

# THE MENORAH: IGNITING THE SOUL OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Beha'aloscha

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Why is Levi Not Included in the Representation of the Jewish People?**

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**The Value of the Kindling of the Menorah**

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**The Released Souls and Conversion of those Captured in War**

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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 it 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.

## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Beha'aloscha

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### The Spiritual Profile of the Jewish People

*Rashi in Beha'aloscha* citing the *Midrash*: "Why does the *Torah* juxtapose the kindling of the *Menorah* to the celebration of the Princes (at inauguration of the *Mishkan*/altar)? When *Aaron* had seen all of the Princes participating in the inauguration of the *Mishkan* he was disappointed and pained. G-d said to *Aaron*, 'I swear on your life! Your contribution is greater than theirs. You shall be the one to kindle and perfect the lights of the *Menorah*.'"

*Ramban*: "Why was *Aaron* disappointed that he was not included by G-d to participate in the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, as the other Princes if in fact his qualification as the officiant of G-d was exclusive to him and his family? In addition, no other individual could have officiated on *Yom Kippur* other than the High Priest. Furthermore, the participation/contribution of the Princes was a momentary event,

while *Aaron's* service in the *Mishkan* was ongoing. If so, what was the basis for *Aaron's* disappointment?"

*Maharal* of Prague: The Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes. Twelve of them received a portion in the Land of Israel and the Tribe of *Levy* did not (because "G-d is their portion.") He explains that the numerical value of the word "*echad* (one)" is thirteen. The Jewish people are a reflection of G-d's Unity.

*Maharal*: Not only does the number of tribes reflects the Unity of G-d, but also the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people reflects the most definitive aspect of "*echad*" (Unity). The most spiritual of the thirteen tribes was *Levy* because they did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf. Because of their state of purity, they were chosen to be the officiants of G-d. In order to indicate their uniqueness and special status, they would be classified with the Hebrew letter "*aleph* (one)." They are on a level unto themselves.



Of the four wives of *Yaakov*, two of them were considered Matriarchs (*Rachel* and *Leah*) and the other two were considered concubines (*Bilhah* and *Zilpah*). *Rachel* and *Leah*, being Matriarchs had a greater spiritual status than the concubines. Thus, the children that they bore for *Yaakov* had greater spiritual potential. They bore for *Yaakov* eight sons. *Leah* mothered six and *Rachel* two.

The number eight is denoted with the letter “ches.” The concubines of *Yaakov*, who were of lesser spiritual status, bore him four sons, which are denoted with the letter “daled.” The three spiritual classifications of *Yaakov*’s children establish the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people which spells the word “echad”: *Levy* (*aleph*), the sons of the Matriarchs (*ches*), and the sons of the concubines (*daled*). They reflect G-d’s Unity in the most obvious context.

*Torah*: G-d had instructed *Moshe* that the Princes should 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. The *Torah* repeats the identical gifts and offerings of the Princes, twelve times. It would seem that the *Torah* could have expressed itself in a more concise manner rather than repeating itself verbatim twelve times. There is nothing in the *Torah* that is superfluous. Every word and letter was written with a specific intent and purpose.

*Ramban*: Although each gift and offering that was given by the Princes was identical in its physical feature, each of their gifts was not similar within a spiritual context. Each gift was infused with a unique intent of the Prince who represented his Tribe. Thus, every gift that was brought by the Prince was in fact a different entity because of its spiritual infusion.

Each of the twelve Princes, who were authorized by G-d to participate with their offerings and gifts in the inauguration of the *Mishkan* together represented the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people. If this was so, *Aaron*, representing the Tribe of *Levy*, should have also participated in the inauguration in some manner. Why was he excluded?

*Aaron* believed that he was not qualified to participate because of his association with the sin of the Golden Calf. He had believed that being chosen by G-d to be the High Priest was an indication that he had been fully rehabilitated from the past. However, when he

realized that he was not asked to participate in the inauguration he was disappointed and pained. He realized that he was not fully reinstated. To this, G-d said, “Your participation is greater than theirs.”

