

# THE MENORAH: IGNITING THE SOUL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Behaaloscha Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### 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.

### 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 and parameters of all that exists and 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: Behaaloscha

# THE MENORAH: IGNITING THE SOUL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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### It is Not in Heaven

*Torah:* If an earthenware vessel becomes contaminated it cannot become purified. However, if it is broken it assumes a pure status because it is no longer classified as a vessel.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: *Rebbe Eliezer* and the *Chachamim* (rabbis) argued about the status of an earthenware oven that had become contaminated and was subsequently severed into parts and reconstructed. The basis for the argument was concerning the purity of the oven. If it were to be reconstructed we would see it as the original vessel/oven, therefore, does it revert to its original contaminated state; or do we consider it a new vessel/oven and it is thus not contaminated. The newly constructed oven has no relevance to the original oven.

*Rebbe Eliezer's* position was that the reconstructed oven was considered pure and thus all food items that

were prepared in it would be considered spiritually pure. However, the majority position was contrary to that of *Rebbe Eliezer* and therefore, the oven was considered contaminated.

During the lengthy exchange between *Rebbe Eliezer* and the *Chachamim*, many miracles were performed to prove *Rebbe Eliezer's* position as being correct. The *Chachamim* were not influenced by these events. Finally *Rebbe Eliezer* declared that if his position was correct a *Bas Kol* (Heavenly Voice) should emanate from heaven stating, "The law is according to *Rebbe Eliezer*." In fact, this occurred. *Rebbe Yehoshua* in response to the *Bas Kol* stood up and said, "*Lo bashamayim he – Torah* is not in heaven!" Meaning, the definitive legal rulings of *Torah* are not determined by G-d, but rather were given to man to decide. Thus, the *Bas Kol* was irrelevant.

When G-d gave the *Torah* at Sinai to the Jewish people, it was meant to be processed by the human mind



within the parameters of the thirteen methodologies of interpretation given by G-d at Sinai. By employing the methodologies ordained at Sinai, man is able to interpret the *Torah* and arrive at the true intention of G-d. This is the basis for *Rebbe Yehoshua's* statement, "*Lo bashamayim he – Torah is not in heaven!*" Regardless of the genius of an individual or the cogency of his position, if the majority assumes another position contrary to the minority, the *Torah* dictates that one must follow the majority rule.

*Gemara* based on a verse from Psalms: When one assumes the status of a *Torah* sage, which of course came about through his own initiative and application in *Torah*, he is permitted to waive his honor. This is because the *Torah* that he possesses is considered "his *Torah*" that he achieved through his toil. Thus, the *Torah* that one possesses, since it came about through his own processing and application of himself, no longer resides in heaven, but rather is integrated into the realm of man.

King David had two serious antagonists – *Achitofel* who advised *Avshalom* to kill his own father, King David, and *Doieg H'Adomi*. *Doieg* was the greatest *Torah* genius of his generation, yet he despised King David. He enraged King Saul against David and because of his incitement, the entire community of *Nove* was killed.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: G-d consulted with King David regarding the *Torah* of *Doieg H'Adomi*. G-d had asked King David, "After *Doieg Adomi* passes away should the *Torah* that he expounded upon be quoted in his name?" King David responded, "There should be no memory of him." G-d then asked King David, "Should he have children that are *Torah* scholars?" King David replied, "He should be uprooted from the tree of life (so that he has no share in the world to come.)" Does G-d need to consult with King David regarding the predicament of *Doieg*? One would think that if *Doieg Adomi* was worthy, his *Torah* would be cited in his name and his children would merit to be *Torah* sages – and if not it would be to the contrary.

We see from this *Gemara* that anything that relates to the transmission or processing of *Torah* is to be determined by man and not G-d- based on the principle of "*Lo bashamayim he*." G-d consulted with King David because it is the *Torah* sage who determines how *Torah* will evolve and be disseminated. As a result of the Sinai event, G-d gave the Jewish people the responsibility

to process His *Torah* within the parameters that He prescribed. The principle of "*Lo bashamayim he*" does not only apply to determining normative Jewish law but also applies to issues of proper conduct and what is to be valued regarding *Torah*.

