

TORAH INSPIRATION A LIGHT MATTER?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon and tell him, "When you light (beha'alosecha) the candles" (Bamidbar 8:1)

As the many commentators point out, there are a few ways to phrase the above instructions regarding the light of the Menorah; beha'alosecha is not one of the normal ones. This forced Rashi to comment:

"Because the flame rises upward, an expression denoting ascending is used for lighting the lamps, implying that one must light them until the light ascends on its own." (Rashi)

But that is where pshat ends and drush begins. As the Talmud points out, the Menorah, the symbol of wisdom, and particularly that wisdom which emanates out from the Oral Law, stood at the south side of the Mishkan. For this reason, the Talmud says, anyone wishing to increase their wisdom should face south when praying (Source).

Therefore, the lighting of the Menorah was also symbolic of the lighting of the fire of inspiration in the hearts of the Jewish people, so that they would wish to pursue wisdom on their own. For, as the Pri Tzaddik points out on many occasion, this was the role of the kohen, and particularly the Kohen Gadol: to cause the Oral Law to enter the heart of every Jew, and to inspire each and every Jew to pursue his own connection to the Oral Law.

Thus, the Torah tells Aharon HaKohen: when you ignite the Menorah, that is, the symbol of individual and national connection to the Oral Law, make sure that it is a flame that can stand on its own, one that reaches Heavenward by itself. You may have to initiate the flame, but, after that, the flame must be able to rise independent of any further effort on your part.

What is the basis of such a command? Better yet, what is the basis of such inspiration, because, in the answer to this question lies the very foundation of chinuch-banim -- education of children. Because, ideally, more important than the transmission of Torah concepts in the early, formative years of a Jewish child, you want to teach a child to find his own personal source of inspiration to pursue Torah at all costs. For, if a child is inspired to learn Torah, he or she will learn it the rest of his or her life, and gain the necessary wisdom.

However, Torah without such inspiration translates into a departure from any serious learning of it in the early adult years (or even earlier), or, the pursuit of Torah greatness, but for the **WRONG** reasons -- such as personal honor. That's called making the Torah one's own crown, and the Talmud does not speak to favorably about that direction in learning:

Anyone who uses the crown of Torah (uses the honor of Torah to his advantage) will be uprooted from the world. (Nedarim 62a)

And, somehow, that inspiration has to be rooted in a genuine personal desire to feel "close" to G-d.

Š The seven lamps should give light over against the face of the Menorah Š

" Š The wicks of the three on the east side should face toward the central one, and, likewise, the three on the west side Š" (Rashi)

-- while the central is pointed straight up, toward G-d. It is as if to say that the other six lights of the Menorah (which correspond to the six days of creation and the six millennia of history), are all just to "launch" us in the direction of G-d. Therefore, the essence of good chinuch (education) is facilitating the child's own desire to feel the presence of G-d, something that must be inspired, because it must be pursued with one's life-force.

Inspiration is something we feel when we see the worthiness of an act, and the importance of our being involved in carrying it out. The more noble the cause, (at least as it appears to us, the more inspiration we are likely to feel. All of a sudden, some kind of inner mechanism kicks in during a moment of inspiration, and we find ourselves motivated like never before.

The ideal form of inspiration is the kind that we feel when we catch a glimpse of G-d's master plan, and how we can contribute to its completion. Somehow, it doesn't make a difference whether or not we succeed. All that counts is that we try, give it our best shot, because that will make G-d happy that He made us, and gave us the opportunity to be involved in His world. In reaching for G-d, we realize, we are, in fact, reaching our potential.

Aharon HaKohen understood this, which is what gave him the ability to function in the extremely holy position of High Priest. The Menorah symbolized this, and this is why the lighting of it was associated with Aharon himself, though, as the Ramban points out, any kohen could have fulfilled the mitzvah.

And, thus, it was Aharon's job to transmit this message to the rest of the nation, to "light their fire," so-to-speak, so that each and every Jew could hook into that master plan, and feel a sense of destiny being attached to it. This would then result in a great desire to be a partner in G-d's plan for creation, bringing the person closer to G-d in the process, and closer to their own personal level of greatness and fulfillment.

