



Three Precious Metals

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Warmest Mazal Tov wishes to Rabbi & Rebbitzin Lewis on the engagement of their daughter שתי

for all to view after the events of the akeidah.

“This is the *terumah* that you should take from them. Gold, silver and copper”. (Shemos 25:3)

The Midrash Rabbah says “Gold, this is Avraham because he was tested in a burning furnace where gold is melted. Silver, this is Yitzchak because he was purified like silver on top of a *mizbeach*. Copper, this is Yaakov, as Lavan said to Yaakov - “נחשתי” - I have learned through divination and Hashem has blessed me because of you (Yaakov)”.

How do we begin to fathom this enigmatic *medrash*? And in particular, how do we comprehend that Avraham is compared to the most precious of metals, gold, and Yitzchak a less precious metal, silver and Yaakov an even lesser metal like copper? Are not all the patriarchs equal in their worth despite the fact that Yaakov is known as the true chosen one of the forefathers. Furthermore, what is this proof that Yaakov is associated with the metal of copper just because Lavan said “נחשתי” (I have divined) which happens to have the same root נחש which means copper. In other words, what is the connection between divination and copper in this word “נחשתי”?

Rav Shimon Schwab zt”l explains that naturally gold has a shining splendour and beauty which does not possess any impurity discolouring its shine. Silver, however, requires a process of cleaning up its impurities and only afterwards does it take on a gleaming shine. Copper, on the other hand is something completely different. From the onset it has no shine at all and only after much polishing and rubbing does it change its dull appearance into something that resembles the gleaming beauty of gold. It would seem therefore this is why the *medrash* compares the Patriarchs to the metals gold silver and copper. Everyone would agree to the fact that Avraham, more than Yitzchak and Yaakov, exhibited the greatest splendour and glory for all to behold. It was very clear to the eye the exultation of Avraham’s greatness. Once Avraham had come out of the burning furnace that Nimrod had thrown him into, the nature of Avraham became famous around the

world to the extent that kings from the east and west were knocking at his door. His splendour struck everyone instantly. Hence Avraham is compared to gold.

Yitzchak’s lustre however was not clear immediately. When Yitzchak came to fulfil the *mitzva* of the *akeidah* he was accompanied by Eliezer and Yishmael. Eliezer was a complete *tzaddik*, one who had complete control of himself. Like his master Avraham, Eliezer was the master of his evil/negative inclinations. He was also one who could draw upon the Torah of his master Avraham and teach that Torah to others. After Yishmael had been banished from the house of his father Avraham, as a result of the potential evil he could perpetrate, Yishmael became a *ba’al teshuva* and it was because of the sincerity of his *teshuvah* that there were *tanaaim* and *Kohanim Gedolim* of Israel who were named after him. Therefore, when Yitzchak proceeds to fulfilling the commandment to do the *akeidah*, he is flanked on one side by a complete *tzaddik* and on the other a *ba’al teshuva* and the unique greatness of Yitzchak was not obvious for all to see. It was only when he came close to Mount Moriah and only he and his father Avraham saw the cloud of the Divine Presence hovering over the mountain (and not Eliezer and Yishmael), did it become abundantly clear that Yitzchak and his descendants have the sanctity of a *korban* on a *mizbeach*. It now becomes evident why Yitzchak is compared to silver. For it is only after a process of purification that the shining splendour of silver becomes clear. Similarly, Yitzchak’s splendour only becomes obvious

When we look at all the different types of distress and exiles that our father Yaakov had to experience it is not apparent at all to the eyes of the world the greatness and exultation of Yaakov. His greatness is so hidden that even when Lavan saw that all of his success could be attributed to Yaakov, he did not consider that it was due to Yaakov being an *adam gadol* (a great man). Lavan attributed it to Yaakov being a *ba’al mazal* (a man who had good luck). Consequently, Lavan said the words “נחשתי” I have learned through divination that Hashem has blessed me because of you. In other words, ‘through my sorcery that I practice I saw that this success of mine came through your *mazal* Yaakov.’

It is because the greatness of Yaakov is not obvious at all to the eyes of the world that he is compared to copper. For only after much rubbing and polishing does the shine of copper become apparent for all to observe.

The symbolism of these three metals, gold, silver and copper reflects the three aspects that describe how the greatness of our forefathers and their descendants, the Jewish people are viewed in eyes of the world.

In our rich Jewish history there have been times when our shining splendour is clearly viewed by all the nations of the world and there have been other times when it is not so obvious. On the other hand, there are very many occasions when our greatness is so hidden that even when the nations see the advantages of having Jews residing amongst them, they attribute it to the luck the Jews possess. It is therefore no surprise that these three metals play such a pivotal role in building this holy *mishkan* in our *sedra*.

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