



Text:

The Jewish nation enthusiastically contributes materials for construction of the Mishkan.

“And the princes [of the twelve tribes] brought the onyx stones and the stones for the settings of the Ephod and the Choshen...”

[Exodus 35:27]

The princes said, “Let the public donate what they will, and we will make up the shortfall.” When the public completed all [that was necessary]... the princes said, “What is [left] for us to do?” [So] they brought the onyx stones....And because they were lazy at the outset, a letter was omitted from [the spelling of] their name [in the Torah scroll, in the above verse.]

[Midrash, cited by Rashi]

Question:

The princes should be given credit for their generosity! They intended to step forward and pick up the slack for the entire nation. Why are they instead accused of laziness?

Answer:

The princes *believed* their offer stemmed from generosity (and undoubtedly intended to make good on their promise.) But G-d, who sees the subconscious mind, testified that their underlying motivation was not absolutely pure. Pure generosity would have led the princes to contribute immediately. Their decision to wait was colored by an infinitesimal drop of laziness. In the end, the princes were left with little to contribute.

Message:

The princes were men of exemplary character, and believed their behavior reflected sincere generosity; in reality, their judgment was skewed by a thread of simple laziness. If these great individuals erred due to a subconscious bias, we are certainly susceptible to misjudgments based on our own hidden flaws. If we engage in honest introspection, we can trust that G-d will help us reach conclusions that are wise and authentic.

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The previous Parsha recounted G-d's reconciliation with the Jewish People after the tragedy of the Golden Calf. The joyous news of G-d's forgiveness is announced on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The very next day, Moses gathers the Jews to communicate G-d's instructions for building the Tabernacle – a symbol of their restored relationship with G-d.

Before instructing the Jews regarding the Tabernacle, Moses commands them to refrain from all work on the Sabbath; even the building of G-d's own Sanctuary must cease on this holy day. Moses then relays G-d's request that the people donate the materials needed for the project.

Both men and women respond to the call with unbridled enthusiasm, contributing over and above the necessary amount; Moses announces that the campaign is over and people should stop bringing supplies.

G-d declares that the principle architect of the Tabernacle will be Betzalel, a member of the tribe of Judah. G-d has "filled him with a Divine spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge..." Betzalel will be assisted by Oholiav, a member of the tribe of Dan, along with any individual "wise of heart, in whom G-d has placed wisdom and understanding, to know [how] to do all the crafts of the holy work."

The Parsha proceeds to catalogue the components of the Tabernacle previously mentioned in Parshas Terumah; each item was meticulously fashioned by the dedicated Jewish craftsmen.

The classical commentators address the apparent redundancy in the multiple accounts of the Tabernacle in the last five Parshas of Exodus. The commentators discover nuances of meaning in the subtle variations in the various texts. In a larger sense, the Torah's lengthy treatment of this topic indicates G-d's love and esteem for His children's handiwork, and His desire to dwell upon the subject at length.

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