

You shall make the Mizbayach of Shittim wood...the Mizbayach shall be square. (27:1)

The *Mizbayach*, Altar, was to be perfectly square shaped. What special significance is there in the fact that the architectural design of the *Mizbayach*--and for that matter, the *Mishkan*, the *Aron Hakodesh* and the *Shulchan*--consisted of rectangular lines? **Horav S. R. Hirsch, z"l**, observes that all of nature's products are symbolized by circularity. Only the human being, whose mind can impose limitations and parameters upon himself, is able to create objects with straight lines and angles. The circle represents the absence of limitation to freedom and autonomy. This lack of restraint reflects *tumah*, spiritual impurity. The rectangle, on the other hand, symbolizes independent will dominating the material world. It represents restraint and control. Hence, it reflects the concept of *taharah*, spiritual purity. The *Mishkan*, as well as the holy *keilim*, appurtenances, represented *kedushah* and *taharah*. Therefore they consisted of rectangular lines.

The *Mishkan* stands in contrast to nature. It represents the sanctification of humans to the spiritual ideal. It characterizes a life of moral self-control, a life of constraint, a life of sanctity. The concept of the *Mishkan* implies man's ability to resist the internal forces which compel him to defer to his natural tendencies. *Horav* Hirsch compares the *Mizbayach* to the *Tefillin*, which are also square. While the *Mizbayach* sanctifies the flesh and blood, the *Tefillin* represent the submission of man's organs to the service of Hashem.