

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXI: Ki Tisa (Ex. 30:11–34:35)

Essay 2. Why G-d consulted both Moses and Israel about Bezalel

בְּרַכּוֹת פָּרָק ט' אָמַר ר' יִצְחָק אֵין מַעֲמִידִין פְּרָנָס עַל הַצְּבוּר אֲלָא אִם פֶּן נִמְלְכִין בַּצְּבוּר שְׁנֵאָמַר "רְאוּ קָרָא ה' " וְכוּ', אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּב"ה לְמֹשֶׁה הֲגִוֹן עֲלֶיךָ בְּצִלְאֵל, אָמַר לוֹ, רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם אִם לְפָנֶיךָ הֲגִוֹן לְפָנַי לֹא כָּל שָׁפָן, אָמַר לוֹ אַף עַל פִּי כֵן לָךְ אָמַר לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, הֲלָךְ וְאָמַר לָהֶם הֲגִוֹן עֲלֵיכֶם בְּצִלְאֵל, אָמְרוּ לוֹ אִם לְפָנַי הַקָּב"ה וּלְפָנֶיךָ הֲגִוֹן לְפָנֵינוּ לֹא כָּל שָׁפָן.

Berachot, chapter 9:

Rabbi Yitzchak said: One may only appoint an administrator over a community if he consults with the community [and they agree], as it is stated: "See, the L-rd has called by name Bezalel." (Exodus 35:30). The L-rd said to Moses: Moses, is Bezalel acceptable to you? [Moses] said to Him: Master of the universe, if he is acceptable to You, then all the more so to me. [G-d] said to him: Nevertheless, go and tell [Israel and see what they say]. He went and said to Israel: Is Bezalel acceptable to you? They said to him: If he is acceptable to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and to you, all the more so to us.

- Berachot 55a

הַקֹּשֶׁה הַנֶּרְעֵב בְּרַךְ (רֵאשׁוֹן בְּפָרְשַׁת פְּקוּדֵי) לָמָּה עָשָׂה שְׁתֵּי שְׁאֵלוֹת לְשֵׁאוֹל מִתְחִלָּה אִם הֲגִוֹן עַל מֹשֶׁה וְאַחֲרַי כִּי אִם הוּא הֲגִוֹן עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמָה צָרִיךְ שְׁאֵלָה וּמָה תִּיּוֹתֵי שְׁאֵלָה יְהִיָּה הֲגִוֹן עַל מֹשֶׁה, אִם לְפָנַי הַקָּב"ה הוּא הֲגִוֹן, וּבְשֵׁלְמָא עִם הַצְּבוּר נִמְלֵךְ מִשׁוּם שְׂאִין מַעֲמִידִין פְּרָנָס עַל הַצְּבוּר אֲלָא אִם פֶּן נִמְלְכִין בַּצְּבוּר, אֲכַל לָמָּה נִמְלֵךְ עִם מֹשֶׁה בְּפָנַי עֲצָמוּ עכ"ל.

The Zera Berach (first essay on parashat Pekudei) raised a difficulty: Why were there two questions, first to ask whether he was acceptable to Moses, and afterward whether he was acceptable to Israel? Why was a question needed at all? What conceivable reason would there be that he would not be acceptable to Moses if he was acceptable before the Holy One, Blessed be He? Granted that one consults with the community, because one does not appoint an administrator over the community unless one consults with the community and they agree, but why consult with Moses himself?

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ועוד יש להקשות היכא יליף ר' יצחק מהכא דאין מעמידין פרנס אלא אם כן נמלכין בצבור, דילמא בעלמא אין צריך להמלה, והא דהוצרך הכא להמלה, לפי שבצלאל היה נער ולא היה כבוד הצבור למנות עליהם נער לפרנס, שלא היה אלא ב[[ו]]י"ג שנים כדאמרין בסנהדרין פרק בן סורר ומורה, כדמצינו גבי שלית ציבור דבעינו נתמלא זקנו, ורבי אליעזר בן עזריה נעשה לו גם שיהיה נראה כבן שבעים שנה, ועוד יש לדקדק בקושר של הכתובים "ראה קראתי בשם בצלאל" וכו' "ואמלא אתו רוח אלהים" וכו'.

