

AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur of the tribe of Yehudah did all that Hashem commanded Moshe. (Shemos 8:22)

And Betzalel the son of Uri...did all that Hashem commanded Moshe: Even things which his teacher Moshe did not tell him his opinion he turned out to be in agreement with what was said to Moshe on Sinai. For Moshe commanded Betzalel to make first the vessels and afterwards the Tabernacle. Betzalel said to him, "It is customary for people to make first the house and then to place vessels inside it?" Moshe said to him, "This is what I heard from the mouth of The Holy One Blessed Be He!" And so Betzalel made the Tabernacle first and afterwards he made the vessels. (Rashi)

To welcome the Shabbos, come let us go
For it is the source of blessing
From the beginning,
From antiquity she was honored
Last in deed but first in thought.
(From Lecha Dodi- Friday night liturgy)

What's the great debate about whether or not to make the vessels and then the Tabernacle or visa versa? Of course it's a matter of practicality to construct the building and only later the furniture. Even Moshe agreed. Why then do we need to know that Betzalel was told at first to make the vessels? The Maharal helps explain why it was that Moshe did not command first on the external structure.

What is the first thing we need before starting to build a building? I know some people will say, "Money!" There's something more basic than that. No not a building permit. Right! A plan! You can't get money or a permit without submitting first an architect's scheme. The drawing itself first requires something even more fundamental before it becomes a reality. Yes. A motivation! A will to create or become! And that all flows from an imaginative picture, an ideal of how things will look or be after all the work is done.

Before I build my dream home I have already pictured how it will be to sit comfortably surrounded by a wall of Torah books and fire place flickering nearby casting forth it's inspiring warmth and light. That picture drives the process from stage to stage. All the details are mapped out and the dirty work begins.

Trucks and bulldozers create a muddy hole where later a foundation is formed of concrete. Materials litter the lot and it all seems chaotic until the frame of the structure begins to take shape. The job is still not nearly done. Subcontractors march on through with wires and tubes and tiles and paint supplies until the inside is as fine as the outside is solid.

The house is complete and the prescient moment is about to take place. The walls are packed with holy books. A bunch of dry logs are loaded into the waiting fireplace. The fire takes. Enters the man, with the vision, tea in hand and sets himself down opening one of the ancient tomes before him as the fire warms his toes. The picture is complete. What was visualized at first was actualized at last.

Lest we be seduced into thinking that the building itself is more important than its true function, Moshe set the record straight. The vessels and their special internal use are the real purpose of the project. The Almighty is not served by a meaningless building. There is no "edifice complex" at play here.

The main part, the essence is the realm within. The outer world serves and thrives on the inner. For practical logistical considerations the external structure needs to be worked on first. The man of action might seem to have a different set of priorities than the soulful dreamer, but the builder is really working to create an appropriate setting, a garment to house an ideal. They, Moshe and Betzalel, are partners.

When Shabbos arrives it is the source of blessing not just for the week ahead but also it fits as the flame atop the wick of week that preceded it, with the realization of the original good all that hard work was aiming to. With that thought in mind we build yet another week and crown it again with an original thought.

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