



“The middle bar between the beams”

The Middle Bar in the Mishkan Was the Staff of Yaakov Avinu He Stored Oil in It to Study Torah at Night

This week's parsha is parshas Terumah. It contains the mitzvas asei to build a Beis HaMikdash (Shemos 25, 8): **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”—they shall make Me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them.** We will focus in particular on the middle bar that extended between the beams of the Mishkan, as it is written (ibid. 26, 26): **“ועשית בריחים עצי שטים... והבריח התיכון בתוך הקרשים”**. **You shall make bars of “shittim” wood . . . And the middle bar between the beams shall extend from end to end.**

In the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 175b), the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, teaches us that the middle bar represents Yaakov Avinu; his kedushah extended throughout the Mishkan. Upon further review, it is apparent that this teaching in the Zohar hakadosh concurs magnificently with the commentary of Rashi on a passuk in this week's parsha (Shemos 26, 15): He notes that the Torah does not say: **“You shall make beams”**—generically, like it does with all of the other components of the Mishkan. Instead, it says: **“You shall make the beams.”** It is referring to specific beams that had been designated and set aside for this purpose. They were from cedar trees that Yaakov Avinu planted while in Mitzrayim. Before he passed away, he instructed his sons to take them out of Mitzrayim with them. He informed them that HKB”H was destined to command them to erect a Mishkan in the midbar from “shittim” wood. Thus, he instructed them to have the wood ready.

This teaches us that Yaakov Avinu, with his extreme level of kedushah, prepared the wood for the beams and planks of the Mishkan. Furthermore, Rashbi

asserts that the middle bar represented Yaakov Avinu. Thus, we can deduce that there is an intimate connection between the kedushah of the Mishkan and the kedushah of Yaakov Avinu. In a sense, his kedushah permeated throughout the Mishkan from side to side. In this essay, we will attempt to explain the special connection between Yaakov Avinu—more so than any of the other Avos—and the Mishkan.

The Mitzvas Asei to Build a Mikdash Applies to Every Generation

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to what the Rambam writes (Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 1, 1): **It is a positive commandment (mitzvas asei) to construct a House for God, ready to have korbanos offered in it. We are to celebrate there three times a year, as it states: “And you shall make Me a Sanctuary.” The Sanctuary constructed by Moshe Rabeinu is already described in the Torah. It was only temporary, as it states (Devarim 12, 9): “For at present, you have not come unto (the resting place and the inheritance).”** In other words, according to the Rambam, the command: **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”**—was not restricted to the sojourn in the midbar, but also applied to Yisrael upon entering and conquering Eretz Yisrael.

The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh explains that the Rambam arrived at this conclusion from the fact that the passuk specifies that Yisrael make a **Mikdash** rather than a **Mishkan**; whereas in the following passuk, it says: **“את תבנית המשכן”**—employing the term

Mishkan. This suggests that even when Yisrael have established themselves in Eretz Yisrael, they are still obliged to build a permanent Sanctuary.

We can suggest another source for the Rambam's conclusion that the mitzvas asei of "ועשו לי מקדש" applies to all generations of Yisrael living in Eretz Yisrael until the end of time. In the commentary of the Sifre (Beha'aloscha), it says:

Wherever it says "לי"—"to Me"—it implies that it will exist forevermore. Regarding the kohanim, He says (Shemos 28, 41): "They shall be kohanim to Me." Regarding the leviim, He says (Bamidbar 3, 12): "And the leviim shall be Mine (to me)." Regarding Yisrael, He says (Vayikra 25, 55): "Bnei Yisrael are slaves to Me." Regarding the firstborn, He says (Bamidbar 8, 17): "For every firstborn of Bnei Yisrael was Mine (to me)." Regarding the Mikdash, He says: "They shall make a Mikdash for Me."

Hence, it is not far-fetched to say that this is how the Rambam deduced that this mitzvah—to build a Mikdash—was not intended exclusively for the midbar, where Yisrael built a Mishkan, but applies to every generation in which Yisrael are privileged to establish their dwelling in Eretz Yisrael.

Notwithstanding, there is an inherent difficulty applying the elucidation of the term "לי" to this passuk: «ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם». As the brilliant Rabbi of Berzhan, tz"l, points out appropriately in Techeiles Mordechai (9), the two Batei Mikdash were destroyed on account of our numerous iniquities; they did not endure. So, how can HKB"H say: "ועשו לי מקדש"—that the Mikdash will stand forever?

