

On the first day of the new moon, on the first day of the month, you shall set up the Mishkan of the Ohel Moed. (40:1,2)

Chazal (Yalkut Melachim 184) teach that the work of constructing the parts of the Mishkan actually concluded on Kislev 25, but Hashem delayed its completion until the month of Nissan – the month in which Yitzchak Avinu was born. What is the significance of the date of Kislev 25 as the date on which the Mishkan was ready? Why did they delay until Rosh Chodesh Nissan to use the Mishkan? Last, what role does Yitzchak play vis-à-vis the implementation of the Mishkan?

The Zera Shimshon quotes Rabbeinu Bachya (Pikudei 21) who says that the construction of the Mishkan corresponded to -- and was designed to mirror -- the creation of the world. (This refers to the calculated time “expended” by Hashem in creating the world.) He explains (Tetzaveh 29:15) that the Choshen HaMishpat, Breastplate, contained seventy-two letters engraved on its stones – one for each of the seventy-two letters that comprise Hashem’s Ineffable Name. This alludes to the world which was created in seventy-two hours. (Only the day-time hours are reckoned, with six days times twelve hours equaling seventy-two hours devoted to Creation.)

The construction of the Mishkan lasted seventy-two days. Thus, we have: seventy-two hours of Creation; seventy-two letters of Hashem’s Name; seventy-two days of constructing the Mishkan. How do we calculate seventy-two days for the construction of the Mishkan? Moshe Rabbeinu descended from the mountain on Yom Kippur and issued the command for the construction of the Mishkan. Tishrei had 20 days remaining, to which we add 29 days of Mar Cheshvan and 25 days of Kislev. While this adds up to 74 days, we forget that two days were spent gathering donations (Midrash Rabbah Shemos 41:2). We now have seventy-two days. While Shabbos was not a working day, it was a day spent learning the halachos required for their continued labor. We now understand why the work was completed on Kislev 25. We still have not explained the significance of the birth of Yitzchak Avinu in the month of Nissan in relation to the Mishkan.

The Zera Shimshon continues that the Mishkan was given its name because of its relationship with the word mashkon, security/collateral. The Mishkan served as collateral for the sins of Klal Yisrael. It would atone for their indiscretions. Chazal (Shabbos 89b) relate that Avraham Avinu and Yaakov Avinu had strong feelings concerning Klal Yisrael’s shortcomings. They felt that if the nation sinned, it should chas v’shalom, Heaven forbid, be wiped out. It was Yitzchak Avinu’s feeling that mercy should be extended to them. Thus, due to his position, Hashem vented His wrath on eitzim v’avanim, the wood and stone, of the Bais Hamikdash, rather than on the people.

Thus, due to Yitzchak’s crucial role in the Mishkan, Hashem waited for the month of his birth, Nissan, to suggest to us that He had accepted Yitzchak’s argument on our part. Klal Yisrael would be redeemed by Hashem’s mercy. The collateral – the Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash – would be in their stead.

Horav Moshe Tzvi Nariyah, zl, offers an alternative reason for choosing the month that Yitzchak was born as the opportune time for bringing the Mishkan into being. Yitzchak was the first person to be nimol l’shmonah, circumcised on the eighth day. He was the one whose birth was presaged by Hashem; indeed, Hashem gave him his name and informed Avraham of it. Yitzchak’s

distinction was his chinuch, dedication from birth, to serve Hashem through mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. From his birth, he was destined to shed blood for bris milah. Later in life he was selected to be the olah temimah, perfect sacrifice, at the Akeidah. Now, as Hashem was about to inaugurate the Mishkan, the message that he conveyed to the nation was a message which they should observe and ingrain in their psyches for the future: to build Torah, one must be prepared to sacrifice. Mesiras nefesh is the critical component in building Torah, without which the edifice, organization, endeavor will not endure.

The Akeidas Yitzchak was initiated by the Patriarch himself. In a conversation (Bereishis Rabbah 55:4) that Yitzchak had with Yishmael, he said, "You are proud that you 'sacrificed' one organ to Hashem (Bris Milah); if Hashem would tell me to sacrifice myself – my entire body – I would gladly do so." Our People are aptly called the People of the Book, but the fact that we are the People who are willing and prepared to be sacrificed for Hashem seems to be secondary. Mesiras nefesh is part of our DNA. It is the foundation of our spiritual commitment to Hashem and to everything for which Judaism stands.

How is mesiras nefesh defined? Does one have to put his very life in danger – even sacrifice it – in order to be labeled a moser nefesh? The following story teaches us a powerful perception of the meaning of sacrifice. After having a number of daughters, a couple gave birth to their first boy. They decided to name him after the mother's grandfather. The young mother began to have second thoughts. "While my grandfather was certainly a fine man who possessed sterling integrity, he was far from scholarly. He was not a talmid chacham. He was a pashuta Yid, simple Jew. Is this the example that we want to set for our son?" she asked.

Her husband went to shul that night and discussed the naming quandary with his Rav. The Rav listened, and then asked the father, "When did your wife's grandfather live in America?" he asked. "Well," replied the young man, "he came to this country in the early thirties and worked in the curtain business. He passed away a few years ago." "Where are his children today?" "They are all deeply religious Torah-observant Jews."

When the Rav heard this, he said, "Anyone who lived in America during the thirties and forties and merited to raise a family that produced Bnei Torah, is far from a pashuta Yid. Name the baby after him. He was far from a simple Jew."

So many of us overlook the sacrifice our forebears had to experience in order to maintain their commitment to Yiddishkeit. I suggest that it was not necessarily the secular/gentile influence, but rather, the taunts from their own co-religionists, who could not tolerate that a Jew could maintain his frumkeit in America. After all, if they were able to shirk off the yoke of Torah and mitzvos, why should he not follow suit?

We are all used to mesiras nefesh stories that convey the perspective that one must either suffer/sacrifice for Torah, but mesiras nefesh means much more. A person "sacrifices" for Torah, because he realizes that without Torah, his life is not worth living. Without Torah, he is nothing. With this in mind, the next story has a deeper meaning.

In a shiur, halachic lecture, concerning the laws of Shabbos, Horav Ben Tzion Abba-Shaul mentioned that if a house is burning on Shabbos, it is prohibited to desecrate Shabbos in order to save the structure. Someone attending the lecture asked, "What? Just sit there and watch your

house burn down? Is this what halachah demands of us?" The Rosh Yeshivah calmly replied, "I never said that one should sit idly by and watch. Absolutely not! You should sing and dance for being granted the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of B'chol me'odecha, loving Hashem with all of your money!"

We do not sacrifice our nefesh for Torah. Without Torah we have no nefesh.