

PARASHAS KI SISA

The Rewards of Sacrifice

It was a tough assignment for a mere *bar-mitzvah* boy. All eyes were upon him. The nation was in deep trouble, and the only hope rested in the talented hands of the thirteen-year-old boy. If he could perform at the highest level, disaster would be averted. Otherwise, all would be lost. The boy's name was Bezalel, and his assignment was to reestablish the connection between God and the Jewish people.

The trouble began when Moses went up on the mountain to receive the Torah and lingered for forty days before he returned with the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. By the last day, the people gave up hope of ever again seeing him alive. A frenzied mob built the Golden Calf as their new deity and danced around it in drunken celebration. This scene greeted Moses when he descended from the mountain. All the pain, all the work, all the struggle, everything had been in vain. In one day of madness, the Jewish people had severed their connection with God. Moses took the Tablets and smashed them to smithereens.

But there was a ray of hope. Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the Jewish people, to give them one more chance, and God relented. He commanded them to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle) as a dwelling for the Divine Presence amidst the people. This would reestablish the severed connection. God also commanded them to assign the entire project to a particular master artisan, a thirteen-year-old boy named Bezalel, whom He had "filled with divine wisdom."

What was so special about Bezalel? Why did God choose to imbue him with the special divine wisdom needed for this critical project?

The clue lies in the way God identifies him—Bezalel the son of Uri the son of Hur. The Torah ordinarily identifies people only by the patronymic, the father's name. Yet here we are told his grandfather's name as well. The commentators conclude that God selected Bezalel in the merit of Hur, his grandfather.

Hur, the son of Moses' sister Miriam, was the only one who had stood against the mob and tried to stop the madness, and they killed him. It seemed at the time that his death had been futile, a terrible waste. But in retrospect, we see that he did not die in vain. Because of his great act of heroism, because of his willingness to sacrifice his life to preserve the connection between God and the Jewish people, his grandson Bezalel was endowed with the transcendent spiritual intuition necessary to build the Mishkan and reestablish the severed connection.

A young man came to seek a sage's advice.

"I feel that I am wasting my life," he said. "I work so hard to improve myself, to become a better person, but I do not feel that I am any different from what I was before. I don't think I have become any wiser. I don't think my character has improved. What is the use of making all this effort if I have nothing to show for it?"

"How long have you been doing this?" asked the sage.

"Six weeks."

"I see," said the sage, "Tell me, young man, when you were a child, did your mother make markings on a wall chart to measure your growth?"

"Yes, she did," said the young man.

"And how often did she measure you?"

"Once a year. On my birthday."

"And what if you had measured yourself every day?" asked the sage. "What would the results have been?"

"Probably not very noticeable," the young man admitted.

"There, you see? The results of your efforts are not always evident right away. Just continue to work on self-improvement, and I assure you that in a year you will be a different man."

In our own lives, we invest so much time, effort and energy into our personal growth, our children, our families, our personal relationships, our businesses and professions, and quite often, we do not see any tangible results. It is easy to fall victim to despair when we do not see our efforts bear fruit. But if our intentions are altruistic and we aspire to a higher good, we can be assured that our hard work will not be in vain.