

## **Betzalel made the Aron. (37:1)**

*Rashi* makes an insightful comment which gives us pause, “Because Betzalel put himself out for this task more than the others, it bears his name.” *Chazal* teach that the origins of Betzalel’s devotion, his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, were in his character, in his DNA, transmitted from his grandfather, Chur. The acts of Betzalel and Chur appear to be token varied expressions of *mesiras nefesh*: Chur giving up his life to prevent the Golden Calf from achieving fruition; Betzalel’s punctilious devotion to the building of the Sanctuary in which the Divine Presence would repose. These acts qualified each of them for the designation of *mesiras nefesh* designation. How are we to understand the connection between the grandfather’s life sacrifice and the grandson’s devotion to building the *Mishkan*?

*Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, explains this based on a *Talmudic* passage (*Berachos* 20a): “*Rav* Papa asked *Abaye*, ‘Why did the previous generations merit miracles, while we do not? It clearly was not because the previous generation achieved a greater level of scholarship, since *Rav* Papa’s generation was proficient in all six orders of the *Mishnah*, which was greater than the previous generation.’

“*Abaye* replied, ‘It is because the early generation exhibited *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, as in the case of *Rav* Ada bar Ahava, who noticed a woman dressed immodestly (calling attention to herself by her flamboyant attire). He thought that she was Jewish and immediately tore the outer garment (that was the cause of the ruckus) off of her. It turned out that he had erred, and actually the woman was a gentile.’” [As a result, he compensated her handsomely for her humiliation.]

According to *Chazal*, the barometer of *mesiras nefesh* is a function of one’s intolerance of a woman’s flaunting herself immodestly in public. The fact that this distinguished sage was willing to ignore public opinion and act zealously indicated his *mesiras nefesh*. Does this mean that *mesiras nefesh* is measured on the yardstick of our zealousness – even if it means that people will think negatively of us? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that we see from here that *mesiras nefesh* means that when someone acts in an affronting manner against Hashem (or His devotees), one feels personally aggrieved. One views this as a personal issue, an attack against his person. He is troubled and expresses his displeasure with action against the perpetrator. This is why *Rav* Ada bar Ahava acted impulsively. To him, this was self-defense. He was being assaulted.

Such a response, however, carries a downside. At times, we become so heated that we react rashly, without weighing the situation from all vantage points. *Rav* Ada reacted before he confirmed the identity of the perpetrator.

Betzalel exhibited this same core quality of *mesiras nefesh*. Veritably, he did not give up his life for the *Mishkan*, but he made certain that Hashem’s Name and honor were priority number one. Indeed, Hashem’s honor and Betzalel’s personal wishes became one and the same. It is for this *mesiras nefesh* that the *Mishkan* is attributed to him.

