

Our *Parashah* opens: "Now you shall command *Bnei Yisrael* that they shall take to you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually." R' Michoel Forschlanger z"l (1883-1958; a leading Torah scholar in Baltimore, Maryland) notes that the words "to you" seemingly are superfluous. He explains:

Hashem made Moshe Rabbeinu His messenger to give the Torah to *Bnei Yisrael*. However, that was true only regarding the information in the Torah. In contrast, says the *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 38a), *Hashem* gave the ability to plumb the depths of Torah, to analyze it, and to make analogies from one law to another, to Moshe alone. Moshe, out of his love for the Jewish People, chose to share that ability with the whole nation.

R' Forschlanger continues: Our Sages say that the *Menorah* represents the Torah. Thus, the oil placed in the *Menorah* represents the Torah's inner wisdom--the wisdom that *Hashem* originally gave only to Moshe. That is why our verse says about the oil for the *Menorah*, "They shall take to you . . ."

R' Forschlanger adds: We find in a number of places in the *Gemara* that an exceptional scholar is referred to as "Moshe" even though that is not his name. For example, the sage Rav Safra said to the sage Rava (*Sukkah* 39a), "Moshe! You have spoken well." *Kabbalists* explain that every great Torah scholar has a "spark" of Moshe Rabbeinu's soul within him. Thus, in every generation, the way to merit to receive the Torah's inner wisdom that was gifted to us by Moshe is by connecting ourselves to the great scholars of the generation. (*Toras Michoel*)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue addressing the subject of "Kavanah."

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z"l (Spain; early 11th century) writes: A person is capable of entering some form of Divine service and departing from it while, all along, his mind is elsewhere. A person may pray for forgiveness with his lips, but his thoughts are running wild. About this, a pious person said, "We must ask forgiveness for how we ask forgiveness." Regarding a person who prays with his limbs [*i.e.*, he mouths the words and "shuckles" / sways back and forth], but his heart and mind are turning away, we read (*Yeshayah* 29:13), "With [the nation's] mouth and lips it has honored me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me." Furthermore, it says (*Tehilim* 78:36), "They sought to beguile Him with their mouth, and they deceived Him with their tongue."

R' Bachya continues: If a person would awaken at that moment and take an accounting of his soul, he would say to himself, "How can I act this way toward the Creator? It would not be proper to act this way toward a human being if I needed something from him or if he needed something from me! If I would ask to borrow an object from someone and he would sense that my thoughts are elsewhere while I am talking to him, he certainly would be disgusted and would reject my request. It goes without saying that if I were thinking about something he disapproves of that he would hate me."

How then, R' Bachya concludes, shall I not be ashamed before my Creator when I try to please Him in a way that I know will not please even someone who is weaker than me?

(*Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Yichud Ha'ma'aseh* ch.5)

Rabbeinu Asher z"l (1250-1327; Germany and Spain; one of the three "pillars" of *Halachah* on whose works the *Shulchan Aruch* is based) writes similarly: "Concentrate during prayer, for it is the service of the heart. If your son would speak to you, but not with his heart, would you not be upset?"

(*Orchot Chaim* No. 36)

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring

10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-593-2272

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Thirty Days Before Pesach . . .

"It is an obligation to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy."

(The Pesach Haggadah)

R' Shlomo Yazya Duran *z"l* (Algiers; late 16th century) asks: Which is it--an obligation or merely something praiseworthy?

He explains: One might have thought that the *Mitzvah* is to tell our children that the Exodus occurred, and then to engage in philosophical speculation about it; for example: How does G-d who is incorporeal cause plagues or miracles to occur in the physical world? In turn, this might lead a person to think that there is no purpose in going into the details of the plagues and miracles, since we cannot understand them anyway. Therefore, we are told: The *Mitzvah* is just telling the story. Therefore, the more one tells, the better!

