

The Message In The Menorah

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Each year when Chanukah time swings around, fond memories of lighting the menorah come to mind. I remember being with my family, singing *Maoz Tzur* and eating latkes with applesauce. But year after year as we continue to light the menorah, are these experiences just a nostalgic ritual, or do they grow and become exciting and ever more meaningful?

The laws of lighting the Chanukah menorah contain some interesting contrasts. On the one hand, the Arizal teaches that a tremendously awesome light descends when we kindle the menorah. On the other hand, we are told to light the menorah below ten *tefachim* (handbreadths) – a place so low that God's Presence does not descend there. Also, on Shabbat it is a mitzvah to light candles and enjoy their light, but on Chanukah we are allowed to gaze at the Chanukah candles only from a distance. Therefore we light the *shammash* candle so that we don't utilize the menorah's light.

Reb Noson explains that the essence of the Chanukah light is so lofty and removed from this world that we aren't yet worthy of it – we can only admire it from a distance. But the fact that this light can descend into our lowly world, in the middle of the workweek and into our very own homes, is simply miraculous. God is sending us a message: Even though we may feel far away from Him and we may not yet be worthy of His light, He is nevertheless shining down to us.

The main mitzvah of lighting is just one candle per household. This is because it's enough for an entire family to look at the light and reflect on this great miracle. But a person who feels distant from God because of all the wrong he has done may not feel worthy of having this great light shine down all the way to his lowly place. Therefore our Sages teach that a better way to light (*Mehadrin*) is for each individual to light his own candle. This way, each and every one of us realizes that the further we are, the happier we should be now that God is shining down to us. For if we are truly so distant and yet God has not abandoned us, how great is His love for us and how

joyous we should be now!

But the very best way to light (*Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin*) is for each individual to light his own candle and add another candle every night. During each and every day of our lives, God performs numerous miraculous acts of kindness for each of us. God created us and will in fact finish what He started, bringing about our final redemption. Let us realize that this process has already begun and that every day He is miraculously bringing us closer, step by step. As we gaze at the holy Chanukah lights, let us remind ourselves and affirm our belief that even though we may be far, the journey home is already underway.

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Shiluach HaKen #4*