In this week’s parsha, Moses is given the instructions for the priestly garments. He is told to speak to all who are חַכְמֵי־לֵב, wise of heart, to make Aaron’s priestly uniform. This term is used in this parsha and the next, Ki Tissa, to refer to those skilled artisans who will help construct what’s needed for the tabernacle and its service. It is often translated just as skilled.

Rambam, in Guide for the Perplexed, gives a broad definition of the word chochmah, which we often translate as wisdom. He writes that it refers to four different things. One is knowledge of those truths that lead to knowledge of G-d, which I think for Rambam meant the rational intellect or even philosophy. The second is knowledge of any craftmanship. The third is the acquisition of moral principles. The fourth implies cunning and subtlety, even in the negative sense. A wise person thus has either high intellectual capabilities, good moral principles, artistic ability, or cunningness. And the root of all of that is a basic cleverness or ability to learn that depending how it is applied can manifest in intellectual, moral, artistic, or even in negative terms.

Malbim, a 19th century Torah commentator in Europe, makes a distinction between one who is wise and one who is wise of heart. Someone who is wise still has to battle his evil impulse. This is the wisdom of Rambam, where the basic intellectual ability is there but how it’s used depends on the person. Malbim writes that one who is wise of heart has filled his soul with wisdom so that there is no room for the impulse for evil. That root cleverness is directed fully towards the positive, the higher.

Instructing all those wise of heart to make the priestly garments suggests that the artisans who make them must not only be skilled craftspeople but also good people, so focused on their craft that only the positive comes through it. What might it mean for each of us to fill our hearts with wisdom when we go about jobs and tasks? To focus on bringing the good out with our intellectual and creative abilities?