HKB"H Secludes Himself with the Torah in the Kodesh HaKodashim

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy various ways, I would like to propose my own humble opinion on the subject. We will begin by introducing a passage from the Midrash (Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu, Chapter 17): "כיון שקבלו ישראל עול מלכות שמים בשמחה ואמרו (שמות כד ז) כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע, מיד אמר הקב"ה למושה שיאמר לישראל שיעשו לו משכן, שנאמר דבר אל בני ישראל וגו' ועשו

Immediately after Yisrael happily and willingly accepted upon themselves the yoke of Heaven, with the proclamation of "na'aseh v'nishma," HKB"H instructed Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan.

Let us endeavor to explain the connection between Yisrael's declaration of "na'aseh v'nishma" and the command: "ועשו לי מקדש"—**they shall make Me a Sanctuary**—i.e. the Mishkan. We will refer to a provocative Midrash expounding on the passuk: "ויקחו ויקחו לי תרומה"—**and they shall take to Me a portion**. It describes the intense love HKB"H has for the sacred Torah, and His reluctance to part from it. It would be worthwhile for every Jew to review this Midrash morning and night (S.R. 33, 1):

"ויקחו לי תרומה, הדא הוא דכתיב (משלי ד ב) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתני אל תעזובו, יש לך מוקח שמי שמכרו נמכר עמו, אמר הקב"ה לישראל, מכרתי לכם תורתני, כביכול נמכרתי עמה שנאמר ויקחו לי תרומה. משל למלך שהיה לו בת יחידה, בא אחד מן המלכים ונטלה, ביקש לילך לו לארצו וליטול לאשתו. אמר לו [המלך], בתי שנתתי לך יחידית היא, לפרוש ממנה איני יכול, לומר לך אל תטלה איני יכול לפי שהיא אשתך, אלא זו טובה עשה לי, שכל מוקום שאתה הולך קיטון אחד עשה לי שאדור אצלכם - שאיני יכול להניח את בתי. כך אמר הקב"ה לישראל, נתתי לכם את התורה, לפרוש הימנה איני יכול, לומר לכם אל תטלוה איני יכול, אלא בכל מוקום שאתם הולכים, בית אחד עשו לי שאדור בתוכו, שנאמר ועשו לי מקדש."

When Bnei Yisrael acquired the Torah, it was as if they acquired HKB"H along with it. **It is analogous to a king who married off his only daughter to another king. When the second king came to take his new bride to his land, the first king, the father, made a small request. Wherever you take her, please make a small dwelling for me, so that I may be near her. I cannot bear being separated from her.** HKB"H made a similar request of Yisrael. So as not to be separated from the Torah, He asked that they build Him a house to live in—as it is written: "They shall make Me a sanctuary."

This Midrash teaches us a fascinating chiddush. We usually explain that the purpose of the Mishkan was to provide atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel" or for the sake of offering korbanos. This Midrash, however, reveals another purpose. It provides a dwelling place, so to speak, for HKB"H to remain together with the

Torah. Due to His great love for the Torah, He cannot part from it.

It is clear that the Midrash is referring to the fact that HKB”H rested His Shechinah in the Kodesh HaKodashim, between the two keruvim atop the Aron, which housed the two luchos that encompassed the entire Torah. From there, all the teachings of the Torah were transmitted from HKB”H to Moshe Rabeinu, as described in our parsha (Shemos 25, 22):

”ונתת את הכפורת על הארון מלמעלה, ואל הארון תתן את העדות אשר אתן אליך, ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפורת מבין שני הכרובים אשר על ארון העדות את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל.”

You shall place the lid on the Aron from above, and into the Aron you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you. It is there that I shall arrange audience with you, and I shall speak with you from atop the lid, from between the two “keruvim” that are on the Aron of the Testimony, and it is all that I shall command you pertaining to Bnei Yisrael.

