

Parashat Vayakel, 5779, 2019:

*Why Bezalel?*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parshiot Vayakel and Pekudei are narrative Torah portions that exactly describe the construction of the *Mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary) and the creation of the *bigdei Kohanim* (garments of the *Kohanim*). The word, “*va'ya'os*” — “and he made,” is used 40 times throughout these passages, 39 of which are stated anonymously. Consequently, the names of the artisans who created a particular *kli* (vessel), or even one of the constitutive elements of the *Mishkan* such as one of the altars, remain unknown. The one exception to this rule is the *Aron Luchot HaBrit* (Ark of the Covenant): “Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.” (*Sefer Shemot 37:1*, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*).

We may well ask at this juncture is, “Why was Bezalel’s name explicitly mentioned solely in regards to the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*, when he was designated by Hashem to be the designer and architect of every aspect of the *Mishkan*?” This is particularly of the moment, since the Torah informs us:

“See, I [Hashem] have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have imbued him with the spirit of G-d, with wisdom, with insight, with knowledge, and with [talent for] all manner of craftsmanship to do master weaving, to work with gold, with silver, and with copper, with the craft of stones for setting and with the craft of wood, to do every [manner of] work.” (*Sefer Shemot 31:2-5*)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) suggests that, “Since he [Bezalel] devoted himself to the work more than the other wise men, it [the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*] was called by his name [i.e. the work was attributed to him alone].” A generation later, the Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) notes in his *Commentary on the Torah* that although Bezalel joined others in creating all of the *Miskan*’s holy vessels, his name was associated, in particular, with the *Aron Luchot HaBrit* because of its singular *kedushah* (holiness). While both Rashi and the Ibn Ezra help us answer our question, I believe the most holistic response has been offered by Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926) in his Torah commentary entitled, “*Meshech Chachma*.”

Rav Meir Simcha begins his analysis by noting that “other people participated in the construction of the various *kalim* (vessels) at the time of the first and second *Beit HaMikdash*, and will do so in the future.” (Commentary on *Sefer Shemot* 37:1, this and the following translations my own) This, however, he asserts, is not the case regarding the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*, whose purpose was to house the Tablets of the Law (*Luchot HaBrit*), since “from the time it was hidden away [shortly before the destruction of the first *Beit HaMikdash*], no other one could be built, for another set of *HaLuchot* could never be constructed.” Rav Meir Simcha continues by explaining that the *Aron Luchot HaBrit* is therefore called:

the *Aron Bezalel*, which will exist throughout all the generations — and there will never be another. This is perhaps the reason for our verse’s specificity [when it states, “and Bezalel made,”] to teach us that throughout the generations another *Aron HaBrit*, and set of Cherubim, may never be produced — but, rather, only those that Bezalel fashioned.

Rav Meir Simcha’s first answer to our question is technical in nature: The underlying rationale as to why Bezalel’s name is associated with the *Aron Luchot HaBrit* is because there can never be another one, since there will never be another set of *HaLuchot*. As a result, the *Aron Luchot*

*HaBrit* is forever known as *Aron Bezalel* — the one and only *Aron Luchot HaBrit* that was created by Bezalel.

Rav Meir Simcha's second answer to our query is more conceptually-based and responds, as well, to another question: "Why was Bezalel chosen to build the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*?" In order to properly understand his response, we need to focus upon his view of the order of historical events surrounding the *Chet* of the *Eigel HaZahav* (Sin of the Golden Calf) and the *Mishkan*, something that is hotly debated among the early and later Torah commentators. In Rav Meir Simcha's view, Hashem initially designated Bezalel as the architect of the *Mishkan*. Shortly following his appointment, however, *klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) participated in the heinous incident of the *Eigel HaZahav*. At that point, Bezalel was specifically charged with the construction of the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*:

The Holy One blessed be He was concerned, following the sin of the *Eigel HaZahav*, that perhaps when someone would build the *Aron HaBrit*, they would have forbidden thoughts during its construction that would be infused with various kinds of idol worship. Therefore, Bezalel was chosen to build the *Aron HaBrit*, since his grandfather, [Chur,] was murdered as a result of his refusal to participate in the creation of the *Eigel HaZahav*.

Our writer concludes his trenchant analysis with a solid explanation as to why Bezalel's name was explicitly mentioned in regards to the *Aron Luchot HaBrit*:

Therefore, based upon his (Bezalel's) training and his natural orientation toward hating anything and everything associated with those who follow after the foolishness, forms and images of all manner [of idol worship,] he would never have embraced any of these foreign thoughts. Therefore, the Torah writes, "And Bezalel made," since he, and he alone, constructed the *Aron HaLuchot* without any [potentially questionable] help whatsoever.

According to Rav Meir Simcha, Bezalel emerges as a true hero of the spirit who was blessed by Hashem with the requisite unique talents and abilities not only to design and build the *Mishkan* in general, but to also construct the *Aron Luchot HaBrit* in particular, *b'taharah v'kedushah* (in

purity and sanctity). With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to follow in his footsteps and dedicate ourselves to attaining such holiness of purpose in our lives. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

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