Jewish Tribune – Tetzaveh

**Hero Worship**

Mrs Feingold wouldn’t be persuaded. She was going to Kathmandu to see the guru.

“But it’s crowded, hot, and too difficult for a lady alone” protested her carer.

“I vont go to Nepal and see de guru.” Mrs Feingold insisted.

“What will you eat? The food is too spicy. You can’t drink the water. You’ll get typhoid, malaria… Why torture yourself?”

“I vont go to Nepal and see de guru.”

Everyone shook their head, and the travel agent made the arrangements.

When she arrived in Nepal, in the Himalayan foothills, Mrs Feingold didn’t waste any time. With the determination of a Yiddishe Bubba, she started her ascent. Undeterred by the crowds, she made her way to the ashram and joined an enormous line of people waiting to see the guru. His assistant tells her that it will take at least three days to reach the guru.

“Dat’s OK” said Mrs Feingold, getting out her knitting needles and chopped herring sandwiches.

Eventually, after three days, she reaches the golden door. The aide tells her firmly, “And remember, you can only say three words.”

“Dat’s OK.”

She is ushered into the inner sanctum. The wise guru is seated, bestowing spiritual blessings on the eager visitors ahead of Mrs Feingold.

Just before she reaches him, the aide reminds her, “Remember, only three words.”

Mrs Feingold reaches the guru, looks him straight in the eye, and says: “Sheldon, come home!”

For many, the lesson of this famous fable is that sadly, some Yidden are ignorant of Torah and the truth, beauty and richness of our own spiritual tradition, and seek enlightenment elsewhere.

Another lesson relates to what is appropriate reverence to spiritual leaders? In Yiddishkeit, while we aspire to emulate and adulate our Gedolim, sometimes, even emunas Chachomim needs to be tempered.

The omission of Moshe Rabbeinu’s name in this week’s parsha is striking. From the moment he is born in parshas Shemos, he appears in every sedra apart from ours.

The Ba’al HaTurim notes that it is a consequence of Moshe saying "מחני נא מספרך" after the sin of the egel hazahav in next week’s parsha.

But the question remains: why omit Moshe Rabbeinu’s name, davka from our parsha, parshas Tetzaveh?

Many answers are given to this question. The Ba’al HaTurim suggests that it is because our parsha deals with the clothing and adornments of the Kohen and Kohen Godol. Moshe Rabbeinu was meant to serve as the Kohen Godol and lost the privilege when he resisted to go on the mission to save Klal Yisroel (see Rashi, Shemos 4,14). Mentioning Moshe’s name in this parsha would be insensitive to him.

Some say "מחני נא מספרך" can be read "מספר ך", from your 20th book (כ having the gematria of 20). And parshas Tetzaveh is the 20th sedra in the Torah.

I’ve always felt that leaving his name out of parshas Tetzaveh is a tender and poignant expression of HKBH’s love for Moshe Rabbeinu. Saying "מחני נא מספרך" after the sin of the egel hazahav was a remarkable exhibition of Moshe Rabbeinu’s mesiras nefesh. He was so dedicated to Klal Yisroel, he was willing to be erased from the very Torah he had battled to secure and give to Klal Yisroel.

On one hand, HKBH had to erase Moshe’s name. If a tzaddik says something it cannot be ignored – קללת חכם אפילו בחנם היא באה (Berachos 56a). But HKBH was reluctant to erase the name of His precious servant and therefore waited until the very last possible moment.

Moshe said "מחני נא מספרך" in parshas Ki Sisa. HKBH didn’t want to act on it straight away, nor in the following parsha, parshas Vayakhel or Pekudei or Vayikra and so on and waited until we were almost back at Ki Sisa before doing it. Namely, parshas Tetzaveh, the last parsha before Ki Sisa.

This year, I came across a fascinating explanation of Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his sefer, the Oznayim LaTorah. He explains that parshas Tetzaveh always falls around the 7th of Adar, the yohrtseit of Moshe Rabbeinu and it is therefore an appropriate sedrah to omit him.

Why? Because there is a danger of deifying a leader. In contrast to some other religions which create festivals around the birthday or anniversary of death of some of their leaders, our holy days focus on the Ribono shel Oilam exclusively. Yes, there are story lines around many Yomim Tovim and some of the heroes and heroines of Jewish History feature prominently, but it is not about worshipping them.

Therefore, at the time of the passing of the greatest leader of Klal Yisroel, we distance ourselves from that erroneous thought and go so far as omitting Moshe Rabbeinu’s very name from the sedrah.

So, although we feel somewhat bereft of Moshe Rabbeinu in this week’s parsha, we at least know why he is not there and are reminded of the limits and dangers of leader worship. Even Mrs Feingold knew that.

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