

This enigmatic energy of the artist is the subject of an important comment by Ramban:

"And they came, everyone whose heart exalted him . . ." (35:32) This is said about the wise ones who did the work, for we do not find this phrase *mevot*, "the exaltation of the heart," about those who brought donations; rather, the expression, *madat*, "their heart moved them," is used. The reason for using the expression "whose heart exalted him" is that they undertook to do the work, although there was no one among them who had learned these crafts from a teacher, or had trained his hands in any way to do them. Rather, a person who felt in his nature that he knew how to practice such skills, "[whose] heart was lifted up in the ways of God" (2 Chr 17:6), would come before Moses and say: I will do all that my lord describes . . . So the text says that there came before Moses "everyone whose heart exalted him" to undertake the work, and "everyone whose spirit moved him" brought the offering.²⁹

Those whose hearts "exalted" them or "booyed them up" are those who have never learned a craft, yet who know that their hands, untrained, can consummate the work. This sense of inspiration,³⁰ of unaccountable courage, is the experience of all the craftsmen, in Ramban's reading. Gradually they sense an inner response to Moses' words, to the mere hint of names for skills that they have never practiced.

The wonder of this ability to "take a hint" becomes central to Ramban's understanding of the genius of Bezalel:

"See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur . . ." (31:2) God said to Moses, "See, I have called by name . . ." and Moses said to Israel, "See, God has called by name . . ." (35:30) The reason for this is that Israel in Egypt had been crushed under the work in mortar and in brick, and had acquired no knowledge of how to work with silver and gold, and the cutting of precious stones; they had never even seen them. It was thus a wonder that there was to be found amongst them such a great, wise-hearted man who knew how to work with silver and gold, and in cutting of stones, and in carving of wood, a craftsman, an embroiderer, and a weaver. For even among those who study from ex-

peris, you cannot find one who is proficient in all these crafts. And even those who know them and are skilled in practicing them, once their hands are continually at work in line and mud, lose the ability to do delicate and fine art-work.

Moreover, Bezalel was a great sage in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge,³¹ to understand the secret of the Mishkan and all its furnishings, why they were commanded and at what they hinted. Therefore, God said to Moses that when he saw this wonder he should know that "I have filled him with the spirit of God," to know all these things in order that he would make the Mishkan . . . The Rabbis also said: "Bezalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created."³²

They meant by this that the Mishkan alludes to the structure of heaven and earth, and he knew and understood its secret.³³

Ramban's analysis is, at base, historical. This is a people with no artistic tradition. The Egyptian slavery, the work with mortar and bricks, constitutes a kind of "anti-artistic" background; not only have they never worked with fine materials, they have never even seen them. In other words, they are a culturally even a sensorily deprived nation. The wonder (Ramban repeats the word *yelle*—"wonder") of a multifaceted genius like Bezalel, therefore, is twofold: without training, he is expert in all fields of craftsmanship; and he is blessed with "wisdom, understanding, and knowledge," to fathom the esoteric meanings in God's instructions for building a structure that is a key to the mysteries of heaven and earth.

Bezalel masters the technical and the philosophical or mystical dimensions of the artist's work. The word "See" expresses the prodigious nature of such an intuitive and profound knowledge. In language saturated with mystical residues, Ramban conveys the primordial, gratuitous energy that fills such an artist:

Contrasted with this enigmatic, polymorphous energy are the constructed forms of Egyptian brickwork. Not only do these constitute no cultural background for the artist, in their course, repetitive objectively, they impart that spark that is the wonder of Bezalel. Indeed, we notice that in the first part of Ramban's description, negatives abound: the people had not learned, had not seen, were not able. Against this background, Bezalel's gratuitous genius emerges with a childlike purity: in a sense, as Ramban himself goes on to suggest, he comes straight from Eden. One can hardly help, however, sensing in this marvelous birth a counterpart for the demonic

only that the artist works with fire; he too appears in the world unexplained, unaccountably potent, like the Galf.