G-d informed *Aaron* that his qualification to kindle the *Menorah* would have greater value than all of the Princes’ participation combined. Just as the soul gives life to the physical body, so too does *Aaron*’s lighting of the *Menorah* draw spiritual energy and Divine Assistance to give meaning and value to the Jewish people.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The light of the *Menorah* represents the Oral Law. Its kindling draws all the Divine Assistance that is necessary for the *Torah* to be understood, processed, and internalized accurately by the Jewish people until the end of time. This responsibility was given to *Aaron*, the High Priest.

The value of the kindling of the *Menorah*, in terms of its effect, is unrelated to the other areas in which the *Kohen* officiated. Although the service of *Yom Kippur* is vital for the forgiveness and atonement of the Jewish people, it is not the equivalent of the spiritual lifeline of the Jewish people that lies in the hands of the *Kohen* through the kindling of the *Menorah*. This was a declaration of *Aaron*’s special and unique status representing the “aleph,” the first and foremost in the spiritual infrastructure of the Jewish people.

## **The Sacrifice of the Tribe of Levy on Behalf of the Jewish people**

*Midrash* citing Psalms: “‘G-d tests the devoutly righteous...’ G-d does not elevate one to a position of honor and greatness until he is first tested. If he endures and succeeds in the tests that were given to him, then G-d will elevate him to a position of status. 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 be 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. However, during the days of darkness all those who were truly evil were removed from among the Jewish people...Those who did not perish during that plague had repented...

"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 the ultimate level of exaltedness. However, regarding the evil ones who love corruption, G-d despises them."

It is interesting to note that the Tribe of *Levy* sanctified G-d's Name through the sacrifice of their lives for the perpetuation of *Torah*. The *Midrash* did not state that they had sacrificed themselves for the sake of G-d but rather for the sake of the spiritual life source of the Jewish people, which is the *Torah* itself. Before *Moshe* passed away, he blessed the Tribe of *Levy*, that they should be the disseminators of definitive *Torah*. It was because they had fully internalized the fact that the Jewish people could not survive without the *Torah* itself, they were thus chosen to be responsible for its dissemination.

## 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. They 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.

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*: We can explain this 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.

*Chovos 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.

## Being Fortunate in Death

*Torah*: “The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more and said, ‘Who will feed us meat?’ ...we have nothing to anticipate but the manna!....*Moshe* said to

*Hashem*, ‘Why have You done evil to Your servant... Why had You placed the burden of this entire people upon me?...*Hashem* said to *Moshe*, ‘Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Israel...and they shall bear the burden of the people with you...”

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: “What had happened to the original group of seventy elders who had been with *Moshe* in Egypt? Seemingly, these elders were newly appointed. The original seventy elders had died in the fire that had consumed the edge of the camp of Israel when the Jewish people had begun to seek out complaints. G-d’s Wrath flared up against them and His fire consumed the edge of the camp.”

*Midrash*: “Actually the original group of seventy elders were deserving to die at Sinai because they had openly gazed in an inappropriate and disrespectful manner upon the Divine Presence. It is similar to one who bites into his bread in the presence of a King. Why did G-d not strike them down at Sinai? Had He done so it would have disrupted with the level of joy experienced by the Jewish people at the time of the giving of the *Torah*. It would have been inappropriate to have a grieving period at the time of Sinai.”

*Torah*: The sons of *Aaron* were struck down by G-d because they had sinned when they had entered into the Sanctuary.

*Chazal*: *Nadav* and *Avihu* in fact deserved to die at the time of the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai because they along with the original seventy elders of Israel had gazed upon the Divine Presence with a lack of reverence. They were meant to die at that moment; however, G-d also postponed their death not to disrupt the joy of the giving of the *Torah*. They were not left to be consumed in the fire along with the original seventy elders who were culpable for the same sin. G-d waited until the day that *Aaron* and his children were installed as priests in order to be taken. The death of the sons of *Aaron*, *Nadav* and *Avihu* was considered to be a Sanctification of G-d’s Name.

*Midrash*: *Moshe* had said to *Aaron*, “Initially I had thought that the one who would be struck down by G-d would be either you or me. (G-d had previously told *Moshe* that on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. ‘I will be sanctified by those who are closest to Me.’) However, after seeing that *Nadav* and *Avihu*

were the ones chosen to die, I understand that they are greater than us.” *Nadav* and *Avihu*, although they had failed at Sinai because and deserved to die, they were taken at a time that brought about the ultimate Sanctification of G-d’s Name. Although they had died because of their spiritual failing, it was subsumed by a greater spiritual result– “I will be sanctified by those who are closest to Me.”