Rashi comments (Shemos 25, 22): **Moshe would enter the Mishkan; as soon as he came into the entrance, 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 Mo’ed.**

Thus, we learn that HKB”H united with the Torah contained in the two luchos ha’Bris that were housed in the Aron in the seclusion of the Kodesh HaKodashim. In this manner, HKB”H fulfilled His request not to be separated from the Torah that He had gifted to Yisrael. This was accomplished by the mitzvah of: **“You shall make Me a Sanctuary.”**

This explains the teaching of the Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu beautifully: **Since Yisrael accepted the yoke of the sovereignty of Heaven joyfully and proclaimed, “Everything the Hashem spoke ‘na’aseh v’nishma.”** And in the merit of this unconditional acceptance, HKB”H gave them the Torah. **Thereupon, HKB”H instructed Moshe to instruct Yisrael to make Him a Mishkan . . . “and I will dwell in their midst.”** Due to his great love of

the Torah, HKB”H did not want to be separated from it; hence, He rests His Shechinah between the two staves of the Aron in the Beis HaMikdash.

HKB”H Has Only Four Cubits of Halachah in His World

We will proceed on this holy pilgrimage by focusing on HKB”H’s statement: **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”**. We had a problem with the statement in the Sifre that whenever the term **“לי”** is used by Scripture, it implies that something is forever. To reconcile this difficulty, we will refer to a teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 8a): **“מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקב”ה בעולמו אלא ארבע אמות—from the day the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, HKB”H only has four cubits of halachah in His world.** This teaches us an important principle: Engaging in Torah-study, within the four amot of halachah, substitutes for the Beis HaMikdash.

It appears that we can make sense of this concept based on what we learned in the aforementioned Midrash. The purpose of the Beis HaMikdash is so that HKB”H can remain with His cherished Torah by dwelling His Shechinah there. Yet, at the time of the churban, the Shechinah left the Beis HaMikdash and ascended to her heavenly abode. This is taught in the Gemara as follows (R.H. 31a): **“אמר רבי יוחנן, עשר מסעות נסעה שכינה—Rabbi Yochanan said: The Shechinah made ten journeys.** Rashi explains: **To remove herself from Yisrael little by little as they sinned—i.e., during the latter years of the first Beis HaMikdash, the Shechinah departed gradually as Yisrael sank deeper into sin.**

Thus, it turns out that the churban stemmed from the fact that Yisrael’s sins and iniquities caused the Shechinah to abandon the Beis HaMikdash. Hence, it stands to reason that the tikun is to return the Shechinah to its dwelling place in the midst of Yisrael. This feat is accomplished through Torah-study. As we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 3, 6): **“עשרה שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה שכינה שרויה ביניהם, שנאמר אלקים נצב בעדת אל... ומנין אפילו אחד, שנאמר בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתך.”** **Ten that were sitting and engaged in Torah-study, the Shechinah rests among them, as it states (Tehillim 82, 1): “G-d stands in the Divine assembly.” . .**

. **And from where do we know that this is true even of one (who is sitting and studying Torah)? For it states (Shemos 20, 21): “Wherever I permit My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.”**

With this understanding, we can now interpret the statement above as follows: **From the day that the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed**—because the Shechinah left it on account of Yisrael’s innumerable transgressions—**HKB”H has only four amot of halachah in His world**—in which He rests His Shechinah with the Torah.

We can now begin to appreciate why HKB”H employed the term “לי” when He instructed Moshe: **“ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם”**. He was pleading with us, His children, in every generation: **“Make Me a Sanctuary”** that will endure forever, even after the churban. You can do this by designating four amot of halachah, so that **“I may dwell among you.”** Because then I will rest My Shechinah there just as I did in the Beis HaMikdash.

The Middle Bar Is the Staff of Yaakov Avinu Who Studied Torah during the Night

Following this enlightening path, we will now revisit the elucidation of the divine Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: **“והברייה התיכון בתוך הקרשים מבריח מן הקצה אל הקצה, דא הוא יעקב קדישא שלימא”**—the middle bar extending between the beams of the Mishkan from one edge to the other represents our holy forefather Yaakov. Clearly, he is referring to a wonderful chiddush presented by the Da’as Zekeinim of the Tosafists on this week’s parsha (Shemos 25, 5) citing the Midrash: **“איתא במדרש שהברייה התיכון היה ממקלו של יעקב, כמה דאת אמר כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה, והביאו למצרים, וכשיצאו העלוהו עמו.”** **We find in the Midrash that the middle beam came from the staff (walking stick) of Yaakov; as it states (Bereishis 32, 11): “For with my staff, I crossed this Yarden.” He then brought it to Mitzrayim; and when they departed, they took it out with them.**

