

Parshas Tetzaveh

The Essence of Moshe

נדפס לזכות חיים מרדכי בן הרב שמואל לייב מרקל לרגל הכנסתו בביתו של אברהם אבינו.

Though Parshas Tetzaveh alludes to Moshe multiple times, it makes no mention of Moshe, by name. This Sicha reveals the deeper relevance of this that is expressive of Moshe’s essential character.

When reading *Parshas Tetzaveh* one will notice, that although most Torah portions are replete with mentions of Moshe, in this week his name is absent.

The commentators explain that this is not coincidental, but rather there is a specific reason for this fact.

Text 1

Moshe is not mentioned in this portion, which is not the case for the entire *Chumash* (Pentateuch); for, from the moment of Moshe’s birth, there is no portion in which he is not mentioned (besides Mishna Torah [Devarim]). The reason is, because Moshe said, “erase me now from Your book, which You have written.” The curse of the wise, even if conditional, comes, and it was fulfilled in this (Torah portion).

Bal Haturim, Shemos 27:20

After the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe *Rabbeinu* prayed that G-d forgive them for their sin. Moshe placed himself on the line and beseeched G-d:¹ “And now, if You forgive their sin; but if not, erase me now from Your book, which You have written.” Moshe requested from the Almighty, that if He does not forgive the Israelites, he wished to be erased from the Torah.

Although G-d did indeed forgive the Jewish people’s sin, Moshe’s request that he be erased from the Torah was (partially) fulfilled in *Parshas Tetzaveh*. While Moshe demanded that he be taken out from the entirety of the Torah, his demand was somewhat realized, in that his name is absent in a single *parsha*.

Every detail in the Torah is precise. Being that it was specifically in this *parsha* that the request was fulfilled, it is understood that there is some correlation between the content of *Parshas Tetzaveh* and Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* wish to be erased from the Torah.

[This is understood all the more when considering that Moshe’s request that he be erased from the Torah was stated in *Parshas Ki Sisa*, which comes *after* the present Torah portion.]

This therefore requires further elucidation: What connection is there between Moshe’s plea that he be removed from the Torah and the concepts explained here in *Parshas Tetzaveh*?

Parshas Tetzaveh deals with the commandments concerning the kindling of the Menorah, the making of the priestly clothing, the preparation of Aharon and his sons for the priesthood, and the making of the alter for incense. What do any of these directives have in common with the idea of Moshe being absent from the Torah?

¹ Shemos 32:32.

Not mentioned

Furthermore, the following point demands clarification as well: the intent of Moshe not being present in this *parsha* is not that he is not *spoken of*, but that he is not mentioned by name. Moshe is indeed referred to in *Parshas Tetzaveh* numerous times.

The very name of the portion, which expresses the intent of its entire content, is “(*V’ata*) Tetzaveh,” meaning, “And you shall command.”

This opening statement is referring to G-d’s instruction to Moshe that he command the Israelites regarding the oil for the Menorah.

Not only does the opening word “*V’ata*” (and you) refer to Moshe, but when the Torah uses the word “you” rather than referring to Moshe’s name, it refers to Moshe on an essential level.

When one refers to an individual as he is relating to the person’s very essence, he uses the term “you” and not their given name—as the expression “you” represents the person as they are on a level which *transcends* their name.

The concept of a name is that it serves as an identifying term for *others*. A name enables another person to refer to the individual.

The individual themselves however, does not need any title. This is so, being that the essence of an individual is considerably deeper than his connection to another, and it therefore entirely transcends his name.

Consequently, the manner in which Moshe was “erased” in this *parsha* (with the absence of his name, instead being referred to with the term “you”) is in a manner which brings about the revelation of his essential identity; Moshe’s true self, in the deepest of ways. Instead of Moshe’s identity being *erased* in this *parsha*, his very

identity shines forth in a way that transcends his name.

Erase me

This idea can be understood through first prefacing with the meaning of Moshe’s request, “erase me now from Your book, which You have written.”

Rashi explains that the book that Moshe was referring to was the Torah.

Text 2

From the entire Torah, so that they will not say about me that I was unworthy to beg mercy for them [the Israelites].

Rashi, Shemos 32:32

The Sages explain, that Moshe’s very identity was Torah. Therefore, when Moshe was asking that he be erased from Torah, he was requesting something that affected his very being.

Text 3

Three things Moshe gave his very self for, and they are called in his name, and these are them: Israel, Torah, and the laws. Israel, how much he pained himself over them and they are called on his name, as the verse states² “And His people remembered the days of old, [the days of] Moshe.” The Torah, as it states³ “Keep in remembrance the Torah of Moshe.” The laws, as it states⁴ “These are the ordinances that you shall place before them.”

