

## 5785 – Numbers 8-12 – B'ha'alotcha (When you set up)

### LIGHTING INSTRUCTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Speak to Aaron and say to him: "When you raise the lamps ... (Num 8:2)*

*"When you raise"—Because the flame rises, the Torah describes kindling in terms of "raising." [The kohen] is required to kindle until the flame rises on its own (Rashi).*

Our sages tell us that the Holy Temple in Jerusalem—and its forerunner, the *Mishkan* ("Tabernacle") that served the Children of Israel in the Sinai Desert was a physical, three-dimensional model of the spiritual architecture of the human soul. The Temple consisted of numerous domains, chambers, and "vessels" each corresponding to another element of our lives and illustrating that element's function and purpose.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Menorah, the seven-branched golden candelabra that was kindled each afternoon in the Holy Temple, **represents our role as "lamplighters": our ability and mission to create sources of enlightenment within our own self, in our fellows, and in the material resources at our disposal.** The Torah devotes a number of detailed chapters to describing the Menorah's construction and the various laws governing its lighting. Each of these details has its corresponding lesson in the Menorah's spiritual significance. In this essay, we will examine a number of principles and laws that pertain to the Menorah and explore their meaning for our own inner and external lives.

"THE FLAME RISES ON ITS OWN."

The eighth chapter of Numbers opens with G-d's instruction to Aaron: When you raise the lamps ... In his commentary on this verse, Rashi dwells on the Torah's use of the word *beha'alotecha*—which also gives the Torah section of *Beha'alotecha* its name which means, "when you raise." Why does the Torah employ this idiom for "kindle"? Rashi explains that the Torah wishes to refer to the flame's nature to gravitate upward and rise, and also to instruct the *kohen* (priest) who lights the Menorah's lamps to hold the fire to the wick until, as Rashi phrases it, *shalhevet olah me'eileha*—"the flame rises on its own."

These words—"the flame rises on its own"—contain some of the basic lessons to be derived from the Menorah.

### LIVE LAMPS

The Menorah's lights are usually referred to as its *neirot*, "lamps." Here, Rashi uses the word *shalhevet*, "flame." While the term *neirot* (singular:

*ner*) can apply to both lit and unlit lamps, *shalhevet* means a live, light-producing flame.

Indeed, the Menorah's lamps, which were lit in the afternoon and burned through the night, were without flames for most of the daytime hours. Each morning, the lamps were cleaned, refilled with oil, and given new wicks. In this state they stood most of the day, awaiting the flame-bearing *kohen* who came to kindle them in mid-afternoon (with the exception of the *ner ba-ma'aravi*, the "western lamp," which burned round the clock).

In those interim hours, the lamp was in its most complete and perfect state: its gold pristine, its wick fresh, and filled to capacity with the purest olive oil. **As a "lamp" it was perfect; nothing of substance was lacking.** One could even argue that lighting it would only sully its luster, char its wick, and use up its oil. But in its unlit state, the lamp was dark, its luminary potential locked within. **It might have been perfect in and of itself, but it was of no benefit to the world outside of itself.**

A person, too, can be a *ner* without being a *shalhevet*, a lamp without a flame. We might achieve a personal perfection—an ornate vessel, fine-tuned talents, and abundant potentials. But **the purpose of life is to be a blazing lamp—to ignite our talents and potentials so that they illuminate our surroundings.**

This is the first lesson of the Menorah: that the goal of personal perfection alone will never suffice to satisfy the striving of our soul. Intrinsic to our nature is the quest to be a "flame"—a source of illumination to our surroundings.<sup>(2)</sup>

### THE VERTICAL SOUL

The second important idea implicit in the phrase "the flame rises on its own" is expressed by the word "rises."

