‘‘*Naso*: The name at the top of the list’’

Rabbi Dr Jeffrey M Cohen

Vayehi b’yom kallot Mosheh lehakim et ha-mishkan, ‘And it was on the day that Moses finished setting up the Sanctuary’ (Nu.7:1). The Midrash finds it astonishing that the establishment of the Mishkan is attributed to Moses, given that he had no part in its actual construction. That was the task of a man called Betzalel, whose wisdom, artistic creativity and architectural skills are described as God-inspired (Ex. 31:2-5; 35:30-34), attributes which were fully employed in the description of the design, manufacture and equipping of that Sanctuary (See Ex. 35:30; 36:2; 37:1; 38:2).

The Talmud (*Ber*. 55a) makes so bold as to suggest that, in relation to one major aspect of its construction, Betzalel was vouchsafed a heavenly instruction that Moses his mentor overlooked! Basing itself on the verse: *And Betzalel…did everything that God commanded* ***Moses*** (Ex. 38:22), the Talmud observes:

> It does not state (as expected) that, ‘*Betzalel…did everything that God commanded him (to do).*’ The implication is that even in regard to instructions that his teacher, Moses, failed to relay to him, but which had originally been communicated to Moses on Sinai, Betzalel was able to home in on. Thus, whereas God told Moses at Sinai to construct the structure first and only afterwards to fashion the vessels (Ex. 25:8-9; 31:7), Moses, when relaying the instructions to Betzalel, told him to make the Sanctuary’s vessels first, before constructing the Sanctuary proper. Betzalel retorted: ‘It is customary to first build a house before bringing into it its furnishings. Is that not what you heard from God?’ Moses replied, ‘You are indeed a Betzalel, that is, one

who stands in the shadow (*b'tzel*) of God,' [over-hearing His instructions]; for that was, indeed, what God commanded me!'

So, given Betzalel's heaven-bestowed skills and unparalleled knowledge of how every detail of the Sanctuary was to be effected, why, then, was the setting up of the Sanctuary attributed to Moses and not properly credited to Betzalel?

In explanation, the Midrash quotes a relevant verse from the book of Kohelet (2:21): *Kiy yesh adam she'amalo bechochmah* - 'There is a man whose toil is invested with wisdom.' This, says the Midrash, refers to Betzalel. However, the continuation of the verse: *Ul'adam shelo amal boh yitnennu chelko* - 'But to the one who has not toiled he gives the credit' – refers to Moses, who did nothing for the Sanctuary and yet, in our sidrah, receives all the kudos for it.

The same, unfair situation occurs again in relation to the Temple in Jerusalem which is always identified as the Temple of Solomon, whereas, in reality, it was King David who did all the *amal*, the toil, by way of preparing the detailed plans, in-gathering all the gold, silver and brass, transporting all the great stone building blocs, and even selecting the precious gems for the High Priest's breastplate. It was David, therefore, who enabled his son, Solomon, to proceed immediately to its construction. Yet his pioneering contribution was subordinated to that of his son, Solomon, after whom the Temple is named.

It is little different in life. Some artists are catapulted to fame and riches on the basis of what are generally perceived as mediocre works of modern art, while other, truly great and gifted,

artists, live out their lives in comparative obscurity and only gain recognition after they have died. Similarly, there are many wealthy people who donate large sums of money to political parties or the arts, and who are rewarded with national honours (a practice, thankfully, now widely condemned), while other sincerely dedicated volunteers, who give their lives to charitable, welfare or educational causes, are overlooked. In academic life also, when scientific or medical papers are published in journals it is generally the Professor's name that appears as the prime author of the research, when, in reality, it is more often their senior staff and researchers who have done all the work.

But publicity is superficial and transient, and Betzalel did not mind for one moment that Moses was the one to receive the ultimate honour of being associated with the establishment of the Sanctuary. Betzalel had played his God-given part, and took enormous pride in the fact that God had employed his artistic and creative skills for such a sacred enterprise. He accepted that he was but the agent of God, and that Moses was the one who possessed the authentic *ruach ha-kodesh*, the divine spirit, the one to whom responsibility for this sacred endeavour was primarily entrusted. In the same way, King David did not mind that he had to take a back seat, and that, although he had done all the planning and groundwork for the Temple, it was his son, Solomon, who was God's choice to live to dedicate it, and that it would be Solomon's name that would be forever associated with that great spiritual enterprise.

We are all part of that collective national and religious endeavour. We are all responsible for each other. We all have a part to play: some in leadership roles, others as vital fieldworkers. And if it is only the names of the leaders that are included in the roll of honour – so be it! In

the words of the Mishnah: *Echad ha-marbeh v'echad ha-mam'it, ubilvad sheyechavein et libbo l'avinu shebashamayim.* 'It matters not whether one achieves much or little, provided that he directs his heart to our Father in Heaven' (Mish. *Men*. 13:11). He knows how hard we have worked and how sincerely dedicated we are. In His book, the names of the field workers may even precede those of the leaders!

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Jeffrey