



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Terumah

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

February 1, 2014

Terumah

**From Role Model to Super
Model**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Terumah > From Role Model to Super Model

February 1, 2014

ABSTRACT

Let me ask you a question: Do you look like a supermodel? No? Well, would you like to?

Do you ever feel as if there is dissonance between who you really are inside and how you appear to the outside world?

There are models and then there are supermodels. In our superficial world we often worship the external supermodel – that which appeals to our eyes. But in this week’s Torah reading we learn the nature of the true super model, which is also the best role model we can find.

Supermodels are beautiful creatures. What makes the supermodel beautiful is the balanced structure of his or her features, the way the different elements of the person blend and harmonize with one another and appeal to the eye.

And even if most of us don’t feel that we qualify for that label, the truth is that every single human being is a supermodel, structured in a beautiful and symmetrical way.

The key to revealing the beauty is to know the structure, so that we can build our own on that model. And we know the structure by looking at the first model (or template) as it is described in the Torah, in *Parshat Trumah*.

Studying the architectural dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant and realizing that we each are Arks in our own right, can help us apply these dimensions to our personal selves and to our everyday lives. This also helps us achieve true joy (as we enter the first of two months of Adar).

Hint: With the Winter Olympics in Sochi approaching, it’s all about the Gold!

FROM ROLE MODEL TO SUPER MODEL

1. The Real You (Joke)

A ripe old gentleman and a lady friend of similar vintage are out on a date. The gentleman has a fake tan from one of those tanning salons and unnaturally perfect white teeth that can only be dentures. He is wearing a faux-leather jacket; on his wrist is an imitation Rolex; and on his head is a ridiculous toupee. The lady has had plastic surgery all over, to nip this and tuck that – she has had a nose job, a face lift, and liposuction. And she has a standing appointment at her dermatologist for Botox injections to iron out her wrinkles.

Says he to her: “Y’know, sometimes I feel as if people don’t really get who I am.”

To which she responds: “Oh my gosh, exactly – all I want is for someone to see the real me!”

Huh?

2. Are You For Real?

Have you ever seen an advertisement in one of those glossy magazines portraying a supermodel toting a handbag or flashing diamond jewelry? Or a TV spot that shows some good-looking people sharing a beer or taking a car for a spin? Doesn’t it make you envious? Don’t you want to be like them, flashing that bling, spinning that car?

Human nature is to want beautiful things and to be beautiful, like those supermodels. This is why companies pay billions of dollars to create ads that use beautiful people to sell their products. They know that it sparks a desire in their target demographic to want to buy that product and become beautiful like that supermodel.

And this is why cosmetic surgery is so popular. Today, one can literally alter one's physical appearance – one can change one's nose and cheekbones, remove body fat, erase wrinkles and sagging jowls, lighten or darken one's skin and then put on a wig or toupee and ... *voila* ... look like somebody else.

Which, of course, inspires the question: Do you ever feel as if there is dissonance between who you really are inside and how you present yourself to the outside world?

Is what you see when you look in the mirror the same image that people see when they look at you? Who is the real you?

3. Religious Context

This question is compounded when we put it in a religious context:

Say I feel religious (whatever religious means) inside of me, in my heart, in my soul – now, does that mean I have to act religious to the outside world as well? Do I have to wear a yarmulke or dress modestly if I feel modest inside and feel like my soul is wearing a yarmulke? In other words: Is it enough to be a good Jew at heart, without any external expression?

And conversely: When I see a religious-looking Jew, with a long black coat, long black peyos (sidelocks), long black beard, and long white tzitzit strings dangling at his side, how do I know if that individual is really religious and God-fearing on the inside? (Indeed, I have heard many a story where a so-called religious person, dressing the part, looking the part, was corrupt and abusive.)

So how to know when we – or someone else – is truly beautiful, truly holy, truly religious, and pure both inside and out?

And how do we achieve this high ideal? Is there some sort of cosmic model – a super role model, if you will – of how to create a beautiful self, to be the best person both inside and out?

The answer is: Yes, there is.

It is called the Ark, and it is described in this week's reading of the Torah.

4. The Structure of Everything

Everything in existence has a structure to it.

