

Rav Mordechai Frankel of Agudah Baltimore

The walls of the *mishkan* consisted of vertical boards of wood called *kerashim*, with a horizontal pole called the *b'riach hatichon* running through the *kerashim*. Rashi (*Shemos* 26:26) explains that there was a hole half-way up each board, and this horizontal hole went through the length of each board. The hole was inside the thickness of the board, so that it was not visible to someone standing inside the *mishkan*. These holes aligned when the *kerashim* were put up, and the *briach hatichon* went through these holes and held the boards together. The *briach hatichon* was made from *shittim* wood and was thirty *amos* long.

In this week's *parsha* (*Shemos* 35:24), it says

כל מרים תרומת כסף ונחשת הביאו את תרומת ה' וכל אשר נמצא אתו עצי שטים לכל מלאכת העבודה הביאו.

Anyone who happened to have *shittim* wood brought it to Moshe for use in the *mishkan*. Now it is certainly possible that some of the *Yidden* took *shittim* wood with them when they left *Mitzrayim*, but why would anyone have taken a pole that was thirty *amos* long? According to *Reb Chaim Noeh*, thirty *amos* is approximately fifty feet, and according to the *Chazon Ish* it is even longer. Without knowing that it would be needed, why would anyone be carrying a fifty foot pole?

Chazal answer this question. The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 94:4)* tells us that when Yaakov went down to *Mitzrayim* he passed through Be'er Sheva and cut down the *Eishel* tree that Avrohom *Avinu* had planted there. Yaakov knew through *ruach hakodesh* that it would be needed in the future and brought this wood with him to *Mitzrayim*. It was this wood that the *Yidden* took with them when they left *Mitzrayim* that was used for the *briach hatichon* in the *mishkan*.

Regarding these *kerashim*, the *possuk (Shemos 26:15)* says עצי שטים עומדים ועשית את הקרשים למשכן עצי שטים עומדים. *Chazal (Succah 45b)* are *doreish* that the final word "*omdim*" teaches us that the *kerashim* are "*omdim le'olam ule'olmei olamim*" – that they last forever. Even though we no longer have the *mishkan*, the *kerashim* were not destroyed. They were placed in *geniza* and did not rot and are still there today.

Apparently, it was necessary for the *briach hatichon* to have come from the *avos ha'kedoshim* and also to last till *moshiach*. Why was this so? Presumably, it was because the *briach hatichon* was the linchpin that held the whole structure of the *mishkan* together. *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* is teaching us a lesson here. *Klal Yisroel* is deeply rooted. That which holds us in place was instituted by the *avos* and will last until *biyas ha'moshiach*.

Sefer Tehillim begins by praising the person who distances himself from *reshoim* and involves himself with Torah. *Dovid Hamelech* compares such a person to an עץ שתול על פלגי מים – a tree rooted by the water banks. The *Midrash (Midrash Tehillim 1:11)* points out that the *possuk* does not say "*notuah*" - planted, but rather "*shosul*" - rooted. The *Midrash* explains that this person is rooted so strongly that all the winds in the world would not be able to move him from his place. The *kapitel* continues to say that the *reshoim* are not like that. They are כמוץ אשר תדפנו רוח – like chaff that the wind will blow away. It is not necessarily that *reshoim* are inherently evil, it is that they are unrooted and go wherever the wind blows them.

The *Vilna Gaon* sees the same lesson in *Sefer Yeshaya (57:20)*, where it says והרשעים כים נגרש – the *reshoim* are like a violent sea. The *Gr"a* explains that *reshoim* are not inherently evil, but rather they get swept along with the tides of the times and finish up wherever that leaves them. (*Siddur Ha'Gra, Shemoneh Esrei birchas ve'lamalshinim*).

We are currently in the midst of a *tzarah* the likes of which we have never experienced in our lifetimes. Our *yeshivas* are all closed. Our *shuls* are all closed. We have never seen anything like it. Pesach is coming. How will we cope? Will we be able to cope? The answer is that one doesn't know how strong a tree's roots are until the wind starts blowing. When the air is calm, every tree stands tall. It is only when the wind blows hard that we find out which trees have strong roots.

We are firmly rooted all the way back to the *avos hakedoshim*, and nothing can move us. We have a *briach hatichon* which gives us backbone. We may sway in the wind, but our roots remain untouched. We know that *Klal Yisroel* has weathered worse *tzoros* in the past, and we will weather this one to.

During World War II, *Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l* escaped to Sweden. It has been recorded (*Avnei Shlomo* volume 1 page 86) that, after he arrived, he hung a sign on his door which said "*Beis Ha'mussar*". The founder of the *mussar* movement, *Reb Yisroel Salanter*, had encouraged his *talmidim* to establish places for *mussar* learning, and such a place was known as a *Beis Ha'mussar*. Now this makes sense in a town with many people, but *Rav Wolbe* was alone at first. What was the point of establishing a *Bais Ha'Mussar* if there was no-one there to attend? The answer to this question is that he made the *Bais Ha'Mussar* for himself. He was deeply rooted in the *mussar* movement, and those roots remained equally strong even when he was completely alone.

It is said that there was a period that he didn't have a *minyán* and had to daven *be'yechidus*. At first he felt bad about this, but he then told himself that this was an opportunity for him to discover what his *tefillos* were really like. When a person is part of a larger *tzibbur*, davening is one of the social norms that everyone engages in. It is only when he is alone that he sees the extent that *tefilla be'kavana* is rooted in him.

Neither us nor *Rav Wolbe* were the first people who had to daven *be'yechidus*. *Sefer Daniel* tells us that Daniel also found himself in this situation. The *possuk* (Daniel 6:11) says

וכוין פתיחן ליה בעליתיה נגד ירושלם וזמנין תלתה ביומא הוא ברך על ברכוהי ומצלא ומודא קדם אלקה כל קבל די הוא עבד מן קדמת דנה.

"He had windows open in his attic facing Yerushalayim and three times a day he fell on his knees and prayed and gave thanks to G-d, as he used to do before this".

This is what it means to be rooted. Whether a person is with others or alone, his *avodas hakodesh* remains the same. The same applies to us as well. Hashem has been *makdim refuah le'makah* by giving us technology which allows a person sit in his house and listen to *Torah* and hear *divrei mussar ve'yiras shomayim* streamed from all across the world. In these trying times we have the opportunity to see how deeply rooted we truly are.

Chazal (*Brachos* 9b) tell us that the first and second chapters of *Tehillim* are really one long *kapitel*. The first one talks how *tzaddikim* are rooted like trees, and the second one talks about the coming of *Moshiach*. *Chazal* (*Brachos* 10a) also tell us that *Dovid Hamelech* started *Sefer Tehillim* with this *kapitel* because he particularly loved it. The message that the roots of *Klal Yisroel* will remain strong until the coming of *Mashiash* is a particularly beautiful one. The *briach hatichon* will stand *le'olam ule'olmei olamim*.