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Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Tetzaveh for your Shabbos Table

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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger lilui nishmos Esther Tehila bas R' Gavriel Pinchas & Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

The "Death" of Relinquishing Our Unique Role

The *Ba'al Ha'turim* at the beginning of Parshas Tetzaveh makes the famous observation that Moshe Rabbeinu's name does not appear in this *parsha* – making it the only *parsha* since Moshe's birth from which his name is omitted. The Vilna Gaon noted that this *parsha* is always read around the time of 7 Adar, the day of Moshe's *yahrtzeit*, and thus the omission of his name signifies his passing at this time of year.

The question remains, however, as to the connection between Parshas Tetzaveh and Moshe's *yahrtzeit*. Why would there be an allusion specifically in this *parsha* to Moshe's eventual passing?

Rav Soloveitchik offered a fascinating insight, explaining that this *parsha* tells about the designation of Aharon and his sons as the *kohanim*. Parshas Tetzaveh presents the guidelines for the *bigdei kehuna*, the special garments worn by the *kohanim*, and outlines the formal procedure whereby Aharon and his son were consecrated for their role. *Chazal* teach that Moshe Rabbeinu was to have assumed the position of *kohen*. When God appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and assigned him the mission to confront Pharaoh and demand that he release *Benei Yisrael*, Moshe initially refused. He argued with God, giving various reasons why he felt he could not accept this mission. Finally, the Torah writes, ויחר אף ה' במשה – God became angry with Moshe, and he said, הלאו אהרון אחיך הלווי, ידעתי כי דבר ידבר הוא – "Behold, your brother, Aharon the Levi, I know that he will assuredly speak" (Shemos 4:14). The Gemara (Zevachim 102a) explains this *pasuk* to mean that God, in His anger, punished Moshe, and named Aharon the *kohen gadol* instead of Moshe. Aharon is referred to here as הלווי because he was to have been the *levi*, with Moshe serving as *kohen*, but because Moshe repeatedly refused to accept the mission assigned to him, Moshe forfeited the role of *kohen* and became a *levi*, instead.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that this is the significance of the omission of Moshe's name from Parshas Tetzaveh, the

parsha that tells of his brother's appointment as *kohen gadol*. Moshe is "erased" from this *parsha* to allude that he was "erased" from the priesthood, which was to have been his, but was taken and given to Aharon.

This *parsha* is associated with 7 Adar, Rav Soloveitchik explained, because it, in a sense, marks the beginning of Moshe's "death." This *parsha* tells of the role that Moshe was to have played but did not, and, in this sense, this *parsha* is about Moshe's "death." When a person fails to fulfill the mission for which he was destined, this marks the beginning of his demise.

We all have a mission to accomplish, a role for which we were brought into this world. We wake up each morning and proclaim רבה אמונתך, that God believes in us, as evidenced by the very fact that we are here. And this is how we must approach every day of our lives – in pursuit of the fulfillment of our mission. If we run away from our mission and purpose, if we decide to sit back comfortably and let somebody else take on the project, sit on the committee, or assume the responsibility for a task that needs to get done, then this is the beginning of our "demise." We are betraying our purpose, the reason why we are here.

We are truly "alive" when we live with vigor, when we passionately and ambitiously pursue our unique mission for which Hashem brought us here.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

Pausing When Entering – and Exiting – the Shul

The *kohen gadol's* robe – the *me'il* – had a series of bells along the bottom, that rang as the *kohen gadol* walked. The Torah commands: ונשמע קולו בבואו אל הקודש ובצאתו ולא ימות – "His sound will be heard when he enters the sanctuary and when he departs, so he shall not die" (28:35).

The Ramban notes that it not customary for people of stature to have bells on their uniforms, that make noise as they walk about. The reason why the *kohen gadol* wore bells, the Ramban explains, is so that כאילו ברשות – he will come before the Almighty "with permission," so-to-speak. The ringing of the bells symbolized the *kohen gadol's*

requesting permission before entering the *Mikdash* to serve God. The Ramban cites in this context Ester's message to Mordechai explaining her reluctance to approach Achashveirosh and plead on behalf of the Jews (Ester 4:11):

כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך יודעים אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא המלך אשר לא יקרא – אחת דתו להמית, לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב וחיה.

Nobody was permitted to come before the king without first receiving permission. Similarly, the *kohen gadol* needed to request permission to come before God by ringing the bells on the bottom of his *me'il*.