I had an intriguing idea! What was so unique and special about the staff of Yaakov Avinu that it deserved to be the middle bar extending between the planks of

the Mishkan? Let us refer to the passuk in parshas Vayishlach that mention’s Yaakov’s staff. He was praying to Hashem to rescue him from Eisav (ibid.): **“קטונתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמות אשר עשית את עבדך כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה ועתה הייתי לשני מחנות.”** **I have been diminished (made small; humbled) by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done for Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Yarden, and now I have become two camps.** Rashi comments: **“For with my staff”: I did not have anything with me—not silver, not gold, and not livestock—just my staff alone. And according to a Midrash Aggadah: He placed his staff in the Yarden, and the Yarden split.**

Rashi’s explanation that Yaakov had been stripped of all his possessions except for his staff is evident from his first encounter with Rachel (ibid. 29, 11): **“וישא את קולו ויבך—he raised his voice and wept.** Rashi comments: **“Yaakov kissed Rachel and raised his voice and wept,” because he came empty-handed. He said, “Eliezer, my paternal grandfather’s servant, had in his hands nose-rings, and bracelets, and delicacies; whereas I have nothing in my hands; because Eliphaz, Eisav’s son, pursued him at his father’s command, to kill him. He overtook him; but since Eliphaz grew up under Yitzchak’s influence, he withdrew his hand. He said (to Yaakov), “What should I do concerning my father’s command?” Yaakov replied to him, “Take that which is in my hand; for, a poor person is considered to be like a dead person.”**

We will endeavor to explain why HKB”H, the Grand Orchestrator, arranged for Eliphaz to strip Yaakov of all possessions except for his staff. We find a fascinating chiddush in the sefer Pa’aneiach Raza (Vayeitzei), authored by Rabeinu Yitzchak the son Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, z”l. He comments on the passuk that describes what Yaakov Avinu did after his momentous night on Har HaMoriah (ibid. 28, 18): **“וישכם יעקב בבוקר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו וישם אותה מצבה ויצוק שמן על ראשה”**—**Yaakov arose early in the morning and took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it up as a monument; and he poured oil on its top.**

The Pa'aneiach Raza asks an obvious question: If Eliphaz confiscated all of Yaakov's possessions, where did the oil that he anointed the stone with come from? He answers that the staff that Eliphaz left him was hollow; Yaakov always kept it full of oil, so that he would have light to learn Torah.

This is an incredible chiddush. Yaakov's staff was not a simple walking stick. He had taken the trouble to hollow it out enough to accommodate a sufficient amount of oil to enable him to learn Torah at night by candlelight. In this case, it is not surprising that HKB"H arranged for Eliphaz to forgo taking away Yaakov's staff. This was clearly an example of the teaching in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) that HKB"H says to Yisrael: «בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו» «בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו»—**My son, I created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.**

Inspirational Words from the Rambam concerning Nighttime Torah Study

Following this sublime path, we will now explain why Yaakov's staff was incorporated in the middle bar between the planks of the Mishkan. Let us refer to the inspirational words of the Rambam concerning the importance of studying Torah during the night (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3, 13):

Even though it is a mitzvah to study during the day and at night, it is only at night that a person acquires most of his wisdom. Therefore, a person who desires to merit the crown of Torah should make the most of all his nights, not wasting even one with sleep, eating, drinking, idle chatter, or the like. Rather, (they should be devoted to) the study of Torah and words of wisdom. Our Sages declared: "The song of Torah can (be heard) only at night, as it states (Eichah 2:19): 'Arise, sing out at night . . .'" Whoever occupies himself with Torah study at night will have a strand of divine favor extended over him during the day . . .

This enlightens us as to why Yaakov Avinu merited having his staff associated with the middle bar in the Mishkan. For, as we learned in the Midrash, HKB"H requested of Yisrael: **"Make Me a Mikdash, so that I may dwell in your midst. I have given you the Torah, but I cannot part from it. I cannot tell you not to take it. Rather, wherever you go, make Me one house to dwell in."** Therefore, what could be more fitting to incorporate into the structure of the Mishkan than the staff of Yaakov Avinu, in which oil was concealed, so that he could study Torah during the darkness of the night.