Mechilta, Shemos 15:1

² Yeshaya 63:11.

³ Malachi 3:22.

⁴ Shemos 21:1.

Moshe gave his entire self for the Torah, to the point that it is referred to as “The Torah of Moshe.”

When Moshe sacrificed himself to be removed from the Torah, it was in order that the Almighty would forgive those that sinned with the Golden Calf, as Moshe states in the beginning of his declaration to G-d, “And now, if You forgive their sin; but if not...”

Moshe was prepared to relinquish his entire identity for individuals who worshipped the Golden Calf—a transgression so severe, that all later sins and their punishments are linked to it!

The verse says,⁵ “But on the day I make an accounting [of sins upon them], I will bring their sin to account against them.” The verse is explained to mean, that any future retribution includes within it some punishment for the sin of the Golden calf as well.⁶

This is surprising: Why did Moshe forgo his entire identity of the Torah for those that sinned with the Golden Calf; for those individuals whose actions were the very opposite of the prohibition not to have false G-ds and who separated themselves from the Torah?

Additionally, the connection between Moshe’s request to be removed from the Torah and the sin of the Golden Calf must be understood. Why would Moshe specifically propose *this* request in order to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf?

It must be that there is a correlation between being omitted from the Torah and bringing atonement for this particular transgression.

Rashi explained, that Moshe’s requested that he be erased from the Torah was in order to prevent future generation from accusing Moshe - “so that they will not say about me that I was unworthy to beg mercy for them.” According to

Rashi, being erased from the Torah did not directly assist the Israelites, but ensured that “they will not say” anything negative concerning him.

Nonetheless, this explanation is not clear. It appears from the simple reading of the verse, that Moshe’s entire request to G-d was to atone for the *Jewish people*, and was not a concern for what would be said about himself or regarding how *he* would be affected personally. Rashi maintains however, that this was not a request that helped the Israelites, but it rather was a request for Moshe.

More importantly, at a time when the entire future of the Jewish people was hanging in the balance, after this tremendous transgression in which G-d wished to destroy his people, how can it be that Moshe, being the dedicated leader he was, would primarily be concerned of something so petty as what would be said about him in future generations?!

One with his people

This question can be clarified through understanding the following fundamental concept:

Moshe’s identity was completely one with the Jewish people. Moshe and the Jewish people were united to the extent that the two were inseparable. While Moshe’s identity was indeed one with the Torah, he was even more united with the Jewish people.

This is expressed in the following statement made by Rashi:

Text 4

Moshe is Israel, and Israel is Moshe, to teach you that the leader of the generation is equal to the

⁵ Shemos 32:34.

⁶ Rashi, *ibid.*

entire generation, because the leader is everything.

Rashi, Bamidbar 21:21

It is for this reason that Moshe was so drastically affected by the sin of the Golden Calf, although he was not present at the scene and was so distant from sin. Because he was one with the Jewish people, when they sinned he too was affected by their actions.

Text 5

And the Lord spoke unto Moshe, "Go down." What is meant by "Go down?" R. Eleazar said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: 'Moshe, descend from your greatness. Have I at all given to you greatness save for the sake of Israel? And now Israel have sinned; then why do I want you?' Straightway Moshe became powerless and he had no strength to speak."

Talmud, Berachos 32a

Seemingly, Moshe should not have been affected by the sin of the Israelites, as not only was he physically not there, but his spiritual level was such, that the concept of sinning was completely foreign to him. Since, however, his entire identity was *part* and *parcel* of the identity of his people, he was automatically affected by their sin.

Greater unity than Torah

This union that the Moshe had with his people was greater and deeper than Moshe's unity with the Torah (which, as explained above, represented his essential identity).

This is relatable the manner in which G-d too, shares His deepest bond with the Jewish people.

Although G-d is one with His Torah, his unity with the Jewish people is even greater.

G-d's unity with the Torah is expressed in the following Talmudic statement:

Text 6

"*Anochi* - I [am the Lord thy God, etc.]". [This word serves as an abbreviation for the words:] I (*ana*) Myself (*nafshi*) have written Myself into the Script (*kesavis yehavis*).

Talmud, Shabbos 105a

G-d has placed Himself into His Torah, and is one with it. However, notwithstanding this great union, the manner in which He is united with the Jewish people is considerably deeper.

Text 7

R' Huna and R' Yirmiyah said in the name of R' Shmuel bar R' Yitzchak: The thought of Israel preceded all. This may be compared to a king who married a matron and did not have a son from her. Once, the king was in the market, and he said, "Take this ink and quill to my son." All said, "He has no son, and yet he says, 'Take this ink and quill to my son'? Had he not seen that he would have a son from her, he would not have said, 'Take this ink and quill to my son.'" So, too, had G-d not seen that Israel would receive the Torah after 26 generations, He would not have written in the Torah, "Instruct the Children of Israel," "Speak to the Children of Israel."

