



THE SECRET SAUCE OF A TZADDIK

Parshat Teztaveh often coincides with the holiday of Purim in some way (in a non-leap year), whether it is tied together with Shabbat Zachor (the Shabbat immediately before Purim), or, as is the case this year, it immediately follows the chag (holiday). As we may remember from our elementary school days, Moshe Rabbeinu's name is noticeably absent from Parshat Teztaveh, which also often coincides with his own Yahrzeit week.

To solve this incongruence, I would like to explore two important episodes of Moshe's life and hopefully gain a better understanding of what true righteousness is, how it applies to this



time of year, and what we can do with this information.

Let's begin with the episode of the cheit ha'egel (the golden calf). The Jewish people sinned terribly, and Moshe Rabbeinu wanted nothing

more than to seek forgiveness on their behalf. Famously, he asserted:

וְעַתָּה אִם תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם אֵין מְחַנֵּי נָא
מִסֵּפֶרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ.

Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the book which You have written.

Shemot 32:32

Here, Moshe Rabbeinu is giving G-d an ultimatum: If You don't forgive the Jewish people, erase me from your Torah, I want no part of it! It is clear from this episode that Moshe Rabbeinu was willing to sacrifice his own life for the Jewish people.

Now let's enter a later episode. The setting is the *midbar* (desert), and

Moshe Rabbeinu is told that his lifelong dream will never come to fruition; he can never enter the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of Israel. In typical *tzaddik* fashion, Moshe pleads with HaShem to overturn this decree. *Va'etchanan el Hashem be'ei hahimor* — and I begged Hashem at the time, saying ... (Deuteronomy 3:23). If you look carefully at this verse, you will notice the *aleph* in the word וְאַתְחַנֵּן. Moshe prayed to HaShem, singularly. In other words, Moshe prayed alone.

The same Moshe who was willing to give up his place in the Torah for the sake of the Jewish people had nobody come to his aid when

this exercise myself, I discovered that I am part of chats that pray for *cholim* (those suffering from illness), for *shidduchim* (marriage matches), and for fertility. I even sometimes see *segulot* (remedies) for *parnassah* (livelihood) on my WhatsApp chats, but there is one thing I realized that is notably absent: prayers for *tzaddikim*.

If a *tzaddik* falls under the category of a *choleh*, then I very likely will have a WhatsApp group dedicated to his *refuah*. But just *stam* (for no apparent purpose), a group dedicated to prayers for our *tzaddikim*? That, I have yet to witness. For the most part, though unfortunate, we hear about the

The same Moshe who was willing to give up his place in the Torah for the sake of the Jewish people had nobody come to his aid when it came time to daven for the one thing he wanted most in the world.

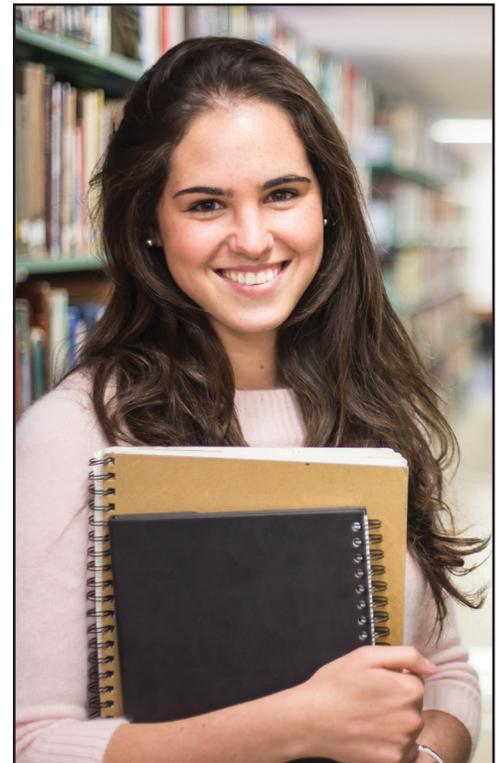
it came time to daven for the one thing he wanted most in the world. We would imagine that a person of Moshe's caliber would be joined in prayer by thousands, considering all he had done for the Jewish people. Perhaps this is why his name is omitted from *Parshat Tetzaveh*, because *tzaddikim*, the heroes of our people, are behind the scenes, often standing alone.

If you need further proof, I challenge you to look through your group chats on WhatsApp (if you are a WhatsApp user) and inspect the purpose of some of your communal groups. After performing

struggles and triumphs of our *tzaddikim* posthumously when their stories are transformed into biographies.

