



March 9, 2024



With  
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Parshas Vayakhel

29th of Adar 1 5784

## The Genesis of Spiritual Ability

The Mishkan was an extraordinarily beautiful and magnificent building built from phenomenally delicate and rare materials. How did the Jews in the desert learn the complex skills required in making the Mishkan? The Mishkan wasn't exactly a log cabin. It was an extremely intricate and sophisticated building requiring great knowledge and experience in a vast array of skills. Where did the Jews, who for decades prior were slaves in Egypt, master skills such as wood carving, gem cutting as well as complex sewing and weaving, which would normally take people years of training and diligent effort to master?

I once attended a Ner L'Elef melave malkah. It was a night of workshops and inspiration geared to individuals planning on becoming community leaders, teachers, executives, rabbis, etc. The very first idea that was discussed came from Rav Malkiel Kotler, the Rosh Yeshiva of Beth Medrash Govoha. He asked the following question: The Torah expends precious ink telling the story of Yaakov coming to a well that was covered by a large stone, blocking access from the local shepherds hoping to draw water. The Torah describes in vivid detail how Yaakov mustered up the strength to singlehandedly throw off the rock, performing a feat of strength that normally required an entire group of men to accomplish. "What is the Torah trying to tell us with this story?" asked Reb Malkiel.

He explained by pointing out a fundamental difference between the secular, physical world and the spiritual world. In the secular world, one only has responsibilities if he has abilities. If one finds himself on an airplane and there is someone in the midst of having a heart attack, those who know nothing about emergency medicine just sit there. But those that do, have a sort of unspoken responsibility to get up and help the guy.

This is not the case in the spiritual world. In the spiritual world, **ability does not lead to responsibility, rather responsibility leads to ability**. Thrusting responsibilities on oneself will grant one the spiritual and physical abilities to carry them out.

Yaakov is called by the Torah an "Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim." He sat in his tent and learned. He did not work out. He did not play football. Out of the group of men that day standing around the well, he was probably the least fit to lift the rock by himself. Yet, he was equipped with one attribute that the others were not. He knew how to thrust upon himself responsibilities, knowing full well that, if sincere, it would bring abilities. Yaakov knew that a Jew doesn't look at

a mountain and say, "I can't climb it." A Jew looks up at a mountain and says, "I **must** climb it." And then he can. Hashem grants him the ability.<sup>1</sup>

The Ramban explains that when these men heard the intricacies of the Mishkan, they didn't tell themselves they couldn't. They told themselves they must. Their burning desire in their hearts to contribute actually gave them the ability to do so. The Torah referred to those people as *Nesa'o Libo*. They were not any more talented than the others. They were not the great-grandchildren of masters of trade. They were people with hearts on fire, ready to serve Hashem. Ready to shoulder the responsibility. Ready to step up to the plate. Their instinctive reaction was not, "I can't." It was, "I must."

Reb Malkiel continued that when a rabbi or teacher or Rosh Yeshiva or executive or community leader sets forth on his mission, he should go with the attitude of, "I must and therefore I can." I must do, and therefore Hashem will give me the ability to do.

How inspiring for us. How often do we not take upon ourselves that speech, that shiur, that class, that chessed, that hosting opportunity, or that shivah call, rationalizing to ourselves that we just can't? "We don't have the right personality," we tell ourselves. "It's not my skillset," we let ourselves say. These Mishkan builders should inspire us to think differently. They should transform us from an "I can't" person to one who says, "I must."

### **The King of the Jungle**

The lion is referred to as the king of the jungle. Ever wonder why? The lion isn't the fastest animal; a cheetah is far faster. The lion isn't the strongest animal; an elephant is far stronger. A lion isn't the fiercest animal; a hyena is far fiercer. The lion isn't the deadliest animal; a Komodo dragon is far deadlier. What, then, is it about the lion that makes it the king of the jungle?

There is one trait that makes a lion stand out. There is one trait that the lion possesses that other animals do not. The lion is one hundred percent fearless. A lion will stand at the edge of a plateau and see its cub that fell below. It will gauge the height and see that it is too deep for it to jump, and do you know what it will do? It will jump anyway! A lion will see food on the top of a mountain and will determine that the mountain is too high to climb; do you know what it will do? It will climb anyway! A lion will see its mate struggling in a raging river, with water too powerful to swim in. What will it do? It will swim anyway! A lion will see a predator lurking, determine that it is too strong to fight, and what will it do? It will fight anyway!

The word Jew is a derivative of the word Judah, or Yehuda. Yehuda was the father of the kings of Judaism. In the Torah he was also referred to as a lion. We carry his name because we carry his lion spirit. We carry the ability to be fearless, to negate preconceived notions about our abilities, to stare fear in the eye and beat it. We have the ability to thrust on our backs responsibilities that did not seem possible. We are called Jews, for we are descendants of spiritual lions. If we remember our namesake, we, too, can join their roar.

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<sup>1</sup> Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz points out that this idea is expressed explicitly in Tefillas Geshem – the special prayer for rain we say every Succos. We beseech Hashem in the merit of our forefathers to bring us rain. When we turn to the merit of Yaakov we say "*Zechor tuan maklo*" – remember the one (Yaakov) who carried his staff ... "*Yichad lev*" – he dedicated his heart and rolled a stone off the mouth of a well. Because he dedicated his heart, he was able to move the stone.