*Rambam* in his introduction to *Yad Chazakah*: The Oral Law is determined by the rulings of the *Torah* sages of each generation. At Sinai, G-d communicated to *Moshe* His interpretation (Oral Law) of the Written Law. However, when the *Torah* sage utilizes the methodologies and interpretations that were given to *Moshe*, to be applied in another setting, these rulings become part of the Oral Law. At the time of the giving of the *Torah*, the angels in heaven protested – "Let Your Glory remain in Heaven." However, G-d's intent of Creation was for man, with all of his limitations, to receive and process the *Torah* with his human intellect - making it "his *Torah*."

## The Untainted Light of the Menorah

*Rashi* in the beginning of the Portion of *Beha'aloscha* citing *Chazal*: "Why does the *Torah* juxtapose the portion of the celebration of the Princes (at inauguration of the *Mishkan*/altar) to the kindling of the *Menorah*?"

*Midrash*: When Aaron had seen all of the Princes participating in the celebration of the completion of the *Mishkan*, he was taken aback (because he felt that his exclusion was because he was not worthy). G-d explained to him that his participation is greater than that of the Princes. Aaron was given the *mitzvah* of kindling the *Menorah*.

*Midrash Tanchuma*: "The exclusion of Aaron is analogous to a king who had prepared a banquet for all of his subjects to attend with the exception of his most beloved friend. The king's friend was saddened and felt that perhaps the king bore a grudge against him and therefore was excluded from the special celebration. After all of the days of feasting were completed, the king summoned his beloved friend and explained, Until now I celebrated with all of your fellow countrymen, however, because of my special intimate relationship with you I wanted our celebration to be in a private setting. I wanted it to be exclusively for you to indicate to what degree I value our relationship."

It is interesting to note that over the seven days of *Sukkos*, seventy oxen were brought as sacrifices in the

*Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) to correspond to the seventy root nations of the world. On *Shemini Atzeres*, which immediately follows *Sukkos*, a single ox was brought to correspond to the Jewish people. G-d wanted their offering be brought exclusively to be separate from the others. This indicates the special relationship that G-d has with the Jewish people.

Similarly, the relationship which G-d has with the Jewish people is not comparable to the relationship between Himself and the Levites/Aaron. The love that G-d has for Aaron and his tribe (*Levyim*) was valued at a special level because they were not tainted with the Golden Calf. They were the only tribe who did not participate in that sin.

*Midrash* continues: "G-d said to *Moshe* to accept the gifts from the twelve tribes. The tribe of *Levi* did not participate. However, once the inauguration of the *Mishkan* was complete G-d said, "Until now all of the tribes were involved in the inauguration for themselves, now you (Aaron and the *Levyim*) should have your own exclusive celebration. This will be the kindling of the *Menorah*. Thus, G-d said, "Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you kindle the lamps..."

*Ramban*: "Why did G-d need to console Aaron by giving him the *mitzvah* of kindling the *Menorah*? He officiated in many other capacities in the *Mishkan/Bais HaMikdash*, which were exclusive to him. For example, no other person could have officiated in the *Mishkan* other than the *Kohen*. In addition, no other individual could have officiated on *Yom Kippur* other than the High Priest (Aaron). Furthermore, the participation/contribution of the Princes was a unique momentary event, while Aaron's service in the *Mishkan* was ongoing. Why then was Aaron taken aback for not being included?"

We find that before passing away, *Moshe* blessed the Tribes of Israel. The blessing that he had given to his own tribe, the Tribe of *Levi*, was that they be the ones to transmit the laws to the Jewish people. Because the Tribe of *Levi* was untainted by the sin of the Golden Calf, they were considered the pure/unhindered conduit for the transmission of the *Torah*. Thus, the *Kohanim/Levyim* were the equivalent of the most beloved and intimate friend of the king. The purpose of Creation and the Jewish people was for the fulfillment of the *Torah*. In order to bring about this ultimate objective, The *Torah* can only be effective in its purest form. This was only possible through the Tribe of *Levi*.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The *Menorah* represents the Oral Law. Its kindling draws all the spiritual influences of illumination that are necessary for the *Torah* to be processed accurately. This responsibility was given to Aaron, the High Priest. The value of the kindling of the *Menorah*, in terms of its function, is unrelated to the other areas in which the *Kohen* and the *Levi* officiated (such as the service of *Yom Kippur*/the Day of Atonement and the daily sacrifices that were brought in the Temple). The spiritual lifeline of the Jewish people lies in the hands of the *Kohen* through the kindling of the *Menorah*. Thus, Aaron was told, "your participation is greater than theirs. You will be responsible for the lighting of the *Menorah* which is the ultimate gift reserved for the most beloved of G-d."

