



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

THE MENORAH, ASSIMILATION, AND ACCULTURATION

RABBI DANNY KROLL

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AYALA BRODIE ('17)

TAMARA KAHN ('17)

LEORA KROLL ('17)

ELI LITWIN ('18)

This week's parsha opens with God instructing Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to produce pure olive oil to be used in the daily lighting of the menorah in the Mishkan. A very different scene played itself out a few thousand years later in the pages of a neighborhood newspaper in New York:

In the December 20, 2007 edition of the Riverdale Press, a letter to the editor written by a local Jewish woman named Arlyne was published, in which she wrote: "On December 7 I took my two small grandsons to the McDonald's on West 236th Street and Broadway for lunch and to play. To my disappointment I found there was no menorah anywhere in the restaurant. There were many Christmas decorations all over as well as a Christmas tree so why not a menorah? There are many, many Jewish people that eat there so why not cel-

brate our holidays as well? They have lost me as a customer...Most of the stores along West 231st Street have a menorah in their window so why should this restaurant not have one?"

Predictably, the responses in the next edition of the newspaper were highly critical of the letter, but things may not be as simple as they appear to be, especially in the light of two contradictory Midrashim.

The Torah tells us that Bnei Yisrael did not initially listen to Moshe when he told them that God would take them out of Egypt because of a shortness of breath and עבודה קשה, hard labor. The midrash comments that they did not listen to Moshe because it was too קשה, difficult, for them to abandon their עבודה, service of foreign gods. Bnei Yisrael did not want to hear about the God of Abraham because it would mean a return to monotheism.

This midrash contradicts a different midrash in Vayikra Rabbah which lists four reasons why the Jewish people were worthy of being redeemed from Egypt

-- they did not change their names or language, did not engage in evil speech and refrained from illicit relations. One could easily explain away the contradiction by saying that not all midrashim have to be in perfect consonance with one another; they are meant to teach important lessons and are not necessarily an accurate portrayal of historical fact. There is, however, an explanation for how a nation that found difficulty abandoning foreign gods was so pious that they made sure not to give their children Egyptian names and did not speak lashon hara.

An insight from Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, which contrasts the Egyptian and Babylonian exiles, is key to explaining the hypocritical behavior of Bnei Yisrael. In Egypt, our ancestors abandoned their ritual practices; they were idolaters and stopped practicing the one mitzvah they had, brit milah. At the same time, they were meticulous about maintaining their cultural identity, keeping their Jewish names, language and family structures. While in Babylonia, however, the Jewish people began to speak Aramaic, changed their names and intermarried; the breakdown of Jewish culture and assimilation into Babylonian culture required a national repentance movement by Ezra. No such revival was needed in Egypt, where 40 days after redemption the people were able to receive the Torah.

How could it be that our idolatrous ancestors were more ready to be observant Jews once they separated themselves from their idols than our Babylonian ancestors who were monotheistic? Explains Rabbi Meir Simcha, that when in exile, preservation of Jewish culture and identity is more important than the observance of mitzvot; a Jew who holds steadfast to his culture is more likely to return to an observant lifestyle than one who is a victim of acculturation.

In an ideal world, Arlyne would have taken her grandchildren to a kosher restaurant. In an ideal world she would not only have Jewish pride and Jewish identity, but also observe mitzvot.

While the menorah she wanted to be kindled in McDonald's was a far cry from the menorah of the Maccabees or the one from our parsha, she should be applauded for not being a victim of acculturation.

FROM MUNDANE TO MASTERPIECE

AYALA BRODIE ('17)

Many people seem to think the topic of the Mishkan and all that is associated with it are unimportant and irrelevant, as we do not have a Mishkan today. In reality, these parshiyot that detail the building of the Mishkan and the *keilim* and the services performed within the Mishkan are among the most profound in the Torah. The messages of the Mishkan are really messages of how to live everyday life.

The Torah says,

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי בְּתוֹכְכֶם

“You shall make for Me a sanctuary and I shall dwell amongst you” (Shmot 25:8). God cannot dwell in an earthly place; He is everywhere, and He is not physical. Why then must we make a home for Him?

The lesson of the Mishkan is that we must use our material, physical objects to serve God. In this way, we can elevate the physical, making it something really valuable. Just as we elevate foods by making brachot and we check our clothing for shatnez to ensure that even with our most material possessions we recognize Hashem, the Mishkan exemplifies the process by which humans can take tangible construction materials and transform them by using them for the service of God.

Our world is full of objects. We treasure our cell phones, iPads, and laptops. But the lesson of the Mishkan still resonates today: our objects can be used for our entertainment, enjoyment, and communication with one another, but they cannot be used solely for the mundane. It's up to us to turn the mundane objects into spiritual masterpieces.

EARNING SPECIAL STATUS

TAMARA KAHN ('17)

Parshat Tetzaveh discusses the roles of the kohanim as well as their garments. The parsha begins with Hashem commanding Bnei Yisrael to procure pure olive oil for the menorah so that Aharon and the kohanim can light the *ner tamid* – the everlasting flame – and only then does the parsha delve into the subject of the kohanim's attire. In order to understand the physical jobs of the kohanim and the title of "kohen," the role itself first warrants an explanation.

