

CHAPTER III — *Ritual Objects of the Synagogue*

(a) Aron Hakodesh

The synagogue is primarily a house of prayer. Our Sages included in the prayer service, the reading from a Sefer Torah on Mondays, Thursdays, Shabbos and Holidays. As a result, the synagogue contains an aron hakodesh to house the Torah scrolls. Originally, in talmudic times, the ark was a small chest which was brought in for the services and was removed after the service. At that time it was not safe enough to keep the Torah in the synagogue overnight. With increased stability and security the aron hakodesh was formally introduced as a permanent structure. Among Sephardic Jews it is customary to keep each Torah in a small chest in the aron hakodesh. The Torah ark is the holiest structure in the synagogue and is therefore placed up front to the east. As a holy object it is of particular significance to beautify its physical appearance.

The aron hakodesh is also symbolic of the aron hakodesh of the Beis Hamikdosh where the Shechina dwelt. It is for this reason that we place the ner tomid above the aron hakodesh and the poroches on the ark. The ark is generally on a raised platform as an indication that one goes upward when studying Torah. The platform is also used by the kohanim when they bless the congregation.



Aron Hakodesh