In contrast, the death of the original seventy elders went unnoticed because they were consumed with the fire of G-d along with the evil ones who complained. We see that even when one is atoned through Divine Retribution, the context in which their death occurs reflects their spiritual dimension. It is true that death comes about as a result of sin; however, the context of one’s death could be the sanctifying G-d’s Name or limited to Divine Retribution.

## The Nazerite’s Ascent in Spirituality

*Torah*: “A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazerite vow of abstinence for the sake of *Hashem*; from new or aged wine shall he abstain, and he shall not drink...anything which grapes have been steeped...a razor shall not pass over his head... the growth of hair on his head shall grow...he shall not come near a dead person....he shall not contaminate himself upon their death...for the crown of G-d is upon his head. All the days of his abstinence he is holy to *Hashem*.”

One may choose to take upon himself the vow of Nazeritehood in order to become close to G-d. When one assumes this status it is considered that he is carrying the “crown of G-d” upon his head. He must abstain from grape products, cutting his hair, or contaminating himself to the dead. The *Torah* tells us that upon the completion of the period of one’s Nazeritehood, which is thirty days, one must bring three offerings.

It is interesting to note that although an ordinary *Kohen* is not permitted to contaminate himself to the dead, he is permitted to contaminate himself to the remains of his seven closest relatives. The High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) on the other hand is not permitted to contaminate himself to anyone, including his closest relatives. The Nazerite, regarding the contamination of the dead, assumes the identical status as the High Priest because the “crown of G-d” is upon his head.

*Gemara*: If a High Priest who is also a Nazerite comes upon the corpse of a Jew that was left unattended (*meis mitzvah*), he is obligated attend to his burial needs despite the fact that he will be contaminated. For the sake of human dignity of the corpse, the High Priest and the Nazerite must contaminate themselves.

It is understandable that the High Priest is not be permitted to enter into a contaminated state because he carries the responsibility of atonement for the entire Jewish people. However, the Nazerite who has no relevance to the atonement of the Jewish people, why should he have the same level of restriction as the High Priest? What is the crown of G-d that he carries upon his head? Simply, one could say that since the Nazerite has chosen to deny himself the pleasure of wine and its derivatives for the sake of G-d, he is elevated to a unique spiritual level.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Pesachim*: When one celebrates it is only over wine. Wine is synonymous with Joy. As the verse states in Psalms, “Wine brings joy to the heart of man.” This allows us to understand the restriction of wine regarding the Nazerite; however, why should he be prohibited from cutting his hair or contaminating himself to the dead regarding his state of spirituality?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: There is an argument regarding the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. One opinion is that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was wheat. Another opinion is that it was the grape. We find that many tragedies that come upon man is because of wine, through his excessive drinking. Thus, it would be compelling to say that the fruit that brought about the greatest tragedy of all, which was the sin of *Adam*, was the grape. Initially *Adam* was intended to be an eternal being. However, because he transgressed by eating of the fruit of the Tree, he became finite and was thus subject to death. Prior to *Adam*’s sin, spiritual contamination of the dead had no relevance to existence.

*Pirkei D’Reb Eliezer*: Until *Adam* had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge he did not have hair growing on his body. He was covered with something that resembled the texture of a fingernail. The hair that grew on his body was only an expression of spiritual impurity that he had introduced into himself. The Nazerite grows his hair in order to remove it and burn it in the sanctuary under the pot in which is peace



offering was being cooked. The Nazerite seeks to revert to the status of *Adam* before the sin by denying himself wine, which had brought about death with all of its consequences.

The Nazerite's intent is to remove himself from every level of impurity in existence in order to become close to G-d. Therefore, when one enters into a state of Nazerithood, he has ascended to the level of wearing the crown of G-d upon his head. The only reason that the Jewish corpse that is left unattended overrides the Nazerite status is because the Jew represents the initial creation of man who was created in the image of G-d. Leaving the Jewish corpse unattended would be considered to be a disgrace to G-d.



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