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מג

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 7 December 2012 - 23 Kislev 5773
Sedra Vayeshev - Chanukah

TEACHINGS OF THE MENORAH

THE SEVEN-BRANCHED GOLDEN OIL-LAMP, CALLED THE MENORAH, WHICH was one of the most prized objects in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, has become a central symbol of Jewish identity. Not in its original form, with seven lamps, but as the Chanukah Menorah, with eight lamps, plus an extra candle, called the *Shammes* (literally: helper), which lights all the others. We begin lighting the Chanukah Menorah after Shabbat, and its influence will be with us throughout the week, including next Shabbat.

Every detail in Jewish life has meaning. This fact is particularly emphasised in Chassidic thought, which seeks to reveal the significance and relevance of Torah teachings. So on this Shabbat before Chanukah, we can ask: what are the teachings of the Menorah? In order to give us a resource for the week ahead, let us take just four of the many teachings and ideas.

Flow into the World: The original Menorah in the Sanctuary¹ was made of a single block of gold. It had a central stem from which emerged six branches, three on each side, decorated with a design including “goblets”. According to Rashi and a drawing by the Rambam², the six branches were straight rather than curved. The same drawing shows the goblets as being inverted: they represent “pouring” downwards. The seven lights represent seven Divine attributes which pour blessing and spiritual radiance downwards, through each of the branches, into the central stem, and then down into the world.

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This is also a teaching to each person: we too should seek to “pour” goodness into the world around us³, including giving spiritual inspiration to others. Doing this, we should continually increase, just as, day by day, the number of Menorah candles increases.

Unity of the Jewish People: The Menorah in the Temple can be seen as representing the entire Jewish people. The seven lights represent seven different ways of serving G-d: one serves with love, flowing like water, in a kind and gentle way; the second, with love burning like fire, which soars upwards in a severe way; third, making Torah study and teaching his or her main approach to life; fourth, battling against evil in practical terms and seeking to accomplish good; fifth, through acceptance and praising of G-d; sixth through feeling the exaltation and pride of being a Jew, chosen by G-d, with the unique responsibility of a Jew; the seventh path is that of humility. Each path is different, but since the Menorah was made from one block of gold, all are one⁴. Thus the Menorah expresses unity together with difference, an important message for our time. In addition, each one of us combines these diverse paths.

Mutual Responsibility: The lights of the Menorah in the Temple were lit each day by the Priest. Each one of us has the responsibility to help each individual around us to shine with his or her own inner spiritual illumination. As long as the oil, the teaching of the Torah, is pure and authentic, each one of us can light the lamps⁵.

Making the Darkness Shine: The Menorah represents “publicising the miracle” of Chanukah. In earlier times (and some places today) the Menorah was lit at the doorway of the house, leading into the street. It stands at the left of the doorway, opposite the Mezuzah on the right. The Mezuzah “shines” into the house, and makes it holy; the Menorah shines into the street, a place of darkness and profanity, and transforms it. The task of the Jew is to make the darkness shine, so that all existence becomes a dwelling for G-d⁶.

1. Described in Exodus 25:31-40. 2. In his own manuscript of the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.21 pp.164-171. 3. See *ibid.*, p.167. 4. Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Torah, Beha'alotcha* 29c. 5. See Rambam, *Biat HaMikdash*, 9:7, and *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 19, p.100. 6. See the Rebbes' *Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat* vol. 6, pp.63-74.

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SEDRA VAYESHEV - CHANUKAH

PROUD TO BE JEWISH

It was the third night of Chanukah and the Levy children were preparing to leave for the Giant Menorah Lighting.

“Oooh, I’m so excited for the Giant Menorah Lighting!” Abigail squealed gleefully.

“Yeah, I love it when the Rabbi goes in the big cherry-picker that goes really, really high!” Gabby added as she zipped up her coat.

“I know!” Benny agreed, “Chanukah is certainly my favourite!”

“Hey, you say that about every festival we have!” Abigail pointed out, laughing.

“Well I love them all! We have so many fun Jewish things to do. It’s like a party all year round!” Benny chuckled.

They made their way to Trafalgar Square, where the Giant Menorah Lighting was taking place. When they arrived, the children felt that special excitement they felt every year at the Giant Menorah Lighting.

The evening passed in a blur. The Rabbi got in the cherry-picker with some men and up they went, higher...higher...higher...until they reached the top of the huge Menorah where someone recited the blessing and lit the first candle. Then there was live music and the men started dancing. Mr Levy got his sons to dance in the circle. The girls started their own circle too, and to everyone’s delight, sticky jelly doughnuts and cups of hot cocoa were given out.

When the Levy family got home, after they had lit their own Menorah, they all sat together around the table, enjoying Mrs Levy's fresh, sizzling homemade latkes while the children shared information they knew about the story of Chanukah.

"We learnt in school how the Greeks tried to get all the Jewish people to be just like them," Gabby said. "They weren't allowed to study the Torah."

"So the Maccabees decided to stand up for Judaism," said Benny. "And they won!"

"Well that certainly teaches us something important," Mr Levy said, eating a latke, "We should be proud of who we are and keep our Jewish identity strong in the world today."

"Yes, I certainly felt that tonight," Benny said, "I noticed some non-Jewish people admiring the Menorah. I couldn't help but feel so proud that I am part of the Jewish people! Just like the Maccabees!"

"Yes, so did I," Abigail said.

"But sometimes it's embarrassing to show our Jewish identity in public," Gabby said.

"Yes, but remember, dear, there is absolutely no reason to be embarrassed," Mrs Levy said, putting her arm around Gabby. "We should be proud of who we are and this will gain other people's respect. It's no secret that we are Jewish, and when others see that we are strong enough to enjoy our Judaism publicly, they will respect our ways and admire us."

"You're right, Mom," Gabby said. "You always are!"

Mrs Levy smiled, "well then, I'm sure you will agree with my suggestion that we play a grand Dreidel game right now!"

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