The Gematria of חו"ט ש"ל חס"ד Equals the Name תנ"ך תנ"ך

We can embellish this idea by explaining the reason Yaakov Avinu chose to hide oil in the hollowed out space of his staff to allow him to study Torah at night. We will refer to the statement of Chazal brought down in the Rambam quoted above. Its source can be found in the Gemara (Chagigah 12b): **Whoever occupies himself with Torah study at night will have a strand of divine favor—יחוט של חסדי—extended over him during the day.** In his sefer Ben Yehoyada, the brilliant, holy author of the Ben Ish Chai writes (ibid.): **It appears to me, with the help of G-d, that יחוט של חסדי is numerically equivalent to כה"ת, which is a holy name from the 72 names; it is derived from the first letters of (Tehillim 150, 6) כל ה'גשמה תהלל and the last letters of (ibid. 9, 11) לא עזב את דורשיך ה'; it helps Yisrael withstand their enemies.**

Additionally, in this year's essay for parshas Shemos, we explored at length a teaching in the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 40): **The staff that was created at twilight (at the end of the six days of creation) was given to Adam HaRishon in Gan Eden. Adam passed it on to Chanoch; Chanoch passed it on to Noach; Noach passed it on to Shem; Shem passed it on to Avraham; Avraham passed it on to Yitzchak; Yitzchak passed it on to Yaakov.** We find the following addendum in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Shemos, end of 168): **When Adam was expelled from Gan Eden, he took the staff in his hand and departed.**

We explained the matter based on Rashi's comment (Bereishis 2, 25) concerning the character of Adam HaRishon after the cheit: **He was not endowed with a yetzer hara until he ate from the tree; then the yetzer hara entered his being.** Also, we are taught in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): «יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו:—man's yetzer overwhelms him every day and attempts to kill him. Therefore, on that same, initial Erev Shabbas of creation, at twilight, HKB"H expelled Adam HaRishon from Gan Eden, created that remarkable staff, and bequeathed it to Adam HaRishon. Because he had eaten from the Eitz HaDa'as, he had given the yetzer hara access to his inner being. To remind Adam to always be vigilant and ready to combat the yetzer—the serpent that waits in ambush every minute of every day—HKB"H prepared a remedy prior to the affliction; He placed the staff in Adam's hand as he departed Gan Eden, so that he could strike the malevolent serpent.

Let us add another relevant tidbit from the teachings of our illustrious teacher, the Arizal, in Sha'ar HaPesukim (Vayigash): Yaakov Avinu was a gilgul and tikun of Adam HaRishon. The source for this fact is found in the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 35b). It is also mentioned by Chazal in the Gemara (B.M. 84a): «שופריה דיעקב אבינו מעין שופריה דאדם הראשון —the radiance of Yaakov Avinu was a semblance of the radiance of Adam HaRishon.

We can now truly appreciate the profound wisdom and foresight of Yaakov Avinu. He used the extraordinary staff—that was created especially for Adam HaRishon when he was expelled from Gan Eden and was passed down to him from generation to generation—to conceal oil for the sake of studying Torah at night. In that merit, **a strand of divine favor—"חוט של חסד"—extended over him throughout the day.** This elicited the sacred name תכ that subdues the yetzer hara and its forces. This explains why Eliphaz, the son of Eisav, was unable to take possession of Yaakov's staff; he was terrified of the name תכ.

In summary, we have learned an extremely valuable lesson. HKB"H requests of us: «ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם». It is incumbent upon us to extend the kedushah of the Beis HaMikdash in every generation—even in times of galus—by engaging in Torah-study, in the four amot of halachah. We are reminded of this by the fact that Yaakov's staff was incorporated into the middle bar extending between the planks of the Mishkan, on account of its ability to subdue all the forces of the yetzer, since it had facilitated his study of Torah at night. Similarly, the middle bar within the four amot of halachah is nighttime Torah-study. In its merit, **a "חוט של חסד" will extend over us throughout the day;** this will elicit the name תכ to subdue the malevolent forces of the yetzer and prevent them from exerting influence and control over us.

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