

# OF OLIVE OIL AND MENORAHS

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Tetzaveh

### Of Olive Oil and Menorahs

This week's parashah begins with the mitzvah to take pure olive oil for use in the menorah in the mishkan and Bet Hamikdash. R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; 1530-1572; rabbi of Cracow, Poland, and author of the glosses on Shulchan Aruch that adapted that work for Ashkenazim) writes that the oil and the menorah are symbols of Torah scholars and the Torah, respectively. This is illustrated by the verses (Zechariah 4:2-3, 11-12, 14), "I said, 'I see, and behold--there is a menorah made entirely of gold with its bowl on its top; its seven lamps are upon it, and there are seven ducts for each of the lamps on its top. There are two olive trees over it, one at the right of the bowl and one on its left.' . . . I then spoke up and said to him, 'What are these two olive trees, on the right of the menorah and on its left?' I spoke up a second time and said to him, "What are the two clusters of olives that are next to the two golden presses, which are pouring golden oil from themselves?' . . . He said to me, 'These are the two anointed men who are standing near the Lord of the Land'." The Gemara (Sanhedrin 24a) comments: "The two anointed men who are standing near the Lord of the Land' allude to Torah scholars in Eretz Yisrael, whose Torah study is pleasant one to the other. 'The two olive trees' allude to Torah scholars in Bavel, whose Torah study is bitter one to the other [as raw olives are bitter]." [This is a reference to the different styles of the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi, the former of which contains significantly more debate and give-and-take than the latter.] We see, Rema writes, that the olive trees and the oil allude to Torah scholars. The menorah itself, he writes, alludes to the seven branches of Torah and also to the seven general wisdoms, all of which are incorporated into the Torah. (Torah Ha'olah I ch.16)

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"The work of a stone engraver, pituchai chotam / engraved like a signet ring." (28:11)

Rashi explains that the first half of this pasuk refers to the work of a craftsman, an expert at working with stones. However, R' Yisrael Taub z"l (1849-1920; the first Modzhitzer Rebbe) observes that Rashi made a subtle change in quoting the verse. While the pasuk refers to "stone" in the singular, Rashi

speaks of "stones" in the plural. Why?

R' Taub explains that Rashi was hinting at a subtle lesson in the verse. The words "pituchai chotam," besides meaning, "engraved like a signet ring," also can mean, "opening what is sealed." We find that the Torah is called "Stone," as in the Tablets of Stone ("luchot even"). The yetzer hara/ Evil Inclination also is called a "stone," as in "a heart of stone" ("laiv even"). Rashi is telling us that one must be an expert craftsman, a master stoneworker, to work on these two stones.

Specifically, the master artisan is someone who understands how and when to open what is closed, and how to close that which is open. When it comes to Torah, the "artisan" must open closed hearts, as we pray every day in the U'va Le'tzion prayer, "He [G-d] will open our hearts with His Torah." On the other hand, the "master stoneworker" also needs to close what should not be open. For example, he must close his eyes and not see improper sights. The Yetzer Hara is hard at work trying to drag one down into the depths of sin and despair. One's heart should be open, full of Torah thoughts and feelings, but the Yetzer Hara tries hard to close it, turning it into a heart of stone. The Yetzer Hara also tries to open what should be closed, trying to attract man to sights he should not see. (Divrei Yisrael)

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"The Choshen / Breastplate shall not be separated from upon the Ephod / Apron." (28:28)

Literally, this verse teaches a halachah that the Kohen Gadol's Choshen should remain firmly attached to his Ephod. R' Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudlikov z"l (1748-1800; grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov z"l) writes that this verse hints at another lesson as well:

The Choshen rests over the Kohen Gadol's heart. The gematria of "Ephod" (aleph-pay-dalet) equals the gematria of "peh" / "mouth." Thus, our verse is hinting that one's heart and mouth should never "be separated." Rather, one's "heart and mouth should be equal," which is our Sages' way of saying that one should not speak deceitfully. (Degel Machaneh Ephraim)

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"Aharon shall bear the judgment of Bnei Yisrael on his heart constantly before Hashem." (28:30)

A midrash records that ten Sages were killed by the Romans in the years following the destruction of the Second Temple as punishment for Yosef's sale by ten of his brothers. Why was there a delay of approximately 1,500 years between the brothers' deed and their punishment?

