



Parshas Vayakhel

February 25, 2022

## A Taste of Torah Intellectual Sacrifice

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Idioms are wonderful for expressing an idea, but you run into trouble when trying to express an idiom in a different language. In both Hebrew and Yiddish, there are countless terms, expressions and idioms that get completely lost in translation.

You're probably thinking that I am going to share a Hebrew or Yiddish idiom and then attempt to explain it. You're right. The term is *mesiras nefesh*. Literally, it means "the giving over one's life force" (the oft-used verb form, *moser nefesh*, translates as "give over one's life force"). Practically, the term is used to express one who goes well above and beyond the call of duty and is willing to make great personal sacrifices in order to achieve a goal. And it comes up in this week's parsha.

Moshe informs the Jewish People that Hashem has chosen Betzalel the son of Uri the son of Chur of the Tribe of Yehuda as the chief builder of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), along with Ahaliav the son of Achisamach of the Tribe of Dan. The Medrash Tanchuma wonders why it is necessary to mention Betzalel's grandfather's name, Chur, when normally just the father's name is mentioned. The Medrash explains that Chur was murdered when he protested against the creation of the Golden Calf. Chur was *moser nefesh* – in this case, literally, as he sacrificed his life – for the sake of Hashem. Therefore, Hashem chose his grandson to create the *Mishkan*.

Indeed, Rashi tells us that although many people worked on the *Mishkan*, the Torah attributes it to Betzalel's efforts, for he was *moser nefesh* in its construction. It would appear that Chur's trait of *mesiras nefesh* carried over to his grandson, and thus made him a worthy heir to receive his grandfather's merit. At the same time, it emerges that *mesiras nefesh* is an integral quality required to be the chief builder of the *Mishkan*, which raises the question: What is the connection between the *Mishkan* and *mesiras nefesh*?

After choosing Betzalel, the Torah continues (Vayakhel 35:31) that Hashem filled Betzalel with "a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight and knowledge, with every craft." The Meshech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk; 1843-1926) explains that these qualities of great wisdom and insight generally mean that a person will spend much time investigating, contemplating and thinking everything through before taking action. This is an excellent approach in many scenarios, says the Meshech Chochma, but it tends to be at odds with the idea of *mesiras nefesh*. If one takes a purely intellectual, rational approach to everything he does, and thinks it through thoroughly, he will likely conclude that it is simply not worth making such a great sacrifice to achieve his goal. Once one has given basic thought to a matter and decided it is important enough to make a sacrifice, one needs to jump in and be *moser nefesh*. Hashem chose Chur's grandson as the one in whom to imbue this great wisdom, as Chur displayed the ability to shut down his intellect and be *moser nefesh* when the need arose.

This idea can be taken a step further in understanding why Betzalel, with this trait of *mesiras nefesh*, was the perfect man for the job. Creating the *Mishkan* required great wisdom and insight, and so Hashem needed to grant these intellectual talents to whomever would be chosen to construct the *Mishkan*. However, Hashem needed someone who would not get too stuck in contemplating everything so thoroughly that his ability to make personal sacrifices and thus ensure the success of the project would be compromised. Hashem therefore chose Betzalel, whose grandfather possessed this quality of *mesiras nefesh*. And indeed, as noted above, Betzalel displayed that same *mesiras nefesh* and self-sacrifice in seeing the work through to its glorious completion; he did not allow his great intellectual abilities to impede his *mesiras nefesh*.

continued on back

### Stories for the Soul

#### Fit for a King, Not an Army

A regiment of Austrian soldiers visited the city of Rimanov. Lacking proper facilities to house the troops, the commanding officer decided to use the main shul in the city for their quarters.

When the Jews of the city were notified, they became frightened. Their only house of worship would now be desecrated. The officials of the congregation pleaded with the officer, but to no avail.

In desperation, they ran to their rav, Reb Mendel of Rimanov (1745-1815), to intercede on their behalf. While they were discussing the matter with him, one of the townspeople remarked, "There is yet a chance that the army will not use the shul." Surprised, they turned toward him and asked, "Why?"

"They would be foolish if they did," he replied. "The walls are shaky, the roof is leaking and the whole appearance of the shul is drab and dirty."

When the rabbi heard this he jumped up in anguish and exclaimed, "Now I know why Hashem punished us with the confiscation of our shul. If we, ourselves, have no consideration for Hashem's house, if we do not respect it enough to keep it clean and tidy and in good order, then why should Hashem have consideration for us? He decided to turn it over to the army, for they may take better care of it.

