



An Amazing Revelation from the Sefas Emes

Betzalel Was a Gilgul of His Grandfather Chur Who Was Murdered Trying to Prevent the Eigel Hence He Was Chosen to Build the Mishkan an Atonement for the Cheit HaEigel

This week's parsha is parshas Ki Sisa. Thus, it is fitting to examine the appointment of Betzalel by HKB"H to oversee the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah teaches us that to fulfill this task, he was divinely imbued with the spirit of G-d—with wisdom, intuition and knowledge. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Shemos 31, 1):

”וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, ראה קראתי בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה, ואמלא אותו רוח אלקים בחכמה ובתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה, לחשוב מחשבות לעשות בזהב ובכסף ובנחשת, ובחרושת אבן למלאות ובחרושת עץ לעשות בכל מלאכה.”

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: “See, I have called by name Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of shevet Yehudah. I have filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge, and with every type of work—to make calculations, to work with gold, with silver and with copper; and in the craft of stonecutting for filling, and in the craft of woodcarving—to do every type of work.”

Similarly, in parshas Vayakheil, when Moshe informed Yisrael of this appointment, it says (ibid. 35, 30): **”ויאמר משה אל בני ישראל ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל בן אורי בן חור למטה יהודה, וימלא אותו רוח אלקים בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה, ולחשוב מחשבות לעשות בזהב ובכסף ובנחשת.”** Moshe said to Bnei Yisrael, **“See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur,**

of shevet Yehudah. He filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with every craft—to make artistic designs, to work with the gold, with the silver and with the copper.”

We learn from our blessed sages that Betzalel was only thirteen years old when he built the Mishkan. This fact is taught in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 69b): **”וכי עבד בצלאל משכן בר: כמה הוי בר תליסר”**—**when Betzalel built the Mishkan, how old was he? Thirteen years old.** This deserves further scrutiny. As mentioned, Betzalel was uniquely qualified to perform this task, because he was imbued with a divine spirit. So, of all the available G-d-fearing, meritorious tzaddikim in Yisrael to choose from, why did HKB"H choose the young Betzalel in particular to construct the Mishkan and fashion its vessels? We find an explicit answer to this question in the Midrash (S.R. 48, 3):

“See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur.” Why was it necessary for the passuk to mention Chur here? Because when Yisrael wished to worship idolatry, he sacrificed his life for HKB"H and did not allow them to do so; consequently, they assaulted him and murdered him. HKB"H said, “On your life (I promise you), I will compensate you (for this heroic act).” It is analogous to a king whose legions rebelled against him. His general stood up and opposed them. He said

to them, “You are rebelling against the king!” They proceeded to murder him.

The king declared, “If he had given me money, wouldn’t I have been obliged to repay him?! All the more so, since he sacrificed his life for me. So, what will I do for him? I will make all of his offspring ministers and governors. Thus, when Yisrael made the eigel, Chur opposed them and sacrificed his life for HKB”H. So, HKB”H said to him, “On your life (I promise you), all of your progeny, I will elevate them and make them reputable.” As it states, “See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel . . . and He has filled him with the spirit of G-d.”

According to the Arizal in Sefer HaLikutim (Vayakheil 35), this passuk in parshas Vayakheil cited by the Midrash is teaching us an important piece of information. HKB”H wished to demonstrate to Yisrael that not only had He forgiven them for the “cheit ha’eigel,” but He also forgave them for murdering Chur. He asserts that it was difficult for Yisrael to believe that the building of the Mishkan would atone for the grievous sin of the eigel. Therefore, Moshe said to them, “**See!**” He drew their attention to the incredible fact that Hashem had chosen none other than Betzalel to build the Mishkan—the grandson of Chur, the man they had murdered for attempting to prevent them from making the eigel. He offered this to them as proof that the work and construction of the Mishkan would atone for the sin of the eigel, seeing as the prosecutor had become an advocate. Specifically, for this reason, the passuk traces his lineage only back to Chur: “**Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur**”—no more, no less. It highlights that he was a descendant of Chur; the prosecutor would now be their advocate.

The Reason HKB”H Consulted with Yisrael regarding the Appointment of Betzalel

It is worthwhile adding the comments of the Chasam Sofer on this week’s parsha. He explains the following Gemara based on the Midrash cited above (Berachos 55a): “אמר רבי יצחק, אין מעמידין פרנס על הציבור אלא אם כן נמלכים בצבור, שנאמר ראו קרא ה’ בשם בצלאל, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה הגון עליך בצלאל, אמר לו רבונו של עולם אם לפניך הגון לפני לא כל שכן,

אמר לו אף על פי כן לך אמור להם, הלך ואמר להם לישראל, הגון עליכם בצלאל, אמרו לו אם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולפניך הוא הגון, לפנינו לא כל שכן.” Rabbi Yitzchak said: We do not appoint a leader over the community without consulting with the community. For, it is stated: “See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel.” HKB”H asked Moshe, “Moshe, do you consider Betzalel worthy (of this task)?” He replied to Him: “Master of the Universe, if he is worthy in Your eyes, then he is surely worthy in my eyes!” He (HKB”H) said to him, “Nevertheless, go and ask them (Yisrael).” He went and said to Yisrael, “Do you consider Betzalel worthy?” They answered him, “If he is worthy in the eyes of HKB”H and in your eyes, then he is certainly worthy in our eyes!”

