

AN UNNECESSARY MIRACLE

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THE MIRACLE OF the oil - so central to the Chanukah story - was completely unnecessary.

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) relates: "When the Greeks entered the sanctuary they defiled all the oils in the sanctuary. And when the Chashmona'im overcame them and were victorious, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol."

But why did they search for pure oil, sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol?

Rav Yaakov Yehoshua Falk (1680-1756) in his Pnei Yehoshua (ad Loc., s.v. Mai Chanukah) famously asks this very question, in light of the halachic principle: Tum'ah hutrah b'tzibbur

- impurity is permitted when the majority of the community, Kohanim, or vessels are impure, service in the Holy Temple is performed in a state of impurity. The Chashmona'im could have lit the candles with impure oil! Any old oil would have sufficed!

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Pnei Yehoshua explains that the entire purpose of the miracle was to "inform them of Hashem's love for them." He continues and explains the miracle in light of the historical context: The Second Temple was

a mere shadow of the first, with many of the miracles that took place daily during the First Temple period absent during the Second Temple period (See Yoma 21b). Even the Shechinah, the Divine Presence was absent! According to Pnei Yehoshua, the miracle of the



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oil was a sign that Hashem's presence and His love had returned to the Holy Temple as they had been during the First Temple.

Many compare and contrast the military victory with the miracle of the oil. While the former was essential, the latter was inconsequential. After wresting control from the Syrian Greeks, the Chashmona'im could have restored Jewish sovereignty to Jerusalem even without kindling the Menorah.

True, the flask of oil may have been unnecessary. But as my rebbe and mentor HaRav Moshe Dovid Tendler zt"l (1926-2021) explained, a gift of love should have no utility, per se. Speaking

to a room of newly-married semicha students, Rav Tendler presented the following mashal: Imagine if you surprised your wife for her birthday or your wedding anniversary with a brand new vacuum cleaner or dishwasher. "But is that what she really wants?" he asked. Instead, he continued, "She wants a shiny piece of jewelry that has absolutely no utility; no function; no use; no real purpose. Its sole purpose is an expression of mutual love."

With this 'unnecessary gift' of a little flask of pure olive oil, sealed with the stamp of the Kohen Gadol, Hashem was expressing His love for the Jewish People. That is the greatest gift of all.

