

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Behaaloscha 5769

Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall shine toward the face of the menorah... And this was the work of the menorah: pounded of gold, to its base, to its flower it was pounded; like the vision that Hashem showed Moshe, so he made the menorah. (8:2,4)

Rashi says (here and on Shemos 25:31) that Moshe had difficulty understanding how to make the menorah, until finally Hashem told him, “Take a talent of gold and throw it into the fire.” And Hashem Himself made the menorah. Therefore it says, “So He made the menorah,” referring to Hashem. We must ask: What was so hard to understand? After all, Hashem showed him a vision of exactly how the menorah had to look. And in the Second Temple, a menorah was made by human hands (Avodah Zarah 43b), so it is certainly possible to do.

The Midrash Rabbah (15:6, brought by Rashi on v. 2) says that when the princes of all the tribes but Levi brought their offerings, Aharon said, “Woe is to me! Perhaps due to my sins the Holy One, blessed is He, is not accepting the tribe of Levi.” Said the Holy One, blessed is He, to Moshe, “Go and say to Aharon: do not fear. You are destined for something greater than this. Sacrifices will only be offered as long as the Temple exists, but the lamps will shine forever toward the face of the menorah.” The statement is hard to understand. Seemingly, just as the sacrifices stopped with the destruction of the Temple, the menorah stopped as well.

The answer is that the Temple was destroyed at the end of the day (Taanis 29a), just after the lighting of the menorah, and the menorah was then hidden from the eyes of the Romans. Still burning, the menorah was placed in a secret underground chamber, where it awaits the redemption and the building of the Third Temple. One should not find this idea so surprising, for we find (Tanchuma Tetzaveh 3) that the menorah sometimes burned miraculously for long periods of time, such as a year or more.

This is the meaning of the Tanchuma (Tetzaveh 7): “The Holy One, blessed is He, said to Moshe: Say to the children of Israel: My children, in this world you needed to light the lamps in the Temple, but in the World to Come, in the merit of that lamp, I will bring the king moshiach, who is compared to a lamp, as it says, ‘I have prepared a lamp for my moshiach’ (Tehillim 132:17).” The “merit of that lamp” refers to the hidden menorah, still burning from its last lighting throughout the duration of the exile.

Moshe knew that the menorah would play a role in the final redemption, and that is why he could not make it. Physically he was able, but he knew that there is a fundamental difference between the redemption and all other areas of life. When it comes to making a living, maintaining health and protecting oneself, a person is permitted and indeed expected to make his own efforts, and then rely on Hashem to grant him success. But in matters relating to the geulah, Jews are strictly forbidden under oath to take any action (other than prayer, teshuva and good deeds). The geulah is strictly Hashem’s domain.

Therefore, at first Hashem commanded Moshe to work on the menorah in order to reward him for his efforts to understand it. Shemos 25:31 begins with the word “v’asisa” – and you shall make. But in the end, as Moshe knew, Hashem did not want the menorah to be made by human hands, but rather by Hashem Himself, since the redemption depends on it. That is why the Torah, later in that same verse, says “teiaseh” – it shall be made without your effort (Divrei Yoel v. 7, pp. 254-257).

This is why the angel showed the prophet Zechariah a vision of the menorah, as we read in the Haftarah, and said: “Not by might and not by power, but by My spirit, said Hashem Tzevaos” (Zechariah 4:6). The menorah, made by Hashem Himself, symbolizes the fact that the redemption will come through Hashem’s spirit, not through any human effort.

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