## The Focus of the Jewish People

*Torah*: "...When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the *Menorah* shall the seven lamps cast light."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: The wicks of the lamps on the left side and right side of the *Menorah* faced inward towards the inner lamp (center) whose wick stood upright. *Chazal* explain, "If one wanted to maximize the light of the *Menorah*, all the wicks should minimally be upright. The fact that the wicks of the *Menorah* are bent towards the center, minimizing their effect, is to indicate that "G-d does not need your light." The value of the kindling of the *Menorah* is not for the sake of illumination but rather it generates elucidation (of *Torah*)."

*Sforno* explaining the symbolism of the wicks of the *Menorah*: "It is when the flames of the six wicks are bent towards the center flame that the *Menorah* functions properly. This will ultimately cause a special light/influence/blessing to come upon the Jewish people. The essence of the *Menorah* is the contribution of those who are represented on the right (*maimeenim*) and those who are on the left (*masmeelim*). The *maimeenim* (those on the right) are those who are totally dedicated to spirituality – *Torah/mitzvos*. The *masmeelim* (those on the left) are those who are dedicated to engage in the material in order to assist the *maimeenim* in their spiritual objective/pursuit."

It is when the *maimeenim* and the *masmeelim* share a common objective of advancing spirituality that the Jewish people function properly/wholesomely. Similarly, the *Menorah* functions in unison when the

wicks on the left and right face the center – to bring about total illumination.

*Sforno*: “The symbolism of the *Menorah* is reminiscent of what occurred at Sinai. At Sinai, the Jewish people declared, “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” Meaning, each individual, functioning in his own capacity, in conjunction with his fellow accepts and fulfills the entire *Torah* as a unified people.”

*Sforno*: The symbolism of the *Menorah* being fashioned from one block of gold (hammered into the proper shape), rather than many components being fused together, represents the unity of purpose of the Jewish people - whether they are engaged in the material or in the spiritual – united to do the Will of G-d.

*Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers): “On three principles the world stands – on *Torah*, service (*avodah*), and acts of loving kindness (*gemilas chasadim*).”

*Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl*: Each of these principles represents one of the Patriarchs. *Avraham* was the Patriarch who devoted his life to espousing monotheism through acts of loving kindness. *Yitzchak*, who was the unblemished offering (the *Akeidah*), represents service (*avodah*). *Yaakov* is the Patriarch who represents *Torah* because he dedicated his life to *Torah* study.

*Reb Chaim of Volozhin*: “Since the three principles stated in the *Mishna* correspond to our Patriarchs, why did Judah the Prince not enumerate them in chronological order of the Patriarchs namely – acts of loving kindness (*Avraham*), service (*Yitzchak*), and *Torah* (*Yaakov*)?” *Reb Chaim* explains that before the *Torah* was given at Sinai, an act of *chesed* was defined as one lending money with interest. However, after the Sinai event (when usury became forbidden by the *Torah*), one who is a usurer does not merit resurrection.

Before Sinai, one who wanted to serve G-d could do so by bringing an offering on his own private altar. However, after Sinai and the building of the *Mishkan/ Bais HaMikdash*, if one were to bring an offering on a private altar he was liable for spiritual excision. What was defined as an act of kindness before Sinai was no longer regarded in this way after Sinai. What was a valid service to G-d before Sinai was considered a grave sin after Sinai. Thus, Judah the Prince is communicating to us that the defining factor, which determines what is and what is not - is the *Torah* itself. Thus, the *Mishna* begins with the principle of *Torah*. Meaning, everything

must be first predicated on *Torah*. Only then, one understands what is considered proper service and loving kindness.

Similarly, although the *masmeelim* were engaged in the material, their guiding light was the *Torah* itself. They received direction from the *maimeenim* (*Torah* sages) who were solely dedicated to the development of their spirituality through *Torah* study and *mitzvos*. The only way a Jew can have a proper understanding and appreciation of his objective in life is through the *Torah*.

