



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

Parashat Tetzave

“Here I Am” or “Not Me”

-Rabbi David Ansbacher-

Parashat Tetzave is unique in the noticeable fact of Moshe's absence from the parasha, as Moshe has been mentioned in every parasha since his birth in Parashat Shemot and will continue to be mentioned in every parasha through the book of Devarim. The commentators suggest several reasons for Moshe's absence. There are those who attribute Moshe's removal from the text to his proposal that Hashem remove his name from the Torah if Hashem decided to punish the whole of the nation and put them to death as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. According to this suggestion, even though Moshe's request was not granted, it was minimally accepted in this week's parasha. According to this opinion, a leader has personal liability for the mistakes of his flock, even if he has no direct connection to the sin itself.

Other commentators attribute Moshe's absence from the parasha to the fact that Parashat Tetzave is often read in close calendar proximity to 7 Adar, the date of Moshe's birth and death. However, the majority of commentators tend to prefer an alternative understanding, which is expressed in the following midrash: “All seven days at the bush, the Holy One, blessed be He, was trying to convince Moshe to go on His mission to Egypt. [After the seven days] the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, ‘Moshe, you say, ‘Send by the hand of whomever you will send’ – on your life, I will clip you by your wings.’ When did He punish him? ... All the seven days of consecration Moshe ministered in the office of Kohen Gadol, and he imagined it was his. On the seventh day He said to him: ‘It belongs not to you but to your brother Aharon.’”

According to this understanding, the fact that Moshe hesitated to the point of refusal to immediately submit to the mission with which he was charged, taking the Jews out of Egypt, is what caused him to lose his appointment as High Priest. Moshe was exceptional in his sense of justice, extraordinary in his sensitivity as a shepherd and was willing to approach the burning bush and to listen to the challenging call issued to him by Hashem. Ultimately, Moshe would go on to dedicate his life to the task of leading the Jewish people through the desert. However, his initial refusal, reticence and lack of immediate enthusiasm for the task at hand were not forgotten and prevented him from being anointed as the servant of Hashem and representative of the people in the Mishkan. Moshe's overbearing sense of humility and his feelings at the time, which found expression in the words “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?” were to his detriment in our parasha.

The surprise at Moshe's absence from the parasha is reminiscent of his similarly surprising absence from the Haggadah that we read on Pesach, which is fully devoted to the exodus from Egypt. The nonappearance of the figure that captained the entire process, stood fast before Pharaoh, brought the plagues down on Egypt, unified the Jewish people and led them out of Egypt is readily apparent on each and every page of the Haggadah. Rabbi Soloveitchik described Moshe's absence thusly: “Moshe's name was redacted from the pages of the Haggadah as if it had never existed. I remember that when I was a child I asked why Moshe was not mentioned in the Haggadah, and none of the answers I received from my father was sufficient. I simply burst



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into tears. In the end, in order to calm me down, my father found Moshe in the Haggadah: “and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant.” This served to somewhat calm me. However, I still felt that we had done Moshe an injustice. This would seem not only to be the feeling of a young, merciful and compassionate child, but also the feeling of the entire Jewish people. We all search for Moshe on Seder Night, but we are never able to find him.”

Leadership is judged in one's immediate answering of the call and full-fledged faith in the fulfilment of its ethos for the betterment of the whole – but, of no less importance, in the humility and modesty professed in the answer and the answerer's willingness to vacate the stage without leaving any personal trace or demand for any credit or memorial after completing the eternal task.

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