The same is true of Mordechai. Before the Purim story, Mordechai was a key player on the *Sanhedrin* (Tribunal of Judges). Upon involving himself in royal matters and getting himself mixed up in the politics of Shushan, he no longer was able to serve in the same capacity. In fact, the Megillah itself writes:

כִּי מֵרִדְכַי הִיְהוּדִי מִשְׁנֵה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ
וְגָדוֹל לַיְהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֶחָיו דָּרֵשׁ טוֹב
לְעִמּוֹ וְדָבָר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל יִרְעֵוֹ.



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For Mordechai the Jew ranked next to King Achashverosh and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular **with most of his brothers**; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

Esther 10:3

On this *passuk*, Rashi comments that the reason Mordechai was only popular among “most of his brothers” is to indicate that the Sanhedrin had started to separate itself from him because of his involvement in politics, and because they felt he wasn’t as invested in his Torah studies. Mordechai, like Moshe, held the burden of Klal Yisrael at his own expense.

Now we have a better understanding and appreciation for the burden that our *tzaddikim* carry. But the goal here is twofold: appreciating our *tzaddikim* and striving to become *tzaddikim*. Having discussed the former, let us address the latter: how to become a *tzaddik*.

Our fate might be determined by God, but we are given the power of choice, the power to choose righteousness. We are a conglomeration of the choices we make; and each time we choose righteousness, we bring ourselves closer to the “*tzaddik*” status. We know that in Esther 4:14, Mordechai utters these famous words in response to Esther’s refusal to go to Achashverosh:

כִּי אִם הִחַרְשׁ תִּחְרִישִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רִוּחַ
וְהִצְלָה יַעֲמוּד לְיִהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתְּ וּבֵית
אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם לָעַת כְּזֹאת הִנְעִתָּ
לְמַלְכוּת.

On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to

royal position for just such a crisis.

Esther was the *tzaddeket* that almost wasn’t. Had she not gone to Achashverosh after Mordechai’s plea, we may not have even known her name. So it behooves us to ask ourselves: what prevents us from making the right choice or living out the best version of ourselves? Amalek.

The first time we are introduced to Amalek, they have journeyed many miles just to “greet” the Jewish people after their exodus from Egypt. At this point, Bnei Yisrael is on a spiritual high. They literally just experienced the splitting of the Sea, and it’s almost as though nothing can bring them down from this incredible level of inspiration.

Enter Amalek. Amalek attacks at the most vulnerable moments in a person’s life. Though it may seem counterintuitive, we are most vulnerable during times of inspiration. Inspiration requires a subsequent call to action if we want to channel that inspiration into something tangible. Either we will harness the inspiring moments we are given for good, or we will become cynical about them. Amalek roots for cynicism.

We are told to both wipe out Amalek, and at the same time, to remember them. In order to resolve this tension, perhaps we must remember what Amalek did to us, and at the same time erase the Amalek inside of us — namely the part of us that is antithetical to the *tzaddik*, the part of us that would rather resort to cynicism than to making the difficult choices that will lead us toward righteousness.

Righteousness, as we have seen, is both something to be appreciated and something we strive to achieve.

Moshe's Hidden and Revealed Name

While Moshe’s name does not appear in Parashat Tetzaveh, the Vilna Gaon notes that there is a hidden reference to his name. The total number of verses in Tetzaveh is 101. The name Moshe is spelled משה. Those are the letters that we see when we write his name. In reality, if one spells out each letter, it is מ"ם ש"ן ה"א and the other letters are the hidden part of his name. The numeric value of the hidden part of his name — the letters that are not part of the actual spelling (the ם in מ"ם, the ן"י from ש"ן and the ך"א from ה"א) totals 101.

Kohelet Yitzchak to Tetzaveh

Moshe Rabbeinu, Esther Ha’Malka, and Mordechai HaTzadik have taught us that righteousness can be a lonely path, and it is a choice that must be consciously maintained. Perhaps we will take it upon ourselves to create WhatsApp groups that focus on our *tzaddikim*, or pray with more fervor when we reach the entreaty for the righteous in our daily Amidah (silent prayers). At the same time, let us strive to make choices that further us along the path of the righteous, harness inspiration for the good, and crush any cynicism that enters our minds. A *freilichen Purim*, one that is *tzaddik*-ful and Amalek-free.