

BRIGHTEST CANDLE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Once Revealed, Twice Concealed, Chapter 4.

TRUE OR FALSE: a candle burns brightest in the dark? The answer is, from the candle's point of view, no. It burns the same way in the light as it does in the dark. From a person's point of view, yes, because as the only source of light, it is easily noticeable, even from a distance.

And there you have it in a nutshell, why it took 36 generations and the Chashmonaim for Chanukah to make it to the outside world and become a holiday unto itself. Until that time, as dark as it had been, it still had not been dark enough. Chanukah even occurs each year at the darkest time of the year.

But, we're getting ahead of ourselves, WAY ahead of ourselves. The real answer to the question begins much earlier. In fact, it even pre-dates Creation:

The blemish of the 974 Generations was b'sod the letters "eileh" from "Elohim," causing the Aleph-Lamed-Heh to become separated from the Yud-Mem . . . While in a state of exile, the Yud-Mem remains Above . . . In the future, they will be joined together as one, and the Name "Elohim" will be completely rectified. (Sefer HaKlallim, Klal 18, Anaf 8:11)

On that day, God will be One, and His Name, One. (Zechariah 14:9)

Before discussing the 974 Generations, there is the issue of the Name of God, Elohim. Even though we write all five letters together and pronounce them as one word, in reality they currently exist, as a function of exile, as two independent parts, Aleph-Lamed-Heh, and Yud-Mem.

What does this mean and how is it manifested in history? The Torah already answered this question when it wrote:

The hand is on God's—Yud-Heh—throne . . . (Shemos 17:16)

The hand of The Holy One, Blessed is He, was raised to swear by His throne, to be at war and [have] hatred against Amalek for eternity . . . Why is the Name divided in two? . . . The Holy One, Blessed is He, swore that His Name will not be complete and His throne will not be complete until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. (Rashi, Shemos 17:16)

The Torah only writes the Yud-Heh of God's four-letter Name, leaving off the Vav-Heh. As Rashi explains, just as God left off the Aleph of "kisay" to indicate Amalek's negative impact on Creation,

He cut His Name short to make the same point. If it wasn't for Amalek, no one could EVER doubt the existence and involvement of God.

The division of Yud-Heh and Vav-Heh is essentially the same as the division between the Aleph-Lamed-Heh and Yud-Mem of "Elohim." It means the same thing and has the exact same effect, because they both correspond to the 10 sefiros.

The 10 sefiros are the system used by God to run Creation, corresponding to the five worlds: Keser to Adam Kadmon, Chochmah to Atzilus, Binah to Beriyah, Chesed through Yesod to Yetzirah, and Malchus to Asiyah. They are the spiritual channel for His light and the means of communicating and implementing His will.

As the light makes its way down through the system from Ohr Ain Sof to Keser to Chochmah, etc., all the way down to Malchus, it is continuously constricted. The amount of light held back on any given level is PRECISELY what God wants held back at any given moment for the sake of the purpose of Creation.

Exile is when so little light comes into the world that man can deny God and His authority:

Pharaoh said, "Who is God that I should listen to His voice to let the Jewish people out? I do not know God, nor will I let the Jewish people out." (Shemos 5:2)

This is what it means for the Yud-Heh to be separated from the Vav-Heh, and the Yud-Mem from the Aleph-Lamed-Heh. This is the reality of Amalek, and the reason why God takes his attacks personally, so-to-speak.

Redemption, therefore, is an intellectual counterattack. It is when enough light comes through the system for man to at least NOTICE God:

So the necromancers said to Pharaoh, "It is the finger of God . . ." (Shemos 8:15)

When enough light makes it into the world to make it IMPOSSIBLE to deny the reality of God, then it is FULL redemption:

Pharaoh quickly called Moshe and Aharon and said, "I have sinned against God your God, and against you." (Shemos 10: 16)

Had this level of light been maintained, the Messianic Era would have begun then and there. It wasn't, because the Jewish people had yet to go free, receive Torah, and settle Eretz Yisroel. Consequently, there was still time to stumble, and over 3300 years later, Moshiach has STILL yet to come.

The battle against Amalek, a war of spiritual attrition for sure, continues. There have been many ways to describe it, and it has taken on many forms over the millennia. But all of it can be reduced to a single objective: the rejoining of Aleph-Lamed-Heh and the Yud-Mem. Amalek works to keep

them apart and leave man in doubt about God. Torah works to draw them together and bring the Final Redemption.