The wisest of men proclaimed, "The human spirit gravitates upward."<sup>(3)</sup> Our deepest strivings tend upward. When children compete over who is "bigger," it is their vertical height that they compare. When people of all ages speak of their desire for self-betterment, they commonly use expressions like "climbing the ladder" "reaching upward" and "raising themselves to "new heights." By the same token, the same proverbist also describes the human soul as a "lamp of G-d"<sup>(4)</sup> Of the four elements (fire, water, air, and earth), only fire gravitates upward. Like a flame forever straining at its tether, the human soul is forever pulling upwards, straining at the wick (i.e., the physical body) that binds it aground.<sup>(5)</sup>

What is the deeper significance of this vertical striving? Certain achievements can be described in terms of growth to the "length" or to the "breadth." We might expend much effort and toil to extending and broadening our accomplishments—but all on the same plane, all within the

<sup>1</sup> Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Numbers*, (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 44-49.

contexts that define our present reality. Our spirit, however, thirsts for more. The "lamp of G-d" within us does not allow us to reconcile ourselves with present reality, whether it is a reality bounded by habit and convention, or even by the most basic dictates of our nature. Intrinsic to the human condition is the quest for transcendence, the striving to break the mold in which we are formed and remake ourselves as something more than what we presently are.

This is the second lesson of the Menorah: that **life is not just a flame but also a flame that rises**. That no matter how extensive our gains may be within the space we have carved for ourselves in this world, we must constantly seek new areas of achievement. Personal perfection is not enough; nor is leadership as a "luminary" in any defined field. Our inner essence as a lamp of G-d demands that we perpetually reinvent ourselves, that we constantly strive to break free of our present plane of existence to reach for something "higher."

#### SELF-SUFFICIENT LAMPS

The third idea is expressed in the words "on its own."

A lamp cannot ignite itself. It requires a fire or spark, an external source of energy to set it aglow. But the objective is that its flame should "rise on its own"—that it be transformed into an independent source of light.

This is the third lesson implicit in the statement "the flame rises on its own." When we act as lamplighters"—whether in the endeavor to ignite our own potentials, to ignite the lamp in our fellows, or to create luminaries out of the materials of our environment—the **objective must be to generate a flame that, once lit, is no longer dependent on its igniter, but sustains itself**. In terms of our efforts toward self-improvement, this means not to suffice with "resolutions" and behavior changes that must be constantly imposed by force of will. Rather, we should strive for a transformation of our nature and character, so that the new behavior becomes the natural, instinctive way to act.

In teaching and influencing our fellows, the objective should be to establish them as self-sufficient luminaries in their own right: to assist in developing their talents and abilities so that their lamps glow independently and, in turn, kindle the potential in others.

Finally, the same applies even to our impact on the physical world. When we utilize the materials and resources of our world toward good and G-dly ends, we imbue them with sanctity and G-dliness. Here, too, a physical object should be made not just into a passive vessel of light, but into a lamp that is an independent source of illumination. For example, instead of just talking to our children about charity or involving them in our own charitable activities, we can help them fashion a *pushkah* (charity box) and install it in their room. Each time the child places a coin in the box, the

*pushkah* is assisting them and training them in an act of charity. A piece of wood or plastic has thus been formed into a "luminary."

Furthermore, even when it is not actually being used to perform a charitable deed, the charity box continues to act as a "lamp" that illuminates its surroundings. As a permanent fixture in the child's room, it acts as a constant reminder to the child of their responsibility toward others. A physical object has become "a flame that rises on its own"—an independent source of guidance and enlightenment.<sup>(6)</sup>

(1) See the essays, "Wood and Stone," "Model Home," and "Spiritual Space" in vol. II (Exodus) of *The Inside Story*.

(2) There is also, however, a different type of lesson from this phenomenon, as the idea of "igniting lamps" relates to our influence on others.

When the *kohen* entered the chamber where the Menorah stood in the Holy Temple to kindle its lamps each afternoon, he found them fully prepared for lighting. The lamps had already been cleaned and filled with oil, and fresh wicks had been inserted. All the *kohen* had to do was bring near their own flame, so that by its mere proximity to the waiting lamp it would ignite the latent energy and luminary potential that the lamp already held.

This is a message to the spiritual "lamplighter" who undertakes the holy task of igniting fellow souls: Do not think that you are achieving anything that your fellows could not, in truth, achieve on their own; do not think that you are giving them something they do not already possess. The soul of your fellow is a ready lamp, filled with the purest oil and equipped with all that is required to convert its fuel into a blazing flame. It only lacks the proximity of another lamp to ignite it. If your own soul is ablaze, its contact with another's soul will awaken its luminous potential, so that it, too, may illuminate its surroundings and ignite other souls, in turn.

