

Betzalel Was Named for His Wisdom

Betzalel Perceived that the Mishkan Was the Wall of Kedushah Standing between the Kedushah of Yisrael and the Tumah of the Nations

In this week's parsha, parshas Pekudei (Shemos 38, 22), we read: "ובצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה עשה את כל אשר צוה ה' את משה"—Betzalel, son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah, did all that Hashem commanded Moshe. Rashi explains:

"It is not written here: 'That which he (Betzalel) was commanded,' but rather: 'all that Hashem commanded Moshe'—implying that even regarding matters which his master had not related to him, his intuition accorded with what had been said to Moshe at Sinai. For Moshe commanded Betzalel to make the utensils first and the Mishkan afterwards. Betzalel said to him, 'The common practice of the world is to first make a house, and afterwards one puts the utensils in it.' He (Moshe) said to him, 'Thus, (as you said,) I heard from the mouth of HKB"H. Then Moshe said to him, 'You were in G-d's shadow (b'tzel El), for indeed, that is what HKB"H commanded me.' And that is what he (Betzalel) did."

Rashi's comment is derived from that which we have learned in the Gemara with several additions (Berachos 55a):

"אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן, בצלאל על שם חכמתו נקרא. בשעה שאמר לו הקב"ה למשה, לך אמור לו לבצלאל עשה לי משכן ארון וכלים, הלך משה והפך ואמר לו עשה ארון וכלים ומשכן, אמר לו [בצלאל], משה רבינו מנהגו של עולם אדם בונה בית ואחר כך מכניס לתוכו כלים, ואתה אומר עשה לי ארון וכלים ומשכן, כלים שאני עושה להיכן אכניסם, שוא כך אמר לך הקב"ה עשה משכן ארון וכלים, אמר לו [משה], שוא בצל א"ל היית וידעת."

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Betzalel was named for his wisdom. When HKB"H said to Moshe, "Go tell Betzalel to make Me a Mishkan, Aron and utensils," Moshe went and reversed the order. He said to him, "Make an Aron, utensils and a Mishkan." He (Betzalel) said to him, "Moshe, our teacher, it is the practice of the world that a man builds a house and afterwards introduces utensils into it. Now, you tell me to make an Aron, utensils

and a Mishkan; the utensils that I make, where will I put them? Perhaps HKB"H told you to make a Mishkan, Aron and utensils." He (Moshe) said to him, "Perhaps you were in G-d's shadow and that is how you knew."

Thus, we learn that HKB"H praises Betzalel for intuiting and doing everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe on Sinai, even the things that Moshe had failed to relate to him. It seems evident that what Betzalel did should apply to us, as well. His behavior and actions should provide us with an important lesson regarding the service of Hashem. It is worthwhile considering what exactly was the dispute between Moshe Rabeinu and Betzalel: What should take precedence, the building of the Mishkan or the making of the utensils? Without a doubt, each one had a deeper reason to justify his point-of-view.

Whatever Is More Sacred Is Given Precedence

We shall begin to shed some light on the matter by first explaining Moshe Rabeinu's point-of-view. He instructed Betzalel to make the utensils first and then the Mishkan, based on the principle taught in the following Mishnah (Zevachim 89a): "כל המקודש מחבירו קודם את חבירו"—**whatever is more "kadosh" than another precedes the other.** Now, the purpose of building the Mishkan is stated explicitly (Shemos 25, 8): "ועשו: "and they shall make Me a Mikdash (sanctuary) so that I may dwell among them."

Accordingly, it is easy to comprehend Moshe Rabeinu's point-of-view that the building of the Aron and the keruvim should take precedence. After all, HKB"H rested His Shechinah upon these vessels as described in the following passuk (ibid. 22): "ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים אשר על ארון: "and I shall arrange audience with you there, and I shall speak with you from atop the lid, from between the two keruvim that are on the Aron of the Testimony. Rashi

explains: **“Moshe would enter the Mishkan. As soon as he came into the entryway, a voice would descend from the heavens to a point between the keruvim, and from there it would go forth and be heard by Moshe in the Ohel Moed.**

Furthermore, the Mishkan was built for the purpose of offering korbanot on the mizbeiach, as the Rambam writes (Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 1, 1): **“מצות עשה לעשות בית לה' מוכן להיות: --It is a positive commandment to construct a House for God, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within.** Similarly, it is to be ready for the performance of other services, such as the kindling of the Menorah, the baking of the “lechem hapanim” and their placement on the “Shulchan.”

