

Something, or rather, someone is conspicuously missing in this parshah. After last week's detailed plans for building and equipping the *mishkan*, Parshah Tetzaveh focuses on the priestly garments and the investiture and duties of its priests. We read elaborate descriptions and meticulous instructions, and we learn that Aaron is to be *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest), with his family inheriting the priesthood. But Moses, the person who is responsible for making all of this happen, is not mentioned by name. His presence is simply inferred when HaShem addresses him three times as you, and in a flurry of commands such as make, clothe, anoint, invest, and sanctify. Chapter 29 details his duties regarding the investiture of Aaron and his sons, and Chapter 30 outlines his instructions for making the sacrificial altar. But oddly, his name never appears. Why? One conjecture is that this omission is the result of Moses' persistent reluctance to accept leadership during his first encounter with HaShem. Briefly demurring would have simply underscored his deep humility, but his prolonged, adamant refusal provokes HaShem's anger. "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, '... This is what God is saying to Moses: I initially said that you [Moses] would be the priest and he [Aaron] would be the Levite; now he will be the priest and you will be the Levite.' And the Rabbis say: Moses became a priest for the 7 days of the inauguration alone, and after that his priesthood expired. ..." (Talmud, Zevachim 102a) We could construe this as punishment for either being overly humble, or for doubting HaShem. Some commentators postulate that Moses, worried that his elder brother Aaron would become jealous, concedes the priesthood to him and withdraws into the background for the priestly succession to be established. Others connect his absence to the sin of the Golden Calf in next week's parshah. "Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, descend from your greatness. ... now that Israel has sinned, why do I need you? There is no need for an emissary. ... Immediately Moses stood and was strengthened in prayer, and asked that God have mercy ..." (Talmud, Berakhot 32a). Others focus on Moses' subsequent request to either forgive and not annihilate the people, or to entirely expunge him from the Torah along with them. Language nerd that I am, I love this little nugget I found concerning that dialogue: Rav Ovadya Yosef zt'l reads **מחני נא מספרך** (obliterate me from **your book**) in Exodus 32:32 as **מספר כ** (... from **Book 20**). Parshah Tetzaveh is the 20<sup>th</sup> portion in the Torah, and in it, Moses is indeed not mentioned by name. But I think there is a more far-reaching dimension to the omission of Moses' name, which has to do with the fact that this parshah is usually read around the 7<sup>th</sup> of Adar, traditionally understood as Moses' birth and death date. Despite his unique status, Moses, like all of us, is human. He was born, and he died; and significantly, no one knows where he is buried. The Torah makes it clear that we need a variety of leaders to ensure that society operates smoothly. But it makes it equally clear that however powerful and talented they may be, their power is to be purely temporal. We do not worship human beings. We worship HaShem, the unseen Presence in all of creation. To perform the necessary rituals for worship, priests are required. Their roles are minutely defined, their succession is established, and their clothing reflects their position. Moses, the charismatic prophet who communicates one on one with HaShem needs no heirs, and no special vestments. His is a completely different kind of leadership, a leadership that will end physically before the people enter the Promised Land, but that will reverberate through the ages, long after temple worship has been replaced by the rabbinic Judaism we practice today. It is defined in the three times HaShem addresses Moses as *you*. "And you shall command the children of Israel ..." (27:20) Overcoming his initial trepidation, Moses takes command and leads this ragtag, fearful, querulous group of former slaves on their 40-year trek from slavery to free peoplehood. "And you bring near to yourself your brother Aaron and his sons with him ..." (28:1) No single person is able to lead alone. Moses takes the advice of his father-in-law Yitro to heart and learns to delegate responsibility. And he ultimately moves aside to establish the priesthood for Aaron and his heirs. "And you shall speak to all the wise hearted ..." (28:3) Speaking is Moses' primary task – first to Pharaoh, and then to the people, instructing them, cajoling them, and instilling in them both the ability and the will to assume the responsibility of their covenant with HaShem. Like the *mishkan's* cherubim, which only serve to frame HaShem's presence, names are nothing more than external tools to help identify or describe an individual and evoke that person's essence – the qualities derived from their earthly actions that transcend time and space. Moses received the "name" of our ineffable God as four voiceless consonants, which, borne on the breath, in their silence carry more meaning than all the words humanity is able to express. HaShem needs no names, for HaShem is omnipresent, reflected in all of creation. Likewise, the little pronoun you is all HaShem needs to express the fullness of what the name Moses contains. Parshah Tetzaveh is not about Moses, but his transcendent essence pervades it, carrying the people onward to the next step in their, and our journey.

Shabbat shalom!