



Carnegie Shul Chatter

March 7, 2018



The Ark of the Covenant

This week's parshah, Vayakhel-Pekudei, Exodus 35:1–40:38, deals with the building of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle that accompanied the Children of Israel on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. And that got me thinking about the Ark of the Covenant.

There have been many stories and suppositions about the Ark of the Covenant and what became of it, but the most famous is probably the Indiana Jones movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Here is a 2009 article from Time magazine that attempts to solve the mystery of the lost Ark.

A Lead on the Ark of the Covenant

By David Van Biema Thursday, Feb. 21, 2008

When last we saw the lost Ark of the Covenant in action, it had been dug up by Indiana Jones in Egypt and ark-napped by Nazis, whom the Ark proceeded to incinerate amidst a tempest of terrifying apparitions. But according to Tudor Parfitt, a real-life scholar-adventurer, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had it wrong, and the Ark is actually nowhere near Egypt. In fact, Parfitt claims he has traced it (or a replacement container for the original Ark), to a dusty bottom shelf in a museum in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Exported from Israel

Since my second article discusses yet another scientific/medical breakthrough from Israel, it seemed fitting to tell you about a current National Basketball Association player who hails from Israel.

Over the years there have been many Jews who have made major contributions to college and professional basketball – guys like Dolph Schayes and Red Auerbach, and Red Holzman, and Nat Holman, to name just a few. But did you know there is an Israeli-born player currently playing in the NBA?

Omri Moshe Casspi is a 6'9", 225-pound forward for the Golden State Warriors. Yes, 6'9", hardly your typical Jew.

Casspi was born in Holon, Israel and was the first Israeli-born athlete ever to play in the NBA. He was a first round draft choice of the Sacramento Kings in 2009, and has played for the Kings, Rockets, Pelicans, Timberwolves and Warriors during his NBA career. Casspi's best season was 2015-16, when he averaged 11.8 points per game. This year he is averaging 5.7 ppg.

Not the usual Israeli export, is he?

As Indiana Jones's creators understood, the Ark is one of the Bible's holiest objects, and also one of its most maddening McGuffins. A wooden box, roughly 4 ft. x 2 ft. x 2.5 ft., perhaps gold-plated and carried on poles inserted into rings, it appears in the Good Book variously as the container for the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25:16: "and thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee"); the very locus of God's earthly presence; and as a divine



flamethrower that burns obstacles and also crisps some careless Israelites. It is too holy to be placed on the ground or touched by any but the elect. It circles Jericho behind the trumpets to bring the walls tumbling down. The Bible last places the Ark in Solomon's temple, which Babylonians destroyed in 586 BC. Scholars debate its current locale (if any): under the Sphinx? Beneath Jerusalem's Temple Mount (or, to Muslims, the Noble Sanctuary)? In France? Near London's Temple tube station?

Parfitt, 63, is a professor at the University of London's prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies. His new book, *The Lost Ark of the Covenant: Solving the 2,500 Year Mystery of the Fabled Biblical Ark* (HarperOne) along with a History Channel special scheduled for March 2 would appear to risk a fine academic reputation on what might be called a shaggy Ark story. But the professor has been right before, and his Ark fixation stems from his greatest coup. In the 1980s Parfitt lived with a Southern African clan called the Lemba, who claimed to be a lost tribe of Israel. Colleagues laughed at him for backing the claim; in 1999, a genetic marker specific to descendants of Judaism's Temple priests (cohens) was found to appear as frequently among the Lemba's priestly cast as in Jews named Cohen. The Lemba — and Parfitt — made global news.

Parfitt started wondering about another aspect of the Lemba's now-credible oral history: a drumlike object called the *ngoma lungundu*. The *ngoma*, according to the Lemba, was near-divine, used to store ritual objects, and borne on poles inserted into rings. It was too holy to touch the ground or to be touched by non-priests, and it emitted a "Fire of God" that killed enemies and, occasionally, Lemba. A Lemba elder told Parfitt, "[It] came from the temple in Jerusalem. We carried it down here through Africa."

That story, by Parfitt's estimation, is partly true, partly not. He is not at all sure, and has no way of really knowing, whether the Lemba's ancestors left Jerusalem simultaneously with the Ark (assuming, of course, that it left at all). However, he has a theory as to where they might eventually have converged. Lemba myth venerates a city called Senna. In modern-day Yemen, in an area with people genetically linked to the Lemba, Parfitt found a ghost town by that name. It's possible that the Lemba could have migrated there from Jerusalem by a spice route — and from Senna, via a nearby port, they could have launched the long sail down the African coast. As for the Ark? Before Islam, Arabia contained many Jewish-controlled oases, and in the 500s AD, the period's only Jewish kingdom. It abutted Senna. In any case, the area might have beckoned to exiled Jews bearing a special burden. Parfitt also found eighth-century accounts of the Ark in Arabia, by Jews-turned-Muslims. He posits that at some undefined point the Lemba became the caretakers of the Ark, or the *ngoma*.

