

Tetzaveh

MEET YOUR INNER MOSES

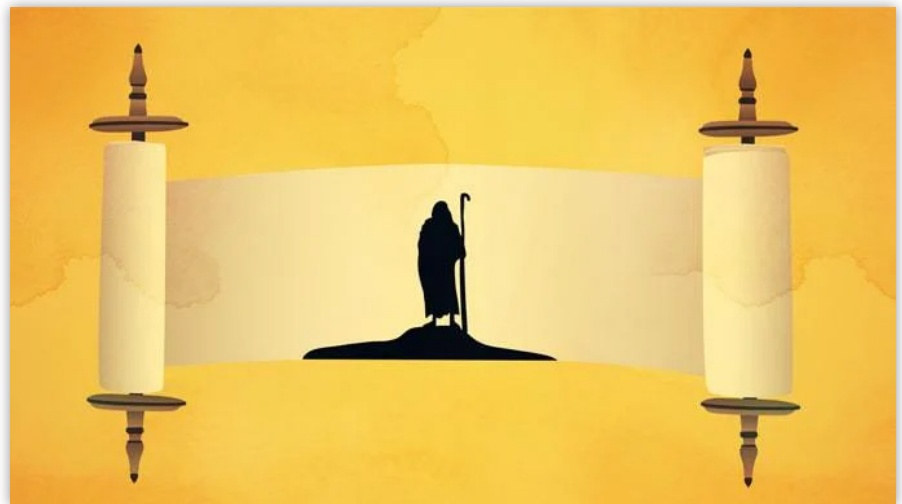
The parshah of Tetzaveh is always read in proximity to the 7th of Adar, which marks Moses' birthday as well as his *yahrtzeit*. The opening verse begins with the words, "And you shall command the children of Israel..." (*Exodus 27:1*) Although G-d is addressing Moses, he refers to him as "you" rather than by his name.

Interestingly, Moses' name is absent throughout this parshah—the only one from the time of his birth until the end of the Book of Numbers.

Why?

The answer lies in an examination of the story of the Golden Calf. While Moses was atop Mount Sinai, the people committed the terrible transgression of rejecting G-d and creating a calf-shaped statue which they then worshiped. When G-d informed Moses of the people's sin, instead of storming down the mountain and yelling, "I've had it with you people! I'm out of here! *Sayonara!*" Moses began to fiercely defend the people, passionately taking up their case.

"Listen, let Me destroy these people," suggested G-d. "They're no good. Let Me create a new



Credit: Sefira Lightstone, Chabad.org

nation out of you. Your descendants will be the new Jewish people."

Now, imagine if G-d appeared to a rabbi today and said, "Listen, I have come to the conclusion that all the Jewish people and all the congregations besides yours are wrong. You're the only one who knows what you're doing. I'm going to go with you only." Many rabbis would likely be thrilled!

But what did Moses do? He flatly rejected the proposition. He said, "G-d, I refuse to be part of this operation unless You forgive the people ... I'm so serious about this that if You do not forgive them, erase me from Your entire book, the book of Torah!"

When a *tzaddik*, a completely righteous person, makes a statement, it must be fulfilled, at least to some degree. So when Moses said, "Erase me from the Torah," even though it was a conditional demand, and even though G-d did, in fact, forgive the people, Moses' words had to be fulfilled. Thus his name is omitted from the parshah of Tetzaveh.

This fierce defense of the people is unique to the character of Moses. He was the unwavering leader, devoted beyond any possible expectation, way above the call of duty. Moses, the greatest prophet and teacher of all time, was also the best friend the Jewish people ever had.

Bridging Heaven & Earth

Moses' connection to the Torah is so profound that it is called "*Torat Moshe*" – "the teachings of Moses." (*Malachi 3:22*) Moses took the Torah from Heaven—from G-d who descended onto Mount Sinai—and gave it to us. (*Ethics of the Fathers 1:1*) He was the bridge from heaven to earth.