We must endeavor to explain why HKB”H opted to consult with Yisrael specifically with regards to this appointment of Betzalel to manage the construction of the Mishkan. In light of the Midrash, the Chasam Sofer explains that HKB”H commanded Yisrael to build the Mishkan to atone for the “cheit ha’eigel.” Furthermore, Betzalel merited being in charge of the entire project, since he was: “**Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur**”; he was the grandson of the man who sacrificed his life in an attempt to prevent Yisrael from making the eigel.

Now, we have learned in the Mishnah (Megillah 25a) that the incident of the eigel is read from the Torah and is also translated for the congregation. The Gemara (ibid. 25b) explains the advantage of this practice: “מהו דתימא ליחוש—**you might have said that we should be concerned about the honor of Yisrael** (and, therefore, should not translate this passage); **thus, it teaches us that it is definitely agreeable to them** (to have it translated), **because it is an atonement for them.** The Chasam Sofer points out, however, that it will be an atonement only if the congregation wants their shame publicized for the sake of atonement.

It was precisely for this reason that HKB”H sent Moshe to inquire if the people felt that Betzalel was a worthy, acceptable appointee. Perhaps, they would object to his appointment, since it would cause them shame and embarrassment; it would remind them of the egregious sin

they committed with the eigel and the murder of Chur. If they felt that their sin was too serious to be forgiven, his appointment would serve no purpose. In fact, the opposite was true. They favored Betzalel's appointment, so that their sin would be atoned for as a result of their shame and embarrassment.

Chur Reincarnated into Betzalel so that Yisrael Would Rectify His Murder

We will now produce a magnificent chiddush from the Sefas Emes (Likutim Vayakheil) concerning this Midrash. Not only did HKB"H choose Betzalel to build the Mishkan, because he was the grandson of Chur, but Chur himself reincarnated into Betzalel. In fact, HKB"H actually altered Betzalel's appearance to resemble Chur. This transformation is what prompted Moshe to say to Yisrael: **"See, Hashem has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur."**

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, it appears that we can find an allusion to this interpretation in the actual text. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, HKB"H announces the appointment of Betzalel at the beginning of our parsha, and Moshe repeats it to Yisrael in parshas Vayakheil as follows: **"See, Havaya has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of shevet Yehudah. He filled him with the spirit of Elokim, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with every craft."** We must endeavor to explain why Moshe Rabeinu initially employs the name Havaya, the name of divine mercy—"rachamim"—and concludes with the name Elokim, the name that reflects the midah of "din."

In Likutei Torah (Ki Sisa), the Arizal asserts that Chur was a gilgul of Adam HaRishon, who was guilty of avodah-zarah when he committed the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as." This is evident from the nachash's remark to Chava (Bereishis 3, 4): **"כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלקים: יודעי טוב ורע."** For G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad. Rashi explains: **"כי יודע, כל אומן שונא את בני אומנתו, מן העץ אכל וברא את העולם. והייתם כאלקים, יוצרי עולמות."** The nachash argued: **"Every craftsman hates others of his craft; G-d ate from the tree and created**

the world. So, by eating from the tree, **you will be like G-d, fashioners of the world."** Therefore, Chur sacrificed his life attempting to prevent Yisrael from making the eigel to atone for Adam HaRishon's act of avodah-zarah.

In this light, we can make sense of Moshe's declaration to Yisrael: **"See, Havaya has called by name, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, of shevet Yehudah."** The name **Havaya** indicates that HKB"H had mercy on Yisrael. He provided them with atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel" and the murder of Chur by appointing Betzalel, Chur's grandson, to oversee the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels.

The continuation of the text goes on to allude to the wondrous ways of Hashem: **"וימלא אותו רוח אלקים—He instilled in him the spirit (רוח) of Elokim.** The word רוח is an anagram of חו"ר—alluding to the fact that he instilled in Betzalel the neshamah of **Chur**; the use of the name **Elokim** indicates that this was an act of "din" designed to atone for Adam HaRishon's sin of avodah-zarah. Now, Chur reincarnated into Betzalel, whom HKB"H imbued **"with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with every craft"** to construct the Mishkan as atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel" and the murder of Chur.