Therefore, Moshe was of the opinion that it was more fitting to make the holy vessels first—such as the Aron, the Menorah, the Shulchan and the mizbeiach. For, they are more important than the Mishkan itself, which was made up of beams and curtains, whose purpose was to house and protect the holy vessels within it. So, now, we must endeavor to explain Betzalel's point-of-view, which accorded with G-d's actual command—that the building of the Mishkan should come first.

The Middle Bar within the Beams Represents Yaakov

I was struck by a wonderful idea that I would like to present to our esteemed audience. We find a fascinating statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 175b) regarding the passuk (Shemos 26, 28): **“הבריה התיכון בתוך הקרשים מבריה מן הקצה אל הקצה. דא הוא יעקב: --“the middle bar inside the beams shall extend from end to end,” this refers Yaakov, the epitome of kedushah.** It behooves us to explain the association of Yaakov Avinu with the middle bar that connected the beams from end to end.

A simple explanation is readily available based on the fact that the Torah lists “atzei shittim” among the items that were to be donated to the Mishkan (ibid. 25, 5). Rashi comments: **“From where did they have ‘shittim wood’ in the midbar? Rabbi Tanchuma explained: Yaakov Avinu foresaw via ‘ruach hakodesh’ that Yisrael were destined to construct a Mishkan in the midbar. So, he brought ‘shittim’ trees to Mitzrayim and planted them there; he commanded his sons to take them with them when they would depart from Mitzrayim.”**

Rashi repeats this fascinating detail in relation to the passuk discussing the making of the beams (ibid. 26, 15): **“ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עומדים—**

the Mishkan of “shittim” wood: It should have said, “And you shall make beams”—not “the beams”—as it says with regards to each and every item. So, what is signified by “the beams”? From those which have been standing and designated for this purpose. Yaakov Avinu planted “shittim” trees in Mitzrayim, and when he was dying, he commanded his sons to take them up with them when they would depart from Mitzrayim. He told them that HKB”H would command them in the future to make a Mishkan of “shittim” wood in the midbar. See to it that you should have them ready at hand.

This helps us understand the statement cited above from the Zohar hakadosh: **“‘The middle bar inside the beams shall extend from end to end,’ this refers Yaakov, the epitome of kedushah.”** Yaakov Avinu went to the trouble of planting cedar-trees in Mitzrayim. It was his kedushah that served as the middle bar, bridging the beams—that were made from the very trees that he had planted-- from one end to the other.

Nevertheless, it should still be obvious to every intelligent person that we must still endeavor to explain the deeper connection between Yaakov Avinu and the making of the beams. In other words, why indeed did HKB”H arrange for Yaakov to plant cedar-trees in Mitzrayim to be available for the building of the Mishkan—a point which the Torah emphasizes with the word “הקרשים”—indicating that the beams were to be made specifically from the wood of the trees that Yaakov planted?

The Walls of the Mishkan Constituted a Barrier Separating the Kedushah of Yisrael from the Tumah of the Nations of the World

It appears that we can explain the matter based on the well-known fact that the vessels in the Mishkan represented magnificent allusions to Klal Yisrael's service of Hashem. The Aron housing the two luchos alludes to those who engage in Torah-study. This is pointed out by the Midrash (S.R. 34, 2) regarding the passuk (Shemos 25, 10): **“ועשו ארון עצי שטים, מפני מה בכל הכלים כתיב ועשית ובארון כתיב ועשו ארון, אמר להם הקב”ה יבואו הכל ועסקו בארון כדי שיזכו כולם לתורה—why does the Torah employ the term “ועשית” (“and you shall make”) with regards to all of the vessels, whereas with regards to the Aron it employs the term “ועשו” (“and they shall make”)? HKB”H was telling them that everyone should come and participate in the Aron, so that they would all merit the Torah.**