Shabbos Day:

On the day the Mishkan was assembled, the cloud covered the Tent of the Testimony. In the evening until the morning, it appeared as if fire was on the Mishkan. That was the way it usually was: the cloud covered it [by day], and there was the appearance of fire by night. When the cloud rose from above the Mishkan, then the Children of Israel marched on; where the cloud stopped, the Children of Israel camped. Thus at the command of G-d the Children of Israel traveled, and at the command of G-d they camped ... (Bamidbar 9:15-18)

As we have mentioned before, life in the desert was meant to be preparation for life in Eretz Yisroel. This is why the Torah emphasizes information and lessons that otherwise would make no difference to us, since we have long left life in the desert. For, within the context of the "big picture," we are still in the "desert," and will remain there until Moshiach comes to redeem us.

In fact, America has long been called a "desert." There is a famous story of how Rabbi Aharon Cutler, zt"l, after World War II, when trying to decide whether to take refuge in Eretz Yisroel or America at the time, did what is called the "Goral HaGra." Someone who is knowledgeable "randomly" opens the Chumash, and interprets the relevant verses that appear for pertinent information regarding the question; it is a lesser form of Ruach HaKodesh, which is a lesser form of prophecy.

Rabbi Cutler, upon opening the Chumash, just "happened" to turn to the verse that says, "G-d said to Aharon, 'Go into the desert toward Moshe Š'." (Shemos 4:27). Rav Aharon understood this to be a reference to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, who had already been living in New York at the time (and who was actually born on Moshe Rabbeinu's yahrzeit), desperately trying to build up the American Orthodox community. Rabbi Cutler's fateful move to the "Desert" resulted directly in the building of one of the biggest and most famous yeshivos in this century, "Lakewood Yeshivah," and he is credited with the rebuilding of the Orthodox Jewish world after the Holocaust.

However, in a broader sense, the "desert" refers to the corridor of time between the moment we left Egyptian slavery and the moment we enter the Final Redemption under the leadership of the Moshiach, who, the Arizal says, will have the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu. And the verses above are telling us how to navigate the desert of each and every generation, on our way to personal redemption, and, G-d willing, national and world redemption.

Thus at the command of G-d the Children of Israel traveled, and at the command of G-d they camped ...

We Jews "travel" and "camp" at the command of G-d. When G-d says "Move!" we pick up and move; when G-d says "Stop!" we put our things down and settle down, until the Divine command comes to move on.

And thus we have wandered through the annals of history until this very day. The question has never been, "Will we have to move again?" but rather, "WHEN will we have to move again?" And judging from history, we have never really been ready to move when the call came, with the exception of a few individuals and groups who merited to read the writing on the wall before it became official news. This is why we have been forced to abandon generations' worth of wealth to the non-Jews who have pushed us out, seemingly unwitting messengers of Heaven Above.

But, a person may argue, life in THAT desert was much different than life in THIS desert. During the forty years of wandering, the clothing never wore out, bread fell from Heaven, and making money was never an issue. We did not live among the non-Jews, and never had to work among them either. Therefore we never had to "fit in" to their society, which, in THIS desert, has created all kinds of demands upon us that has made life as a Jew difficult.

So, recently, someone wrote me, based upon a previous parshah sheet, and asked the question that most asked by people entertaining the possibility of making aliyah: How will I survive financially in Eretz Yisroel? While on my most recent trip, another question came up: Why should I live in Israel when doing mitzvos is so much easier for me here in America?

The answer is the same to both questions, which we can arrive at through a parable. How does a wife feel about receiving flowers every year on her anniversary -- if her husband happens to be a florist? Is it the flowers that convey the message of the husband's love and concern for his wife on their anniversary, or, the effort expended by the husband in sending the flowers?

"According to the effort is the reward" (Pirkei Avos 5:22), the rabbis tell us, and that is particularly true about mitzvos. Mesiros nefesh -- self-sacrifice -- for G-d is the currency of the World-to-Come, not just the execution of the commandments. The more of us we put into our mitzvos and our pursuit of holiness, that is, a closer relationship to G-d, the greater the statement of love we convey to G-d.

