

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XIX: Terumah (Ex. 25:1–27:19)

### Essay 9. Acacia wood

**פְּסוּק** "וַעֲצֵי שִׁטִּים", פֶּרֶשׁ רַש"י, וּמֵאַיִן הָיוּ לָהֶם עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים בְּמִדְבָּר? יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ צָפָה בְּרוּחַ הַקּוֹדֶשׁ שֶׁעָתִידִין יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכוּ' וְהָבִיא אֲרָזִים לְמִצְרַיִם וְכוּ'.

There is a verse that lists “acacia wood” among the gifts that Israel should bring to build the Tabernacle.<sup>1</sup> **Rashi explains:**

**But from where did they get acacia wood in the wilderness?** Rabbi Tanchuma explained it thus: **Our father Jacob foresaw by the gift of the Holy Spirit that in the future, Israel would once build a Tabernacle in the wilderness. He therefore brought cedars to Egypt and planted them there, and bade his children take these with them when they would leave Egypt.**<sup>2</sup>

- Rashi on Ex. 25:5

Regarding the apparently confusing suggestion that acacia wood comes from cedar trees, as opposed to coming from acacia trees, Rosh Hashanah 23a states: “There are ten types of cedar, as it is stated: ‘I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree and myrtle and the pine tree; I will set in the wilderness cypress, the plane tree, and the larch together’ (Isaiah 41:19).” The Gemara thus considers the term “cedar” to be a generic term for several different trees, including acacia.

The *Zera Shimshon* will now discuss Rashi’s commentary on Ex. 26:15, “You shall make the boards for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, standing [upright].” Rashi writes:

It should have said: “You shall make boards” [i.e., without the definite article], as it is said for each other item [required for the Tabernacle]. What is the [meaning of] “the boards”? [It speaks of] those [boards] that are “standing” and designated for that [purpose]. [I.e., already in existence.] For our father Jacob had planted cedar trees in Egypt, and when he died, he ordered his sons to carry them up with them when they would leave Egypt. He told them that the Holy One,

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. 25:5.

<sup>2</sup> Based on Midrash Tanchuma, Terumah 9; cf. Bereishit Rabbah 94.

Blessed be He, would order them to erect in the wilderness a Tabernacle of acacia wood. “See that they be ready in your hands!” That is what the Babylonian embodied in his poem: “The planting of those who had been admonished grew rapidly to become ‘cedar for the beams of our House,’<sup>3</sup>” that they should be ready in their hands before this.

- Rashi on Ex. 26:15

ומלבד הרמז שכתב רש"י גופיה על "וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים" בַּה"א הַיְדִיעָה או "עֲצֵי שֹׁטִים עֹמְדִים", עוד יש לומר דבְּפֶרֶשֶׁת וַיִּגַּשׁ אֶמֶר פֶּרְעֹה לְיוֹסֵף "בְּמִיטֵב הָאֶרֶץ הוֹשֵׁב אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אֶחָיֶךָ" וּמִשְׁמַע "הוֹשֵׁב" כְּגַרְיִם. וְכֵן עָשָׂה "וַיּוֹשֵׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו", וּמֵהוּ שֶׁחֲזַר לומר "וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחְזָה" וְכוּ' הֲלֹא פֶרְעֹה לֹא צָנַח כִּדְ? וּמֵה צוּרְךָ הִנֵּה לָהֶם לְאַחְזָה לְשׁוֹן יְרוּשָׁה וְחֻזְקָה אִם הָיוּ שָׁם כְּגַרְיִם. וְאִין לומר שֶׁנָּתַן לָהֶם אַחְזָה לְמַחְזִיתָם, שֶׁהָרִי נֶאֱמַר אַחְרָיו "וַיַּכְלִל יוֹסֵף" וְכוּ'. אֲלֵא וְדַאי שֶׁ"וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחְזָה" רֹמֵז שֶׁהֵבִיא אֶרְזִים וְכוּ' וְנָתַן לָהֶם רְשׁוּת לִישַׁע אֵילָנוֹת, וְזֶהוּ אַחְזָה.

