

| שמות לה:א | Exod. 35:1 | Comment |
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| ויקהל משה את כל עדת בני ישראל ויאמר אליהם.. | <i>Now Moshe assembled the entire community of the Children of Israel and said to them:</i> | <i>Now Moshe assembled.</i> Who would think that an innocuous piece of narrative about assembling the entire community could invite us into a huge discussion about <i>when</i> the assembly was convened, <i>how</i> it was convened, <i>who</i> was convened, and <i>why</i> it was convened? Rashi tells us that the convocation took place on the day after Yom Kippur. This immediately connects us to the traditional chronology of the events at Sinai, which posits that Moses descends from Mt. Sinai after three 40 day periods, coinciding with Yom Kippur. For Rashi, the message is clear: Yom Kippur signals a new beginning for Israel, based on forgiveness. Now that the people have been forgiven of their grave sin of idolatry, they have a new opportunity to reset their relationship with God. When Rashi points out that Moses gathered them, <i>by his word</i> , and not, <i>by his hands</i> , he treats us to an example of exegetical subtlety: The people's assembly is a <i>voluntary response</i> to Moses' <i>persuasion</i> and not a <i>compelled response</i> to Moses' <i>coercion</i> . Judaism has always tried to find the balance between these two forces. Do we <i>voluntarily</i> accept the commandments, or are we <i>compelled</i> to do so? Is a life of the commandments a <i>voluntary response</i> that accepts obligation, or a <i>compelled response</i> dependent on coercion? |
| רש"י | <i>Rashi</i> | |
| ויקהל משה. למחרת יום הכפורים כשירד מן ההר, והוא לשון הפעיל, שאינו אוסף אנשים בידים, אלא הן נאספין על פי דבורו. | <i>Now Moshe assembled: the day after Yom Hakippurim when he descended from the mountain. This verb is in the form of hiph'il (causative) because he didn't gather the people by his own hands, rather they gathered together on the basis of his word.</i> | |

| מדרש לקח טוב לה:א | Midrash Lekah Tov Exodus 35:1 | Comment |
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| תבוא קהלת משה רבינו, דכתיב: ויקהל משה... ויכפר על קהלת אהרן, שנאמר: ויקהל קדם על אהרן, תבוא אמירת משה רבינו, שנאמר ויאמר אליהם משה, ויכפר על אמירת אהרן, דכתיב: ויאמרו אליו קים עשה לנו אלהים. | Let <u>this</u> "assembly" of Moses our Master - as it is written: <i>And Moses assembled</i> (Exod. 35:1) atone for <u>that</u> "assembly" of Aaron, (32:1) as it is said: <i>And the people assembled against Aaron.</i> Let <u>this</u> "statement" of Moses our Master - as it is said: <i>And Moses stated to them</i> , (35:1) atone for <u>that</u> "statement" the people made to Aaron as it is written: <i>They said to him, Up, and make for us a god.</i> (32:1) | This beautiful midrash picks up on the theme that the building of the Tabernacle was an act of atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The author of the midrash notes the connection between the first words this parasha - |
| and the first words of the Golden Calf episode. There it says: ויקהל (vayikahel), and here it says: ויקהל (vayakhel). There it says: ויאמר אליהם (vayomer aleihem), and here it says: ויאמרו אליו (vayomer eylav). In other words, the Torah's choice of words is a deliberate hint to us that there is a process of repair going on here. The remedy for ganging up on Aaron to make an idol is coming together with Moses to build the Tabernacle. The remedy for the ultimate sin, ordering Aaron to make a tangible substance, gold, into a god, is Moses instructing the people to make an intangible substance, time, holy. Shabbat. שבת. The ultimate mitzvah. A teaching like this shapes our ethical lives. Thus, to undo a wrong, you have to do a right. To undo a sin, you have to do a mitzvah. To counter the political forces that push us apart, we have to find ways of coming together. If evil diminishes God's presence in the world, it is up to us to magnify and sanctify God's holy name, enhancing God's presence through acts of goodness and Kiddush HaShem. To overcome darkness, add light. And to defeat death, choose life. | | |

| רמב"ן | Ramban-Nachmanides | Comment |