Similarly, the service of the kindling of the light of the Menorah is an allusion to those who study Torah. Whereas the

service of baking the “lechem hapanim” and its placement on the Shulchan is an allusion to Zevulun; he engages in commerce in order to support Yissachar, the pillar of Torah. This is taught in the Gemara (B.B. 25b): **“הרוצה שיחכים ידרים ושיעשיר יצפין, וסימניך: -- שלחן בצפון ומנורה בדרום”** **“a person who wants to become wise should face south, while a person who wants to become wealthy should face north; and your mnemonic is: The “Shulchan” stood in the north, while the “Menorah” stood in the south.** By means of the kohanim’s service in the Beis HaMikdash, kedushah was transmitted to every individual according to his particular spiritual level; to those who studied Torah, Torah was transmitted from there; to those who supported the study of Torah, income and wealth were transmitted from there.

Now, with the utmost reverence and adoration, we can suggest that the building of the Mishkan itself—that surrounded and protected all of the vessels: the Aron, the Menorah, the Shulchan and the mizbeiach—represents an exalted allusion to the wall of kedushah. It alludes to the barriers that every Jew must surround himself and his family with as he enters his house. By means of the four walls of our houses, we must separate ourselves from those who have gone astray and from the nations of the world, who are not governed by the yoke of Torah. Those four walls must prevent the negative influence of the wanton behavior prevalent in our cities from invading Jewish homes and destroying their kedushah.

This is the point of the mezuzah, which one places on the doorway of his house. While the four walls of a house provide protection against external, foreign influences, the doorway of the house is vulnerable; it is open to the public domain. Hence, it requires special protection to prevent prohibited things from entering the house. The Maharsha expresses this notion as follows in Chiddushei Aggados (Menachos 43a): **“והמזוזה היא — עיקר הסיכוב של מחיצות הבית לשמור במקום הפתוח”** **—the mezuzah constitutes the main component of the barriers of the house, guarding the open place.**

Thus, it should be apparent that the beams of the Mishkan constituted a wall of kedushah, surrounding the vessels of the Mikdash. As such, they not only allude to the protective walls of a Jew’s house composed of wood and stone, which prevent prohibited and undesirable things from entering it; but they also allude to a spiritual aspect. It is imperative that a Jew erect spiritual fences and aids to protect his body and soul from being contaminated, chas v’shalom, by the senseless influences of Olam HaZeh.

How nicely this explains how Betzalel was able to intuit the Omnipresent’s will—that construction of the Mishkan should take precedence over the construction of the vessels. For, although it is true that the vessels of the Mishkan possess lofty allusions pertinent to the study of Torah and the service of Hashem; nevertheless, these things only have value if we have a Mishkan in place to start with. The Mishkan encompassed the fences and partitions that form the wall of kedushah that separates us from the goyim. If those fences and partitions are not there to separate us from the tumah of the goyim, then the Torah and service in the Mishkan are meaningless and worthless. We can emphasize this point with the following passuk (Tehillim 50, 16): **“ולרשע אמר אלקים מה לך לספר חוקי ותשא”** **“and to the wicked, G-d said, “What purpose does it serve for you to recount my laws and to bear my covenant on your lips?”**

This then is the message Betzalel conveyed to Moshe: **“Moshe, our teacher, it is the practice of the world that a man builds a house and afterwards introduces utensils into it. Now, you tell me to make an Aron, utensils and a Mishkan; the utensils that I make, where will I put them?”** In other words, if I don’t prepare the Mishkan first, which is the wall protecting the kedushah, then where will I place the vessels that extend and transmit the Torah and service to Yisrael? Without safeguarding, they serve no purpose.

Yaakov Avinu Taught Us to Remain Separate from the Other Nations

Following this line of reasoning, let us rise to the occasion to explain the statement above from the Zohar hakadosh: **“The middle bar inside the beams shall extend from end to end, this refers Yaakov, the epitome of kedushah.”** It is a known fact that Yaakov Avinu had the privilege of being the only one of the Avos whose children were all tzaddikim—“his bed was perfect.” For, it is written (Bereishis 47, 31): **“וישתחו ישראל על: —ראש המיטה”** **—and Yisrael prostrated himself toward the head of the bed.** Rashi comments: **“Because his bed was whole, and there was no wicked person in it—i.e. his progeny were flawless; after all, Yosef was a ruler, and moreover, he had been taken captive among the goyim and, yet, he stood fast in his righteousness.**

