

The Mishkan as Therapeutic Healing (Vayakhel)

Parshat Vayakhel informs us that the chief architect of the *Mishkan* project was, 'Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehuda' (*Shemot* 35:30), with the deputy-chief being 'Oholiav, son of Achisamach, of the tribe of Dan' (ibid. 35:34). Yet we find an interesting expression when Betzalel's name is first mentioned: 'See (*re'u*), God has called by name Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehuda'. The question posed by our Sages is: what is the significance of the word 'See' (*re'u*)?

The Gemara (*Brachot* 55a) answers this question and, in doing so, derives an important principle that a community leader may only be appointed once the community has been consulted:

'Rabbi Yitzchak said: Do not appoint a leader over a community unless the community has been consulted [prior to their appointment], as it says: 'See (*re'u*), God has called by name Betzalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehuda' (*Shemot* 35:30). [It is as if] the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moshe: "Moshe, is Bezalel suitable (*hagun*) to you?" [to which] Moshe replied: "Master of the universe! If he is suitable (*hagun*) to You, then all the more so he is suitable to me!" [God] said to him: "Nevertheless [I want you to] go and consult [the people]". [So Moshe] went and said to the people: "Is Bezalel suitable (*hagun*) to you?". They said to him: "If he is suitable (*hagun*) to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and to you, then all the more so he is suitable to us."

It should be noted that while both Betzalel and Oholiav are appointed, the word 'See' (*re'u*) is only used with respect to Betzalel. Consequently, the Gemara only speaks about a consultation process in relation to Betzalel's appointment. Of course, a simple reason as to why this is the case is the fact that, as *Shemot* 35:30-34 implies, Betzalel was appointed as the chief architect, while Oholiav was appointed as deputy chief. However, I believe that embedded in the lesson taught by Rabbi Yitzchak about consulting the community before appointing leaders is a deeper lesson relating specifically to Betzalel and as expressed by the question: 'Is Betzalel suitable (*hagun*)?'

So far, I have translated the word '*hagun*' as 'suitable', but if we wish to be a little more precise, what this really means in this context is: 'Is Betzalel a sensible and capable person who is well-matched for this task?' Given this definition, we must now consider why this question needed to be asked, and to begin our answer, we must reflect upon the association between the *Mishkan* and the *Egel HaZahav*.

Numerous rabbinic statements inform us that the *Mishkan* was an atonement for the *Egel HaZahav*. For example, the *Sifrei* (*Devarim* 1:18) writes: 'Let the gold of the *mishkan* atone for the gold of the calf!' Accordingly, Dr. Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg explains that, 'the atonement function of the *Mishkan* evokes the idea of a

therapeutic project' (*The Particulars of Rapture* p. 320). Yet while Betzalel was an emissary of the people by project managing the building of the *Mishkan*, his grandfather – Chur (who himself was the son of Miriam and Kaleb) – not only firmly objected to the building of the *Egel HaZahav* but was, in fact, killed by the people in response to his protestations (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 10:3).

Given this context we now turn back to the *Mishkan* project and we can better understand the question: 'Is Betzalel suitable (*bagun*)?'. Specifically, the question being asked is whether it is suitable, sensible, and a well-matched appointment for Betzalel, the grandson of Chur, who was killed for trying to stop the building of the *Egel HaZahav*, to be the chief architect of the *Mishkan* whose purpose is to atone for the *Egel*? Perhaps Betzalel may be too emotionally invested in this project? Or perhaps he may carry resentment for the murder of his grandfather?

Of course, we can never quite know how another necessarily feels. Consequently, rather than Moshe simply replying 'Yes!' to God's question, he replies by saying, "If he is suitable (*bagun*) to you, then all the more so he is suitable to me!" – as if to convey the fact that if God believes that Betzalel is up to the task, then Moshe will support this decision. So too, when the people are asked their opinion, they respond by saying, "If he is suitable (*bagun*) to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and to you [Moshe], then all the more so he is suitable to us."

Having explained the complex emotional associations between Betzalel and the *Mishkan*, we now have a further reason why Rabbi Yitzchak doesn't make reference to Oholiav. As mentioned, a simple reason for this omission could be because Oholiav was appointed as a deputy to Betzalel. But a further reason may be because the whole question of whether Betzalel was 'suitable' was not a relevant consideration to Oholiav's appointment.

Our Sages (see *Brachot* 55a) have noted that the name Betzalel literally means 'in the shadow of God', and this is generally understood to refer to the spiritual wisdom shown by Betzalel. However, there is another way to understand Betzalel's name, which is that he lived under the shadow of the *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) of his grandfather Chur who was murdered for speaking up for God.

Of course, this shadow could have made Betzalel bitter and negative. Instead, Betzalel channelled his wisdom to enable the people in their atonement process for the sin that led to the murder of his grandfather. As such, the *Mishkan* was not only a therapeutic project for the people. It was also a therapeutic project for Betzalel himself.

Shabbat Shalom