

You shall make the planks of the Mishkan of shittim (Acacia) wood, standing erect. (26:15)

The Midrash observes that atzei shittim refers to wood derived from a tree that does not bear fruit. Chazal explain that, if in the future, a person would want to build a house of wood from a fruit-bearing tree, he would be prevented from doing so by applying a simple logic. If the King of Kings, Hashem, to Whom everything in this world belongs, said that His Mishkan should only be built from wood from a type that does not bear fruit, how can a human being make a different decision? We derive from here that whatever we do, regardless of its simplicity or mundane nature, we may not ever do anything, whether it is person or communal, in such a manner that it might adversely affect another person – financially, emotionally, socially. Going forward by stepping on the shoulders of our fellow is not the Torah's idea of progress.

No one will disagree that mundane endeavors may not infringe on the sensitivities of our fellow man, but does it apply as well with regard to devarim she'b'kedushah, endeavors of a consecrated, spiritual nature? There really is nothing holier than the Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash. Yet, we may not use wood from a fruit-bearing tree. Every step of the way, we must be certain that our sensitivity toward our fellow is not diminished.

One who takes it upon himself to establish a makom Torah that will educate, inspire, and change the lives of many might feel that his goals take precedence over the needs and feelings of the few individuals who stand in the way of progress. He may feel that all tzedakos, communal charity funds, should be refocused toward his endeavor. If, as a result, a few people might have it rough – well, everybody has to sacrifice for the betterment of the klal.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, presents a scenario which we cannot dispute. Imagine that our generation has been handed the unparalleled mission to build the Bais Hamikdash. Certainly, we would all throw ourselves into the work: from the planning stages until the moment of fruition. By the way, what will happen to the “lesser” mitzvos, such as gemillas chasadim, acts of lovingkindness, charity, visiting the sick and elderly, looking out for the orphaned children – both physically and spiritually? We all know the answer to that question, and we surely have a rational excuse to validate our indifference. It is not that we do not care. It is just that we have to address something of “greater” importance.

The next scenario: We have just been informed (over our cell phones, of course) that Moshiach Tziddkeinu is about to arrive shortly. How would we react? We would run! We would push our way forward, each one vying for the first look, to be seen and blessed. What about the old man whose cane can take him only so fast? Or the fellow in the wheelchair whose pusher leaves him, so that he can run and greet Moshiach? Will any of the younger generation, the stronger generation, notice that they are lagging behind, or will they be too busy stepping over them?

This is why Hashem told us not to use wood from a fruit-bearing tree. When doing a mitzvah, take everything and everyone into consideration. A mitzvah that is carried out in such a manner that it ignores the welfare and emotions of others is missing a vital ingredient that renders it spiritually flawed.

What is the cause of such spiritual discrepancy? Why do some people perform chesed

successfully, earning the accolades not only of the beneficiaries of their good work, but also of the entire community? Others, however, try and simply do not realize the fruition of their wonderful work. It all depends on the acceptance and integration of a pasuk in our parshah. V'asu li Mikdash v'shochanti b'socham, "And they shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall repose among them" (Shemos 25:15). What is the true purpose of my endeavor? Am I doing it for Hashem, or to garner attention for myself? When I seek the limelight, I have no reason, no desire, to share my time with anyone else. I am too busy promoting myself. If, however, I am acting Li, "for Me"/Hashem, then I act no differently than He would act. When Hashem provides chesed, or asks for us to do something for Him, He always takes into consideration the emotions and sensitivities of the little "guy." Someone who is all filled with himself has no room for Hashem.

An American Jew decided to take a "spiritual" vacation together with his wife. What better and more inspirational place is there than Eretz Yisrael? He figured that if he were to imbibe all the ruchiniyos, spirituality, that the Holy Land has to offer, he should first arrange to have all of his materialistic needs addressed. He wanted to remain focused on spirituality and sanctity – nothing else.

He called a real estate broker and gave him his "order": a five-room apartment, with air conditioning; religious neighbors – but not too frum, observant; a parking garage; a shul nearby; and, of course, a supermarket that carries all of the American products. The real estate agent immediately went to work and located the perfect apartment in the perfect neighborhood with all the necessary accruements. Everything seemed perfect – until the day of arrival.

Mr. & Mrs. Ploni landed in Ben Gurion Airport and immediately took a monit, taxi, to their destination. They walked into their apartment and were surprised that it was "lived" in. There were people there – specifically, a young mother and her three children, who had just finished lunch. "Why are you here?" the man asked the young mother. "I live here," she replied. "Why are you here?" she asked. "I rented this apartment for two months! That is why I am here!" he responded somewhat emphatically.

The American tourist called the real estate agent, and, before he could issue a word of complaint, the agent asked, "So, how is the apartment? Is it not exactly what you asked for? Five rooms, great view, wonderful neighborhood. What more can a person want?"

The American was dumbfounded, but he was able to blurt out, "But there is a family living here!"

The agent was taken aback. "One second, you never mentioned that the apartment had to be empty!"

V'asu Li Mikdash v'shochanti b'socham: Anyone can build a Sanctuary for Hashem – and he sincerely thinks that he has prepared a wonderful abode for the Almighty. The problem is that the sanctuary that he has created within himself is not empty. It is filled with his Ani, "I," "me". He is filled with himself – his anger, arrogance, unwarranted hatred for others, all of the flawed character traits that represent him. If we want Hashem to repose in our Mishkan, we must clear "ourselves" from it, to make room for Him.