

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Vayakhel
March 5, 2016

פרשת ויקהל
כ"ה באדר א' תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 35:1-38:20
Maftir for Parashat Shekalim: Shemot (Exodus) 30:11-16

In this *parasha*, the *Bnei Yisrael* bring so many materials for the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) that Moshe tells them to stop; Betzalel and Oholiav, gifted craftspeople, construct the elements of the *Mishkan*.

The backgrounds of Betzalel and Oholiav, the craftspeople mentioned above, elucidate some important Jewish principles.

The Torah in Chapter 35 tells us that the two major artisans for the *Mishkan* were (verse 30) Betzalel the son of Uri, the son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehuda, and (verse 34) Oholiav, the son of Achisamach, of the tribe of Dan.

A number of commentators pick up on a *midrash* in *Shemot Rabbah* 40:4 which addresses the familial designations of Betzalel (whose name means "In the Shadow of God") and Oholiav ("The Father is My Tent").

Betzalel was from Yehuda, the largest, wealthiest, and most prominent tribe, descendants of the fourth son of Leah, Yaakov's first wife, the one with whom he is buried. The future enduring line of kings would arise from the tribe of Yehuda, as will, according to tradition, the Messiah at the end of days.

Contrast this with the tribe of Dan, from which Oholiav came. Dan was the smallest tribe in both number and wealth. Their members were descended from Bilhah, the servant of Rachel and the concubine of Yaakov. Further, Dan was destined not to remain in its given territory in Israel. The tribe's portion was quite close to the Philistine land along the coast of what is now Gaza, and its citizens were attacked frequently by marauding Philistines. They therefore decided to move north and unilaterally wiped out Leshem, a Gentile city, to establish their claim there. (See the Book of *Yehoshua* (Joshua), chapter 19 for the full story.)

In addition, we know something about Betzalel's grandfather, Chur. He is the one who assisted Aharon in holding up Moshe's arms during the battle of Amalek, an action which assured Israelite victory (*Shemot* [Exodus] Chapter 17). Chur was left in charge of the camp together with Aharon when Moshe went up Mount Sinai to receive the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments (*Shemot* 24). Chur's name is omitted from the episode of the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 32), which a *midrash* attributes to his having been killed by the horde when he resisted its attempts to create an idol.

Further, the Babylonian Talmud talks at length in Tractate *Berachot* 55a about Betzalel: how he was selected, how wise he was, and what insight he had.

Conversely, we know nothing about Oholiav or his family. Only his father is mentioned, not his grandfather, and Achisamach is mentioned in the Torah only here, in relation to Oholiav. The Talmud source cited above does not mention Oholiav at all.

What we have in the two primary builders of the *Mishkan* is an impressive man from a large, wealthy, and important tribe, descended from a prominent individual, and a seemingly unremarkable individual from a small, poor, and morally weak tribe, whose family is virtually unknown.

The *Mishkan* was built as The People's House of Worship and was meant for every single member of *Bnei Yisrael* from the most to the least prominent, from members of the highest strata of Jewish society to the most commonplace people. This ideal was exemplified by the contrasting backgrounds of its two gifted builders.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How important is one's lineage in terms of what one accomplishes in life?
- How much do a person's birthplace, family structure, and era of their birth determine a person's life path?
- Should every Jewish organization be open to every Jew? Why or why not?