

THE LIGHT OF THE MENORAH, THE LIGHT OF DEVOTION

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Chanukah celebrates two miracles: The victory of the Jews over their Syrian-Greek persecutors and the ability of one small flask of oil to remain lit in the Menorah in the Temple for eight days. (See I:57, 58 for further background information.) On the Shabbos during Chanukah, we usually read the Torah portion of Miketz. In Miketz, Yosef (Joseph) rises to power in Egypt after correctly interpreting the dreams of two of King Pharaoh's servants. In one of the dreams, Pharaoh's chief butler saw a vine. The Torah (Bereishis 41:10) relates the butler's description: "And in the vine were three branches; and it was as though it budded, and its blossoms shot forth; and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes." The Ben Ish Chai writes that this vision carries with it a message which specifically relates to Chanukah.

Our Sages have often compared the Jewish people, the Ben Ish Chai writes, to grape vines. One reason for this is that the people, as vines, are weak and delicate. However, just as the weak vines produce sumptuous fruit, so too does the Jewish nation bear fruit - in their performance of Mitzvos (commandments) and study of the Torah. The three vine branches described in the butler's dream represent the three ingredients necessary to properly carry out G-d's dictates contained in the Torah. One must have his thought, his speech, and his actions dedicated to the service of G-d. If any one of these three elements is lacking, so too will a person's devotion to G-d.

The threefold significance of the vine holds true for another item as well. Our Sages compare the performance of Mitzvos to a lamp ("ner"). Why a lamp? In order for a lamp to function properly, it needs three components: the lamp itself, fuel, and a wick. Similarly, as we said, to perform a Mitzvah properly, one's thoughts, speech, and actions all have to be directed toward this goal. Our lighting of the Menorah on Chanukah serves to remind us of this lesson. When we light the Menorah, we recall the miracle that happened in the Temple: only one small flask of pure oil was found, and it miraculously sufficed to keep the Menorah lit for eight days. Why did a miracle occur through the Menorah? G-d was sending the people of the time a message. G-d was telling them that they merited the miracle because their service of G-d was complete. They dedicated every fiber of their being to the proper service of G-d. The Menorah, a lamp, signified this total dedication.

Before lighting the Menorah, we ready the Menorah itself. We prepare the candles or the oil. We prepare the wicks. We procure a flame. If we don't have a candle or oil, we cannot light. If we do not have some receptacle to hold the candle or oil, we cannot light. If we do not have a flame, we cannot light. Right before we light the Menorah, we should step back and think: Why am I lighting

this Menorah? One should think about the mitzvah he is about to perform. One's thoughts, speech (the blessing), and actions (the actual lighting) should all be focused on what is about to occur. If we make a blessing without thinking about what we are doing, our performance of the Mitzvah is incomplete. The lesson of the Menorah is a lesson in how we are to devote ourselves to the performance of Mitzvos. The least we can do, and a good start in applying this lesson to every aspect of our lives, is to light the Menorah with the same total devotion that it signifies.

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