

# PURE OIL

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Torah ordains that the olive oil used to light the eternal menorah - candelabra - must be of the purest and best available. There is obvious logic to this requirement. Impure oil will cause the flames to stutter and flicker. Impure oil also may exude an unpleasant odor and make the task of the daily cleaning of the oil lamps difficult and inefficient. Yet I feel that the basic underlying reason for this requirement of purity of the oil lies in the value that the Torah advances in the performance of all positive things in life - the necessity to do things correctly, enthusiastically and with exactitude.

In 'halachic' parlance this is called 'kavanah' - the intent to perform the commandment and deed properly and in the best possible way. That is the story of the pure container of oil that is the core of the miraculous story of Chanuka. The Hasmoneans could have used regular, even impure oil and still not have violated any strong 'halachic' stricture. Yet the idea of 'kavanah', of doing the matter in the best way possible, introduces an element of special dedication and holiness into what otherwise would be an event of rote and habit. This is what drives the spirit of holiness and eternity that accompanies the performance of 'mitzvot.' So the requirement of the Torah for the purest possible oil to fuel the holy and eternal menorah - candelabra - is readily understandable when the concept of 'kavanah' is factored into the value system of the Torah.

The light of the menorah has never been dimmed over the long history of the Jewish people. Though the menorah itself has long ago disappeared from the view of the Jewish public - it was no longer present even in Second Temple times - the idea of its light and influence has continued to be present in Jewish life. The flame is not a tangible item - it is, in reality, an item of spirit more than of substance.

It provides light and warmth and psychological support in very difficult times and circumstances. Yet, its influence and support is somehow directly connected to the investment into actually kindling it. That is the import of the words of the rabbis in Avot that according to the effort invested so is the accomplishment and reward.

All things spiritual are dependent upon the effort invested in creating that sense of spirit - the purer the oil, the brighter and firmer the flame. This simple yet profound message forms the heart of this week's 'parsha.' It also forms the heart of all values and commandments that the Torah ordains for us.

The 'parsha' of 'Tetave' speaks to all of us in a direct and personal fashion. It encompasses all of the

goals of Judaism and is, in itself the light of spirituality that lights our souls and lives.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)