

THE WAY WAY-UP

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aaron and say to him: "When you light-up the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the Menorah." (Bamidbar 8:1-2)

When you light-up: *בְּהֶעֱלֵתָּךְ*, lit.; when you cause to ascend. Since the flame rises, (Scripture describes kindling in terms of ascending.) He is required to kindle the lamp until the flame rises by itself (Shabbos 21A). Our Sages further expounded from here that there was a step in front of the Menorah, on which the Kohen stood to prepare [the lamps]. –Rashi

The Torah could have used another and more precise verb of "hadlaka" to describe the igniting of the Menorah. Why is the language of going-up- ascending employed here? Rashi offers two different explanations. 1) Just as a flame goes up, see to it that each flame goes up. 2) Steps were placed there for the Kohen to ascend in order to prepare the lights. We understand that there is a Hallachic component in instructing the Kohen to light each candle till the flame catches and it goes up by itself. One must be lit before moving on.

There is a great deal of educational value implied here. Teachers and parents can pay attention and gain from this the degree of their responsibility to educate. I like to say that the goal of education is to create a KLI RISHON- a primary hot vessel that is attached to a heating source. The layman too can learn the importance of completing a task. The Torah learner learns the need to learn thoroughly. Also very nice! I am thinking, though, about something a little deeper.

There is a unique phenomenon visibly on display by Jews and only Jews. We tend to sway like palm trees in shifting wind. Back and forth Jewish people rock almost uncontrollably. I remember witnessing once as one of my Rebbeim lectured a room filled with secular minded Jews. I was standing in the back observing. Somewhere in the middle about half were unconsciously beginning to move back and forth. Don't ask me about the other half. It was a remarkable testimony. A testimony about what, you ask?

The wisest of all men King Solomon had stated, "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." It's not just a metaphor. It's a fact. Armed with that piece of powerful information the Zohar explains this odd behavior. A candle flame is striving to up. Just as water rushes with a ferocity to get back to its source the ocean where all rivers run, so too the flame wants to return to its source the sun.

The candle knows that once it is swallowed up by the sun its individual identity will be overwhelmed and even obliterated. Still it constantly strives to reunite. When the Jewish personality is inspired and

the soul is stimulated the natural reaction is to sway that way as it yearns to connect with HASHEM!

The candle itself is a more than a metaphor. The Cohen learns from this primary teacher to do the same for himself, his children, his students, and all of Israel. The Torah learning, the Oral Torah represented by the Menorah must penetrate, ignite, and excite the Jewish soul to go up and up!

About Rashi's second answer, I have a practical-technical question. The Menorah stood at approximately 6 feet. I can't imagine every Cohen needed steps to complete that task. What do we gain from the fact that there were stairs there?

When Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky ztl went to visit a Hebrew Day School. He gave his warm approval to every class but when visiting the kindergarten class he noticed the Mezuzah was in the lower third of the door way. He asked the Morah why the Mezuzah was so low. She replied that she had put it there intentionally so that the little children can reach the Mezuzah and kiss it.

He gently reminded her that although a nice sentiment, it is a lost opportunity in education. "Rather", he suggested, "place the Mezuzah where it belongs at the bottom part of the top third of the doorway, and place a chair there for the children to climb up to kiss it. By doing so, you will be teaching them daily that we must go up to the Torah and not expect it to come down to us". The steps below for the feet and the flame above both point **the way way-up!**