width, and height.[[54]](#footnote-54)  Exo. 25:10 | Shape will become clear.  Exo. 25:9 | forty days and forty nights.  Exo. 24:18 |  |

From the above chiasm we can deduce that the goal of both ‘arks’ is the terumah (that which was lifted up), the gifts that would result.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 7:17*** *And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up (*וַתָּרָם*) above the earth.*

***Shemot (Exodus) 25:2*** *Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering (*תְּרוּמָה*): of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.*

Offering – terumah – something lifted up and elevated.

# The Terumot[[55]](#footnote-55)

So, there we have it – this seems to be the center of a remarkable chiasm, spanning Genesis and Exodus, these two arks – Noach’s ark, and HaShem’s ark. Forty days and nights, and *terumah*. What are we to make of this remarkable structure in the text? And what are we to make of its center?

I’m sure there is much to make of it, but let me leave you with two thoughts.

**What Does the Ark of the Covenant Represent?**

Broadly speaking, the construction of each ark is meant to prepare for a fateful moment in time, what we might call a moment of ‘contact’: A moment in which HaShem’s world, as it were, interfaced with man’s world. The first time this happened, in the days of Noach, it meant the end of the world as we know it: Water wiped away all created things, taking the world of man back to its pre-Creation state. Man was left marooned in HaShem’s world – unable to survive, except through the aid of an ark.

But the second time HaShem’s world interfaced with our own, it wasn’t disastrous; it was awesome, quite literally. It was wonderful. It was a moment we call revelation. HaShem’s presence descended upon a mountain in a cloud. And one man, Moses, ascended into the cloud, and managed to survive the encounter. He descended with a pair of tablets that were to be ensconced in an ark.

That ark... was meant to help recreate Moses’ experience for the people as a whole. For, it might *seem* that it was only Moses who could encounter HaShem this closely, this personally. The rest of the people were left below, at the foot of the mountain. And yet, it is not so. Because while Moses was engaged in that solitary encounter with HaShem at Sinai, HaShem instructed Moses to build a Tabernacle, with an ark as its centerpiece. And the Tabernacle had a single purpose: To allow HaShem to dwell among the people. To democratize Moses’ experience, as it were.

Through the ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle, the Sinai experience would be able to recreate itself, publicly, for the whole people to experience. HaShem’s world would be brought into man’s world. And not only would we survive the encounter, we would flourish, and be nourished and blessed by it.

# From Noach's Ark to God’s Ark of the Covenant

The ark, as vehicle for God’s presence, would, over time, seem to possess an almost miraculous power. The Talmud teaches, for example, that *ha’Aron nosei et nos’av. –* that in reality, people didn’t really carry the ark; it would bear aloft the people carrying it. It is as if God’s ark was buoyant; as if it floated off the surface of the earth, just as Noach’s ark did.

But this special power that the ark of the Covenant had, its miraculous ability to levitate, as if carried by water, where did that ability really come from? The center of our chiasm suggests a fascinating, and poignant, answer. It came from the people of all things. It came from the common man, it came from the gifts of his heart, his terumah, offerings.[[56]](#footnote-56)

You see, the center of our chiasm connects the water’s ability to bear aloft Noach’s ark, *vatarem me’al ha’aretz,* with the people’s gifts of *terumah*. Seemingly, each had the same function. In other words: The *terumah* weren’t *just* gifts; *terumah*, as its literal translation suggests, was *that which lifted up.* Like the rain that lifted up Noach’s ark, the *terumah* would be that which lifted up HaShem’s ark.

To me, that is very poignant. The *terumah* that the people brought consisted of very material things. Linen, wool; gold, copper; wood and building materials. But somehow, those material things, would invest HaShem’s ark with its most mysterious, ethereal, spiritual power; the power to rise above materiality itself, to float above the earth. *How* could the gifts do that? I don’t know. But perhaps it has something to do with how the *terumah* was given: *Terumah* was given from the heart. Each person brought what they most desired to bring to HaShem. Something you give from the heart may look material. It may feel physical. It is just a rose. Just a card. But when given from the heart, a gift… is more than a material thing. It rises above the material. It dances on air. A gift, from the heart, has the power to bring a little bit of HaShem’s world into our own, and to keep it safe here with us.

