

FLASHES OF INSPIRATION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The concept of uplifting one's eyes and spirits permeates this parsha of the Torah. By using the verb *b'halotcha* - when you raise - in describing the process of lighting the great menorah/candelabra that stood in the mishkan/Tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem, the Torah emphasizes the necessity of making the ceremony one that is spiritually uplifting and memorable. It is not enough to merely light the fires of the menorah. One has to see to it that the lights raise themselves and inspire others. Rashi, quoting Midrash, states that the priest lighting the menorah did not discharge his duty until the flame took hold and raised itself. Raising itself was not only a technical issue but rather an indication that the lights of the menorah had to serve as an inspiration for Israel. God does need our lights and flames. But we need them to light our darkness and anxiety. We may raise the flames by igniting them but they raise us with their radiance and message of hope and holiness. The importance of inspiration as a factor in Jewish life and survival cannot be overstated. The vision and light of the menorah remains the source of Jewish inspiration and optimism throughout the ages.

Just as the actions of a person can inspire optimism and idealism, so too does human behavior also contain the ability to breed depression and negative thinking. Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, takes leave of Moshe and his family and the camp of Israel in order to return home to Midyan. Yitro has a positive motive for so doing. He is returning to a land of paganism and idolatry to spread the idea of monotheism and the universal God there. Nevertheless, Moshe begs him not to leave the camp of Israel. He tells Yitro that "we are beginning now to travel" to the Land of Israel. We need your enthusiasm and presence with us for this historic venture to succeed and go smoothly, is the message that Moshe communicates to his father-in-law. Moshe is aware that there is great hesitation and trepidation about the Land of Israel within the camp of the Jews. There are many who are not anxious to go there and those who sense the difficulties and problems inherent in the attempt to conquer and settle the land. The fact that Yitro, Moshe's own father-in-law, is somehow not willing to accompany them on this adventure has a depressing effect upon Israel. Hence the later sad and disastrous events that are described towards the end of the parsha. Instead of "*b'halotcha*" - raising and inspiring Israel in its belief in the Land of Israel and God's promise to grant it to them and us, Yitro's behavior only proves to place a negative damper on the whole project. Without enthusiasm and inspiration, the Land of Israel will surrender itself to the Jewish people only with great difficulty and inordinate pain.

Most of our lives have to be dealt with in a spirit of "*b'halotcha*." Lifted morale, upraised vision and

enthusiasm for the holy causes of Torah and Israel are the necessary ingredients for successful Jewish living. Naysayers, nitpickers, cynics and pessimists are always our undoing. Raising our sights will uplift our lives as well.

Shabat shalom.

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