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| כל עדת בני ישראל – יכלול כל עדת בני ישראל האנשים והנשים, כי כולם התנדבו במלאכת המשכן. | ...the <u>entire</u> community of the Children of Israel - includes the <u>entire</u> community of the Children of Israel the <u>men and the women</u> , for all of them donated (goods and labor) in the making of the mishkan. | When Ramban comments on this verse, he veers into what we might call <i>proto-feminism</i> . By focusing |
| on the word <u>כל</u> in the phrase <u>כל עדת בני ישראל</u> - he affirms the role that women played in providing the materials and fabricating the Tabernacle. But to Ramban, this gathering is not only about listening to Moses pronounce the prohibition against burning fire on Shabbat. It is about <i>re-kindling</i> the relationship between the people and God. The Golden Calf incident fractured that relationship. Ramban writes: <i>Since God reconciled with them with the second set of tablets...He returned to the previous stage of His relationship with them and to the love of their courtship phase.</i> The re-issuing of the tablets was the first attempt to mend their relationship, and here, the <i>pre-construction-of-the-Tabernacle-convocation</i> was a way to restore that relationship completely. Not only because of forgiveness and atonement, a la Rashi above - but, because of commitment and desire. Because of God's love. | | |

| שמות לה:ל-לא | Exodus 35:30-31 | Comment |
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| <p>ויאמר משה אל־בני ישראל ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל בן־אורי בן־חור למטה יהודה: וימלא אתו רוח אלהים בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת ובכל־מלאכה:</p> | <p>Moshe said to the Children of Israel: See, God has called by name Betzalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda; he has filled him with the spirit of God in practical-wisdom, in discernment and in knowledge, and in all kinds of workmanship.</p> | <p>Betzalel: Knowledge and Creativity. Often, we overlook these chapters because they repeat earlier material and they go on and on about every single detail of the mishkan. But we should be attentive here to Moses' exuberance, the delight and wonder that one experiences when one witnesses the genius of human creativity in action. (The deep irony is that it also took ample creativity to fashion the Golden Calf.) When Moses says, See, God has called Betzalel by name, his joy is palpable. And what a unique name it is! It is either a contraction of בצל אל - in the shadow of God or, בצלם - in the image of God. Maybe it's both. Both ideas reflect different aspects of the unique creative gifts of the artist: the experience of total freedom to be able to express oneself - ie. to be in the shadow of God, and the experience of being able to create - ie. to be in image of God. The midrash presents God (through the words of Isaiah) boasting about bringing an artistic genius like Betzalel into the world. In an audacious metaphorical leap, the midrash compares him to a doctor's apprentice, a person who is only beginning to learn the art of healing. (And, metaphor within metaphor: healing is art and art is healing). When everyone praises the apprentice (Betzalel) for his awesome, inventive bandages, his mentor, the doctor (God) says, rather boastfully and exuberantly (and maybe with a little drop of humor), "Don't praise him, praise me! Give me the credit for his genius!"</p> |
| <p>שמות רבה מה:ה ראו קרא ה' בשם, הָדָא הוּא דְקָתִיב (ישעיה נד, טז): הַגֵּה אֲנִי בְרַאתִי חָרָשׁ, זֶה בְּצַלְאֵל. נִפְחַת בְּאֵשׁ פָּחַם. חָטְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֵשׁ, שָׁנְאָמַר (שמות לב:כד): וַיִּשְׂלַכְהוּ בְּאֵשׁ וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה. בָּא בְּצַלְאֵל וְרִפָּא אֶת הַמַּכָּה. מְשֻׁל: לְתַלְמִידוֹ שֶׁל רוֹפֵא שָׁנְתוּ רַשְׁיָה עַל מַכָּה אַחַת וַתִּתְרַפְּא. וְהָיוּ מְקַלְסִין אוֹתוֹ. אָמַר לָהֶם רַבּוֹ: קָלְסוּ לִי שְׁלֵמְדֵיכוֹן. כִּדְ הָיוּ הַכֹּל אוֹמְרִים: בְּצַלְאֵל בְּחִכְמָתוֹ וּבְתַבּוּנָתוֹ עָשָׂה אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן. אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: אֲנִי הוּא שֶׁבְרַאתִיו וְלִמְדֵי, שָׁנְאָמַר: הַגֵּה אֲנִי בְרַאתִי חָרָשׁ, לְפִיכֵד אָמַר מֹשֶׁה: רְאוּ קָרָא ה' בְּשֵׁם... שמות רבה מה:ה</p> | <p>Midrash Shmot Rabbah 48:5 See, God