

THE TRIUMPH OF QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

There is a famous question posed by the Bais Yosef regarding how many days of Chanukah we celebrate: If the oil the Maccabess found was sufficient to last one day in the Menorah, and the oil miraculously lasted eight days, the miracle, then, only occurred on seven days. Why then is Chanukah celebrated for eight days? (See [vol. I # 58](#) for further discussion of this question and answers given.)

One answer to this question is put forth by the Ta"z (Orech Chayim 670:1). On the first day the Menorah was lit, there was enough oil put in each branch of the Menorah to last one day. However, not all of the oil was consumed on that first day. The oil did last for the next eight days. Therefore, being that all the oil was not consumed on the first day as it should have, a miracle occurred on the first day as well. Hence, we appropriately celebrate Chanukah for eight days.

In the "Klei Chemdah" (VaYakhel p.157), we find an interesting question regarding this answer of the Ta"z. It appears that the miracle the Ta"z is describing is one of replenishment: the oil, as it burned, miraculously replenished itself. Therefore, there was enough oil to last the entire eight days. There is a problem with this oil. The Torah explicitly describes what type of oil is to be used in the Menorah: pure olive oil, pressed, for lighting.... This is the only oil that can be used in the Menorah and the only type of oil upon which a blessing is allowed. However, this is not the oil that was in the Menorah. The oil in the Menorah was "miracle oil." It looked like olive oil. It burnt like olive oil. It "came" from olive oil. However, practically speaking, it was *not* olive oil. That being the case, a question is readily apparent: How could the Menorah be lit for the last seven days with oil that was not permitted for this purpose?

The answer, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik says, is that the oil in the Menorah did not replenish itself each day. The miracle was that the quality of the oil improved to an unnatural degree of efficiency. The oil's quality was so greatly improved that only a fraction of the amount usually needed to last a day was actually consumed on the first day. This explanation answers the problems posed. First, a miracle did occur on all eight days. Because the quality of the oil was miraculously improved, the oil burnt more efficiently on the first day as well. Second, the oil that was used was not "miracle" oil. It was the same pure olive oil that had been found and used on the first day. The reason why the oil lasted for eight days instead of one is because the oil burnt more efficiently, not because the oil miraculously replenished itself.

The fact that the miracle occurred in a qualitative fashion fits in with the theme of Chanukah. The

prayer "Al HaNissim" which is recited on Chanukah reads "You handed over the mighty to the weak, the large in number to the small, the impure to the pure, the evil to the righteous, the wanton into the hands of those involve themselves in your Torah." The author of this prayer highlights the qualities of the nation of Israel and the Syrian Greeks, who battled each other. The Syrian Greeks were larger in number. They were stronger. They were warriors. They should have won the war. They were of a larger quantity than the Jews. However, they lost the war to the Jews. The Jews were pure. They were righteous. They were students of the Torah. They were of a greater quality than their opponents. The victory of the Jews represents a victory of quality over quantity. The miracle of the oil involved quality overcoming the natural bounds of quantity. Chanukah is a holiday which is based on the superiority of quality over quantity. It is this lesson which should be taken to heart on Chanukah. We should remember that when it comes to our performance of Mitzvos, of the precepts of the Torah, of good deeds, numbers are not all that counts. The quality of our performance is of extreme importance, and Chanukah attests to the importance of quality. Chanukah should serve as an inspiration to all of us, so that we can all improve the quality of our deeds and the quality of our lives.

(from Sefer Hегyonai Halacha)

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