

## PARASHAT BEHAALOT'CHA



### הַמְנוֹרָה וְאוֹר הַשְּׂכִינָה The Menorah and the Divine Light

#### ■ Opposite the Menorah

The manner in which the High Priest lights the Menorah in the Mishkan (Tabernacle) receives special attention in the weekly portion of Behaalot'cha. Its entire opening passage is dedicated to this act of holy service:

... בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי הַמְנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת.

... *when you [Aharon] light the lamps, the seven lamps shall illuminate opposite the face of the Menorah.* (Bamidbar 8,2)

What does the Torah mean when it says *opposite the face of the Menorah*? How, actually, were the candles in the lamps arranged, and what did they illuminate?

Rashi explains that the wicks of the six outer lamps were turned towards the middle one. That is to say, *the face of the Menorah* refers to the middle lamp; the three candles on the right side were turned leftward, and the three candles on the left side were turned rightward; all six faced towards the center.

Why was this done? Why did the candles not simply burn straight and true? Rashi explains that this was to show that the Menorah was not merely a source of light. The lamps were turned inward, to the center, so that it not appear that Hashem needs the light to light up His Mishkan.

But this answer raises even more questions! First of all, why does the Torah say *the seven lamps shall illuminate opposite the face of the Menorah*? Only six lamps - three on each side - illuminate the middle candle at the face of the Menorah! Secondly, is the purpose solely to negate a false impression? Is there no *positive* concept to be learned from the pointing of the candles specifically towards the center?

### ■ The Middle Lamp's Mission

A few words in the Gemara (Megillah 21b) clear up the entire picture:

**The words “shall illuminate opposite the face of the Menorah” teach that the candles face the Western Lamp (the middle lamp), and the Western Lamp faces the Shechinah, the Divine Presence.**

To understand this, we must visualize the layout of the Mishkan. It was shaped as an east-west rectangle; on the western end was the Holy of Holies, partitioned off by the Parochet curtain. Further east was the Menorah, with its candle-lamps arranged from north to south, directly facing the Parochet.

The above Talmudic passage teaches that all seven lamps must face a specific direction: the six outer candles face the middle lamp, and the middle lamp faces the Parochet. That is, the “journey of the lights” towards the Western (middle) Light does not end there, but rather at the Parochet concealing the Holy of Holies, where the Divine Presence is revealed in the light of prophecy bursting forth from between the two *cherubim* above the Holy Ark.

We thus understand the verse as follows: *The face of the Menorah* means the front of the Menorah, and *opposite the face of the Menorah* refers to that which stands opposite the Menorah – namely, the Parochet, representing the revelation of the Divine Presence between the *cherubim* above the Ark.

But why, then, do the six other lamps not face the Parochet directly? Why must their light go through the “middleman” of the central lamp? The answer is that this is precisely what the Sages wish to teach us: in order to face the spot where the Shechinah is revealed, a “middleman” is required. The middle lamp, the special Western Lamp, is like a *shliach tzibur*, the representative of the other six; in their name, it directly faces the Parochet and the *cherubim*.

All seven lamps thus illuminate towards the Parochet, but only one of them does so directly; the others shine towards it indirectly via the central lamp

that faces the Parochet and the spot where the Shechinah is revealed. What is the nature of this unique mission entrusted to the middle candle?

### ■ **Testimony for the Entire World**

Another Talmudic passage, a Baraita, seeks to clarify the necessity of the lighting of the Menorah – and its answer provides a totally different vantage point:

**Does G-d really require a light in the Mishkan? After all, the Children of Israel walked for 40 years in the desert, with no light other than that of Hashem!**

**Rather, the light served as testimony to the entire world that the Divine Presence dwells amidst Israel. The Western [central] Lamp miraculously remained lit for longer than the others: The Cohen would put the same amount of oil in all the lamps – yet while the others burnt out by the morning, the middle one burned all day until the Cohen would come to re-kindle it the next evening.** (Shabbat 22b)

The Gemara's question is a very fundamental one. G-d is the source of light for the entire universe, and certainly for Israel, in the form of the Pillar of Fire that led the way for 40 years in the desert! What can be gained by having several candles burning in the Menorah in the Mishkan, which was already as bright as fire all night?

