

# THE MENORAH: IGNITING THE SOUL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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**The Value of Lighting the Lights of the Menorah**

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## A Quantum Leap that Results in Second Place

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1. The 12 Princes inaugurated the Mishkan with gifts and sacrifices over a 12 day period.
  2. Moshe had a question: should the order be according to age or travel formation?
  3. If it would be birth, Reuvein would be the first; if would be travel formation, Yehuda would be first.
  4. It was dictated by G-d that the order should be according to travel.
  5. Rashi: Reuvein came with a claim that they should precede Yissachar because they are the first born.
  6. G-d said, because Yissachar suggested the gifts and sacrifices in honor of the inauguration, he precedes Reuvein.
  7. Another reason: since Yissachar represents Torah, he supersedes Reuvein.
  8. Why does the Midrash have to validate Yissachar's position if G-d said the order should be according to travel formation?
  9. It was only because Yissachar made the suggestion and represents Torah, did G-d say that it should be according to travel formation.
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## Ramchal: Existence As Willed by G-d

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1. All existence is contingent on G-d's continuous Providence, willing that all should be.
  2. G-d's essence is not contingent on anything other than Himself.
  3. The scope & parameters of all that exists & their systems are only effective to the degree that G-d endowed them.
  4. Although in the physical and spiritual realm there are systems and orders, G-d is not bound by any of them because He is the Master.
  5. G-d created existence for the sake of good.
  6. Evil only exists for man to choose to suppress and negate it.
  7. There are many things we witness, experience, and see, which seem contrary to the objective of creation. At the end of time, in retrospect, we will see that it was all for good.
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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Beha'aloscha

# THE MENORAH: IGNITING THE SOUL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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### **Aaron's Contribution to the Jewish People**

*Rashi in Beha'aloscha* citing the *Midrash*: "Why does the *Torah* juxtapose the inauguration of the *Mishkan* with the kindling of the *Menorah*? When *Aaron* had seen that all of Princes of Israel had participated in the inauguration of the *Mishkan* with gifts and sacrifices and he and his tribe were excluded, he was taken aback and distraught (he had believed that he and his tribe were excluded because of their unworthiness). G-d said to him, "Yours (participation) is greater than theirs. You, *Aaron* will have the *mitzvah* of kindling the *Menorah*."

*Ramban*: Why did G-d need to console *Aaron* by telling him that his *mitzvah* of kindling the *Menorah* is greater than that of the Princes? *Aaron*, as the High Priest was the only one qualified to officiate on *Yom Kippur*. In addition, the involvement of the Princes was only at the time of the inauguration. In contrast, *Aaron*, as the High Priest officiated on a continuous basis by bringing the incense offering in addition to the other sacrifices.

*Torah*: G-d had instructed *Moshe* regarding the participation of the Princes in the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. They were to bring their gifts and sacrifices over a twelve-day period in a specific order in honor of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The *Torah* delineates each of the gifts and offerings of each Prince. Each Prince had brought the identical gift and offerings. The *Torah* repeats what each Prince had brought on his particular day verbatim twelve times. It would seem that the *Torah* could have expressed itself in a more concise manner rather than repeating itself twelve times. There is nothing in the *Torah* that is superfluous. If the *Torah* could have been more brief but chose to present the gifts of the Princes in a more lengthy manner? It is thus clear that it is not repetitious and superfluous.

*Ramban*: Although each gift and offering that was given by each Princes was identical in the physical sense, regarding its symbolism and level of representation of each tribe, the innateness of the gifts were not the same. Each tribe, within the spiritual infrastructure

of the Jewish people, has its own representation and contribution. Each Prince, representing his tribe, infused the gifts and offerings with the intent that represented the spiritual profile of that tribe.

The participation of the twelve Princes in the inauguration of the *Mishkan* was to address the totality of the *Mishkan*, which corresponds to the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people. G-d said to *Aaron* that his contribution to the entire spirituality of the Jewish people would be greater than theirs. *Aaron's* contribution, through the kindling of the lights of the *Menorah*, although as a *mitzvah* it was a detail in the *Mishkan* as sacrifices were; nevertheless, its value was greater than all of the gifts of the Princes combined.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The illumination of the *Menorah* symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. If one wants to attain wisdom he should pray in a southerly direction because the *Menorah*, which was in the covered sanctuary in the Temple was located on the southern wall. All the Divine Assistance that is needed to fathom the truth of *Torah* comes about through the kindling of the *Menorah*.

