

Parsha Ponders

Tetzaveh | February 14, 2019 | 10 Adar I 5779

*The unnecessary lights*¹

ואתה תצוה את-בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלות נר תמיד: באהל מעוד מחוץ לפרכת וגו' חקת עולם לדרתם מאת בני ישראל

You shall command the Children of Israel, that they should take to you highly purified, crushed oil for illumination, to ignite a constant flame. [It will be] in the Tent of Meeting, outside the *Paroches* curtain...an everlasting decree for their generations, from the Children of Israel²

The *parsha* begins with the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah* in the Temple. This command seems highly out of place. It would have belonged nicely after the *Mishkan* was erected in its place, and not to be sandwiched between the *parsha* of the Temple vessels and the *parsha* of the Kohanic garments. Why was it placed here? As well, there's a different *parsha* later³ in the Torah dedicated to the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah*. These verses in our *parsha* would have belonged better there. Finally, the end of the verse appears unnecessary. It could have simply ended by saying that the *Menorah* is an everlasting decree for their generations. What do the words, "from the Children of Israel", add to our understanding?

An answer could be based on a proper understanding of offerings in the first place. The *gemarra* points out⁴ that many offerings in the Torah are referred to as a satisfying aroma for Hashem⁵. A person might, G-d forbid, think that Hashem *needs* us to bring offerings. They could think that it's some sort of nourishment for the Almighty. However, these are patently false. Hashem tells us (rhetorically), "if I were hungry..."⁶, and "do I eat the flesh of bulls?"⁷. Offerings are also not a sort of bribe to appease an angry deity⁸. Offerings do nothing for Hashem. Rather, they are for our own benefit. They are opportunities for us to fulfill Hashem's will, and to provide atonement for our transgressions⁹. This back-and-forth in the *gemarra* shows that despite sounding absurd, it's a realistic misunderstanding that Hashem needs our offerings¹⁰. Therefore, there are various verses¹¹ and teachings which come to negate this mistake. While the commentators¹² give various explanations behind the true purpose of offerings, at the end of the day it is simply a decree beyond our understanding¹³.

This mistake is possible to make with the Temple offerings. However, with regards to lighting the *Menorah* in the Temple, it's impossible to think that Hashem benefits from its light. The *gemarra* asks¹⁴ rhetorically: Does He even need its light? Behold, He lit the way for the Jews for forty years with His

¹ Based on [Be'er Yosef](#) to [Exodus 27:20-21](#)

² [Exodus loc. cit.](#)

³ [Leviticus 24:1-12](#)

⁴ [Menachos 110a](#)

⁵ [Leviticus 1:9, 17, 2:2](#), among others

⁶ [Psalms 50:12](#)

⁷ [Ibid](#) verse 13

⁸ See [Rashi](#) to [Menachos loc. cit.](#)

⁹ [Ibid](#)

¹⁰ See [Moreh Nevuchim 3:32](#)

¹¹ Others include [I Samuel 15:22](#), [Isaiah 1:11](#), [Psalms 50:8](#)

¹² *Inter alia*, [Rambam](#), [Ramban](#), [Ba'al HaHakeidah](#)

¹³ [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Me'ilah 8:8](#)

¹⁴ [Shabbos 22b](#); [Menachos 86b](#)

pillar of fire¹⁵! That is, the Jewish people saw with their own eyes that Hashem didn't need them to light the *Menorah* for Him. He is the source of all light, and He lit the way for them in the wilderness. There's therefore no need for any theological correction, unlike the offerings. The Jewish people had complete clarity that the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah* was a decree beyond our understanding.

However, this clarity was only during the years that the Jews were in the wilderness¹⁶. Once the Jews entered the land of Israel, and the pillar of fire ceased, life was back to normal. To avoid any potential errors in understanding, the Torah specifically states that the lighting of the *Menorah* is an eternal decree for their generations. Meaning, even future generations should realize that Hashem doesn't need the light of the *Menorah*, and the reason why we light it is beyond our understanding. This also explains the seemingly redundant ending of the verse: "from the Children of Israel". What this means is any benefit that comes from the lighting of the Children of Israel, is equally unnecessary for Hashem. It's all the same decree, whose reasoning is beyond our understanding.

This also explains why the Torah placed the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah* in the awkward spot right before the Kohanic garments are described. This week's *parsha* deals with the command for Moshe to inaugurate his brother Aharon and his descendants as Kohanim for the Temple. They are to have their own special garments for their service as they bring offerings for individuals and the community. To avoid any mistakes that what Aharon and his descendants do in the Temple is for Hashem's personal benefit, the *parsha* starts with the *mitzvah* to light the *Menorah*. This *mitzvah*, as explained, is impossible to misunderstand; it's very clearly a decree. It's command is placed at the beginning of the *parsha* to show that everything else with regards to the Temple, including the garments and service of the Kohanim, are to be viewed the same way.

Good Shabbos

¹⁵ [Exodus 13:22](#) and [Numbers 14:14](#)

¹⁶ Parenthetically, see the [Be'er Yosef's](#) footnote which points out that this approach answers [Tosafos'](#) question (*ad. loc. s.v. וכי לאורה*) on the *gemarra*