



PARSHAS VAYAKHEL – DAVID VINCENT

In celebration of Itamar's 2nd Birthday

In this week's Parasha, Moshe relays G-d's command to Bnei Yisrael, that "Every wise-hearted person among you shall come and make everything that G-d has commanded [for the Mishkan]" (Shemot, 35:10). This phrase, 'wise-hearted,' is repeated many times over the course of the Parasha, all in the context of Bnei Yisrael making the Mishkan. Within the Parasha, the words also appear independently: the word 'heart' appears twice, and the word 'wise,' once.

The word 'heart' appears when Bnei Yisrael generously give everything they have – gold, silver, copper – to fund the building of the utensils for the Mishkan. Why here, though, are Bnei Yisrael referred to only as "generous of heart," as opposed to 'wise-hearted men', as found throughout the Parasha?

The word 'wise' appears when the 'wise people' of Bnei Yisrael approach Moshe and tell him to ask the people to stop bringing their possessions for the Mishkan, for there was a surplus. Again, why here are Bnei Yisrael referred to simply as 'wise people' as opposed to 'wise-hearted men' or even 'generous of heart'?

In order to resolve these two difficulties, we must first understand the meaning of the phrase. What is a wise heart? What does it mean to have a wise heart?

In Mishlei (10:8), we stumble on this phrase as well. Here, the verse reads, "The wise-hearted will seize mitzvot." Based on this verse, the Vilna Gaon understands "wise-hearted" as a person who jumps into an action as soon as he can, without pushing it off. This is derived from the word "seize". Based on this explanation, we can understand this phrase, "wise-hearted men," in the context of building the Mishkan. With the exception of the lead architects, Betzalel and Oholiab, who G-d filled with "G-dly spirit, with wisdom, with understanding, and with knowledge, and with every craft," the builders of the vessels for the Mishkan, as well as the Mishkan itself, were normal, non-architecturally-savvy people (Shemot, 35:31). These regular people are referred to as "wise-hearted," because even though they contained no building knowledge and education, as soon as they were instructed to build the Mishkan, they completely immersed themselves in the task without any hesitation, despite their lack of architectural knowledge.

Based on this understanding, the Chafetz Chaim, in chapter seven of Torat HaBayit, explains the phrase 'wise-hearted' as a person who follows his heart to such a high level that G-d rewards him with the knowledge and wisdom necessary to perform the task he so desired to perform. Thus, as a result, the person goes from someone who simply follows his heart without any direction, to someone who wisely follows his heart with the requisite knowledge to perform the task into which he immersed himself. This explains the technical problem Bnei Yisrael would have experienced-how, exactly, are non-trained workers supposed to create the detailed vessels of the Mishkan? They had no goldsmiths or specialty weavers; from where did the necessary experience come?

In Pirkei Avot (4:1), the famous question is asked – 'Who is wise?' Ben Zoma answers, 'He who learns from every person.' A wise person is a person who loves wisdom. A 'wise-hearted' person is someone who craves wisdom so much, he always searches for it, everywhere and from everyone.

Bereishit Raba (Chapter 52) lists Avraham as the quintessential 'wise-hearted' man. Avraham is a 'wise-hearted' man because he went out of his way, followed his heart, and argued with G-d to save the wicked city of Sdom. Avraham kept on pushing more and more for something in which he truly believed.

We can now answer the two previous questions we posed – why Bnei Yisrael are referred to as just "generous of heart" and "wise men," as opposed to "wise-hearted". When Bnei Yisrael generously give everything they have – gold, silver, copper – to fund the building of the utensils for the Mishkan, they are referred to as "generous of heart," for giving involves following one's heart and doing what one believes in. However, unlike those involved with building the Mishkan and its vessels, whose generous hearts became wise-hearts through immersion in something in which they had no background, those generous people who donated, while impressive, did not extend their commitment past normal, natural tasks of which everyone is fully capable. On the other side, when Bnei Yisrael approach Moshe and kindly request that he ask people to stop bringing their possessions and generously giving for the Mishkan, for there was a surplus, they are referred to as "wise people". There is no mention of the heart, as these people are in fact representing the opposite of generous giving, by ordering the generous giving to stop. However, sometimes it takes a wise person to know when to stop something good.