

WHEN YOU RISE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha begins with the word b'halotcha which is the verb that precedes the object of the sentence, the candles and lights of the candelabra in the Tabernacle and Temple. Thus the verse in its simple meaning refers to having the flame rise when lighting the candelabra. But the verb b'halotcha literally means "When you rise." And I think that this idea contains an important lesson for all of us. The candelabra in the Temple represents the light of the Torah, of God's presence, so to speak in the world. The object of the kohein, the priest of Israel in lighting the candelabra is to spread this divine light throughout Israel and the world and thereby to dispel the darkness of evil and contentiousness that so pervades the world.

However, the lighting of the candelabra was not meant to be merely a mechanical, robotic act. The kohein who performed this task of lighting the candelabra had himself to be first uplifted morally and spiritually. Thus the Torah wrote the verb b'halotcha- when you raise yourself - then you are entitled to light the candelabra for others. A person who is not of high moral character is unlikely to be an effective preacher of morality to others. Those who possess divine light within themselves are capable of producing divine light for others. Judaism is very strict in its view of these matters. A candelabra lit by someone who is unworthy of the task is doomed to flicker and eventually be snuffed out. The candelabra in the Temple had an eternal flame - ner maaravi - associated with it. As such, the achievement of eternity requires the uplifting of one's self on a consistent and permanent basis.

The Talmud goes to great lengths to confirm this basic principle of Jewish thought. The rabbis there stated: "Bedeck yourself first before you attempt to bedeck others." Otherwise, the rabbis warned, when one attempts to tell someone to remove a splinter from one's self, the reply invariably will be to remove the large beam from your own eye. Hypocrisy is the great enemy of true faith and morality. One cannot lecture others about splinters while carrying one's own beams around. The rabbis of the Talmud noted that even in their times those who could effectively reprimand others for poor behavior were rare and scarce. What shall we say therefore about our times? The Mussar movement of nineteenth century Lithuania attempted to raise the moral caliber of Jewish society by emphasizing this very message of b'halotcha. The key to influencing others lay in self-improvement. Leading by example, by soft words and goodness was seen as the correct method for lighting the candelabra and spreading the light of holiness throughout society.

I think that, if ever, now is the time here in our Jewish world to mount such a renewed effort at self-

improvement in order to influence our entire world positively. We may not yet possess the Temple and its great candelabra but the idea and lesson that they represented are certainly present here and now as well. Our task is to implement this symbolic lighting of the divine candelabra.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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