

# CHANUKAH OIL: A REAL NO-KNOW

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

One of the central miracles of the Chanukah story was finding the "one bottle of pure olive oil" that should have burned for one night, yet lasted for eight. The fact that the olive oil was indeed pure, and had not been defiled by the invading Roman army, was ascertained by the fact that it was still sealed with its original seal, stamped with the stamp of the High Priest (Kohen Gadol). [Shabbos 21b]

Tosafos (ibid.) challenges this premise: He proves that it is possible for the oil to have become defiled without removing the seal from the bottle by means of a special tu'mah (defilement) called tu'mas heset, which dictates that even if the bottle were nudged indirectly, it (and the oil inside it) would be rendered impure. If so, asks Tosafos, why were they permitted to use the oil for the Menorah, since its seal was only partial proof of its sanctity?

When R' Shimon Goldfling (names have been changed) disembarked from his bus travelling from Bnei Brak to Tel Aviv that fateful winter day, he forgot one crucial thing: his briefcase. In his briefcase were his appointment book (which contained his schedule of appointments for the day), his cell phone, his lunch, and numerous other papers and documents. Without it, he was lost. He had realized his error within 30 seconds of the bus having pulled away, yet it was too late to do anything. Using a pay phone, he contacted the bus company's head office, relating his predicament, and asking them to call him back at the pay phone as soon as a driver reported finding a briefcase. Then he began waiting. And waiting. Every half-hour, he would call the head office to enquire if anything had been reported; and every half-hour they assured him that nothing had been reported yet, but that they'd call him as soon as anything turned up. As the hours passed, so did the missed appointments. R' Shimon could feel his blood pressure rising with each tick of the clock.

Finally, in the late afternoon, the pay phone rang. They had his briefcase. It had been located by a cleaning crew in a station a few blocks away. R' Shimon claimed his briefcase. The day was a complete write-off. He opened his briefcase, and noticed there were 12 messages on his cell phone. Intrigued, R' Shimon began listening:

Message 1: "Hello, Mr. Goldfling, this is Rabbi Silver of your son, Moishie's, Yeshiva. I tried calling your wife at home, but no one answers. We have a small problem here. We took the boys on a hike, and Moishie seems to have become lost. We've been searching for twenty minutes, and I'm getting concerned. Please call back as soon as you get this message." R' Shimon felt his already elevated blood pressure go up a notch.

Message 2: "Hello, this is Rabbi Silver again. Please call me as soon as you can. We've been searching for almost an hour, and we can't find Moishie. I'm very nervous. I'm calling in the army."

Message 3: "Hello, Mr. Goldfling, are you there? We have soldiers combing the area. They're bringing in helicopters as well." Message 4: "Hello, this is Rabbi Silver. Moishie has been found. He seems to have fallen off a small cliff. He's not conscious, and the army is transporting him by helicopter to the nearest hospital. I am going along. Please call back!"

Message 5: "Mr. Goldfling, we just arrived at the hospital. Moishie is still unconscious, and is being examined right now by the doctors. I'll let you know what they say as soon as they're finished."

Message 6: "Hello, Mr. Goldfling, this is Dr. Schlisser. Moishie seems to have sustained a serious blow to his head. There may be swelling in the brain. He has not, as yet, shown any response to stimulation. I am very concerned. Please call us at the hospital as soon as you receive this message. We may need to operate to relieve the swelling." R' Shimon could feel his body beginning to tremble. He sat down on a bench in the bus station in a daze.

Message 7: "Dr. Schlisser again. It doesn't look good. If I don't get any response to stimulation within the next 20 minutes, I'm going to have to operate."

Message 8: "Hello, Mr. Goldfling, this is Dr. Schlisser. I myself don't quite know what happened. Moishie has suddenly begun responding to stimulation. This is very positive. I'm putting off operating for now."

Message 9: "Mr. Goldfling - this has to be a miracle! Moishie has regained consciousness. He is talking coherently, although he remembers nothing of the hike or his fall. But this is to be expected. I'm going to keep him in emergency for observation. I will advise you as to his progress."

Message 10: "This is Dr. Schlisser. We've been observing Moishie for over an hour. He seems fine (but he refuses to eat hospital food!). I just got off the phone with your wife, Rutie. It seems she was out doing errands for most of the day. Anyway, I'm satisfied with Moishie's progress, and we're sending him home with an ambulance. Moishie should consider himself one very lucky boy! For a while there, things were touch-and-go."

Message 11: "Hello, Tatty, this is Moishie. I don't really know what happened. I woke up in a hospital room this afternoon surrounded by doctors and nurses. They told me I fell off a cliff. I feel okay now; my head hurts, and I'm hungry. Why aren't you answering your cell phone?"

Message 12: "Shimon, this is Rutie. You have no idea of what's gone on today! It's too long to tell you over the phone. Baruch Hashem everything's fine now. Where are you, anyway? It's late! Please come home as soon as you can."

R' Shimon could feel the blood beginning to return to his flushed face. In the space of four minutes, he had just lived through what should have been the most stressful day of his life. The more he

thought about it, the more he realized how grateful he was for having forgotten his briefcase on the bus. Imagine, he thought, if I would have had my cell phone. I would have spent my day in absolute terror, not knowing for hours whether Moishie would live, or, G-d forbid, die. Imagine the rushed trip to the hospital, agonizing over the decision of whether to operate or not. It would, he thought, surely have sent me into a state of nervous breakdown.

Had it occurred to anyone to question whether the flask of oil had become defiled through tu'mas heset, says the Yid HaKadosh, and the sh'eilah had been put before a rav, they would indeed not have been permitted to use the oil. Yet in fact (although they had no way of knowing it), the oil was pure. So Hashem arranged that, despite the thousands of Torah scholars and sages present, no one remembered this halacha. This, itself, was a miracle! The oil was used, and the story of Chanukah came to be.

As R' Shimon Goldfing would surely tell you: Sometimes it's best not to know. "He who places his trust in Hashem, kindness will surround him." (Tehillim/Psalms 32:10).

*This week's publication is sponsored by Mrs. Jennifer Hoffmann, in honor of the 90th birthday of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Dora (Dolly) Hoffmann, and the bas mitzvah of her granddaughter Sara Elky Hoffmann.*

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