

# OIL AND INCENSE

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

In last week's parsha (Exodus 25:1-9) we find a list of all the materials which G-d required of the Jews in order to build the (Mishkan) Sanctuary. Among the materials are gold, silver, copper, various colors of dyed wool, linen, animal skins, logs, precious stones, and others. All of these materials are necessary in some way for the actual creation of the Sanctuary. Seemingly out of place in this list are in verse 6: oil for light, and a list of spices which would be blended for use in the anointing oil, and the incense. These are not for the building and institution of the Sanctuary, rather they are used in the actual service in the Sanctuary after the building is completed. Why are they mentioned here?

Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch (19th century) addresses this issue. In his inimitable style he cites passages from the end of Leviticus (26), which is the book dealing with the laws regarding consecration of the Temple, and our lives. There it states G-d's promise "If you will go in My statutes...and I'll place My sanctuary among you." To quote Rabbi Hirsch: When the verse states "and I'll dwell among you", ...it extends far beyond the mere presence of G-d in the Temple, but that it means the proximity of G-d on our midst, showing itself...in the whole happiness and prosperity of our private and national life under His protection and blessing. ...this blessing...is not brought about by the mere building and upkeep of the Sanctuary, but...by consecrating and giving up our whole private and public lives to carrying out the Divine Torah."

Rabbi Hirsch explains the meaning of the oil and the incense spices in this vein. His premise is that if these materials are mentioned among the things going into the building of the Sanctuary, then they are essential to the fulfillment of the purpose of the Sanctuary. The oil, and the burning of the lights represent the illumination and clarity of mind which we receive through Torah learning. The burning of the spices represent the sublimation of our actions to the inspiration and direction we receive through learning, and turning them into something pleasing to G-d. The combination of diligent study of the Law, together with its performance, must be "built" into the foundations of the Sanctuary.

Again, in this week's parsha we find the discussion of the Priestly garments preceded by the introduction of the oil for the lighting of the Menorah. At this point we are immediately following the orders to build the Sanctuary. Rabbi Hirsch explains that two things are indicated here. To quote: "On the one hand the care of the lights is the duty which in point of time takes precedence over all other duties, (just) as the clearness of mental vision which is to be derived from the Torah, is the "mother" of keeping the dictates of the Torah." He quotes the sages of the Talmud, "Great is Torah study, for it

stimulates action. "On the other hand, that the essential mission of the Kohain (Priest) is nurturing the enlightenment that is derived from the Torah."

The discussion again of the lights which represent Torah enlightenment precede the discussion of the priestly garments to convey to us who their wearers should be to us. They represent the enlightenment and importance of Torah. Even their clothing bespeaks purity, honor and dignity, and needless to say, so must their actions. Nowadays we have no Temple, and no service that goes along with the Temple. We must be the representatives of the enlightenment of Torah and its values. The following story told by Rabbi Pesach Krohn illustrates this point beautifully.

A religious man stopped along a New York road to make a call at a pay phone. There on the phone lay an address book. The man picking it up began to look for a name identifying its owner. After much futile effort, he finally happened upon a number of a "Ma" with a (305) Florida area code. Later he called the number, and after a lengthy but pleasant long distance conversation, he received the necessary information and duly returned the address book intact to a thankful young woman.

A week later the man received a beautiful bouquet of flowers from the owner of the address book. Curious, he called the young woman for an explanation. She told him the following. "I became Torah observant about five years ago, and my mother was so opposed, that she broke off all contact with me. Things remained status quo until last week when you called her. Not long after speaking with you, she called me. She apologized and said that if I am part of such a group of people who show such concern for each other, even to call long distance to try to track down the owner of a lost article, then how could she be against it? Your good deed brought a mother and daughter back together!"

These are the kinds of deeds which contribute to having the Sanctuary in our midst. Let's see what we can do individually, and as a community, to merit having the Sanctuary in our own midst speedily in our days.

Good Shabbos!

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