The Gemara's answer gives us a totally new viewpoint of the Menorah. Certainly another few candles make no difference, but the issue here is one of quality, not quantity. The central candle burned much longer than its oil allowed it, such that the extra light was of a wondrous and miraculous kind - *ex nihilo*, something from nothing. As the Cohen lit the other candles from this miraculous light, the Menorah provided not only light, but also living and daily testimony of Hashem's wondrous presence amid Israel.

This, then, was the purpose of the lighting of the Menorah: To attest every day to the wondrous phenomenon of G-d's dwelling amidst Bnei Yisrael.

### ■ **“You Will Light My Candle”**

Clearly, the Baraita is telling us that the candles don't actually light up the Mishkan, as we understood at first; the opposite is true. The central lamp is nourished by the light of the Divine Presence, and gives of its light to the

others. The central, western candle remained lit by daily miracle, and the other candles received their light, each night, from this miracle. The other lamps were thus nourished by the miracle of the western light.

Given this insight, we see that the candles point towards the western light not in order to light up the Parochet, but rather the opposite: The middle candle is the conduit by which the Divine light is passed from the Holy of Holies, hidden behind the Parochet, to all the other lamps. The source of the other candles' light is the Divine Light, via the middle lamp.

### ■ A Single Piece of Gold

We know from Parashat Terumah that the Menorah was a very complex piece of handiwork, with cups, bulbs and flowers engraved with precision on its branches and main shaft (Sh'mot 25,31). Yet here in Parashat Behaalot'cha, of all the details the Torah could have told us about the Menorah's construction, it chooses to list only this one point:

זֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנְרָה: מִקְשָׁה זָהָב עַד יְרֵכָה עַד פְּרֻחָהּ מִקְשָׁה הוּא...

*This is the way the Menorah was made:*

*one single piece of gold, from its base to its top...* (Bamidbar 8,4)

The Menorah was not made of separate pieces, but was rather hammered and chiseled out of one solid piece of gold. Why does the Torah choose to specify just this detail here? It wishes to show us a clear link between these two commands: tilting the candles towards the middle one, and fashioning the Menorah out of one piece. The Torah is emphasizing the parallel between the *one source* from which the branches of the Menorah are made, and the *one source* from which the candles draw their light.

Both materially and spiritually, the various components of the Menorah are nourished from one source: The six arms of the Menorah are each made from one central piece, while the six burning candles all receive their light from the western lamp - which itself miraculously burns from the light emanating from behind the Parochet, between the *cherubim*.

The Torah brings out this point by emphasizing here only one detail: the Menorah's construction out of one solid piece of gold.

### ■ Between the Cherubim

What does the Parochet conceal behind it? Behind the Parochet is the Holy of Holies - so holy that no one ever enters it, except for the High Priest on

Yom Kippur. Inside this room is the Ark of the Covenant, and atop that is the golden Kaporet covering, and the two angel-shaped *cherubim* – from between which the Prophetic Voice emanated from the Heavens. This voice would then penetrate the Parochet, to be heard only by Moshe Rabbeinu's prophetic spirit:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת הַקּוֹל מִדְּבַר אֱלֹהֵי מַעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת  
מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים ...

... *Moshe heard the Voice speak to him from above the Kaporet,  
between the two cherubim ...* (Bamidbar 7,89)

This is the last verse of Parashat Naso, followed immediately by the opening verse of Behaalot'cha and the story of the Menorah. That is to say, right after we learn of the Prophetic Voice from the Holy of Holies, we learn that the lamps were pointed in that direction and received their light from it. The message is clear: Just as the prophetic voice emanated from behind the Parochet, above the Ark, between the *cherubim*, so too the spiritual light emanates from the same place, towards the Western Lamp, which gives of its light and strength to the other lamps.

This is precisely how King David described it in the Book of Psalms:

כִּי אַתָּה תֹאמֵר גְּרִי ה' אֵי-לֵהִי יִגִּיהַּ חֹשְׁכָי.

*For You will light my candle,  
my G-d will illuminate my darkness.* (Psalms 18,29)

## ■ The Priestly Blessing: From the Center Outward

We find another element in Parashat Naso that lends an extra dimension to our lesson. The Cohanim are commanded to bless the nation with the Priestly Blessing, which, as we learned above,<sup>1</sup> is an amazingly structured prayer. Its three verses comprise an ascending series of three, five, and seven words:

יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ.  
יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנְּנֶךָ.  
יֵשׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

*May G-d bless and preserve you.  
May G-d shine His countenance upon you and show you grace.  
May G-d lift His face towards you and grant you peace.* (Bamidbar 6,24-26)

1. in *The Light of the Menorah of Blessing*, to Parashat Naso.

