

THE OIL OF ANOINTING WAS MEANT TO 'LIGHT THE FIRE' OF THE KOHANIM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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The Oil Of Anointing Was Meant To 'Light The Fire' of the Kohanim

In this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu is instructed to make the Shemen haMishcha [anointing oil]. He was instructed to anoint Aharon and his sons with the oil to sanctify them for the priesthood and then he was to tell the children of Israel that 'This shall be for Me, oil of sacred anointment for your generations.' [Shemos 30:30-31].

Rashi on these last words quotes a teaching of the Sages [Horiyos 11b] that the original Shemen haMishcha that Moshe made to anoint Aharon would remain intact in its entirety into the distant future (l'asid lavoh). When the Temple will be rebuilt - may it occur speedily in our own days - we will use that very same flask of oil to anoint the priests prior to their service in the Third Temple.

It is obviously an open miracle for such a small quantity of oil to last for so long. It is somewhat akin

to the miracle at the time of the Chanukah story of the oil that lasted for eight days without being consumed.

G-d does not make miracles unnecessarily. Even if, for some reason, it would have been part of G-d's Grand Plan to have all Kohanim for all time be anointed by the oil prepared by Moshe Rabbeinu, that plan could have been carried out without resorting to such a miracle. The All-Knowing G-d could have figured out how many gallons of oil would be necessary to anoint the Kohanim of all future eras and tell Moshe to prepare large quantities of oil, instead of merely preparing 12 lug. Why did G-d make this open miracle, (which was perhaps greater even than the Chanukah miracle) that the small quantity of Shemen HaMishcha that Moshe prepared would last forever?

I saw a very interesting observation on this question from Rav Dovid Feinstein. This miracle taught us the lesson that the Kohanim did not become sanctified because of the Shemen haMishcha. If Shemen haMishcha was necessary for sanctifying the Kohanim, it is logical that it would be consumed. The process of transferring holiness from the oil to the person would necessarily consume the oil. By virtue of the fact that the oil did not become consumed, the Torah is informing us that it was not the oil that made them holy.

How did they become holy? They became holy on their own. The Shemen haMishcha was merely a catalyst. It was like a candle. When a second candle is lit from a first candle, the full brightness of the original candle remains intact. The Shemen haMishcha inspired Aharon and his sons to find and bring out the sanctity that was already inherent in the kohanim. The lesson is that people cannot be "made holy". There is no magic formula to sprinkle somebody with "holy oil" so that he will automatically become holy. It does not work that way.

Holiness must be self-generated. There can be an inspiration for the holiness and the Shemen haMishcha served that function. It was supposed to "light their fire", so to speak, and inspire them. But the holiness had to come from within. The same is true regarding wisdom and character traits and any form of sanctity.

We as parents can try, can inspire, can cajole and persuade our children. We can try every tool in the book. But we can not pound kedusha [holiness] or chochmah [wisdom] or midos [character traits] into a child. Our children are blessed with an inherent sanctity by virtue of their neshamas [souls]. We can try to inspire that inherent sanctity, to bring it out and make it blossom. However, we cannot impose it or superimpose it on them. This is the lesson of the oil of anointing. This is why G-d felt it necessary to make such a miracle to teach this enduring lesson that sanctity cannot be imposed - it must be inspired.

When Is There An Opportunity To Make Use of Warped Thinking?

There is an interesting Daas Zekeinim m'baalei haTosofos on this week's parsha [Shemos 32:2]. When the masses approached Aharon and asked him to make for them an "Elohim that will lead us" he told them to remove the golden jewelry that was upon their wives, sons, and daughters and bring it to him. When we read this pasuk and take it at face value it appears to be a ringing indictment of Aharon. He appears to be "guilty as sin". The Daas Zekeinim, however, tells us that Aharon was acting for the sake of heaven.

Aharon reasoned as follows: "If I appoint Kalev or Nachshon the leader in Moshe's absence, then I will have problems. Moshe will return and there will be a dispute in terms of who will be the leader. If I don't act, the masses will appoint someone on their own. That would be even worse. Who knows whom they might appoint? That person would be even less amenable to yielding his power once Moshe returns. If I volunteer to take over myself, that might offend Moshe. He might think that I am usurping his territory."

Because of this dilemma, the Daas Zekeinim explain, Aharon resorted to the age-old tactic of stalling for time. "I will tell them bring me gold from their wives." Aharon expected that the men would get nowhere with such a request and the project would die for lack of material. It was a brilliant tactic. He anticipated that the husbands and wives would start fighting with one another over this request. They would lock themselves in a room to argue about the matter. By the time the dust settled, Moshe would be back.

As we all know, it did not turn out that way. But Aharon's thought process prior to issuing his call for jewelry certainly seems a lot more reasonable to us after reading the interpretation of the Daas Zekeinim.

What can we learn from the comment of the Daas Zekeinim? We can learn that we can observe someone doing something that appears to us to make him as guilty as sin. However, despite the appearance that there are no extenuating circumstances, that may not really be the case. One never knows.

Rav Hutner used to say that there is a time and a place for use of every character trait - positive or negative. There is a time for anger. There is a time for jealousy. Sometimes one is supposed to be angry or jealous. If there is a time for everything, Rav Hutner used to ask, what about the character trait of possessing a warped mind (krumkeit)? When is the time and place to use a warped mind? Rav Hutner answered that when it comes to giving someone the benefit of the doubt when confronted with suspicious circumstantial evidence, then one may and should use warped thinking, if that's what it takes, to come up with an explanation why the person may not be as guilty as it appears.

It might be necessary to bend over backwards and to twist oneself into a pretzel to come up with a plausible explanation for a person's suspicious behavior. But removing suspicion from a person is precisely the correct opportunity to make use of warped thinking and to perhaps justify the motives

of the person.

All too often we see our Biblical heroes or our next door neighbors involved in activities which make us want to question their wisdom, ethics, or morality. The lesson of this Daas Zekeinim m'baalei ha Tosfos is to not jump to conclusions. Let us use all our creativity and even our 'krumkeit' to figure out why this person may not be as guilty as he appears.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Ki Sisa are provided below:

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