If we examine the manner in which Yaakov Avinu educated his sons, the shevatim, we see that he taught them to remain separate from all of the other nations and not to adopt their evil ways. This fact is alluded to in the passuk (ibid. 33, 17): **“וייעקב”**

“**then Yaakov journeyed to Succot and built himself a house.** In other words, he erected four walls around himself and his family that served as a wall of kedushah. This barrier separated them and protected them from the evil influences of their external surroundings, which were not governed by the precepts of the Torah.

Here are several examples demonstrating the extent to which Yaakov Avinu went to safeguard this wall of kedushah that separated them from the reshaim. We will begin with the incident described in parshas Vayeitzei, when Yaakov fled with his wives and children from the wicked Lavan. When Lavan became aware of their flight, he pursued them with the malevolent intent of wiping them out completely. HKB”H, however, appeared to Lavan at night in a dream and cautioned him (ibid. 31, 24): “**השמר לך מדבר עם יעקב מטוב עד רע**”—**beware lest you speak with Yaakov either good or bad.** Upon seeing that he could not harm Yaakov, Lavan wished to establish a covenant with Yaakov and his offspring, as it is written (ibid. 44):

“ועתה לכה נכרתה ברית אני ואתה והיה לעד ביני ובינך... ויאמר יעקב לאחיו [רש”י: “הם בניו”] לקטו אבנים, ויקחו אבנים ויעשו גל ויאכלו שם על הגל... ויאמר לבן ליעקב... עד הגל הזה ועדה המצבה, אם אני לא אעבור אליך את הגל הזה, ואם אתה לא תעבור אלי את הגל הזה ואת המצבה הזאת לרעה.”

So now come, let us make a covenant, I and you, and He shall be a witness between me and you . . . And Yaakov said to his brethren (Rashi: referring to his children), “Gather stones!” So they took stones and made a mound, and they ate there on the mound . . . And Lavan said to Yaakov . . . “This mound shall be witness and the monument shall be witness that I may not cross over to you past this mound, nor may you cross over to me past this mound and this monument for evil.”

Yaakov’s actions are seemingly inexplicable. Lavan wanted to enter into a covenant of friendship. So, why did Yaakov direct his sons to gather stones and to make a mound forming a barrier and separation between them and Lavan? To answer this question, let us introduce a concept presented in our hallowed sefarim. Our enemies employ two distinct strategies when combatting Yisrael. They either wage a military battle against Yisrael, embittering their lives and pounding them into the dust; or they adopt a peaceful approach, drawing them near, so that they can intermingle with them, as it is written (Tehillim 106, 35): “**ויתערבו בגוים וילמדו מעשיהם**”—**they mingled with the goyim and learned their ways.**

This explains very nicely the tactic adopted by the wicked Lavan. His initial plan was to annihilate them completely. Upon realizing that he could not accomplish his malevolent intent, he adopted an alternate ploy. He attacked Yaakov’s kedushah by entering into a covenant with him. By drawing him very close, he hoped to corrupt Yaakov’s offspring via the evil ways they would learn from him. He hinted this to Yaakov by saying: “**ועתה**”—now that plan A is not viable, and I cannot annihilate you physically and militarily; “**לכה נכרתה ברית אני ואתה**”—let us enter into a pact which will allow me to corrupt your offspring peaceably.

Yaakov Avinu, however, grasped Lavan’s malevolent intent immediately. Therefore, he cleverly responded with his own strategy to save his offspring from falling victim to Lavan’s treachery: “**ויאמר יעקב לאחיו לקטו אבנים**”—by instructing his children to gather stones, he hinted to them that they must wage a battle against Lavan and his comrades, the enemies of kedushah. They should not allow them under any circumstances to have the audacity to draw near to them and to corrupt them. We find that David HaMelech employed a similar tactic in order to combat Goliath (Shmuel 1 17, 40); he chose five smooth stones with which to kill the Philistine.