## The Challenge of the Jew

*Torah*: The Jewish people complained in the desert saying, “Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks onions, and garlic.” How do we understand this fond reminiscence over the period when the Jewish people were in Egypt?

In Egypt, they were slaves and endured untold hardships. Their statement may be compared to a survivor of the concentration camps reminiscing over the stale bread and putrid soup that he had eaten in the camps. The question is even more difficult since the Jewish people had reached an advanced level of spirituality at the Sinai experience when they declared, “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” How could they even consider putting the Egyptian experience in a positive context?

*Torah*: The Jewish people had said, “We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*)...”

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: “Does this mean to say that the Egyptians fed the Jewish people fish without payment? If the Egyptians would not give the Jewish people straw to make bricks would they have given them fish without payment, or perhaps we could understand the word “*chinum* (free of charge)” to mean “free from *mitzvos*.”

*Sifse Chachumim*: “Free from *mitzvos*” means that as slaves the Jewish people were provided for by their masters, the Egyptians. However, after Sinai the sustenance of the Jewish people was provided by G-d and was contingent on their observance of *mitzvos*. If they observe the *mitzvos* properly then the earth will give forth its bounty. If they do not observe the *mitzvos* properly then the earth will withhold its bounty. While in Egypt as slaves, this level of accountability did not exist.



Whether the master of the Jewish people was the Egyptian or G-d Himself, in either situation they would have only been provided for if they performed adequately. If so, why is the accountability to G-d more taxing than that of their Egyptian masters?

This question leads us to a profound principle that can be learned. The level of accountability of the Jew is very different than that of the nations of the world. For the non-Jew it is sufficient not to violate the Noachide laws and all that is required of him is to behave responsibly as a moral human being. However, the level of expectation of the Jew is at a different level because he is bound by the 613 *mitzvos*, which govern every aspect and nuance of his life. There is no aspect of a Jew's life that is not governed by the *Torah*. There is nothing to compare to this level of accountability.

*Torah* in the portion of *Haazinu*: "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak and may the earth hear the words of my mouth."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: *Moshe* was telling the Jewish people that heaven and earth are his witnesses. If the Jew follows the ways of the *Torah*, then the rain will come in its time and the earth will give forth its bounty. However, if they do not observe the *mitzvos* then they will be denied these blessings. This means that the Jewish people are continuously evaluated and are subject to G-d's scrutiny at every moment. This unlimited level of accountability is what the Jewish people in the desert could not tolerate. Relatively speaking, in Egypt they received their sustenance "for free (without charge)" because their level of accountability was limited to their quota of productivity.

During the forty-year period, in the desert, if the Jewish people were to deviate and transgress (even to the smallest degree) the Will of G-d, the *Midas HaDin* (Attribute of Justice) would come upon them instantly. When they were finally settled in the Land, every community was required to have *shoftim* (judges) and *shotrim* (officers) who were responsible for enforcing the dictates of the court. If one were to violate the *Torah*, he would be reprimanded and punished accordingly.

If a community had as few as 120 individuals it was required to appoint a *Sanhedrin Ketana*, (lower Jewish Court) comprised of 23 judges of special status. These judges were ordained through the ordination of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and therefore were qualified to render rulings in every area of law (capital, corporal, etc.).

The only way one was able to sin and not be punished was to sin in private. This level of vigilance and holding one accountable to this degree was unprecedented. What is the special value of accountability? Is it only to instill fear of punishment or is it something of greater value? It would not say much for society if people did not violate the law because of their concern of prosecution.

*Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos*: One should pray for the welfare of government because without fear of government, people would swallow one another alive. Is this to say that the only reason a moral/ethical person does not break the law is because he would be punished? Accountability establishes a baseline to determine what is considered appropriate or unacceptable. Accountability causes one to understand the nature and gravity of one's actions.

When the Jewish people in the desert had said that the Egyptians had given them fish "free of charge," they were recalling the time they were not held accountable for their personal behavior. All they needed to do was to provide the quotas that were demanded of them and then the Egyptians fed them. However, after the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai, when the Jewish people became the "priestly, kingly and holy people," their level of accountability was of a different dimension. G-d held the Jew accountable for every aspect of his life and if he did not adhere to the *Torah*, he would not be provided for. If a Jew is cognizant of his obligation and responsibility, he will perform and conduct himself accordingly.