R' Duran continues: What does it mean to tell "more"? It means that we should relate the miracles within the miracles. We do this when we say in the *Haggadah* that each plague was really four plagues or five plagues. Also, one could do this by relating the *Midrash* that describes how *Bnei Yisrael* became wealthy selling water to the Egyptians during the Plague of Blood. And, one could relate that the Plague of Hail consisted of balls of ice with fire inside. The more one spells out the details of the miracles, and the miracles within the miracles, and the plagues within the plagues, the better. Engaging in philosophical speculation about how any of these things happened is not part of the *Mitzvah*. *(Tiferet Yisrael: Introduction)*

R' Eliezer Ashkenazi *z"l* (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) also notes that the *Haggadah* seems to contradict itself, saying first that speaking about the Exodus is an "obligation," and then saying that it is "praiseworthy." He answers: The sentence, "The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy," is not part of the *Haggadah*-narrator's statement. Rather, the narrator says, "It is an obligation to tell about the Exodus from Egypt." How so? By relating to our children, "The more one tells about the Exodus, the more he is praiseworthy."

Why should we tell our children that the more we talk about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy we are? R' Ashkenazi explains: If Pharaoh had let us go of his own volition, it would be demeaning for us to talk about it. Does one proudly say, "I was a slave and my master generously let me go"? But, that is not what happened! *Hashem* took us out of Egypt miraculously, against Pharaoh's will, and that is something we are happy to talk about--the more the better. *(Ma'asei Hashem)*

"Now you shall command *Bnei Yisrael* that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually." (27:20)

R' Gershon Stern *z"l* (1863-1936; rabbi of Marosludus, Romania) writes: In his commentary to the first verse in the Torah, *Rashi z"l* asks why the Torah begins with the story of Creation rather than with the first *Mitzvah* that was given to the Jewish People. *Rashi* answers that, lest anyone accuse the Jewish People of stealing *Eretz Yisrael*, *Hashem* wants to make clear that He created the world and He can give *Eretz Yisrael* to whomever He wants.

R' Stern continues: R' Shimon Sofer *z"l* (1821-1883; the "*Michtav Sofer*"; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) asks, "Even so, the Torah is meant to teach us how to act!" How is that goal furthered by pointing out that we inhabit *Eretz Yisrael* legitimately?

R' Sofer answers: The Torah (*Shmot* 19:6) calls upon us to be "a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation." Just as the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* are meant to inspire, and set an example for, all of the Jewish People, so the Jewish People are meant to inspire, and set an example for, the other nations of the world. In order to do this, however, our behavior must be above reproach. Therefore, it is crucial that the Torah justify our being in *Eretz Yisrael*.

R' Stern adds: Our verse can be interpreted allegorically in light of the above. *Midrash Shir Ha'shirim Rabbah* teaches: In what way are the Jewish People like oil? Just as oil brings light to the world, so the Jewish People bring light to the world. [Until here from the *Midrash*.] However, as our verse states, the oil--and by analogy, we--must be "pure." And, why are we "pressed"--i.e., persecuted and dispersed? "To kindle the lamp continually" --so that we can spread the light of the Torah throughout the world. *(Peninei Yalkut Ha'Gershuni p.112)*

"The stones shall be according to the names of *Bnei Yisrael*, twelve according to their names . . ." (28:21)

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg *z"l* (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: Each of the twelve stones in the *Kohen Gadol's* breastplate had a unique appearance. Presumably, the color of each tribe's stone somehow relates to the unique characteristics of that tribe. Indeed, *Rashi* (to *Bemidbar* 2:2) writes that each tribe's flag matched the appearance of the stone that represented that tribe in the *Choshen*.

Despite their differences, R' Mintzberg continues, the twelve stones combined to form a beautiful ornament. And, if one stone was missing, the *Choshen* was not "kosher."

R' Mintzberg concludes: Our Sages teach that we have a tradition that none of the Twelve Tribes will ever cease to exist. As reflected by their different-colored stones, as well as by Yaakov's individual blessing to each tribe, each tribe brings something unique to our collective service of *Hashem*. Each tribe's different approach is legitimate and necessary, and each complements all of the other approaches. At the same time, what the tribes have in common is greater than what distinguishes them, and, that commonality is crucial to achieving our mission. *(Ben Melech: Bereishit III p.392)*