\* \* \*

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1. AKA Teibah or Teivah [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the Septuagint both were assigned the same Greek word, *kibotos*, though different words, Tebah and Aron, as used in the Hebrew text. refer to Noach’s ark and the ark of the covenat. The NT Greek does not differentiate between the Tebah and the Aron, calling them all kibotos (or kiboton). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In Rabbinic Hebrew, we find the words *Tebah*and*aron*used almost interchangeably. For example, one Mishna (Ta’anit 2:1) tells about how on communal days of fast the *Tebah* would be taken outside to the city plaza in a show of public outcry, and another Mishnah (*Megillah* 3:1) rules that money received from selling a synagogue building can only be used for purchasing a *Tebah* or something holier than a *Tebah .*What does the Mishna mean when it refers to a *Tebah* in these cases*?*The commentators discuss whether the Mishna refers to the Holy Ark of a synagogue which houses the Torah Scrolls, or to the table (known as *bimah*) upon which the Torah Scrolls are placed while being read. Either way, the word *Tebah* in the language of the Mishna does not refer exclusively to something floating on the sea or housing a live person, which defeats the definition given above. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. HaShem’s ark [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Traditionally, at the end of each Parsha a word is formed containing the numerical value of the number of verses in it. This word is known as the “siman” and alludes to an important theme discussed in the Parsha. Parshat Noach has the siman “Betzalel”, who was the architect of the Mishkan and the individual who built the Tebah which housed the “Luchot” – “the sapphire tablets of the covenant”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In The Flood saga in Bereshit (Genesis) chapters 6-9, we find the word ‘covenant’ used eight (8) times! [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. the Tabernacle in the wilderness [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Yoma 21a; Megillah 10b; Bava Batra 99a. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. לשנ Lashon is the Hebrew word for speech. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Luchot HaBrit translates as the tablets of the covenant. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Israel ben Eliezer or Yisroel ben Eliezer (1698 – 22 May 1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov or as the Besht, was a Jewish mystic and healer who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism. "Besht" is the acronym for Baal Shem Tov, which means "Master of the Good Name," a term for a holy man who wields the secret name of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bereshit (Genesis) 6:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This section was written by Rav David Silverberg. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Kohelet Rabba 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bereshit (Genesis) 7:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. 8:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bereshit Rabba 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Moed [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bereshit Rabbah 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Yoma 19b [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Orach Chaim 619:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch (608:4) records a custom not to eat foods that warm the body, and thus, might lead to a seminal emission. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Many have the custom to stay in shul singing the special Shir HaKavod, including Anim Zemirot. Rav Soloveitchik felt that only on Yom Kippur, when we are like angels, are we allowed the “audacity” to so praise   G-d. For this reason, he opposed the singing of Anim Zemirot on Shabbat (see Nefesh HaRav, 162). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lit., ‘the place of the ark was not included in the measurements. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. 1 Melachim (Kings) 6:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This is the sense but not the exact wording of I Melachim (Kings) 6:24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. V. Yoma 21a and B.B. 99a. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Pressed, squeezed together in the Temple. Rashi would have it as a simile of a ‘floating mass’, immovable in a swaying mob. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lit., ‘House of the Mercy Seat’, v. supra p. 73, n. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The ten cubits from the ground where the Cherubim and the Ark were standing. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The space of twenty cubits from the Cherubim to the top. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. They were empty. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The Ark and the Cherubim, as stated infra, miraculously occupied none of the space of the Sanctuary. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cf. Yoma 21a; Meg. 10b. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Meg. l.c. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Though the entire area of the Holy of Holies was only twenty cubits by twenty. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Bereshit (Genesis) 6:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. lions that didn’t make it onto the ark protecting Noach from his potential murderers, see Rashi on 7:13 and Bereshit 32:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. so that there would be enough to feed all of the ark’s inhabitants, see 6:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rabbi Dov Kramer [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Bereshit Rabbah 31:12-14, Rashi to Bereshit 6:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. These two words often occur together in the opposite order, but only twice in this order. (Strong’s numbers 02351 01004). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Daniel 12:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ***Bereans*** **(*Hebrews) 9:4*** *The ark of the covenant [was] covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and AAron’s rod which budded, and the tablets of the covenant*. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. There is also an opinion that there were two sets of Luchot – tablets – the first broken set carved and written by HaShem, and the second whole set which were carved by Moshe and written by HaShem. (Shekalim 16a and Bava Batra 14a)  [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Shekalim 16a and Bava Batra 14a. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. But the metaphor goes deeper than this. Water is an intrinsic part of this world, one of the fundamental building blocks of life and creation. In a real, tangible way, the world would cease to exist without the elegant molecule H2O. The same is true for Torah, which is not just the written and oral Torahs, but also what it means to be a Jew. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. 27:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Iyov (Job) 29: 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. A metaphor to denote hospitality. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 55:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Zohar I:117a [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Rashi’s approach is that the Kaporet, the lid to the Holy Ark (as well as the Keruvim, the golden sculpture of two cherubs fashioned above the lid) is not only a detail of the Aron (and the Eidut within it, the Tablets that “testify” to HaShem’s love and commitment to the Jewish people), but a separate vessel and indeed having its own significance. Underscoring HaShem’s love for the Jewish people, the Keruvim are “*d’mus partzuf tinok*,” fashioned with the face of a child, as it is written, “For, when Yisroel was **young**, I loved him” (Hoshea 11:1) (“*partzuf* ***tinok***”). This notion resonates with Rabbeinu Bechayei’s lengthy teaching on the Keruvim: “According to *pshat*, the literal level of interpretation,” the two Keruvim depicted a male and a female, “signifying how beloved the Jewish people are to the Almighty, like the love between male and female. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Throughout the Torah we find that when a place or vessel is being constructed to house HaShem’s holiness, the dimensions and descriptions of the item are recorded in great detail. Similarly, the Torah elaborates upon the construction of the Tebah and the Aron. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Terumot is the plural of terumah, normally translated as *offering*. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Terumah, in fact, does not mean a gift or an offering. It derives from two separate roots that mean both separate and elevate. To explain: in essence, the contributions to the Mishkan were not just a means to an end. True, there was a need for a Temple and Moses conducted a fund drive for contributions towards its construction. But there was much more than that. The process of giving for the Mishkan had intrinsic importance in and of itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)