As a simple example, an office building is structured with a foundation, floors, walls, cement, sheetrock, brick, glass, wiring, piping, plumbing, staircases, elevators, cubicles, doors, boardrooms, etc. etc. etc.

So is the case with human beings. We are intricately structured phenomena.

Structures are built following a model, a template, a blueprint. And, often times, before a construction company begins a massive project, the architect will create a scaled model of the building as a template. Once a functional working model exists, it is so much easier to replicate it again and again. Just look at cars, or iPhones. A model concept is created, by which millions can follow.

5. The Supermodel

The structure is what makes something or someone beautiful.

A supermodel is a supermodel because his/her structure is symmetrical and harmonious, because the manner in which the supermodel is formed is refined and pleasing to the eye.

This is also what makes a building beautiful – the way the lines and contours and light and dimensions all flow into one another in a fluid symphony of material perfection. (This is also the case with the iPhone. It is a perfect marriage between clean design, simple interface, and smooth technology.)

A beautiful structure is one where all the elements mesh and all the parts click. An ugly structure is lopsided, clunky, uneven, with materials and designs clashing with one another.

When it comes to human beings – this most dynamic of all creatures who is even more dynamic than, yes, an iPhone 5 – what are the perfect dimensions we are meant to look for? What are the finest materials we are meant to use in our lives to realize our beautiful potential? What super model should we be trying to emulate so that we can become supermodels ourselves?

As usual, the Torah supplies the answer.

6. The Ark-e-Type

This week's Torah reading – *Parshat Trumah* – describes the structure of the Tabernacle and its sacred vessels of service, including the Menorah, the Altar, and the Ark. This Tabernacle – the original intimate dwelling place for God and a prelude to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem – was the central Divine sanctuary in this world. And it was, and is, the global scale model – the best super model – for how to construct a home-base for God on earth.

Our Sages tell us that the Holy Temple was a physical, three-dimensional model of the spiritual architecture of the soul. The Temple consisted of numerous domains, chambers and vessels – each corresponding to an element of the inner life of man and illustrating that element's function and purpose.¹

¹ See BeChayei on Exodus 25:9; Shaloh, Parshat Terumah (324b); Torat HaOlah by Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (the Rama).

God said, “Build for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among you.”² The purpose of existence is to build a Divine home in our material universe. Building this home is thus a model for every form of building that we will ever devise – from the skyscrapers in our sprawling cities to our businesses and corporations; from our personal lives, homes and families to our social structures.

As such, the construction of the sanctuary offers us many lessons in life. Which explains why the Torah elaborates upon every detail of its construction, and not once, but three times.

7. On the Personal Scale

On a personal scale, each one of us is entrusted with building such a sanctuary in our lives, in our environments, and in our hearts, out of the materials and tools we have been given. And the personal sanctuary that we build for God is meant to follow the model set forth by the sanctuary described in this week’s Torah reading.

Obviously, many details go into building a sanctuary, and I would love to address them all. But, due to time constraints, let me focus on one element, one vessel. And let me draw from it a lesson relevant to all our lives today – so that we can all become better people, more beautiful people, inside and out.

Directly following God’s instruction to construct a sanctuary for Him on this earth, the Torah describes the first of its vessels: the Ark of the Covenant which was housed in the Holy of Holies, and into which were placed the tablets of the Ten Commandments – the first set of broken tablets and the second set of whole tablets, as well as a Torah scroll. The Ark was the safe, if you will, of the Divine wisdom, not unlike the arks in all synagogues that today safeguard the Torah scrolls.

God gave specific instructions on how He wanted everything to be in His sanctuary, the Ark included. He told Moses:

²Exodus 25:8.

Make the Ark out of cedar wood...and you shall overlay it with pure gold; from inside and from outside you shall overlay it; and you shall place upon it a crown of gold all around.³

Let's review those instructions: Construct an Ark out of cedar, overlaid with pure gold, both on the outside of the Ark and the inside. And then top it all off with a golden crown that encircles the Ark.

