

Parashat Terumah 5775, 2015:

Building the Mishkan, Building Our Relationship With Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shmuel David ben Moshe Halevy, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.
(*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

This *pasuk* (verse) is the most famous one in our *parasha*. The phrase, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary” is the straightforward *mitzvah* to construct the *Mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary), whereas “and I will dwell in their midst” contains Hashem’s promise to dwell among the Jewish people subsequent to our building the Sanctuary. In addition, the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) utilized our verse as the source for the obligation to construct the permanent *Beit Hamikdash*: “It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within. We [must] celebrate there three times a year, as [the text states] states: ‘And you shall make Me a sanctuary’” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit Habechirah* 1:1, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

The materials for the first *Beit Hamikdash* were acquired in a planful and highly organized fashion. By way of illustration, *Sefer Melachim* speaks at great length regarding King Solomon’s acquisition of the lumber (cedar and cypress wood) necessary

to construct the Temple. This was a classic Mid-Eastern kind of business transaction, wherein King Solomon bartered wheat and oil for wood:

And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, for he had heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram was ever a lover of David... And, behold, I [Solomon] propose to build a house for the name of the L-rd my G-d, as the L-rd spoke to David my father, saying, "Your son whom I will set upon your throne in your place, he shall build a house for My name..." And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, "I have heard that which you have sent me, I will do all your desires concerning cedar wood, and concerning cypress wood. My servants shall bring (them) down from Lebanon to the sea, and I will make them into rafts (to go) by the sea to the place that you shall send me, and will separate them there, and you will transport (them), and you shall accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household." And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat (for) food to his household, and twenty measures of beaten oil, thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. (I: 5:15, 19, 22, 23, and 25)

While it is unmistakably the case that the first *Bet Hamikdash* was built from foreign and domestic (i.e. Israel-based) materials, the question arises, "Where did the Jewish people get the requisite resources to build the *Mishkan*?" For example, acacia wood (*atzai shittim*) was used extensively in the construction of the *Miskan* and its vessels:

They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height... And you shall make poles of acacia wood and you shall overlay them with gold... And you shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits its length, one cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. (*Sefer Shemot* 25:10, 13, 23 - among a total of 26 citations regarding acacia wood in chapters 25-38)

Even though the acacia tree is found in the Sinai Peninsula, (<https://ferrelljenkins.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/the-acacia-in-the-sinai-wilderness>) it is more than doubtful that our wandering ancestors would have been able to find the requisite amount of this wood to fulfill Hashem's commands. This would be the case, as well, regarding many of the other materials that were used to build the Portable Sanctuary.

Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself on *Midrash Tanchuma* IX, asked our question specifically in regards to the acacia wood:

and acacia wood: Where did they get these [trees] in the desert? Rabbi Tanchuma explained that our father Jacob foresaw with the Holy Spirit that the Israelites were destined to build a Mishkan in the desert, so he brought cedars to Egypt and planted them. He commanded his sons to take them with them when they left Egypt.

A parallel version of this *Midrash* is found in *Midrash Shemot Rabbah* (Vilna), Parashat Terumah 33:

Rav Tiviyomi said: “When the time drew near for our father Jacob to pass from this world, he called to his sons and said to them, ‘You should know that in the future the Holy One Blessed be He will tell your children to make the *Mishkan*. Therefore, you should have all the necessary materials prepared and at hand, as the text states, “and G-d will be with you” (*Sefer Bereishit* 48:21, i.e. on account of the *Mishkan*).

The *Midrash*’s expansion upon this narrative is deeply insightful and, comes to the heart of our original question, “Where did the Jewish people get the requisite resources to build the *Mishkan*?”

In the future, He will say to you, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary.” He will then descend and cause his Divine Presence (*Schechinah*) to dwell amongst you. As the text states, “And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.” There will be those of them [i.e. your future offspring] who will have prepared themselves for these matters, whereas others will have forgotten them. [Therefore,] when Moshe will come to build the *Mishkan*, there will be those who will bring [the materials] from that which they have prepared and there will be those who will bring [the building supplies] in nearly an accidental manner. This is why the text states, “And every man with whom was found blue, purple, or crimson wool, linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red or tachash skins, brought them ... and everyone with whom acacia wood was found for any work of the service, brought it.” (i.e. only some individuals were properly prepared for this auspicious moment, *Sefer Shemot* 35:23-24)

The *Midrash*’s message is compelling, shedding a bright light upon one of the foundations of Judaism: Spiritual preparation (*hachachnah ruchanit*) is one of the essential elements in performing the mitzvot in an authentic and meaningful manner. Only those individuals of the *Dor Hamidbar* (Generation of the Desert) who zealously

believed in, and guarded, the *Massorah* (our tradition) regarding the future building of the *Mishkan* were then able to fully participate in its construction. The others were forced to scramble about in a haphazard manner in order to be part of this historic moment.

When we reflect upon the *Midrash's* message in our own lives, we immediately recognize that our mitzvot-actions must be preceded by heart-felt *hachachnah ruchanit* in order to be imbued with genuine spiritual passion and devotion. If we fail to do so, our performance of the commandments will be nothing more than mere rote and robotic behaviors. This is not just a factor in 21st century life. Long ago, in the eighth century BCE, the prophet Yeshiyahu (Isaiah) proclaimed the pitfalls of a rote orientation toward mitzvot observance: “And the L-rd said: ‘Because this people has come near; with their mouth and with their lips they honor Me, but their heart they draw far away from Me, and their fear of Me has become a command of people, which has been taught (*mitzvot anashim m'lumdah*).’” (29:13) Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (1809-1879), known as “the Malbim,” elucidated Yeshiyahu’s words in the following manner:

There are those who perform the *mitzvot* solely because this is what they have become accustomed to do since their youth and they are used to performing them. They perform them without any cognitive gesture (*kavanah*) and without thought – even though they may know that they are commandments from G-d. They, however, do not perform them in any way, shape, or form because Hashem commanded them to do so. Instead, they perform them because this is what they were dictated to do by their teachers and parents. They [the *mitzvot*] are performed without any understanding and are mere mechanical actions reinforced by past rote behaviors... (Commentary to *Sefer Yeshiyahu* 29:13, translation and brackets my own).

With Hashem’s help, and our passionate desire, may *hachachnah ruchanit* permeate all our mitzvot-actions, so that they become dynamic existential gestures that are the very essence of authentic communication with the Master of the Universe. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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