

Becoming the Light

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Parshat Tetzaveh

At the beginning of this week's Parshah, we read G*d's instruction to Moses (Exodus 27:20), **Instruct the Israelites to bring pure pressed olive oil for illumination, to keep the lamp always lit.**

At the beginning of last week's Parshah, we read (Exodus 25:8), **Have them make Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell among them**, which we understand to mean that, if we make ourselves into Sanctuaries for G*d, then G*d will dwell within us.

We read this week's beginning in much the same way. The pure, hand-pressed olive oil (what is today called "extra-virgin" or "first-pressed" olive oil) is not something external to ourselves. Just as we were directed to build the Sanctuary within ourselves, so we bring the olive oil within ourselves.

And the lamp of the Sanctuary, too, is not external but within. Even more, we are not just to kindle the lamp within ourselves, but actually *to become* the lamp, the oil, and the Sanctuary. The Prophet Jeremiah (11:16) declares to the people of Israel, **The Eternal has called you a fresh and beautiful olive tree.** A Midrash explains that, just as the oil illuminates, so the Temple (of which the Tabernacle in the wilderness, of which our Parshah speaks, is a precursor) illuminates the entire world. Similarly, the Midrash continues, our ancestors were called a fresh olive tree because they were expected to cast light throughout the world.

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In essence, the Midrash teaches us that we, Israel, have a responsibility to illuminate the entire world with the Light of the Creator. And there are at least two ways of being Israel.

- ☆ We can be Israel, according to the literal meaning of the name, by being G*d-wrestlers, as our ancestor Jacob received the name Israel (Genesis 32:25-29) after he **wrestled with the Divine and the human and prevailed**. We “wrestle with” G*d in a unique combination of battle and intimacy, the very opposite of “fighting against.” It is an intimate “wrestling match” between lovers, each seeking to enhance the strength of the other and each being wholly supportive of the other!
- ☆ We can also be Israel by interchanging the first two letters of the Hebrew *Yisrael*, (ישראל) making the word *Shir-E*ל* (שיר-א*ל), the song of G*d. The song does not exercise control – does not even attempt to exercise control – over the singer. We become the song of G*d by submitting wholly to G*d’s Will and allowing/enabling G*d to “sing” us.

We exercise that responsibility not by kindling some external lights – although doing so is, indeed, a significant first and symbolic step – nor even by kindling an internal light – although that, too, is a vital step on the way – but by *becoming* the light.

To becoming the Sanctuary, the oil, and the light, may we soon be led.

Shabbat Shalom.