

## Tetzaveh - Rabbi Lerner - February 17, 2013

### The Golden Mizbeach

30:1-3: *You shall make an Altar on which to bring incense up in smoke, of acacia wood shall you make it. Its length an Amah, and its width an Amah - it shall be square - and its height two Amohs; from it shall its horns be. You shall cover it with pure gold, its roof and its walls all around, and its horns, and you shall make for it a gold crown, all around.*

30:7-8: *Upon it shall Aharon bring the spice incense up in smoke, every morning when, he cleans the lamps he shall bring it up in smoke. And when Aharon kindles the lamps in the afternoon he shall bring it up in smoke, continual incense before Hashem, for your generations. The Ketores is split up into two equal amounts each day.*

30:9-10: *You shall not bring upon it alien incense, or an elevation-offering (Olah) or meal-offering (Minchah); nor may you pour a libation upon it. Aharon shall bring atonement upon its horns once a year, from the blood of the sin-offering (Chatas) of the atonements, once a year, shall he bring atonement upon it for your generations; it is holy of holies to Hashem.*

When entering the Har Bayis from the East, the outermost courtyard of the Bais Hamikdash was the Ezras Nashim; the next innermost section was the Azarah, in which was found the main Mizbeach - all of the animal and meal korbanos were brought there - that is where most of the action occurred daily. The next section was the Haichal, which contained the Menorah to the South, Mizbeach to the West, and Shulchan to the North. While the Torah says Aharon brought the Ketores, it did not have to be the Kohen Gadol - Aharon did it to inaugurate this Mizbeach at the beginning, but any Kohen could bring the Ketores, and any one of them could light the Menorah.

Why is this section about the golden Mizbeach first discussed here in Tetzaveh instead of Terumah which contains all of the specifications of all other Keilim? And why do we need a separate Mizbeach at all for incense - why not burn it on the copper Mizbeach?

**Ramban**: The golden mizbeach is one of the inner Keilim of the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash (as opposed to the Mizbeach for korbanos) which should have been specified with the Menorah and Shulchan in parshas Terumah; and, in fact, in regards to its actual construction, in Vayakhail, it is mentioned together with the other Keilim. The reason it is listed here separately at the end of all of the specifications for the Mishkan is because at the end of all of God's instructions, after detailing the bringing the offerings of libations and daily Olos and all of the details for the inauguration day (Miluim), the Torah then tells us in 29:43: *I shall set My meeting there with Bnei Yisrael, and it shall be sanctified with My glory* - that Hashem will appear there. And then in 29:45 *I shall rest My Presence among Bnei Yisrael, and I shall be their God*. Hashem's shechina will appear to us there and dwell amongst us. **Ramban**: Now, after Hashem's shechina will appear and His Presence will dwell in the Mishkan, it is appropriate to talk about the incense, because after the completion of this whole section and the descent of the Shechina, it was necessary to bring the Ketores for the Glory of God. This is one of the secrets of the Torah that Moshe was given by the Malach Hamoves, that Ketores can stop and ward off a divinely inflicted plague, epidemics that could destroy Bnei Yisrael. We see examples of this in the desert, where Aharon stays the plague killing many Jews by bringing incense. The very proximity of the Shechina opened up the possibility of immediate punishment if we sin. We wish to keep this ideal setting, where Hashem appears to us daily and resides amongst us; the Ketores will guarantee our keeping this special relationship with Hashem. Why is the Ketores so

powerful, more than the daily Korbanos, in appeasing God? Because when Hashem wants to get angry, the image projected by the Torah by Hashem is *Vechara Api* - My anger will be kindled - My nose will be flaming with anger. It is an image similar to a fire-breathing dragon. Ketores will appease Hashem's Midas Hadin - there will be this sweet savory smell of the multiple blended ingredients, that will somehow assuage God's anger, 'soothing His nostrils' as it were. It is an offering that is all about smell, with no residue, unlike other Korbanos.

**Chizkuni**: Any Ketores that is not brought from the tzibur is considered a Ketores Zarah; it must always be brought on behalf of the congregation. One of the reasons Nadav and Avihu were killed on the eighth day of the Miluim was because they offered a Ketores Zarah - it was a private offering brought by individuals. Ketores must always be brought on behalf of the congregation to preserve the status quo of Hashem appearing daily to Bnei Yisrael.

**Rabbeinu Bachya**: agrees with the Ramban; and now that we know the deeper secret of the Ketores, every intelligent person should disagree with the **Rambam** who said that the Ketores was more of a deodorant whose role was to push away the offensive smell of the preparation of the animals for sacrifice. The Ramban's interpretation has a much deeper meaning.

