

ETERNAL LIGHT

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to Aharon, and say to him, "when you kindle the lights..." [8:1-2]

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, quotes a fascinating Medrash: "Why is the Torah portion concerning the Menorah found immediately following the portion concerning the princes of the tribes [and their offerings during the Dedication of the Tabernacle, at the end of Parshas Naso]? Because when Aharon saw the dedication [offerings] of the princes, he was distressed that neither he nor his tribe were included. HaShem said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the lights.'"

Yet the Ramban, Nachmanides, is puzzled by HaShem's "consolation" of Aharon. What is the greatness of the lights, such that preparing and kindling them would outweigh the offerings of the princes? Aharon and his children the Cohanim, the Priests, were entrusted with many other unique tasks, and the lighting of the Menorah seems unexceptional.

The Ramban concludes that this passage is deriving a hint from the Torah to future events - to the dedication (Chanukah) which would occur during the Second Temple by way of Aharon's descendants, the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans, the Maccabees). He then says that the Ran, Rabbeinu Nissim, found a Medrash which says the same thing: "G-d said to Moshe, 'speak to Aharon, and say to him, "there is another dedication which includes the kindling of the lights, and I will do miracles and save Israel through the hands of your children, and make a dedication which will be called by their name," and this is the dedication of the Chashmonaim."

The Ramban writes that the Yelamdenu and Medrash Raba go still further, to connect the kindling of the Menorah found after the offerings of the Princes, to the Priestly Blessings mentioned before them, which we discussed last week. Neither the blessings nor the lights were ever nullified, even after the destruction of the Temple - so, says the Medrash, it is to Aharon's honor and benefit that he was not included with the Princes.

Yet one may ask: we understand why G-d would want the priestly blessings to apply for all eternity. But what is the great importance of the lighting of the Menorah, that we need lights - even without sacrifices - throughout our exile?

The Ohr Gedalyahu, Rabbi Gedalya Schorr zt"l, offers the following answer: our Sages tell us that when the princes initially came to Moshe to offer their sacrifices, he did not want to accept them, for no such sacrifices had ever been offered. Only when G-d told him to take them, did he do so. As such, the sacrifices have within them an element of Oral Law, an element of Torah not found within the written text. So too, the Menorah - Aharon's 'consolation' which is still greater - symbolizes the burning light of Torah, and on a Kabbalistic level draws down the ability to learn Torah, to produce novel Torah ideas, into the world.

This light, we have learned, is eternal - for it is found within our Chanukah lights. It is not only found in the Temple. Each of us, as we light the Menorah, pulls from this same reservoir of energy and shines its light into the world.

May each of us learn to truly draw from this source, brightening our homes with the lights of the Chanukah candles at the appropriate time - and with the light of Torah, throughout the year.

Good Shabbos!