

Tzaddik in a Fur Coat

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Parshat Vayak'hel

What a wonderful image it is! The Israelites were so excited that they brought offerings for the construction of the Tabernacle; they were so generous that Moses finally had to tell them to stop giving, that there was too much.

But this mass generosity tells only one part of the story. They brought gold; they brought silver; they brought copper. They brought wool of blue, of purple, of scarlet. They brought linen and goats' hair and rams' skins dyed red. They brought hides that had been processed into leather, and they brought acacia wood. They brought oil and spices and incense, and they brought every conceivable variety of precious stones. And it was too much. And yet it was not enough.

This incredible and democratic generosity needed something more. It needed the genius of an exceptional individual, an artist, to take all the gifts, all the donations, all the offerings, and turn them into the Tabernacle. In fact, it needed two artists, Betzalel and Oholiav, for each exercised his own type of artistry. And this teaches us an important lesson.

Betzalel, the Torah tells us, was filled with a divine spirit of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. He was so great an artist that his works brought people to tears. But, inspiring as Betzalel's artistry may have been, he was not

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personally inspiring. He and Oholiav were both expert artists and craftsmen, but Oholiav, we read (Exodus 35:34), had the ability to teach others.

How can we say that? Does not the text state explicitly that both Betzalel and Oholiav had the ability to teach and inspire. Yes, it does, and therein lies the point. When the text speaks of Betzalel alone, his artistry is described in the most glowing terms. Only when he is teamed with Oholiav do we read of his teaching ability. It is clear that, master artist and craftsman that he was, he was able to teach others only when he joined with the outstanding artist and master teacher Oholiav.

Thus, there are three parts to the construction of the Tabernacle, or, by implication, to any worthwhile project. The materials must be gathered, and all can contribute. The work must be done, and this requires an inspired artist. And finally, in order for the project to partake of the Divine Spirit, the *Ruah haKodesh*, another type of inspiration is need, the inspiration that will inspire others.

Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk once said of a famous rabbi, "He's a tzaddik (a saint, a perfectly righteous individual) in a fur coat."

His disciples asked him what he meant.

"There are two types of tzaddik," he replied. "One wears his sainthood like a fur coat; it keeps him warm in the winter cold. The second kind of tzaddik uses his sainthood to light a fire. The fire warms him, and it warms others as well."

Shabbat Shalom.

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