Besides the hint that Rashi himself wrote on the text “you shall make the boards,”<sup>4</sup> with the definite article,<sup>5</sup> or the text “of acacia wood, standing [upright],” it can also be said that in parashat Vayigash, Pharaoh says to Joseph, “the land of Egypt is open before you: settle [הוֹשֵׁב] [*hoshev*] your father and your brothers in the best part of the land,”<sup>6</sup> and the meaning of “*hoshev*” is like “settlers.” Thus, he did, as it is written, “So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and he gave them an estate in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.”<sup>7</sup> Why did Scripture continue, saying, “and he gave them an estate” etc., for didn’t Pharaoh command this? I.e., what was the reason for this latter verse? Also, what was the need for them for “an estate,” which is the language of an inheritance and a presumption of ownership, if they were present as settlers and not citizens? We can’t say that he gave them an estate to sustain them, for it is said afterward, “Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father’s household with bread, down to the little ones.”<sup>8</sup> Rather, it’s certain that “and he gave them an estate” is a hint that [Jacob] brought cedars etc., and [Joseph] gave them permission to plant trees, and this is “an estate.”

וְעַדִּין יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק מָה אֵיכָפֶת לִיָּה לְיַעֲקֹב דְּוָקָא עַל הַקְּרָשִׁים. אִי תִימָא לְפִי שְׁלֵא הָיוּ מְצוּיִים בְּמִדְבָּר, אִם כֵּן הִנֵּה לוֹ לְהֵבִיא אַף אֲבָנֵי הַשֵּׁהָם וְאֲבָנֵי מִלּוּאִים. וְאִי תִימָא שְׁלֵא מְצָאָם אוֹ שְׁלֵא מְצָא יָדוֹ לְהֵבִיאָם וְסִמְךָ שְׁעִנְגֵי כְבוֹד יוֹרִידוֹם לָהֶם, אַף הַקְּרָשִׁים יָבִיאוּ לָהֶם וּמֵה צוּרְךָ הִנֵּה שִׁיבִיאָם יַעֲקֹב לְמִצְרַיִם.

It is still necessary to check what particular difference it made to Jacob regarding the boards. If you’ll say that it was because they were not found in the wilderness, if so, he should

<sup>3</sup> Song of Songs 1:17.

<sup>4</sup> Ex. 26:15.

<sup>5</sup> The *heh ha'yediah* (ה"א הַיְדִיעָה) refers to a *heh* being prefixed to a word to indicate a definite article: “the.”

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 47:6.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 47:11.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 47:12.

have also brought lapis lazuli and other stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece.<sup>9</sup> If you'll say that he did not find [the stones], or else he would have brought them also, or that he wasn't able to bring them with him, and he relied on the Clouds of Glory<sup>10</sup> to bring them down to them, then [the Clouds of Glory] could have even brought the boards to them. So what need was there that Jacob would bring [the boards] to Egypt?

וַיֵּשׁ לומר דאיתא במדרש על פסוק "וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים", אָמַר ר' חַנִּינָא לֹא הִנֵּה הָעוֹלָם רָאוּי לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּאַרְזִים וְלֹא נִבְרָאוּ אֱלֹא בְשִׁבִיל הַמְשַׁכָּן וְהַמְקַדֵּשׁ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ עֲצֵי ה' אֲרָזֵי לְבָנוֹן" וְכֹי' וְעֵשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה מִיַּי אֲרָזִים הֵם וְכֹי' עַכ"ל. וְאִם כֵּן הוּאִיל שֶׁצִּפּוּהָ יַעֲקֹב שֶׁהָאֲרָזִים שִׁישׁ בְּעוֹלָם לֹא נִבְרָאוּ אֱלֹא לְצוּרָה הַמְשַׁכָּן וְהַמְקַדֵּשׁ, מִן הַדִּין הוּא לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בַּמְשַׁכָּן מֵאוֹתָם שִׁישׁ בְּעוֹלָם וְלֹא מֵאוֹתָם שִׁיבִיאוּ עֲנָנֵי הַכְּבוֹד מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְלָכֵן הִבִּיאוּ אֲרָזִים לְמִצְרַיִם וְכֹי'.

