

# **BETZALEL SON OF URI SON OF CHUR (SON OF MIRIAM)**

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## **Parshas Tetzaveh**

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[Even though we will be speaking this evening about a pasuk that is not in Parshas Tezaveh, the pasuk is in both Ki Sisa and Vayakhel. Since in many senses, the last 5 parshiyos of the Book of Shemos all deal with the same topic (the construction of the Mishkan and the various vessels and priestly garments used in the "Temple Service") my practice is to treat all 5 parshiyos as one for homiletic purposes and feel it is not inappropriate to discuss this pasuk the week of Tezaveh, even though it does not actually appear in the current week's parsha.]

The pasuk says, [Shemos 35:30]: "And Moshe said to the Children of Israel: Behold Hashem has designated by name - Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur of the Tribe of Yehudah." (Almost the exact same pasuk appears in Shemos 30:2.) Every construction project needs a project manager - an architect, a general contractor, a person who guarantees to get the job done. That person in the Mishkan construction project was Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur.

In Parshas Vayakhel, Rashi identifies Betzalel's grandfather Chur as "the son of Miriam", sister of Moshe. Chazal say that at the time of the building of the Mishkan, Bezalel was only 13 years old. Picture the scene: Moshe Rabbeinu called a press conference. In front of the entire Jewish nation, Moshe introduced the future architect for the construction of the Mishkan - one of the most monumental building projects that would ever take place in the history of the Jewish people. Who does Moshe introduce to be the general contractor for the project? A 13 year old! Would this inspire confidence in the project? This was a young kid who had no previous experience in anything near the magnitude of what was being proposed! What goes on here?

The Medrash in Shemos Rabbah raises the question why Chur was mentioned in describing the lineage of Betzalel (typically the Torah identifies individuals at most by their father's name only). The Medrash explains that Chur allowed himself to be martyred when he protested the desire of the

people to make a Golden Calf, under the assumption that Moshe was not going to return from his 40 day absence atop Mt. Sinai. Chur stood up against the crowd, tried to subvert their idolatrous intentions, and was killed in the process. At that moment, Hashem promised to reward Chur for his act of self-sacrifice (mesiras nefesh). The payback for Chur's heroism was that he had a grandson with the talents of Betzalel who was entrusted with the task of constructing the Mishkan. For this reason, Chur's name is mentioned when Betzalel is introduced. Betzalel became who he was by virtue of the heavenly reward promised posthumously to his grandfather.

Let's put ourselves in Chur's place. The crowd was dancing around singing "we need this Calf, we need this Calf!" From a rational point of view, it made absolutely no sense for Chur to try to stand up against the frenzied mob. It was an irrational act, almost foolhardy. There was no way the large crowd was going to change their mind because of the stubborn opinion of one individual. The proof that the "rational" thing to do was to go along with the will of the masses, is that this is exactly what Aharon did. The Talmud says that Aharon saw what happened to Chur and was convinced that the same thing would happen to him unless he cooperated with the unruly crowd.

So, in hindsight was Chur right or wrong? In hindsight he was right! Sometimes in life a person just needs to do the right thing without asking himself "Is this going to succeed or not?" Sometimes a person needs to do the right thing and take a stand even though it will not succeed and even though he will pay a personal price for taking this stand. There are times when we need to let the chips fall where they may and not determine our actions based on their potential chance for success.

In retrospect, Chur's activities did pay off and bear fruit. Because of his self-sacrifice, he merited a grandson like Betzalel who had the merit of building the Mishkan.

Moshe Rabbeinu came to Klal Yisrael - a group of slaves fresh out of Egypt who only knew how to work with bricks and mortar. He told them that the nation was now going to have a magnificent structure with exquisite vessels and priestly garments made out of the finest of materials. Their reaction undoubtedly was "We cannot do it. We do not have the expertise to accomplish the task. We don't have the training. We don't have the skills."

Moshe Rabbeinu then brought forth a little Bar Mitzvah boy named Betzalel. He introduced him to the nation and said, "See this kid? This is our head architect. He is going to do it for us! Do you know why he is going to be able to do it? It is because he had a grandfather named Chur. When Chur looked at the impossible mission, his attitude was 'We must try.'"

