

CHASAM SOFER

BEHA'ALOSCHA

The Light of Torah

דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת־הַנֵּרוֹת אֶל־מִוֶּל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יֵאִירוּ שִׁבְעַת הַנֵּרוֹת

Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light (8:2).

The verse teaches that the flames of the six outer lamps must be directed toward the center of the Menorah. What does this arrangement of the flames symbolize? It can be understood based on the following introduction.

Hashem showers us with blessing in accordance with our performance of mitzvos. Every mitzvah that we perform, so to speak, “unlocks” Hashem’s blessing by making us worthy of receiving that blessing. And each individual mitzvah is the key to a specific aspect of His blessing; when we do a particular mitzvah, we merit to unlock the blessing associated with that mitzvah.

Now, the light of the Menorah represents the Light of Torah (see *Bava Basra* 25b with *Rabbeinu Gershom* ד"ה ומנורה, and *Shemos Rabbah* 36:2-3). One might thus think that the purpose of lighting the Menorah in the *Beis HaMikdash* is to make us worthy of receiving Hashem’s ultimate blessing — the gift of Torah knowledge. But it is not so. Unlike other aspects of Hashem’s blessing, which might be activated by a person’s physical performance of a mitzvah, Torah knowledge is so spiritually sublime that it cannot possibly be acquired as a result of man’s physical actions. Rather, Hashem grants the gift of Torah knowledge to one who toils diligently to understand the Torah and plumb its depths. When a person invests the required effort to uncover the secrets of the Torah, he is awarded those secrets directly from Hashem. But no physical action on man’s part – not even a mitzvah action – can possibly make him worthy of unlocking the channel of Torah knowledge and drawing down this exalted blessing upon himself.

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The arrangement of the Menorah's lights, with the six outer lamps directed toward the middle one, is meant to teach this lesson. While the outer lamps of the Menorah symbolize the Light of the Torah, the center lamp represents Hashem, the Source of this Light. By directing the outer lamps towards the middle one, we indicate that the Light of the Torah can be kindled by Hashem alone. Our physical kindling of the lamps does not cause their light to shine outward toward us; rather, it causes them to turn *inward* toward the Light of Hashem, which is what enlightens us and illuminates our lives.

With this understanding of the verse, we may explain a statement of the Gemara in *Shabbos* (22b). The Gemara remarks: "Does Hashem need the light of the Menorah? Why, during the forty years that the Jews were in the Wilderness they traveled by the Light of Hashem Himself! Rather, the light of the Menorah testifies to the entire world that the *Shechinah* dwells among the Jewish People."

How does the light of the Menorah provide this testimony?

Based on the above, we may explain that the Gemara's question, "Does Hashem need the light of the Menorah," means the following: Can it be that we light the Menorah in order to make ourselves worthy and thus "enable" Hashem to grant us the blessing of Torah knowledge? Why, this cannot be the purpose of the mitzvah, since the Jewish People traveled in the Wilderness for forty years by Hashem's Light! During those forty years, they experienced the illuminating Light of Torah Knowledge *directly* from Hashem, Who spoke to them "Face to face" at Sinai (*Devarim* 5:4). Surely, no physical mitzvah act can gain us access to that Light, nor is it *needed* to bring us that Light!

The Gemara answers that indeed, the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah is not meant to unlock the blessing of Torah knowledge. Rather, since the Menorah's light is in fact totally unnecessary — as seen from the fact that the six outer lamps face the middle one — the Menorah serves to remind us that when we toil in Torah we receive

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knowledge *directly* from Hashem, as the Jewish People did in the Wilderness. This testifies that the *Shechinah* rests among the Jewish People (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah*, p. 31, ד"ה בהעלתך ב).

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