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) cites the commentary Nezer Ha'kodesh which explains that when the Jewish People are fulfilling Hashem's Will generally, Hashem judges

us Himself for any wrongdoings we commit. Only when we fail to fulfill His Will in general does He turn us over to human judges. Thus, Yosef's brothers were not judged in Yaakov's time, nor afterward, as long as the Bet Hamikdash stood--a time when Hashem was generally pleased with Bnei Yisrael. After the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, Hashem allowed human judges (the Romans) to punish the Jewish People for their ancestors' sale of Yosef.

R' Kluger adds that this is alluded to in our verse: As long as Aharon is wearing the Priestly Garments, the judgment of Bnei Yisrael will be constantly before Hashem, not before human judges. (Chochmat Ha'Torah)

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"A gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate on the hem of the robe all around. It must be on Aharon in order to minister. Its sound shall be heard when he enters the Sanctuary and when he leaves, so that he not die." (28:34-35)

The Talmud Yerushalmi relates: "The sage Shmuel used to count little chickens during prayer / davening. The sage Rabbi Bun ben Chiya used to count the beams of the house during davening." Why did they do that? Certainly they were not so distracted as to be looking at chickens or beams!

R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (the Belzer Rebbe; died 1927) explain: It is related that the Rebbe R' Elimelech (great chassidic leader; died 1787) used to hold a watch in his hand during the Shabbat mussaf (known as "Kedushat Ketter" in the Sephardic liturgy which chassidim follow). R' Elimelech said that he felt so uplifted during that particular prayer that he was afraid his soul would leave him. Therefore, he held a reminder of this temporal world in his hand in order to bring himself back to earth.

If a relatively contemporary sage (R' Elimelech) prayed thus, certainly the sages of old did, explains the Belzer Rebbe. That is why Shmuel counted chickens in the middle of davening and Rabbi Bun counted the beams of the house. They needed to do so in order to remain attached to this world.

In this light, we can understand the purpose of the bells attached to the Kohen Gadol's robe. If the sages of the Talmud could lose their connections to this world during moments of spiritual ascent, certainly Aharon was at such risk when he entered the Holy of Holies. Therefore, "Its sound shall be heard when he enters the Sanctuary and when he leaves, so that he not die." The sound of the bells brought him back to earth. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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Shemittah

In previous weeks we have discussed some of the halachot that govern the handling and

consumption of produce with "kedushat shevi'it" / the sanctity of the seventh year. This week we discuss some of the general guidelines for determining whether produce of Eretz Yisrael has kedushat shevi'it.

The shemittah year begins on the first of Tishrei (i.e., Rosh Hashanah) All agricultural work that is prohibited by Torah law during the shemittah is prohibited beginning from that date. All grains, legumes and tree fruits that reached "onat ma'asrot" / the "season of tithing" before Rosh Hashanah are considered produce of the sixth year (i.e., not shemittah), even if they are gathered in the shemittah year. ("Onat ma'asrot" is the stage of growth at which produce becomes subject to ma'aser / being tithed; see more details below.) If these crops reach onat ma'asrot after Rosh Hashanah, they are considered fruits of the shemittah year and have kedushat shevi'it.

Rice that reached its full growth in the sixth year is considered produce of the sixth year even if it is harvested in the shemittah year. If it reaches its full growth in the shemittah year, it has kedushat shevi'it.

Vegetables and etrogim have kedushat shevi'it if they are picked during the shemittah year, even if they were fully-grown in the sixth year. If vegetables grow during the shemittah year but are not picked until after the shemittah, they do not have kedushat shevi'it according to Torah law.

Tree fruits, including citrus fruits other than etrogim, have kedushat shevi'it if the trees budded in the shemittah year, even if they are picked after the shemittah year. If the trees budded in the sixth year, the fruit does not have kedushat shevi'it even if it is picked in the shemittah year.

Legumes that are normally eaten dried have kedushat shevi'it if they reach one-third of their full growth during the shemittah year. Legumes that are normally eaten fresh as well as dried (for example, peas) must be handled like vegetables; thus, even if more than one-third of their growth occurred in the sixth year, they have kedushat shevi'it if they are picked in the shemittah year.

Grain has kedushat shevi'it if it reaches one-third of its growth during the shemittah year. (Rambam, Hil. Shemittah ch.4; R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, Sefer Ha'shemittah 1:4; R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l, Kitvei Ha'Grish: Shevi'it p.52)

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