

The Menorah of Flesh

Hanakkah 2008 drash (in conjunction w/Parashah 10; Miketz)

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One of the primary symbols of this Hanakkah celebration is the menorah. This is a part of the tabernacle, which has significance beyond its physical, historical form. The following lesson is taken from Designed by God, Built by Man, a book I am nearing completion. As I begin, think of yourself having a tour of the tabernacle. You have already gone past the outer court, the altar, the laver, and now have entered the holy place:

Now we are inside the tabernacle. The beauty we see is amazing, especially for a tent. This is no ordinary tent, though, it is the house of God. With the thick layers of skins making the tent, it would be completely dark, and the beauty would be lost to us if it were not for one thing. To our left, there is a golden lampstand, or menorah. It's seven branches give off light which illuminates the entire room.

There are two distinct aspects to this menorah. There is the menorah itself. Then there is the light it produces. Both have symbolism throughout Scripture and both have relevance. First I will examine the menorah.

“You are to make a menorah of pure gold. It is to be made of hammered work; its base, shaft, cups, ring of outer leaves and petals are to be of one piece with it. It is to have six branches extending from its sides, three branches of the menorah on one side of it and three on the other. On one branch are to be three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a ring of outer leaves and petals; likewise on the opposite branch three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a ring of outer leaves and petals; and similarly for all six branches extending from the menorah. On the central shaft of the menorah are to be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its ring of outer leaves and petals. Where each pair of branches joins the central shaft is to be a ring of outer leaves of one piece with the pair of branches – thus for all six branches. The rings of the outer leaves and their branches are to be of one piece with the shaft. Thus the whole menorah is to be a single piece of hammered work made of gold. [Sh' mot/Exodus 25:31-36]

When looking at the Hebrew, it seems most everything pertaining to the menorah related in some way to light. The word menorah is the feminine form of manor, which means yoke, as is used in farming, but itself comes from the word neir, which means glisten, referring to the glisten of a freshly plowed furrow. The word for purity is tahor, which comes from a root meaning to be bright. Gold in Hebrew is zahav, which also comes from a root word meaning to shimmer. There is to be no doubt that the dominant theme surrounding the menorah and its purpose is that of light, both physical and spiritual. Before I expand on this further, there are a few more aspects of this temple furnishing which deserve attention.

One of these aspects is that the menorah was fashioned out of one solid piece of gold. It was hammered out into its shape. This would take a great deal of time and skill

to create, especially with all the petals and leaves fashioned into it. Here we have a picture of the Messiah, who was pure and perfect like gold and yet was beaten and wounded for our transgressions as we see in Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 53:5. We have another picture relating to our bodies given to us by Rav Shaul.

"Don't you know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one wins the prize? So then, run to win! Now every athlete in training submits himself to strict discipline, and he does it just to win a laurel wreath that will soon wither away. But we do it to win a crown that will last forever. Accordingly, I don't run aimlessly but straight for the finish line; I don't shadow-box but try to make every punch count. I treat my body hard and make it my slave so that, after proclaiming the Good News to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

[1 Corinthians 9:24-27]

There is a process by which we become a vessel able to carry God's light to the world. This takes hard work. In some ways, the fashioning comes from God, and in others it comes from the discipline we put on our own lives to enable God to do with us what He desires. When life is most difficult, and we are going through harsh trials, we can endure knowing that we are being reformed into a menorah for God's light. The end result is something spectacular, brilliant, and pure, though the way of getting there is harsh.

Another concept to grasp is the seventh candle. This is the middle candle which is traditionally raised a little higher than the other six candles. This can allude to Creation, which was formed in six days and the seventh day was one of rest. However, the middle candle has been given the title, the shamash or servant candle.

"Let your attitude toward one another be governed by your being in union with the Messiah Yeshua: Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God something to be possessed by force. On the contrary, he emptied himself in that he took the form of a slave by becoming like human beings are." [Philippians 2:5-7]

Here we see that the shamash candle is representative of the Messiah Yeshua. Like the menorah itself, He was beaten, yet pure. He tells his talmidim, however:

"I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch which is part of me but fails to bear fruit, he cuts off; and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit. Right now, because of the word which I have spoken to you, you are pruned. Stay united with me, as I will with you – for just as the branch can't put forth fruit by itself apart from the vine, so you can't bear fruit apart from me." [Yochanan/John 15:1-4]

Yeshua is the middle branch, but just as the other six branches came off that middle branch, so to we who are united with Yeshua come out of Him. Without Him we are nothing and can do nothing. He is our source of life. The branches of the menorah were identical to the shamash. In the same way, we the branches of Messiah seek to continually be more and more like Him.

