

## Artistic Inspiration

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Ancient Greek culture, in order to explain why certain individuals displayed extreme ability in the arts and sciences, posited that these individuals had been “possessed” by spirits called “muses.” Their names and areas of influence were supposed to be the following:

|          |              |             |                        |
|----------|--------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Calliope | Epic poetry  | Polyhymnia  | Sacred poetry          |
| Clio     | History      | Terpsichore | Choral dance and song  |
| Erato    | Love poetry  | Thalia      | Comedy                 |
| Euterpe  | Lyric poetry | Urania      | Astronomy <sup>1</sup> |

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muse>

It would appear that of all of the arts and sciences, those who could compose and/or play in a tuneful manner were considered to be especially affected by a muse, resulting in their gift of “music.” A “museum” reflects the concept that a place where the arts and sciences are on display is a “seat or repository of the muses.” Does such an approach suggest that when one is “musing” he is awaiting this type of inspiration to suffuse his being? The artist himself is sometimes self-conscious of the constructive effects of a “muse” upon his efforts, as is reflected in the opening prologue to Shakespeare’s Henry V:

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend  
The brightest heaven of invention,  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!  
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,  
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire  
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that have dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object: can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to reflect upon what is including in the list of talents and interests, and what is omitted. Literary muses are more in evidence than instrumental music ones. The plastic arts and mathematics are not represented at all, while history, which typically is considered neither art nor science, is listed. Such a list provides a window on Greek culture, its values and priorities.

O, pardon! since a crooked figure may  
Attest in little place a million;  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;  
Into a thousand parts divide on man,  
And make imaginary puissance;  
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history;  
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

-- <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/henryv/henryv.1.0.html>

The playwright realizes the incredible audacity necessary to assume that an audience will suspend its disbelief, and as a result of the lines that he writes and the actors' delivery of them, people will somehow be magically transported to a time and place that in reality has nothing to do with where they currently are. How can such a process when successfully achieved, not be influenced by outside spirits and mystical influence?

**LeHavdil**, a similar assumption, although clearly couched in terms consistent with Jewish belief, appears to underlie the manner in which Betzalel and the other Chachmei Leiv (the wise of heart) were able to construct the Mishkan, its vessels and furniture as well as the priestly garments for those who would perform the Divine Service within the Tabernacle's precincts. Their artistic inspiration is defined as a God-Given Attribute, in effect a type of prophecy:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> R. Adin Steinsaltz, in "Samson: The Prophet of Power" (Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book, Basic Books, NY, 1984, pp. 113-4) posits that prophecy can take on different forms:

Samson was not a hero because of his greater muscular strength; in fact, he was always surprising the people around him, the Philistines, the women and so on. He does not seem to have been an exceptionally big or impressively muscular man. His strength derived from something within him that functioned on a different level. In other words, he was a channel of Divine Manifestation, even if in a manner unique and unfamiliar to us. And because he was a genuine prophet, the few prayers he uttered were answered at once...The point is that his requests were not concerned with the future of the nation, nor did he ask for wisdom for himself or a holy temple for the people. He asked for strength because he was that kind of prophet. And he was a true prophet in that he was a vehicle of Divine Might.

Shemot 28:3

And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I (HaShem) have Filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to sanctify him, that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office.

Ibid. 31:3-6

And I have Filled him (Betzalel) with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise skilful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, behold, I have Appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have Put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee.

Ibid. 35:30-36:2

And He hath Filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. And to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of skillful workmanship. And He hath Put in his heart that he may teach,<sup>3</sup> both he, and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath He Filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of workmanship, of the craftsman, and of the skillful workman, and of the weaver in colours, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any workmanship, and of those that devise skillful works. And Bezalel and Oholiab shall work, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the LORD hath Put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all the work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD hath commanded.' And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had Put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.

However, the Tora text points out that while these individuals had special Divine Spirit invested within them from Above, they nevertheless had to be qualified in the first place to apparently be able to be positively affected by this Heavenly Artistic inspiration:

Shemot 28:3

And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise-hearted, whom I have Filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to sanctify him, that he may minister unto Me in the priest's office.

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So by extension, Betzalel and his colleagues were vehicles of Divine Beauty!

<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of teaching among the various abilities that HaShem Gave to these individuals emphasizes that this activity does not only involve "science", i.e, knowledge of subject matter, classroom management, understanding of student psychology, etc., but also "art", an instinctive sense of the best way to communicate complex ideas and skills to those who are as yet uninitiated in these areas of learning.

Ibid. 31:6

And I, behold, I have Appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have Put wisdom, that they may make all that I have Commanded thee:

Ibid. 36:1

And Bezalel and Oholiab shall work, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the LORD hath Put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all the work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD hath Commanded.'

