

Our Parasha begins with these words (Exod. 35:1):

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| וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם | Now Moses assembled the entire community of the Children of Israel and said to them: |
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Immediately we picture a large convocation of people, standing before Moses and listening intently to what he has to say. In this instance he is issuing a set of laws regarding Shabbat, including the prohibition against kindling fire. He then calls for donations to the sanctuary:



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| זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר: קַחוּ מֵאִתְּכֶם תְּרוּמָה לַה' | This is the matter that 'ה' has commanded, saying: Take, from yourselves, a gift for 'ה'. (35:5) |
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Moses catalogues the list of items, gold, silver, bronze etc., and then lists all the things that are to be made,

such as the ark, the table, the menorah, etc. In my counting there are 15 different items to be donated and 20 things to fashion. That is a lot of information to retain, and it is doubtful that these recently released slaves would have had any experience knowing how to make these things. Yet, they don't question Moses. They don't object. They don't say a word. The Torah simply reports that: **they left.**

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| וַיֵּצְאוּ כָל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה. | So the entire community of the Children of Israel went out from Moshe's presence (35:20) |
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And in the very next verse it says:

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| וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ וְכָל אִשׁ נְדָבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה' | and then they came, every man whose mind uplifted him, and everyone whose spirit made-him-willing brought 'ה's contribution (35:21) |
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Moses gathers them. Speaks to them. And then...**they leave.** Without saying a word. They do come back with gifts. But when **they leave**...silence. What is going on here? I raise this question because the Children of Israel are a rather talkative bunch. Take a few examples from their recent past: After escaping Egypt, they arrive at the shore of the Sea of Reeds, with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit. They say:

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| הֲמִבְּלֵי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם | Were there no graves in Egypt? |
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When they are safely on the other side, they sing:

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| אֲזַי שִׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל | Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang this song... |
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They complain for water at *Marah* (15:24); they complain about their lack of food (16:3); they complain again about water at *Masa and Meribah* (17:2); they answer **we will do** to the initial invitation for a covenant with God, (19:8); and then, after the Sinai revelation, they are so

scared of what they saw, that they pleaded with Moses that only he be the one to talk to them, not God, **lest we die**, (20:15); they say **we will do**, again, when offered the covenant, (24:3) and then they say, **we will do and we will obey**, when the covenant ceremony is completed (24:7). There is a whole series of interactions with Moses before and after the Golden Calf incident. Before he goes up the mountain for the second time, the people **rise and stand outside their tents** (33:8); and when he comes down, and his face is beaming, **they are afraid to come close to him** (34:30); they are so afraid of his face, that **he has to wear a veil** in front of them (34:35). When he convened the people here, his face must have been veiled too! Given that they are so quick to complain, and that they are frequently not shy about expressing themselves, **why is it that they are silent here?** Why is it that the text seems to suggest that they leave Moses without uttering a word?

1. Urgency. *Midrash Lekah Tov*, (12th century): **they left to bring the gifts and they did not hesitate.**

2. Joy. *Tzror Hamor*, (R. Abraham Saba, 1440-1508, Spain): **They left in a state of joy and contentment because they were informed that by contributing to the building of the mishkan they would receive atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf.**

3. Fear. *Sihat REIM*, (b. 1961, Ottawa, Canada): **They were terrified of Moses. With the sin of the Golden Calf and the ensuing violence fresh in their memory they were mute with fear and did not know how to respond to him.**

4. The Sanctuary of Silence Concept: (Israel Knohl, b. 1952, Israel): **The outstanding characteristic of this sanctuary is the holy silence within it. In stark contrast to what was common in the temples of the Near East, and indeed to other temples in Israel, the Temple...is a sanctuary of silence.** Comment: Since, according to Knohl, the rituals in the Mishkan were conducted in silence, it shouldn't surprise us that the people's reaction to Moses, was...silence. As they are being deputized to supply the priests with the holy furnishings, they are, at least in this instance, behaving like priests and acting...silently.

5. The Masoretic Notes: It's interesting that the first aliyah concludes with our verse about the people leaving. Aliyot are often divided at important narrative junctions. Take the very first aliyah of the Torah: it narrates the six days of Creation and concludes with Shabbat. The next aliyah is a retelling of the Creation story. To the rabbis, verse 35:20 ends the scene. The people, quite literally, exit the stage. In the very next scene, they return onstage with their gifts:

