

TETZAVEH (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Light up your Life!

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

This week, we are introduced to the laws of the Kohanim. These Priests, descendants of Aaron, were in charge of the Temple Service. One of their assignments was the daily requirement to light the golden Menorah. They were required to fill the Menorah with “*clear olive oil, crushed for lighting, to light the continuous light.*” (Exodus, 27:20)

The Menorah, which remained lit 24/7/365, could only be fueled with oil that was “*crushed for lighting.*” Olives were crushed by hand in a mortar until a single drop, totally clear of sediment, came out. This “custom-made” clear olive oil, crushed for lighting, was the only oil that was acceptable for the Menorah. (Obviously, they went through a lot of olives!)

After the first drop came out, the olives were ground in a mill. The resultant oil, although unfit for the Menorah, was acceptable as an ingredient in meal offerings. Rashi explains that the Menorah lighting oil could not have any sediment in it. For the meal offerings, however, this was not a problem.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of Blessed Memory, explains why the Menorah was different from the meal offerings. The oil for the meal offerings also had to be clear. Whatever sediment was in the oil could be filtered out, and then the oil could be used. The oil for the Menorah was disqualified if it had EVER contained sediment.

The Menorah, explained Rabbi Feinstein, is a source of light. It is symbolic of a national leader, who “illuminates” his nation with Torah instruction. There can be no “sediment,” no appearance of impropriety. Even after “filtering,” once the apparent misconduct has been explained away, the taint remains. Not everyone may have heard the explanation, and not everyone may accept the explanation. Rabbi Feinstein says that it is not good enough to have a “clarification” of our possible “sedimentary” behavior. One’s actions should be CLEAR, totally beyond question.

Even Aaron himself had a bit of a problem in this regard. When Moses was told by G-d to designate Aaron as the High Priest, he was a bit surprised. Moses was disappointed with his brother. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, he was shocked to see the nation worshipping a calf that Aaron had made. How could his brother have done such a terrible thing? How could he have participated in this national sin?!

G-d explained to Moses that He knew that Aaron's intentions were honorable. Aaron had actually attempted a delaying tactic, hoping to delay the Golden Calf Mass until Moses could arrive. Although his actions had the APPEARANCE of impropriety, G-d understood where Aaron was coming from, and He now made sure that Moses understood as well. It took an explanation from G-d to totally remove the "sediment" from Moses' view of his brother's actions.

We do not have G-d acting as our PR agent, explaining our questionable deeds to dubious onlookers. G-d knows when we are doing the right thing; our neighbors don't. It behooves us all to always act properly, 24/7/365. It's not good enough to be right, we have to ACT right. We must make sure that all our actions are clear olive oil, allowing us to shine brightly for all to see.

Have a great Shabbos and a happy Purim.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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