Ramban ends by quoting a classic Talmudic account of Bezalzel's gift: "He knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created." In combining the elements of the Mishkan, Bezalzel is responding to hints from the cosmos. Intuitively, he grasps the "secrets" implicit in the work and, in Koenig's terms, "disoculates" combinatory matrices that were hitherto unexplained.

Ramban's claim for Bezalzel, then, goes far beyond the depiction of a craftsman. To be Bezalzel is to be the artist who works in fire: effectively, to be a mystic, a world-maker. Indeed, the Talmudic word for "combining," *tzuf*, carries the associations of "working-with-fire," "smith-work." Godlike, Bezalzel creates new worlds from elements never before fused.

BEZAZEL: IN THE SHADOW OF GOD

This notion of the artist is further played out in the commentary of Ha-amek Davar. He questions the unusual expression for the artist: *chachamim*, "the wise of heart, into whose heart God has given wisdom" (36:2). And he defines the gift as the spontaneous knowledge, as in a child, of which art form will prove congenial. The moment of inspired choice is an "exaltation of the heart," in relation to a specific kind of work. Ha-amek Davar describes a sort of Montessori or Pestalozzi educational environment, in which the child freely and truly chooses his own materials.

In this "romantic" reading, the commentator places great faith in the myth of the informed heart. "The heart has its reasons which reason cannot know" (Pascal). The courage to listen to the prompting of the heart is the gift of God. Following this inspired moment of choice, many years of hard work may be required to master the chosen craft. Unlike Ramban, Ha-amek Davar does not speak of a meticulous and instantaneous mastery; the worker is simply in the initial confidence of choice.

However, underlying the romantic element in these readings of the artist's work and providing a strong taproot to nurture them is a classic midrash that makes a still more startling claim:

"And Bezalzel, the son of Uri . . . made all that God had commanded Moses" (38:22) "All that Moses had commanded him," is not written.

here, but, all that God had commanded Moses—even in matters that his master had not told him, Bezalzel's opinion was attained with what Moses had been told on Sinai.³³ For Moses told Bezalzel to make the furnishings first and the Mishkan afterwards but Bezalzel said to him, "Surely, it is the way of the world first to build a house and then to place the household utensils in it" Moses replied, "So, indeed, did I hear from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He." Moses also said, "Bezalzel, you must have been in the shadow of God (*Be tzel-ef*), for absolutely no did God command me." And Bezalzel did make the Mishkan first and then he made the furnishings.³⁴

The artist's intuition fills the gap between the verse "Bezalzel made all that God had commanded Moses" and the unrealized "as Moses had commanded him." There are cases where Moses revised God's words and Bezalzel simply knew God's will and consummated it. The play on Bezalzel's name ("You must have been in the shadow of God . . .") expresses this unmediated knowledge that bypasses the deflections of the messenger.

In the shadow of God, Bezalzel becomes an archetype for primary, inspired knowledge. One might even say that he most purely fulfills God's project in creating the human being: "Let us make man in our image (*be-tzal-menal*) . . ." (Gen 1:26). To be the "image of God," the *tzalon*, perhaps involves a "shadowing" ability (*tzal*): a subtle, self-effacing sensibility that can pick up on hints, on intimations that are almost nonexistent. In a context in which blatant images of God emerge from fire, the midrash constructs Bezalzel as the subtle knower of secrets, filled with the spirit of God.

The formulaic phrase, "He made all that God had commanded Moses," is, of course, repeated many times, particularly in the context of the fashioning of the priestly garments. In a daring passage, Ha-amek Davar explores the implications of the midrashic reading.

"And Moses saw all the work and behold, they had done it as God had commanded Moses, so had the Israelites done all the work and Moses blessed them" (39:43). Moses found it marvelous that "they had done it as God had commanded Moses," because he had not had time to touch them all the detailed instructions as God had taught him, and yet Bezalzel, through his peculiar genius, had achieved perfect accuracy in his work. "In the shadow of God," he had intuited the precise forms of God's will.³⁵

Ha-amek Davar cites another source to suggest that "as God had commanded Moses" refers to the original command: "Let them make Me a sanc-

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