

Parashat Tetzaveh: Everlasting Love

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Shemot 27:20-21

וְאֵתָהּ תְצַוֶּה | אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלָיו שֶׁמֶן זַיִת
זָךְ כֶּתִית לְמָאֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד: בָּאֶהָל מוֹעֵד
מִחוּץ לַפֶּרֶכֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַעֲדוֹת יַעֲרָךְ אֹתוֹ אֹהֶרן
וּבָנָיו מֵעֶרֶב עַד־בֹּקֶר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֶם
מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: {ס}

You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly. Aaron and his sons shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain which is over [the Ark of] the Pact, [to burn] from evening to morning before God. It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages.

1. The Light of the Oil

Midrash Shemot Rabbah 36:3

דָּבָר אֲחֵר, זֵית רַעֲנָן, רָאָה הָיָא דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה
מֵאִירִין לְאָדָם בְּשִׁעָה שְׁעוֹסָק בָּהּ, וְכָל מִי שְׁאִינו
עוֹסֵק וְאִינו יוֹדֵעַ הוּא נִכְשָׁל, מִשָּׁל לְמִי שְׁעוֹמֵד
בְּאַפְלָה בָּא לְהִלָּךְ מִצָּא אָבֹן וְנִכְשָׁל בָּהּ, מִצָּא בִּיב
נוֹפֵל בּוֹ הִקִּישׁ פָּנָיו בְּקֶרֶקֶע, לָמָּה, שְׁלֹא הָיָה בִּידּוֹ
נֵר, כִּי הָיָה שְׁאִין בִּידּוֹ דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה, מִצָּא עֲבָרָה
וְנִכְשָׁל בָּהּ וּמֵת, שְׁכֵן רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ צוֹחֶת (מִשְׁלִי ה',
כג): הוּא יָמוּת בְּאִין מוֹסֵר, וְאִין מוֹסֵר אֵלָּא דְּבָרֵי
תוֹרָה, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (מִשְׁלִי ד', יג): הַחֲזֵק בְּמוֹסֵר אֵל
תִּרְפָּה. לָמָּה הוּא מֵת לְפִי שְׁאִינו יוֹדֵעַ בְּתוֹרָה וְהוֹלֵךְ
וְחוֹטֵא, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (מִשְׁלִי ד', יט): דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים כְּאַפְלָה
לֹא יָדְעוּ בְּמָה יִכָּשְׁלוּ,

Another matter, "a flourishing olive tree," see how words of Torah illuminate for a person when he engages in them, but anyone who does not engage and does not know, stumbles. This is analogous to one who is standing in the darkness; if he attempts to walk, he encounters a stone and stumbles over it, or he encounters a sewage pit, falls in, and bangs his face on the ground. Why? Because he does not have a lamp in his hand. So too, a layman who does not have words of Torah which him encounters a transgression, stumbles, and dies, as the Divine Spirit cries out: "He will die for lack of admonishment" (Proverbs 5:23), and admonishment is nothing other than Torah, as it is stated: "Hold fast to admonition, do not let go; [safeguard it, as it is your life]" (Proverbs 4:13). Why does he die? Because he does not know Torah and he goes and sins, as it is stated: "The way of the wicked is like blackness; they do not know on what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:19).

אָבֵל אוֹתָם שְׁעוֹסָקִים בְּתוֹרָה הֵם מֵאִירִים בְּכָל
מְקוֹם, מִשָּׁל לְמִי שְׁעוֹמֵד בְּאַפְלָה וְנֵר בִּידּוֹ, רָאָה
אָבֹן וְלֹא נִכְשָׁל, רָאָה בִּיב וְלֹא נָפַל, לָמָּה, עַל שֶׁהָיָה
בִּידּוֹ נֵר, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (תְּהִלִּים קיט, קה): נֵר לְרַגְלִי
דְּבָרְךָ וְאוֹר לְנִתְיָבְתִּי. וְכֵן (מִשְׁלִי ד', יב): אִם תִּרוּץ
לֹא תִכָּשֵׁל, וְכֵן (מִשְׁלִי כ, כז): נֵר ה' נִשְׁמַת אָדָם,
אֲמַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יְהִי גִירִי בִּידְךָ וְנִרְךָ בִּידִי,
וְאִיזִי נֵרוֹ שֶׁל הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, זֶה תוֹרָה, שְׁנֶאֱמַר

