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Parshat Tzav by Rabbi Hirsch
“Enthusiasm Makes All the Difference”

Parshat Tzav is unique on our calendar, because of its proximity to both Purim and Passover. In most years, it falls on Shabbat HaGadol (the Shabbat preceding Passover), and in a leap year like this one, it falls immediately before or immediately after Purim. The Talmud explains that during a leap year, Purim is observed in the 2nd Adar instead of the first one so that it will be closer to Passover and thereby connect these two holidays of “redemption”. *Tzav*, which is uniquely linked to both Purim and Passover, is a fitting source to help us learn how the holidays are connected.

The title of last week’s Parsha, which begins a new book of the same name, is *Vayikra*, which means “[God] called”. According to Rashi, this title connotes warmth and closeness. Perhaps his interpretation is based on that Parsha’s description of sacrifices in the Tabernacle; as the Zohar notes, the Hebrew name for sacrifice (*korban*) implies that animal sacrifice is a vehicle through which one can develop closeness (*kurva* in Hebrew) to God. At first glance, Parshat Tzav (meaning “command”), with its harsh name and crude descriptions of these same sacrifices, appears to be the other side of the coin – a harsh view of this world, characterized by fire, blood, and death. In that sense, *Tzav* is a reminder that we must acknowledge the painful and complicated reality of this world.

But the two worldviews of *Vayikra* and *Tzav* are not simply two sides of the same coin in God’s universe; they are actually intertwined. Consider the alternative meaning of the word *Tzav*, which according to Sifra is *Zerizut* -- enthusiasm and excitement. The Talmud characterizes Kohanim, the primary characters in *Tzav*, as *Zerizim* – enthusiastic individuals. If we see our world for what it is, we may come to understand that enthusiasm and harshness are closely connected. We need enthusiasm to deal with this difficult world, but in the process of meeting its harsh challenges and obstacles, we each develop an identity and discover our unique life’s purpose.

In the story of Purim, Esther initially expresses her fearful reluctance to approach King Achashveirosh in order to save the Jews. Mordechai’s response is one of the most startling verses in the entire Torah: “We’ll find salvation elsewhere, while you and your father’s house will be lost.” In other words, “We don’t need you to save the Jews; they will be saved one way or another. The only question is whether you will play a part in that inevitable event.” Esther was inspired to act with enthusiasm instead of fear, because she fully grasped Mordechai’s point: it was not up to her *whether* the Jews would be saved or not, but she could determine *how* the story would unfold. In place of merely surviving because Haman was killed, we now have the beautiful history and holiday of Purim, all because of Esther.

Purim is adjacent to Passover on the calendar because Mordechai’s message to Esther holds a deep insight about the Passover miracle of freedom. If we read the story of Exodus closely, we find that Moses and the Jews were initially desperate to find a path

to liberation from Egyptian bondage. But as time went on, they realized that their freedom was preordained, even if they knew not when or how it would unfold. As the Talmud teaches, God determines the solution to a problem before the problem even exists. Once they became confident that redemption was inevitable, they could act with such determination and alacrity that their bread had no time to rise and thus became Matza – the bread of liberation. Even with their liberation predetermined, the Jews had a vital role to play. We too, with our unique capabilities, can inspire ourselves and others to make a significant difference in our individual lives and ultimately, in our national redemption.

This could be why the Talmud notes the similar spelling of the words *Mitzvot* and *Matzot* and tells us that the Mitzvah to guard the (Shmura) Matzah, to ensure that it's baked quickly, is a lesson that we should act passionately to fulfill **all** Mitzvot. In other words, genuine mitzvot entail much more than merely following commands by rote. A true mitzvah is carried out with genuine engagement, which is also a vital factor in all our meaningful endeavors.

That message brings us back to this week's Parsha title, *Tzav*, which is the root of both *Mitzvot* and *Matzot*, making this Parsha the perfect bridge to connect Purim and Passover. *Tzav* inspires us to face all the challenges that life throws our way, not with despair or bitterness, but with enthusiasm and energy, rooted in our conviction that each of us can make all the difference in the world.

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