



Spending Time Next To The Menorah

Is it better to stay with the Menorah and stare at the flames and concentrate and meditate on them, or is it better instead to learn Torah next to the Menorah? **ANSWER** It depends on what a person's level is, and what his situation is right now. Generally speaking through, it is better to first look at the flames and concentrate on them, then learn Torah next to the Menorah, and then return again to looking at the flames.

The Avodah of Staying With The Neiros

What should a person do after lighting the Menorah? How much time should a person looking at the neiros (Chanukah lights), as well as singing and saying divrei Torah? **ANSWER** The Mishnah Berurah says that P'chatchilah (ideally), it is proper for a person to stay with the Menorah for a half hour. The root of everything is the revelation of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in His Torah, and that is why it is proper for one to say Torah thoughts about Chanukah and about the menorah. The days of Chanukah are called "days of hodaah" (thanks), to give thanks and praise.

That is why it is proper for a person to give hodaah (thanks) to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for all of the miracles that happened during these days to the Jewish people as a whole, through singing, as well as thanking Hashem for one's personal lot. (A hint to thanking Hashem for one's personal lot is reflected in the halachah that a guest staying at another's home for Chanukah needs to include himself in the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, by donating a coin (perutah) to the one whom he is staying by. By donating a coin (perutah) to be included in the mitzvah, the guest "includes" his individual life, his "peratiyos", with the collective whole of Klal Yisrael. It is written, "The flame of Hashem is the soul of man." More specifically, the word "light", ner, is an acronym for the words Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah [the three basic levels of the soul]. The flame, oil and wick of a Menorah, which in Hebrew is ner (flame), shemen (oil), pesilah (wick), which is an ac-

ronym for NeFeSH (the soul). This is because the light of a flame has the power to illuminate and awaken and reveal one's soul – one's nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. One needs to connect his perspective and his inner essence to the light of the Menorah and to the movements of the flame, by becoming inwardly connected to it. Looking at the Menorah lights, amidst inwardly connecting to it, has the power to awaken the neshamah (Divine soul).

This is a matter that is dependent on one's personal spiritual level and it does not apply equally to every person. Each person individually should recognize his current level and according to his current level. To the extent that a person connects his soul to the spiritual illumination of the Menorah's light, it becomes more appropriate for a person to sit with Chanukah neiros, according to his capabilities, and by remaining balanced in his other areas of avodas Hashem, such as his Torah learning and his davening, etc.

Even more so, some have the custom of making the wicks for the Menorah by using pieces of clothing, because the "Chayah" level of the soul is present on one's clothing. And, even more so, the Chanukah lights are called "the light of a man and his home", which is a hint that the Chanukah lights reveal the deepest level of the soul, the "Yechidah", which is hidden in one's house. This is the "spiritual light that is hidden away for the future", the light of Mashiach, and for this reason there are those who said that Chanukah will not disappear in the future. There are rare individuals who have a spark of the Yechidah level of the soul revealed with them, and the light of the Menorah on Chanukah can awaken this spark further.

Going even further, one who merits the revelation of the "Yechidah" level of the soul can feel a tremendous pleasure when viewing the Menorah lights, as in the teaching of the Gemara that "The species has found its species", like beloved friends who find each other. For a person who knows of such an experience, it is upon him to feel

the light of the Infinite surrounding him on all sides, and that he is in the center and that he is nullified, to Hashem's Infinite Light. And this is a very deep and intrinsic pleasure of the neshamah.

Chanukah & Purim Through Women What is the depth behind why the Chanukah and Purim miracles came about through women, Esther on Purim and Yehudis and Chanah on Chanukah? **ANSWER** The Torah's festivals came about in the merit of great men [the Avos/forefathers], whereas the Rabbinical festivals [Chanukah and Purim] were allotted to be in the merit of women.

Looking at the Lights When we are looking at the ner Chanukah (the flame on the Menorah) what should we be thinking? What kind of "light" are we receiving from it? **ANSWER** The Bnei Yissocher says that the ner Chanukah is [an aspect of] the ohr haGanuz, the original light from the first day of Creation which Hashem hid away for the tzaddikim in the future. Therefore, Chanukah is really the "light of the future", which was hidden away for the future. That was the depth of why the jug of oil sealed by the Kohen Gadol was hidden away - and when it was found, it was a fulfillment of the verse, "The light of the righteous brings joy." The miracle of Chanukah came about through the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans, or Macabees) who were few against many when they fought the Yevanim (Greeks) and there was no natural way for them to win, yet they were willing to give their lives for this and they showed mesirus nefesh, which really meant that they give up their personal ratzon (will), because nefesh is identified as the ratzon and by giving up their own ratzon (in order to fight for the ratzon Hashem) they were essentially giving up their nefesh, and it was this mesirus nefesh which made them win and bring about the entire miracle. The "light" revealed on Chanukah is therefore the power of giving up our own ratzon, and when we are divested from our ratzon, the will of the Creator takes over our will [enabling us to give up our will to do Hashem's will]. That was the miracle of the jug of oil. Normally, constriction brings sadness while expansion brings joy, yet from this tiny, sealed, constricted jug of oil there was a joyous miracle which came about. The joy was really the depth of the miracle.

As a hint to all of this, the word Chashmonai (חשמונאי) can be rearranged into the words ayin yismach א"י שמ"ח which means "through ayin, we can be happy", meaning that joy comes from accessing ayin, which is reached through bittul (surrendering) of our ratzon (our personal will) in order to do Hashem's will.

Hope and The Ray of Infinite Light What is the concept of the kav ohrEinSof, the ray of Infinite light which is above man and which connects together all of Creation, and how can we connect to it? **ANSWER** It is explained in Kaballah [in the Arizal] that at first, the infinite light (ohr EinSof) of Hashem filled everything, and when it arose within His will to create the creations, He removed the light and pushed it to the sides. There was a vacant space empty from infinite light, and then Hashem extended a ray (a kav) from His infinite light that was outside of the vacant space and entered it into within the vacant space. From this light came the ideal formation of man, called Adam Kadmon (Primordial Man) and every creation was included in this exalted creation. Thus the pnimiyus, the inner dimension of all created beings is this ray of Infinite Light, the kav. The Ramchal and others explained that the word kav is from the word tikva, hope. Thus, the inner essence of man is tikva. The kav, the ray of infinite light, is mainly revealed from the space of Adam Kadmon and down to Atzilus, meaning that the kav can be revealed for one who is "aitzel" near Hashem, or, it can be found with one who has emanated (ne'etzal) from Hashem's light [those whose souls are rooted in the world of Atzilus]. Below the world of Atzilus, the ray of infinite light isn't as revealed [and therefore it is harder for a person to have hope when he is found below Atzilus]. That is why it is written, "Hope in Hashem, strengthen and reaffirm your heart, and hope in Hashem", because a person has to keep strengthening his hope, for it is harder to have hope when one is found below Atzilus, when he isn't "near" Hashem.

Therefore in every situation, one needs to find the kav, the ray of infinite light – or the tikvah, the hope that shines within this situation – and that hope can bind a person with the Creator, in a wondrous way!