

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL

תשפ"ד

The building of the Mishkon was a wonderous accomplishment. Klal Yisroel in Egypt were not involved in any kind of skilled craftsmanship for generations. They were either dealing with stones, bricks and mortar for constructing buildings, or working in the fields – all of it unskilled labor. No delicate artisnry was involved in any of their physical labor. Yet, to construct the Mishkon, they needed expert goldsmiths, silversmiths and coppersmiths, expert carpenters and wood carvers, expert weavers, gem cutters, etc. Overnight they produced all this! How was it possible? Betzalel was put in charge of everything. He taught everyone the skills they needed. But how did he get all of his knowledge?

The posuk says Hashem called Betzalel by name. Hashem bestowed all this knowledge of all the skills that were involved in this work to those who volunteered. And he gave Betzalel the ability to teach these skills to others. It was all through ruach hakodesh.

The gemara says Betzalel was able to combine the letters by which the universe was created. Chazal tell us in Sefer Yetziroh that the process of creation was not a direct creation of the physical universe. It started with a spiritual process of the combination of letters of loshon hakodesh. That is how the Torah became a blueprint of the world. Hashem had an outline that He wanted – a world that revolved around the fulfillment of the Torah. He put every aspect of creation into the words of the Torah first. Through a spiritual mechanism, this resulted in the physical world. This spiritual mechanism is called tziruf osiyos.

The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim says Moshe Rabbeinu who completely understood the entire Torah also understood every aspect of the physical world. People think Chazal had a primitive understanding of the world and they make fun of various statements in the gemara. The truth is that Chazal had a very deep understanding of the physical world through their deep understanding of the Torah. This is why Chazal were way ahead of the knowledge of their time in many instances.

Betzalel had a deep understanding of the properties of gold, silver and wood, etc. There is also practical knowledge of how to manipulate those properties to produce items. There is also the ability to teach these techniques to others.

The Ramban explains that Betzalel first took on the task without knowing how to do it. He trusted that because he wanted to fulfill the will of Hashem, he would surely succeed. This reflects the Ramban's general principles of emunoh and bitochon. When your goals are spiritual goals and they are realistic, and you put in maximum effort, you are guaranteed success. You can rely on this absolutely. But when your goals are for material success, then you have to have basic emunoh that Hashem is running the world, but there is no guarantee that you will succeed.

This means when you set your sights on a specific spiritual goal and you put in maximum effort, Hashem guarantees success. I have rarely seen this guarantee fail – if at all. The first year I opened the yeshiva, one bochur came to me at the end of the year and claimed he tried and tried to succeed in learning but failed. He wanted to move on to something outside Torah. He asked me to bring him to Rav Shach for advice. He told Rav Shach he tried and tried to succeed in learning but he has failed. Rav Shach responded that he didn't believe him – because Chazal advise that if someone says he tried and didn't succeed, don't believe him! In the end, this bochur grew to become a

rosh yeshiva. This is what the Ramban says. If you give your maximum effort for spiritual goals, your success is guaranteed.

So Hashem granted Betzalel, and those who he guided, the ability to master incredibly difficult craftsmanship. From within the Torah, Betzalel was able to understand the theoretical properties of all these physical materials.

There is a midrash which says that Torah provided the measurements of Noach's teivoh to teach us derech erez. They are to teach us the most ideal dimensions of a seaworthy vessel that can withstand the harshest sea conditions. The most ideal proportions for stability and buoyancy are the proportions of the teivoh. Nautical laboratories throughout the world have made experiments and they have confirmed that the proportions of the teivoh are the most ideal to maintain stability and buoyancy in a stormy sea.

Even though we aren't shipbuilders, the Torah wanted to give us one explicit example to show us that all true knowledge about the world is embedded somewhere in the Torah in various levels of depth. There have to be a few places that are obvious, to show you that the Torah understands the world and that there is nothing in the world that is incompatible with the Torah. People throughout history have claimed the Torah is wrong about many things. But it is only because of their own underdeveloped understanding of the world. This is true in particular about what Chazal say about the liver and the kidneys regarding treifos. They only found out recently about the regenerative properties of the liver. They only found out about 30 years ago that animals who chew their cud can have their kidneys removed, and still filter their blood through their extra stomachs. But for hundreds of years before, they thought Chazal's medical knowledge was primitive and full of errors.

The Torah has all the chochmoh of the world. Through knowing the Torah, Betzalel was able to understand how to manipulate all these materials. But the Ramban adds that it started with a willingness to jump in and try without knowing how. If you are inspired to fulfill the rotzon Hashem and you are sincere in your desire, there is nothing that will stand in your way. You will be able to accomplish what would normally not be possible. Anyone who jumped in to try to contribute to the project was granted supernatural knowledge and abilities in order to do it. This is how the Mishkon was built.

One additional point. Everything that was built for the Mishkon was executed exactly as Hashem commanded. The artisan couldn't design his own keilim according to his whims. There are two types of creative personalities. One type of creative person can use his creativity to find ingenious solutions within very tight constraints. A composer who wants to compose a new symphony needs to understand how a symphony orchestra works – how all the various instruments work together – and he understands what constraints he needs to work under to compose that symphony. That is true creativity. But modern music today is just raw self-expression with no constraints and no rules. That kind of creativity only produces chaos.

The artisans under Betzalel's guidance didn't deviate the slightest from the will of Hashem, but it didn't interfere with their creativity.

In the beginning of next week's parsha the Torah gives a very detailed accounting of all the material donated. Moshe Rabbeinu is going step-by-step through all the types of materials to see what everything he received was used for. But then there is an 'azloh geireish' – Moshe is

nervous because if there is some amount of silver that is not accounted for, people will say that he pocketed some of the silver for himself.

There is a yesod we learn from this – that people involved in avodas hakodesh have to be worried about how people will think about their behavior. You have to act in a way that is clear and apparent to everyone that you are sincere and honest in your avodas Hashem. You cannot rely on people trusting that you are doing the proper thing. It has to be obvious.

In this country, we are going through very difficult times. The Olam haYeshivos are under a microscope by the general Israeli society. We are expected to live to a higher standard, and when they see us behaving in a manner not befitting a Ben Torah, it reflects badly not just on you but on the Torah.

We are coming towards Purim. This is a day that can be a vehicle to reach very high levels of avodas Hashem, and it can be abused by people to be the one or two days of the year to act like a goy. People get confused about the purpose of alcohol. The alcohol is a tool to increase the spiritual simcha that should naturally be coming from avodas Hashem. In the non-Jewish world, the simcha is from the alcohol itself and it has been imported to much of the Jewish world. It is an issur gomur. At that point, it becomes a chillul Hashem.

So when the general society is looking at our community of Bnei Torah with hyper scrutiny, you need to make sure that you aren't causing a chillul Hashem. If you look like a yeshiva bochur, you are representing Hashem to the rest of society. Make sure your behavior commands respect, and makes clear to people that the Torah has made a positive impact on your life and has elevated you.