(3) King Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 3:21.

(4) Proverbs 20:27.

(5) See *Tanya*, chapter 19.

(6) Based on *Sefer HaSichot* (Book of the Conversations) 5751, vol. 2, pp. 600ff.

1. *In those interim hours, the lamp was in its most complete and perfect state ... As a "lamp" it was perfect; nothing of substance was lacking. One could even argue that lighting it would only sully its luster, char its wick, and use up its oil. But in its unlit state, the lamp was dark, its luminary potential locked within. It might have been perfect in and of itself, but it was of no benefit to the world outside of itself.*

a. James 2:14-24

<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, **if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?** Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup>Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my

deeds. <sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. <sup>20</sup>You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup>Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup>You see that **his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did**. <sup>23</sup>And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>You see that **a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone**.

1) James 1:22

<sup>22</sup>Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**

b. Matthew 7:21, 26

<sup>21</sup>Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven ...** <sup>26</sup>But **everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.**

c. Titus 1:16

<sup>16</sup>(Those who are corrupted and do not believe [v.15]) claim to know God, **but by their actions they deny him**. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

d. Titus 3:8

<sup>8</sup>This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, **so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good**. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

2. *But the purpose of life is to be a blazing lamp—to ignite our talents and potentials so that they illuminate our surroundings.*

a. Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>14</sup>"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>**Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl**. Instead they put it on its stand, **and it gives light to everyone in the house**. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, **that they may see your good deeds** and glorify your Father in heaven.

b. John 5:35

<sup>35</sup>John was **a lamp that burned and gave light**, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

c. John 8:12

<sup>12</sup>When Yeshua spoke again to the people, he said, "**I am the light of**

**the world**. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

d. Ephesians 5:8

<sup>8</sup>For you were once darkness, but now **you are light** in the Lord. **Live as children of light ...**

e. Bamidbar Rabbah 13:16

My children, since My light is your light and your light is My light, let us go and give light to Zion. As it says, 'Arise, shine, for your light has come' (Isaiah 60:1), and so it says, 'The Lord shall be your everlasting light' (Isaiah 60:19). And not only for you do I give the light, but so that you should give light to Me, as it says, '**And nations shall walk by your light**' (Isaiah 60:3)."

f. Midrash Tehillim (Psalm 119:105)

"Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said: Torah is called 'light'... The Holy One said to Israel: My children, **since there is light in you, illuminate the world. Illuminate one another and illuminate the nations of the world**, as it says: 'I the Lord have called you... and made you a covenant for a people, a light for the nations.' (Isaiah 42:6)."

3. *This is the second lesson of the Menorah: that life is not just a flame but also a flame that rises. That no matter how extensive our gains may be within the space we have carved for ourselves in this world, we must constantly seek new areas of achievement.*

a. Isaiah 58:6-8

<sup>6</sup>"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: **to loose the chains of injustice** and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>Is it not **to share your food with the hungry** and **to provide the poor wanderer with shelter**—when you see the naked, **to clothe them**, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? <sup>8</sup>**THEN your light will break forth like the dawn ...** your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

b. Proverbs 4:18

<sup>18</sup>The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, **shining EVER BRIGHTER** till the full light of day.

c. Proverbs 20:27

<sup>27</sup>The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD that sheds light on one's inmost being.

d. Ephesians 2:10

<sup>10</sup>For we are God's handiwork, created in Messiah Yeshua **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

e. Philippians 2:15

<sup>15</sup>so that **you may BECOME blameless and pure**, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then **you will shine among them like stars in the sky ...**

f. 2Peter 1:5

<sup>5</sup>For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith goodness**; and to goodness, knowledge ...

g. Hebrews 5:11-6:3

<sup>11</sup>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But **solid food is for the mature**, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

<sup>61</sup>Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Messiah **and be taken forward to maturity**, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup>instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And God permitting, we will do so.

