

PARSHAS TETZAVE – DAVID FOSKETT

Having compiled in last week's sedra a detailed description of the building of the Mishkon and its vessels, we now turn our attention to the mitzvahs pertaining to the Avodah which took place in it; the lighting of the Menorah, the Bigdei Kahunah and inauguration of the Kohanim, the Tamid offering, and the Incense Altar. Despite giving over the mitzvah of the oil in just two pesukim, let us take a look in greater detail as to what requirements the oil must meet.

The opening posuk (Shemos 27:20) tells us that the oil to be used for the Menorah must be:

- Olive oil;
- Pure;
- Crushed for illumination;
- Used to light a lamp continually

According to the Midrash, one of the reasons why Hashem commanded Moshe to use olive oil is that the olive is a holy fruit. As it says in Yirmiyah (11:16), whereby Klal Yisroel is likened to the *'fresh olive, a beautiful fruit of beautiful shape, did Hashem call your name'*. In conjunction with what we have read recently in Parashas Yisro (Shemos 19:6), that Hashem assured Klal Yisroel they would be a *'kingdom of priests'*, as well as, *'a holy nation'*, a direct parallel between the holiest nation and holiest fruit is drawn.

In addition the olive oil must indeed be pure, meaning it does not suffice for the oil merely to be made from olives, rather, it must be rid of all impurities that may exist in the oil. Rashi tells us in his commentary that this 'pure' grade refers to sediment free oil. The process by which such oil was obtained is clearly detailed in the first Mishnah found in Menachos 86a: The olives are harvested three times a year and it is from each of these three harvests that only the first drops of oil were suitable for use in the Menorah. This oil, which was crushed or rather pressed, and not milled, was the only oil suitable for illumination. However once the olives were milled, there was concern that sediment from the milling process would appear in the oil and thus render it unsuitable for illumination. Oil that was produced thereafter was nevertheless suitable for Menachos, meal offerings.

The last condition given was that the oil for illumination is used to light the Menorah continually. Looking at the posuk one may ask the following question: why does the posuk refer to the act of lighting as *'lehe'alos'* rather than the more commonly used word *'lehadiq'*? Sifsei Hachamim answers this by stating that the Kohen is required to light the wicks in the oil until the flame rises up entirely, thus it is not sufficient to simply ignite it.

To take this idea a step further Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch zt'l, in his commentary on the Chumash, teaches us a fundamental lesson in chinuch. As discussed in Shabbos 21a we learn that the Kohen was instructed to hold the torch until the wick continued to burn on its own. As Rav Hirsch puts it, this is comparable to a teacher, whose task is to 'hold' onto his pupil up until the point where he is able to learn by himself. The implication is such that just as the teacher must acquire the patience to teach his pupil right until he has grasped the subject fully, so too the pupil must also be patient not to be frustrated by the guiding hand of his teacher.

Moreover we can also take from our posuk another teaching, timely connected to the mitzvah of *Matanos Le'evyonim*, giving gifts to the poor. We learned above that although the oil collected from each of the three harvests, only the first 'batches' were suitable for use in the Menorah, the rest being suitable for meal offerings only. Yet as the second Mishnah on Menachos 86a states, the batches reduce in quality e.g. the third of the first is of equal quality to that of the second of the second and the first of the third. On this the Me'am Lo'ez tells us that the varying levels of quality exist so as to enable those of varying means to be able to offer up the best they can afford. Thus, when a person wants to bring a gift, i.e. to Hashem, he will want to give the very best that he can, according to his level. Notwithstanding that to Hashem, a poor man's small gift is just as precious as the large gift from a rich man. Nevertheless, when giving Tzedakah we learn from this that we should offer up the best that we can, irrespective of the size of our donation, simply in accordance with our means. This lesson teaches us that essentially the spirit in which a gift is brought is what truly matters.