The midrash (Tanchuma Titzaveh 7) explains that the Menorah (candelabrum) was not placed in the Kodesh HaKodashim (Holy of Holies) because “*It [the Aron (ark)] does not need human light”* (ibid).

The midrash leaves us puzzled. Why does the midrash assume that we would have thought to place the Menorah inside the Kodesh HaKodashim? And, secondly, why would placing the Menorah in the Kodesh HaKodashim have been so bad?

Methodologically, in order to uncover the midrash’s meaning, we should examine what the Aron and Menorah symbolize and the nature of their relationship. In truth, the Aron and Menorah are part of a larger grouping in the Chumash, along with the Kaporet (ark’s cover) and Shulchan (table) which are sectioned off by the Chumash, listed separately (Shmot 25: 10-40) before the command to construct the Mishkan (tabernacle) (ibid 26:1).

The Aron and Kaporet, the first two Kaylim (vessels) that the Torah discusses, are linked. Firstly, they are physically attached; the Kaporet serves as a cover for the Aron, (ibid 25:21). Additionally, the structure of the Chumash hints to a connection between them. In contrast to the other Kaylim which are separated from each other with a space in the Torah, the Aron and Kaporet are not. Placing both Kaylim together in one paragraph highlights their connection.

Furthermore, the Chumash introduces the Aron and Kaporet with similar language, next lists their measurements, and commands that they be made of *“Pure gold”* (ibid 25:10-11, 17). Finally, only the Aron and Kaporet are actually placed in the Kodesh HaKodashim, isolating them geographically from the other Kaylim.

Before explaining the deeper connection between the Aron and Kaporet, let us develop the significance of the next two Kaylim the Torah discusses; the Shulchan and Menorah.

Both the Aron and the Kaporet parallel other Kaylim. The Aron parallels the Shulchan while the Kaporet, parallels the Menorah.

The Torah introduces the Aron and Shulchan with similar language, subsequently lists their measurements, and instructs that they both be made of *“Shittim wood”* and plated with *“Pure gold”* on the inside and out. Moreover, each is to have a golden crown surrounding them, four golden rings with two placed on each side, and poles placed through the rings to *“Carry the Aron”* and to *“Carry the Shulchan”* (ibid 25:10-14, 23-27).

In a similar vein, the Kaporet parallels the Menorah. The Torah introduces both with similar language, instructs that they be made by hammering out the shape from one large gold piece, and both have has symmetrical offshoots. The Kaporet has two Kruvim (angels) jutting out on the top, one on each side, whereas the Menorah has six branches stemming from its base, three on each side. The Kruvim face inwards looking at each other (ibid 25:17-18, 20, 31) just like the six branches of the Menorah face the Ner Tamid (middle candle) (Menachot 98b, Sifri Bamidbar 59).

As they were placed in the Kodesh HaKodashim, the Aron and Kaporet were located in an area off-limits to man. Aside for the Kohan Gadol on Yom Kippur, no one was allowed to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim. That area was designated for Hashem only.

The Aron, a closet or box located inside the Kodesh HaKodashim, housed the Shachena (Rabaynu Bachaya Shmot 25:8, 10). On top of the Aron rested the Kaporet, Hashem’s mechanism of communication, as the Torah explains, *“And I will be known to you there, speak to you there from on the Kaporet, between the two Kruvim that are on the Aron HaEdut, everything that I will command you concerning Bnei Yisrael”* (Shmot 25:22). Because angels personify Hashem’s word, they, the Kruvim, are to be placed upon the Kaporet (Rabaynu Bachaya Shmot 25:18). This symbolism perfectly depicts Hashem’s method of communication in this world.

Furthermore, Chazal (Yoma 21a, Bava Batra 99a, Megilla 10b) claim, that although mathematically impossible, the Aron miraculously had no physically dimensions. The Aron taking up no space further supports our theory that it contains the Shachena, for that is precisely why the Aron took up no space, because the Shachena didn’t.

In contrast to the Aron and the Kaporet, the Shulchan and the Menorah were located outside the Kodesh HaKodashim, in the Kodesh (the Holy). There Kohenim were welcome when working in the Mishkan. Beyond that they typify commonly used household furniture. The Shulchan and Menorah’s function and location portray them differently from the Aron and Kaporet; the Aron and Kaporet are uniquely Godly, while the Shulchan and Menorah human. They represent how man interacts with God.

If the Aron is designed to house Hashem’s Shachena and the Kaporet communicates Hashem’s message, then perhaps the Shulchan and Menorah, conversely, represent man and the communication of his message. Bread, the quintessential human food, is placed on the Shulchan (Shmot 25:30) representing man, while the Menorah symbolizes the light he is supposed to emanate into the world.

However, the Torah’s message from these Kaylim is profoundly deeper, for Hashem and His ideology are one, as captured by the connection between the Aron and Kaporet. However, man and his light are independent of each other. The Torah does not require the Shulchan to touch the Menorah; instead, they are supposed to be aligned with one another. Symbolically, we are supposed to share our message, and to enlighten the world, but it’s not automatic, like the Aron and Kaporet.

In light of this we can return to the original perplexing midrash. If the Aron contains Hashem’s Shachena, and the Menorah represents the light that is supposed to shine for the world, there is reason to believe that the Menorah should have been placed inside the Kodesh HaKodashim along with the Aron, for there is could have reflected Hashem’s light. However concluding that the Menorah must remain outside illustrates something else. The Menorah’s light reflects man’s values and represents his capacity to enlighten the world.

However, there is another powerful idea that emerges from our understanding the Mishkan. We cannot enter the Kodesh HaKodashim because a distance between man and God is appropriate; Hashem is omnipotent, infinite, and therefore separate. The Shulchan and Menorah illustrate that man can connect with Hashem, and paradoxically, both are true. On the one hand, Hashem is distant, beyond comprehension and we must respect that. And yet man is obligated to enter into the Kodesh, approach Hashem and serve him there. Although we will never be able to fully connect, nor fully grasp a complete understanding, we can relate to the divine through the human lens of this world.