has called by name, as it is written (in the book of Isaiah 54:16); It is I who created the smith, that (says God) is Betzalel. To fan the charcoal fire - Israel sinned with fire, as it is written, (Exod. 32:24), So I said to them: Who has gold? They broke it off and gave it to me; I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf. Betzalel came and cured the wound. This can be compared to a student of a doctor, who put a bandage on a wound, and it healed. Subsequently, people praised him. His master said to them: "Praise me, for I have taught him." Likewise, everyone used to say: Betzalel made the mishkan with his wisdom and understanding. Whereupon God said: "I am the one who created him and taught him." As it is written, It is I who created the smith. (Isa. 54:16) Therefore, Moses said: See, God has called by name...</p> | |
| <p>Everybody recognizes that the student (Betzalel) is extraordinary, but they are only able of seeing what's in front of them: his skills, his techniques, his workmanship, ie. his wisdom and understanding. But the people do not see the crucial third aspect of creativity, that is, his God-given דַּעַת-da'at-knowledge. They don't see that because they (and most ordinary non-artistic people) don't fully understand the capability that most distinguishes him, namely, his capacity for wonder. That is the da'at-knowledge that God has given Betzalel. The word ראו-See! is an excited word for recognizing the unclassifiability, the unfathomableness, of what Betzalel can do. <i>Did you ever see a person like that?! He's not just any ordinary craftsman, he has a divine gift! What he can do has an element of mystery in it, that can't be summed up by objective criteria!</i> That mystery derives from God. דַּעַת-da'at knowledge is something other than חִכְמָה וְתַבּוּנָה-hokhmah u-t'vunah-wisdom and understanding. The classic understanding of da'at is: the capacity to combine two things that are different. Fire does that. Fire can melt two different metals and create an alloy. Fire can destroy but also create. Fire can de-form and re-form. It can create something new out of disparate elements. What is it that's godly about super-creative people, in the arts and sciences? <i>They have the ability to combine (at least) two things that don't originally belong together.</i> Two areas of activity which you would never have thought of placing together - the artist is the one who does that. The first instance of da'at in the Bible is when two opposites come</p> | | <p>together: male and female. And Adam knew Hava his wife... וַהֲאָדָם יָדַע אֶת חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ. (Gen. 4:1). And from that intimate knowledge, and from that basic endowment of human generative and creative potential - which is the birthright of every human being - (in other words, from that godliness) - all civilization comes into existence. All (subsequent) human invention is about taking disparate things and making something new out of them. In the Bible (Gen. 4:21-22), the first inventions are (remarkably) musical instruments: the lyre and the pipe (made from bones and sinews, animal-horns, skins and wood), and (regrettably?) metal tools. Thus, in the biblical telling, music and violence (and by extension, peace and war) are products of human inventiveness and creativity. (There's a sermon in that.) All the great inventions are combinations of disparate elements, and contain an element of wonder. <i>The happy meeting of hooked atoms of thought.</i> (Henri Poincaré) The printing press, the incandescent bulb, the internal combustion engine, the silicon chip, the mRNA vaccine! The iPhone! The pizza! Sushi! The Oreo cookie! All of these emerge from disparate elements, have elicited wonder, and changed the world! And what is poetry if not taking different elements and combining them into something breath-taking! <i>Rock and Roll?</i> The blending of rhythm-and-blues, jazz, gospel and country. We could go on. Shabbat however, is the greatest invention, combining rest and renewal! Shabbat Shalom! (these comments based on Dr. Avivah Zorn-berg's recent lecture at Beit Avichai, (3/13/2023), <i>Torah as Poetry: Vayakhel-Pekudei: Beyond Images.</i> Available on YouTube or at www.bac.org.il)</p> |

