

MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And you will command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you clear olive oil. (Shemos 27:20)

CLEAR: Without sediments, as learned in Menachos (86a), "He leaves it to ripen at the top of the olive tree . . ." (Rashi)

In other words, Rashi is explaining, it is not enough that the oil not have sediments by the time it is to be used for the Menorah, but it must be oil that NEVER had sediments in it from the beginning.

As the Mishnah explains, the olive tree is harvested three times a year. The first harvesting time was for the olives at the top of the tree that ripened the quickest. The second harvest was of the olives from the middle branches which received less sunlight, and the third harvest was of the olives from the lowest branches that never receive full sunlight and only complete their ripening process after harvesting.

Oil was extracted from the olives of each harvest through three methods: crushed in a mortar, pressed with a beam, and finally, ground with millstones. However, only the oil that was crushed in a mortar produced the clear oil to which Rashi refers.

The question arises: What difference does it make if the oil once contained sediments, as long as it is perfectly clear when used in the Menorah?

There are many lessons that can be learned from this halachic detail, but one that I can personally appreciate has to do with the difference between being what is formally called a "Ba'al Teshuvah," and someone who is born "frum from birth," that is someone who has "returned" to his or her Torah roots, or, someone who was born into them.

Both terms are inaccurate. For, the word "ba'al" implies the process has been completed, and the process of returning to Torah is an ongoing and dynamic one. That is why many prefer to the term, "Chozar b'Teshuvah," which implies the person is in the process of returning, no matter how observant they have already become.

Likewise, no one is ever born "frum from birth," even though they have been born into a frum, that is, religious home. Being Torah observant is a matter of learning Torah and performing mitzvos, neither of which are relevant to a newborn baby. It also implies CHOOSING to learn Torah and mitzvos, something that certainly isn't relevant until the child is much older.

However, having clarified this point, there is still a very distinct difference between the two types of Jews, a difference that brings with it pros and cons.

More than likely, a Jew who has lived in the secular world has partaken of things that, according to the Torah, are prohibited. Kedushah, the foundation of Torah, is rarely, if at all, a priority for a non-religious Jew. And, as Rashi points out at the beginning of Parashas Kedoshim, it is the need for kedushah that usually builds the fences between that which is permissible by Torah and that which is not.

Thus, at the moment that a Jew has "woken" up to the relevance of Torah to his or her life, he or she is like olive oil filled with sediment. It usually takes some serious teshuvah to "filter" out those sediments, so that the Chozer b'Teshuvah can "normalize" from a Torah perspective, inside and outside.

However, as only Chozer b'Teshuvah will tell you, even after such purification processes have been performed, and the sediments seems to have been removed, something always seems to remain behind. Sometimes they remain as unconscious memories, liable to surface when a specific event occurs that triggers the memory.

Sometimes, the memory might even be what psychologists call a "live memory," one that when triggered also draws up emotions from the past as well. When that happens, a Chozer b'Teshuvah might even find himself undergoing a psychological and emotional test he thought he left behind years ago, maybe even decades ago, much to his chagrin.

As one Chozer b'Teshuvah put it, "Even though it had been years since I had seen the movie, and I had no desire to see it again, or any movie for that matter, for reasons I can't even explain, I saw a scene from it in my mind one day while learning Talmud in yeshivah. I had been tired and had spaced out for a moment, until I realized what was playing in my mind. When I woke myself from my trance, I was embarrassed slightly, though my chavrusa (study partner) had no idea what I had been thinking about. I thought to myself, 'You mean that stuff is still a part of me now, after all these years of learning and doing teshuvah?' It was one of many such frustrating moments."

Is there no hope for the Chozer b'Teshuvah? Is he or she doomed to be a product of his or her less-than-desirable past, at least in THIS world?

SHABBOS DAY:

... They shall take for you clear olive oil. (Shemos 27:20)

In the meantime, we can better appreciate why the olive oil used in the holy Menorah be pure from the start. The light of the Menorah represents Torah, particularly the Oral Law, the bulk of the learning that goes on in the yeshivah world. A lack of purity cannot only distract a person from learning Torah, but it can also distort the Torah they learn.

Thus, it is an amazing blessing to be born into a religious environment (something that did not happen for me). There is a certain purity, assuming that the religious family is "normal" by Torah standards, that is enviable. The "sediment" that the average secular Jew comes back to Torah with, can be a real burden and challenge to eradicate. Sometimes, for some "Chozrei b'Teshuvah," it results in a treacherous spiritual tightrope walk between two very different worlds - the one from which they came and the one to which they are going.

If the analogy is correct, then this is tantamount to saying that the only true "fuel" of Torah is the pure-bred Torah Jews. This doesn't mean that oil with sediments can't burn, or burn just as brightly as non-sedimentary oil, for in reality it does. However, it does mean that there is something impure in that light, and Torah light needs to be as pure as possible.

How depressing.

Well, the first thing to know is that this has nothing to do with one's portion in the World-to-Come, which ultimately is what living by Torah is all about. In fact, because a Chozer b'Teshuvah had to fight his way back to Torah, and time-and-time-again decided to do the right thing over the comfortable thing, he may be earning more reward for his mitzvos than someone for whom living by Torah is just second nature.

As the rabbis have taught:

According to the effort is the reward. (Pirkei Avos 5:22)

Fighting against decades of secular upbringing to align oneself with Torah living brings much reward. In fact, precisely because the mark of secular living remains embedded in a Chozer b'Teshuvah's consciousness, recreating past struggles, he or she has a continuous opportunity to increase his or her reward in the World-to-Come, beyond what one is going to receive for the everyday Torah learning and mitzvos he will have performed.

