

They shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination. (27:20)

“Pure, pressed”: only the oil which was designated for lighting the *Menorah* had to be the product of pressed olives – not crushed. The oil used for illumination must be quintessentially pure, without any sediment, in its original state. Filtering later on is insufficient. The oil must be pristine from its very beginning. Thus, the oil was made by gently pressing the olive until only one drop emerged. That drop was used for illumination.

La’Yehudim haysah orah v’simchah v’sasson vikar, “The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor” (*Megillas Esther* 8:15). *Orah zu Torah*, “Light, this is (the light that emanates from) Torah” (*Meseches Megillah* 15). True light that illuminates, that irradiates one’s life and gives him the ability to serve as a beacon of light and radiance for others, is derived from Torah. Just as the light that shone from the holy Menorah in the Sanctuary was the product of pure olive oil, the first emergence from the pressed olive, so, too, the light that emanates from one who studies Torah must be the result of pure oil, effort that is *kassis*, pressed, whereby one exerts pressure in order to study Torah.

Too many of us are focused on groping through the darkness, helping one another to make it, despite the overwhelming gloom which obscures our ability to see, to maneuver, to develop. There are those who are one step ahead. They cannot and will not resign themselves to living in the darkness. They look for any way, any opportunity, to pierce through the blackness that surrounds them.

A *chasid* once asked the **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, why the *Rebbe* chooses to seclude himself in his house, spending the day deeply involved in Torah study. True, many *chassidim* visit him at home, thus allowing for his influence to spread, but he could achieve so much more if he would not isolate himself from the world.

The *Rebbe* listened intently to the question, replying with the use of the following parable. Three wealthy men were incarcerated in a dungeon. Apparently, they had sinned against the king, and, even though the infraction was one of perception, the king was not a forgiving person, and even a perceived infraction rendered the offender guilty, and thus he had to be punished. The dungeon was tiny, cold and damp, with all types of vermin making it their habitat. In addition, it was dark, the darkness palpable to the point that the prisoners could not even locate their own mouths in order to place food inside.

This is where the varied personalities of the three prisoners played itself out. One prisoner was not much of a thinker. He had been most fortunate to have earned a huge sum of money, but-- when it came to fending for himself in an inhospitable situation-- he was at a total loss. He could locate neither the food, nor the spoon with which to eat – and worse – he could not even find his mouth.

The second prisoner was a wise man, accustomed to the world, he knew his way around. Regardless of his predicament, he could be relied on to discover some way out. He took pity on the other man who was by now starving - unable to find his food, spoon or mouth. He was able to maneuver himself over in order to feed the sorry fellow, thus keeping him alive in the dungeon.

So far, we have addressed prisoners number one and two. What about prisoner number three? He remained quietly in his corner, secluded from the other two. Apparently, he was faring well, since he neither asked for assistance, nor offered any. This upset prisoner number two, who asked him, "Why do you not offer me assistance in taking care of prisoner number one?"

The elusive number three explained his somewhat incomprehensible behavior: "We are incarcerated in a miserable, dark dungeon. We are unable to do anything, because we cannot see. You spend the entire day figuring out how to gather the rations from one end of the cell to bring it to our friend, so that you can feed him. Do you realize that we have been here for an entire month, and he still does not know how to fend for himself? I am not sitting around wasting time. While you occupy your time with him, I am using my fingers to notch out a hole in the dirt wall. Once I dig deep enough through the wall, I will allow some rays of sun to penetrate. One drop of light drives away much darkness. When I succeed, our friend will once again be able to see, and he will finally be able to feed himself!"

Horav Shlomo Schwadron, zl, adds that that this that the meaning of, *La'Yehudim haysah orah v'simchah vikar*. "First, there must be *orah*, light, which refers to Torah. Once Torah permeates a person, he becomes suffused with its light. Everything else-- gladness, joy and honor-- follows in tow, because, until one can see, he remains disjointed and unable to perceive anything else. How does one gain Torah? *Kassis la'maor*: press yourself, work hard, toil, labor, involve yourself in Torah; you will see the light begin to at first flicker, then become stronger, until it shines brilliantly and illuminates your entire life."