

Moshe said to Bnei Yisrael, “See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah. (35:30)

The *Midrash Tanchuma* quotes this *pasuk* as the basis for making two points – one *halachic*, the other, *hashkafic*; both are ambiguous in terms of their relationship with the *pasuk*. First, the *halachah*: One may not wear a garment of *kilayim/shatnez*, a mixture of wool and linen, even if ninety-nine garments separate him from the forbidden garment. As long as the *shatnez* is on his body, it does not matter how much space interposes between himself and the garment. The *halachah* is understandable, but what does it have to do with the *pasuk*?

Second, the *Midrash* states that when a person performs good deeds, he creates a Heavenly angel that protects him, and he merits the privilege of performing more good deeds. One good deed creates the opportunity for more good deeds. Once again, an inspiring lesson, but what does it have to do with the *pasuk* which designates Betzalel as the architect of the *Mishkan*?

Horav Nisson Alpert, zl, explains that *mitzvah* performance engenders a good name for a person. A good reputation is precious; one that is derived from performing good deeds is especially meaningful. This is indicated by Hashem’s choice of Betzalel as the architect of the *Mishkan*. He was an individual who thoroughly understood the profound mystical secrets required to execute this awesome task. When the Torah writes that Hashem proclaimed Betzalel by name, it means that it was Betzalel’s good name that made him worthy of this lofty position. It was his good name that gave him the ability to construct the abode that served as the resting place for the Divine Presence. It was in Betzalel’s own *z’chus*, merit, that he warranted this honor – not because he was Chur’s grandson, the man who had sacrificed his life for the honor of Hashem in an attempt to prevent the Golden Calf from materializing.

How does a person develop a good name worthy of Divine recognition? It is achieved by distancing oneself from evil, i.e. guarding oneself from committing transgressions. Once this hurdle is achieved, he will merit doing good. Two types of evil exist. While most people do not comport with hard-core evil, there is a type of evil from which we must take great care to distance ourselves. It is the evil that conceals itself within the gray area of what is permissible, as the behavior is not clearly defined a “*mefurasha issur*”. The Torah does not spell out that this activity is prohibited, despite it being the antithesis of what any observant Jew would do. *Ramban* refers to such activity/person as *naval b’reshus haTorah*, a despicable person with the Torah’s dispensation. In other words, some activities are just plain forbidden, and other activities are not forbidden, but are just “not right”. An observant Jew does not act in this manner.

We now understand why the *Midrash* cites *kilayim* as a transgression from which one must distance himself, even if ninety-nine garments separate him from it. *Shatnez/kilayim* is an admixture of otherwise permitted items – wool and linen. Despite the fact that they are

independently permissible, when mixed together, they present a serious transgression. The *Midrash* asks how far should one distance himself from *kilayim*, or from a combination of two otherwise permissible items? *Chazal* say that, even if ninety-nine layers of clothing separate him from the *kilayim* garment, he is committing a sin. In other words, regardless of how one presents it, *kilayim*, or gray-area prohibitions, are extremely dangerous.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* underscores the lesson to be derived from here. Even if there technically is a *heter*, *halachic* dispensation, for some matter, and one could even suggest that it will not directly lead to anything *asur*, prohibited, nonetheless, if one knows deep in his heart that there is a possibility of certain inappropriate consequences occurring “indirectly”, but as a result of his actions, one may absolutely not do it.

Sadly, not all people are able to “smell out” the prohibitions which lurk in concealment, to anticipate what might go wrong. These people do not take chances. Simply, if there might be deadly poison somewhere in the food, who in his right mind would chance it? A person who is aware of the “black and white” and distances himself from the “gray”, is a person who is worthy of building the *Mishkan*. That person was Betzalel.

Betzalel’s grandfather, Chur, gave up his life to prevent the *eigel ha’zahav*, Golden Calf, from becoming a reality. Why? He saw the possibility of it turning into full-scale idolatry. Perhaps, now, they were only seeking a tangible replacement for Moshe *Rabbeinu*. The next step, however, was to transform the *eigel* into a god. He saw the *kilayim* and died for it. His grandson inherited that incredible insight.