

VAYAKHEL (EXODUS 35:1-38:20)

The Architect

2008 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The donations were pouring in. Moses had put out the word that he was accepting contributions of precious items for the construction of the Tabernacle. The shopping list was massive. Silver, gold and copper. Woolen cloths colored with various expensive dyes and animal skins. Olive oil, spices, and gems.

In addition to raw materials, Moses was looking for talent. He needed weavers and metalsmiths. He needed people to build the walls and the furniture.

It was a massive project. There were plenty of good-hearted people willing to help. What was still needed was someone to pull it all together:

Moses said to the Children of Israel, “Observe that G-d has selected Bezalel...and has filled him with a divine spirit of wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and all types of craftsmanship; to weave designs, to work with gold, silver, and copper; stone cutting and carpentry; to perform every craft of design...” (Exodus, 35:30-33)

Now the Tabernacle crew had a foreman. Bezalel, the head architect and his assistant Oholiav, were given their mandate: Coordinate the volunteers into a cohesive, organized work force, and build the House of G-d.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein pointed out that the Torah uses a very unusual terminology: *“Observe that G-d has selected Bezalel...”*

What did Moses mean by *“Observe...”*? What is there to observe? Moses seems to be telling the people that it should be obvious that G-d had selected Bezalel as the architect. How could they possibly know? They weren't prophets!

Rabbi Feinstein answered that Bezalel's assignment should have been obvious. Bezalel was a talented man. He possessed a deep understanding of the various areas of expertise required for the job. He understood woodwork. He understood design. He was an expert craftsman. He didn't need to be commanded to do the job; it should have been self-evident. Why else would G-d endow him with so much ability?

Moses was telling the nation that they should realize that Bezalel was the man for the job because he knew how to do that job. And the point of that statement, said Rabbi Feinstein, is that we should all realize that if we have certain talents and abilities, we are obligated to use those abilities to serve G-d. Are you strong? Do physical work for your Shul or Yeshiva. Are you organized? Chair next year's dinner. Are you artistic? Decorate the shul social hall. Do you possess wealth? Use it to help the poor and to support Torah institutions. Don't wait for a command from G-d; just do it!

We all possess various areas of expertise. G-d gives us talent and He expects us to use it in His service. If we allow our G-d-given gifts go to waste, we can expect to answer to G-d someday as to why we didn't do what was obviously incumbent upon us.

An elderly gentleman in the retirement community where I work lost his wife. He told me during Shiva that he was thinking of moving. "I moved here because my wife needed some extra help. But I, thank G-d, can manage on my own. After Shiva, I'd like to get your advice about my various options."

I wasn't looking forward to the discussion. He was a very helpful fellow. Everyone in the community loved him. If someone needed a favor he was happy to oblige. I didn't want to see him go.

After Shiva he came back to the home. As he walked in the front door, he recognized a former neighbor of his who had just moved in. This gentleman was a retired rabbi who was suffering from early stages of dementia. He was confused and in need of guidance. Our friend, just up from Shiva, knew and understood exactly the guidance that the rabbi needed.

Our post-Shiva discussion was no longer necessary. "I'm not going anywhere," he told me. I now understand exactly what G-d has planned for me. Rabbi ____ needs me."

Do you want to know what G-d expects of you? Look in the mirror. See what you know how to do, and do it!

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz