

# PARSHAS TETZAVEH

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*Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Parshas Tetzaveh, 5631*

Note: Before beginning this ma'amar, the Sfas Emes tells us "Eini zocheir karui. Bekitzur velo nichtav kaseider." That is, he does not recall properly; his notes on this ma'amar are disjointed and abbreviated. In effect, he is giving us advanced notice that we will need an extra dose of siya'ata dishmayua (help from On High) to understand what he is saying in this ma'amar.

The parsha starts with HaShem telling Moshe to command ('tetzaveh') Bnei Yisroel to provide pure olive oil for the Kohanim to use for lighting neiros (lamps) in the Mishkan. The Sfas Emes begins by quoting Medrash Raba (36, a). The Medrash poses Chazal's classical question. HaShem has no need for us to provide Him with light. Why, then, does He have us light neiros in the Mishkan?

Chazal provide answers to this question -- which the Sfas Emes ignores. Instead, he draws our attention to something we might otherwise have missed: the question's premise. Chazal's question is premised on the assumption that by lighting the lamps, Bnei Yisroel provide light to the world. How do we do it? With our ma'asim tovim (good deeds). Note how commonsensical this is. If we do a good deed, we do in fact make the world a brighter place.

The Sfas Emes adds a word of caution concerning our self importance. We can provide light to the world. But we should be careful not to believe that the light comes from our power. In reality, we provide light because HaShem commands us to perform certain actions, AND He also decrees that those actions generate light. In other words, the fact that mitzvos and ma'asim tovim make life brighter and more cheerful is not an intrinsic feature of those actions. They have the property of lighting the world only because HaShem built that feature into acts of ma'asim tovim. The idea, then, is that by following HaShem's command we light neiros. We should be aware, however, that the lamps provide light not because of any intrinsic property in our action but because HaShem makes it happen.

Mention of light and of neiros evokes irresistibly a pasuk in Mishlei (6:23): 'Ki neir mitzva veTorah ohr ...' (ArtScroll: 'For a commandment is a lamp, and the Torah is light ...'). In that context, the Sfas Emes cites a passage in the Zohar. As we know, the Torah contains 248 mitzvos "Aseh" (positive commandments). The Zohar tells us that those 248 mitzvos Aseh correspond to the 248 limbs in the human body. Note, further, that we cannot do mitzvos without using those limbs -- i.e., our bodies. When we use our bodies to do mitzvos, our limbs become vessels for the light of Torah. You may

wonder: OK, I can see how by doing mitzvos, our limbs become instruments for bringing the light of Torah to the world. But to function as a conduit, a channel must have a source. Where does the light of Torah which we are conducting come from? The Sfas Emes's answer: the brain of every person in Klal Yisroel is hard-wired to the light of Torah.

The Sfas Emes continues with the text of the Zohar. As we have seen, the Sfas Emes very rarely works with gema'trios (the numerical values of the Hebrew letters that form a word). But in this context, he does cite a gematria. The Zohar notes that if we add two items -- e.g., the ahava and yir'a (love and awe of HaShem) with which we try to do mitzvos -- to the 248 positive mitzvos, we obtain the gematria -- the numerical value -- of 250. Not by chance, this is also the gematria of the word neir -- lamp. So we see another link between our performing HaShem's commandments and the light of the neiros in the Mishkan.

Continuing with this theme, the Sfas Emes points out that we can read the word 'mitzva' as related to the word 'tzavta' -- connection. (The Sfas Emes spells "tzavta" with two letters "vav" in the middle of the word. He is fully aware that this spelling differs from the spelling of the word "tzevat" -- tongs, The latter is spelled with a letter "vav", and with no "vav". A good dictionary will tell you that the two words can be used interchangeably; for both have the meaning of "connection".) By our performing mitzvos, all of our physical actions can be connected to the light of mitzvos. The Sfas Emes notes that in this way, we can achieve the tikun of asiya -- the spiritual enhancement of all physical activity.

The Sfas Emes tells us more about the mitzva-tzavta connection. Concluding (for now) with the mitzva-tzavta connection, the Sfas Emes quotes a thought from his grandfather. The Chidushei Harim recognized that doing mitzvos can be difficult -- to a degree that performing the commandments requires HaShem's help. The Chidushei Harim saw an acknowledgement of our need for this help in the text of the berocho we say before doing a mitzva: "ahsher kideshanu be'mitzvosav ve'tzivanu". The Chidushei HaRim read these words in non-pshat mode. Thus he understood the berocho as saying: because of His Tzivui -- our connection with HaShem -- He will enable us to perform the mitzva.

We can view this thought as icing on the cake. The cake itself is the sound-alike "tzvav" that we find both in the word "mitzva" and in the word "tzavta". This shared syllable teaches us a basic fact of life: that performing mitzvos can enable us to connect to HaShem.

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