

You shall make the planks of the Mishkan of shittim (acacia) wood. (26:15)

Rashi comments that Yaakov *Avinu* anticipated the need for lumber for the building of the *Mishkan*. Aware that wood was not a commodity one found in the barren wilderness, he planted these trees in Egypt upon his arrival. He instructed his children that when they would eventually leave Egypt – at the end of their exile – they should take the wood with them. *Horav Doniel Alter, Shlita* (son of the *Pinchas Menachem*), adds that immediately upon his arrival in what was to be *galus Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exile, Yaakov sought to imbue his children and all his future descendants with belief in the *Geulah*, Redemption. Throughout our tumultuous history of persecution libels, pogroms and Holocaust, what kept us going was the belief and hope that one day it would all end.

Imagine a young child walks by the home of his aged grandfather, Yaakov, and he notices the tall trees growing in the backyard. He asks for an explanation, since he has not seen such trees anywhere else. His grandfather tells him that one day Hashem will liberate us from the land of Egypt, and we will be commanded to make a Sanctuary for Him. These trees will be used as part of the structure. Furthermore, these tall trees could be noticed from distant places such as Ramses, where the Jews were struggling under the watchful eyes of their Egyptian taskmasters. When they saw the trees, they were infused with a sense of hope for better days, when they would leave this accursed land. Yaakov showed us the way to inculcate our children and future descendants with *emunah*, faith in Hashem, and hope for an end to our *galus*. Providing our children with tangible, concrete symbols of *Yiddishkeit*, in addition to including them in every aspect of the tradition, helps them to maintain a strong identity and bond with *Yiddishkeit*. Our problems emerge when we eschew tradition: turn our backs on the past; lose our sense of pride and identity; encounter breaches in our legacy and rifts with our children.

Parenting entails responsibility: the responsibility to imbue each of our children with a clear, untarnished Jewish religious identity. He should know who he is, from whom he has descended, and which direction we would like (expect) to see him follow. We must invest him with a strong, vibrant *emunah*, faith, so that he has the strength and ability to withstand and overcome the challenges he will confront in life. The greatest tool which we possess to teach our children is our example. When he sees our positive actions, how we live authentically, maintaining spiritual integrity and adhering to our core values, he respects us and views our lifestyle as one he, too, would want to live. When *Klal Yisrael* saw the trees growing in Yaakov's yard, they were infused with hope – hope for a better day – a day on which the exile and its suffering would end.

Years ago, this story saw light in *Peninim*. It impacts an inspiring lesson. A young boy was sent with his family to the dread Auschwitz death camp. For a short while, father and son shared a barrack. Despite the unspeakable, debasing horrors to which the Jewish captives were subjected, many of them held on tightly to whatever vestiges of Jewish religious observance they were able. One winter, every one of the internees reminded his fellow prisoners that the festival of *Chanukah*

was approaching. In two days, the first *Chanukah* light would be kindled in Jewish homes throughout the world. The Nazi murderers wanted to destroy the Jewish people and their laws and rituals with them. This was all the more reason to defy them – even at the risk of their lives.

They quickly devised a plan for enabling the lighting of the first candle. One of the men was able to fashion a makeshift menorah from metal scraps that he found. For a wick, he took some threads from his prison uniform. For oil, they used some butter he was able to “purchase” from a guard. Understandably, such observances were strictly prohibited. To be caught meant almost certain death. Yet, these men felt that it was important. The Nazis could take their bodies, but they could not sever their bond with Hashem.

When the young boy took all this in, he wondered to his father, “I can understand the scrap metal – it has no value. What are a few threads from a uniform? The butter, however, was food and could be used for nourishment. Why ‘waste’ something from which they could benefit?”

His father replied, “My dear son, both you and I know that a person can live a long time without food. I want you to know a person cannot live a single day without hope. This is the fire of hope. Never let it be extinguished – not here – not anywhere.

With this in mind, we have a new perspective on the *Karshei ha'Miskhan*. These planks were no ordinary construction-grade wood. These planks were derived from Yaakov *Avinu's* “trees of hope.” They held up the *Mishkan* either in our midst or in our hearts. We have hope, because we have a connection with the Torah, with Hashem. If we lose hope, we are lost.

In winter of 2004, a tsunami crashed down on eleven countries in Southern Asia, killing over 170,000 people. One minute, they were sitting comfortably on the beach, staring at the calm waters and enjoying the warm sun; the next minute, they saw to their horror, forty-foot waves come crashing down on them. Some people survived the calamity. Those who tried to outrun the raging waters that crashed down on the beach were not successful. One man (there were also others) did not run from the water. Instead, he climbed a tree and held on for dear life. The water swept by beneath while he was wrapped tightly on top of the tree. Rabbi Paysach Krohn cites *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl (Ruach Chaim Pirkei Avos 6:7)*, who comments on the *pasuk, Eitz Chaim hee la'machazikim bah*, “It is a tree of life to those who grasp it” (*Mishlei 3:18*): “The world is like a raging sea, with its waves storming to sink/drown someone in the depths of his desires and ambitions. One who wishes to be spared from the effects of the outside world should grasp and cling to the Tree of Life – the Torah.”

A powerful lesson. We have survived because we have held onto the Torah. It has given us hope and has comforted us during the vicissitudes of life. It has kept us strong and encouraged us when the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, has attempted to sink us in a sea of desire and immorality. We have held on for thousands of years, and we will continue to do so until that glorious day when *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* will issue the clarion call for our redemption.