

## "And this is the donation you shall take from them, gold, silver and copper." (25:3)

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* infer that these three metals represent the three Patriarchs. Gold is symbolic of Avraham *Avinu* in that he was tested like gold in the fiery furnace. Silver alludes to Yitzchak *Avinu*, who was purified on the altar in the same manner that silver is refined. Copper, which in Hebrew is "*nechoshes*," brings Yaakov to mind. Lavan was referring to Yaakov when he said, "*nichashti*," I have observed the signs that Hashem has blessed me for your sake" (*Bereishis* 30:27).

This *Midrash* begs elucidation. First, what relationship is there between the Patriarchs and the various metals used for the *Mishkan*? Second, the *Midrash* seems to imply that Avraham is compared to a very precious substance, Yitzchak to something of a lesser value, and Yaakov to a metal inferior to both of them. This idea is inconsistent with the fact that Yaakov was the *b'chir ha'Avos*, the chosen of the Patriarchs. Third, Yaakov is compared to copper only because of a single word used by Lavan in his conversation with Yaakov. This is hardly a reason for equating Yaakov with copper.

*Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l.*, offers a homiletic rendering of the *Midrash*, which explores the parallels between the qualities of these metals and the predominant characteristics of the Patriarchs. By nature gold is pure and brilliant. Silver, however, must be cleansed of impurities and polished in order to bring out its sparkle. Copper has a unique feature. At first glance, it looks uninspiring. When it is polished, however, it begins to glisten almost like gold! This is the meaning of the *Midrash*. Avraham *Avinu's* reputation was undisputed. His greatness and nobility were manifest to all. When Avraham miraculously escaped certain death from the fiery furnace, his prominence was conveyed to the world. Kings from all over came to pay homage to Avraham. His natural brilliance shone forth like gold.

Yitzchak *Avinu* did not immediately achieve such consummate distinction. Indeed, when he was traveling to the *Akeidah* with his father, accompanied by Yishmael and Eliezer, it was not readily apparent which of the three "youths" was the most distinguished. Eliezer was a *tzaddik*, the prime student of Avraham, and Yishmael had already repented. Indeed, some of the pre-eminent *Kohanim*, *Gedolim*, and *Tanaim*, were named after him. Only when they arrived at *Har Ha'Moriah* did Yitzchak alone notice the unique cloud hovering over the mountain. Thus, his distinction became unequivocal. It was now apparent that he and his future descendants were imbued with a special sublimity -- a *kedushas ha'guf*. They were to be physically consecrated as a *korban*. This "process" of clarification, which resulted in the revelation of the purity of the "true" Yitzchak, can be compared to the refinement of silver which brings out its shining splendor.

The third metal, copper, reflects the persona of Yaakov *Avinu*. During a major part of his life, Yaakov was engulfed in anguish and distress. His pre-eminence as a *tzaddik* was veiled, so that

even Lavan who spent so many years with Yaakov did not recognize his virtue and saintliness. Lavan attributed his remarkable success to his own good fortune. This is apparent from Lavan's statement to Yaakov, "*nechashti*, I have observed the signs", referring to Lavan's ability to perceive that Hashem blessed him because of Yaakov. Lavan required sorcery to see that Yaakov brought him success, and he still credited it to his own good fortune! Yaakov, like copper, had to go through many "polishings" until his natural brilliance shone forth.

*Am Yisrael* is comprised of various types of Jews, represented by the three characteristics of our *Avos*. These distinctions are reflected by the three metals used to build the *Mishkan*, so that it would embody the divergent attributes of all Jews.