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Titzaveh: Lighting the Fire

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“V’Ata Titzaveh es Bnai Yisroel, V’Yikchu Elecha Shemen Zayis Zach Kasis La’Maor L’Haalos Ner Tamid

You shall command the Children of Israel and have them bring you clear olive oil, [made from olives that were] crushed for lighting, to keep the lamp burning constantly. In the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain, which is before the Testimony, Aharon and his sons shall arrange it [for the lamp to burn] from evening to morning before God. This is an everlasting statute for their generations of the Children of Israel.” (Exodus 27:20-21)

God commands Moshe to issue the call for pure, virgin olive oil to be used for the daily kindling of the *Menorah*. But why here? Moshe had already asked the people (in last week’s Parsha) to contribute the various materials necessary for the construction, fabrication and maintenance of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). Furthermore, why is the discussion about the oil inserted between the construction of the *Mishkan* and its utensils and the appointment of Aharon and his sons?

Rabbi Moshe Alshech (born in Turkey in 1507, and died 1593 in Tzefat, Israel) explains that Moshe was distressed. Moshe had seen the incredible generosity of the people. He asked them to contribute precious metals, fine fabric and jewels and they did so with a complete heart and a generous spirit. In fact, that they were so generous that Moshe had to end the collection. Moshe saw Betzalel and Ohaliav, the head craftsmen who, together with their volunteers, built and constructed the various utensils and structure of the *Mishkan*. He saw Aharon who was chosen by God to be the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) and he saw his nephews who had been chosen to serve alongside their illustrious father. Moshe saw all of this and grew despondent. *What is my role? Where is my share in this holy work?* Moshe felt left out, marginalized and unimportant. It was in this moment of despondence and sadness that God appeared to Moshe and told him, “You are vital to the people, you are the foundation of the entire nation, for you are the enabler of their growth.”

Where did this incredible national generosity come from? The people witnessed Moshe’s selflessness; they saw all he sacrificed for God and nation. The people said, “If Moshe could give up the trappings of a normal life and devote himself wholly to serve God, we can give of our gold, silver and jewels.” When Aharon was asked to assume the role of the High Priest he hesitated but quickly realized he had no choice. He knew he had to assume this mantle. “If Moshe has assumed so much responsibility, I must do my part as well.”

This is the meaning of the opening verse of this week’s Parsha. God is communicating an all-important message to His beloved servant.

“V’Ata, (and you Moshe)” – You must understand and appreciate how important you are.

“V’Yikchu Eylecha Shemen Zayis Zach, (and have them bring you clear olive oil)” - Oil represents potential; it is the fuel capable of creating great illumination. Tell the people to come before you with their oil of potential.

“L’Haalos Ner Tamid, (to light a lamp continually)” – Moshe, you are the flame; you are the one who ignites the oil of the people. You are the catalyst for their growth; you are the one who inspires them to be more and to actualize their potential.

“V’Ata Hakrev Eylecha Es Aharon Achica V’es Banav, (and you, bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him...)” – Moshe, your brother is unsure of himself, build him up. Bring him close and inspire him. Whisper in his ear that you believe in him. Remind him, that if you can assume your responsibilities, he can assume his. Ignite his oil and allow him to find his greatness.

It is in these simple verses that God lifts Moshe from the depths of despondence and reminds him that enabling others to find their personal greatness is the true pinnacle of human accomplishment.

We often assume that the path to life-greatness is paved with personal accomplishments. That the metric of our success is how much we can each do, accrue and accomplish as an individual. But this is only partially true. We must grow, we must accomplish, and we must achieve. However, we must remember that a life solely devoted to personal self-actualization is incomplete. Life cannot be exclusively dedicated to one’s personal growth and achievement. We must all strive to be an enabler and facilitator of the growth of others. We must look to see what we can do to inspire and uplift those around us. Sometimes, a kind word, a compliment, a few minutes (or hours) of our time, a few words of inspiration can be what it takes to motivate our fellow Jew to move forward in his/her life journey. If we can find the strength to be attentive to the difficulties and struggles of the other, we can give them the strength to overcome their hurdles and become more.

With our family, our friends and our community, our job is to become Moshe Rabbeinu enablers of growth. We must each strive to be the flame that ignites the soulful, potential-rich oil of all those around us.