

02/11/2016

*Dvar Torah for Parshat Terumah*

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# Christina's Yearning

Rabbi Avi Orlow | BronfmanTorah | Terumah 2016

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Rabbi Avi Orlow is an educator with a great love of irreverent, relevant, and revealing Torah. Avi is currently the Director of Jewish Education at the Foundation for Jewish Camp. He has held numerous positions as a camp educator and a Hillel Rabbi and spent an unforgettable stint running youth programming in Minsk, Belarus. Avi has a BA in religious studies from Columbia University and was ordained in the charter class of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the open Orthodox rabbinical school. Avi lives in White Plains with his wife, Cantor Adina Frydman, and their children, Yadid, Yishama, Emunah, and Libi. He blogs religiously at [saidtomyself.com](http://saidtomyself.com).

One of my favorite paintings is [Andrew Newell Wyeth's Christina's World](#) (1948). Perhaps his most famous image, it depicts his neighbor, Christina Olson, sprawled on a dry field facing her house in the distance. It seems that Wyeth was inspired by Christina, who, crippled with polio and unable to walk, spent most of her time at home.

Besides his attentions to the details of the field, the Olson farm, the colors, and the shading, the greatness of this piece is how his painting depicts movement. We, the viewers, also share her desire to crawl home. It is hard to look at this without yearning.

02/11/2016

I was thinking about Wyeth's painting when reading *Terumah*, this week's Torah portion, in which we read about the construction of the *Aron*, Holy Ark. There we read:

17. And you shall make an ark-cover of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.

18. And you shall make two Cherubim of gold; of beaten work shall you make them, at the two ends of the ark-cover.

19. And make one Cherub at the one end, and one Cherub at the other end; of one piece with the ark-cover you shall make the Cherubim of the two ends thereof.

20. And the Cherubim shall spread out their wings on high, screening the ark-cover with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the ark-cover shall the faces of the Cherubim be.

[\(Exodus 25:17-20\)](#)

This is at once our most holy image and one which is just too hard to understand. Why are they facing each other? On this the Talmud says:

Rabbi Kattina said: Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the Cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were inter-twisted with one another, and they would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.

(Yoma 54)

It must have been amazing those Cherubim to touch [three times a year](#), but what of the rest of the year? Rabbi Kattina's Cherubim spent much of the year frozen and reaching out for each other. Like Wyeth's Christina caught struggling to get home, the Cherubim are perpetually caught in a state of yearning for each other.

I have been thinking about this on the occasion of having recently turned 40. I am sure that I am not alone in still thinking of myself as an 18-year-old. It has been hard to come to grips with the fact that my children are much closer to my imagined age than I am. My father-in-law said it well in a very touching birthday

02/11/2016

note. He wrote, "Today you are 18 years old with 22 years of experience. In other words, it is all about attitude in life. You are living your life to the fullest, always searching to maximize your opportunities and experiences."

We are always reaching and yearning for things that are out of reach, be it the Olson Farm, the other Cherub, or being 18 again. On the occasion of reaching this milestone it is important to take stock of how many things I have been able to reach in my life. I have been blessed with an amazing wife, a beautiful family, and meaningful work that I enjoy doing. What am I really yearning for? What do I want to accomplish with the rest of my time on this earth? Reaching this milestone has helped me focus in on the things I still want to do with my life. I am confident that best is still ahead of me.

-- For more on Wyeth check out [Artsy's Andrew Wyeth page](#).



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