

IMPRESSED BY THE HORSES

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Moshe said to the Children of Israel, 'behold, HaShem has called the name of Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur, from the tribe of Yehudah. And He has filled him with the Spirit of G-d, with wisdom, understanding and knowledge of all the work. To think thoughts, to do with the gold, and with the silver and with the copper.'" [35:30-32]

"And Betzalel and Ahaliav, and every man with a wise heart, whom HaShem gave wisdom and understanding to know to do all of the Holy work, did in accordance with all that HaShem Commanded." [36:1]

"And Betzalel made the Aron from Shittim wood, 2.5 amos [cubits] in length, 1.5 amos wide and 1.5 amos tall." [37:1]

We see that Betzalel was placed in charge of the entire process, but that his students, especially Ahaliav, helped him throughout the construction. Again and again we are told that they made each item, frequently using the expression "and he made" but not specifying who in particular did each task. But when we arrive at the Aron, which held the Tablets Moshe brought down from Mount Sinai, we are told specifically that Betzalel himself made the Aron.

Rashi says that this is "because he put his entire soul into the work, more than the other wise men, and therefore it was called by his name."

The Sifsei Chachamim, a commentary on Rashi, says that with most of the other objects, Betzalel showed Ahaliav and the others what to do -- but because there was such great Holiness to the Aron, he himself worked to complete it. However, Rashi himself seems to imply that it was not the percentage of work which was done by Betzalel that caused him to be identified with the Aron, but rather the caliber of his investment in the project.

The Shaarei Aharon, by Rabbi Aharon Rotter, also takes this approach to Rashi. He lists an array of early and later commentators (the Ramban, the Zohar, the Ba'al HaTurim, the Sha"ch and the Meshech Chochma) who say that Betzalel made the Aron himself, and who offer various reasons why this was so. But according to the Sha'arei Aharon, Rashi implies that the other Sages worked with Betzalel on the Aron, but it was called in his name because he put his soul into the work more than the others did. There was a qualitative difference between the work done by Betzalel versus the others, such a great difference that the Aron was called in his name.

According to Rabbi Chaim Volozhner, founder of the first modern Yeshiva, says that not only did the caliber of work matter, but even the caliber of giving mattered -- and that discerning the latter was part of Betzael's job.

Reb Chaim had a fundraiser who worked for the yeshiva, going from town to town. There was a villager in one place who gave the fundraiser a large sum every year, a surprising amount of money for one who did not appear to be wealthy.

One year, the fundraiser approached Reb Chaim and explained that if he were able to travel in his own wagon with his own driver, he could move more rapidly from place to place and thus collect more for the yeshiva. Reb Chaim agreed, and gave him the wagon. The fundraiser also explained that if he were able to put on a better appearance, and enter the homes of wealthy donors dressed like someone accustomed to dealing with large sums, then he would also be able to elicit larger donations. Again Reb Chaim agreed, and thus the fundraiser went out with a new suit and coat as well.

But when the fundraiser came to the village where he had always been so well received in the past, the villager took one look at the fundraiser, refused to give him a penny, and even expressed regret for giving in previous years.

When the fundraiser returned the yeshiva, Reb Chaim noticed that the villager was not listed among the donors, and immediately found out what had transpired. He then told the fundraiser that the next time the latter planned to travel to that particular village, he, Reb Chaim, would like to come along.

Thus, a few months later, Reb Chaim himself showed up on the villager's doorstep. He was received with great honor, and the villager inquired about the yeshiva as if he were every bit as concerned about its success as he had been previously. Eventually, Reb Chaim was able to ask him why he had rebuffed the fundraiser earlier that year.

The villager replied that he always understood that the fundraiser was working for the benefit of the yeshiva. But when he saw that great sums of money had been spent hiring a wagon and driver, and dressing up the fundraiser in a new suit, he was afraid that his money was not being used to support Torah learning, but rather for stylish tailoring!

In answering the villager, Reb Chaim explained how "thinking thoughts," making calculations, was part of Betzael's job. Some people, he explained, give because they are impressed by the horses. It is those people whose money supports the carriage, and in fact who support the fundraiser himself. Those people who give only because they are interested in supporting Torah learning, he said, are still giving to exactly that -- all the more so, now that all the fundraising expenses have been covered!

We learn from this that in all of our actions, our intention can make all the difference. Not only our work, but even our donations, are evaluated for purity of thought and purpose! And someone who

devotes his (or her) soul to a project can be credited as if he had done the entire task, all by himself.