On the one hand, the assertion that Wisdom will be Imparted only to the already wise, is explained by NeTzIV (Shemot 31:6) as paralleling the requirements for individuals to obtain Rabbinic ordination (Sanhedrin 5a, Horiyot 2b), i.e., they have to be both “Gamir” (having learned from others) as well as “Savir” (able to derive conclusions that might not have been already arrived at by others). Consequently, the wisdom that already has to be extent in the builders of the Mishkan is what an individual has previously learned from others. Only once there is a solid basis of knowledge, can it be augmented and inspired to reach truly heroic heights.

Turning to the description of the specific prerequisite state-of-mind that the individual had to possess to receive extra Divine Inspiration, “Chochmat Lev” (wisdom of heart) is a strange term, practically an oxymoron, in the sense that usually intellect and cognition is not associated with the heart, but rather the mind. Consequently, commentators, offer insights to try to explain the particular interaction between emotion and wisdom that “Chochmat Lev” might connote and why such a synergy is particularly necessary in order to construct the Mishkan. NeTzIV on 28:3 suggests that the contribution of the heart to wisdom is the perspective of “Yirat HaShem” (the fear of God). His perspective calls to mind the statement of R. Elazar ben Azaria in Avot 3:17, “...Im Ein Chachma, Ein Yira; Im Ein Yira Ein Chachma” (if there is no wisdom, there cannot be fear [of Heaven]; if there is no fear, there cannot be wisdom). Similarly, Hillel is quoted in Avot 2:5 as stating, “Ein Boor Yereh Chet VeLo Am HaAretz Chasid...” (no ignoramus will fear sin and no unlettered person can be a pious individual). Apparently a moral component needs to inform one’s knowledge, even as a significant level of sophistication will be necessary if a person is to be fully morally competent. Especially in light of the purpose of the work of the Mishkan’s artisans, i.e., to create a physical platform dedicated to the Divine Spirit, if they were nothing more than craftsmen, they would not be able to create a worthy structure dedicated to such an exalted, spiritual purpose.

A different approach to “Chochmat Lev” is offered by R. Elozar Schach<sup>4</sup> who cites Rabbeinu Yona’s comment on Avot 4:1—“Ben Zoma says: Who is a wise man? He who learns from every person.”

The scholars of the nations of the world have said that if someone does not love wisdom, he is not a wiseman, but a fool. One who loves wisdom and has a constant

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<sup>4</sup>Tallelei Orot, ed. R. Yissachar Dov Rubin, on Shemot 35:10.

desire to acquire more, this is who is considered a wiseman. For this reason the Mishna states that the latter individual is ready to learn from anyone, even someone who only knows a single thing, because he constantly desires to expand his knowledge...

Consequently, suggests R. Schach, the emotional component of the “Chochmai Lev” is their quest to always learn more. Perhaps such an attitude was particularly appropriate for the fashioners of the Mishkan since HaShem, Whose Presence would eventually Dwell within this structure, is ultimately unknowable by human beings. Only a lifelong quest to perfect one’s knowledge of the Divine, with the full realization that such perfection is by definition impossible to achieve, will qualify an individual to receive precisely that measure of knowledge that he needs to work on the Mishkan.

A final distinguishing characteristic for those involved with the construction of the Tabernacle appears in Shemot 36:2:

And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.

With regard to this quality, NeTzIV states, “he has the confidence that he will succeed in this activity and therefore decides to volunteer to carry out this particular task.” It is unclear whether the kind of self-assuredness that encourages individuals to try to accomplish things that they have never tried before is the result of a particular inherited personality trait or whether it was inculcated and encouraged by the upbringing one received during his formative years. In a recent article in an education journal,<sup>5</sup> Robert Marzano describes the research that has demonstrated that the positive relationship that a student thinks that he has with his teacher profoundly affects his performance in his school work. It therefore stands to reason, based upon this phrase in Shemot 36, teachers, parents and anyone else who has prolonged and steady contact with young people should take to heart how they might encourage the next generation of people who have the confidence to take risks and hopefully maximally succeed.

In the final analysis, the construction of the Mishkan involved all sorts of miraculous events and behavior. Yet contemporary lessons abundantly present themselves: 1) truly extraordinary achievement will involve Siyata D’Shemaya (the Assistance of Heaven); 2) even the most gifted individual will benefit if he acquaints himself with thinking of the past on the subject at hand; 3) great skill and wide knowledge must be applied within a framework of justice and morality; 4) if a person is talented, but disinterested in that talent and its possible development, chances of success radically diminish; and 5) the only way that someone can investigate whether he has what it takes to make great inroads and contributions, they need to have the courage and self-confidence to try. Give us some “Chachmai Lev” and we can hopefully make the world a much better place.

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<sup>5</sup> Educational Leadership, 68:6, March 2011, pp. 82-3.