

## Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah – Terumah

As I read this week's Torah portion, I found myself drawn to what many people think is a more mundane part of the story. God continues to give Moses instructions regarding the creation of a community and, in particular, the construction of the Tabernacle. As God starts to describe the ark and the poles with which it will be carried, I traditionally smirk and think of all of the wonderful "deals" to be had on limited edition authentic reproduction (meaning "real fake as opposed to fake fake") commemorative coins that are actually poor metals layered in 24 karat gold. See the ark and the poles are to be acacia wood covered in gold. I guess the argument from the text is that gold is not strong enough, on its own, to house and carry the ark, so the wood provides the substance and strength while the gold appropriately adorns the sacred items. Perhaps the same can be said for the coins; if they were really gold or silver, they might not hold up to the wear and tear of the handling they will get from admirers needing to review the collector's collected pieces.

This year is different. Last week, I lost a dear friend. Ted Kliman was a brilliant artist with an incredible soul. I first met him at a convention while I was still in Rabbinical school. I was stricken with awe in the face of his soulful (even if slightly macabre) work}. Since that time, Ted (and Itzy (his wife) have been counted amongst those whom I hold dearest in my heart. Ted's art and his soul came to life through the use of the tallit (prayer shawl), posed in positions, as though emotive human beings filled them – but no being was inside the shawl. His work was haunting and beautiful; redeeming and mournful. They look so real that it is hard to not see a body even where none was visible. Ted was motivated by the plight of our people and of all people; by the Shoah (Holocaust) and all genocide. When I first met him, I told him that one day I would be in a position to hang his work in my home. Several of his pieces hang in my home and my office, and he has exhibited his work in both congregations in which I have been privileged to serve. Ted's work has been displayed and treasured in settings religious and secular; Christian and Jewish.

It was his passing that made me see this portion with new eyes. The gold on the ark is the dressing the adornment. The tallit in Ted's work serves the same purpose. Each of his characters has a soul; you can feel it just looking at the work. And yes, just as the gold differentiates the ark from another box, the pose of the tallit sets the tone for the entirety of the picture. But the strength and character for both are found beneath the surface. Looking at Ted's work, one can almost tangibly feel the anguish or celebration of the person beneath the cloak. It is not the tallit that moves the soul, it is the artist's soul, as shared through the darkness beneath the tallit that causes us awe.

As I wrestled with this text and our loss, I came to realize that this understanding is at the core of our humanity. We all wear "window dressings." For some it is our clothes, our home, our size, our careers, or our adornments. For others it is attitudes we adopt or facades that we wear (or all or some of the above). But there is substance that exists beneath the surface that drives each one of us. Still though, too many of us never get to see that in each other or ourselves, for we accept, reject, attract, or repel each other based primarily on our perceptions of the façade. I always wondered why the ark had to be covered in gold. The sad truth is that were it not, we probably would have rejected it, thinking it as not being valuable or sacred. I see this parshah as being about insecurity. Only by attracting us to the ark,

will we pay attention to what exists within. We should not need the “advertisement” to attract our attention to the true beauty of the ark -- the values contained within the golden facade. The same can be said for each of us; we lack self-confidence -- inner security over what is inside ourselves. We spend time doing things to make ourselves more attractive -- perhaps to ourselves and perhaps to others. The truth is that we need to be aware enough to see and appreciate the soul that exists within each of us. It is inside ourselves that we find the humanity that we cherish. We are fragile creatures who occasionally fear that we lack value. In our insecurity, we suffer, and when we suffer, the world around us suffers because we are unable to share and give of ourselves to each other. Pay more attention to the gift that lies beneath the “tallit,” beneath the golden, ornate facade. Celebrate the soul that really is our life long substance, and not just the temporal window dressings behind which we too often hide. Become whole. Ted, you will be missed, but thank you for the gift of your “art and soul.” Shabbat Shalom.