Following the Giving of the Torah, Moses spent 40 years teaching Torah—hence his title, "*Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses, our Teacher." The people of that generation were known as the "Generation of Knowledge." Moses was the greatest teacher who ever lived, and their knowledge of Torah was therefore exceptional. With all their needs taken care of by G-d in the desert, they did not have to go to work; rather, they spent their days studying Torah. And what was Moses doing? He was teaching them.



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Comparing Moses to his brother, Aaron, reveals their opposite roles: Aaron, the High Priest, elevated the offerings of the Jewish people, presenting them to G-d. Aaron helped the Jewish people with a connection to G-d that was instigated from below and directed to above; he uplifted them through the service in the Tabernacle.

Moses, on the other hand, helped the Jewish people establish a connection with G-d that went from above to below. He took the Torah from on high and brought it down to us.

From the Water

What does Moses mean? Surprisingly, it is of Egyptian origin.

When Princess Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter, discovered a basket floating on the Nile River, she opened and found Moses, from whom spiritual light emanated. Touched by compassion, she took him in and saved his life. Raising him as her own son, she named him Moses, saying, "For I drew him from the water." (*Exodus 2:10*)

Let's take a deep dive, so to speak, into the idea of Moses being "drawn from the water."

According to the teachings of Chassidism, which are based on Kabbalah, there are two worlds:

the covered world and the revealed world.

The ocean symbolizes the covered. The Talmud notes that everything on dry land also exists in the sea—plants, animals, an entire world. In the ocean, however, everything is hidden beneath the water. Since we cannot see it, it is called the "covered world," or the "world of concealment." In contrast, the revealed world is our physical world, the world of dry land.

Moses was not of our world—he was from the world of concealment. That is why he radiated light. He was from a higher realm, more angelic than human. He is associated with the "water" world. Princess Bithiah drew him out of the water because he's a "water creation," i.e., a heavenly being. With such a lofty source, Moses was very uncomfortable in the world of revelation. He was more at home in heaven than he was on earth; more comfortable in the water, so to speak, than he was on dry land.

No Big Deal

This distinctive quality—being more celestial than terrestrial—enabled Moses to nourish and instill faith in G-d within the Jewish people. He is called "*Raya Mehemna*," which can be translated as the "faithful shepherd" or "shepherd of faith."

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses declares, “And now, O Israel, what does the L-rd your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear the L-rd, your G-d.” (*Deuteronomy 10:12*) The Talmud famously asks, “Only to fear G-d? Is fearing G-d a small matter?”

For a human being, fearing G-d does not come naturally. It's easy for us to fear hurricanes, earthquakes, the IRS, and the FBI, but fearing G-d is no small feat. Acquiring “fear of Heaven” requires diligent effort, as explained by the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, in Tanya. One must dig deep, like searching for a treasure, as humans do not naturally fear G-d; we fear lions and tigers and bears.

Why, then, does the verse say, “What's demanded of you is nothing more than fear of Heaven”? Is fear of Heaven no big deal? The Talmud answers, “Yes, for Moses, it's not a big deal.” For Moses, with his unique nature, fearing G-d was natural. (*Berachot 33b*)

But wait a minute—this answer leads to an even bigger question! When Moses says, “All G-d wants is that you fear him,” he is addressing all of Israel, every Jew. How does it help to know that for Moses it was easy? For everyone else, it was a huge deal!

The answer, says the Alter Rebbe, lies in the fact that there is a Moses in every generation. To acquire fear of G-d one must connect to the Moses of their generation.

In his discourse *Ve'atah Tetzaveh* (based upon the opening words of this week's Torah

portion), the Rebbe explains that in the same way Moses was the leader of his generation, Mordechai led the generation during the Purim story, and the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, led his generation. The Previous Rebbe was so dedicated to his generation that he boldly refused to back down in the face of opposition—the Soviets, the Nazis, the raging assimilation in America—even risking his own life and the lives of his disciples.

