



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY
Executive Director, Camp HASC

Dedicated L'Iluys Nishmas HaChaver
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

Optimization

Starting on Rosh Chodesh and throughout the month of Nissan, we are given a mitzvah opportunity to recite *birkas ha-ilanos*, a special blessing over a newly budding fruit tree. It was the holy practice of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt'l, the great *tzadik* and *poseik ha-dor*, to fulfill the mitzvah at the first opportunity and in the best way possible.

One Rosh Chodesh Nissan, after davening *shacharis k'vasikin*, 'with the sunrise', Rav Shlomo Zalman and his son set out to recite the special blessing. "*Tatte*, look! There are two budding trees right here, we can go right over and make the *brachah*."

"Ah, thank you, yes, they are beautiful... but I prefer to go somewhere else," Rav Shlomo Zalman replied."

They walked some distance through Shaarei Chesed and arrived at a small courtyard where a single tree stood, with a few buds sprouting. Knowing that his father was of the halachic opinion that it is preferable to make the *brachah* upon seeing at least two fruit-bearing blossoming

trees, the *gadol ha-dor*'s son was surprised. "But *Tatte*... There's only one tree?" he said.

Rav Shlomo Zalman smiled at his son. "You're right. It is preferable to make the *brachah* over two trees." He then motioned toward the apartment above the garden, where an elderly woman stood at the window looking out toward the garden below. "Do you see that woman watching us? She lost her husband many years ago and lives alone, rarely venturing out. She waits all year for me to come and make *birchas ha-ilanos* on this tree. Bringing joy to an *almanah*, and showing her sensitivity, is a *mitzvah d'Oraisa*, a Biblical commandment, while reciting the *bracha* on two trees is a praiseworthy rabbinic stringency.

Rav Shlomo Zalman looked toward the window, nodded at the elderly woman, smiled, and made the *brachah* over her tree.

Our sedra describes the building of the Mishkan, and details the elements of its construction. Every element of the structure, from its design, materials, colors, and size, was according to Hashem's instructions:

כָּל אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה ה' אֶת-מֹשֶׁה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל הַעֲבָדָה

וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-הַמְּלָאכָה וַהֲנִה עָשׂוּ אֹתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
ה' בְּנֵי עַמּוֹ וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה

“Just as Hashem had commanded Moshe,
so did Bnei Yisrael do all the work.

And Moshe saw all the work, and behold they had done it as Hashem had commanded, *kein asu*, ‘so had they done’, and Moshe blessed them” (*Shemos*, 39:42-43).

The *Ohr haChayim haKadosh* teaches that there are certain details in our performance of mitzvos that, while optimal and enhance the mitzvah, are not required. The Torah’s repetition of *kein asu*, “and so they did,” teaches us that Bnei Yisrael did everything they were commanded, אפילו דברים שאינם אלא, מצוה מן המובחר, “even those elements that are not required but which optimize the fulfilment of the mitzvah”.

Rav Dr. Yitzchak Twersky, The Tolner Rebbe, zy’a, sees the construction of the *Mishkan*, meeting place between Am Yisrael and Hashem, as a paradigm for our fulfilment of mitzvos, as well as a fundamental life lesson in our Divine service. Mitzvos are opportunities for us to draw close to Hashem; when we fulfil them *min ha-muvchar*, ‘in their ideal form’, we express a desire to draw close to God. When we invest ourselves in following halachah with dedication and enthusiasm,

we continue the precedent of *kein asu*. Striving to go beyond the letter of law and exceeding that which is required, we express our desire to live a life of fulfilling *ratzon Hashem* in the highest possible way.

Starting on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we can recognize the exalted levels of commitment to *halachah* prevalent in Jewish homes. The intensive efforts, dedication and stringencies prevalent in every community in Klal Yisrael are certainly a source of Nachas to Hashem, a *limud zechus* on High. Pesach season is a ‘headquarters’ of *chumros*, stringencies and ‘extras’, along with our *minhagim*, holy family traditions and customs. At a time where we are so focused on striving to live with *mitzvah min ha-muvchar*, it is critical to remember where to focus our priorities.

Rav Yisrael Salanter, zt’l, warned his students that they ought to be ‘*machmir*’, stringent in preparing and baking matzos and fulfill every aspect of the *halachah* beyond the letter of the law. He also charged them to make sure to be sensitive and kind to the women who worked in the matzah bakery, most of whom were poor and many of whom were *almanos*.

May we, this Rosh Chodesh Nisan and Yom Tov season, merit to fulfill all of our obligations ה' כאשר צוה, “as God has commanded us”, and observe *mitzvos min ha-muvchar* — by following in Rav Shlomo Zalman’s example, keeping ‘the main thing’ the main thing. ■

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