

Parshas Tetzaveh

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1. Taking Control of One's Life

The Torah states that oil was needed for the Menorah. **“Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed (*kasis*) olive oil for illumination...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that it was only the first droplet of oil extracted from the olive that qualified for kindling of the Menorah; and it only qualified when the extraction was done with the intent that it was for the sake of illumination.

Rabbeinu Bachya cites the Midrash, which says the letters that spell the word *kasis* allude to the length of time that each of the two Temples stood. The word *kasis* is spelled “kaf taf yud taf.” Numerically, the letters “kaf taf” are equivalent to 420, which is the length of time the Second Temple existed. “Yud taf,” which is numerically equivalent to 410, is the amount of time the First Temple was standing. Thus, when the Torah discusses the mitzvah of pressing (*kasis*) the olive for the sake of illumination, it is alluding to the duration of the First and Second *Batei Mikdosh*. The Menorah was kindled for a period of 830 years. The allusion to the period of kindling is communicated through the word *kasis*, which means, “crushed” connoting the destruction of the two Batei Mikdosh (Two Temples). Why does the Torah choose the extraction of the oil for the Menorah to communicate the length of time that the First and Second Temple existed?

The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra* tells us that the illumination of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. The Talmud tells us that if one wishes to gain wisdom when he prays, he should pray in a southerly direction because the Menorah in the Temple was situated on the southern wall.

The Gemara in *Tractate Yoma* says that the First Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins: adultery, murder, and idol worship. The Second Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred). The Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim* tells us that after the destruction of the First Bais HaMikdash, the question that was posed to G-d was, “What was the basis for the destruction of the Temple?” G-d responded, “It was because the Jewish people did not precede their Torah study with the blessing that one is obligated to recite before one studies.”

Ran (Rabbeinu Nissim – the last of the early commentators of the Talmud) explains that the non-recitation of the blessing of the Torah prior to study indicated that the Torah was not studied for its own sake as a mitzvah to fulfill the Will of Hashem, but rather for the sake of intellectualism. Had they recited the blessing before the study of Torah the Temple would have not been destroyed.

The Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin* states, “I have created the *yetzer hara* (*the evil inclination*) and I have created the Torah as its antidote.” The Talmud is telling us that regardless of one's ability or understanding of right and wrong, one cannot take control of his inclination (*yetzer hara*) without the study of Torah. It is only through Torah that one gains clarity and is able to internalize its concepts to overcome the evil inclination.

The Maharal of Prague explains that the study of Torah is only an antidote when one studies it with the intent to live one's life according to its teachings, which is for the sake of performing its mitzvos - not for the sake of its intellectualism. Although the Torah itself is G-d's Wisdom, *Chachmas Hashem*, if one only studies it for the sake of its intellectualism and not as a way of life (*ohr a chaim*) the Torah, will not be effective as an antidote.

With this, we can understand why the Torah alludes, through the word “*kasis*” (pressed/crushed)

regarding the illumination of the Menorah, to the time of the First and Second Temple. As long as the Jewish people study the Torah for its own sake (as a way of life), the Torah acts as an antidote against the *yetzer hara*. This is signified by the purity of the oil. Just as the oil used for the Menorah (symbolizing the Oral Law) only qualified when it was in its purest state, so too the Torah must be studied with the purest intent. The Torah only provides that illumination in this context. Without this illumination, it is only a question of time before the Temple would be destroyed. <![endif]>

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the symbolism of *shemen zayis zoch* (*pure olive oil*) is alluding to the purity of Torah. “*Kasis l’mohr*” (*crushed for illumination*), alludes to one’s willingness to sacrifice and deprive himself for the sake of Torah study. Only then does one achieve that special level of clarity. <![endif]>

Now we are able to understand the Gemara in Tractate *Yoma*, which states that the First Temple was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins. Since the Jewish people of that era did not study Torah for its own sake, it did not provide the clarity that was needed to act as an antidote to subdue their evil inclination. <![endif]>

2. The Pivotal Role of the Jewish People <![endif]>

The Torah states that the Menorah should be placed, “**In the Tent of the Meeting, outside the Curtain (*Paroches*) that is near the Testimonial-tablets.**” The Torah specifically states that the Menorah is to be located on the outside of the *Paroches*, which is the location of the Holy of Holies (the outer part of the covered Sanctuary). <![endif]>