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| וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ לִבּוֹ וְכָל אִשׁ נְדָבָה רוּחוֹ אֹתוֹ הֵבִיאוּ אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה' לְמַלְאכַת אֹהֶל | And then they came, every man whose mind uplifted him, and everyone whose spirit made-him-willing brought 'ה's contribution for the skilled-work on the Tent of Appointment, for all its service [of |
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| מועד ולקל עבדתו ולבגדי הקדש. | construction], and for the garments of holiness. (35:21) |
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Read this very closely and you can conclude: **1.** Moses told the people what to bring. **2.** The people then left. **3.** Only those who were moved, came back with the stuff. What do we take away from this? **1.** There are many compelling ways to read a text. **2.** Even the most minute details, reveal a greater narrative. **3.** Communities achieve their collective goals in different ways. Some communities can mobilize everyone to contribute and participate; some only a fraction. Recall the "80-20 Rule," (also known as the Pareto Principle) which states that 80% of the results are a come from 20% of the participants. Did the Mishkan capture the imagination of the entire people? Was everyone involved? While a close reading of the text leads us to believe that only a fraction participated, other readings see this as a moment of joy and contentment for the entire people.

Betzalel and His Skills: The principal of the Mishkan project was the gifted craftsman, Betzalel.

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| וימלא אתו רוח אלהים בהקמה בתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה. | He (God) has filled him with the spirit of God in practical-wisdom, in discernment and in knowledge, and in all kinds of workmanship (35:31) |
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In a world of AI (all the illustrations on this sheet were done by AI), there is something to be said for ordinary human intelligence. Some people though, just have more talent than others, especially when it comes to art. Developmental psychologist Howard Gardner proposed the **Theory of Multiple Intelligences**, which states that each of us is endowed with many different ways of processing information. While Gardner would attribute Betzalel's unique talents and skills to **spatial intelligence**, the Torah attributes them to God in three areas: **הקמה, תבונה, and דעת** - usually translated as, **wisdom, understanding, and knowledge**, three categories that are subject for a lot of discussion. 19th century Italian commentator, R. Isaac Reggio, a man who most likely encountered many artists in his time, describes these capabilities as follows:

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| בהקמה באר מה פעל רוח אלהים בקרבו ואמר בהקמה - שנעשה לבו לב חכם מציר ציורי הקמה בטבע: | With HOKHMA He (Betzalel) expressed what the spirit of God did inside him; and (the text) says BEHOKHMA - to indicate that his heart became a wise heart capable of drawing the beauty (created by God's wisdom) in nature. |
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In this context, **hokhma**, which we usually translate as **wisdom**, is rather the unique ability that artists have to translate what they see into a drawing. **Drawing is a curious process, so intertwined with seeing that the two can hardly be separated. Ability to draw depends on ability to see the way an artist sees.** (Betty Edwards, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain.)

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| ובתבונה שהבין מליצות ההקמה והפיק תבונות כי צריך בינה רחבה להבין אפן עשית המשכן והבגדים בכל פרטיהו מן המליצות הקצרות שהשתמשה התורה בהן: | And with TVUNAH means that he understood proverbs of wisdom, and was able to spread ideas because (an artist) needs tremendous intuitive ability to be able to discern the way of making the Mishkan and the clothing, in all of their details, from the short phrases that the Torah uses. |
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In other words, **tvunah**, is the ability to translate the words, terminology, and poetic phraseology of the Torah into forms and objects. This is the way an artist **thinks**.

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| ובדעת הן הסודות העמוקות שעליהן רומזת מלאכת המשכן וכליו וכך אמרו חז"ל: יודע היה בצלאל לצרף אותיות וכו': | And with DA'AT, these are the deep secrets to which the work of the Mishkan and its vessels alludes. And this is what the Rabbis said: Betzalel knew how to join the letters... |
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Da'at is deep knowledge. While many would argue that artistic skills can be taught, some would argue that what differentiates the pedestrian from the sublime is the ability to convey deeper layers of meaning. Leonardo DaVinci had that ability; AI doesn't. **Joining the letters** is a reference to a talmudic teaching that attributes to Betzalel a fraction of God's mystical creative ability.

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| אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: יודע היה בצלאל לצרף אותיות שנובראו בהן שמים וארץ. | Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: Bezalel knew how to join the letters with which heaven and earth were created. Berachot 55a |
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Creativity is not magic. It is a process of assembly. In the rabbinic view of the world, God brings the world into existence through words. Words are made up of letters. And the ability to **join them** brings worlds into existence. That is the great mystery of creation. But the artist has some of that mystical ability. A human being is an image of God, **Tzelem Elohim**, and has a fraction of God's ability.

Betzalel was endowed with remarkable skills, insight and knowledge, making him an extraordinary example of God's image.



Today is the 155th day of the Hostages' captivity. We pray for their freedom. May God watch over them and protect them. May they be released now!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Devora and David Schiff to commemorate the 6th Yahrzeit of Devora's father, Robert Siegel, z'l.
שבת שלום! עם ישראל חי!
Shabbat Shalom! Am Yisrael Hay!