We don't have to worry about the Yud-Mem. As it says, they "ascended" to a safe haven up in the sefiros, out of the reach of "Amalek." The tragedy is that the entire time they remain there, man has either limited or no access to them, resulting in a VERY confused and spiritually dangerous world.

They won't return however until the Aleph-Lamed-Heh is ready for them. Not only is that something we CAN do, it is what we MUST do. That IS our Avodas Hashem, our service of God. This is what we recall, and accomplish, when each year we light the 36 candles of the Chanukiah.

It's what Adam HaRishon was supposed to have done by NOT listening to the snake, and avoiding the sin. It's what Noach was reminded of when he sent the dove from the Ark:

He waited another seven days and again sent the dove . . . (Bereishis 8:10)

Into the exile of the Greeks who blackened the faces of the Jews. (Tikunei Zohar 13)

The dove came to him in the evening and behold, there was an olive leaf torn off in her mouth. (Bereishis 8:11)

Had not God enlightened the wise to light the candles with the oil of the olive, the "Survivors of Yehudah" would have been lost forever . . . From the moment the leaf was torn off in her mouth, "25" was made to dwell upon the Jewish people—the 25th of Kislev. (Tikunei Zohar 13)

It's what Ya'akov Avinu was doing when he poured the oil over his monument, and when he went back for the jar of oil the night he fought with the Angel of Eisav. That's why victory resulted in a name change to "Yisroel," because drawing out and revealing the Hidden Light is what it means to be a Yisroel.

The fact that Ya'akov could not reveal his prophecy about the End-of-Days indicated that, in spite of all his efforts to reveal the "Light of 36," he still fell short. There was darkness in his time, but even Lavan, his trickster uncle and father-in-law, believed in God and acknowledged His hand in history. This is why, in spite of the miracles God performed for Ya'akov, Lavan could still try and kill him.

It wasn't until the Greek exile that the world became dark enough. The world sees the Greeks as THE source of light in history. The Torah sees it just the other way around:

The earth was null and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. (Bereishis 1:2)

. . . "darkness" refers to the Greek exile, which darkened the eyes of the Jewish people with decrees . . . (Bereishis Rabbah 2:4)

The Biblical idea of God had been fading for generations, and the Greeks and Hellenists had gone so far as to write God out of history:

... ordering them to write on the horn of an ox that they have no portion in the God of Israel.
(Bereishis Rabbah 2:4)

The separation between the Yud-Mem and the Aleph-Lamed-Heh was at its worst during THAT exile. History, spiritually-speaking, had hit rock bottom.

Then came the Chashmonaim. They mounted both a physical and spiritual suicidal resistance. It had to be. It was the only way to make clear that a life without God and Torah is no life at all, certainly not one worth living. It had to be, so that when they won the war, found the jar of oil, and it burned for seven extra days it would be clear that Yud-Mem and Aleph-Lamed-Heh belong together. Elohim is alive and well and functioning in history.

A person who is real with Elohim acts accordingly, even when intoxicated. If a person who truly believes that God runs the world, they are not stingy with their money. They know that God gave it to them, and can just as easily take it away from them. So why not use the money meaningfully?

A person who lives with the reality of Hashgochah Pratis certainly does not lose their temper. Losing one's temper implies an injustice has been done, one that God would not have agreed to. As the Talmud says:

No man stubs his finger below unless it was first decreed Above. (Chullin 7b)

THIS is the TRUE measure of a person, where they stand with Elohim. Does their life restore the Aleph of God awareness and Hashgochah Pratis to the Chof-Samech of "ki-say"? Do they live in a way that reunifies the Yud-Mem with the Aleph-Lamed-Heh of Elohim, the Vav-Heh with the Yud-Heh of God's holiest Name?

Ya'akov Avinu did, which is why he journeyed for 36 years, married a woman, Leah, whose name had the gematria of 36, and whose other wife, Rachel, died at the age of 36. The Chashmonaim did, which is why their victory occurred at the end of the 36th century from Creation, and resulted in a holiday of 36 lights.

Oh, and one more person did as well, but he needs, DESERVES, a chapter of his own.