The *Yalkut* states that the proper location for the Menorah should have been along side the Ark. However, it must be placed on the other side of the *Paroches* so that “you (the Jewish people) should not think that I (Hashem) need your light.” The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra* tells us that the light of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. Thus, it would have been logical for the Menorah to be along side the Ark, which is the repository of the Tablets and the Torah itself. <![endif]>

The *Yalkut* continues by telling us that when Moshe was told about the mitzvah of the kindling of the Menorah, he was taken aback and was astounded. He asked G-d, “**Since You are the light of the world why do You need our light?**” Hashem responded, “**To elevate you (Jewish people) in the eyes of the nations of the world. So that they should see that G-d needs your light.**” Firstly, this seems contradictory to the first *Yalkut* that we cited which stated explicitly that the Menorah was placed on the outside of the *Paroches* so that one should not think that G-d needs our light. Secondly, if in fact G-d does not need our light how could He say that the value of the kindling of the Menorah is to elevate us in the eyes of the world? This would be misleading and false. How do we understand this?

One of the tenets of Judaism is that there is a system of reward and punishment that is in effect. If one does something positive, he will be rewarded. If one fails and transgresses, he will be held culpable for his action and be punished. One could think that since this is part of the infrastructure of creation that G-d is bound to this principle. Therefore, within the context of existence, G-d is constrained by the laws that He set forth. Thus, according to this belief, it would be perceived that G-d’s blessing vis-à-vis existence and on an individual basis is predicated solely on the performance of the Jew. However, this is not the case. Hashem may choose to override the system of reward and punishment whenever He chooses to do so – even if one is undeserving. This is communicated clearly and succinctly through the location of the Menorah. If it would have been located in the Holy of Holies, which is the location of the Divine Presence (*Shechina*), one could have mistakenly thought that G-d is bound to the Jew’s behavior. However, since Hashem said that its location must be on the other side of the *Paroches*, it is clear that He is not bound to any degree. The overriding of the system of reward and punishment is no less the Will of G-d as the system itself. <![endif]>

Chazal tell us that existence was created only for the sake of the Jewish people and for the sake of the Torah, which are both called “*Reishis*” – the most special. The *Yalkut* in the Portion of *Vayeitzei* tells us that when Yaakov fled his parent’s home for Charan he slept on Mt. Moriah and placed twelve stones around his head. When he awoke, the twelve stones had been fused into one indicating that he would be the Patriarch to father the twelve tribes. Hashem took that stone and sunk it to the depths of the earth. It became the cornerstone of existence. The *Yalkut* continues to tell us that the reason there are twelve signs in the zodiac, twelve hours in the day and night, and twelve months in the year is to indicate that the Jew’s existence is reflected in every aspect of creation. This is what the *Yalkut* means by - **“To elevate the Jewish people in the eyes of the nations of the world so that they should see that G-d needs their light.”** <![endif]>

Although Hashem is not constrained or bound in any context, under normal circumstances G-d’s interaction with existence is based on the spiritual level of the Jewish people. If we succeed spiritually, the world receives blessing and is elevated. However, if we fail, blessing is withheld from existence. With the understanding of the Jewish people’s pivotal role in existence, they will be elevated in the eyes of the world.

3. The Secret to Redemption <![endif]>

The Torah states, “**Now you (Moshe) shall command the Children of Israel that they take for you (Moshe) pure, pressed olive oil (*shemen zayis zoch*) for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually.**” Rashi cites the Gemara that explains that *shemen zayis zoch* (pure pressed olive oil) means that only the first droplet of oil extracted from the olive qualifies for the kindling of the Menorah. Since the Torah states that the gift of the olive oil that was given by the Jewish people must be given to Moshe (as the fuel to be used for the kindling of the Menorah), there seems to be a connection between the oil and Moshe. <![endif]>

The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra* explains that the illumination of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law. Since Moshe was the conduit for the transmission of the Torah, we can understand the relationship between him and the oil of the Menorah. <![endif]>

The Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin* tells us that in the time of *Chizkeyahu HaMelech* (the King of Judah), the Assyrian King, *Sancherev*, approached Jerusalem with millions of troops to conquer the city and destroy the Temple. The Gemara tells us that it was “in the merit of the oil” that the camp of *Ashur (the Assyrians)* was miraculously obliterated in one night. What is the meaning that it was “in the merit of the oil” that the kingdom of Judah was not conquered? When *Chizkeyahu* ascended the throne and became king, he had taken a sword and a Torah scroll and placed them next to one another and he said to the people, “Either you live by the Torah or you will be pierced by the sword.” Because of this ultimatum, a standard of spirituality was established. Every Jewish child from Dan to Beersheba was proficient in all the laws pertaining to spiritual purity.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains in the name of the Zohar, that in the merit of the Patriarchs the Jewish people were redeemed from three of our exiles: the Babylonian exile in the merit of Avraham, the Persian (*Poras Maadai*) exile in the merit of Yitzchak, and the Greek exile in the merit of Yaakov. The Zohar continues that the redemption of the Jews from our current exile, the Edomite exile (Roman), will be in the merit of Moshe. Moshe Rabbeinu will not allow his merit to be utilized to bring about redemption until the Jewish people properly engage in Torah study and observance. The reason our exile is so lengthy and redemption has not yet taken place is because we have not yet achieved that special level of Torah study. <![endif]>

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that *shemen zayis* symbolizes the study of Torah and *zoch (pure)* alludes to the purity of that study. It must be for its own sake, *Torah l’smah*. Just as only the purest droplet of olive qualified for illumination of the Menorah, so too does one’s Torah study need to be pure in its intent. He continues to explain that the words “*kasis l’mohr*” (*crushed for illumination*), alludes to one’s willingness to sacrifice and deprive himself for the sake of Torah study. <![endif]>

The verse states, “*Ha kol kol Yaakov v’ha yadayim yidei Esav (the voice is the voice of Yaakov, the hands are the hands of Esav).*” Yitzhak our Patriarch had given this blessing to his son Yaakov. “The voice of Yaakov” is referring to Torah study and *tefillah* (Prayer), which is an expression of the “voice.” Chazal explain that as long as the Jewish people engage with their “voice,” as the “voice” of Yaakov, (symbolic of Torah study), then the hands will not be the hands of Esav. Meaning, that Esav will not have the ability to harm or diminish the Jewish people. However, if the Jews do not utilize their voice for Torah study then the hands will be the hands of Esav. Meaning we will fall victim to the oppression and cruelty of Esav. According to the Gemara in Tractate *Megillah*, if one tells you that Rome is standing in its glory and the same is true with Jerusalem, this cannot be so. It is not possible for Edom (the decedents of Esav) to simultaneously co-exist in a state of glory with the Jewish people because they are diametrically opposed. If one rises, the other one must fall. Thus, we can understand the words of the Zohar that the ultimate redemption will only come about in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu - when the Jews will be fully engaged in Torah study on a selfless level despite its difficulties. <![endif]>

If Torah is studied in its proper context, it will affect every aspect of existence and will bring about our redemption from our current exile. <![endif]>

4. The Impact of Spiritual Conscience

The Torah states regarding the priestly vestments of the Kohen (*bigdei kehuna*), “**You shall make vestments of sanctity for Aaron your brother, for glory and splendor.**”

The Torah tells us that Aaron and his sons were installed as the Kohanim (the Priests) to officiate on the eighth day. For the first seven days of the Mishkan, Moshe was the officiant of G-d. The Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* asks, “What did Moshe wear when he officiated in the Mishkan?” It answers that he wore a white tunic. It was unnecessary for Moshe to officiate in special vestments.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that since Moshe was qualified to officiate without special vestments it is an indication that they are not integral to the service of the Mishkan. If this is the case, then why was it a prerequisite for the service of Aaron and his sons? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the purpose of the vestments were for “honor and splendor” as it is stated in the verse. Since Aaron was the permanent officiant of G-d it was necessary for him to be identified as such by wearing the special holy vestments. Since Moshe was officiating only on a temporary basis, he was not required to wear the holy vestments.

The Gemara in Tractate *Zevachim* states regarding Kohanim in the context of their service in the Temple, “If the Kohen is wearing his priestly vestments, then he is considered a Kohen. However if he is not wearing his vestments he is not considered a Kohen at the time of the service.” As the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, if the *bigdei kehuna* were worn by the Kohen only as an indication that he was the officiant, then the service is valid. However if he is not identified the way he is meant to be, then his service is not accepted.

When Adam and Eve were created by G-d, they existed in the Garden of Eden in an unclothed state. The sense of shame had no relevance to mankind before Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, which was in violation of G-d’s Dictate. Before the sin, Adam was spiritualized to such a degree that his physicality radiated the holiness of his *neshama* (soul). Chazal tell us that initially the angels in heaven sang the praises of G-d to Adam confusing his radiance with that of G-d Himself. After he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge his radiance was diminished. His body assumed a level of earthiness and took on a physical status. It lost all of its spiritual characteristics, thus obscuring the radiance of his soul.