Fine, but what about the role of a Chozer b'Teshuvah in everyday life? Must he play a sedimentary role in Jewish life, and be satisfied with this alone? Or, does the comparison of the returning Jew to the olive oil of the Menorah have its limitations?

We'll let the Talmud answer those questions:

Completely righteous people cannot stand in the place that Ba'alei Teshuvah stand. (Brochos 34b)

And, as if that were not enough:

The level of the Fifty Gates of Understanding is the level of knowledge given to the Ba'al Teshuvah. (Pri Tzaddik, Tu B'Av 6)

This is not bad, considering the Talmud says elsewhere:

Fifty Gates of Understanding were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moshe except

for one. (Rosh Hashanah 21b)

And, it is to the Fifty Gates of Understanding that the light of the Menorah alludes. How do we resolve THIS one?

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

"If [one is drawn] to scoffers, he will scoff; but if to the humble, he will find favor." (Mishlei 3:34)

The Talmud analyzes the order of the Aleph-Bais, and asks:

Why does the face of the Kuf turn away from the Raish? The Holy One (in Hebrew, this Name begins with the letter Kuf), Blessed is He, says, "I cannot look at an evil person (rasha)." Why does the "tahg" (crown) of the Kuf face the Raish? The Holy One, Blessed is He says, "If he will return, I will tie a crown upon him like Mine." Why does the leg of the Kuf hang down? If he [the evil person] decides to return and ascend, he can ascend with it. This supports Raish Lakish, who said, "Why is it written, 'If [one is drawn] to scoffers, he will scoff; but if to the humble, he will find favor' (Mishlei 3:34)? [To teach that] they open the door for one who comes to defile himself. However, for one who comes to purify himself, they help him." (Shabbos 104a)

This is a very accepted principle in Torah. If a person is into sinning, then Heaven will give him opportunity to do so, though never actually help him to perform the sin. In fact, the undoing of many a sinner is the way they are so successful in spite of their spiritually self-destructive attitude and actions. They wonder, "If G-d really cared, wouldn't He stop me somehow?"

Says the Talmud, no. Thus, people may eat, drink, and be merry today, but tomorrow they will pay for it, BIG time.

However, this is not the case for a person walking in the direction of Torah. For such a person, Heaven not only shows them the door, but helps them to cross the threshold as well. In other words, one who comes to purify himself may find himself far more purified than he had previously been capable of becoming on his own. A miracle!

Interesting is the choice of word the Talmud made. It ought to have said, "One who comes to return to Torah, they help him." Why did the Talmud choose the concept of purification to speak about Ba'alei Teshuvah?

Because, as we have said, to become a TRUE Ba'al Teshuvah takes a miracle, one that Heaven is prepared to perform with pleasure for the Chozer b'Teshuvah who walks in that direction, according to the level of desire to walk in the path of Torah. When it comes to Chozrei b'Teshuvah, God is prepared to help remove the "sediment" that the person cannot remove, and make them as if they had been pure from the start.

That's right, from the start. Then they can become the "shemen zais zach" - the pure olive oil Rashi

speaks about for the light of the Menorah. And, as we shall now see, b'ezras Hashem, that is just the beginning of where they can go from there.

MELAVE MALKAH:

[Moshe said,] "I implored G-d at that time . . ." (Devarim 3:23)

The following has to be one of the most amazing concepts in Torah, at least on the level of Pshat:

Moshe Rabbeinu was rooted in the 49 gates of understanding, which are the ways of Torah, and therefore his prayer did not help to nullify the decree [against him]. Therefore, he began the parshah by saying, "I implored G-d at that time (Devarim 3:23) . . . And G-d told me, 'It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter!' (Ibid. 26)." [However, he later continued by saying,] "Now, Israel . . ." (Ibid. 4:1), that is, through teshuvah, hinted to by the word "now" (as the Talmud says in Rosh Hashanah 21b), ["you can achieve what I could not,] which is the fiftieth gate, [and] you can rectify everything." For, "completely righteous people cannot stand in the place that Ba'alei Teshuvah stand" (Brochos 34b). Therefore, ". . . listen to the decrees. . ." (Pri Tzaddik, VaEschanan 3)

In other words, Moshe was saying to the Jewish people just before he died, you can achieve what I could not - BECAUSE I was completely righteous: the 50th gate of understanding, which is a function of teshuvah I cannot do. It is yours if you keep the decrees of Torah, and sincerely desire to purify yourselves. Then G-d will grant you what He would not, could not grant me!

Well, if that is the case, then the tables have been reversed! All of a sudden, for all the protection growing up religious provides, it denies the person certain privileges available only to those who turn their ships around towards the harbor of Torah! Chozrei b'Teshuvah can become the best "Menorah fuel" around!

Not to worrrrrry.

There are few, if any at all, Moshe Rabbeinu's around. Even those who possess the privilege of growing up with Torah, and it is a phenomenal privilege that must never be taken for granted, chances are that there are still plenty of areas of religious issues requiring some form of teshuvah or another. That is, even "frum-from-birthers" can also become Chozrei b'Teshuvah, and eventually, Ba'alei Teshuvah as well.

After all, Moshe Rabbeinu had been talking to a generation that had been born into the world of Torah, and were so close to G-d that they merited the miracles that occurred for them each day of their journey. And, let's not forget who their rebi was throughout all the years either.

Thus, there is great hope for ALL Jews to be that invaluable "shemen zais zach," those born religious, and those who choose to be so later on in life. We can all be a great source of Torah light.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org