

February 23

Tetzaveh / You Shall Command

This week's parashah is all about commands. HaShem is instructing Moses about olive oil for the menorah, the garments for the Kohen ha-Gadol, and the installation ceremony for the priests. At the end of Chapter 29, HaShem tells Moses, "I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord, am their God, who brought them up out from the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God."

It was really great for the Israelites to know these things, but what else should they know? HaShem provides lots of "do's" and "don'ts" throughout the Torah, but some of His commands might be a little fuzzy when it comes to how to fulfill them. It's a good thing that they had the Urim and Thummim so they would know exactly what HaShem wanted. Got a question? Just go to your Kohen HaGadol and he'll straighten things out in a jiffy.

That was great for them, but what about us? There is some controversy as to exactly when the Urim and Thummim stopped working, but that is really irrelevant. All we have is our inherited traditions, our sacred writings, the world around us, and the small, still voice that speaks within each of us. Here's how it works. The traditions and customs translate lofty and profound insight into concrete deeds, providing constant access to holiness and morality. The sacred writings record our ancestors' encounters with HaShem and their insights of what He wanted from them. The world around us is a source for understanding HaShem through His creation. Finally, the God who created the world also made the human soul, giving us the ability to distinguish between good and evil. No single one of these can convey the depth and majesty of God's will. To gain insight into HaShem's will, we must utilize the gifts of tradition, sacred writings, God's creation, and the conscience, but we must also filter them through the insight, wisdom, and experience of our ancestors. Without the Urim and Thummim, we cannot pin-point God's exact will for us in every situation, and each person may have his own path to follow. We cannot disdain the viewpoints of others, even if they differ from our own. Instead, we can learn from each other and encourage each other, even though we may follow different ways.

Hebrew reading Exodus 28:30

English reading Exodus 28:29-30

Haftarah reading 1 Samuel 15:22-26

B'rit Chadasha Hebrews 13:10-16