Parfitt's final hunt for the *ngoma*, which dropped from sight in the 1940s, landed him in sometimes-hostile territory ("Bullets shattered the rear screen," of his car, he writes). Ark leads had guided him to Egypt, Ethiopia and even New Guinea, until one day last fall his clues led him to a storeroom of the Harare Museum of Human Science in Zimbabwe. There, amidst nesting mice, was an old drum with an uncharacteristic burnt-black bottom hole ("As if it had been used like a cannon," Parfitt notes), the remains of carrying rings on its corners; and a raised relief of crossed reeds that Parfitt thinks reflects an Old Testament detail. "I felt a shiver go down my spine," he writes.



The Ark of the Covenant is carried into the Temple

Parfitt thinks that whatever the supernatural character of Ark, it was, like the *ngoma*, a combination of reliquary, drum and primitive weapon, fueled with a somewhat unpredictable proto-gunpowder. That would explain the unintentional conflagrations. The drum element is the biggest stretch, since scripture never straightforwardly describes the Ark that way. He bases his supposition on the Ark's frequent association with trumpets, and on aspects of a Bible passage where King David dances in its presence. Parfitt admits that such a multipurpose object would be "very bizarre" in either culture, but insists, "that's an argument for a connection between them."

So, had he found the Ark? Yes and no, he concluded. A splinter has carbon-dated the drum to 1350 AD — ancient for an African wood artifact, but 2,500 years after Moses. Undaunted, Parfitt asserts that "this is the Ark referred to in Lemba tradition" — Lemba legend has it that the original *ngoma* destroyed itself some 400 years ago and had to be rebuilt on its own "ruins" — "constructed by priests to replace the previous Ark. There can be little doubt that what I found is the last thing on earth in direct descent from the Ark of Moses."



Well, perhaps a little doubt. "It seems highly unlikely to me," says Shimon Gibson, a noted biblical archaeologist to whom Parfitt has described his project. "You have to make tremendous leaps." Those who hope to find the original biblical item, moreover, will likely reject Parfitt's claim that the best we can do is an understudy. Animating all searches for the Ark is the hope — and fear — that it will retain the unbridled divine

power the Old Testament describes. What would such a wonder look like in our postmodern world? What might it *do*? Parfitt's passionately crafted new theory, like his first, could eventually be proven right. But if so, unlike the fiction in the movies, it would deny us an explosive resolution.

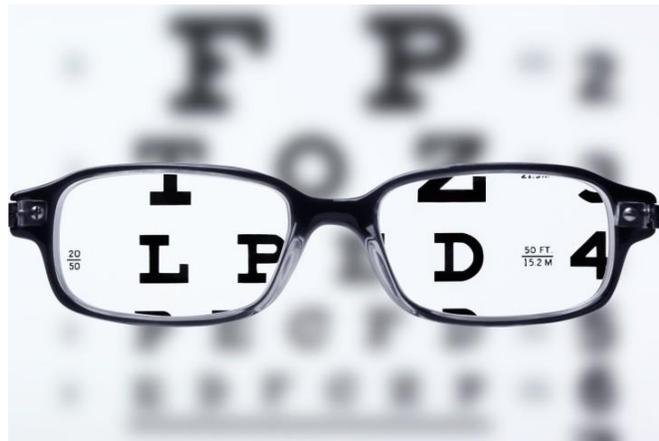
Israel Does it Again!

Every day there seems to be some new scientific or medical breakthrough coming out of Israel. Here is one announced in jerusalemonline.com earlier this week. I sure hope this becomes available soon.

Israeli ophthalmologists develop nanodrops that could eliminate need for eyeglasses

Israeli doctors may have developed “nanodrops” that could essentially replace eyeglasses. The eye-drops have already been tested on pigs and produced promising results. The human trials will apparently be conducted later this year. **Mar 4, 2018, 5:00PM, by Becca Noy**

Ophthalmologists at Israel’s Shaare Zedek Medical Center and Bar-Ilan University’s Institute of Nanotechnology and Advanced Materials may have invented “nanodrops” that could do away with the need to wear glasses. The patented eye-drops have already been tested on pigs’ corneas and produced promising results.



In the trials, the pigs’ short-sightedness and long-sightedness improved. The clinical trials on humans are expected to begin later this year. Dr. David Smadja, the lead researcher

among the ophthalmologists, announced the breakthrough last month at Shaare Zedek Medical Center’s second biennial research day in Jerusalem. According to Smadja,

if the human trials are successful, the nanodrops could eliminate the need for eyeglasses altogether.

“Eye drops filled with synthetic nanoparticles [sic] have shown promising potential for a revolutionary alternative non-invasive correction of refractive errors,” Smadja said in a research abstract submitted to the European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons.

Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one’s yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email mrmike7777@yahoo.com.