This explains the continuation of the passuk very nicely: **"He filled him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with every craft—to make artistic designs, to work with the gold, with the silver and with the copper."** Since he was a gilgul of Chur, he remembered everyone who participated actively in his murder; conversely, he recognized everyone who merely stood by silently without condemning Chur's murder but did not participate in the murder. Based on the level of their involvement in that heinous act, he determined whose contributions would be used for the holier parts of the Mishkan and whose contributions would be used for other parts of the Mishkan.

The Magnificent Relationship between Betzalel and Aharon HaKohen in the Avodah of the Mishkan

Based on this introduction, we will examine the magnificent relationship that existed between Betzalel and

Aharon with regards to the avodah in the Mishkan. On the one hand, Betzalel, the gilgul of Chur—who was murdered sanctifying the name of Hashem, by attempting to prevent Yisrael from making the eigel—merited constructing the Mishkan and its vessels, which atoned for the “cheit ha’eigel.” On the other hand, Aharon, who actually made the eigel to spare Yisrael from extermination, merited performing the sacrificial service in the Mishkan—offering korbanos to atone for Yisrael’s act of avodah-zarah.

Let us begin with a tremendous chiddush in the Midrash (V.R. 10, 3). Aharon accepted upon himself the blame and possible consequences for making the eigel in order to save Yisrael from extermination. In this merit, HKB”H chose him to be the Kohen Gadol, the one who performs the service on Yom HaKippurim in the Kodosh HaKodashim. This explanation is based on the sages’ elucidation of the passuk (Tehillim 45, 8): “אהבת צדק ותשנא רשע על כן משחד אלקים: אהבתי צדק ותשנא רשע על כן משחד אלקים—you love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore, Elokim, your G-d, has anointed you with oil of joy from among your peers.

When Yisrael performed that ignoble deed, they originally approached Chur. They asked him to make them a god. When he refused their request, they attacked him and killed him . . . Afterwards, they approached Aharon, asking him to make them a god. Hearing their request, Aharon immediately became fearful . . . He deliberated as to how to proceed. They had already killed Chur, who was a prophet. If they now killed him, a kohen, they would in effect be fulfilling the passuk (Eichah 2, 20): “Should a kohen and a prophet be slain in the sanctuary of Hashem”; they would be exiled immediately . . . Aharon figured that if they make the eigel, they will be held accountable for the despicable act; it is preferable that I be held accountable and not Yisrael . . . HKB”H said to Aharon: For “loving righteousness,” attempting to vindicate My children, and not wishing to hold them accountable (“hating wickedness”), “therefore, Elokim, your G-d, anointed you.” He said to him: From the entire tribe of Levi, only you will be chosen to fill the position of Kohen Gadol.

This is also discussed in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 7a). There, however, it states that had Yisrael also murdered Aharon, there would have been no remedy for them. They deduce this from the following passuk (Shemos 32, 5):

“Aharon saw and built a mizbeiach before him.” What did he see? Rabbi Binyamin the son of Yefet said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: He saw Chur slaughtered before him. He figured: If I do not do as they wish, they will now do to me what they did to Chur, and they will fulfill through me the words of the passuk (Eichah 2, 20): “Should a kohen and a navi be killed in the Sanctuary of Hashem.” As a consequence, there will never be a remedy for them; therefore, it is preferable that they make an eigel—leaving open the possibility that they will have a remedy by means of teshuvah.”

The Self-sacrifice of Aharon versus the Self-sacrifice of Chur

This prompts the Chasam Sofer to ask: **The prohibition against avodah zarah falls into the category of “be killed rather than transgress.” So, how did he conclude that it was preferable to transgress this aveirah? . . . Even more surprising is the fact that in the aftermath of the incident of the eigel, he was appointed Kohen Gadol. How did he merit that?**

He explains that the concept of “mesirus nefesh” means sacrificing one’s spiritual self to Hashem, as well. In other words, one has to be willing to also forfeit his portion in Olam HaBa. If a person is only sacrificing his physical body in Olam HaZeh, it wouldn’t be termed “mesiras nefesh” but rather “mesiras guf.” Here are his sacred words:

In the “mussar” sefarim, it is presented in the name of a particular chassid that if it was decreed from above that for a mitzvah we would be punished and for an aveirah we would be rewarded, I would still perform the mitzvah and not the aveirah out of love for Hashem—knowing that it is the will of my Maker to perform the mitzvah . . . He explains there that this is the true meaning of “mesiras nefesh.” If we merely

sacrifice our lives for the honor of Hashem, we have not sacrificed our souls but only our bodies . . . but if we perform an act that causes the forfeiture of the soul, knowing that one's soul will descend to hell to be lost forever, and nevertheless one does not desist, because Hashem will be sanctified by this act, this is a true act of "mesiras nefesh."