When it comes to parnassa, it is the hand of G-d that supports us on either side of the ocean. "All is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven" (Brochos 34b) is true ANYWHERE in the world. What changes from Chutz L'Aretz to Eretz Yisroel is the willingness of a Jew to live with the reality of the Divine hand in his or her life.

The illusion of self-dependency in Chutz L'Aretz is exactly that: an illusion. And, being an illusion, it becomes a test, one than can easily be failed an entire lifetime -- one gift horse that, perhaps, ought to be looked at "in the mouth."

On the other hand, life in Eretz Yisroel may not be as materialistic as it may be outside of Israel, but that is not a curse, but one of the biggest blessings a person can enjoy in this world. For, it makes it far easier to be able to "move" or "camp" at the word of G-d, especially at a moment's notice.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe heard the people crying with their families near the entrances of their tents (Bamidbar 11:10)

"Families gathered together and cried to make public their complaints. Our rabbis said [that they complained] regarding families, that is, the family relationships that were forbidden to them." (Rashi)

However, one may ask, was this the first time they heard about the forbidden relationships? Did they not hear about the prohibitions of incestual relationships over a year ago?

That is the Sifsei Chachamim's question, and he answers something very interesting that has relevance to every generation. He says:

"Prior to the arrangement of the camps according to tribe, all Jews intermingled. But now that each tribe was by itself, the women of one tribe did not come near the [men of] another tribe [and therefore avoiding marriage among relatives became more difficult]. (Sifsei Chachamim)

In other words, the Sifsei Chachamim is explaining, it was a shidduchim problem they had cried about. They had been frightened by the lack of potential spouses, on the one hand because they were cut off from the women of other tribes, and, on the other hand, because they were forbidden to marry some of the women from their own tribes. The introduction of the tribe-by-tribe order greatly reduced the possibility of finding wives, and that they felt was reason enough to cry!

Were they wrong? The Torah seems to say so. However, considering the following Talmudic passage, maybe they had what to worry about:

Rabbah bar Bar Chanah said in the name of Rebi Yochanan: Pairing people [for marriage] is as difficult as splitting the sea was! (Sotah 2a)

However, concludes the Talmud, that difficulty is referring to second marriages, for, as the Talmud adds:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Forty days prior to the formation of the embryo, a Heavenly voice goes out and states, "So-and-so will marry so-and-so!"

In other words, when it comes to the first marriage of individuals, long before the man and woman are even of age to consider the possibility of being married to each other one day, they have been paired up in Heaven, something, Rashi explains, that is a function of mazel (destiny). In such cases, it is never a matter of TO WHOM, but, one of WHEN, and therefore, theoretically, the tribes had little to cry about if they were being married for the first time, and that is true in EVERY generation -- no matter WHAT desperate news the shadchanim deliver.

However, when it comes to second marriages, says Rashi, the spiritual quality of one's actions plays a role in the mating process, and, it is very unlikely that one will meet his true soul-mate and spiritual equal. Therefore, just like splitting the sea went against its "natural" existence, so, too, are second

marriages against the natures of the spouses (somewhat), which means more work to make them work out.

This is why there is a comparison being made to the splitting of the sea. For, just as the sea had to be split -- a great miracle to be sure -- without sufficient merit to warrant such a miracle, so, too, must the miracle of a compatible marriage be executed without sufficient merit of the individuals involved. That requires even more trust in G-d than normal, something we humans don't like to rely upon, ESPECIALLY when it comes to getting married. And, the more we have to wait to find our partners, the more desperate the situation appears to us, and the more we doubt G-d's involvement.

That's really what the tribes were crying about. More available women and men meant less need for Divine precision, less need for trust in G-d. But this is just a parable for all matters of daily life, particularly when it comes to earning a living -- particularly when it comes to earning a living in Eretz Yisroel.

The terminology that "it is easier to earn a living in [choose your country of preference]" means: there is less need to rely on G-d to take care of me and my needs. "There are more opportunities in Š" people will say, meaning that there is less need to rely on Heaven's precision in finding one that works for them.

