

# MITZVAH LAMP

*by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene*

*The Mitzvah: There is a rabbinic commandment to kindle the Chanukah lights to celebrate the military victory at the time of the Maccabees and the miracle of the oil that burnt for eight days.*

The Kohanim, the Priests were the heroes of the Chanukah story. The descendants of Aharon were the ones to defeat their mighty enemy. They discovered the uncontaminated jug of pure olive oil with the signature of the kohein gadol, High Priest still intact. They kindled the lamps of the Menorah, candelabrum. Their small quantity of oil miraculously remained alight for eight days until new supplies were prepared. The name Chanukah denotes the "inauguration" of the Temple anew.

Interestingly, the original mitzvah of lighting the Menorah in the Sanctuary was entrusted to none other than Aharon the High Priest. Moshe's brother was upset at the original inauguration of the Sanctuary in the desert that he was not involved in the sacrificial offerings of the princes; in lieu of this, G-d instructed him with the mitzvah to kindle the Menorah (Numbers 8:2).

What is the role of the kohein, priest in the lighting of the Menorah, both at the outset and through the generations, as in the time of Chanukah?

The symbolism of the lamp captures the dynamic nature of a mitzvah.

"Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr, the mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is the light" (Proverbs 6:23). The soul is spiritual, but yet is inextricably tied to man's body. In this respect, it compares to a lamp that emits lights - non-material - but is tied to the physical wick of the lamp (See Maharal, Nesiv HaTorah Ch.16).

The Torah light of the soul correlates to the world of action through the physical action of mitzvah, and the lamp that carries this light to illuminate the darkness. The image for the Torah's Written Law is the Aron (itself related to the word Ohr, light). But the symbol of the Oral Law, that delineates exactly how this is to be translated into the practical mitzvos, is the lamps of the Menorah.

All of man's Avodah, "divine service" is based on uniting the spiritual and material realms - relating man to G-d, as symbolized in the Menorah kindled by Aharon.

The evil decree leveled by Antiochus against the Jewish nation, explains the Bach, was because the Jewish population had become lackadaisical in their Avodah, divine service. Not surprising, the very essence of the Avodah, the service in the Temple was under attack and was halted until the Maccabees conducted a re-inaugural.

Chanukah celebrates the spiritual victory over the Greeks. And which party better than the Kohanim, the Priests operated in the Temple, to be the valiant victors to re-instate the /Avodah/ with tremendous self-sacrifice by defeating the formidable Syrian-Greek forces! And this was the reward to Aharon's special mitzvah of lighting the Menorah because of his diligence and willingness to serve G-d and his despair at losing out on another mitzvah.

Beauty and the arts, the inheritance of Greece, have no intrinsic value; their worth is only where they are used as a springboard for developing man's relationship to His Creator to transcend his physical, natural framework. An example of this is the splendor and artisanship of the Temple and the Priestly vestments.

Greek influence and culture is termed "darkness" in the sense that it blackened the world by failing to channel their profound wisdom to illuminate the existence of G-d. Its magnificence is only where "Yefes (Greece) will dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27).

Hellenistic ideals exalted the beauty of the body - yet it disdained something like circumcision that proclaimed a relationship and covenant between man and G-d. Greece did not destroy the Temple; rather, they objected to the notion of transcendence. To this end, the pure oil used for the Menorah - symbol to divine service and interface between the physical wick of the lamp with the non-material flame of its light- was targeted and contaminated.

The discovery and lighting of an unspoiled jar of oil was a tremendous source of joy. It signified the Jewish people's Avodah and their mitzvah observance reflecting their relationship to G-d, and of their transcendence. The oil sealed with the signature of the High Priest, who wore "eight" garments burned for "eight" days. "Eight", notes the Maharal, is the number of transcendence, in that it is one more than seven, which denotes the complete cycle of the natural world. This was the symbolic defeat of Greece that preached only operating in the natural, material universe.

The legacy of Aharon and his descendants is that a Jewish life is a continual one exclusively dedicated to serving G-d. Of course, G-d has no need for man's light; rather, He lays down an opportunity for man to fulfill His will and through this draw closer to Him. This light of the Menorah was recaptured on Chanukah. This ideal is the cornerstone and inauguration to living a life of using the physical world as a lamp for the light of Torah.

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