"This I advise we do immediately," continued the rabbi. "Hire carpenters and laborers to repair the shul. Beautify it until it becomes the holy place it is supposed to be."

The elders of the congregation rushed away immediately and engaged workers to repair and beautify the shul. They worked continuously, day and night, until the shul was once again a beautiful place to behold.

continued on back

## Kollel Happenings

### KOLLEL 24<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ARRIVES WITH A TWIST

The Kollel will celebrate 24 years with a twist as it ties together its annual online triple crowdfunding campaign on Monday-Tuesday March 14-15 with a gala Purim Celebration on Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup> at the Kollel Torah Center, featuring music, dancing and refreshments. Visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org) for more details.

### PARENTAL NEGLIGENCE IN A CHILD'S CRIME AT MARCH 2 T4T

Join Maxwell Cohen, Deputy District Attorney at Office of the First Judicial District Attorney, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for *It's No Child's Play: Parental Negligence in a Child's Crime* on March 2, 7:30 pm on Zoom. For further details, contact the Kollel at [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

### M.B. GLASSMAN DIVISION GOLD SENIOR LUNCH & LEARN MONDAYS AT EDOS

The GOLD Lunch & Learn for seniors itakes place at EDOS, 198 S. Holly St., on most Mondays at 12 noon. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Class is available on Zoom, as well. For info, to confirm there is a class or for Zoom link info, email [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

## Halacha Riddles

**Last week we asked:** Separate groups of people are eating on separate tables in a restaurant; none of the groups have a connection with any others. In one case, all the people eating there can be part of a *mezuman* together, but in the other case, they cannot. What is the difference between the two cases?

**Answer:** In one case, there is at least one table that has three men eating together who create their own *mezuman*; in such a case, all the other groups may join. In

the other case, there is no single group that can form its own *mezuman*, and since they are all on separate tables, they cannot combine either, as discussed previously (Piskei Teshuvos 193:7).

**This week's question:** A group of four adult Jewish males are eating a bread meal together. One of them is permitted to *bentch* and depart without being part of a *mezuman*, while the other three may not. How is this possible?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XL

Despite the opposition, Rabbi Shapiro pressed forward. He succeeded in obtaining many financial commitments from wealthy Polish Jews, and construction began.

However, some six months after the

groundbreaking, the Polish economy collapsed, and the value of its currency plunged. Suddenly, those earlier commitments were no longer feasible, and Rabbi Shapiro was forced to look elsewhere for funding to make his dream a reality.

## A Taste of Torah

*continued from front*

The Meshech Chochma cites a thought from the Chasid Yaavetz (Rabbi Yosef Yaavetz), who was expelled from Spain in 1492 along with his Jewish brethren. The Chasid Yaavetz noted that the Jews who did not cave to the pressure to convert to Christianity were largely the simple Jews who did not engage in the study of philosophy and spend much time contemplating theological matters. The bulk of those who remained in Spain and were willing to convert to Christianity, says the Chasid Yaavetz, were the intellectually advanced people who spent their lives investigating, debating and discussing

matters of philosophy, theology and the like. When their time came to make the terrible choice, they were not *moser nefesh*, because their intellectual pursuits got in the way of their willingness to take the plunge and do what was right.

A Torah life requires that one think, question and debate. However, overthinking the basic tenets and mitzvos of the Torah may rob a person of the ability to be *moser nefesh* when the need arises. Judaism is not merely rational; the ability to, at times, let go of one's intellect and to do what is intuitively correct is a vital element in living a Torah-true life.

## Stories for the Soul

*continued from front*

A few days later, the general arrived to inspect the shul and give final approval for its use. He spent many hours examining and measuring. Finally, he announced that the shul was too small to be used. Inasmuch as there was no larger hall in Rimanov, they decided to move to the next town where there were larger quarters for the entire

regiment.

The Jewish People generously gave of their resources and time to build a magnificent structure, the *Mishkan*, for Hashem to reside in. It is important that we dedicate ourselves to creating houses of worship fitting for the King of kings.

To sponsor Torah Weekly, delivered weekly in print and via email to thousands of Jews worldwide, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org)  
Denver Community Kollel | 5080 W. 14th Ave., Denver, CO 80204 | 303-820-2855

[info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) | [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org)

To receive Torah Weekly by email, email to [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org)