



Presence through Absence

People tend to often focus on what's missing – the guy that didn't show up to the Shiva, the thing that is missing from their lives, and so on. Why?

The Peculiar Focus

Good Shabbos!

Human beings, and human nature and human behavior, is always a fascinating subject. There's always something interesting that people do.

For example, when a family is, unfortunately, sitting shiva for a loved one, you'll have a lot of people coming and visiting to offer their condolences. However, of all the people who come, the person they remember the most is "the one who didn't come." They talk about him and get angry about him, and carry around that baggage for many years.

In other words, instead of remembering the hundreds of people who came to visit and share in the family's pain, and to take comfort from the love that the visitors gave the mourners, they're busy with just one thought: How can that one close friend not have bothered to come or even call?

In like manner, when a young couple gets engaged, everyone calls in to wish mazel tov. People who have not spoken to them in years send them greeting cards, gifts and best wishes—but the one guy who

forgets to call, who actually did have a good excuse (just then he was out of town, etc.), they remember him more than everyone else, and out of an abundance of anger, they make sure to not invite him to the wedding...

And that brings us to this week's Torah portion of Tetzavah.

The Missing Name

The Parshah of Tetzavah is the only Parshah in which Moshe Rabbeinu's name is specifically not mentioned. From the beginning of the Book of Shmos (Exodus), which we are told about the birth of Moshe, until the end of the Book of Devarim (Deuteronomy), Moshe is mentioned in every Torah portion.

But here in our Parshah his name is not even mentioned once.

In a sicha, the Rebbe quotes the explanation of the Baal HaTurim, who explains that it is connected to Moshe Rabbeinu's ultimatum to G-d, "please erase me from Your book that You wrote" if He doesn't forgive the Jewish Nation for the Sin of the Golden Calf. Since a tzadik's every word—even conditional words—has an effect on the universe, Moshe Rabbeinu's words to that effect (Shmos 32:32) indeed resulted that one entire Torah portion—our current Torah portion—erases Moshe's name.

To that, the Rebbe adds that by Divine Providence, the Parshah of Tetzaveh is the Torah portion that is read in the week in which falls Moshe Rabbeinu's day of passing (Hisvaduyos 5751 Vol. I, pg. 316).

But what's really happening here is that there is no portion in the Torah that talks about Moshe Rabbeinu more than the Parshah of Tetzaveh.

Missing but Present

Anyone studying this Parshah will immediately notice that Moshe's

name is missing—and will ask the question, “How can it be that Moshe’s name is not mentioned?” Indeed, all the commentators are busy with this question—after all, because he is “missing” from the Parshah, he is remembered perhaps more than any other Parshah!

We find a similar phenomenon in Megilas Esther, the Scroll of Esther, which we’ll be reading in a short time. The Megilah is the only book in Tanach that doesn’t mention G-d’s Name at all. It’s a phenomenon not to be believed—here you have the entire Tanach, one long Word of G-d from the Five Books of Moses to the Prophets and Scriptures written under Divine Inspiration, and in the Tanach itself, there’s one entire book describing a miracle that happened to the Jewish Nation... and doesn’t mention G-d’s Name!

The simple explanation is that since the Megilah was written in Persia, the Sages were concerned that if it contained G-d’s Name, then when the Persians would translate it to their language, they’d replace G-d’s Name with the name(s) of their false god(s). The Sages therefore thought that it would be better to not mention G-d’s Name in the Megilah at all.

But the Rebbe explains that there is something much deeper going on here.

There are two kinds of miracles, the Rebbe points out. There are those miracles that upend the very order of nature and physics, like the Splitting of the Sea. That was an open miracle seen by all. Then you have miracles hidden inside the natural order, like the story of Purim, which a person can claim resulted of “a confluence of factors”: Esther of all people was chosen to be queen and Mordechai saved the king’s life a short time after that, so when Queen Esther came to the king to beg for mercy for her nation, he took pity on her and decided to change the evil decree (Sichos Kodesh 5731 Vol., I pg. 510).

If you really want to, you can insist that there was no miracle here.

