

# Tetzaveh: Moshe Rabbeinu's Yahrzeit

- Nisson Shulman.

Kabbalists say Tetzave omits Moshe's name because of his Yahrzeit. We remember the day of death rather than the day of birth, because the worth of a person depends on how they live their life. Taking Moshe as a model for Jewish life. Above all his characteristics, Hutzpah. Explanation of Bitzdeka teromem goy veHesed Leumim Hatat in our time. The tight-rope of negotiations with implacable enemies.

Tetzaveh: Moshe Rabbeinu's Yahrzeit

(Originally delivered in St John's Wood Synagogue, London, February 18, 1989, on the occasion of the Israeli Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Yoram Biran's first official visit to the Synagogue. References to the occasion have been omitted in this version of the sermon. [NES])

Moshe Rabbeinu's name is omitted from Tetzaveh. Kabbalists teach that it is because during this period Moshe Rabbeinu died. His Yahrzeit is on the 7th of Adar.

Why do we remember the Yahrzeit rather than the birth? Moses was born the same day he died. Yet we observe his Yahrzeit rather than his birthday.

We remember the day of death rather than the day of birth because in this way we emphasize that the worth of a person depends upon what he or she does with life. Only at the end of life can we judge the value of a life. Moses lived 120 years, a perfect life, for he was an ideal man. Vayamat Moshe ish haE-ohim. And that is why we observe the Yahrzeit.

That is the way we remember all our forbears, through Yahrzeit, rather than birthdays.

Other faiths exalt the birth of their leaders. In fact the Christian concept of a "son of god" indicates that they require him to be born great. "No!", says Judaism. "No man is born great. All depends on what a man does with his gifts and his life."

That is why Rambam emphasized that each Jew must consider himself as potentially able to be as great as Moshe – and responsible to try!

In this spirit, Raay haya Ezra shetinaten Torah al yado leYisrael, ilmale kidmo moshe... (Sanhedrin 21b). For Christians, it is an impossible concept that every man could achieve the greatness of the man they worship as god. But for Jews, all are equally children of God. Banim atem laHashem E-ohaychem... (Devarim 14:1) when we walk in his way. And we forfeit the right to this title of child of God when we don't. Banim gadalti veromanti, vehem pashu Bi... (Yeshayahu, 1:2).

So every Jew should take Moshe as a model and attempt to achieve some of his greatness.

What are the characteristics of Moshe, which we should seek to emulate? You know most of

them, of course; his humility, his compassion, his fight for the downtrodden, his search for justice, his sacrifice for his people, his patience, so many virtues that we should seek. But one above all is needed for our time of crisis and confrontation: not only with enemies, but also with friends; not with just some nations, but now with almost all nations of the world in varying degrees! And that characteristic is Chutzpah!

To be able to stand, unafraid, before the greatest rulers in the world, and represent justice and right on behalf of Israel, utterly rejecting injustice and wrong. Such was Moshe Rabbenu's characteristic, when he stood before Pharaoh, and rejected his suggestion that he would let only the men go, only the adults, leave the children behind, declaring, Binarenu ibizekenenu nelech, bebanenu ubibenotenu, ki hag laHashem lanu...

Moshe wasn't afraid of Pharaoh. He didn't change because of public opinion, even if many of his own people wanted him to compromise, coming to him in righteous deputations and committees to complain. They undoubtedly sought interviews with Pharaoh where they tried to be humble enough to erase the impression of this stubborn, intractable, and impractical Moshe! But Moshe stood unafraid, and on this essential point unyielding, because he knew he wasn't speaking for himself alone; he was speaking for the Lord and His people; He was speaking for Jewish survival.

All our lives we have experienced the perfidy of most nations. We have never outgrown the time to which the words of King Solomon apply, that Hesed leumim hatat, "the righteousness of nations is wickedness." What did King Solomon mean by this?

He meant that the world gives no thought and makes no comment about more than half a century of Israel's honest struggle for peace, but rushes to accept the hypocrisy of terrorists demanding concessions from Israel even before negotiations: demanding that Israel treat with its enemies before it has any real gestures that indicate sincerity; demanding that it treat under conditions that would renew terrorism with renewed strength, should the foe prove – as is more than likely – intractable implacable and hypocritical as always before.

He meant that the world forgets that there is no army as humane as Israel's and that no nation would act with the patience that Israel's army does, or with the consciousness of conscience that marks its every step and act. It means that the world would rather have startling headlines than truth, and Israel pictured as the villain rather than as she really is – the beleaguered nation beset by terrorism on almost all its borders as well as from within. It means that Israel is easy to condemn, because it will not respond with violence against those who condemn its actions, but the Arabs are dangerous to hurt, because they respond with terrorism, and even with murder, callously and publicly demanded by their religious leaders. This is the practical meaning and application of hesed leumom hatat.

Such far from even handed policies have been Israel's lot since the State was born, when Moshe Sharet, then Shertock addressed the United Nations, pleading that they resist Arab demands to upset the formation of Israel. He said: "The incursion of armies from neighboring countries has proceeded in broad daylight, under the very eyes of British authorities. The British Navy has continued to blockade Palestine's seaboard against the arrival of visa-less Jewish immigrants, but

the land frontiers, North East and South, were left open to aggression."

Since that time, through five wars on Israel's soil, through blockade and siege, through political strife, economic boycott and terrorist attacks on defenseless settlements and innocent travelers, women and children, Israel has had ample opportunity to rediscover, again and again, that hesed leumim hatat.

Despite this, despite the critical times we face and will probably continue to face in the future, there are rays of hope.

King Solomon's passage is introduced by three important words, bitzedaka yeromem goy; "A nation shall be exalted in righteousness". King Solomon knew the nations that surrounded him, but he also had faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness.

We are a people who have withstood every test of time. We have faced many challenges to our survival, Bechal dor vador omdim aleynu lechalotenu. In every generation we have also faced the challenge of explaining ourselves to our friends. We are alive today as a living tribute to our fathers who had the courage and strength to withstand every test. Let us be worthy of these fathers.

May that time come to pass, soon, when no longer shall we fear attack by night or stones by day; no longer shall we fear rockets in kibbutzim, or prepare to meet the deadliest of chemical weapons which might strike without warning at any time. But the leaders of our people shall bring us tidings of righteousness and truth, and justice and peace, so that Bitzedaka teromem goy, in righteousness shall our nations truly be exalted. AMEN VEAMEN.