The truth is, it is G-d Who helps the Jew find his job, be it in Eretz Yisroel or Chutz L'Aretz. So what's the difference, then? The difference is that, whereas in Eretz Yisroel it is G-d who helps the person find his matching profession at any given point in time, perhaps through a messenger, in Chutz L'Aretz, He may work through a messenger, who works through a messenger, who works through a messenger, and so on.

In other words, outside of Israel, one runs a tremendous risk of not seeing the hand of G-d sufficiently in his or her life, and, as a result, he or she fails to sufficiently praise G-d for His help. On the other hand, daily life is clearly a miracle in Eretz Yisroel, and, as a result, words of praise continuously flow from the mouths of many Jews here. Each word of praise is another building block in the eternal "home" of the Jew in the World-to-Come.

It is interesting to note that a wife, in the Torah, is referred to as "bread," the symbol of one's livelihood (Bereishis 39:6; Rashi). She is also called "house," symbolic of the home she is to build around her husband, which is why she walks around her husband under the Chuppah seven times, counter-clockwise.

Why seven times? To symbolize that she must help her husband to draw down the Divine Presence from the seventh and farthest level of Heaven -- the ultimate expression of Hester Panim -- the Hiding of G-d's Face. It is the woman's role to foster the values that make a home fitting for the Divine Presence to visit, and within which to dwell.

Why counter-clockwise? To symbolize her need to be willing to go against societal pressures and

natural tendencies, when they interfere with building a true Jewish home. And, a true Jewish home is built upon trust in G-d; the more trust in G-d plays a role in the family life, the more Jewish the home will be. And when this is not the case, G-d forbid, then "family matters" become something to cry about.

MELAVE MALKAH:

How can I repay G-d for all His kindness to me? (Tehillim 116:12)

This is the second half of the tehillah we began to discuss last week. The theme of this section is giving thanks to G-d for all the good He does for us, in spite of the fact that they are too numerous to count and repay. Fortunately G-d understands and appreciates that human limitation, and accepts our desire to do so as compensation for what we cannot repay.

I will raise the cup of salvations and I will invoke the Name of G-d Š (13)

According to Rashi, this is not a simple imbibing of wine to celebrate personal redemption. This verse refers to the Wine-Offerings that are destined to be brought along with the Thanksgiving-Offerings when we return to Eretz Yisroel at the end of this long and final exile. Just as Dovid HaMelech made vows while on the run to bring sacrifices upon his safe return to Eretz Yisroel, so, too, will the returning exiles feel compelled to bring offerings to thank G-d for their return to Eretz Yisroel.

Please G-d, for I am Your servant, the son of your handmaid, You have released my bonds Š (16)

Š Because the slave who is the son of a handmaid is far more submissive than one who was born free, and later became a slave (Rashi). As the Sforno explains, a person born into freedom remains a free spirit even if he is forced into slavery. Only the fear of punishment and the possibility of reward reigns his will in and brings his actions in line with the will of his master.

However, a slave, the son of a slave, has no will but His master's; it is the only world he has even known. Dovid HaMelech is conveying the extent to which we must be willing to depend upon G-d to succeed in life. We may think that we're in control, but ultimately, without G-d's help, we cannot release ourselves from our bonds.

And, there is no greater bond than the one the yezter hara has over us. In fact, all external troubles are just physical manifestations of spiritual weaknesses we have as individuals, and ultimately, as a people. If we can become free of the shackles of the yetzer hara, then, all physical obstacles and entanglements become nothing more than passing thoughts. This is true of all the enemies of the Jewish people throughout all the ages.

Hence, Dovid HaMelech's plea to G-d: Because of my very lowliness and my inherent human

weaknesses, I am imprisoned forever by that which binds me. Unless, of course, You help me. And, it is this very recognition that begins and brings about the process of personal and national redemption, and what resulted, ultimately, in Dovid's right to be the "father" of Moshiach, whenever he finally arrives, may it be in our time. It is this that allows to grow beyond the yetzer hara, in order to become an independent light reflecting the light of G-d.

Have a great Shabbos,
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