

## **Not to Use Gazis, Chiseled Stones, for the Altar**

by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Shemos 20:22 the Torah tells us that when we make the altar, it cannot be made for Gazis which means chiseled stones. No iron tools are to be used in the construction of the altar. The Torah tells us that it is tantamount to desecrating the altar with a sword designed for killing. Rashi explains further that the sword is designed to shorten man's life and the altar is designed to prolong life so it is not fitting that these two opposing elements should have contact with each other. Indeed, any contact of iron and the altar made the stones unfit.

The Kli Yakar develops this idea a little bit differently. The altar symbolized humility and the sword symbolizes arrogance. We see in paintings and sculpture the idea of warriors lifting their swords in an extremely arrogant manner suggesting their readiness to fight. Perhaps in modern times we see the same type of arrogance manifested when one takes a gun. Furthermore, going up steps and taking great strides also symbolizes arrogance. The altar represents the humble spirit in which korbonos were to be brought. The construction and the conduct upon the altar indicated total submission to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Kli Yakar then explains from the Gemara in Sanhedrin 7B the juxtaposition of the Mitzvos involving the altar to the beginning of the next Parsha which discusses societal laws. Just as we learn lessons of humility from the altar, the judges must especially personify humility. Without this requisite trait Torah knowledge cannot be absorbed and the judge cannot function properly. The Tanna Bar Kapparah understood the idea of being deliberate in judgment from the fact that no stairs were used for the altar's ramp. Just as when goes up on a ramp without steps one is forced to go more slowly and carefully, so too, a judge should approach every case coming to him slowly and carefully. Moreover, it is understood from these verses that the Sanhedrin, the great rabbinical court and highest authority for Am Yisroel, and the Bais Hamikdash must be next to each other. It was imperative that judgments in all areas of life had to be guided by the sense of holiness felt by the close proximity to the Bais Hamikdash.

While we sadly do not have the Bais Hamikdash and the Sanhedrin today, we still can apply the same lessons to our lives. Just as the judges had to feel the awe of the Bais Hamikdash when they rendered judgments, so too, we have to realize that when we make decisions in our lives we also have to feel the awe of Hakadosh Baruch Hu over us. Just because we do not have the outward manifestations of Hashem's presence that we had in earlier times, it does not mean he is less with us. We just do not feel his presence as readily. We must always remember, both as individuals and as Am Yisroel, that everything we do is a reflection on our creator. We are Hashem's nation and we have to do everything according his rules.