

BEZALEL'S ABILITY TO SHARE THE STAGE MADE HIM A LEADER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayakhel

Bezalel's Ability To Share The Stage Made Him a Leader

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 585, The Melacha of Trapping. Good Shabbos!

The Talmud states: "There are three things that the Almighty Himself proclaims: Famine (ra'av), Abundance (sovah), and a good leader (parnas tov)." [Berachos 55a]. The Gemara cites pasukim [verses] to prove each of these points. The pasuk [verse] cited to prove that the Almighty Himself proclaims a good leader is the pasuk from Parshas Vayakhel: "See, Hashem has proclaimed by name, Bezalel son of Uri son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah." [Shmos 35:30].

Bezalel was the general contractor, so to speak, behind the construction of the Mishkan. He perhaps had artistic ability. He was a good organizer. He was talented. But it is strange that the Gemara refers to him as a 'parnas tov'. Where do we see leadership qualities in Bezalel? He succeeded in getting the job done under budget and on time -- he was a good general contractor. But in what sense does that make him a good leader (parnas tov)?

The Yalkut Shimoni on this week's parsha contains the following teaching: During the building of the Mishkan, two tribes had a partnership -- the tribe of Yehudah (as represented by Bezalel) and the tribe of Dan (as represented by Oholiav ben Achisamach) had a partnership.

Why did they need two tribes for the project? In truth, G-d did not need anyone to build the Mishkan, but it certainly would have been sufficient to provide just one tribe. Bezalel could have done the job alone. With his G-d given talents, he did not need a partner. Nonetheless, the Medrash emphasizes that the Mishkan had to be built by two tribes.

Rav Chaim Zaytchik, zt"l, writes that this Medrash allows us to better understand the previously cited Gemara that labeled Bezalel as a 'parnas tov.' There are many people who are interested in getting

involved in communal work as long as they will have the spotlight by themselves. They are in it so that when the job gets done, they will be able to say: "Look, what I've done!" But if you ask them to be a co-chairman, to share the job and responsibilities, and as such, to share the limelight and glory, they say -- "under those circumstances, I am not interested."

The Almighty is looking for people who work lishma [altruistically]. He wants people who are interested in efforts for the Sake of Heaven, not for the sake of an ego trip. The true test of a person's motive is whether he will tolerate a partner. Therefore, the first test that the Ribono shel Olam gave Bezalel -- to see whether he was the man for the job -- was to assign him a co-chairman. "I want you to work with someone, with someone who is not even from the prestigious tribe of Yehudah, but from the "lowly" Tribe of Dan. In accepting this partner, Bezalel showed us how to be a leader (parnas tov).

Why State The Obvious?

The Parsha begins "And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and said to them..." [Shmos 35:1]. The section ends some twenty pasukim later with the words: "The entire assembly of Israel left Moshe's presence." [Shmos 35:20] Moshe told them what he needed to tell them and everyone left.

If this was a Talmudic passage, the Gemara would analyze it, asking, "This is obvious - what is the Torah telling us?" It goes without saying that if Moshe Rabbeinu summoned them to deliver a message, that when he was through delivering that message they would all walk out. Why does the Torah that never wastes words need to include pasuk 20 at the conclusion of the narration?

Rav Elya Lopian says that the pasuk is teaching that when the Jews walked away from Moshe Rabbeinu, it was evident that they had been in the presence of a Moshe Rabbeinu. One does not spend time in the presence of a great Jewish leader without having an indelible impression left upon him. Certainly this is true immediately after the encounter. Often the impression lasts a lifetime.

The pasuk "The entire assembly of Israel left Moshe's presence" teaches that the impression was "written on their faces" and they were a changed people because they spent time with a Moshe Rabbeinu. Rav Elya explains that when we see someone staggering drunk on the street and we ask ourselves "where was he?" the answer is obvious. He was in a bar getting drunk.

So too, when we see a person who was in the presence of a Moshe Rabbeinu, it is evident where the person was. He was in the presence of holiness. Such is the influence of any environment. When one is in a holy environment, when one is in the presence of a holy congregation, when one is with spiritually great individuals, it makes an impression and it makes a difference. And the opposite is true as well.

The Ponevitzer Rav, of Blessed and Holy memory, once offered a great interpretation to a Medrash in Parshas Toldos: Yosef Meshisa was a despicable Jew. He was a traitor to his people. When it came

time destroy the Temple, the Gentile invaders were afraid to walk into the Holy Sanctuary. They picked a Jew to walk in first and betray his G-d. Who did they pick? They picked this low-life Yosef Meshisha. They told him to go in to the Temple and as a reward, he could take anything he wanted for himself. He went in and took out the Golden Menorah. When the Gentiles saw what he took, they told him that this was too great a prize for a commoner. They told him that he could go back in and take something else that was more appropriate. This time they promised that he could keep whatever he found.

However, he refused to go in a second time. They offered him a bonus. If he went in a second time, they would give him all the collected tax from Judea for the next 3 years. He still refused. "Is it not sufficient that I angered my G-d once, should I anger Him a second time?" They tortured him until he died, but he refused to go back in.

The Ponevitzer Rav asked - what happened to Yosef Meshisa? This was the traitor whom the Gentiles picked as being the most likely Jew to do their bidding in desecrating the Temple. He already went in and stole the Menorah. Now he suddenly became a Ba'al Teshuva and refused to ever do it again, despite the offer of riches and despite the torturing. What happened to him?

The Ponevitzer Rav explained what happened to him. He was in the Beis HaMikdash for two minutes. He was never the same again. The influence of being in a Holy Place for two minutes changed his life.

If a person is exposed to radiation, he doesn't smell it; he doesn't feel it; two minutes of exposure can change his whole body. Likewise, one can be exposed to kedusha [holiness] for two minutes and become a different person.

That is what this pasuk is teaching us. The congregation left the presence of Moshe... but they were not the same anymore. They were not the same Jews because they had been in the presence of a great man. Being in the presence of a great man, or even being in the presence of a holy place -- a Beis Medrash, a Beis Knesses [House of Study; House of Prayer], being in Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel] can change a person's life.

This is why environment, friends, and community are so important. Such is the power of holiness. It can change a person forever.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayakhel-Pekudei are provided below:

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