The spiritual heartbeat of the Jewish people is the *Torah* itself. The *Torah* is the equivalent of the soul that is infused in the body. Although the contribution of the Princes represents the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people, that is the equivalent of the body, it remains a nonfunctional entity without the *Torah* that is its soul. The relevance and linkage of the Jewish people to G-d is only through the *Torah*.

*Zohar*: "The Jewish people, the *Torah*, and G-d are one." Thus, it is the kindling of the *Menorah* that gives the Jewish people relevance to the truth of *Torah* and to G-d Himself. We find the blessing that *Moshe* had given to the tribe of *Levy* before his passing relates to their responsibility to disseminate of the *Torah* to the Jewish people.

*Malachi*: "The lips of the *Kohen* shall safeguard knowledge. You shall seek *Torah* from his mouth. Because he is an agent of G-d..."

*Torah*: Regarding the kindling of the *Menorah*, "And *Aaron* did so..."

*Rashi* citing *Sifri*: "This is to tell us the praiseworthiness of *Aaron*, that he did not deviate." Seemingly, the kindling of the *Menorah* was not a difficult *mitzvah* to perform. If this is so, why would one have considered that *Aaron* would have deviated from fulfilling it correctly? What

deviation is possible regarding the kindling of the *Menorah*? G-d had said to *Aaron* that his participation is greater than theirs. One would think that after being told by G-d of how unique and special the kindling of the *Menorah* is, *Aaron* could have experienced some degree of pride. Even the most righteous person would feel a momentary sense of pride.

The *Torah* is attesting to the fact that despite his privilege and qualification to kindle the *Menorah*, his level of humility was not affected whatsoever. Being given the unique task of kindling the *Menorah* did not make him change in any way. If he would have been affected and sensed some pride, it would have caused a deficiency of the *mitzvah* of the kindling. Thus it would be classified as a deviation. His lighting would have brought about a limited result.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that the *Torah* is compared to three liquids: water, wine, and milk. One would think that the comparison of *Torah* to water would be: just as water is basic to one's existence (because one cannot live without water), so too is *Torah* basic and essential to one's spirituality. However, the *Gemara* tells us that the comparison to water is within the context of its nature. Just as water flows from an elevated location to a lower one where it accumulates, so too can the *Torah* only be acquired and retained by the one who has a low/humble spirit.

The greater the level of one's humility the greater relevance one has to process and come upon the truth of *Torah* to become a repository of it. Because *Moshe* was the most humble person who ever walked the face of the earth, he was the most qualified to be the one to receive the *Torah* on behalf of the Jewish people. Because of his innate quality of humility, he had the greatest capacity to be its recipient. No one reflected this characteristic of water more than *Moshe*.

Since the characteristic of humility is fundamental to the process of coming upon the truth of *Torah* and retaining it, so too the one who is qualified to activate the forces which is the Divine Assistance to allow the Jewish people to comprehend and fathom the truth of *Torah*, must be exceptionally humble. Since *Aaron* did not experience the slightest degree of pride, when he was told the his is greater than theirs, his kindling had brought about the maximum degree of Divine Assistance for the Jewish people to come upon the Truth of *Torah* until the end of

time. Thus, Aaron is praiseworthy that he did not allow his privileged status to affect him.

## Meriting Acclaim

*Torah*: "Take the Levites..."

*Midrash* citing a verse from *Psalms*: "'G-d tests the devoutly righteous..."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: "One, who attempts to purify himself, will be assisted. One who attempts to contaminate himself – they open the way before him (allow him to do so)." If one chooses to sin, G-d does not assist him in the process, He only allows him to actualize his intent to sin. However, if one chooses to purify himself by doing a *mitzvah*, G-d assists that person to succeed.

*Midrash*: "G-d does not elevate one to a position of honor and dominance unless he is first tested. If he endures and succeeds in the tests that were presented to him, then G-d will elevate him to a position of status, dominance. We find regarding *Avraham*, our Patriarch that he was tested in ten areas. Only after he succeeded in all of these tests did G-d bless him, as it states, 'G-d blessed *Avraham* with everything.'