That's because it was a miracle hidden within nature. G-d's Name is not mentioned in the Megilah to symbolize this fact—that in the Purim miracle, G-d's Hand was not openly seen.

But what's most interesting here is that the very fact that G-d's Name does not appear in the Megilah is the very thing that causes everyone to talk about G-d and discuss G-d's Presence again and again.

In Tanach, you have a story that actually uses this very technique explicitly.

David and Jonathan

Everyone's heard the famous story of David and Goliath—how King Saul promised his daughter to the man who would slay the fearsome Philistine giant. Understandably, then, after an unknown young shepherd boy named David came forward and actually killed Goliath, David was very popular among the people. So when King Saul, David and the entire army returned from the battle at which David had killed Goliath, all the womenfolk awaiting them sang out, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."

But immediately after that, the story continues: "And Saul was very chagrined, and the matter displeased him, and he said, 'They ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they ascribed the thousands. And what more can he have, but the kingdom?' And Saul eyed David from that day on."

Here something very sad happened: On the one hand, Saul promised David his daughter, but on the other hand, a fearsome spirit of jealousy had now descended upon him. What's more, with David's every passing victory on the battlefield, Saul hated him more and more, to the point that Saul twice tried to assassinate him.

So David is now the king's son-in-law on the one hand, and the mortal enemy of the king on the other hand. (Some would joke, "Of course

David was his mortal enemy! He was his son-in-law!” But that’s not what was happening here.)

Well, David flees for his life and hides out in the desert and Jonathan, Saul’s son and David’s best friend, is sent by his father to summon David. When Jonathan finds him, he tries to convince him to return to the king’s palace. But David says to him: “Your father tried to murder me twice, and that’s what he wants to do this time, too.” But Jonathan argued that that didn’t make sense: “My father shares all of his secrets with me—if he wanted to kill you, I would have already known about it one way or another.”

Jonathan suggested a way for David to check what Saul really thought about him. He said to him that tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh, the head of the new month, and that Rosh Chodesh is not one but two days. The custom was that every Rosh Chodesh was marked with a festive meal the same way we have a festive meal on Shabbos or Purim.

And so, said Jonathan, “You will be remembered because your seat will be remembered.” The plan was that David would not be attending the king’s feast, and his chair would remain empty, and his absence would catch Saul’s attention and the king would ask why David was missing from the king’s table. At that point, Jonathan would answer that David had gone to Bethlehem to visit his family, and he would see what Saul’s reaction would be.

That’s what they did.

At the feast on the first day of Rosh Chodesh, David was clearly missing, with his set place remaining empty. However, Saul paid no attention to it—he thought to himself that it was just a coincidence.

On the second day, however, when David again did not show up for the Rosh Chodesh feast, King Saul this time turned to Jonathan and asked him, “Why has the son of Jesse not come, both yesterday and

today, to the bread?" Jonathan replied that he had asked him for permission to go and visit his father's house in Bethlehem for the Rosh Chodesh feast. "And Saul's wrath flared against Jonathan and he said to him... 'Send for him and take him to me, for a son of death is he!'"

Now the cat was out of the bag. The long knives had come out. Saul had explicitly stated that he wanted to kill David, and Jonathan saw that it wasn't David's paranoia but a real situation (Samuel I:19-20).

Be Present Through Absence

This concept of presence marked by absence works with G-d, too.

The Sages tell us that "One who is accustomed to attend synagogue and does not attend one day, G-d inquires about him" (Talmud, Tractate Brachos 6:2). G-d wants to know where he is and what happened that he didn't show up. Is he not feeling well? And if so, G-d worries that he feel better.

But if he doesn't show up several times, he makes people stop worrying about him.

On a much higher level, though, Chasidic philosophy explains that when a Jew prays to G-d and prays for the needs of another Jew, not even uttering half a word about his own needs, G-d then wonders: "It's interesting that this Jew 'forgets' to pray for himself!" G-d then "remembers" him and sees to all his needs, blessing him with children, life and abundant prosperity.

Good Shabbos!