4. *The third idea is expressed in the words "on its own." A lamp cannot ignite itself. It requires a fire or spark, an external source of energy to set it aglow. But the objective is that its flame should "rise on its own"—that it be transformed into an independent source of light.*

a. Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>18</sup>Then Yeshua came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, (immersing) them ... <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

1) The disciple-making process involves a good deal more than just convincing someone to say/recite "the sinner's prayer."

b. Pirkei Avot 1:1

They said three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, **raise many disciples** and make a fence round the Torah.

c. Legends of the Jews<sup>2</sup> 4:8:19

Among the **many** thousands of **disciples** whom Elisha gathered about him during the sixty years and more of his activity, the most prominent was the prophet Jonah.

d. Lessons in Leadership; A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible,<sup>3</sup>

Metzora; How to Praise 6

Zakkai had **disciples**. Every rabbi had **disciples**. **The imperative "Raise up many disciples" is one of the oldest rabbinic teachings on record.** What the mishna is telling us is how to create **disciples**.

1) This *mishna* is doing more than telling us that R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai had disciples. Every rabbi had disciples ... What the *mishna* is telling us is *how* to create disciples. **It is easy to have students who are uncritical devotees but never become creative intellects in their own right.** It is not difficult to create followers. **It is far harder to create leaders.**

e. Covenant and Conversation; Numbers; The Wilderness Years,

Pinchas, The Crown All Can Wear 32

"Raise up **many disciples**"—The school of Shammai says: A person is to teach only one who is wise, humble, of good stock, and rich. But the school of Hillel says: **Everyone is to be taught** ... For there were **many** transgressors in Israel who were attracted to the study of Torah, and from them sprang righteous, pious, and worthy men. To what may it be compared? ... "To a woman who sets a hen to brood on eggs—**out of many eggs, she may hatch only a few, but out of a few [eggs], she hatches none at all.**" Avot DeRabbi Natan, version 2, ch. 4.

f. Matthew 13:47-52

<sup>47</sup>Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup>When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup>This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup>"Have you understood all these things?" Yeshua asked. "Yes," they replied. <sup>52</sup>He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven **is like the**

2 The Legends of the Jews is a chronological compilation of aggadah from hundreds of biblical legends in Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash.

3 Lessons in Leadership; A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

**owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures AS WELL AS OLD."**

- 1) "When viewed in the context of the Second Temple period, the Gospel parables are imbued with old and new. According to a saying attributed to Hillel, anyone who does not add to one's learning through new and innovative creativity should be killed (Avot 1:13). One adds to the old as one captures the essence of Torah and passes the message on to subsequent generations. The parables embrace the old world of Jewish learning by making new out of the earlier traditions. **The new, however, is not a rejection of the old but rather a renewal and reapplication that blends together a powerful combination of ancient themes and fresh ideas.**

Such a process makes the message of the Torah relevant. This dynamic breathes fresh life into the old message, which actualizes Torah in experience. **It does not replace or cancel Torah but renews its essence through revalidation and reinterpretation.** The primary objective of Jewish learning is to realize the purpose of Torah in the fear of God. **Each generation must embrace the old and the new.** Through this innovative process a parabolic illustration creates a new story that infuses life into the old by adding to what has been learned.

The ancient Torah inspired fresh analysis and creative interpretation. Householders, day laborers, thieves, bandits, judges, widows, shepherds, farmers, priests, Levites, embezzlers, as well as kings and queens, princes and princesses, rich and poor, ordinary men and women, young and old—taking the stage of rabbinic and Gospel parables, they capture the imagination of the original audience. Most of the new stories are combinations of the old. The possibilities for original plots and innovative story lines drawn from a treasure store of stock characters and folklore settings are limitless."<sup>4</sup>

2) Eiruvin (Mixtures) 21b

R. Hisda asked one of the young Rabbis who was reciting aggadoth in his presence in a certain order: "Did you hear what [was the purport of the expression,] 'New and old'?" "The former" the other replied: "are the minor, and the latter are the major commandments." "Was then the Torah," the former asked: "given on two different occasions?"<sup>(11)</sup> But **the latter [are those derived] from the words of the Torah while the former are those derived from the words of the Scribes."**

(11) First the major (old) and then the minor (new) commandments?

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<sup>4</sup> Brad H. Young, *The Parables, Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, (Hendrickson Publishers), p. 30.