**Meshech Chachmah**: The commandment of the golden Mizbeach HaKetores is separated from all the rest for another reason; if there is no Aron, one cannot have the Luchos in the Mishkan - they cannot be placed in any other receptacle; if you don't have the Bigdei Kehunah, a Kohen cannot do any Avodah; if you don't have the Menorah, you cannot improvise with any other lights; if there is no Shulchan, you cannot set up the chalahs; if you don't have the copper Mizbeach, you cannot offer any of the Korbanos. However, if you don't have a golden Mizbeach, you can still bring the Ketores. It is the only service that does not require a vessel. We see from this from the Gemorrah Zevachim, which says that when this Mizbeach is uprooted, you can still bring the Ketores; it is a Hidur Mitzvah, but is not Me'akev; it adds to the Mitzvah, but does not invalidate it; it is not critical, unlike all of the other Keilim; that is why it is listed separately at the end of the details of the Mishkan. It would seem to make it less important than the other Keilim.

**Abarbanel**: disagrees with the previous opinion about its relative importance. We are told that we cannot bring a Ketores Zarah; we must stick to the plan with the precise measurements and contents of Ketores. And at the same time, the Torah tells us of the incredible kedusha of this Mizbeach - once a year the Kohen Gadol sprinkles blood on this Mizbeach to achieve atonement for the nation. That is why the Torah ends off this entire section with 30:10, calling it *Kodesh Kadashim* - it is very holy - none of the other vessels are called this name; it is almost a continuity of the Kodesh Kadashim of the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash on the other side of the Paroches. It is separated out because its holiness was greater. The other Mizbeach is covered with a cheaper metal - copper - while this one is made from the most precious metal of all, gold.

**Netziv**: A Midrash says that there was an incredible power of this mizbeach that was very effective. The mention of the Mizbeach was delayed until now because, as the Gemorrah in Yuma says, Ketores has the special power to atone for Lashon Harah, one of the greatest of sins. Ketores somehow conjures up the acts of Gemilas Chesed we do, which are compared to Besamim; God smells our acts of Chesed through Ketores, as if they were something very sweet. The Gemorrah quotes a story of Rabbi Yeshuah Ben Korchah, who heard from an old man who had gone to Shiloh where the Mishkan had resided, and he smelled the smell of Ketores from the walls of Shiloh - it was a strange, perplexing statement - why was there no aroma from Yerushalayim, where there 800 years of offerings during the combined time periods of both

Batei Hamikdash, while there was a strong aroma of Ketores in Shiloh where the Mishkan resided for only 300 years? Why was that smell stronger? The difference was that of the kedusha of Yerushalayim vs Shiloh - Yerushalayim, in the territory of Binyamin, was the center and source of all Torah; the Bais Hamikdash was the source of all Torah knowledge and Halachah; the Lishkas Hagazis, the seat of the Sanhedrin, was there. Shiloh however, was in the territory of Yosef, not Binyamin; in Shiloh there was not as much Torah being disseminated - in the Mishkan even the Kohanim were not learning that much - the Kohanim didn't even know then that shechitah for korbanos could be done by a Zar, an ordinary, non-kohen Jew. But Yosef was known for the midah of chesed - he took care of the needs of all of his brothers and their families in Egypt, despite what they had done to him. Shiloh was the Zechus of chesed, and the aroma of Ketores was greater there than that of Torah from Yerushalayim. We see this link between chesed and the Ketores from one of the spices - Chelbanah, a foul smelling spice - when mixed with the others, its smell was transformed; it is symbolic of redeeming the sinners, those who do not smell well - it is chesed from Hashem, that even the sinners can be redeemed amongst all of the rest of Bnei Yisrael. Ketores represents chesed, which is what makes Hashem forgive us.

**Kli Yakar**: why do we have two separate altars in the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash? Both will atone for the sins of those Jews who go off the derech. The copper one is to atone for the human being's body - animal parts offered as a replacement for the body of the sinner who should have been killed, just as the ram was brought by Avraham in place of Yitzchak at the Akeidah; the flesh being burned spares our organs; this is why the height of the copper mizbeach is greater than the golden one - it is about the height of a human being; it represented the stature of a human being. However, the neshamah of a sinner also needs atonement. When we sin, it is not only with our body - our Neshamah is wounded as well; the animal parts might spare our body, but it does not heal our Neshamah. That is the purpose of the golden Mizbeach - just as the spirit of a human returns upwards to Hashem, the incense rises towards the heavens to heal the Neshamah.

**Rav Baruch Simon** quoting **Rabbi Willig**: The Neshamah is mostly up in heaven, remaining pure; it is the lower part that dwells within us and touches the lower world that can get sullied; that part of the Neshamah must be purified, and that is done by Hashem. That is the reference in Yom Kippur when no one is allowed to be there in the Haichal when the Kohein Gadol is doing the Avodah with Ketores and with the sprinkling of blood - that ban includes even the angels - they are chased out of the Bais Hamikdash so that it is just the Kohein Gadol and His God. The reason is that only Hashem has the greatest of chesed for man; angels cannot be trusted to be mochel our sins. Only Hashem, who has infinite patience with His people will forgive us completely; He will purify our Neshamos. Only Hashem will accept completely the Teshuvah of humanity.