

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Beha'alotcha / פרשת בהעלתך

Spreading the Light

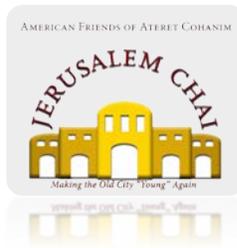
The opening section of this week's parsha contains a command to Aharon to light the menorah on a daily basis. The midrash,¹ notes certain discrepancies between the way that candles are normally lit in a house and the manner of lighting in the Beit HaMikdash and concludes that these candles served a fundamentally different purpose. While generally, indoor candles are meant to create light within the confine of the home, the candles of the menorah were meant for the light to spread from the Beit HaMikdash to the outside world. While the midrash does not explicate the exact identity of this light, presumably it is the light of Hashem that emanates from the Beit HaMikdash to enlighten a dark world.

The notion that the Beit HaMikdash is the spiritual capital of the world would seem to only be true when it is built and functioning. Nowadays, however, when the central Menorah is no longer being lit, perhaps we are bereft of such a spiritual force. The Sefat Emmet² relates directly to this issue and argues that even today we can look at Yerushalayim as the spiritual center of the world. Even when there is no light of the Menorah, we still have the light of Torah emanating from Yerushalayim: "For from Zion the Torah will emerge." The light of Yerushalayim's Torah will shine forth throughout the world.

In the days of the Sefat Emmet even this notion of Yerushalayim as the Torah capital of the world was probably more of a hope than a reality. While there were Yeshivot in Yerushalayim, the Torah capitals of the world were clearly in the diaspora. Now, however, we are witnesses to the phenomenon that the Sefat Emmet described. We are extremely privileged to be living in a time in which the Torah has returned to its former place of glory and Yerushalayim really is the Torah capital of the world. Once again, light shines forth from Yerushalayim.

¹ Bamidbar Rabbah 15:2.

² Sefat Emmet to Parshat Beha'alot'cha, 5660.



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The Sefat Emmet continues that in addition to Torah, another source of light in the modern era are the Jewish people themselves. The word “Zion” is the same numerical value as “Yosef” and thus refers to the Jewish people. Accordingly, the Torah emanates from the Jewish people, who spread the divine light throughout the world.

While the Sefat Emmet presumably was referring to Jews worldwide, perhaps the optimal read the verse is the combination of these two interpretations of Zion. The spiritual capital of the world is Zion – the place and the Jewish people living in the holy city. These people who merit a unique closeness to the Shechinah have a special opportunity and responsibility to spread the light of their city’s Torah to the entire world.

Through this, may we once again merit to light the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash and have its light spread to the entire world.