

BEHAALOSCHA (NUMBERS 8:1-12:16)

Happy Passover . . . er . . . Chanukah!

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Aaron was distraught.

It was the twelfth of Nissan, three days before Passover. As we read at the end of last week's Torah Portion, the Mishkan, the portable Tabernacle, had been built and dedicated. For twelve days, leaders of the respective tribes of Israel presented their gifts for the dedication of the Altar. (See "Play It Again, Achira".) They donated vessels of silver and gold, containing flour and oil for meal offerings on the Altar. They gave incense and livestock for the Temple Service. Each day, a representative of a different tribe tendered his generous gift. Every tribe was represented. Every tribe but one.

Aaron and his fellow Levites were on the outside looking in. They had not been included in the ceremony. The other twelve got to participate; the Tribe of Levi did not. Aaron feared that he and his tribe had been found unworthy of being part of the dedication of the Tabernacle due to his involvement in the Golden calf episode.

G-d assured Moses that his brother had no reason to worry: *"Speak to Aaron, and tell him, 'When you will light the flames, the seven flames will shine toward the front of the Menorah.'*" (Numbers, 8:2)

Midrash Tanchumah explains that G-d was telling Moses that Aaron should not feel bad about being excluded from the *Chanukah* (Literally, "consecration ceremony") of the Altar. Aaron was responsible for a much more important role -- the daily kindling of the Menorah.

There are many reasons given as to why the daily lighting of the Menorah was more important than the generous gifts of the other tribal leaders. However, many commentaries prefer to emphasize a reference to a DIFFERENT lighting of the Menorah.

Ramban -- Nachmanides, points out that the selection of the Hebrew word *Chanukah* is no coincidence*.* G-d's message to Aaron was, "Don't worry about the fact that your family was not involved in this *Chanukah* -- Consecration Ceremony of the Altar. I have a much more important *Chanukah* for your family. The day will come when the enemies of Torah will desecrate My Temple. They will offer pigs on My holy Altar and put up statues of Zeus. They will defile most of the oil for My Menorah.

“Your children, Aaron, the Hasmonean Kohanim -- Priests, will fight My enemies. I will perform miracles for them. I will allow them to defeat a formidable Syrian-Greek war machine. They will ‘throw the bums out’ and re-dedicate My Altar and My Temple. They will find that one jar of oil, and I will miraculously allow it to burn for eight days until they can produce more ritually pure oil.

“This *Chanukah* of the Altar that you didn’t do, don’t worry about it. It is a wonderful act of dedication by your fellow Tribes of Israel. But it is a one-shot deal. The *Chanukah* of the Altar by the tribal leaders will only last as long as the Temple stands and offerings are brought on My holy Temple Mount.

“YOUR *Chanukah*, Aaron, will enlighten and inspire the People of Israel forever.”

“... *the seven flames will shine toward the front of the Menorah.*” Rashi explains that the three lamps on the west side of the Menorah and the three lamps on the east side of the Menorah, all pointed toward the central lamp. (“*toward the front of the Menorah.*”)

The wick of the central lamp was faced toward the Holy Ark.

My Rebbe, Rabbi David Feinstein, points out (Kol Dodi on the Torah, page 217) that the Menorah is symbolic of wisdom. The position of the six outer lights directed toward the middle light, with the middle one in turn directed toward the Ark, tells us where all knowledge should be focused.

The various branches of knowledge, says Rabbi Feinstein, are all dependent upon Torah. Mathematics and science can and should be used to help us serve G-d. Any other use of such knowledge is of no value.

Consider the following. Man’s harnessing of the atom has allowed us to create electricity. It also allowed the U.S. to end the Second World War, saving countless American (and Japanese!) lives. It has allowed just and free countries (such as the U.S. and probably Israel) to deter their enemies from attacking them. Unfortunately, as we all fear today, it can be used in a very un-G-dly fashion.

Medical research has obviously saved countless lives. That is G-d’s work. One need only mention the name Mengele (I refuse to call him “Doctor”) to understand the extent of depravity that can come from an un-G-dly use of medicine.

The Menorah was made from one large chunk of gold, beaten into shape. The seven branches of the Menorah all came from one source. All branches of intelligence come from one source as well. He Who said, “Build a Sukkah,” also created the trees for building material and the knowledge of architecture. He Who said, “Circumcise your son on the eighth day,” also created a human body that produces Vitamin K (clotting factor) by the sixth or seventh day of life.

There's a great T-shirt I once saw. It has a picture of a light bulb, plugged into the following statement (in Hebrew) "And G-d said, 'E= MC²' . . . and there was light!"

Have a great Shabbos.

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