

In this week's parasha, as well as the following three parshi'ot, Tetzave, Vayak'heil, and Pekudei, the Torah places a great deal of emphasis upon aesthetics. The Torah goes to great lengths to enumerate elaborate lists of details of the Mishkan - not only what was to go inside but also outside. Yet, our Chazal teach us not to be impressed with what we see on the outside but to focus on what's within, "*AL TIS'TAKEIL BE'KAN'KAN ELA BE'MAH SHE'YESH BO*" [Avot 4:27]. If only the inside is important why should the physical appearance be of any significance?

In parashat Ki-Tissa [Shemot 31:2] we are introduced to Betzalel, the architect and Master Builder, who is charged with the overall construction of every phase of the Mishkan. Although Betzalel was only thirteen years old at that time [Sanhedrin 69b], it was remarkable, if not miraculous that he could have the wide range of crafts needed to build the Mishkan. The Gemara Berachot [55a] shares the following story: Betzalel's name reflected his wisdom. HaKadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe: "Tell Betzalel to make the Mishkan, Aron and Keilim." When Moshe relayed the instructions to Betzalel, he changed the order to Aron, Keilim and then Mishkan. So Betzalel tells Moshe, usually one builds a house and then puts its contents inside - but you said to make the Keilim and then put them in the Mishkan...where should I put the Keilim? Moshe responds, "You must have been in HaShem's shadow [tzeil is a shadow] and overheard!"

Rav Avraham HaKohen Kook explains this Gemara. When Moshe heard the original order he did not feel that the order had any specific importance. Moshe felt that the Mishkan was the most important item and had the most Kedusha, therefore it should come first, so he changed the order when he spoke to Betzalel. However, Betzalel, as an artist, was more sensitive to aesthetics and quickly noted Moshe's error. As an architect and craftsman he knew that the order was in regard to what appears on the outside and what was to be inside - and not by levels of Kedusha. Moshe conceded and explains the origin of Betzalel's name - "in HaShem's shade".

Our synagogues and shuls are replicas of the Mishkan and Beit HaMikdash. They represent the symbol of the Jewish community and should be the most beautiful that the community can afford. They need not be ostentatious but they must be as aesthetically and presentable as possible. In addition, there is a general rule that all our Mitzvot should be performed in the most beautiful manner as possible [Gemara Shabbat 133b - (this week's Daf Yomi), based on the passuk "*ZEH KEILI VE'AN'VEI'HU*", *This is my G-d and I will glorify Him.* [Shemot 15:2]

At all times, they should be clean, neat and litter-free. Picking up pieces of litter paper is not the exclusive job of the custodian; it's everyone's Mitzvah of Kedushat Beit Knesset!

Siddurim, Chumashim and other sefarim must always be neatly stacked, and chairs neatly lined in rows before and after Tefillah. The Rambam writes that “*VE'ASU LI MIKDASH*”[25:8], ‘They shall make a Sanctuary for Me’, is a Mitzvah LeDorot, for all generations to come. Not that we have to build a Mishkan, but just as the Mishkan was aesthetically beautiful, so must be our Mikdash Me’at, our synagogues and shuls meet those standards