"G-d had tested *Yitzchak*, our Patriarch with *Avimelech*. After he had succeeded he was blessed. G-d also tested *Yaakov*, our Patriarch with many difficulties and hardships such as those regarding *Esav*, *Rachel*, *Dina*, *Yosef*, *Shimon*, *Binyamin*, and regarding his material state when he fled from the home of his father. As it states, 'With my walking staff I crossed...' After he succeeded G-d blessed him... *Yosef* was tested with the wife of his master *Potiphar* and twelve years of imprisonment... but after he succeeded he ascended to become king...

"The Tribe of *Levy* gave their lives to sanctify the Name of G-d so that *Torah* should not be nullified. When the Jewish people were in Egypt they detested the *Torah* and circumcision. They all became idolaters. They were involved in all forms of abominations...Throughout the entire years of bondage the Tribe of *Levy* remained devoutly righteous. They observed the *Torah* and were circumcised. When the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, the Tribe of *Levy* did not participate... When G-d had seen that they were righteous, He tested the Tribe of *Levy* and they succeeded. After they had withstood the tests, the *Torah* states, 'The Levites shall be

Mine,' which is a confirmation that they had succeeded. They had been elevated to become G-d's officiants."

*Torah*: As a consequence of the sin of the Golden Calf, the firstborn, who were initially qualified to be the officiants of G-d (Priests), became tainted and were thus disqualified from officiating. The Tribe of *Levy*, because they did not participate in the Golden Calf were chosen to be the officiants in the *Mishkan*/Temple instead of the firstborn. The fact that the Levites did not participate in the Sin of the Golden Calf only explains why they were not culpable for punishment.

*Midrash*: Not being culpable is not sufficient to be given special status, but rather, G-d requires the righteous to prove themselves in order to be elevated to greatness. Therefore, in addition to not being tainted through idolatry, the Levites needed to also withstand the tests of G-d in order to be qualified to be His officiants. We see that even in Egypt before the sin of the Golden Calf that the Levites had esteemed the *Torah* and never faltered. They continued to circumcise themselves in Egypt although the Jewish people did not do so. They continued to be devout while the Jewish people abandoned G-d and their religion.

At Sinai, when *Moshe* wanted to purge the Jewish people of those who had worshipped the Golden Calf, he proclaimed, "Who is for *Hashem* shall come with me." The Levites, although they were small in number, immediately rose to the occasion and put their lives in jeopardy to sanctify the Name of G-d. It is because they withstood G-d's tests that they were elevated to greatness.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: G-d only associated His Name with the holy Patriarchs because they withstood the tests with which G-d had presented them. Although one may not be subjected to the level of tests that were presented to the Patriarchs, each person is tested continuously every day. If one is able to subdue and not pursue his desires, but rather chooses to dedicate himself to the spiritual, then he has succeeded in withstanding his tests. One is able to merit the ultimate good by choosing to sanctify G-d's Name although he is not esteemed by the public.

King David: "I speak Your Testament before kings and I am not embarrassed." King David was worthy to be king because his only concern was to bring glory to G-d.

## The Uniqueness of the Jewish People in the Eyes of G-d

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: The devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*) are greater than the greatest angels.

*Reb Chaim* of Volozhin in *Nefesh HaChaim*: Regardless of great the *tzaddik* may be, he is not be able to fathom or grasp to any degree the angel's understanding of spirituality. This is because the angel was created by G-d as a spiritual being and endowed with its specific spiritual dimension. In contrast, the *tzaddik* is devoutly righteous only due to his own initiative to chose the Will of G-d. Since the greatness of the *tzaddik* is attributed to his own actions, he is greater than the angel who was created as it is with no capacity of spiritual advancement.

*Torah*: The Jewish people accepted the *Torah* at Sinai by unequivocally declaring, "*Naaseh V'nishma* – we will do and we will listen."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: When G-d heard their declaration, He exclaimed, "Who revealed this secret to My children?" They had expressed themselves as angels do. The angels are ready to do the Will of G-d before hearing His Directive. Although the declaration at Sinai of the Jewish people was identical to that of the angels, their expression of "*Naaseh V'nishma*" was even greater than the angel because they had made the declaration as a result of their own choice. Unlike the angel who was created to function in this manner and endowed with clarity.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: The world was not in a secure state until the Jewish people accepted the *Torah*. Had the Jewish people not accepted the *Torah*, the world would have reverted back to a state of pre-existence. By making the declaration of "*Naaseh V'nishma*," the Jewish people fulfilled the objective of Creation. The objective of existence is not that it should simply continue but rather everything within it should bring glory to G-d. As the Prophet states, "For My Glory I have created it ..."

