

Vayakhel - Pekudei – Michael Lebrecht

כ"ז אדר תשע"ז – 25th March 2017 – שבת פרשת החדש - ויקהל - פקודי

The most significant person involved with building the Mishkon was a 13 year old boy called Betzalel, the son Uri, the son of Chur of the tribe of Yehudah (Shemos 35:30).

The Torah waxes lyrical about his abilities, talents and spiritual achievements. This effusive praise is spread over several pesukim. Each one of his ascribed capabilities deserves a study and analysis of its own in order uncover more layers of expertise than the simple translation may suggest.

His particular gift of 'VeLachashov Machashovos' (Shemos 35:32) is an example. The literal translation would suggest an ability to 'compute calculations'. Yet in contrast to this relatively minor accomplishment, the Gemorro (Berochos 55a) informs us that Betzalel also possessed the unique skill and understanding of how to combine the letters uttered by Hashem when creating heaven and earth to accomplish great things. How is it possible to mention these contrasting skills in the same breath?

The sefer Gan Roveh suggests that 'Lachashov Machashovos' is an immensely superior talent than you may think at first sight. He writes that Betzalel was faced with difficult decisions. Hundreds of thousands of people were making donations. Clearly, some contributors would make their donations joyfully and with a full heart. Others would do so grudgingly and with little enthusiasm. The former group would deserve to have their contributions used for the holier parts of the Mishkon (Aron, keruvim etc) whilst members of the latter group would be underserving of such an honour and their contributions ought to be designated to less holy parts of the Mishkon (the hooks, rings etc).

The challenge for Betzalel was to work out which group the donors fell in.

In Parshas Ki Siso (Shemos 31:1 - 5) a virtually identical description of Betzalel is given by the Torah. There the Targum Yonoson explains the phrase 'Lachashov Machashovos' as 'being able to discern the thoughts (machashovos) of the givers, and how to apply each donation.' Problem solved.

However, in Parshas Vayakhel the same Targum Yonoson explains 'VeLachashov Machashovos' as meaning an expert craftsman of gold, silver etc. What moved him to alter his explanation of the identical phrase?

The context of the phrase provides the answer. In Parshas Ki Siso (Shemos 31:1) Hashem speaks only to Moshe about Betzalel. Therefore, the extraordinary ability to read people's minds was known only to Moshe. However, in Parshas Vayakhel the news of Betzalel's appointment was conveyed by Moshe to Klal Yisroel (Shemos 35:30). It would have been highly inappropriate to reveal to all and sundry this amazing gift, bearing in mind the centrality of individual thoughts in the whole donation process. Donors' thoughts had to be genuine. Hence, in Parshas Vayakhel, Targum Yonoson downgrades this description of Betzalel and provides an alternative one - 'a master craftsman.'

This explanation could also explain why in Parshas Ki Siso 'Lachashov Machashovos' is not preceded by a 'vov' but in Parshas Vayakhel it is. In Parshas Ki Siso its' meaning is completely different to the skill mention beforehand, and therefore there is no need for a connective 'vov' (and). It is a standalone gift. However, in Parshas Vayakhel the 'VeLachashov Machashovos' talent as described by Targum Yonoson is similar to the previous talent and therefore can have the connecting 'vov' (and).

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin once used this thought when speaking to donor to a Yeshiva. The man didn't mind making a donation but was reluctant to donate if his money would be used for 'demeaning' items of everyday use. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin assured him that just as with the Mishkon where the thoughts of the donors were known to Betzalel who directed their donations to an appropriate use, so would his donation to the Yeshiva be directed to a suitable use by Hashem.