

THE MERIT OF GRANDFATHERS AT WORK

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Sisa

The Merit of Grandfathers At Work

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 540, Machatzis HaShekel. Good Shabbos!

To a great extent, the last 5 parshiyos of the book of Shemos all deal with the mitzvah of building the Mishkan. It would seem from all the Torah pasukim [verses] that begin "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying..." that Moshe Rabbeinu was the person who was given the responsibility to build the Mishkan. However, we learn in this week's parsha that the real person in charge of the construction was not Moshe Rabbeinu. Rather, it was his great nephew -- "Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Chur". [Shemos 31:2]

The Daas Zekeinim wonders why the Torah uncharacteristically traces Bezalel's genealogy back three generations to his grandfather, Chur. The question is all the more pronounced because just four verses later, when the Torah introduces Bezalel's assistant, Ahaliav ben Achisamach, the Torah only mentions his father's name, not his grandfather's name.

The Daas Zekeinim answers that Bezalel was traced back to his grandfather, Chur, because Chur was killed as a result of his refusal to accede to the wishes of the people to build a Golden Calf. Since the Mishkan came to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, it was only fitting that the Torah point out that Chur's grandson was tasked with constructing the edifice that would achieve atonement for the sin Chur tried to stop.

This observation of the Daas Zekeinim could easily be overlooked by virtue of the fact that the Torah's narration of the sin of the Golden Calf does not appear until this week's parsha (Ki Sisa) while the mitzvah to build the Mishkan was already introduced in the preceding parshios of Terumah and Tezaveh.

The Daas Zekeinim -- based on the principle that the Torah's presentation of events is not always chronological ("ayn mukdam u'me-uchar b'Torah") -- explains that this is not the way it happened.

Indeed, he explains, the sin of the Golden Calf came first and the purpose of the building of the Mishkan was to act as the antidote / atonement for that sin.

G-d remembered the sacrifice of Chur. Divine Providence may grind exceedingly slowly, but ultimately, the merit of grandparents, great-grandparents, and beyond is not forgotten. Therefore, it was only appropriate that Chur's grandson should be the architect and builder of the Mishkan.

This Daas Zekeinim is a proof to that which we see happening in life so many times -- except that we do not always live long enough to see it. Many times, the fact that grandparents provide a great source of merit for their grandchildren escapes us. Since we live relatively short lives, we can't always see Divine Providence working. The Daas Zekeinim points out an example of such a situation. The merit of the grandfather enabled the grandson to atone for Klal Yisrael.

I would like to share an interesting story that I recently read, where such a concept also plays out:

There was a non-religious Jew in Tel Aviv, who had absolutely no interest in anything related to Judaism. Outreach workers who met this fellow would try to have some kind of effect on him, all to no avail. One day he was walking down a street in Tel Aviv. He passed a shul and there was a Jew standing outside the shul yelling "Mincha! Mincha!" The fellow continued walking. The Jew ran after him and explained that they needed a tenth man for the minyan. He replied, "I'm not interested." But the Jew was persistent... "Perhaps he had Yahrtzeit..." He kept begging and begging, until finally against his better judgment, the non-religious fellow allowed himself to be pulled into the synagogue for the afternoon prayer service.

As painful as this is for us to think about, unfortunately, there are many Jews in Eretz Yisrael who have never witnessed, let alone, participated in a minyan -- never even witnessed other people praying. There are unfortunately people in Eretz Yisrael who do not know what "Shma Yisrael" is all about.

The fellow sat in shul watching people say Ashrei, say Kaddish, and then everyone stood up to daven Shmoneh Esrei. Those raised in observant families have seen this all our lives, and think that it is no big deal to see people standing, "shuckling" (rocking back and forth), quietly reciting the standing prayer. But the first time a person sees that in his life, it can be an amazing sight.

I similarly heard after the Siyum HaShas, the ceremony upon completion of study of the Talmud -- which, for the tens of thousands studying a page per day according to the "Daf Yomi" cycle, was a public gathering held in multiple locations -- that the part of the event that made the biggest impression on the non-Jewish ushers at Madison Square Garden was the silence of the tens of thousands of people during the silent Shmoneh Esrei of Ma'ariv. Everyone was seemingly in a different world. It was an amazing sight even for the Jews who were there, how much more so for the non-Jews who were seeing this for the first time.]

This Israeli was taken back by what he saw during those 15 minutes of observing Mincha in the Tel

Aviv shul. He left the synagogue immediately after Mincha, but he decided that he would have to look into the matter further. He went back to the Kiruv workers from Lev L'Achim who had pestered him before. To make a long story short, he became interested in Judaism and became a Ba'al Teshuva.

When the friends of his non-religious father heard that the son became a Ba'al Teshuva, they started asking the father what happened. They heard rumors that he was invited to daven one Mincha and from that he overturned his life. They wanted a confirmation of this incredible story.

The father confessed that there was more to the story than the single Mincha. The father admitted that his own father, the boy's grandfather, was a religious European Jew. His father came to Tel Aviv many years earlier, but he -- the son of this European Jew -- left the fold and raised his son totally without religion, until the son now returned.

The grandfather always used to daven in a specific shul in Tel Aviv. It was the very shul that was lacking the minyan for Mincha the day his grandson passed by and was pulled in to be the tenth man.

The father said that he firmly believed that it was the prayers of his own father who called his grandson back, and those prayers were answered.

Without doubt, there is great irony that the shul in which the grandfather had davened for so many years was the door through which the grandson returned to Yiddishkeit. This is a modern day version, perhaps, of the lesson pointed out by the Daas Zekeinim in our parsha: The grandfather, Chur, who gave his life to try to stop the sin of the Golden Calf, had the merit that his grandson be the one to achieve the national atonement for that sin.

We don't see the grandfathers today. We don't see the great-grandfathers today. But we do hear these stories of people coming out of nowhere to embrace Judaism. We can't figure out where it comes from. It is a Bezalel son of Uri son of Chur story. The Torah returns to those who provide it with lodging. [Bava Metziah 85a]

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Ki Sisa are provided below:

- Tape # 046 - Dealing With Illness on Shabbos
- Tape # 089 - Returning From Medical Emergency on Shabbos
- Tape # 137 - The Census: Can Jews be Counted?
- Tape # 184 - You and Seriously Ill: How Much Responsibility
- Tape # 230 - The Mitzvah of Shekalim and Davening Mussaf
- Tape # 274 - Saying Tehillim at Night

Tape # 320 - The Melacha of Dyeing
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Tape # 496 - Tallis: Bringing It Home On Shabbos
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