Therefore, the Jewish people assumed the greatest level of value in the eyes of G-d because they brought the ultimate glory to Him by accepting the *Torah* to be able to fulfill His Will. Because the Jewish people had demonstrated this unique level of self-negation at Sinai, they merited to be called the Children of G-d. They are not only the subjects of the King of kings, they are His Children. Just as a father loves his children so too does G-d love the Jewish people.

*Torah*: "Then I assigned the Levites to be presented to Aaron and his sons from among the Children of Israel to perform the service for the Children of Israel in the Tent of the Meeting and to provide atonement for the Children of Israel, so that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary."

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: The term "Children of Israel" is mentioned five times in the verse to indicate the great love that G-d has for the Jewish people. Why did G-d choose to repeat the "Children of Israel" five times? Through this repetition, G-d is revealing to the Jewish people and the world that the basis for His unique love for them is their relevance to the Five Books of the *Torah*. It is not because they Jewish people are more gifted than any other nation, but rather it is only because they accepted the *Torah* that the nations of the world had rejected.

If the entire value of the Jewish people is their acceptance and adherence of the *Torah*, then what is the consequence of rejecting the *Torah* and ignoring the Will of G-d? Although the Jewish people do not lose their status as being the Children of G-d, they are classified by the Prophet as "errant children." Thus, G-d as their Father must discipline and punish them as a father would so that they should correct their ways. He does not reign in on the nations as He does on the Jewish people. He only does so as an indication of His love to His Children.

### Looking for an Alternative

*Torah*: "The people took to seeking complaints; it was evil in the eyes of G-d and G-d heard and His Wrath flared, and a fire of *Hashem* burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp." Who were those who complained? It was those who sought out complaint. G-d had provided all of the conceivable needs and amenities that were necessary for the Jewish people. They were given the Manna to sustain them physically and spiritually. They were given an unlimited source of water which flowed from the wellspring of Miriam. In addition, they were engulfed by the Clouds of Glory that provided every level of protection and comfort.

The Jewish people basked in G-d's Presence throughout this period of time. G-d's obviousness could not be denied. If this was their predicament, why would they seek out a reason to complain? They should have been

fully content. The only basis for one to complain when one is lacking or unhappy. If in fact there was nothing to which their happiness could be attributed, it is evident that it was G-d Himself. They were in essence saying that they had no interest in Him. This is the position of one who is defiant. Despite the fact that it was obvious that there was no alternative to G-d, they nevertheless sought to complain.

It is stated in the Ten Commandments: "Do not covet your fellow's house...your fellow's wife...nor anything that belongs to your fellow." How is it possible for one who has an interest in his fellow's belongings to control this inappropriate desire?

*Ibn Ezra:* This can be explained with an allegory. When the Prince chooses to marry the Princess, regardless of her beauty and other qualities, a commoner does not envy the Prince for marrying her. This is because the commoner understands with certainty that the Princess has no relevance to him as a commoner. There is no basis for consideration, since she is not within the context of his choice. Identically, if one would understand and internalize that every individual's personal predicament is unique and specific for that person through G-d's endowment, then he will not be envious of his fellow's successes or possessions because they have no relevance to his existence.

If one in fact does have designs on his fellow's possessions it is only because he did not internalize this belief and reality. The only reason one has a sense of lack and unhappiness is because he believes that greater success and opportunity is available to him. This is the understanding of the dictum that is stated in the *Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers*, "Who is the wealthy one? It is the one who is happy with his lot." This is the person who truly internalizes the fact that what G-d had given him is meant to be his and not more.

*Gemara in Tractate Shabbos:* "One's material allocation (for the year) is set from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Rosh Hashanah*." One cannot earn or achieve, within the material realm, more than what G-d had allotted to him, regardless of his initiatives. G-d became enraged at those who sought to complain in the desert because, understanding and realizing His Omnipotence, there was no basis to feel lacking. It was only because they believed that there was an alternative to G-d that they sought to complain.

*Chavos HaLevavos:* One should be overwhelmed with thankfulness to G-d for everything that He has

bestowed upon him. If so, then why is one not content and satisfied? It is because one chooses to focus on what he does not have rather than on what he does have. Because one has a tendency to focus on what his fellow possesses, it causes him to focus on what he does not have.

