

## Vayak'hel

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*“G-d has called by name Bezalel ...and has filled him with the Spirit of G-d, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.” Exodus 35: 30-31*

This week's torah reading includes a recapitulation of the instructions for building the tabernacle, a sacred charge to build a “home” on our physical earth where G-d will reside among the people. When constructing a gathering place for an entire nation, a world class tabernacle, we would expect the selection of great architects and artisans of the day – a Pierre L'Enfant (builder of Washington) so to speak. Yet when G-d appoints a craftsman to build a home amongst the people, rather than select an I.M.Pei we get Bezalel, the 13 year old boy from the tribe of Judah.

We in the Jewish community are accustomed to a culture of seniority in which advanced years in communal service imply knowledge and impart authority. Our contemporary Bezalel would no doubt be sent off to leadership development programs until he turns 45. Thus it borders on shocking to conceive that G-d chose such a youngster.

Thankfully the torah takes care to enumerate this youth's qualifications for the job at hand. And while we might expect that chief amongst them would be his skills as a craftsman or his management abilities to lead his colleagues we instead learn that he is filled with *Ruach Elokim*, the spirit of G-d. And what is this spirit? *Chochmah, Tenubah and Da'at*, wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

Nehamah Leibowitz in her commentary “New Studies in Shemot” notes the recurrence of this triad of qualities in two other places in the Torah:

“G-d by *chochmah* founded the earth, by *tenubah* established the heavens, by *da'at* he split the waters.” Proverbs 3:19-20

And when Solomon built the temple, Hiram the architect is described as having these qualities as well. (See Kings 7:14)

Leibowitz concludes “the tabernacle signifies man's making of a house for G-d, paralleling G-d's making of a world for man.”

Commentaries provide numerous translations and nuances in understanding these three terms, but put most succinctly by Rashi: wisdom is the ability to learn from others, understanding is the ability to apply what we learn and knowledge is the holy spirit that guides us.

In the Jewish spiritual tradition, these attributes are intrinsic to the exploration of personal spirituality and holiness. The chasidic masters devoted great energy to the attainment of

these qualities in their search for closeness with the divine. So inherent are they to Jewish understanding of self-awareness that the Lubavitch movement is actually named Chabad, an acronym (like so many Jewish organizations do) of – *Chochmah, Binah* (a variation of *Tenubah*) and *Da'at*.

Returning to Bezalel – he is charged as we have seen with extending the act of creation by performing, as Leibowitz noted, a parallel function. And in so much as he is taking on a divine effort these attributes are essential to the task. And it is only once he has these attributes that he is then recognized for his skills in “all manner of workmanship.”

Our efforts toward *Tikkun Olam*, repair of the world, likewise seek to extend the act of creation. We do not understand Tikkun Olam as a critique of G-d's handiwork but as the ongoing process of creation in which after seven days preparing the canvas the brush has been passed to us. So too we do not expect to finish the “repair” but to engage our children and successors to continue on (as Rabbi Tarfon said, ours is not to complete the task, nor may we refrain from it Avot 2:21).

We might say in essence that we are trying to make all the world a tabernacle and in so doing we should ask ourselves: What skills are required for us to do this work? What do we need to know and how must we act if we are to be tikkun activists, both as individuals and in social justice projects?

To begin with, we need to know how to learn from others. The struggles for justice have been long fought and our efforts are empowered by knowing what went before and by respecting and valuing the insight of peers and predecessors. Our efforts are strengthened when we take the time to learn with and from those who experience injustice on a day to day basis. We need to take the time to understand their experiences and not ignore their wisdom and contributions in addressing the challenges at hand.

We also need to be able to apply our knowledge. Once we know what the injustice is we have to understand how to make change. We need to analyze power structures and map out strategies. We need to develop our skills at understanding the “how” as well as the “what” when taking action.

And all of this is made stronger by our spiritual guidance. Our inner-compass of religion, ethics and values that shapes us and gives us the motivation to do sustainable work towards a better world.

Through wisdom, understanding and knowledge we can become informed, strategic and sustained activists in the pursuit of social change. And like Bezalel, may we all aspire to extend the divine work in this world.

Shabbat Shalom

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