We learn from Yirmiyahu that Bnei Yisrael is compared to an olive, and therefore there are many similarities between the olive oil intended for the menorah and Bnei Yisrael. Pure olive oil is the highest quality oil, and so too, our nation is the holiest nation. Furthermore, oil is hydrophobic and does not blend into a mixture; it remains separate, similar to the separation that Bnei Yisrael has maintained from all other nations, preserving the Jewish identity. Oil rises to the top of solutions, and when we perform mitzvot and fulfill Hashem's will, we rise above the other nations, above the distractions in our lives, to higher levels of spirituality in Hashem's eyes. A major aspect of oil is the light it brings into the world; as the chosen nation, the *ohr lagoyim*, it is our duty to shed light onto the other nations and illuminate the world with Torah and mitzvot.

Accepting our elevated status as Am Yisrael requires us to first consider our responsibilities that accompany this title. We are responsible to use our kedusha to achieve the status of *ohr lagoyim*; only once we take on the responsibility of being role models may we merit that title.

One role and responsibility of the kohanim was to light the menorah, a source of light in the Beit Hamikdash, with the pure olive oil. The description of the garments that the kohanim don follows the description of their holy duty of lighting the menorah because their roles, their responsibilities and obligations, take precedence over their status, shown through clothing.

Moshe's name is not mentioned once in this entire parsha. This exclusion is due to Moshe's plea to Hashem to forgive Bnei Yisrael after they sinned with the *cheit ha'egel* at Har Sinai. Moshe asked Hashem to exclude him from the holiest of books if Hashem refused to forgive Bnei Yisrael, and although Hashem did in fact forgive the nation, a tzaddik's words must be followed through to fruition. Moshe's name is therefore absent from this parsha to demonstrate the need to *earn* a title, or recognition, through responsibility. Moshe overlooked his kavod, his honor, to defend Bnei Yisrael, and as their leader, he put their needs before his own.

As part of the Jewish nation, if we desire to illuminate the world and shed light onto the other nations, we have to have true intentions and fulfill our duty without allowing distractions to intervene. We must learn to overcome the obstacles, and so we must prioritize our responsibilities in this world and our service to Hashem.

THE INTERWOVEN LESSONS OF CLOTHING

LEORA KROLL ('17)

Parshat Tetzaveh focuses on the clothes that the kohanim wore. The kohanim are an important part of the Jewish people even today, but why must the Torah go into detail about the special clothes they wore? Kohanim no longer serve in the Beit Hamikdash, so why is it important to concern ourselves with the seemingly trivial details of their clothing?

The answer can be found by first examining the Kohen Gadol's breastplate, the *choshen*. At first glance, this seems like an incredible work of art that the Kohen Gadol would wear to indicate his high stature, but it proves to be more than a decorative garment. Throughout the period of the Neviim and beyond, the Kohen Gadol would use the breastplate to contact Hashem and ask Him difficult questions.

We can learn from this that if someone as

great as the Kohen Gadol had to ask for help, then we should not hesitate to do so as well. When we are asked a tough question or faced with a difficult problem, we should not be afraid to ask for assistance.

CATCHING CHARACTER

ELI LITWIN ('18)

וְאֵתָהּ תְצַוֶּה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

“And you shall command the children of Israel...” (Shmot 27:20)

The first word of this sentence, **וְאֵתָהּ**, and you, is completely unnecessary, because the second word, **תְצַוֶּה**, starts with the Hebrew letter *taf*, which itself means “you”. The word **תְצַוֶּה** already means “and you shall command.” What do we need the first word, **וְאֵתָהּ**, for? In reality, God is teaching us how to command others; how to inspire others; how to teach others.

וְאֵתָהּ, and you: The way you act, the way you walk, the way you talk, will be the measure of success you will have in **תְצַוֶּה**, in your ability to “command” others to do. If you want others to follow you, then watch yourself first. If you want to impress good deeds and good characteristics upon others, then practice what you preach. Character cannot be taught. It must be caught. You must be caught up in a wave of emotions and influences. You must want to emulate the character of your parents, your Rabbis, and your great leaders, because you have become impressed by them. A Rebbe must inject his own personality into his students if he wants them to follow in his footsteps. The students must be captivated by his midot, by his characteristics. It is the personality of the Rebbe that becomes part of his students. They are caught up in the web of greatness of their Rebbe. Thus is character molded.

Yehoshua was the foremost student of Moshe Rabbeinu. He became the leader of Klal Yisrael after his Rebbe, Moshe Rabbeinu, died. Nowhere in the Torah do we refer to Yehoshua as the talmid (student) of Moshe Rabbeinu. He is rather called *mesharet* Moshe, “the person who served” Moshe. Yehoshua was always with Moshe. He observed Moshe all the time. This molded Yehoshua into the great leader that he became.

Perhaps the Torah is trying to teach us that if you are trying to impart words upon someone else to educate him or motivate him, then the measure of your success will only be as great as how you conduct yourself.

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