At first glance, does that not seem strange to you? I mean, the Menorah was constructed out of one huge piece of solid gold, so why was the Ark only gold-plated? The Ark sat in the Holy of Holies and contained the Torah, the very essence of Judaism – so why was it not made of solid gold? Why make the Ark out of cedar wood with only a gold overlay? And if, for whatever reason, God wanted wood involved, or was trying to save a few bucks (who said God wasn't Jewish?) why overlay the inside of the Ark with gold as well? (I mean no one sees the inside?!)

What does it all mean? And how is it relevant for us?

8. Ark-e-Texture

The Talmud⁴ elaborates on the details of the Ark described in the Torah and says a most amazing thing:

From inside and from outside you shall overlay it ... Any Torah scholar whose inside is unlike his outside, is not a Torah scholar.⁵

The Ark's dimensions are not only specified so exactly for reasons of architectural precision. These dimensions are here to teach us a lesson and to be a model for us in our personal lives.

³ Exodus 25:10-11.

⁴ Yuma 72b.

⁵ The Mahrasha explains that this means any scholar who studies Torah but is not in awe of Heaven, is not a scholar.

Teaches the Ark: If one is gold on the outside but not on the inside – in other words, if one is insincere – this is no Ark. And if one is gold only on the inside but not on the outside, then this is not presentable or respectable or indeed genuine. I mean, how genuine is a person who is good as gold inside but who never shines outside, who never demonstrates his or her goodness. Neither shortcut will do. Gold on the inside *and* the outside is the mandate.

We are the Arks of today. Each one of us contains and safeguards the principles and teachings of the Torah for all the world, and therefore we must be gold without and within. If a Jew is only pure gold on the inside, then his Ark is not yet complete; and if her Ark is only gold on the outside, then that Ark too is not yet complete.

For some of us, being gold on the inside may be easier than on the outside. For others, it is the other way around. But we each have to undertake an honest self-appraisal, find our weakness, and turn it into pure gold.

9. Was God Cheap?

But why then did God not instruct Moses to construct the Ark out of solid pure gold, like the Menorah? Why was the Ark formed of wood and only overlaid with gold? Was God being cheap?

Gold itself is pure, beautiful and luxurious, and this is how an Ark must present itself to the world within and without, as pure, beautiful and luxurious.

But this gold, this precious purity, must be based on an unwavering and firm foundation.

Gold is the most malleable of metals, it is soft and it is dainty. Gold is easily shaped. Gold is innocent and sincere. These are great and essential qualities, but we live in a harsh and unforgiving world. An Ark, whose role in this universe is to carry the Torah through the harshest deserts and the darkest storms, must be fashioned out of a firm and staunch

backbone, and this is where cedar wood comes into play. Cedar wood comes from a tree that grows in harsh conditions, reaches 130 feet in height and 8 feet in diameter. Not surprising its wood is very strong.⁶

Pure gold – so fragile, innocent and sincere – may come to be manipulated by the painful realities of earth, but the unwavering cedar wood will never be influenced by an outside world and will forever remain true and protective.

10. Constructing Ourselves

This is how we must construct ourselves, as Arks – as Torah bearers of the world – imitating the supermodel of the Ark of the Covenant.

We must make ourselves out of cedar wood, firm and unwavering in our convictions. Then we must overlay this conviction with pure gold, with the most precious and refined of metals. For we must glitter to the world, and we must be invaluable.

But, in addition to this overlay on the outside, which all the world sees, we also must be overlaid with gold on the inside, so that our insides are like our outsides.

If we are only gold on the outside, but we are not gold on the inside, then how can we ever be suitable carriers for Torah and truth? How can we be sincere and genuine if we are different outside than we are inside?

If we are like the ripe old gentlemen and his Botox date, this is not a supermodel; this is a super-muddle, where all is mixed up and confusing. This isn't truthful and sincere; this is deceit.

⁶ Cedar wood is a very strong and aromatic, and it resists decay and bug infestation. Your grandmother probably had a cedar chest or maybe even a cedar closet. Unfortunately, the species of cedar with these marvelous properties have been overharvested and so you don't see cedar chests much anymore. If you inherited one, treasure it. For more about the biblical cedar see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon_Cedar Note: The so-called American Red Cedar is not a cedar, but a juniper; unlike cedars, junipers abound.

