Jewish Tribune – Teruma

**Holy Roots**

Klal Yisroel are told to bring various materials to build the Mishkan. One of them is עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים - Rashi quotes the Medrash that Yaakov Avinu saw in ruach hakodesh that in the future Klal Yisroel would build a Mishkan in the midbar and therefore brought cedar wood to Mitzrayim and planted it there so his descendants would be able to take them with when they leave.

The Taz in his commentary on Chumash (Divrei Dovid) asks an interesting question. The Gemoro in Yoma (75b) tells us the Klal Yisroel could buy food from local merchants in the midbar, so why couldn’t they also buy cedar wood?

Why did Yaakov Avinu find it necessary to go to so much trouble to take cedar wood with him down to Mitzrayim, plant it there and require his descendants to schlepp it on their travels for many months in order to build the Mishkan?

The Chiddushei Harim, the first Gerrer Rebbe, answers the question of the Taz by noting that on two occasions Rashi notes the need for doing things “lishmah”. On the opening words of the sedrah - וְיִקְחוּ לִי תְּרוּמָה, Rashi famously says two words - **לִי לִשְׁמִי**. The Mishkan had to be built with the purest and most proper of intentions.

So too, on the words **וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם**, Rashi says **וְעָשׂוּ לִשְׁמִי בֵּית קְדֻשָּׁה** – they should make in My Name a house of holiness.

The pure altruistic intention of construction from the earliest of stages is essential. Therefore, says the Gerrer Rebbe, it may have been possible to purchase cedar wood from the locals, but a higher form of cedar was necessary. One that was planted with the highest form of purity and the most noble of intention.

Yaakov Avinu was not just supplying wood for his children; he was conveying an important life lesson. If a project is important, the foundations must be carried out with a lofty holiness.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (85b) describes how R’Chiya reintroduced Torah to generation in which it had been forgotten. He began by planting flax from which he made nets to trap deer. He caught the deer and used their skins as parchment to write down Chumash and Mishna and began teaching.

Why was it necessary for R’Chiya to plant the flax, make nets, trap animals and obtain skins for parchment? Could he not have just purchased parchment?

The Vilna Gaon answers that beginnings are critical and serve as a foundation for what is to follow. Only if every step is taken with holy and pure intentions will the result be holy and pure.

It is for this reason that we are extra scrupulous during the Asseres Yemei Teshuva. It is not double standards to take on chumras that we may not keep all year round. Rather, it is an awareness that the first ten days of the year are the foundations for all that follows.

When Rav Ruderman founded the Ner Yisrael yeshiva in Baltimore, he insisted that there be no bittul Torah in the first week of the yeshiva’s existence. No shmoozing between chavrusahs or lax behaviour in the newly established Beis Hamedrash. Cracks in the foundations are more damaging than higher up the building.

And when it came to the Mishkan, not just the building of it but everything about it needed correct kavvonos and intentions. And this is true in all aspects of our avodas Hashem.

The story is told of Vilna more than 200 years ago. In those days it was often difficult to get *arba minim*for Succos, which had to be imported over long distances from other climes.

One year, it was almost impossible to get an *esrog* in Vilna. In fact, there was only one. The Vilna Gaon was the unquestioned *godol hador*and even he did not have an *esrog* for Succos. His *talmidim*did their best to secure the *esrog* for their master. They offered the possessor of the single Vilna *esrog* that year large sums of money, but he turned them down. He did, however, make them a counteroffer: He would give the Gaon his *esrog*, if the reward for the Gaon's fulfillment of the mitzvo went to him, instead of to the Gaon!

It was a steep price and a very unusual one. The *talmidim*were not sure how their master would react. When they told him of the price for the esrog, he accepted immediately and radiated great joy, exclaiming, "Now I will be able to fulfill this mitzvo completely *lishmo!"*

It may have been possible to purchase wood from the locals, but Yaakov Avinu understood that the roots of this project had to be holy and wholesome and planted with the highest form of purity and the most noble of intention.

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