Based on this notion, he proceeds to explain Aharon's rationale for making the eigel. We learned from the Gemara that he had already witnessed the murder of Chur and feared that if they killed him too, the words of the passuk would be fulfilled: **"Should a kohen and a navi be killed in the Sanctuary of Hashem."** As a result, they would be lost forever; therefore, he concluded that it would be preferable for them to make the eigel, for which they could make amends by means of teshuvah.

The connection between Betzalel and Aharon is now quite apparent. Betzalel was the gilgul of Chur, who sacrificed his physical body to prevent Yisrael from making the eigel. Therefore, as his reward, he merited building the physical structure of the Mishkan and its vessels. Aharon, on the other hand, was willing to sacrifice his soul, to be disgraced for all eternity, to spare Yisrael from extermination. Therefore, he merited performing the internal avodah—the service of the korbanos in the Mishkan. They both contributed to the sanctity of the Mishkan, which was an atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel."

Moshe United the Forces of Aharon in Chur in the Battle against Amalek

With this in mind, we can offer a wonderful explanation for Moshe Rabeinu's decision to have Aharon and Chur join him atop the hill in the battle against Amalek. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Shemos 17, 10): **"ויעש יהושע כאשר אמר לו משה להילחם בעמלק ומשה אהרן וחור עלו ראש הגבעה, והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל וכאשר יניח ידו וגבר עמלק, וידיו משה כבדים ויקחו אבן ושימו תחתיו וישב עליה ואהרן וחור תמכו בידיו."** **Yehoshua did as Moshe instructed him, to do battle with Amalek; and Moshe Aharon and Chur ascended to the top of the hill. It so happened that**

when Moshe would raise his hand, Yisrael prevailed; and when he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. Moshe's arms grew heavy; so, they took a rock, placed it underneath him and he sat on it; and Aharon and Chur supported his hands, one on this side and one on that side.

Now, the Sefas Emes (Yisro 5635) asserts that the "cheit ha'eigel" was attributable to the poisonous venom Amalek infected Yisrael with during their battle. He writes: **Without a doubt, all of the wrongdoings that were done subsequently with the "eigel," everything happened on account of the wicked Amalek. May his name be blotted out!** In a similar vein, he writes (Purim 5636): **The truth is that the entire "cheit ha'eigel" is attributable to the wicked Amalek, who confused us prior to receiving the Torah and injected venom and the leaven in the dough (the yetzer hara).**

With this understanding, the Sefas Emes (Parah 5638) interprets Yehoshua's remark to Moshe when they approached the camp after Yisrael had sinned with the eigel (ibid. 32, 17): **וישמע יהושע את קול העם ברעה ויאמר אל: "ויהושע שמע את קול מלחמה במחנה" —Yehoshua heard the sound of the people in its shouting, and he said to Moshe, "The sound of battle is in the camp!"** According to the Sefas Emes, Yehoshua sensed via his "ruach hakodesh" that the "cheit ha'eigel" was a remnant and repercussion of the battle with Amalek, which he himself participated in, as per the passuk (ibid. 17, 9): **ויהמר משה אל יהושע בחר לנו אנשים: "ויהמר משה אל יהושע בחר לנו אנשים" —Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose men for us and go out, do battle with Amalek."**

We can now comprehend Moshe Rabeinu's profound reason for having Aharon and Chur accompany him during that battle. Through the power of nevuah, he knew that Amalek had infected the hearts and dedication of Yisrael, which ultimately led to the making of the eigel. Hence, he strategically had the two people who sacrificed themselves to save Yisrael from the "cheit ha'eigel" join him on the hilltop—Chur who was killed for standing in the way of the people and Aharon who complied by making the eigel.

Furthermore, they were the suitable choices for that role, since they were destined to play integral roles in the service of the Mishkan, the atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel.” Chur, who reincarnated into Betzalel, was imbued with “ruach Elokim” to construct the Mishkan and its vessels. Aharon performed the avodah of the korbanos in the Mishkan to atone for Bnei Yisrael. Foreseeing the integral roles that those two would play in the Mishkan—the atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel”—Moshe concluded that they would most certainly possess the power to assist him in the battle with Amalek that caused the “cheit ha’eigel.”

At this point, it is fitting to present a wonderful allusion found in the sefer Bris Kehunas Olam. In his usual, sacred

manner, he offers an explanation as to why Moshe chose to have Aharon and Chur join him during the battle with Amalek. He points out that the gematria of their two names--אָהֲרֹן חוּר (470)—is exactly the same as the milui of עֵי"ן מ"ם לַמ"ד קו"ף--עַמְל"ק (130+80+74+186=470). This coincides beautifully with what we have discussed in this essay. Aharon and Chur were essential to the service of the Mishkan, which was an atonement for the “cheit ha’eigel.” They possessed the power to combat Amalek, who caused the “cheit ha’eigel.” In the merit of assisting Moshe to defeat Amalek, they merited being intimately involved afterwards with the Mishkan to provide atonement for Yisrael.



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