Of course, we are all human beings and sometimes what we feel inside is not what we express outside, and sometimes how we act on the outside is not really how we feel on the inside. And that's okay. But it's only okay if we know it isn't the ideal, and the ideal we strive for is to fashion ourselves after the Ark – gold both inside and outside, with wood in the middle.

This integration also helps us achieve true joy – which is especially relevant today, Rosh Chodesh Adar I, as we enter the first of two months of Adar when we increase in joy. Tension and anxiety is often a result of us feeling split between our insides and our outsides. When we join them together we achieve a state of harmony and wholesomeness.

11. The Crown (Talmudic Insight)

You may find yourself asking: How can I make myself strong as cedar wood and shiny like gold, both in and out? That sounds rather difficult!

The answer to this lies in the conclusion of Torah's description of the Ark: *...and you shall make upon it a crown of gold all around.*

The Talmud states that there were three crowns upon three vessels of the Tabernacle: one was on the Inner Altar, one was on the Ark, and one was on the Table. Aaron, the High Priest, claimed the one on the Altar, as it represented the priesthood; King David claimed the one on the Table, as it represented royalty. But thus far, no one has claimed the one on the Ark, which represents Torah. Whomever wishes may come and claim it.⁷

The Talmud continues that the Hebrew word for “crown” is written in the Torah *zar* (which actually means “foreign/strange”), but it is read *zaer* (which means “crown”). Why this contradictory expression? The implication is clear:

⁶ Lest you think this crown is inferior to the other two, the Torah says, Through me, kings shall reign (Proverbs 8:15) – through the Torah (aka Ark) the royalty itself is crowned.

Is the Torah foreign, a thing that is completely irrelevant to you (and unfortunately many people feel this way)? Or is the Torah a crown, sitting upon your head and making a very personal statement?

The Talmud continues: If God's word remains only on the written page then it is foreign (*zar*). But when it is read, studied and lived, then it becomes a crown (*zaer*). In other words: We must read and personalize these words to make of them a crown for our lives.

To borrow from "Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark," we must become *Readers* of the Lost Ark, and that is how we find what is lost – for we find it in us.

12. Familiar versus Foreign

It is a question of familiar versus foreign – is the Torah (and the Ark which houses it) familiar to you or is it foreign?

If the Torah is read and studied and cherished, it is familiar. If it only words on a page high up on a library shelf, then it is foreign. For us to be gold both on the inside and on the outside while maintaining our strong cedar spine, the Torah has to be familiar and royal to us (*zaer*), not foreign and alien (*zar*).

The Torah can remain an object inside the Ark and never become a part of our lives. And the Ark can remain a word inside the Torah, it's meaning a mystery. This, sadly, is a common experience for many Jews and why the mere mention of the word "Bible" or "Hebrew school" has people packing their bags and heading to Miami Beach. The Torah and the Ark are irrelevant and foreign (*zar*) things for them.

But what happens when we read the Torah, understand it and internalize it? Then we come to realize that in addition to being a highly holy vessel in the Tabernacle, the Ark is also a power tool and holy vessel within our very own selves. We learn that the Ark is a metaphor for our ability to be carriers of Divine wisdom and conveyor belts for the most super of all supermodels.

This is the difference between something foreign and something that is precious to you – the former makes no difference in your life, while the latter makes all the difference in your life.

13. In Conclusion: A Working Model

Now, to reference our original question:

Do you ever feel as if there is dissonance between who you really are inside and how you present yourself to the outside world?

Is what you see when you look in the mirror the same image that people see when they look at you? Who is the real you?

Groucho Marx, that great philosopher, is quoted as saying: “These are my principles; if you don’t like them, I have others.”

The original super model, the Ark, consisted of three distinct features:

- It was made of solid cedar wood.
- It was overlaid with gold within and without.
- It was encircled with a golden crown.

If you want to look like the true supermodel, you must cultivate the same three things.

- First, you must cultivate an unwavering, solid center, made of staunch cedar-like conviction.
- Second, you must be pure, precious and priceless, like gold, both inside and out.
- And, third, you must ensure this by crowning yourself with the gold standard of Torah, reading and internalizing it, and never allowing it to become foreign you.

If you do that, you will look like a super model to those around you (no plastic surgery required) because you will be super model.

Shabbat Shalom!