After Adam and Eve had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, they heard the voice of Hashem in the Garden and they hid themselves. G-d said to Adam, “Where are you?” Adam responded by saying “I heard the sound of You in the garden and I was afraid because I am naked. So I hid.” Rashbi cites Chazal who explain that “naked” is not referring to the nakedness of Adam’s body but rather

to the nakedness of the one mitzvah that he was given and failed. According to the literal understanding of the text, after eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he had a sense of shame because of his nakedness that did not exist before the sin. How do we understand this?

Before Adam ate of the Tree, his physicality was in-sync with the spirituality of his soul and therefore it had a semblance of the radiance of G-d Himself. However, after his transgression when his being diminished and took on a physical dimension, he experienced great shame. He understood what the capacity and quality of his physicality was meant to be originally and that it was no longer at this level because of his failing.

The Shalah HaKadosh explains regarding the priestly vestments, that since man's physicality was diminished because of the sin of Adam, there needs to be something to compensate for the spirituality that was lost. In essence, the body itself is the outer garment of the soul. Initially that outer garment (the body itself) was *bigdei Kodesh* (Holy Vestment), which was not the case any longer after Adam had eaten from the Tree. The priestly holy vestments prescribed by the Torah were meant to compensate for the body, which no longer functioned as the holy vestment. The Shalah HaKadosh explains that when the Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us that Moshe officiated in a white tunic, it is saying that he was not in need of an outer holy vestment because he himself was spiritualized to the point that his body was the vestment. Despite Aaron's special level of sanctity, he was in need of the holy vestments to compensate for what had been lost as a result of the sin of Adam.

If the Kohen wore the priestly garments then he was considered to be in a qualified state as a Kohen (as stated in the Gemara). Because he wore vestments of holiness, it compensated for the "glory and splendor" that was lost.

After the sin, Adam's sense of shame due to his nakedness emanated from his sense of his spirituality. Adam understood that he could no longer achieve that original state because his physicality was no longer in harmony with his spirituality. That spiritual conscience is the basis for every human being's shame regarding nakedness. If one loses his spiritual conscience, there is no longer a sense of shame vis-à-vis his nakedness. Rather than seeing immodesty as shameful, we view it as part of an attractive nature. When we see the modesty of our society continuously eroding to all-time lows, it is only a reflection of the generation's lack of spirituality.

5. Understanding the Atonement Process

The Torah tells us that the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) was adorned by eight vestments. The Midrash cites the Gemara which asks, "Why does the Torah juxtapose the portion which discusses the priestly vestments to the portion of offerings (*korbanos*)? To teach us that just as the offerings atone for sin so too do the holy vestments atone for sin." The Midrash explains that each vestment worn by the *Kohen Gadol* atoned for a specific sin. For example, the tunic (*kesones*) atoned for bloodshed; the linen pants worn by the Kohen atoned for forbidden sexual relations; the turban (*mitznefes*) atoned for haughtiness and arrogance, etc. How do we understand the role that the vestments worn by the Kohen Gadol played in the atonement process?

The Torah establishes a principle of agency that enables a person to commission an agent to act on his behalf and the agent is then recognized as the person himself. One could say that the Kohen Gadol was considered an agent of the Jewish people since he represented them in the atonement process. However, this would not be possible because penitence (*teshuvah*) and confession (*vidui*) cannot be delegated through an agent. The individual himself who needs atonement must experience them.

The Midrash asks, "Why is the passing of Aaron's sons juxtaposed to Yom Kippur? It is to teach us that just as Yom Kippur atones, so too does the passing of *tzaddikim* (devoutly righteous people) atone for the generation." However, since each person is responsible for correcting his own failing through *teshuvah*, how does the passing of the *tzaddik* atone for each individual's sins? How is this understood?

There are two types of Divine Judgment - one is judgment vis-à-vis the generation (the Klal Yisroel itself as a nation) and the other is vis-à-vis the individual. When the Midrash states that the passing of tzaddikim atones for the sins of the generation it means exactly as stated - the generation as a people and as community. Meaning if there is a basis for judgment against the Jewish people then the passing of the tzaddik will atone and stay that judgment. However, on an individual basis one is obliged to undergo the *teshuvah* process to bring about personal atonement.

Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (The Laws of Repentance) that in order for one to be atoned for sins, he must confess his sins (*vidui*); he must feel remorse for the past and be committed not to repeat the wrong. There are certain sins where *teshuvah* is not sufficient to bring about atonement. One is in need of bringing a sin offering, experiencing some degree of suffering, experiencing Yom Kippur itself, or even death.

The Torah tells us that on Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol, who was the only individual qualified to officiate, would confess the sins of entire Jewish people (*vidui*) on the goat that was sent to *Azazel* (and cast down the mountainside). This would atone for every Jew's transgression. How do we understand this?

The Torah tells us that each Jewish male above the age of twenty had to contribute a half-silver coin (*Machtzis HaShekel*) for the sake of purchasing communal offerings. Through the *Machtzis HaShekel* each Jew had a share in these offerings. Similarly, the holy vestments that were worn by the Kohen Gadol were also purchased with these communal funds. They were inherently holy and had no less sanctity than the offerings themselves. Thus, every Jew had an interest in the vestments of the High Priest.

As we see from Rambam, *teshuvah* alone is not always sufficient to bring about atonement. One needed to supplement it with an offering. The areas of transgression, which are atoned by the priestly vestments (as discussed in the Midrash) such as murder, adultery, corrupt judgment, etc. are types of sins that require more than *teshuvah* alone for atonement. There is no question that each individual Jew needed to do *teshuvah* for his own transgressions. However, the holy vestments of the high priest, which represented every member of the entire Jewish people complemented their *teshuvah* to bring about atonement.

The Gemara in Tractate *Zevachim* explains that the word "*kapara* – atonement" means to "wipe clean." The understanding of this word is derived from the same word used to identify the process of the Kohen "wiping clean" his hands from the blood of the offering. In order for one to have the complete atonement, it needed to be supplemented with the holy vestments worn by the Kohen Gadol.

6. Hashem is Always with Us

The Torah states, "...**Make for Me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell in your midst.**" The *Yalkut* explains this concept of the Mishkan with a parable. "It is analogous to a king who had a young daughter of whom he was very fond. When he walked with her in public locations (markets alleyways, etc.) he would continually speak to her and show his affection regardless of who was watching them. However, when his daughter reached puberty (adulthood) the king said, "It is not respectful to you, my special daughter, to openly communicate with you in public view. We will make a private setting where we will meet so that I can express my affection to you."

When the Jewish people were in Egypt, Hashem performed revealed miracles. When they left Egypt, the world witnessed Hashem splitting the Sea. At Sinai, Hashem communicated openly with the Jewish people - face to face. After the Sinai event, when the Jews were taken as His people and were established as His kingly, priestly, and holy people, He said, "It is no longer befitting for you that I should communicate with you in public view." Therefore, He commanded the Jewish people "...**Make for Me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell in your midst.**"

The Midrash is comparing the Jewish people in Egypt to the young child. Just as a child needs to

be continuously reassured and acknowledged by the father in order to understand his love and affection, so too, the Jewish people initially (before we became a People) needed Hashem to openly demonstrate His feelings through the various revealed miracles. Once Hashem established His relationship with His people at Sinai, it was no longer necessary for Him to relate to them openly.

The Midrash tells us that the level of revelation that was experienced by the maidservant at the splitting of the Sea was greater than that of Yechezkel the Prophet. Why was it necessary for G-d to reveal Himself to such a degree? The only reason for this level of revelation was to demonstrate to the Jewish people what He had done for them. The zenith of revelation was the Sinai event when G-d brought heaven to earth and He took the Jewish people as His nation.

After Sinai, when the relationship between G-d and His people was confirmed, He said to the Jewish people, "I will interact with you in a more private setting... ..**Make for Me a Sanctuary – so that I may dwell in your midst.**" Regardless of His concealment, one should not question G-d's Presence among us because He has proven to us that we are His people despite our failings. After the destruction of the First Temple, Hashem went into concealment. There were longer open miracles, prophecy had ended, and there were five things lacking in the Second Temple that were present in the First. The most significant was the lost presence of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) which had been constantly present during the period of the First Bais HaMikdash.

Despite the tragedies and holocausts that have befallen the Jewish people throughout the millennia, G-d is still with us. As G-d promised the Jewish people, "The Torah will never be forgotten by you," G-d is always in our midst and He will never abandon us. Regardless of our many difficulties to comprehend Hashem's ways, we believe that our relationship is eternal because He initially demonstrated His love and affection for us.