Bereishis Rabba 1:4

Similar to the way that G-d is more united with the Jewish people than with His Torah, the

leaders of the generations as well, are united with the Jewish people in a way that transcends their unity with Torah.

Moshe's sacrifice

This is the explanation as to why Moshe said, "Erase me now from Your book, which You have written." He sacrificed his connection with the Torah due the greater unity that he had with the Jewish people.

Since his connection with the Jewish people was so deep, it was expressed in two ways:

- A) His sacrifice for the entirety of the Jewish people was more important than his sacrifice for the Torah.

This idea is similar to what is written concerning the Beis Yosef, R. Yosef Karo. It is said⁷ that he was destined to martyr himself to sanctify G-d's name, but because he was *punished*, he did not merit to do so.

Now, were he to have merited to sanctify G-d's name, and passed away at that time, he would not have not yet had the opportunity to compile the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, which seems like a greater accomplishment.

The truth is however, that this is not the case. For, no matter how great his accomplishment in Torah, it does not reach the greatness of dying for the sole reason of being a Jew—and expressing his unity with G-d.

- B) Once it is understood that Moshe was more deeply connected to another Jew than he was with the Torah itself, it is understood that he would sacrifice himself for *any* Jew—even one who had separated himself from the Torah. For,

since Moshe's bond with his fellow Jew transcended his connection with the Torah, it therefore was not affected by the individual's separation from the Torah (through transgression).

This concept is expressed in the following statement in the Talmud:

Text 8

Israel hath sinned. R. Abba b. Zavda said: "Even though [the people] have sinned, they are still [called] 'Israel'." R. Abba said: "Thus people say, 'A myrtle, though it stands among reeds, is still a myrtle, and it is so called.

Talmud, Sanhedrin 44a

This is what Moshe declared in his words, "And now, if You forgive their sin; but if not, erase me now from Your book, which You have written." Moshe was saying: if the sin of the Jewish people with the Golden Calf was so great, that the Torah cannot bear to forgive them (though G-d Himself would), than may I be erased from the Torah. If Torah cannot forgive them, let G-d Himself forgive them in a manner that transcends Torah.

Moshe was expressing this ultimate bond with the Jewish people, describing his connection as being above his union with the Torah. Being that his ultimate unity with the Jewish people stemmed from the fact that *G-d's* unity with the Jewish people is above the Torah, Moshe thereby brought this tremendous union to light, and thus effected the atonement for the Jewish people's transgression. (This unity with G-d, in turn, was then able to reunite them with the Torah once again.)

⁷ Magid Meisharim, *Parshas Tetzaveh*.

V'ata Tetzaveh

Accordingly, we can understand why it is specifically in *Parshas Tetzaveh* where this idea is expressed.

This great and ultimate unity of the Jewish people with Moshe, alluded to in Moshe's declaration to be erased from the Torah, is expressed in the first verse of the *parsha*: "And you shall command (*tetzaveh*) the children of Israel."

A deeper meaning to this instruction is that the essence of Moshe should connect all the Jewish people together, in order that they become one entity. The word "*tetzaveh*" in Hebrew, shares the same etymology as the word "*tzavsa*," meaning connection. Moshe was therefore instructed to *connect* all the Jewish people to each other, to form one entity.

In order for this to be done, Moshe needed to connect with the Jewish people in the way that he exists in his very essence. At the level of Moshe's "name," and the corresponding spiritual levels, he is one with the Torah. At this expression of Moshe's identity, the Jewish people are ordered according to their spiritual level. Hence, when Moshe is expressing himself through his name, he cannot unify all of the nation of Israel.

It is therefore specifically when Moshe's identity is expressed in the word, "*V'ata*," (and you) referring to his *essence*, when this unity of the Jewish people is possible.

When Moshe is revealed in his essence, in the way in which he himself unites with the all the Jewish people no matter their spiritual standing, he can then connect *all* the Jewish people to each other, even those who had sinned.

Kindling lights

This explanation sheds light as to why Moshe was specifically erased from *Parshas Tetzaveh* and the connection between revealing the very essence of Moshe and the content of the *parsha*. The beginning verse of "*V'ata tetzaveh*" continues with the directive to light the *Menorah* (Candelabra) in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). The verse states:

Text 9

And you shall command the children of Israel, and they shall take to you pure olive oil, crushed for lighting, to kindle the lamps continually.

Shemos 27:20

The idea of uniting the Jewish people is related to the kindling of the *Menorah*, which was performed by Aharon, the High Priest.