It can be said that it's brought in a Midrash on the verse, "You shall make the boards for the Tabernacle of acacia wood":

**Rabbi Chanina said: The world was not fit to use cedars, and they were not created except for the Tabernacle and the Temple, as it is said, "The trees of the L-rd drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, His own planting,"<sup>11</sup> and Lebanon [means] the Temple, as it is said, "that good mountain and the Lebanon."<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: **There are twenty four types of cedar**, but only seven types are praiseworthy, as it is said, "I will plant in the wilderness cedar, acacia, and myrtle, and oil tree; I will set in the desert cypress, elm, and *te'ashur* together."<sup>13</sup>**

- Ex. Rabbah 35:1

If so, since Jacob saw that the cedars in the world were only created for the needs of the Tabernacle and the Temple, it should properly be used in the Tabernacle from the [trees existing] in the world, and not from those that the Clouds of Glory would bring from Heaven, and therefore they brought the cedars to Egypt and planted them there.

**אִי נִמְי בְּדָרָה אַחֲרֵת, דְּאִיתָא שֶׁם בַּמְדְּרָשׁ עַל פְּסוּק "וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים", לְמַה עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים, לְמַד הַקַּב"ה דָּרָה אֲרִיז לְדוֹרוֹת שְׂאֵם יְבַקֵּשׁ אֲדָם לְבָנוֹת בֵּיתוֹ מֵאֵילָן עוֹשֶׂה פִירוֹת אוֹמְרִים לוֹ וּמָה מְלָךְ מְלָכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקַּב"ה שֶׁהִפְלִי שְׁלוֹ שֶׁאֲמַר לְעֲשׂוֹת הַמְשַׁכָּן אָמַר לֹא תִבְיֵא אֱלֹא מֵאֵילָן שְׂאֵין עוֹשֶׂה פִירוֹת וְכֹי' עַכ"ל. וּבִשְׁלֵמָא כְּשִׁישׁ לָהֶם כָּל מִין עֲצִים וְלֹא יִקְחוּ אֱלֹא אֲרָזִים, שְׁפִיר יִלְפִינָן, אֶבֶל אִם הָיוּ הָעֲנָנִים מְבִיִּאִים לָהֶם דָּרָה נֹס, אֵין לְלַמּוֹד כָּלֵל מִזֶּה שֶׁהִפְלִי הִנֵּה בְּגַס וְלֹא הִשְׁחִיתוּ שׁוּם אֵילָן, וְאֶדְרַבָּא הֵייתִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁהַסּוֹד הִנֵּה דוֹקָא בְּאַרְזִים.**

Alternatively, by another way of interpretation, as it is brought there in the Midrash Ex. Rabbah on the verse, "You shall make the boards for the Tabernacle of acacia wood":

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 35:27.

<sup>10</sup> The Clouds of Glory protected the Israelites in the wilderness.

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 104:16.

<sup>12</sup> Deut. 3:25.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 41:19. Scholars debate the identity of some of the listed trees.

**Why acacia wood? The Holy One, Blessed be he, taught proper behavior for the future generations, that if a man wants to build his house from a fruit-bearing tree, say to him, “If the supreme King of Kings, to Whom all things belong, when He gave instructions how to build the Tabernacle; He said do not take from trees bearing trees, how much more should this apply to us.”**

- Ex. Rabbah 35:1

**Granted, when they have all types of trees and they only take cedars, we can derive this nicely, but if the Clouds of Glory would have brought them by way of a miracle, they wouldn't learn anything from this, for everything would have been miraculous and they wouldn't have damaged any tree, i.e., chopped down a tree to obtain the wood, any tree. To the contrary, I would say that the esoteric secret is specifically in the cedars.**

וְלָכֵן יַעֲקֹב שֶׁהָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן שֶׁהָיָה שָׁם כָּל מִין אֵילָן וּבַחֹר בְּאֵלֶּהָ, בָּא לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבָנָיו הַדֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ שָׂאֵם יִבְנוּ בְּתֵימִים יִבְנוּם בְּאֵילָנוֹת שְׂאִינָם עוֹשִׂים פִּירוֹת, דָּאֵי לָאוּ הָכִי לֹא הָיָה מִבִּיאָם אֶלָּא הָיָה מִמֵּתִין שֶׁהֶעֱנְנִים יְבִיאֻם כְּמוֹ אֲבָנֵי הַשּׁוֹהֵם.

**And so Jacob, who was in the land of Canaan, where there was every kind of tree, and the choicest of them, came to inform his sons of the proper behavior, that if they built houses, they should build them from trees that do not bear fruit.**

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