This structure is wondrously parallel to the way we perceive the structure of the Menorah. When we first look at its central stem and the candles immediately adjacent to it on both sides, we see three lamps. We then expand our gaze outward, and see two more lamps on each side of the central stem, for a total of five. Finally, we see the whole picture: three lights on each side, for a total of seven lamps of the Menorah. Thus, the Menorah is based on a 3-5-7 pattern, just like the Priestly Blessing.

By reciting the Priestly Blessing each day, with its 3, 5, and 7 words, the Cohanim light a spiritual Menorah, with its light emanating from the center - just as the real Menorah receives its light from the center, the Holy of Holies.

In addition, just as the central staff of the Menorah is that which supports it, the same is true of the spiritual Menorah of the Priestly Blessing. How so? The middle word of the first blessing is *Hashem*; the second blessing's middle word is *His face*; and in the third blessing, the middle word is *to you*. These words, the vertical center, are also the horizontal center, as they are the middle three words of the middle blessing.<sup>2</sup> The message of these three words is clear: "Hashem's light shines upon you, O Nation of Israel, and grants you strength and blessing."

### ■ Aharon's Perfect Performance

Aharon the Priest understood this supreme secret very well, and he focused on it when he lit the Menorah: G-d as the Ultimate Unity from which abundance is generated.

When the Torah says that Aharon performed the lighting of the Menorah "*as Hashem had commanded Moshe*" (Bamidbar 8,3), Rashi surprises us by explaining that the verse means to praise Aharon for having done it exactly as G-d instructed, without changing a thing. This is puzzling: Why would Aharon not obey G-d's word? What "praise" is it to say that Aharon carried out his job as G-d had commanded?

The answer is: The middle lamp symbolizes "mission." It alludes to the fact that the light of G-d does not pass directly to every individual Jew, but only via an emissary – the High Priest. We recall that when Moshe was first asked to be an emissary to Israel, he repeatedly asked G-d to release him from this mission. Aharon, however, happily accepted his assignment with love. As Hashem told Moshe with some annoyance:

2. See the diagram in the above-mentioned article.

הָלֵא אֶהְרֹן אֶחִיךָ הַלְוִי יִדְעֵתִי כִּי דָבָר יִדְבֹר הוּא  
וְגַם הִנֵּה הוּא יֵצֵא לְקִרְאָתְךָ וְרָאָה וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ.

*“Your brother Aharon the Levite, I know that he will [agree to] speak [to Pharaoh]; and behold, he is coming towards you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart.”* (Sh'mot 4,14)

The Torah waited specifically until here, where the lighting of the Menorah is recounted, to tell us Aharon's praise. The vitality and importance of the Menorah's middle lamp as an agent by which to transmit the Divine light to the other lamps alludes to something: It hints at the value and importance of emissaries: the High Priest, who transmits G-d's light and blessing to the Nation of Israel, and the prophets, who transmit G-d's word to G-d's people.

Aharon the High Priest is worthy of being the one to bless the Nation of Israel with the light of love and joy.

#### ■ Five and Two

All of the above is based on the supposition that the Menorah was placed from north to south, facing the Parochet on the west. But there are Mishnaic sages who say that the Menorah actually stood in an east-west direction, with the eastern-most lamp furthest from the Parochet and closest to the Mishkan entrance.

According to this opinion, the “western lamp” is not the central one, as we understood above. Instead, it is the second one from the east, i.e., the lamp that is west of the eastern-most lamp. Why is this the one that is considered to be “*before Hashem*”? Because when the Priest walks in from the east towards the Menorah and arrives at its first lamp, he then continues walking towards the Holy of Holies. As Rashi explains, the moment he takes one step forward to the Holy of Holies – at the second lamp – it is considered as if he is standing before Hashem. This is why the second lamp is “*before Hashem*.”

Given this configuration, the candles on the Menorah are divided into five (on the west) and two (to the east) – and in fact, the daily cleaning of the Menorah cups followed this pattern: The priest would first clean five of them, then sprinkle the blood of the daily sacrifice offering, and then clean the remaining two cups.

The days of the week correspond to the Menorah according to both approaches, as follows:

According to the first opinion, we view the central lamp as the Sabbath, flanked on one side by the days that precede it, namely, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and on the other side by Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Sabbath, the central lamp, shines upon the weekdays on both sides, while at the same time it is nourished from the Supreme Light.

