



Inherited Sensitivity (Vayakel-Pekudai)

By Rabbi Ben Tzion Spitz



You don't raise heroes, you raise sons. And if you treat them like sons, they'll turn out to be heroes, even if it's just in your own eyes. -Walter Schirra Sr.

Before Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God, he tells the people of Israel that he's leaving Aaron and Hur in charge. However, we never hear about Hur ever again. The Midrash says that Hur rejected

the people's request to construct the Golden Calf, and in their rage, they killed him. Aaron, understanding that he would be the next victim, and in an effort to prevent more bloodshed (his own), gave in to the request and made them the infamous Golden Calf.

When things eventually calm down, God chooses Hur's grandson, Betzalel, as the main architect and designer of the Tabernacle, with the exclusive task of personally making the holiest piece, the Ark of the Covenant.

What is highly unusual about the Ark, and which likely raised eyebrows initially as it does in a sense to this day, is that God ordered that the Ark cover would have not only one but two figures, two little idols of cherubs facing each other. How could it be that the same God who shows such abhorrence to graven images, who was ready to wipe out the entire nation of Israel because of their worship of the Golden Calf, could command the construction of figures to be placed on the holiest object, an object which symbolizing his most concentrated presence on earth?

There are multiple answers the rabbinic commentators provide to the question and I've given some of their answers in previous years (see Vayakel archive). However, according to the Meshech Chochma on Exodus 37:1, whatever the

rationale, that Ark and those cherubs needed to be fashioned with the utmost purity of purpose, without any hint whatsoever of idolatrous intention.

That, according to him, is one of the reasons why Betzalel was such a perfect choice for the job. His grandfather, Hur, had fought, resisted and gave his life in the struggle against idolatry. By his upbringing and nature, Betzalel would have an abhorrence to idolatry. He would bring a complete purity of purpose in the creation of the Ark and its accompanying images, without a sliver of thought, without a notion of idolatry.

Hur's heroic sacrifice helped form his grandson's character. That grandson becomes a partner with God in the creation of the holiest items on earth.

May we see them returned, to the rebuilt Temple, speedily and in our days.

And the Plague Stopped by Shmuel Sackett

Everybody is worried about a plague that is sweeping the world. As Jews, what must we do when such a thing happens? Simple; we check our sources and find what the Torah says about it. Yes, many people have been sending around cute "gemmatrias" and "Torah codes" but those things can always be flipped around to mean other things as well so I never get excited about them. Therefore, let's go directly to the TaNaCH itself and leave all the other things aside.

The source is the last chapter in Shmuel Bet (Samuel II) – chapter 24. Hashem tells King David to conduct a census, but unfortunately, King David and his general Yoav count the people via the wrong method and King David realizes his mistake. "David's heart smote him after having counted the people, and David said to Hashem, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done...'" (verse 10 – translation by ArtScroll) Hashem then sends a plague and 70,000 Jews are killed in one day! (According to many commentators, they were actually killed in one hour!) Imagine that... 70,000 Jews died

in this horrific plague! Unthinkable! When will it stop???
Heaven help us!!

King David prays to Hashem and says; “Behold, I have sinned and I have transgressed, but these sheep (i.e. the Nation of Israel) – what have they done?” (verse 17) The prophet Gad then tells him what must be done to stop the plague: **David must build a mizbeyach (altar) on Har Ha’Bayit (the Temple mount)!** Immediately upon hearing this, King David goes to Aravnah the Jebusite – who owned that incredible real estate! – and offers to buy it from him. Aravnah answers him in a similar way to what Ephron said to Avraham when he wanted to buy Ma’arat Ha’Machpela, to bury Sarah. Aravnah tells David that he can take it for free; “Let my lord the king take it...” (verse 22). David refuses to take it for free and insists on paying full price (just like Avraham did in Hebron...); “The King told Aravnah, ‘No, I shall purchase it from you...” (verse 24). A price is set, David buys Har Ha’Bayit and then comes the last verse in the chapter (verse 25); “David built an altar there to Hashem, and he offered elevation offerings and peace offerings (i.e. different sacrifices). Hashem then answered the prayers of the land **and the plague ceased from Israel.**”

Ok, let’s make a quick review. There was a plague where 70,000 Jews died in one day (or one hour...) and, naturally the people were worried that this would continue. David davens to Hashem and the prophet, Gad, tells David that – in order for the plague to stop – he must build a mizbeyach on Har Ha’Bayit and offer sacrifices! David quickly runs to a guy named Aravnah, who owned that property and buys the Temple Mount from him!!! King David then builds a mizbeyach, offers sacrifices and the plague was over. No quarantine... no vaccine... just building a mizbeyach on Har Ha’Bayit to offer Korbanot (sacrifices). Hmmm.

Let’s put this aside for a moment and think about something else. As you know, there are 613 mitzvot in the Torah; 248 positive and 365 negative. If a person does not perform one of the positive commandments – fails to put on Tefillin, does not shake a Lulav, does not eat Matzah on seder night etc.. – he does not receive a harsh punishment. However, there are 2 positive commandments – only two! – that carry the very serious punishment of “Karet” if they are not performed. One is Brit Milah and the other is Korban Pesach. Baruch Hashem, in Israel, a whopping 98% of parents gives their baby boy a kosher brit milah so that’s good... but what about the Korban Pesach? Unfortunately, it’s completely ignored.

You might state; “But we don’t have the Bet Ha’Mikdash!” – Here is the answer to that point from the Gadol Ha’Dor, HaRav Yisrael Ariel; “Of course, we yearn for the building of the Beit HaMikdash, may it be this year, but its absence does not prevent the Korban Pesach from being sacrificed. There are many historical sources informing us that the sacrifice was offered on the Temple Mount throughout the generations despite Jerusalem’s destruction, and leading poskim from the past and present maintain that the Korban Pesach offering is not dependent on the existence of the Temple.”

But what about a mizbeyach, Kohanim who know how to perform this service and the fact that we are all “Tameh” (ritually impure)?? Once again, here’s HaRav Ariel: “A kosher lamb is available; 50 trained kohanim are waiting; the necessary priestly garments have been fashioned; the Temple Institute has constructed an altar that can be used; there are areas on the Temple Mount where it is permitted to walk, including a 10-by-10 meter area where the Altar can be placed in its halachic position. And finally, since the Korban Pesach is a communal public offering, it can be brought even when the congregation is in a state of spiritual impurity, like it is today.”

To conclude this article, let’s combine the 2 points I wrote above; King David stopping the plague by building a mizbeyach on the Temple Mount and the fact that the Korban Pesach – a mitzvah that is to be performed in just over 2 weeks - can be brought even today. Do I really need to add 1+1 for you? The answer is before our eyes!! This year, there is simply no excuse! Most of the Israeli population is on lockdown with the IDF and police maintaining order. It will not require much effort to allow several members of each community to come to Har Ha’Bayit with a Korban Pesach. As stated above, everything is ready; kosher lambs, trained Kohanim and even a mizbeyach that can offer these sacrifices – exactly as King David did close to 3,000 years ago.

This is our chance! I am convinced that Hashem has spun the entire world on its head just so that the Jewish people in Israel can offer the Korban Pesach. We have no excuses. Let’s pray that Hashem will guide our leaders to do the right thing and then, once again, this verse can come to fruition: “Hashem then answered the prayers of the land **and the plague ceased from Israel.**”

Am Yisrael Chai!