

BEHAALOSCHA (NUMBERS 8:1-12:16)

G-d's Partners

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

The Menorah in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple, needed to be kindled every day by the High Priest:

G-d spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and tell him, ‘When you kindle the lights, the seven lights will illuminate the face of the Menorah.’ ”

When you kindle the lights... It has been observed by many commentaries that the Torah uses an unusual word to describe the kindling of the lights. *Beha'aloscha*, the title of this week's Torah Portion, literally translates as “*When you LIFT UP (the lights...)*”

Midrash Rabba (15:5) gives an interesting explanation:

Israel asked G-d: “Master of the World! Why are You telling us to light candles before You??!! You are the Light of the World...”

G-d responded: “It is not that I need the light; rather I want you to give Me light just as I gave you light. I want to raise your status before the nations of the world. Let them say ‘Look how Israel provides light for He who illuminates the entire world.’ ”

This can be compared to a sighted man and a blind man who walked together on the road. The sighted man told the blind man, “When we enter the house, go light a candle for me and give me some light.”

The blind man requested an explanation. “On the road you accompanied me. Until we reached your house, you supported me. And now you say, ‘Light a candle for me and give me light?’ ”

The sighted man responded, “I don't want you to feel indebted to me for supporting you on the road.”

This was G-d's message to Israel... He led them and provided light for them, as it says, *G-d went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel day and night.* (Exodus, 16:21) Once the Tabernacle was constructed, He called to Moses and said, “Give Me light,” as it says, “*When you kindle [literally, lift up] the lights... -- in order to lift YOU up!*”

This Midrash is fascinating! It seems to be saying that G-d gives us Commandments as a payback—You scratch My back, and I'll scratch Yours! What is this Midrash trying to tell us?

[It is important to understand what a Midrash is. It is not, as some would maintain, merely a collection of quaint legends and stories. Many of the same rabbis who discuss and debate essential matters of Jewish law in the Talmud are quoted in the Midrash. These are oral discussions of the written text of the Torah. A Midrash is a Talmudic interpretation of Torah that has been handed down from generation to generation going back to Mount Sinai. These are crucial lessons in Torah values.]

G-d doesn't need our Mitzvah observance: He's doing fine without them. Yet, He produces the *illusion* of a quid pro quo. Why?

There seem to be two reasons:

1. Our own attitude toward Mitzvah observance -- We shouldn't feel that we have nothing to offer to G-d. In reality, we don't have anything for Him. We are the recipients of His charity. He supports, sustains, and protects us purely out of love and compassion. There is nothing in it for Him.

However, as the sighted man in the Midrash told the blind fellow, "I don't want you to feel indebted to Me for supporting you on the road."

We should not let ourselves feel so overwhelmed by G-d's largesse, that we don't even TRY to pay Him back. In reality, there is absolutely nothing that we are capable of doing that equates to His gifts of life, protection, livelihood, etc. (Just envision Adam in the Garden of Eden. G-d gave mankind a Paradise with one small favor in return. Had Adam and Eve NOT eaten from the forbidden tree, would we conclude that they now DESERVED the world G-d had created for them???)

If we focused on the fact that G-d gives us so much more than we can ever repay, we might be tempted to sit back and do nothing! "Hey! I'm freeloading anyway! I may as well freeload all the way!"

The Torah rejects that notion. In one respect, are required to view our relationship with G-d as if it were a partnership. "I do for G-d, because He does for me." (On the other hand, of course, we must keep in mind that it is not an equal partnership. We dare not equate our Mitzvah observance with His Providence. It is too easy to say, "I do Mitzvahs. Why doesn't G-d do more for me?" He already gives us more than we deserve.)

2. The attitude of the rest of the world toward us. This is an amazing concept. The Midrash tells us that G-d said that He wanted to make it LOOK LIKE we are providing The Great Illuminator with light! We are G-d's partners in running the world. We work together; He gives us light, we give Him light. He takes us out of Egypt; we eat Matzah. He wakes us up in the morning; we put on Tefillin and pray to Him in the morning.

Why does G-d want to promote this attitude? Does He want the nations of the world to fear us? Does He want them to respect us? Does He want them to revere us?

Perhaps the answer to all these questions is yes. In the eyes of the world, we are G-d's partners. We should see it the same way.

The Torah tells us to emulate G-d and to ...*walk in His Ways*. (Deuteronomy, 28:9) What are His ways? G-d is...*Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth...* (Exodus, 34:6) Our Sages tell us that G-d is showing us the way: Just as G-d is *Compassionate and Gracious*, so too must we be.

We're the junior partner. We have to keep striving to catch up with the Senior Partner.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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