

This Week in Torah Tzav
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We are a people who are in a unique relationship with God. God commands us and we respond. *Mitzvot* are not good deeds by definition, although they often lead to them. *Mitzvot* are directives from God that should be imperatives in our lives. This week's *parasha* is called *Tzav*, meaning God commanded. In it, we read lots of commands from God about the sacrifices and the temple cultic worship—how things are done.

Contemplating the relevance of these words for a 21st century Jew, I didn't get much further than the notion of *Tzav*. How does God “command” us? Through words? Through instincts? Through preaching and teaching of sages, rabbis, and gifted leaders? How does God “speak” to us?

In the Torah, God literally speaks to Moses. They dialogue, they converse. God commands the creation of a new vehicle—the *urim* and *thurmim*, with the establishment of the Temple and the *kohanim* (the priesthood). These are handheld devices and stones that were cast like lots. The High Priest would then interpret them as if some sort of divination. This cleromancy would guide people as if it was a spiritual “8 Ball” (Remember that toy from your youth? You would ask questions of a large 8 ball and shake it, and the answer would float to the small window on the bottom). First mentioned in the Exodus, these tools were worn and carried by the *Kohan HaGadol*. But in Leviticus, it serves as a communication tool from God.

The actual definition of these words is hard to pin down. In fact, over time these words have become abstract concepts rather than tangible things. In fact, Yale University has taken the words to their emblem and translated them to be: Light and Truth... or in Latin: “Lux et Veritas.” The concept that enlightenment through learning and application of such a truth has become the motto of other universities as well. This cerebral and intellectual engagement can be most empowering, surely leading us to the answer of how God “speaks” to us. God commands and we hear that Divine voice in our intellectual grappling with concepts found in our texts.

Tzav is also a voice from within. We have learned what is right in the world. We know what is wrong. That voice of conscience and the pangs of guilt that we experience when we fail to live up to those standards can be perceived as God's commands. This is best illustrated by Rabbi Chaim Stern's prayer: "You are the still clear voice within us..." For him, God is found when we turn inward and listen to that voice of conscience which is the Divine voice. As we seek outward to learn, we must look inward as well. I guess that is one way to understand the duality of the *Urim* and *Thurmim*—two things needed to hear God's commands: intellect and consciousness.

On Saturday night, we Jews will sit at the *Seder* table as we start our celebration of Passover. Use these tools of smarts and soul to help engage the ritual. Experience the history; learn of our journey. Hear the subtle and overt voice of God. We are commanded not to merely do these rituals, but to experience them as if we were there. That is the essence of a *mitzvah*—to do what God commands us to do but with a whole heart and with full attentiveness.

How does God speak to us? In our study, in our doing, in our consciousness, in our rituals, in our experiencing, in our intellect. The answer is all the above or one at a time or some at a time. *Tzav!*