How does one maintain that cognizance?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "The study of *Torah* is of paramount value because it brings to action...I have created the evil inclination and I have created the *Torah* as its antidote." Thus, if one studies the *Torah*, he will have a sense of "right" and "wrong" and not experience it as a burden.

## **The Linkage Between the Holy Temple and the Torah Itself**

*Torah*: The *Leviyim* (Levites) were chosen by G-d to replace the *Bechorim* (first born - *Kohanim*) to be the officiants of G-d. In one of the verses regarding the *Levy* representing the Jewish people, the term "*B'nai Yisroel*

(children of Israel)” is mentioned five times, which seems to be superfluous. What is the significance of this repetition?

*Rashi citing Chazal:* The term “*B’nai Yisroel*” is mentioned five times to correspond to the five books of the *Torah* (*chamishah chumshei Torah*). Why is the *Torah* equating the Jewish people to the *Torah* by repeating their name five times in the context of the *Leviyim* assuming the role as the officiants of G-d?

*Torah:* When *Esav* returned from the field tired and weary, he discovered that his grandfather *Avraham* had passed away. *Yaakov*, his brother, was preparing lentil soup, which is the food eaten by a mourner. *Esav* requested of *Yaakov*, “Give me some of that red stuff!”

*Yaakov* understood from *Esav*’s expression that he was totally immersed in physicality and therefore was not the appropriate person to be the *Kohen*. Thus, *Yaakov* asked *Esav* to sell his birthright in exchange for the food that he had requested. *Esav* readily agreed to sell the *Bechorah* (birthright), which was the *Kehunah* (Priesthood). *Yaakov* thus assumed the rights of the *Bechor*. *Yaakov*’s interest was not to take away what rightfully belonged to *Esav*. Rather, since *Esav* was unbecoming the position of *Kohen*, *Yaakov* purchased the birthright from him. The purchase of the *Kehunah* was purely for the sake of the Honor of G-d.

The *Kehuna* (Priesthood) qualifies the person who assumes that status to be close to G-d and thus have a special relationship with Him. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) was the only person qualified to enter into the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur* and to be in close proximity to the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence).

*Yaakov*, as the inherently spiritual person, was qualified to assume the status of *Kohen*, which was the birthright of the Jewish people, and thus had relevance to G-d’s *Torah/ Chachmas Hashem* (Wisdom of G-d). The spiritual representatives of the Jewish people were the *Kohanim* and the *Leviyim*. Since they were able to have this level of representation, it is indicative of their

own spiritual capacity. Thus, the Jewish people have relevance to *Torah* and G-d. As it is stated in the *Zohar*, “*Yisroel*, the *Torah*, and G-d are all one.”

*Torah:* The *Leviyim* replaced the *Bechorim* and the *Torah* mentions “*B’nai Yisroel* - the Jewish people” five times. This is to communicate that just as the *Leviyim* are qualified to be the officiants of G-d because of their spiritual standing, so too the Jewish people have relevance to the *Torah* because of their spiritual status (as the children of *Yaakov*). The innate spirituality of the Jew allows him to have relevance to the Wisdom of G-d and the *Torah*. To emphasize this point, in the same verse which mentions the *Leviyim* assuming responsibility for the Jewish people vis-à-vis G-d, the *Torah* also mentions “*B’nai Yisroel*” five times to indicate their relevance to G-d’s *Torah*.

Now we are able to understand the tefillah (prayer) at the conclusion of the *Amidah* (silent prayer) which we recite three times a day: “May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days. Grant us a share in Your *Torah*...” Why do we mention having a share in G-d’s *Torah* in conjunction with the rebuilding of the Temple?

As we had explained, the Jewish people are qualified to have a special relationship with G-d – as it is indicated through the representation of the *Kohen* and the *Levy*. Consequently, the Jewish people have relevance to the *Torah* and the Land of Israel, which is the prime location for the fulfillment of the *Torah*. One is interlinked to the other. When we pray, we ask for the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) because we have relevance to its sanctity, which emanates from G-d’s Presence. For that same reason, the Jewish people are qualified to have a share in His *Torah*.

It is stated, “From Zion, the *Torah* emanates.” Zion is identified as the location of the Divine Presence. Thus, since the Jewish people have relevance to the Divine Presence they have relevance to the Holy *Torah*.



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