This then is the significance of the words: “**ויקחו אבנים ויעשו גל**”—utilizing Yaakov’s kedushah, they found a way to make a mound of stones to serve as a barrier separating Lavan HaArami from the offspring of the holy people. Upon seeing that Yaakov revealed his evil intentions, Lavan was forced to accept this separation and give it his blessings. At that point, he asked that they at least agree to a pact not to wage war against him. Therefore, he said to Yaakov: “**This mound shall be witness and the monument shall be witness that I may not cross over to you past this mound, nor may you cross over to me past this mound and this monument for evil.**”

The Grave Danger Inherent in Associating with the Wicked Eisav

This provides us with a very nice understanding of the events depicted in parshas Vayishlach. Yaakov sent messengers to his brother Eisav in order to appease him (Bereishis 32, 5): “**ויצו אותם לאמר, כה תאמרו לראדני לעשו, כה אמר עבדך יעקב, עם לבן גרתי ואחר עד**—**he instructed them, saying, “Thus shall you say to my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant Yaakov: ‘I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now.’”** Rashi points out that: “**The term “גרתי” equals 613 (“taryag”); in other words, I lived with the wicked Lavan and, nevertheless, observed the “taryag” mitzvos, and did not learn from his evil deeds.**”

Based on our current discussion, we can suggest that Yaakov intended to convey a message to Eisav with these words. While he was in fact sending emissaries in order to appease him and make peace with him; nevertheless, he wanted Eisav to understand beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had no intention of entering into a covenant of friendship and camaraderie with him. Instead, he was doing exactly what he did with Lavan. He devoted himself to the work he performed for him; yet, he maintained a distance and separation from him and all of his evil ways.

Now, let us scrutinize this second example of Yaakov's behavior. Not only did he make his intentions clear, but he acted accordingly; he distanced himself from any association with the wicked Eisav. After placating his brother Eisav and making peace with him, Eisav extended him an offer of brotherhood and friendship (ibid. 33, 12): **“וַיֹּאמֶר נְסִיעָה וְנִלְכָה וְנִלְכָה לְנִגְדְךָ”** -- **and he said, “Travel on and let us go — I will proceed alongside you.”** Rashi explains: Eisav said to Yaakov, **“I will do you this favor, that I will extend the days of my travel by going as slowly as you need to.”** This is what is meant by **“לְנִגְדְךָ, in line with you.** Notwithstanding, Yaakov Avinu turned down this friendly gesture:

“וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲדוֹנָי יְיָדַע כִּי הַיְלָדִים רַכִּים וְהַצֹּאן וְהַבֶּקֶר עֲלוֹת עָלַי, וּדְפֻקוֹם יוֹם אֶחָד וּמִתּוֹ כָּל הַצֹּאן, יַעֲבֹר נָא אֲדוֹנָי לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ, וְאֲנִי אֲתַנְהֵלָה לְאִטִּי לְרַגְלֵי הַמִּלְאָכָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי וּלְרַגְלֵי הַיְלָדִים, עַד אֲשֶׁר אָבוּא אֶל אֲדוֹנָי שְׁעִירָה.”

But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and cattle are upon me; and they will drive them hard for one day, then all the flocks will die. Let my lord go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the work that is before me and to the gait of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.” Here Rashi comments: **He broadened the journey for him, for he only intended to go as far as Succot. He thought to himself, “If he intends to do me harm, let him wait until I come to him.” But he did not go. And when will he go (to keep his word)? In the days of the Mashiach, as it says: “And saviors will arise upon Har Tziyon for mete out justice to Har Eisav.”**

The great luminary, Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, elaborates in his sefer Ben Ish Chai on the dispute that went on between Yaakov and Eisav. He views it as a vital lesson regarding the spiritual danger associated with any relationship with reshaim. Let us delight in his words of wisdom:

“וַיֹּאמֶר נְסִיעָה וְנִלְכָה וְנִלְכָה לְנִגְדְךָ. יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק אִיךָ נִהְפַךְ עֲשׂוֹ לְאִישׁ אֶחָד לְבַקֵּשׁ הַחֲבֵרָה עִם יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוֹ ע”ה, אַחֵר שֶׁתְּחִילַת בִּיאָתוֹ הִיָּתָה כְּדֵי לְהַרְגוֹ, אֲלֵא הַשִּׁי”ת הִיָּה בְעֶזְרוֹ... וְנִרְאָה לִי בְּסִייעָתָא דְשְׂמִיָּא... כִּי תְחִילָה רִצָּה עֲשׂוֹ לְכוּא עַל יַעֲקֹב בַּחֲרֵב כְּדֵי לְאַבְדּוֹ ח”ו, וְסוּף עָתָה בָּא לְהִיפֹךְ... שְׁעִזֵּב הַחֲרֵב וְהַמִּלְחָמָה עִם יַעֲקֹב, וְדִיבֵר לְהִיפֹךְ נְסִיעָה וְנִלְכָה בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בַּחֲבֵרָה וְשִׁיתוּף וּבַהֲשׂוּאָה אַחַת, וְאַלְכָה נִגְדְךָ לְעִזְרָתְךָ וּלְשִׁמּוֹר אוֹתְךָ.”

וְכָל זֶה אֵינּוּ אוֹמֵר מֵאַהֲבָה אֲלֵא מִשְׂנֵאָה, שְׁחָשַׁב שְׁבֻזָּה יֻכַּל לוֹ לְקַלְקֵל דְּרַכִּיו ח”ו, וְאִזּוֹ יִגְבֵּר עָלָיו וְיִהְיֶה לוֹ תְּקוּמָה בְּעוֹלָם. אֲךָ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוֹ ע”ה הִרְגִישׁ בְּנֹזֵק הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה, וְאָמַר לוֹ אֲדוֹנָי יְיָדַע כִּי הַיְלָדִים רַכִּים וְכו’, כְּלוּמַר יִדְעָתִי לֹא מֵאַהֲבָה וְטוֹב לִב אֶתָּה רוֹצֵה בְּכֶךָ, אֲלֵא כּוֹזְנֵתְךָ כְּדֵי לְהַתְּגַבֵּר עַל זְרַעִי וּלְשַׁלוֹט בָּם, עַל יְדֵי קַלְקוּל מְעִשִׂיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יִתְּקַלְקְלוּ מִחֲבֵרַת זְרַעְךָ, דֹּאז יִדְפְּקוּם הַמְּקַטְרִגִּים יוֹם אֶחָד וּמִתּוֹ כָּל הַצֹּאן”.

He addresses Eisav's apparent change of heart regarding Yaakov Avinu; Eisav initially came to kill Yaakov and then decided to befriend him. The Ben Ish Chai proposes an explanation. Eisav's seemingly gracious proposal was not uttered out of brotherly love but out of hatred. He calculated that he stood a better chance of harming Yaakov and undermining his plans, chas v'shalom, by adopting this new tactic.

Yet, Yaakov Avinu sensed the danger and responded appropriately. He informs Eisav that he is aware that the offer is insincere and that Eisav's true intention is to rule over and dominate Yaakov's offspring. Yaakov foresees the inherent harm in the union and friendship of his descendants with Eisav's descendants; that unholy alliance would ultimately result in the demise of his entire flock.

Yaakov Avinu Planted Cedars in Mitzrayim so that His Offspring Would Emulate Them”

Now, let us address the challenging question of why Yaakov planted cedars in Mitzrayim in anticipation of the building of the Mishkan. This is seemingly surprising. For, we find a passuk that explicitly associates the cedar with haughtiness (Vayikra 14, 4): **“וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וּלְקַח לְמִטְהָר שְׁתֵּי צִפְרִים חַיִּית טְהוֹרוֹת וְעֵץ: -- the Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, a crimson tongue of wool, and hyssop.** Rashi explains: **“Cedar wood, because afflictions come because of haughtiness. Crimson wool and hyssop, because what is required for his remedy and cure? He should lower himself from his arrogance like a worm and like a hyssop.”** That being the case, why did Yaakov plant trees for the Mishkan that symbolize haughtiness?

Let us suggest an explanation. When Yaakov was preparing to go down to Mitzrayim, where immorality was prevalent, he became gravely concerned. He wondered how his children would maintain their sense of morality during the exile in Mitzrayim. Therefore, he devised the plan to plant cedar trees in Mitzrayim, in order to inculcate in Yisrael a sense of haughtiness related to kedushah. Thus, they would not be ashamed on account of their names, their language or their dress, when confronted by the Egyptians. For, the passuk states (Divrei HaYamim II 17, 6): "וּיִגְבֶּה לְבוּ בְּדַרְכֵי ה'-- **his heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem**—only by emulating the tall, proud cedars would they succeed in maintaining their kedushah in Mitzrayim.