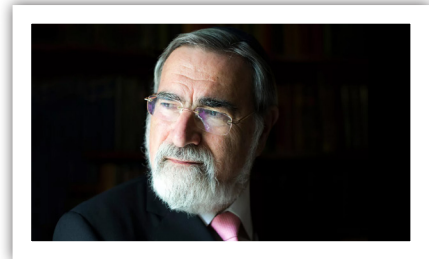
Not only is there a Moses in every generation, but there is also a Moses in every Jew. The soul of the Jew—the *neshamah*—comprises five levels. Two levels—“*chayah*” and “*yechidah*”—are subconscious and the source of our faith. The highest level of the soul is the aspect of Moses—the faithful shepherd and the shepherd of faith.

By tapping into the *yechidah*, every individual can become a Moses. Moses teaches us to bring forth the inherent leadership qualities within each of us—the Moses within.

Now we can understand the Talmud's answer: Is fear of G-d no big deal? Yes, for Moses—the Moses within each of us—it's no big deal!

True Leadership

Rabbi Dr. Lord Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, addressed the gathering at “770”, the Chabad headquarters in N.Y., during the week of *shivva* observance following the Rebbe's passing on the 3rd of Tammuz, 1994.



Rabbi Dr. Lord Jonathan Sacks

Reflecting on his personal experience, Rabbi Sacks spoke about coming to the Rebbe as a young student and having his life transformed. “I have met many leaders,” he told the audience. “Do you know what great leaders do? A great leader creates followers. The Rebbe is the only great leader I met who creates not followers but leaders! The Rebbe inspired me not to sell myself short but to be a leader.”

That is precisely what a Moses does—bringing out the inherent leadership qualities within us.

The primary beneficiary of our leadership is ourselves. When we believe in ourselves, maximize our potential, and ac-



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knowledge that our past accomplishments are not enough, we motivate ourselves to achieve more.

When individuals reported their achievements to the Rebbe, he invariably encouraged them to do more. “That’s great,” he would say, “but don’t be satisfied with that; go out tomorrow and do more.”

We must strive to become the leaders we have the potential to be and actively work to transform the world—because we can.

Activating Our Inner Moses

A young man, a member of a Chabad community in Western Europe, would disappear once a month. Nobody knew where he went or what he did. Despite becoming increasingly inspired by and involved in Jewish observance, he always wore a troubled expression.

One day, he confided in his rabbi: “Rabbi, I’m very conflicted. I must tell you where I go during my monthly disappearances. I have a relationship that I’m not proud of, a relationship with a non-Jewish woman. I know that the Torah forbids it, but I can’t end it! It’s killing me. I’m conflicted. I don’t know what to do.”

The rabbi, feeling empathetic but uncertain how to advise the struggling man, said, “I really don’t have an answer for you. But I can tell you who does—the Rebbe. So I recommend you go to New York, visit the Rebbe, and ask him what to do.”



He was fully prepared for the Rebbe to proverbially “hit him over the head with a frying pan,” because how else could a rabbi respond to such a confession? Anticipating a stern response, the man braced himself for rebuke.



At first, the man was reluctant, but his conflict got the best of him. He traveled to New York and briefly told the Rebbe his story. He was fully prepared for the Rebbe to proverbially “hit him over the head with a frying pan,” because how else could a

rabbi respond to such a confession? Anticipating a stern response, the man braced himself for rebuke.

Instead, the Rebbe looked at him with warm, loving eyes, and said, “My friend, I am envious of you. All of us are searching, always trying to find out what is expected of us. What does G-d want from me? What should I be doing now? What is my purpose? I envy you because you know exactly what you need to do. You have a test before you and know exactly what is expected.”

This is Moses—bringing out the quality of leadership within each one of us, uplifting and reminding us, “Whatever it is you’re facing in life, you know exactly what to do; tap into the Moses within you.”

Let us commemorate the birthday and *yahrtzeit* of Moses—the greatest teacher who ever lived—by internalizing the message of Tetzaveh, the one parshah that omits his name. May we all become the leaders we have the potential to be, and may we merit to welcome the era of Moshiach, when we will be reunited with all of our great leaders, beginning with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—with Moses at the forefront—may it happen speedily in our days. Amen.

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