

Our Parasha this week is B'ha'alotkha "When You Set Up", B'midbar 8:1- 12:16.

Theme - The Light of Torah

It begins by briefly discussing the daily lighting of the golden menorah in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). It contains a description of the Levites' consecration ritual. It then describes the celebration of Passover in the second year in the desert, complete with the bringing of the korban Pesach (Paschal lamb).

Our Parasha also teaches that those who are tamei (ritually impure) on the regular date of Passover and therefore unable to participate in the offering, are commanded to celebrate Pesach Sheni, a quasi-Passover celebration held one month later, at which time the korban Pesach is eaten with matzah and bitter herbs.

It mentions the cloud and fire which alternated resting above the Mishkan. It then describes the standard procedure by which the Children of Israel would break camp to continue their travels in the desert. Soon after leaving Mt. Sinai and journeying to the Wilderness of Paran, the people begin a series of bitter complaints.

Spurred by the erev rav (the "mixed multitude" who joined the Jewish people upon leaving Egypt), the Children of Israel are dissatisfied with the manna, their daily miraculous portion of heavenly bread. Our Parasha states that as Moses begins to despair, Hashem commands him to select seventy elders to form the Sanhedrin, the court which would assist him in leading the nation. Almost immediately, two of the newly-elected members announce a prophecy in the camp.

Our Parasha tells how Hashem sends a massive flock of quail which the people gather to eat; those who had complained about the lack of food overstuff themselves and die during this supernatural event. It concludes with Miriam speaking lashon hara (slander) to Aharon (Aaron) about their brother Moses. She is punished by Hashem with tzaraat (a skin disease representative of a spiritual shortcoming) and is quarantined outside the camp for seven days.

In the parasha it says; "Speak to Aharon and say to him that when he makes the flame of the menorah go up..." (B'midbar 8:2).

There are two ways to light a candle. You can touch a flame directly to the wick, or you can hold the flame away from the wick until it spontaneously bursts into flames because of the extreme heat.

There are two ways to teach Torah and pass the tradition down to the next generation. You can force a child to study Torah and perform mitzvot, or you can let them see your passion for mitzvot and Torah.

We can use every educational technique available to inspire them until their own personal interest in Torah and mitzvot is ignited. To symbolize this lesson Aharon is told specifically to light the menorah in the second manner. Why because the menorah symbolizes the Oral Torah, the personal transferal of Hashem's Word.

The mitzvah of lighting the Menorah is described in this week's Parasha. The lighting was to take place in a manner where all the lights were to be inclined towards the central shaft. In the Sefer Iturei Torah by Rabbi Aaron Yaakov Greenberg we find the comment that the light of the menorah is symbolic of knowledge. King Soloman said: "Mitzvot are the candles and Torah is the light." (Proverbs 6:23)

Our sages teach that the number seven is representative of the seven branches of wisdom. They teach that the central shaft of the menorah represents Torah knowledge. What do the Sages say the other six outer lamps represent? Why do the Sages teach that they must all face the center stem?

Our Sages teach that the six outer branches represent the six fields of knowledge; 1) medicine, 2) physics, 3) mathematics, 4) art, 5) psychology and 6) sociology. These are essential fields of scholarship. Were it not for excellence in these areas we would not have; heart transplants, ballet, air transportation or, the internet.

But the Torah is telling us that society cannot rest on knowledge alone. Unless this information is focused and directed toward the center stem, symbolizing God, Torah and spirituality, then this wisdom is worthless. Or even worse, destructive. Knowledge and wisdom is only valuable when directed toward the central shaft. Knowledge and wisdom is only valuable when directed toward Torah principles. To this end, the term employed in commanding Aharon to kindle the Menorah, "Behalosecha," means, literally, "When you elevate." Secular knowledge achieves inherent worth only when it is elevated. This thought was expressed by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his essays on the Torah. Rav Hirsch forcefully argued that secular knowledge was not to be shunned. He said, "The times must be raised to the level of Torah, Torah must not be lowered to the times."

The Kesav Sofer, in his Torah commentary, analyzes the Sabbath blessing given by fathers to their sons: "May you be like Ephraim and Menasha." Why are these two role models chosen over all others? The answer lies in the essence of the achievements of Ephraim and Menasha. Ephraim was the prototypical Torah scholar. Menasha represented secular achievement. We pray that our children attain both realms. But, Kesav Sofer cautions that, we must remember that Yaakov "placed Ephraim before Menasha." Secular studies have value only when preceded by Torah Knowledge and Torah Spirit.

The Torah describes the Menorah as consisting of one piece of pure gold. The Menorah's seven branches are bedecked with decorative cups, knobs and flowers all fashioned from a single, solid piece of gold. Torah and secular studies cannot be artificially torn apart. When they are one organic whole, dedicated to appreciating the spiritual dimension to all that exists, they truly form one unit which is pure and precious. A simple but poignant description of how Torah and secular studies can form a perfect association is found in the writings of Rav Yitzchok Hutner, z"tl. A student was concerned about the propriety of his pursuit of a secular profession, not with standing his proficiency in Torah studies. The student was reassured by Rav Hutner that it is indeed possible to "rent two rooms" in one apartment. He explained the need to draw a circle around one's life, to place G-d in the middle of the circle, and then to broaden the circle with "points" of life.

The Torah tells us that Aharon fulfilled his obligation and, according to Rashi, "he did not change." The Vilna Gaon explains that the enthusiasm of Aharon never waned. He never felt that his Avodas Hashem was rote. Aharon could do the same mitzvah many times and still do it with freshness and vitality. We too must strive to live an integrated life, one where all our activities are directed to the central light of Torah. If we can attain this harmonious integration, we will achieve the Menorah's ideal of "kindling an eternal light." It is this light that has illuminated the Jewish world. Israel awaits the time when this light will touch all of G-d's creations.

The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Not by force, and not by power, but by my spirit, says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, " (Zech. 4:6) In the fourth chapter of Zechariah, the prophet was shown a vision of a golden menorah (lamp stand) like the one used in the Temple. On each side of the menorah stood an olive tree. From each of the trees, oil was fed into the seven lamp bowls at the top of the seven branched menorah. The prophet was informed by an angelic guide that the two olive trees are the, "two who have been anointed with oil; they are standing with the Lord of all the Land." (Zech. 4:14) They are also referred to as the "two witnesses" in the revelation of Yochanan.

The menorah is a symbol of God's light and revelation in the world, specifically through Israel, but inclusive of all believers through the Brit Hahaha. It is fed by the faithfulness of Hashem's people who stand between a holy God and a lost world as prophets and priests. This assignment can never be accomplished by human effort, no matter how strong or noble. It is only by the grace of The Holy One, Blessed be His Name, that his Ruach flows in us and through us to keep the menorah of his light ablaze. Recognize that our heavenly Father desires

to manifest His illuminating glory through us. Offer yourself fully to Him, putting on confidence in your flesh. Allow the Ruach of Hashem free reign in all aspect of your life.