

Message from the Parsha

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Two Arks; One Journey

Dedicated to the memory of Robert M. Beren z"l, whose generosity and vision left an indelible mark on the global Jewish community and on Ohr Torah Stone in particular. His legacy lives on and will continue to shape our world far into the future.

When Moshe recounts the revelation at Mt. Sinai in this week's parsha, he mentions crafting an ark for the new, second set of Tablets after the shattering of the originals (D'varim 10:1-2). This raises some questions: Was it a temporary structure to transport the second luchot from Sinai, or did it serve a more permanent purpose? If it was just a temporary carrying case for the second luchot why mention it? If permanent, what was its role, given that the Mishkan would have the "Ark that Betzalel made"?

Rashi (Devarim 10:1), building off of Yerushalmi Sota 8:3, states that there were, in fact, two sacred arks - one mentioned in this week's parsha made out of wood, which housed the first, shattered tablets; and the golden Ark for the second set. Each ark and its particular contents served its own role in emblematically offering guidance to the Jewish people. While the Golden Ark was housed within the inner sanctum of

the Mishkan, Kodesh HaKodashim, the ark made of wood was reserved for unique occasions. When the Jewish people would go out to battle, they would leave behind the Golden Ark (except one time, in the days of Eli Kohen HaGadol), but bring along the wooden ark, to demonstrate the presence of the divine even in the midst of the people's most trying moments.

These two arks highlight two components of the Jewish experience. On the one hand, there is the Golden Ark that remains within the private domain with the second set of luchot, which remained intact. This ark represents the sense of permanence that we yearn for and wish to achieve in our private domain. We have a responsibility to ensure that our Jewish experience, like the second set of luchot, is complete and whole, unwavering, un-surrendering, uncompromisingly golden.

Yet it is also our responsibility to bring the ark of the covenant into the public domain, to engage our tradition with society and to bring our values into the public square - especially in times of conflict or polarization whether in Israel or the Diaspora. This wooden ark, revealed in this week's parsha, with its shattered tablets, reflects the fact that there are challenges and sometimes even setbacks in how we bring

the Torah and Jewish values into the public domain, just as there were setbacks at Sinai. Yet, we continue to do all that we can to forge a path forward.

Robert M. Beren, whose first yahrzeit will be observed next week, embodied the dual messages of both arks. Throughout his life, he supported institutions that made sure that the “Golden Ark” of uncompromised learning was at the highest intellectual and spiritual level possible. Yet he also dedicated his time and resources to make sure that Judaism made an impact in the public thoroughfare, mirroring the role of the wooden ark. He wanted to ensure that the ark of God was not just found in the Holy of Holies, but could engage society in the public thoroughfare. May Mr. Beren’s memory continue to be blessed by the amazing work of his family and by institutions like ours who are committed to this legacy.