

# IF HE COULD DO IT...

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*And Moshe called Betzalel and Oheliav and every wise-hearted man within whom HASHEM has endowed wisdom, everyone whose heart inspired him, to approach the work, to do it. (Shemos 36:2)*

To whom is Moshe appealing to do the holy work of the Tabernacle? Is his want ad a call only to the already talented and experienced?

The Chofetz Chaim writes in the 7th Chapter of Toras HaBais, the following footnote: "We find this by the building of the Tabernacle, that anyone who put his heart and desire to make the Tabernacle, HASHEM gave him knowledge and wisdom to know how to do it, as it says in Vayakhel, "And Moshe called Betzalel and Oheliav and every wise-hearted man within whom HASHEM has endowed wisdom, everyone whose heart inspired him, to approach the work, to do it." It does not say "and everyone" (signaling a separate thought) but rather "everyone" indicating that it is a single matter. Meaning that anyone who agrees and decides in his mind to draw close to the task to contemplate how to do this, HASHEM will give him the knowledge to do it. This relates to any good thing, whether it is an action concerning a holy matter that he needs to apply his heart to contemplate how to do it, or whether it is a matter of learning Torah. If one decides in his mind to try to become an expert in some part of the Talmud or similar such thing, and he sees to it to review it many times, or he wants to clarify and master some Hallacha-Law and he strives in pursuit of it, HASHEM will grant to him knowledge in his heart and will help him to make his thoughts a reality."

The Talmud (Baba Metzia 84A) records a famous incident that occurred between the sage Rabbi Yochanan and a bandit and gang-leader known as Reish Lakish: "One day Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the Jordon. He saw Reish Lakish jumping into the river after him. Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "Your strength should be used for Torah!" Reish Lakish answered back, "Your beauty is meant for women." Rabbi Yochanan replied, "If you abandon your ways, I will give you my sister, who is even more beautiful than I am, for marriage." Reish Lakish accepted this upon himself. He then wanted to return to collect his clothing but he could not muster the strength. (Since he apportioned his strength to spiritual pursuits some of his physical prowess abated.-Rashi) Rabbi Yochanan taught him Chumash and Mishnah, and Reish Lakish became a great man." (Reish Lakish became the brother in-law and all-time study partner of Rabbi Yochanan. It's hard to travel a few pages in the Talmud without finding both of their names prominently included in the scholarly discourse)

Amazingly Rabbi Yochanan did not yell "thief" when he saw this mugger bounding toward him. Rather he saw his great spiritual potential. When Reish Lakish heard Rabbi Yochanan's suggestion

that he too could become a scholar he rejected it immediately as absurd. Perhaps that's the meaning of his answer to Rabbi Yochanan that his beauty is meant for women. "Just as one cannot change their gender, so I cannot become anything other than a thief." He felt it to be an-impossibility that he could leave his life of crime and become a Talmud scholar. Rabbi Yochanan tested his thesis, albeit with an ulterior motive. Reish Lakish took the pugnacious challenge and realized he could become much more than he had been. Rabbi Yochanan was right and we too must believe if he could do it... DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).