With a sense of joy, we can now shed some light on the allusion we found in the Zohar hakadosh: **"The middle bar inside the beams shall extend from end to end,' this refers Yaakov, the epitome of kedushah."** For, the middle bar passing in between all of the beams of the Mishkan, from one end to the other, represents the kedushah of Yaakov Avinu. He taught his offspring how to maintain their kedushah by erecting partitions that would separate them from the goyim. Thus, they would follow in his footsteps, as he attests to his own accomplishments in his message to the wicked Eisav: **"I lived with the wicked Lavan and, nevertheless, observed the "taryag" mitzvos, and did not learn from his evil deeds."**

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the passuk: **"ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עומדים"**—**you shall make the beams of the Mishkan of "shittim" wood, standing erect.** Regarding this passuk, we find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Succah 45b): **"עצי שטים עומדים, שעומדים דרך גדילתן"**—**the phrase "shittim wood, standing erect" indicates that they stand the way they grow.** Based on what we have discussed, the Torah describes the beams--that were made from the trees that Yaakov planted--in this manner to allude to the fact that we must stand tall and steadfast—the way we were brought up and educated -- like the cedar tree. We must remain true to the ways of the Torah that were handed down to us from generation to generation.

In this manner, we can also interpret another elucidation regarding this passuk that appears there in the Gemara (ibid.): **"עצי שטים עומדים, שמא תאמר אבד סיברם ובטל סיכויין [רש"י]: "משנגגז אהל"**

מועד בטל לו עולמית"], תלמוד לומר עצי שטים עומדים, שעומדים לעולם—**perhaps you will say** (that since the Mishkan is no longer in service and the beams have been stored away), **"Their promise has been lost, their hope of survival is gone forever!" Therefore, the Torah informs us: "Shittim wood, standing erect"—they will remain standing for all eternity.** Based on what we have learned, here is the Gemara's message. We should not mistakenly believe that since the Mishkan has been concealed away, the wall of kedushah provided by the beams of the Mishkan no longer protects the Jewish home and family. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the point: **"עצי שטים—they will remain standing for all eternity.** In every generation, it is imperative that we follow in the footsteps of our forefather Yaakov, who planted cedar trees in Mitzrayim. He did so to teach us to remain strong and steadfast in the ways of the Torah that were handed down to us—like the cedar. Thus, we will remain separate from the goyim and their ways.

How nicely this helps us explain Moshe Rabeinu's statement to Betzalel: **"שמה בצל א"ל היית וידעת" - perhaps you were in G-d's shadow ("b'tzel El) and that is how you knew.** Let us refer to the following Gemara (Megillah 18a): **"מנין שקראו הקב"ה ליעקב אל, שנאמר (בראשית לג-כ) ויקרא לו אל אלקי ישראל... ויקרא לו ליעקב אל, ומי קראו שנקראו (בראשית לג-כ) ויקרא לו אל אלקי ישראל—where do we see that HKB"H called Yaakov "El"? For it says: "And He called him 'El,' the G-d of Yisrael" . . . Rather, interpret the passuk as follows: "And He called Yaakov 'El.'" Who called him "El"? "The G-d of Yisrael." Thus, we see that HKB"H referred to Yaakov by the title "El."**

We can suggest that HKB"H was hinting to Yaakov with this appellation that just as He is separate and superior to all the forces of tumah, so, too, was Yaakov set apart from all the nations of the world and the forces of tumah. This then is the meaning of Moshe's statement to Betzalel: **"Perhaps you were in the shadow of 'El," and that is how you knew."** In other words, you merited being in the shadow of Yaakov, whom HKB"H called "El"—indicating that he was set apart from all the forces of tumah. Therefore, you were able to perceive that it was necessary to build the Mishkan first from the beams that came from Yaakov's cedars; for they allude to the fact that it is imperative to separate ourselves from anything that is not "kadosh."

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