

BOSTONER TORAH INSIGHTS

BOSTONER 'CHASSIDUS' IN ENGLISH

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA – 18 SIVAN 5781

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Regarding his role of lighting the Menorah, the Torah says ויעש כן אהרן "And Aharon did so" (Bamidbar 8:3). Rashi cites the well-known Midrash that the Torah is showering praise on Aharon that he did exactly as Hashem commanded and that Aharon 'did not deviate'. This remark becomes a springboard for most commentaries to ask: What would prompt us to think specifically by lighting the Menorah that Aharon would have an inclination to deviate from Hashem's command so that he is explicitly praised by the Midrash for not doing so.

From the words, "toward the face of the Menorah you should illuminate seven candles" (Bamidbar 8:2), it is derived that the wicks should tilt or lean towards the center candle. The Gemara (Shabbos 22b), in regard to the Mitzvah of Menorah, records a disagreement whether the essential Mitzvah is the 'lighting of the Menorah' or rather 'seeing to the installment of a lit Menorah'. Based on this disagreement a practical difference that would result is whether one should tilt the wicks toward the middle candle before lighting or it may be done even after the candles are lit.

According to the Panim Yafos, Aharon on his own understood from the next Pasuk, "toward the face of the Menorah raise up the candles" (Bamidbar 8:3) that at the time of lighting the wicks should already be tilted to the center. It was this practice that Aharon understood intuitively and did not deviate from which earned him praise.

The central candle, which miraculously continued burning even after the other candles were extinguished each day, was a testament to Klal Yisroel to the presence of the Shechina. It was from this candle that the other candles were lit and to this candle the wicks would lean. The Panim Yafos cites Maakos (10a), Pirkei Avos (4:1) and Tehilim (119:99), that just as a Torah teacher educates his students and shines Torah upon them, the Torah teacher is also enriched by his students and has a better understanding of the Torah he teaches them through their questions and feedback. Similarly, this is demonstrated by the fact that other candles were 'given light' by the central candle, and yet they 'shine their light' back upon the central candle.

Torah teachers and students should learn face to face, as it says, "Your eyes shall see your teachers" (Yeshayahu 30:20). There is a character flaw to become slightly embarrassed when learning something new from someone else, because you are conceding that you were 'lacking knowledge' or 'ignorant' of intelligence that others have. It is this 'embarrassment' or pride in our own intelligence that often causes us to interrupt people that are speaking to show them how smart we are because we 'already know what they are going to say'. Very often, we do not know what another person will say. At worst we are completely wrong and even at best there are still nuances and perspectives we can pick up if we would listen to people and here them out completely.

This is what is demonstrated by lighting the other candles from the middle candle and then in turn having them face the middle candle. Students who are embarrassed cannot learn from their teachers (Avos 2:5), but teachers who would be embarrassed by the thought that their student might think they had taught their teacher something the teacher did not already know will never learn from their students. Accordingly, parents who are embarrassed will not learn from their children, and employers who are embarrassed will not learn from their employees, etc.

Only Hashem is all knowing and 'knows the thoughts and deeds of man'. This is perhaps why it was instituted by the Rambam as one of the 13 fundamental principles of Emunah. No matter how smart we are and how much knowledge we have acquired, we will always lack knowledge that other have. That is the essence of being human and it is only our pride and arrogance that makes us think otherwise. Aharon was praised for demonstrating that students and teachers should always be facing each other and trying to learn as much as possible from each other and never to 'hide their face', which is the trait of embarrassment of our own human intellectual limitations. It is this embarrassment, rooted in pride and arrogance, which prevents us from understanding Torah, understanding others and understanding ourselves, which further prevents us from our ultimate Avodas Hashem in this World.

May it be His will that the light of the Menorah shall be revealed once more with the building of the Beis HaMikdash and the coming of the Go'el Tzedek, speedily in our days.