When *Esav* had met his brother *Yaakov*, after not seeing him for many years, he noticed the camps of *Yaakov's* people and asked, "Who are these (people) to you?" *Yaakov* responded, "The Children who G-d has graciously given to your servant." *Esav* then asked *Yaakov* regarding the gift that was sent to him. *Yaakov* answered that it was sent to find favor in his eyes. *Esav* responded to *Yaakov* by saying, "I have much. My brother, let what you have remain yours."

*Yaakov* urged his brother to accept the gift as an expression of his reverence for him. He urged *Esav* saying, "Please accept my gift which was brought to you, inasmuch as G-d has been gracious to me and inasmuch as I have everything." *Yaakov* expressed himself regarding what G-d has given him as having "everything" because he recognized that whatever he was meant to have would be provided by G-d, unrelated to his initiative. However, *Esav* who was the one who personified the material, believed that all his successes were due to his initiative and ability. Therefore, he did not believe that he had everything because there was so much more for him to accomplish and acquire.

## **G-d's Primary Location** **(from Nasso)**

*Torah:* "It was (*vaay'he*) on the day that *Moshe* finished erecting the Tabernacle..." The word "*vaay*" in Hebrew means "woe."

*Midrash:* "On the day that *Moshe* completed the *Mishkan* it was woe to the angels. They said, 'G-d had commanded 'Make for Me a *Mishkan* so that I should dwell in your midst.' Now that the *Mishkan* is complete the Divine Presence will dwell amongst His children.' G-d said to the angels, 'Do not be concerned. My Divine Presence will be with you in heaven always.' ...However, the consolation that G-d had given the angels was empty and without value. It is in fact to the contrary, the primary location of the Divine Presence is in the terrestrial world and not in heaven. As it states, 'His Splendor is on the earth and then in heaven...'"

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: “The Signet of G-d is Truth.” If this is so, how could His consolation to the angels be without basis?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: “If the previous generations are classified as angels, then we can be classified as man. If the previous generations are classified (only) as men, then we are classified as donkeys and not even the donkey of Rav Pinchas Ben Yayir.”

*Chasam Sofer*: The angels function as G-d’s agents is to carry out His Will. However, their degree of function is determined by the spiritual performance of the Jewish people– to what degree they adhere to the dictates of the *Torah*.

*Torah*: “If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for you rains in their time. The land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit.” If on the other hand the Jewish people do not do the Will of G-d, then He will withdraw His blessing from the world and it will function on a deficient level. In actuality, the Divine Presence is on the terrestrial level; however, from the perspective of the angels, because of their interaction with existence (causing it to function at a greater or lesser degree) causes the angels to believe that the Divine Presence is on the heavenly level. What gives the angels meaning and purpose is G-d’s utilization of them. Thus, they believe that the primary location of the Divine Presence is in heaven and not on earth.

*Chasam Sofer*: If the angels rise and fall based on the behavior of the Jewish people, then mankind is behaving as the “human being” should. However, if the angels becomes relatively non-functional because G-d withdraws His blessing from existence, then mankind is no better than the donkey. Just as the donkey does not affect the spiritual system, so too the human being because of

his spiritual deficiency. Thus, the understanding of the angels is incorrect because G-d’s is factually on the terrestrial plain and not primarily in heaven.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: After *Moshe* received the *Torah*, *satan* asked G-d, “Master of the Universe, where is the *Torah*? It is no longer in heaven.” G-d responded, “It is on the earth.” When G-d informed him that the *Torah* was in the earthly realm, *satan* continued to search but could not locate it. *Satan* returned to G-d and asked, “I asked the earth and the sea and they responded that they did not have the *Torah*. Where is the *Torah*? G-d responded, “I gave it to *ben Amram* (the son of *Amram* – *Moshe*).” If in fact the *Torah* had already been given, why was *satan* still interested in its location?

Since *satan* understood that the only way he could be subdued and incapacitated is through the study of the *Torah*, he attempted to undermine its relevance to mankind. G-d concealed it from him because He understood that based on *satan*’s ability to prosecute, he could render the Jewish people unworthy and unfit to possess the *Torah*. As we find regarding *Chizkiyahu*, the king of Judah who was meant to be *Moshiach*. *Sancheirev*, the Assyrian king was to be the Armageddon (*Gog* and *Mogog*). However, because of the prosecution of *satan* G-d agreed that *Chizkiyahu* should not merit to be *Moshiach*. G-d conceals the true location of His Presence from the angels so that they should not interfere with the spiritual opportunity that was given to the Jewish people.



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