

## **And when you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build them hewn, for you will have raised your sword over it and desecrated it. (20:22)**

The *Bobover Rebbe*, *Horav Bentzion Halberstam, z.l.*, interpreted this *pasuk* in a novel homiletic manner. He once davened in a *shul* where the *chazan*, instead of focusing on achieving proper *kavanah*, devotion, was priding himself on his ability to enunciate the words clearly with the proper syllables. His melodious voice only increased his arrogance. Witnessing this degradation of the sanctity of *Tefillah*, prayer, the *Bobover Rebbe* remarked: The *Torah* states: "If you will make for Me an altar of stones."; *Chazal* teach us that *tefillah* has replaced the altar with its sacrifices. The *Sefer Yetzirah* states that in kabbalistic vernacular, "uh,ut", letters, are referred to as "stones." The *pasuk* can then be interpreted as "If you will build your present day *mizbayach*, altar -- which is a reference to our *tefillos* -- of stone -- referring to the enunciation of the letters; "Do not build them hewn." A stone cut by metal is smooth and exact. This would refer to those words and letters which are articulated with clarity and proper emphasis placed on the syllables. The inference would be, suggested the *Rebbe*, that just as one should not build an altar of hewn stone, he should likewise not create a *tefillah* of words whose entire emphasis is upon the grammar and enunciation while ignoring the spiritual devotion and essence of the *tefillah*. The reason for this is, "For you have raised your sword over it." The "*cherev*," sword, is an allusion to arrogance, as the *Torah* states, *l,utd crj ratu "the sword of your grandeur," (Devarim 33:29)*. The root of the word "*l,utd*" is "*vutd*", haughtiness. A *tefillah* of this nature is nothing more than an exercise in organized conceit.

This thesis by no means suggests that the proper enunciation of the words is not to be emphasized. Not only is it necessary, its absence impugns the very nature of *tefillah* and demonstrates the reader's lack of erudition. However, those whose prime focus during davening is to remind everyone around them as to the proper vocalization of the words, either by themselves enunciating the words in such a manner that it literally disturbs the *kavanah* of others, or by constantly haranguing and denigrating those who do not emphasize the words correctly, perhaps, if these pious individuals would place greater emphasis upon their own spiritual devotion they would not hear the mistakes of others.