



פרשת וַיִּשָּׁב חֲנוּכָה / Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayeshev 5781

The Light of the World

The holiday of Chanukah revolves around the fire and light of our Menorahs. Generally, light is understood to be a symbol of spirituality, Torah and a person's soul. This is based on the verses: "For a mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is light"¹ and "The candle of God is a human soul."² Accordingly, many have explained that the light of the menorah represents the innermost depth of our souls or the deepest ideas of Torah. Why? What is it about light such that it is used as a metaphor for lofty ideas?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe³ explains that most created entities that exist in this world are material in their nature. They take up space, can be touched and have mass. Light, however, is different. It exists as a discernable and helpful created entity and yet it is impossible to touch or weigh. Light is pure energy and not encapsulated or bounded by the limitations of matter. As such, light is a liminal entity. On the one hand it is a created entity and of our world. And yet, light is as non-material as our world allows. Therefore, when the Torah wants a metaphor for an item which is in this world but not necessarily of this world, such as the human soul, it focuses on light.

Perhaps this is the reason that from all cities in the world, Yerushalayim is associated with lights. The Midrash states: "Yerushalayim is the light of the world, as the verse states 'and the nations will walk by your light.'"⁴ The above teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe brings this description into sharp focus. Yerushalayim, like light, exists as the gate between the physical and spiritual realms.

On the one hand, it is a physical city that must be built, lived in and kept up like any other city on the globe. On the other hand, though, Yerushalayim transcends these limitations. It is the home

¹ Mishlei 6:23.

² Mishlei 20:27.

³ Likkutei Sichot 25, Chanukah.

⁴ Bereishit Rabbah 59:5.



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for God in this world and the gateway to the spiritual realm. It is where there is a spiritual ladder that allows one to slowly climb out of this world into the heavens.

With this understanding of the Menorah and Yerushalayim, we can approach the Talmud's statement regarding the purpose of the light of the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash. The Talmud teaches that this light was testimony to everyone in the world that the Divine Presence rested amongst the Jewish people.⁵ It is a fire in Yerushalayim – a form of a light within a light – which represents the ultimate light from beyond. Despite the fact that it is philosophically untenable for such a light to dwell on earth, the Menorah of the Beit HaMikdash represents the fact that God does indeed reside in Yerushalayim and within the Jewish people.

⁵ Shabbat 22b.