



## Love of Learning • Parshat Ki Tissa

Throughout the closing fourteen chapters of Exodus, we observe with awe the creative genius and masterful craftsmanship that helped ensure the construction of the Tabernacle, its vessels, and the priestly clothing. From where did these newly freed slaves become adept at woodworking, stonecutting, and craftwork? When did they acquire the skills, abilities, and knowledge to design, weave, thread, and embroider? How did they become expert goldsmiths, silversmiths, and coppersmiths?

The only possible resolution, writes Nahmanides, is Divine intervention. God singled out Bezalel and “endowed him with a divine spirit” (Ex. 31:3), which enabled him to carry out the construction contract. Why was Bezalel chosen as the leader of this project? There is no explicit indication in the verses as to his particular propensities. We know little of his background. We are afforded no accompanying aptitude test, previous employment history, or remarkable resume.

There is one clue provided, not regarding Bezalel’s chosenness, but in describing the skilled artisans who assisted Bezalel in constructing the Tabernacle. For them, instead of just stating that God granted them a “Divine spirit,” the verse relays that “in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom” (Ex 31:6). The prerequisite for Divine wisdom was wise heartedness. If they did not possess any previous experience or expertise, what does it mean that they were wise hearted?

Turning to the story of Solomon for a parallel, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in his *Sichot Mussar*, suggests that being wise hearted denotes demonstrating a deep and burning desire for wisdom. Solomon was granted wisdom by God precisely because he desired it. Instead of requesting long life, riches, or military victory, he beseeched God for discernment in dispensing justice (I Kings 3:11-12). The artisans’ wise heartedness, argues Rabbi Shmuelevitz, is precisely this love of learning and strong desire to discover. This virtue signaled to God to endow them with the further wisdom necessary for the task.

Midrash Tanhuma connects the model of the wise hearted artisans to Joshua the son of Nun.

God also supplemented Joshua’s wisdom with Divine wisdom, filling him with the “spirit of wisdom” (Deut. 34:9). Like Solomon, we find indication that Joshua too was an exemplar possessing an unquenching thirst for knowledge. The verse states that Moses’ “servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man (*naar*), did not depart out of the Tent” (Ex. 33:11). Following the chronological calculations of the Sages, Ibn Ezra questions the description of Joshua as “a young man,” as he was fifty-six years old at the time. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Sorotzkin, in his *Rinat Yitzchak*, suggests that “young man” is not a description of age, but of attitude and mindset. Despite his older age Joshua embodied an intense yearning for knowledge and growth. He viewed

himself and interacted with others as someone with so much more to learn and achieve. It was his desire to learn that kept him young at heart.

Positive psychology points to love of learning as one of their 24 character strengths important for flourishing. Love of learning is a primary predictor of school satisfaction and school achievement and is one of only two strengths that independently predict well-being. Resonant of

Joshua's description as a "young man," Dr. Ben Kean suggests that "a love of learning may be particularly valuable during older age in that it may prevent cognitive decline."

Observing the artisans' craving for wisdom, Solomon's pleading for discernment, and Joshua's youthful exuberance for knowledge, we would do well to cultivate our own love of learning and passion for continual growth.

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**Character Challenge:** Learn something new every day this week and share it enthusiastically with others.

**Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l:** "Hence the Torah ends with the last command – to keep writing and studying Torah. And this is epitomised in the beautiful custom, on Simchat Torah, to move immediately from reading the end of the Torah to reading the beginning. The last word in the Torah is *Yisrael*; the last letter is a *lamed*. The first word of the Torah is *Bereishit*; the first letter is *beit*. *Lamed* followed by *beit* spells *lev*, "heart." *So long as the Jewish people never stop learning, the Jewish heart will never stop beating*" ("The Heart, the Home, the Text," *Covenant & Conversation*)