According to the second approach, we view the first five days of the week as one unit, and Friday-Sabbath as a separate entity. In this configuration, the days of the week provide for Friday, which in turn prepares for Shabbat.

This is precisely what happened with the Manna when Israel spent 40 years in the desert on their way to the Land of Israel. A double portion of Manna fell on Friday – including one portion for the Sabbath, on which the Manna was not provided. As is written: *On Friday, when they prepare that which they will bring, there will be double...* (Sh'mot 16,5)

Thus, from a materialistic standpoint, the six days prepare for the Sabbath, while spiritually, the Sabbath nourishes the weekdays.

It is interesting to note that the Land of Israel's Seven Species are also divided into five and two:

אֶרֶץ חִטָּה, וּשְׂעֵרָה, וְגִבְעַן וּתְאֵנָה וְרִמּוֹן, אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וּדְבָשׁ.  
*A land of wheat, barley, vines, figs and pomegranates;  
 a land of oil-producing olives and honey.* (D'varim 8,8)

The first time “*land*” appears, it is followed by five species, and the second time, it is followed by two. (This arrangement has Halakhic ramifications as well: whichever species is closer to “*land*,” the blessing recited upon it receives precedence.) Note that the sixth species is oil used for illumination, alluding to the lighting of Sabbath candles at the end of the sixth day.

### ■ **The Western Lamp: The Grand Finale**

Let us return to the Gemara (Shabbat 22b), which states that the Western (central) Lamp remained lit all day without oil, and that the Priest would use it to light the other candles in the Menorah. The Cohen would then extinguish it, clean out the cup, and fill it with new oil and a new wick. He would then light the wick from the already-lit candles. (This is one understanding of this passage, as quoted in Tosafot s.v. *Mimena*, Menachot 86b.)

The ramifications of this approach are beautiful: The candles are lit from the miraculous western light, and then the miraculous light is returned

from the other lamps to the central lamp – from which the other candles are once again lit the next day, and so on again and again. For hundreds of years, a miraculous light burned continuously in the Menorah.

We thus have two approaches, one in which the Western Lamp is in the center, and one in which it is number two. If we combine these two views, the broader significance is this: When the central lamp of Sabbath stands in the middle of the week (north-south), it is nourished from the Supreme source, and nourishes us. Afterwards, in the east-west configuration of five and two, we return and nourish it.

### ■ The Priestly Blessing, Again

Let us return to the Blessing of the Cohanim, structured just like the seven branches of the Menorah – but this time, let us look at it from the 2-5 position. Note that Hashem's Name is always the second word in each blessing –

*May G-d bless ...* בְּרַכָּהּ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶהּ.  
*May G-d shine ...* יֵאָר ה' פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וְיִחְנֶהּ.  
*May G-d lift ...* יִשָּׂא ה' ...

and in the last blessing, which has seven words, Hashem's Name is that which divides it into 2 and 5 words:

יִשָּׂא ה' פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וְיִשֵּׂם לָהּ שְׁלוֹם.  
*May G-d lift* [2 Hebrew words]  
*His face towards you and grant you peace* [5 words].  
 (Bamidbar 6,24-26)

However, though G-d's Name is the second word in each blessing, it is actually the center of the first blessing. This means that the Priestly Blessing actually includes both of the proposed arrangements of the Menorah. How so?

Let us picture the Cohen walking in and seeing the Menorah facing him, with G-d's Name – the central, Western Lamp – in the middle. Slowly and gradually, the Menorah “revolves” around its middle axis – and the Cohen then finds himself standing opposite the first candle, which is next to the second lamp, which is now the Western Lamp, the representation of G-d's Name.

Thus, the Menorah first stands from north to south, with the western lamp facing the Divine Presence, from where it receives its light and then grants

it to the other lamps. The Menorah then “turns” in our mind’s eye to the right, towards the Table, and the five lamps then nourish the sixth lamp, which in turn gives off to the Western Lamp, which is now the second one. At this point, the Western Lamp will illuminate towards the Table of the Showbread and will grant it blessing and abundance. And from the “pure Table that stands before G-d,” nourishment and abundance will be granted to all of Israel.

We have thus seen how a small passage at the beginning of Parashat Behaalot’cha is not small at all in terms of content and meaning.