The work *U'Isitcha Elyon* develops this point further. He comments that unlike human beings, who need to be informed before somebody comes into their home or into their room, Hashem does not need to be informed. He obviously knows who is coming and when. Seemingly, then, there is no reason for the *kohen gadol* to request permission, as though notifying God of his desire to enter the *Mikdash*. However, the *kohen gadol* needed to announce his entry not for God, but for himself. A person cannot just step into a place of sanctity without pausing and reflecting. The *kohen gadol* "rang" so that he would stop for a moment and recognize that he was now entering the sacred site.

This applies to our shuls and *batei midrash*, as well. We should not walk into a shul or *beis midrash* casually, on our phones, laughing with a friend, without pausing for a moment to reflect on what we are now doing, that we are about to speak to the Creator. We need to put our minds in the right place before running in and starting to *daven*.

The Torah says that the *kohen gadol's* bells would ring not only when he entered the *Mikdash*, but also when he exited the *Mikdash*. This might mean that before we leave shul or the *beis midrash*, too, we need to take a moment and think of how we will bring the experience with us wherever we go during the day. Our *davening* and learning must inform and inspire everything we do; therefore, we should not just run out, but first briefly pause and reflect.

Every one of our *tefilos* ends with *עלינו לשבח*. This prayer serves as the mission statement of Jewish life, a statement that we reaffirm before we leave shul. That mission statement is – לתקן עולם במלכות שדי – to uplift the world in accordance with Hashem's vision and plan.¹ Before we leave shul to tend to our affairs, we take a moment to reflect upon the goal of everything we do – to elevate the world and bring glory to the *Ribono shel olam*.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Hashem Wants to Hear From Us

Commenting on the *pasuk* – that the sounds of the *kohen gadol's* robe were heard as he

entered the *Mikdash* (28:35) – the *Ba'al Ha'turim* observes that the word *ונשמע* appears in only two other places in the entire *Tanach*. One is *Benei Yisrael's* famous proclamation, *נעשה ונשמע* ("We will do and we will hear" – Shemos 24:7).

The other is a *pasuk* in *Megilas Ester* (1:20) in which Achashveirosh's advisor tells him, *ונשמע פתגם המלך אשר יעשה בכל*, *מלכותו* – that the royal edict would be sounded throughout his vast empire. What might be the connection between these three *pesukim*?

Rav Shaul Alter *shlit"a* explained that a person might mistakenly think that the notion of *אל הקודש*, that God listens to those who approach Him, is reserved for the exceptionally righteous. Some people assume that they are too distant from Hashem, that they are too flawed, that they have strayed too far, for Hashem to have any interest in them. They feel they should not call out to Him because He does not want to hear them.

But the truth is that just as *אל הקודש*, *ונשמע קולו בבואו אל הקודש*, the *kohen gadol's* sound was heard in the *Mikdash*, similarly, *ונשמע*, *פתגם המלך...בכל מלכותו*. Tradition teaches that the word *המלך* in the *Megilla* alludes to Hashem. This *pasuk* indicates to us that the "King's" interest extends *בכל מלכותו*, throughout His "kingdom." No matter how far a person has wandered, no matter how badly he had stumbled and erred, he is still in Hashem's kingdom, and Hashem wants a relationship with him. Once our ancestors proclaimed *ונשמע*, their unconditional devotion to Hashem, they secured a position in His kingdom, guaranteeing that He will always listen to them. Anytime we wish to speak to Him, lean on Him, turn to Him for help, or to feel His embrace, He is there waiting for us.

I once met a fellow who had grown up in a *chassidische* family but then left religious observance entirely. He ended up getting in trouble with the law. The night before the verdict would be announced, he told me that he felt like praying, asking Hashem for a favorable outcome, but he couldn't do it.

"Why would He want to hear from me now?" he asked. "I haven't spoken to Him or have had anything to do with Him in many years. Why would He listen to me?"

I explained to him that one day, he will be a father, and he will see that there is nothing a child could do that would make his parents not want to hear from them. Even if a child leaves his parents and has no contact with them for years, when he eventually picks up the phone and calls, they would not hesitate to answer the call, and they would be overjoyed to hear from him. The same is true of Hashem. Ever since the pronouncement of *ונשמע*, there is nothing we can do that would make Hashem not want to hear from us. Wherever we are, *בכל מלכותו*, whatever condition we are in, *ונשמע קולו* – Hashem lovingly and compassionately hears our prayers.

¹ Notably, the expression *תיקון עולם*, which some Jewish groups today use to describe their idea of Judaism's purpose, never appears that way in our sources. The complete phrase is – לתקן עולם במלכות שדי – expressing our vision of a world that is perfected through the recognition of Hashem and a commitment to His will, as taught to us in the Torah.