Bezalel's Ability To Share The Stage Made Him a Leader

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Our Text (Berachot 55a):
R. Johanan said: There are three things which the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself proclaims, namely, famine, plenty, and a good leader. 'Famine', as it is written: The Lord hath called for a famine. 'Plenty', as it is written: I will call for the corn and will increase it. 'A good leader', as it is written: And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, See I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri.

R. Isaac said: We must not appoint a leader over a Community without first consulting it, as it says: See, the Lord hath called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Do you consider Bezalel suitable? He replied: Sovereign of the Universe, if Thou thinkest 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 Bezalel suitable? They replied: If the Holy One, blessed be He, and you consider him suitable, surely we must!

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Johanan: Bezalel was so called on account of his wisdom. At the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses; Go and tell Bezalel to make me a tabernacle, an ark and vessels, Moses went and reversed the order, saying, Make an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Bezalel said to him: Moses, our Teacher, as a rule a man first builds a house and then brings vessels into it; but you say, Make me an ark and vessels and a tabernacle. Where shall I put the vessels that I am to make? Can it be that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to you, Make a tabernacle, an ark and vessels? Moses replied: Perhaps you were in the shadow of God and knew!

Questions for Deeper Understanding:
Bezalel was the general contractor, so to speak, behind the construction of the Mishkan. He perhaps had artistic ability. He was a good organizer. He was talented. But it is strange that the Gemara refers to him as a 'parnas tov'.

- *Where do we see leadership qualities in Bezalel? He succeeded in getting the job done under budget and on time -– he was a good general contractor. But in what sense does that make him a good leader (parnas tov)?*

The Yalkut Shimoni contains the following teaching: During the building of the Mishkan, two tribes had a partnership -– the tribe of Yehudah (as represented by Bezalel) and the tribe of Dan (as represented by Oholiav ben Achisamach) had a partnership.

Why did they need two tribes for the project? In truth, G-d did not need anyone to build the Mishkan, but it certainly would have been sufficient to provide just one tribe. Bezalel could have done the job alone. With his G-d given talents, he did not need a partner. Nonetheless, the MIdrash emphasizes that the Mishkan had to be built by two tribes.

- *Why require a partnership to build the mishkan, why not just have it built by Bezalel or created by God?*

Commentary:
Rav Chaim Zaytchik, zt"l, writes that this Midrash allows us to better understand the previously cited Gemara that labeled Bezalel as a *'parnas tov.'*

There are many people who are interested in getting involved in communal work as long as they will have the spotlight by themselves. They are in it so that when the job gets done, they will be able to say: "Look, what I've done!" But if you ask them to be a co-chairman, to share the job and responsibilities, and as such, to share the limelight and glory, they say -- "under those circumstances, I am not interested."

According to this view, God is looking for people who work *lishma* [altruistically]. He wants people who are interested in efforts for the Sake of Heaven, not for the sake of an ego trip. The true test of a person's motive is whether he will tolerate a partner. Therefore, the first test that God gave Bezalel -– to see whether he was the man for the job -– was to assign him a co-chairman. "I want you to work with someone, with someone who is not even from the prestigious tribe of Yehudah, but from the "lowly" Tribe of Dan. In accepting this partner, Bezalel showed us how to be a leader *(parnas tov).*