

Nissan, Seth, Yonatan, Zev, Aryeh, Ari, and Jason,

This week's parsha, פרשת בהעלותך, opens with a description of the menorah and the mitzvah of its lighting:

וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנְרֹתָהּ מִקֶּשֶׁה זָהָב עַד יְרִכָהּ עַד פְּרֻתָהּ מִקֶּשֶׁה הִוא כַּמְרֹאֶה אֲשֶׁר הִרְאָה ה' אֶת
מֹשֶׁה כִּן עָשָׂה אֶת הַמִּנְרֹתָהּ:

And the workmanship of the menorah was of hammered gold, its central pole, its flowers, was hammered work; according to the image which God had shown Moshe, so he made the menorah.

The menorah with all its intricate details was to be fashioned according to the precise instructions and model that God had shown Moshe. So it was with the menorah, and so it was with the Sanctuary:

כִּכְלֵ אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְרֹאֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶת תְּבֻנֵת הַמִּשְׁכָּן כִּן וְאֶת תְּבֻנֵת כָּל כֵּלָיו וְכִן תַּעֲשֶׂה:

According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the Sanctuary, and the pattern of all its vessels, even so shall you make it.

The Mishkan is to be firm, exact, absolute. Such a mode of construction is appropriate for the House of God. God who is the Rock, the Ultimate, the Absolute.

However, our avodah, our service of God, is of a different nature. We are not to serve God with a rigid model. Our ongoing avodah is not the making of the menorah, our avoda is the lighting of its lamps:

וְלֵאמֹר אֶלֶּיךָ אֱלֹהֵי בְּהַעֲלֹתְךָ אֶת הַנִּרְוֹת אֶל מוּל פְּנֵי הַמִּבְרָה יֵאָדְרוּ שֶׁבַע הַנִּרְוֹת

Speak unto Aaron and say unto him, When you light the lamps, in front of the menorah the seven lamps shall give their light.

Commenting on the verb בהעלותך to refer to lighting, Rashi states:

על שם שהלהב עולה, כתוב בהדלקתן לשון עליה, שצריך להדליק עד שתהא שלהבת עולה מאליה.

Because a flame rises, it refers to their kindling with the language of “rising up,” for Aharon had to kindle the lamp until the flame would ascend on its own.

Humans are not rigid, and one size does not fit all. The flame in every human being dances and draws near to God in its own unique way. These flames must be nurtured so that they can rise up to God, me'eleyha, on their own, self-sustaining, and according to their own nature.

We at YCT embrace the message of B'haalotkha. We believe that each one of you and your fellow students has his unique talents, each has his unique contribution to make to Klal Yisrael, each comes with his unique flame. To impose on you a single, rigid model of rabbinic leadership would be for us to do the unthinkable, to quench that flame. Rather, through our multifaceted curriculum and our diverse range of rebbeim, rabbinic mentors, and leadership professionals, we offer you and your fellow students different models of what a rabbi and a leader can be. We nurture each flame until each one of you can become a שלהבת העולה מאליה.

Nissan, Seth, Yonatan, Zev, Aryeh, Ari, and Jason - you have become strong and steady flames in your own right. You seven are the seven flames of the menorah - all stemming from a common base, all pointing to the Kodesh HaKadashim, to the Holy of Holies, but every one separate, every one drawing near to God in a different way, every one bringing a distinct form of leadership to Klal Yisrael.

My dear talmidim, you bring to your rabbinate the message of the Mishkan and the message of B'halaotekha. The Mishkan Hashem in our days – the Torah and Halakha – is absolute and firm, with intricacies that must be precisely followed. But people are

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individuals, flames that must be tended, so that each person can find his or her own way to draw close to the Holy. These are the individuals whom you will teach and lead.

A rigid model cannot inspire. A rigid model is disempowering. You all know this. You know that to be a rabbi is not to be an authoritarian. To be a rabbi is to empower others in their avodat Hashem, in their service of God.

Each one of you is vibrant, powerful flame. It is now through your flame that you will – as your semikha parchment says, הלהיב אותם - ignite the flames of your congregants so that they too, every one of them, will also become a שלהבת העולה מאליה.