The hebrew word for these branches is qaneh, which can be translated as beam, rod, or bone. We find a phrase in Scripture similar to Adam's pronouncement concerning Hevah/Eve, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh", or simply "bone and flesh". This is to say that I and you are the same. Particularly, our bones are all made of the same calcium and marrow. They are all shaped the same. People recognize each other not from bone, but from distinctions in flesh. If the flesh were removed, individual identity is lost. The similarity in flesh that Adam and others in the Bible talk about, I think, is spiritual similarities. To use the two together means that those two or more people are alike in every way.

We are the branches or bones of the Messiah. In this way, we seek to become like Him in every way. We listen to His teachings and apply them to our lives. Where He goes, we go. What He does, we do. Our words are according to His Word. He was beaten on our behalf, and in turn we are called to suffer for Him. The menorah is pure, He is pure, and we are called also to be pure in order to be the vessel for His light we were fashioned to be.

This brings us to the purpose of the menorah, which was to shed light for the priests serving in God's tabernacle. The cups of the menorah were filled with oil which also was pure olive oil. [*Sh'mot/Exodus 27:20*] Wicks were made from unusable garments of the priests according to Jewish tradition. Assuming this to be true, there are a few applications here.

Oil in Scripture is often used for anointing and consecrating. We see this paralleled by the Spirit of God, who often does the same thing. [*Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18*] We also see robes worn by God's people as representing righteousness. [*Revelation 19:7-8*] The wicks and the oil were burned together to provide light for the tabernacle. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit of God fills each of His people, and when combined with righteous deeds, provide a light of God's glory for all the world to see.

Yeshua said, "If you love me, you will keep my commands; and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another comforting Counselor like me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever." [*Yochanan/John 14:15-16*] Being filled with the Spirit and living a righteous life based on Torah go hand in hand. Power can be going to a machine, but unless you see it doing something, you won't know the power is there. What good is it for a Believer to have the Spirit of God dwelling within him, if that person's life on the outside is just as corrupt and dark as everyone else? At the same time, living the commands of God without the power of God enabling and guiding the Believer to do so, leads to legalism and hypocrisy. You can end up with a beautiful exterior and a dark, empty interior. Both the Spirit and righteousness are needed to produce the light that the menorah provides.

Now what about the light itself? There are three dominant themes, which I call the "three 'L's of God" found from the beginning to the end of the Bible. They are light, love, and life. I hope that as I write this book, the themes of love and life become clear, but here, my focus is on light. As a photographer, I understand a little more than many people the importance of good light and the problems which bad light or lack of light can provide. As with many parts of God's creation, when we think of light we ought to

think not so much of the physical light we all live in and see, but the spiritual light that the physical light is a picture of.

“And this is the message which we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him – none!

If we claim to have fellowship with him while we are walking in the darkness, we are lying and not living out the truth. But if we are walking in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of his Son Yeshua purifies us from all sin.” [1 Yochanan/1 John 1:5-7]

At Creation, God divided the world of light from the world of darkness. Darkness is the default of the universe. Without light, there is only darkness. One does not go into a dark room and remove the darkness. Instead, one applies power to a light bulb which emits light, thus canceling out the darkness. This is what the light of the menorah does. Even in the tabernacle, there is darkness without the light of the menorah removing it. Likewise, without light emitting from the burning oil of the Ruach Ha Kodesh in our lives, even the greatest of God's saints will be filled with darkness from within.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Likewise, when a people light a lamp, they don't cover it with a bowl but put it on a lampstand, so that it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.” [Mattityahu/Matthew 5:14-16]

Yeshua said that He is the light of the world and likewise, those who are his branches are called to be lights to the world as well. Being a light to the world is to be the basis of who we are, the frame we build the rest of our lives on, in the same way that our bones are the framework of the rest of our body.

Notice that our light comes out in good deeds. This is echoed in Tehellim/Psalms 119 when David declares that God's Word is a lamp unto our feet. It is the words of Torah which give us the formula for making our life into a light for the world, so they can see the truth of God. Thomas Edison discovered a thousand ways of making a light bulb that didn't work, before he discovered the one way that did. Throughout human history, mankind has invented a thousand ways of living, all of which lead to darkness, when God has given us the one way, His way, which leads to light.

“The light of the wicked will flicker and die, not a spark from his fire will shine, the light in his tent is darkened, the lamp over him will be snuffed out.”

(Iyov/Job 18:5-6)