

Parshat Behalotcha: Personal Enlightenment

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The parsha opens with the command to light the Menora, "Behaalotcha et haneirot." Behaloscha means when you raise the lights. Rashi explains that the kohen was commanded to hold his fire to the wick until the flames of the Menora rose up. It can be interpreted to mean when you rise up to the Menora. There were stairs in front of the Menora upon which the kohen would stand and prepare the wicks. What is the significance of the stairs and why does the parsha write about preparing the wicks instead of lighting them?

The Be'er Yosef explains that stairs represent preparation before we can light the Menora. They also signify wisdom and Torah learning. Although the manager of a property may know the property better than its owner, he is still not the owner. Similarly, a person can have knowledge of Torah, but if he does not have proper middot, he does not have the qualities necessary to own Torah.

The three steps of the Menora symbolize three critical middot that we need to develop in ourselves. The mishna in Avot says, "One who has a good eye, a humble temperament, and a lowly spirit is a disciple of Avraham." The Be'er Yosef notes, based on the Shelah, that these three middot parallel the three evil traits that take a person out of this world: jealousy, lust, and honor. Aharon Hakohen embodied the three good middot. When Moshe attained the leadership position that he was in line for, he was happy in his heart, and displayed no jealousy. He humbled himself

to make peace between people. A lowly spirit refers to curbing desire. When the anointing oil was poured on Aharon, he did not benefit from it but rather understood that his position was given to him by Hashem. So on a symbolic level, when the kohen ascended the steps of the menorah, he was teaching us that if one wants to attain Torah and chochma one must first work on becoming a baal middot.

We can also find these three models in the parsha. The first group of zekeinim (elders) was decimated because of gaava. When they saw a vision of Hashem they turned it into an egotistical experience and utilized it for self aggrandizement. In contrast, the new second group of zekeinim was the former Jewish taskmasters in Egypt who refused to beat their fellow Jews and instead took the beatings upon themselves. Greatness stems from feeling the pain of others, and they personified the nefesh shefeila, humble spirit. Therefore they merited that the Divine spirit rested upon them.

Ayin yafah is the converse of envy. Eldad and Meidad excelled in this midda. Hashem commanded seventy two elders to come to the Mishkan. A lottery would determine which of them would join the new group of seventy zekeinim. Eldad and Meidad decided to step out on their own to save their fellow counterparts from humiliation. Hashem rewarded them with prophecy in the camp, while the other zekeinim only received prophecy near the Mishkan. How does one reach this level of taking

pleasure in other person's happiness and rejoicing in their success? Rabbi Twersky explains that just as Hashem is absolute unity, all neshamot are one. We are separate only because we are physical. To the extent that we give priority to the spiritual aspect of our being, we become one with others.

Moshe Rabbeinu represents the ruach nemucha. Most people view themselves as an entity, but if they would come in contact with Hashem as Moshe did, they would realize that they were nothing compared to the enormity and immenseness of their Creator. Gaava is distorted self perception where a person craves honor to assure himself that he is a worthwhile person. This desire can never be fulfilled. A person must realize that he possesses a soul that is a vehicle of holiness. Humility says, I am great but I can become even greater. Gaava says, this is what I've accomplished. I am finished.

The three steps of the menorah represent the three major steps in life. The candles symbolize the soul of man. Their preparation corresponds to working on ourselves to become spiritual beings. Our challenge is to stop for a moment and look at ourselves as that candle. Life is about working on our middot. We have to ask ourselves, are we working on preparing the candles, are we advancing up the three steps of having a lowly spirit, running away from honor, and being sensitive to others? If indeed we are, then we are accomplishing what Hashem meant us to achieve when he placed us on this earth.

