



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

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Parashat Vayakhel **Wisdom of the Crowd** **-Rabbi Elyashiv Knohl-**

In Parashat Vayakhel we read of Moshe's appointment of Betzalel the son of Uri to oversee the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The position was one of vast responsibility and scope, including with regard to the astronomical amounts of gold, silver and other valuables that were required for the project. The appointment itself was dictated by Hashem: "Moshe said to the children of Israel: 'See, Hashem has called by name Betzalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He has imbued him with the spirit of God...'" The Sages of the Talmud took notice of the specific language used by the Torah and asked themselves why the Torah chose to employ the phrase 'see.' Why didn't Moshe turn to the people directly and simply say to them 'Hashem has called by name Betzalel'? In answer to this question, the Talmud states as follows: "R. Isaac said: We must not appoint a leader over a community without first consulting it, as it says: Hashem has called by name Betzalel, the son of Uri. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: Do you consider Betzalel suitable? He replied: Sovereign of the Universe, if You think him suitable, surely I must also! Said [God] to him: All the same, go and consult them. He went and asked Israel: Do you consider Betzalel suitable? They replied: If the Holy One, blessed be He, and you consider him suitable, surely we must as well!" (Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55a).

If we were to compare the words of the Talmud to what we know of the culture of modern leadership, although officials are democratically elected to parliament, their posts (ministerial and otherwise) are given to them by the prime minister and a select number of other officials without consulting the people. We are often witness to appointments that result in public outcry, appeals to the High Court of Justice and other criticisms. The midrash cited by the Talmud contains a great secret: even if one has the power to appoint others, it is preferable to consult the people prior to making the appointment and only then to announce the candidate's ascension to the relevant post. In this way, the leader saves himself from the rather humiliating experience of having to rescind the appointment and the appointee from the disappointment of having the promised position taken away from him.

Another danger that is omnipresent when a leader is tasked with appointing others to positions of power is the nepotistic urge faced by every person: to take care of their own interests and those of the people close to them. These interests are not always aligned with the requirements of the relevant position. The midrash makes an attempt to address this issue by focusing on the word 'see,' and states as follows: "'See, Hashem has called by name Betzalel.' Scripture states elsewhere:



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'So shall you find favor and good understanding in the eyes of God and man' (Proverbs 3:4). How is this so? At the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Moshe on the mountain regarding the construction of the Mishkan, He revealed to him every vessel that was to be made for the Mishkan and how to make it, as it is said: 'Now see and make according to their pattern.' ... After He had mentioned every item to him, Moshe asked: Master of the Universe, who is to build all of these? Hashem responded: 'See, I have called by name Betzalel.' When Moshe descended from the mountain, he told Israel: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, has commanded me to construct for him a tabernacle of wooden planks, an altar and a table.' They asked: 'Who is to build all of these?' Moshe responded: 'Betzalel.' The Israelites began gossiping and complaining of Moshe: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, did not command him to appoint Betzalel to construct the Mishkan, but rather he chose to appoint him of his own volition since Betzalel is his relative. Moshe is the king, his brother Aharon is the High Priest, Aharon's sons are the priestly hierarchy, Elazar is the prince of the tribe of Levi, the sons of Kehat are the bearers of the Mishkan and now he [Betzalel] is charged with overseeing the construction of the Mishkan. It is Moshe's desire to control all of these powers.' To this Moshe responded: 'I have done nothing of my own volition, but rather it is all by Hashem's direct command, as he then showed them: 'See, Hashem has called by name Betzalel.'" In this the verse 'So shall you find favor and good understanding in the eyes of God and man' is fulfilled: that you shall find favor and good understanding in the eyes of God, this is Betzalel, with regard to whom the Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'See, Hashem has called by name.' (Tanchuma Vayakhel, 3).

These teachings by our Sages demonstrate to us that in a theocracy permission must be asked and granted by the people. It becomes all the more apparent, then, that in a democracy the people should also be included and consulted when making decisions so that such decisions are acceptable to the people, thus avoiding future criticisms, outcry and anguish.

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