Furthermore, there is another difficulty: How does Rabbi Yitzchak derive from here that one does not appoint an administrator unless one consults with the community and they agree? Perhaps in general there is no need to consult, and that it was required here only because Bezalel was young, and it was not respectful of the community to appoint a youth over them as leader—for he was only thirteen years old, as stated in Sanhedrin, in the 8th chapter, entitled “A stubborn and rebellious son” (69b). This is similar to what we find regarding a prayer leader, that we require that his beard be filled in;¹ and Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah experienced a miracle that he appeared like a seventy-year-old.²

We also need to check the connection of the verses: “See, I have called out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him with a Divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft.”³

אבל איתא בשלחן ערוך יורה דעה (סימן רמ"ב סעיף ד') אסור לאדם להורות בפני רבו, ואפילו נטילת רשות לא מהני אם הוא רבו מובהק, אבל אם אין רוב חכמתו ממנו משמע התם דנטילת רשות מהני, ועיי"ש בפוסקים. ואם כן משה היה רבו מובהק של בצלאל כמו שהיה הרב מובהק של ישראל, ולא היה יכול בצלאל להיות פרנס ולהורות, ואף נטילת רשות ממושה לא הנה מהני ליה.

It is brought in the Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah (siman 242, se'if 4): It is forbidden for a person to issue halachic rulings in the presence of his teacher, and even getting permission does not help if he is his primary teacher. But if the majority of his wisdom is not from him, it is implied there that taking permission does help. See there in the decisors.

If so, it would seem that Moses was the primary teacher of Bezalel, just as he was the primary teacher of Israel, and therefore Bezalel could not be an administrator or issue rulings. Even getting permission from Moses would not have helped him.

ולכן אמר לו הקב"ה למשה "ראה קראתי בשם בצלאל" . . . ואמלא אתו" וכו', כלומר עכשיו שאני מלאתי אותו רוח חכמה ותבונה, אם כן אין רוב חכמתו ממך, ואם אתה תתן לו רשות להורות יכול להורות. ולאחר שצמח לו משה הרשות לא היה צורך להמלה בישראל, וכינון שראינו שעל כל פנים רצה להמלה בהם, על פרוק צריך לומר שהטעם הוא מפני שאין מעמידין פרנס וכו', והשתא ליכא למימר שנגמלה בהם לפי שהיה נער, שפינו שנסמך ממושה להורות יצא מפלל נעד ובא לכלל חכם, ויש קונן חדש מלא ישן, ועליו נאמר "והדרת פני זקן" זה שקנה חכמה, ואפילו יניק וחסים.

Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: “See, I have called out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him with a Divine

¹ Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim, siman 53, se'if 6.

² Berachot 28a.

³ Ex. 31:2–3.

spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft.” **That is to say, now that I have filled him with a spirit of wisdom and understanding, the majority of his wisdom is not from you, Moses; and if you grant him permission to issue rulings, he can issue rulings. After Moses granted him permission, there would no longer have been any need to consult Israel.**

Since, however, we see that in any case He wished to consult with them, you must say that the reason is because one may only appoint an administrator over a community if he consults with the community [and they agree]. Now there is no room to say that He consulted with them because [Bezalel] was young, for once he was authorized by Moses to issue rulings, he left the category of “youth” and entered the category of “sage.” There is a new vessel filled with old wine,⁴ meaning a young person possessing the wisdom of the elderly. Concerning him it is said, “show deference to the elder,⁵ that is, one who has acquired wisdom, even an infant who is wise.⁶

ואם תאמר ומה הוראה שייך במעשה המשפן, יש לומר שהרי מציינו שבצלאל שינה ממה שאמר לו משה ועשה את המשפן תחילה, ועוד משה צנה שיעשה ארון עץ מצופה זהב והוא עשה שלשה ארונות וכדומה.

If you say: What does issuing rulings have to do with the construction of the Tabernacle? One can say that we find that Bezalel altered what Moses told him and made the Tabernacle first. That is:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Go say to Bezalel, “Make a tabernacle, an ark, and vessels.” Moses went and reversed the order and told [Bezalel]: “Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle.” [Bezalel] said to [Moses]: Moses, our teacher, the practice in the world is that a person builds a house and only afterward places the vessels . . . Perhaps G-d told you the following: “Make a tabernacle, ark, and vessels.” [Moses] said to [Bezalel]: Perhaps you were in G-d’s shadow [*betzel El*], and you knew [what He said].

- Berachot 55a

Moreover, Moses commanded that he make an ark of wood overlaid with gold, but he made three arks, and so forth. That is:

[The Torah states that the Ark should be made of wood with gold plating inside and out (Ex. 25:10–11).] Bezalel made three arks: A middle one of wood, nine [handbreadths tall]; an inner one of gold, eight [handbreadths tall]; [and] an outer one [of gold], ten [handbreadths] and a bit [tall].

- Yoma 72b

Thus, Bezalel’s deviations from Moses’ instruction were allowed because design decisions about the Tabernacle involved halachic reasoning. Because the majority of Bezalel’s wisdom came from G-d, and because Moses granted permission, Bezalel was allowed to issue such rulings.

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⁴ Pirkei Avot 4:20.

⁵ Lev. 19:32.

⁶ Kiddushin 32b.