Levels of Chassidut

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilas Yesharim teaches us that there are three divisions of chassidut (piety). The first relates to deed, the second to performance of mitzvot, and the third to intent. The Ramchal teaches that mitzvot should be performed with ahava (love) and yirah (fear), the two key pillars of avodat Hashem. Yirah expresses itself in the verse, "Et Hashem Elokecha tirah," one should fear Hashem. This refers not only to fear of punishment but

yirat haromemut (awe of His exalted grandeur). Ahavat Hashem is expressed in the verse, "V'ahavata et Hashem Elokecha," and you should love Hashem and "U'vo tidbok," and you shall cling to Him. Yirah is hachnaah (humility) and boshes (shame). Ahava is manifested by performing mitzvot with joy and passion.

The Rambam teaches that there's a constant

mitzvah to love and fear Hashem. One should perform mitzvot out of love for Hashem, not out of obligation or routine. The Mesilas Yesharim explains that yirat haromemut is expressed when a person prays and is aware that he is standing in front of Hashem. Therefore the Gemara says when a person davens he should know before whom he is praying. Intellectually this understandable but in actuality it is very difficult because we

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cannot perceive it. The Mesilas Yesarim tells us that with minimal contemplation one can implant in one's heart that one is entering into a discourse with Hashem. Just like if we speak to someone on the phone thousands of miles away we're convinced the person is listening, otherwise why would we speak to him, so too Hashem is certainly listening. The

problem is we don't think so.

The Rambam writes that when a person stands in prayer, no other thoughts should enter his mind. He should feel as if he is standing in front of the King of kings. If you had an interview that could make or break it for you, would your mind be on shopping for

Shabbat? No, you'd be totally involved. Why not in front of Hashem? And if you'd say, maybe I understand this concept but I don't see or feel it, the Rambam tells us, one must prepare, and one should do so before davening so that one can approach the King of Kings in a befitting way.

Parshat Behaloscha: Kindling The Flames

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

In the beginning of the parsha Hashem commands Moshe to tell Aharon about the mitzvah of kindling the menorah. He must light the wicks and not remove his hand until the flames burn brightly. Then the Torah gives a description of the menorah. This seems perplexing, as everything about the menorah was already discussed previously. Why is it mentioned again here? Rashi explains that in this case it's not a repetition of what happened previously but it is about something that happened in this time frame. The previous parsha discusses the sacrifices that were offered by the twelve leaders of the tribes during the inauguration of the mishkan in the desert. Aharon was not one of the leaders. He was a kohen. Yet he saw the offerings and felt somehow excluded from the celebration. He wondered why he had no part in it. Moshe comforted him that his lighting of the menorah would be greater. All of this seems difficult to understand. How is it conceivable that a person of Aharon's caliber

would be jealous? Why would lighting the menorah make him feel better?

Each one of the leaders of the tribes had to offer an identical offering. Yet the parsha repeats what every leader did twelve times to teach us that although they all did the same thing, each person served Hashem in his own unique way. In the same way, although all people of Klal Yisrael have one aim, each of us is unique and individual. Aharon's real question was, "Where do I, as a kohen, fit in? Am I or am I not part of the picture?" It wasn't common jealousy but a serious question of, "Who am I?" Moshe's meaningfully answered that he would kindle the menorah. In a sense, he was implying that Aharon's unique contribution would be to add light to the world. He would be a source of a life and would enable others to achieve, which in a sense is greater than one who acts.

However, there was a condition that he had to

keep his hand on the wick when lighting the flame until it could stay lit independently. As an enabler there is a risk of co-dependence. We want people to value us. So while giving someone the gift of self, it's hard to draw away sometimes. This is a problem parents often face when their children become adults. They have to let them grow to be themselves. A perfect parent is one who can retire from the job of parenting. The perfect Rebbe is one who creates students who will eventually not need him. So Aharon was told that his role on the one hand was even greater than the leaders, because he would give light. But he had to do it in a way that each flame could eventually stay lit independent of him. His victory and his moment of greatness would be when he was no longer needed.

May we merit to kindle the souls of others and may we attain the wisdom to know when to let go so that these flames can continue to burn brightly and illuminate others.