This is why Moshe called the "press conference" to introduce Betzalel. It was not to show off Betzalel's resume, which was non-existent, but rather to emphasize where he came from. He was the grandson of Chur. Chur showed us that when confronting a 'Mission Impossible,' a person must nevertheless try.

This also explains why Rashi adds the biographical information regarding Chur: "He was the son of Miriam." From where did Chur get this capacity to see something that appears to be beyond human

possibility and say "I am going to do it anyway because it's the right thing to do"?

The Tolner Rebbe writes that he got this very characteristic from his mother. When Amram - the greatest man of his generation - went ahead and divorced his wife (after the decree that the male children would be thrown into the Nile), out of a sense of hopelessness and resignation to the inevitable fate of the children, it was Miriam who told him he was wrong. Amram evaluated the situation and said "Our efforts in having children in Egypt is for naught. We will have children and they will be killed." Miriam argued with her father. She told him that his decree was worse than Pharaoh's decree.

Why was Miriam arguing with her father? Did she think she had a chance convincing her father - the "Gadol haDor" [greatest sage of his generation] that he was wrong and she was right? What were her chances of success? Next to nothing! So why did she do it? It was because it was the right thing to do. When something is the right thing to do, one does not ask questions, one just does what is right.

This is the hallmark of the House of Miriam, which is the House of Chur, which is the House of Betzalel. When presented with impossible situations, one just does what one has to do; the best one can do under the circumstances. G-d will take care of the rest.

The Tosfos HaRosh on the Torah suggests an interesting background to the pasuk "And Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aharon, took the tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing." [Shemos 15:20] The Tosfos HaRosh explains that after the Splitting of the Red Sea and the song of "Moshe and Bnei Yisrael," the women came to Miriam and told her "We want to sing also. We also want to participate." Miriam told them, "You can't. It is forbidden and immodest for women to sing publicly in front of men." Everyone walked away depressed because they were not able to participate. Miriam then said, "Wait a minute! I have an idea!" She took a tambourine in her hand and started making noise with it. Then she said, "Now it is okay to sing, because the men will not be able to hear you above the noise of my tambourine."

Miriam saw a situation that looked hopeless. What can we do? The halacha is that we can't sing - we must find a solution to the problem. She took the tambourine and did find a solution to the problem.

A similar pattern emerges from the Gemara in Shabbos which teaches that the women wove curtains for the Mishkan from wool that was still on the backs of live goats. It is hard enough to weave in general. What kind of idea was it to make the curtains from wool while it was still attached to the live goats?

It is because all the women wanted to weave. They each wanted to be involved in the mitzvah of making the curtains for the Mishkan. However, some of them were impure due to their menstrual periods. They would not be able to come in contact with the curtains, lest they make them 'tameh'. They went to Miriam and asked her - "What can we do?" Miriam gave them the idea to weave on the backs of the live animals. A live animal is not susceptible to impurity (not 'mekabel tumah'). Here again, Miriam solved a seemingly insolvable problem with creativity and determination!

When the situation looked hopeless, when the prognosis was desperate, Miriam was the 'go-to person'. She always had a plan. That was her legacy to her son Chur - do not walk away from a hopeless situation. Do the right thing. Chur did the right thing. He stood up and that action bore fruit - two generations later in his grandson.

Moshe saw that the people felt the task of building a Mishkan was hopeless. They had no experience, they had no talent, and they had no training. "Fear not", he told them. See that G-d has designated someone who comes from a long line of ancestors who take action and whose actions bear fruit even in situations which look hopeless: Namely, Betzalel son of Uri son of Chur, (son of Miriam -- Rashi).

The Sefas Emes cites the Zohar that after Betzalel was introduced to Klal Yisrael, his face changed to the image of his grandfather Chur. This is exactly what Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to convey. Chur got us here. This Chur, in the personage of his grandson Betzalel, will be responsible for building us our Mishkan.

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 Tezaveh are provided below:

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