

Pekudei 5782

פקודי תשפ"ב

Can You Rival and Respect Your Teacher?

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Parashat Pekudei brings the Book of Exodus to a close. Strikingly, Exodus opens with the loss of one home as the Israelites descend into Egyptian enslavement, and that same book closes with the festive completion of another home, the Mishkan or Tabernacle that is the dwelling place of God's presence. As Pekudei opens we are reminded that the Tabernacle project, far from being the work of one person, involves the entire Israelite "village"—God, Moses, Israelite craftsmen, and Israelite donors. Still, most significantly, we are reintroduced in this Torah reading to the master artisan of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances, Bezalel. The process of bringing the Tabernacle into fruition began some seven chapters earlier when we were initially introduced to Bezalel and his assistant Oholiab: "God spoke to Moses, 'See I have singled out by name Bezalel . . . I have endowed him with divine spirit of skill, ability and knowledge in every kind of craft . . .'" (Exod. 31:1). And now, with the Tabernacle's momentous conclusion we are told, "Now Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, had made all that the Lord had commanded Moses" (38:22). What is the import of this final statement about Bezalel? How does this comment give us further insight into the master artist who was commissioned for this sacred task?

Rashi, the prolific medieval commentator, illuminates our understanding of this verse: "The verse does not state that Bezalel made all that he was commanded but rather that *Bezalel made all that God had commanded Moses*. The significance of this language is to communicate that even regarding such things which our teacher Moses did not instruct him, Bezalel's own opinion was in accord with what Moses had been told at Sinai." Rashi goes on to quote an insightful midrash from Berachot 55a which gives more texture to the character of Bezalel:

At the moment [of commanding the building of the Tabernacle] God came to Moses and said, "Go to Bezalel and tell him to make the Tabernacle, ark and its appurtenances." Moses went to Bezalel and reversed the order instructing Bezalel to make the vessels first and then build the Tabernacle. Bezalel pushed back on Moses stating, "Moses, my teacher, surely it is the way of the world that one first builds a house and then tends to its furnishings! These furnishings that I will fashion, where shall I put them? Perhaps God said to you, first make the Tabernacle and then the furnishings?!?" Moses replied to Bezalel, "You must have been sitting in the shadow of God (*b' tzal EI*), for certainly this is how God commanded me!"

Rashi's commentary joined to the literal sense of our verse teaches us volumes about the sacred relationship between teacher and student. First, God instructs Moses regarding the building of the Mishkan. Second, Moses relates the instruction to his talented artisan Bezalel. Third, far from responding in a mechanical way and simply doing what Moses describes, Bezalel thinks deeply and critically about the task at hand and suggests that the container must be built before the contents. Fourth, note well how respectful Bezalel is in his demeanor with his teacher and boss, Moses. Rather than speaking in an aggressive and critical way, declaring that "Moses, you must be mistaken," Bezalel uses the language, "*Perhaps* God said to you"—gentle language that gives Moses the ability and space in which to correct himself. Bezalel, in our midrash, comes to teach us *derekh erez*, a moral and ethical way of speech. It is in this explicit

sense (and I believe in many more implicit ways), that Bezalel goes beyond following mere instructions and heeding the guidance of his teacher. Bezalel is proactive and reflective in his learning and execution. Certainly, this is what makes him worthy of his name: he is literally and figuratively creating “in the shadow of God.” It is this closeness to God that gives our masterful artisan the ability and perseverance he needs—and the graceful, loving strength to rival his teacher Moses—to bring the Tabernacle into being.

May we learn both from the artistic talents of Bezalel and, perhaps more importantly, from his exquisite model of *menshlikhkayt*.

With wishes for a good week and Shabbat shalom.