

# Transporting the Holy Ark

## Building the Mishkan

### Exodus 25:8

"ועשו לי מקדש יתנכשו מכותב"

*"And they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell amongst them"*

### Numbers 7:9

"כי עבודת הקדש עליהם שאו בכתף"

*"Because the service of the holy belongs to them, they shall bear upon their shoulders"*

### Exodus 25:15

"בטבעת הארן יהיו הבדים לא יסרו ממנו"

*"The poles shall be in the ark's rings; they shall not be removed from them"*



**IMAGE OF THE HOLY ARK**

### **Maimonides: Positive Commandment #20**

The 20th *mitzvah* is that we are commanded to build a Sanctuary to serve [G-d]. In it we offer sacrifices, burn the eternal flame, offer our prayers, and congregate for the festivals each year, as will be explained.

The source of this *mitzvah* is G-d's statement (exalted be He), "Make a Sanctuary for Me." We have already explained that this general term ["Sanctuary"] includes many parts. The *Menorah*, the Table, the Altar, etc. are all parts of the Sanctuary, everything together is called by the name, "Sanctuary," even though the Torah gives a distinct command for each individual element.

It is possible for one to entertain the thought that G-d's statement regarding the Altar, "Make for Me an earthen Altar," constitutes a *mitzvah* separate from that regarding the Sanctuary. However, the explanation is as follows: The plain meaning of the verse refers to the era when it was permissible to bring sacrifices on a *bamah*, i.e. when we were allowed to construct an earthen altar and bring sacrifices upon it in any location. However, our Sages, may they rest in peace, explained that it is a commandment to build the altar attached to the ground, and that it cannot be moved around as it was in the desert. They explained this verse in the *Mechilta* of R. Yishmael: "When you enter Israel, make for Me an altar attached to the ground." If so, this does apply to all generations.

### **Maimonides: Positive Commandment #34**

The 34th *mitzvah* is that we are commanded that the *kohanim* shall carry the ark on their shoulders whenever it is moved from one place to another.

The source of this *mitzvah* is G-d's statement (exalted be He), "[He did not give any wagons to the descendants of Kehos] since they had responsibility for the most sacred articles, that they had to carry on their shoulders."

And even though the commandment was said at that time to the Levites, this was only because Aaron was the first *kohen*, and therefore the number of *kohanim* at that time was very small. For future generations, however, this *mitzvah* is incumbent on the *kohanim*. They are the ones who are required to carry it, as explained in the Book of Joshua and the Book of Samuel.

When Dovid commanded the transportation of the ark the second time, it is written in Chronicles, "The sons of the Levites carried the ark of G-d on their shoulders with poles, as Moshe commanded in the name of G-d." Similarly, when the division of the *kohanim* into 24 watches is mentioned in Chronicles, it is written thereafter, "These

have been appointed to serve in the House of G-d as commanded to their father Aaron, as commanded by G-d, the G-d of Israel." Our Sages explained that this hints to the service of

the *kohanim* of carrying the ark on their shoulders — this is what was "commanded by G-d, the G-d of Israel." The *Sifri* says,

"The verse says, 'as commanded [to their father Aaron,] as commanded by G-d, the G-d of Israel.' Where were they commanded? In the verse, 'He did not give [any wagons] to the descendants of Kehos [since they had responsibility for the most sacred articles,] which they had to carry on their shoulders.' " This shows that it [carrying the ark on the shoulders] is counted among the *mitzvos*.

## Maimonides: Negative Commandment #86

The 86th prohibition is that we are forbidden from removing the poles [used to carry the] ark from its rings. One who transgresses this prohibition is punished with lashes.

When discussing those prohibitions that are punishable by lashes in the end of tractate *Makkos*, our Sages asked, "But the *Tanna* omitted one who removed the poles from the ark" — i.e. that he is also punished by lashes — "which is prohibited from the verse, 'they shall not be removed.'" This shows that it counts as a prohibition and that it is punishable by lashes.