

# TORAH WEEKLY

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## The Light of the World

By: Rabbi Yosef Melamed (Originally Published 2018)

If something appears out of place in the Torah, there's a reason for it. That being the case, let us examine the opening of this week's parsha, which begins with G-d's commandment to Moshe to take pure olive oil for the lighting of the Menorah. The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin; 1816-1893) notes that this commandment seems to be out of place. The previous parsha, Terumah, deals with the construction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and most of its vessels, and concludes with the Outer Altar and courtyard structures. The rest of this week's parsha deals with the special holy garments the Kohanim (priests) wore during their service in the Mishkan. Why does the Torah interrupt with a discussion about the olive oil needed to kindle the Menorah? At the very least, it could have been discussed in the context of the Menorah in Parshas Terumah!

The Netziv offers the following amazing answer. The Medrash (Shemos Rabba 37:4) tells us that when G-d appointed Aharon as Kohein Gadol (High Priest), it was difficult for Moshe. Moshe felt bad that he would not be the Kohein Gadol and father of all future Kohanim. G-d appeased him with the verse (Psalms 119:92), "If not for your Torah as my delight, I would have been lost in my affliction." The verse is homiletically understood to say that G-d is telling Moshe that if not for Moshe's Torah as G-d's delight, the world would have been lost.

The implication of the Medrash is that Moshe felt bad that he would not be the source of the priesthood. G-d appeased Moshe by informing him that he had something even better, for he is the one through whom the Torah was given.

Firstly, asks the Netziv, where did the Sages see such a dialogue in the verses of the Torah? Secondly, what was the nature of the appeasement for Moshe? Torah is for all Jews, as is clear from many places. Although Moshe accepted the Torah at Sinai, he was just a messenger on behalf of the Jewish Nation. Priesthood would be something special for Aharon and his children. Anyone foreign to Aharon's lineage would not be able to perform the Temple services.

The Netziv explains that the questions discussed answer each other. The Sages were bothered by the problem posed above: Why was the commandment to take olive oil for the Menorah juxtaposed specifically with the appointment of Aharon as Kohein Gadol? The answer lies in the essence of the Menorah and its light. The purpose of the Mishkan was to cause G-d's presence to dwell on this earth. The true channel for this dwelling is through the Torah. The purpose of the Mishkan was to bring about the bounty of Torah through its special vessels, the Ark and the Menorah.

However, continues the Netziv, there was a fundamental difference between the two. The Ark was the repository of the power of the Written Torah. This was symbolized and effected through the Tablets containing the Ten Commandments, which were situated in the Ark. The Menorah, however, was to function as the conduit of the Oral Law. This was the essence of the light of the Menorah. The special sweetness of plumbing the depths of Torah understanding, together with the ability to think of new and novel insights, was to be brought about and channeled through the power of the Menorah and its lights.

When G-d instructed Moshe to have the Jews take olive oil, He said, "let them take to you;" this taking was to be on behalf of Moshe. Moshe, through his greatness, was to be the leader of the Jews in this special area of Oral Torah. Of the depths and novellae of the Torah. A fountain of light and knowledge which would shine throughout the world. This special gift would be passed along to Moshe's children, too. The Talmud teaches that initially, the Torah was given exclusively to Moshe, and he later shared it with the entire Jewish Nation. Nonetheless, Moshe and his children maintain a unique connection with the study of the Oral Law. This was the appeasement for Moshe, because this was to be the greatest gift of all, to be enjoyed by Moshe and to be passed on to his generations.

The message for us is eternal. Throughout the ages, whether in the brightest time of day or in the darkest of nights, we can always count on the joys of plumbing the depths of the Torah, both Written and Oral, to raise our spirits and to inspire and enliven our souls.

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