

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Yosef *ben* Leib HaLevi *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

A Sight to Remember

PARSHAS VAYIGASH 5777

This week's *parshah* contains the narrative of Ya'akov's reunion with his son Yosef after so many years. The meeting entailed a massive relocation, as Ya'akov and his entire family descended to where Yosef was in Mitzrayim, to take up residence there.

The Last Stop

Before departing Eretz Yisrael for the last time, however, Ya'akov made a final stop. As the Torah relates: וַיֵּסַע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶץ שֶׁבַע... וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֶׁבַע... וַיָּבֹאוּ מִצְרַיִם – “And Yisrael journeyed with all he had, and he came to Be'er Sheva... And Ya'akov arose from Be'er Sheva... And they came to Mitzrayim” (*Bereishis 46:1-6*).

This, apparently, was no ordinary stop. The Medrash (*Bereishis Rabbah 94:4*) fills in some of the details of what took place. In that area was a grove of *shittim* trees, which had been planted by Avraham Avinu and were destined for use as construction material in the future Mishkan (Tabernacle). Ya'akov travelled to Be'er Sheva to cut down and collect these trees en route to Mitzrayim. These he brought with him to Mitzrayim, where they awaited B'nei Yisrael's eventual return to the Land, and the erection of the Mishkan.

R' Ya'akov Kamenetsky explains the significance of this endeavor. Of course, these trees fulfilled the important purpose of providing wood for the Mishkan. But Ya'akov Avinu had an added calculation. Aware that his progeny would remain in Mitzrayim for long years, he was concerned for their spiritual welfare. Would they be able to hold out against the pull of assimilation? He was fearful lest they never leave Mitzrayim, eventually losing their identity completely. The bringing of the *shittim* trees was thus intended to prevent such an eventuality. Through them, he forged a connection between himself and all of his future offspring. These trees would serve as a tangible reminder for all successive generations of the Redemption that would come in the future. They could always look to these trees and recall that they were transplanted here by their ancestor Ya'akov, and that they themselves would one day take the wood with them to Eretz Yisrael for use in the Mishkan of Hashem.

In addition to the poignancy of this sentiment, there are some interesting *halachic* implications to this act of Ya'akov, as we shall see.

Intentional Building

The notion of intent plays a significant role in many areas of *halachah*. Such is the case in connection with the production of various mitzvah items, as is illustrated by the following Mishnah (*Sukkah 1:3*):

סֵפֶה יְשָׁנָה : בֵּית שְׁמַאי פּוֹסְלִין וּבֵית הַלֵּל מְכַשְׁרִין . וְאִיזוֹ הִיא סֵפֶה יְשָׁנָה , כָּל שֶׁעָשָׂהּ קֶדָם לְחַג שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם .

“Regarding an ‘old’ *sukkah*: According to Beis Shammai it is disqualified, while Beis Hillel sanctions its usage. What is considered an ‘old’ *sukkah*? Any *sukkah* that was assembled thirty (or more) days before the (Sukkos) festival.”

The basic premise of Beis Shammai is that for a *sukkah* to be considered “kosher” for festival usage, it must be constructed with this purpose in mind. Suppose someone erected a *sukkah* at some point in the year without even thinking of the holiday; perhaps he merely wanted a

shady booth with which to enjoy the outdoors. He later realizes that the *yom tov* is approaching, he needs a *sukkah*... and, lo and behold, he has one already made. Beis Shammai contends, however, that such a *sukkah* is not suitable for festival usage – it lacks the basic requirement of having been built expressly for the festival. This is considered an “old” *sukkah*, i.e. one that was constructed before it was designated for festival use. Any *sukkah* constructed at least thirty days before the festival falls into this category; as this is a time-period far removed from the *yom tov*, it is assumed that the builder’s mind was not focused on the festival. If, however, it was assembled in closer proximity to the festival – within the thirty-day period – we may assume that the builder did, in fact, employ the proper “mitzvah intent.” As the holiday is in the offing, his mind was likely focused on thoughts of the festival.

Intentional Dyeing

In any event, as mentioned, this is only one example of many. A similar *halachah* applies with regard to other mitzvah objects: for instance, the leather straps of *tefillin* must be processed with the express intent of the mitzvah of *tefillin*; the blue *techeiles* dye is applied to the *tzitzis* with the intent for the mitzvah; and so on.

The question arises about dyeing the *bigdei kehunah* (priestly vestments): must these likewise be processed with this specific “mitzvah intent”? A verse in the Torah would seem to indicate that this is not necessary. The *passuk* reports on Yisrael’s response to the call to donate materials for the construction of the Mishkan and the production of the vestments: כָּל־אִישׁ וְהָבִיאוּ אֵשֶׁר־נִמְצָא אִתּוֹ תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן... הַבִּיאוּ בָרוּחַ – “Any man who had with him blue and purple (fabrics)... brought (these to Moshe)” (*Shemos* 35:23). Now, these were fabrics that the people already had in their possession *before* the call for donations was issued, having taken them with them at the start of their desert journey. That means they were already processed and dyed without any thought to the Mishkan or the *bigdei kehunah*; nonetheless, they were accepted and subsequently fashioned into the *begadim*. Apparently, then, *bigdei kehunah* are an exception – as opposed to *tzitzis* which must be dyed “*lishmah*” (with the proper intent), no such requirement applies to the *bigdei kehunah*.

In light of Ya’akov’s plan, however, the above proof may be negated. The patriarch, as we have learned, brought the *shittim* trees to Mitzrayim in order to keep the concept of the Mishkan alive in the consciousness of the nation. That being the case, it is quite plausible that these fabrics actually *were* dyed with the proper “mitzvah intent”. Although the processing took place long before the call for donations was issued, the people – thanks to Ya’akov’s trees – were quite cognizant of the eventuality of the Mishkan and its accompanying articles of service (*Emes L’Ya’akov, parshas Vayigash, Vayakheil*).

Next week, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, we will examine another traditional practice which, like Ya’akov’s trees, is also intended to remind us of the coming Redemption.

Mishnas Chayim is brought to you by **Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah**, a network of Torah scholars dedicated to bringing the merits of Mishnah study to the greater Jewish public. Encompassing Mishnah, Gemara, and variety of other services, **Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah** primarily assists mourners interested in acquiring the merit of Torah study for their loved ones.

Contact us at 732-364-7029 or at www.ChevrahLomdeiMishnah.org.