There is a basic question on the above verse; the verse states "and they shall take to you pure olive oil." The verse states that the oil for the *Menorah* be brought to Moshe.

This though needs clarification. Why was it necessary for Moshe to be the one who received the oil for the *Menorah*, if Aharon ultimately was the one to actually kindle the lights? Why could they not bring the oil directly to Aharon?

The reason was however that Aharon was only given the ability to "kindle" the souls of the Jewish people who, as lamps, are in a prepared state to be lit. He was only able to inspire those who were already illuminated with the lights of Torah and *mitzvos* (G-dly commandments).

Text 10

For a *mitzvah* is a candle, and the Torah is light and disciplining rebukes are the way of life.

Mishlei 6:23

Aharon on his own, could not inspire *all* of the Jewish people; only those who were already lamps. He was only able to raise those that were already partially inspired in their service of G-d.

Yet, through the Jewish people first bringing the oil to Moshe—who was able to unite *all* the Jewish people, and bring out the essence of their soul's existence—then, even those who were not illuminated with Torah and mitzvos beforehand, were able to be “lit” by Aharon.

The remainder of the *parsha*

According to the above, it is also understood how the concept of “*V'ata Tetzaveh*” is connected to the rest of the ideas of the Torah portion.

When the *parsha* discusses the preparation of Aharon and his sons for their service in the *Mishkan*, the Torah emphasizes that Moshe should be the one who prepare them for this role.

Text 11

And you bring near to yourself your brother Aharon, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel to serve Me [as priests]: Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu, Elazar, and Isamar, Aharon's sons. You shall make holy garments for your brother Aharon, for honor and glory.

Shemos 28:1-2

The reason for this is as follows:

Aharon expressed the concept of priesthood and holiness. As an extension of that role, the affect that he had was only upon those that served G-d. He was able to affect only those who had some connection to the *Mishkan* and to the *Menorah*. However, through Moshe being the one that consecrated Aharon and his sons as priests, he caused that their affect be felt on all of the Jewish people.

The Alter for incense

Following the preparation of Aharon and his sons for the priesthood, the Torah discusses the construction of the *Mizbeach* (Alter) for the *Kitores*, (Incense).

Text 12

You shall make an altar for bringing incense up in smoke; you shall make it out of acacia wood. It shall be one cubit long and one cubit wide, a square, and two cubits high; its horns shall be [one piece] with it. You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, its walls all around, and its horns; and you shall make for it a golden crown all around. You shall make two golden rings for it underneath its crown on its two corners, you shall make [them] on its two sides, so that it should serve as holders for poles with which to carry it. You shall make the poles out of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.

Shemos 30:1-5

Seemingly, the discussion of the construction of this Alter should have been in *Parshas Terumah* where the rest of the commandments concerning the construction of the *mishkan* are found, and not in this week's *parsha*.

The reason for its inclusion in *Parshas Tetzaveh* however, is because the incense too, expresses the unity of the Jewish people.

The Talmud brings out this idea in the following statement:

Text 13

Said R. Hana b. Bizna in the name of R. Chisda the pious: "A fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast; for behold the odor of galbanum is unpleasant and yet it was included among the spices for the incense."

Talmud, Krisus 6b

The incense, which required various types of spices, including the unpleasant odor of galbanum, represents the necessary inclusion of every type of Jew, no matter what level they stand on. Every Jew, no matter if he is a sinner or not, is part and parcel of the rest of the Jewish people.

The Lesson

From here we learn a tremendous lesson in our service of G-d. Moshe was willing to sacrifice what was most essential to him, the Torah, for another Jew—even one who had sinned.

This idea is, in truth, even deeper than the concept of "you shall love your neighbor as yourself⁸." For there, the stress is that one should love another "as yourself." Moshe,

however, loved another Jew even *more* than he loved himself as he sacrificed his identity of Torah for another Jew.

In a similar vein, Moshe requested from G-d, and thus gave the ability, that this quality of love for every Jew that he had, should be given to each and every one of us, in all generations. Thus, we too can care for another in a similar way.

This is the deeper meaning of how Rashi explained Moshe's condition with G-d, to erase him from the Torah—that "they will not say about me that I was unworthy to beg mercy for them [the Israelites]." For, were it not for Moshe's sacrifice, one would think that one does not need to give of himself in such a way, and the Jewish people would learn from this for generations to follow! Moshe's sacrifice however, taught us though that this is not the case.

This is the lesson to be learned: It is not enough to love every Jew as you love yourself, it is demanded that we sacrifice our very identity for another Jew. This should be expressed in bringing each and every Jew closer to the Torah.

(Based on Likutei Sichos 21, Tetzaveh 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.

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⁸ Vayikra 19:18.