But those who engage in Torah, they illuminate everywhere. This is analogous to one who is standing in blackness with a lamp in his hand; he sees a stone and he does not stumble, he sees a sewage pit, but does not fall. Why? Because he has a lamp in his hand, as it is stated: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalms 119:105). Likewise, "If you run, you will not stumble," (Proverbs 4:12). Likewise, "The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord" (Proverbs 20:27). The Holy One blessed be He said: 'Let My lamp be in your hand and your lamp in My hand.' What is the lamp of

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>(משלי ו, כג): כי נר מצוה ותורה אור, מהו כי נר מצוה, אלא כל מי שעושה מצוה הוא כאלו מדליק נר לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ומחיה נפשו שנקראת נר, שנאמר: נר ה' נשמת אדם.</p>	<p>the Holy One blessed be He? It is the Torah, as it is stated: "For the mitzvah is a lamp, the Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). What is "for the mitzvah is a lamp"? It is that anyone who fulfills a mitzvah is as though he kindles a lamp before the Holy One blessed be He, and sustains his soul, which is called a lamp, as it is stated: "The soul of man is the lamp of the Lord."</p>
<p>ומהו ותורה אור, אלא הרבה פעמים שאדם מחבב בלבו לעשות מצוה, ויצר הרע שבתוכו אומר מה לך לעשות מצוה ומחסר את נכסיה, עד שאתה נותן לאחרים תן לבניך, ויצר טוב אומר לו תן למצוה, ראה מה כתיב: כי נר מצוה, מה הנר הזה כשהוא דולק אפלו אלף אלפים קרוינין וסבקיין מדליקין הימנו אור במקומו, כך כל מי שיתן למצוה, אינו מחסר את נכסיו, לכן נאמר: כי נר מצוה ותורה אור.</p>	<p>What is "Torah is light"? Many times a person desires in his heart to fulfill a mitzvah, and the evil inclination that is within him says: 'What is in it for you to fulfill a mitzvah and lose your property? Instead of giving to others, give to your children.' The good inclination says to him: 'Give it for a mitzvah.' See what is written: "For the mitzvah is a lamp" – just as this lamp, when it is kindled, even thousands upon thousands of wax and tallow candles are kindled from it, its light remains undiminished. So, anyone who gives for a mitzvah does not lose his property. That is why it says: "For the mitzvah is a lamp, the Torah is light."</p>

Bavli Berakhot 57a	
<p>והרואה זיתים בחלום, זוטרי — פרי ורבי וקאי עסקיה כזיתים. והני מילי פרי, אבל אילני — הוי"ו ליה בנים מרובין, שנאמר: "בניך כשתלי זיתים וגו'". איכא דאמר הרואה זית בחלום — שם טוב יוצא לו, שנאמר: "זית רענן יפה פרי תאר קרא ה' שמך". הרואה שמן זית בחלום — יצפה למאור תורה, שנאמר: "ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך". הרואה תמרים בחלום — תמו עונותיו, שנאמר: "תם עונך בת ציון".</p>	<p>One who sees olives in a dream, and they are small, it is a sign that his business will flourish, increase, and be durable like olives. However, the Gemara adds a caveat, saying that this applies only when he sees the fruit of an olive tree; but, one who sees olive trees, it is a sign that he will have many children, as it is stated: "Your children like olive plants, round about your table" (Psalms 128:3). Some say that one who sees an olive tree in a dream, it is a sign that a good reputation will spread for him, as it is stated: "The Lord called your name a leafy olive tree, fair with goodly fruit" (Jeremiah 11:16). One who sees olive oil in a dream should anticipate the light of Torah, as it is stated: "That they bring unto you pure olive oil beaten for the light" (Exodus 27:20). One who sees palm trees [temarim] in a dream has seen a sign that his transgressions have ceased, as it is stated: "Your iniquity is finished, O daughter of Zion" (Lamentations 4:22), as the Gemara likens <i>temara</i>, date, to <i>tam ra</i>, evil has ceased.</p>

2. Everlasting Love

Rabbi Shai Held, "Parashat Tetzaveh: Between Ecstasy and Constancy," <i>The Heart of Torah</i> , Volume 1	
<p>What is true of the service of God is true of any relational commitment we make: We commit that we will be present even when the spirit does not so move us...At a certain point in the unfolding of a relationship, we discover that love is an emotion and an existential commitment. We decide that we will love even in moments when we are not overcome with feeling.</p>	
Bell Hooks, <i>All About Love: New Visions</i>	
<p>A generous heart is always open, always ready to receive our going and coming. Amid such love, we need never to fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers; the experience of knowing we always belong.</p>	