

# ***Parashat Tetzaveh***

## **Divine Hiddenness and Harmony**

### *A Temple Dialectic*

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik observed that *Parashat Tetzaveh* contains the daily obligations to kindle the menorah and to offer the incense, which are actually intertwined:

The burning of the incense and the lighting of the lamps are merged together by the Torah into one mitzvah. As a matter of fact, there is a separate *kiyum* (fulfillment) of combining, almost simultaneously, the kindling of the candles with the offering of incense.<sup>1</sup>

On a symbolic level, the menorah radiates light, signifying intellectual comprehension, conceptual clarity, the light of reason. The incense, on the other hand, creates an impenetrable smokescreen, representing the hidden mysteries of the universe, the obscurity and inscrutability of God's ways. At the exact time that the candles of the menorah were kindled, the incense was burned. As the smoke rose and filled the room, the radiance of the lights was dimmed by the haze. Nevertheless, the lit candles could still be made out.

In a figurative sense, this duality is emblematic of our own religious experience. In our lives, moments of clarity are routinely mingled with confusion and the concealment of God. But even in the fog the lighthouse can guide a tossed mind away from perilous shoals. In the Rav's inimitable words: "There is a light behind the vast and cosmic drama. The distant star bears witness that divine harmony and cosmic peace prevail throughout creation."<sup>2</sup>

### *Tension in Prayer*

The notion that a Jew's faith is illuminated by bolts of clarity against a background of confusion is also poignantly evident in our daily prayers.

(1) *The Kedushah*: The prayer in which we sanctify God, the *Kedushah*, draws on the words of two different prophets. Yeshayahu beheld the Master of the Universe in the Temple. It was a time of blessing and success, in which everyone could see the resting of the divine presence. The angels called to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). In contrast, the word of God came to Yechezkel not in the Land of Israel but in the Babylonian exile, where he was mourning the destruction of the Temple. His vision took place at a time when God had hidden His countenance, an act of *hester panim*, and so he could not proclaim that "the whole world is filled with His glory." God was obscured from view, hidden above the seven firmaments. Yechezkel heard a voice say, "Blessed be the Lord's glory from His place" (Ezekiel 3:12). In this vision, God is remote, in His transcendent abode. "Sometimes we need not search for

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<sup>1</sup> *Chumash Mesoras Harav*, 2:272.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:273.

the Holy One; we see His presence in the whole world. At other times, we must search for Him at great length.”<sup>3</sup> The Jew is caught in and lives with this dialectic.

(2) *Elohai Netzor*: At the end of the *Amidah*, we utter the plea, “May He who makes peace in His high places make peace for us.” The Talmud explains the verse upon which this phrase is based (Job 25:12) to mean that God makes peace between the archangels Gavriel and Michael, who each represent a different set of attributes.<sup>4</sup> Michael represents *chesed*, loving-kindness, and hence forgiveness and compassion. Gavriel represents the opposite, namely, *din*, strict justice, and hence punishment and sometimes retribution. Despite their seeming incompatibility, God makes peace between them. In God’s domain all apparent contradictions dissolve. There is no dichotomy within his unitary domain, only harmony and peace. Upon finishing the *Amidah*, we acknowledge the tension within our existence and pray that the time will finally come when mankind sees this harmony on our plane of existence as well.<sup>5</sup>

### *Exploring the Rav’s Insight*

The Rav shared the following anecdote from his childhood with regard to the theological tension of faith, the wrestling of the man of faith with mystery and doubt:

In my youth, I asked my father, Reb Moshe, why the Sages left so many questions unresolved and simply ended the Talmudic discussion with *teku* [i.e., “the question remains unresolved”]. My father answered me by asking why there were *chukim* [statutes without any apparent human rationale] in the Torah. He explained that God wished to teach us that not every event and happening can be comprehended by the limited mortal mind. Just as the Torah remains our eternal document even with the *chukim*, similarly a Jew must continue his eternal march before the Almighty, even though at times he does not comprehend the events that transpire around him. Likewise, my father held that the Rabbis instituted the concept of *teku* so that a Jew would understand that his faith must remain complete even when there are unresolved questions and events in his life.<sup>6</sup>

The literal meaning of the word *teku* is “let it stand.” The Talmud employs this term when debate has reached an impasse, a “standstill.” No final verdict has been reached. In another well known interpretation, *teku* (תִּיקוּ) is interpreted as an acronym for *Tishbi yetaretz kushiyot u-va’ayot* (תִּשְׁבִּי יִתְרַץ קוּשִׁיּוֹת וּבִעֲיּוֹת)—the TisbHITE, the prophet Eliyahu, will answer all unresolved questions and difficulties in the messianic era. We learn to live with the questions knowing that answers, albeit beyond our ken in the present, do exist. Harmony exists on high and will eventually be our lot, too.

The *Zohar* states that the word *teku* (תִּיקוּ) is similar to the word *tikun* (תִּיקוּן), “repair,” except it is missing the final *nun*. Numerologically, the *nun* is 50, which represents the fiftieth gate of understanding or wisdom. The human mind cannot attain this final degree, which is why God’s decrees cannot be comprehended by man. It is only when we reach the time of

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<sup>3</sup> *Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur*, 127.

<sup>4</sup> See *Derech Eretz Zuta, perek Ha-Shalom*.

<sup>5</sup> *Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur*, 145–146.

<sup>6</sup> Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 1:171 (bracketed additions in the original).

*tikun*, of cosmic repair, that all the mysteries and enigmas will evaporate and God's unity will be fully revealed. At that time, everyone will apprehend the wholeness and harmony of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Zohar*, III:27b.

