



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

BEREISHIT > Miketz

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

December 3, 2010

Miketz

Two Sermons

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Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart*

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Enter the Heart”

Bereishit > Miketz > Small Jars

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ABSTRACT

In this week’s Torah reading, an amazing mosaic of events comes together. It is as if all through the past weeks’ readings – which have been detailing events in the life of Jacob and his sons, the Twelve Tribes of Israel – we have been collecting pieces of a puzzle that now come together to reveal a fascinating picture. And as an added bonus, all this relates to the miracle of Chanukah, and – like all of Torah – packs powerful lessons deeply relevant to our modern lives.

At the core of it is the secret of the small jar of oil which Jacob found on Mount Moriah as he was making his escape from Esau, and which the Maccabees found on Mount Moriah when they recaptured the Temple – a small jar containing enough oil for one day but which kept the menorah lit for eight days.

What does this teach us?

There are big miracles in small jars. We may like to score great achievements; we may prefer to gravitate to major events and dramatic experiences. But often we will encounter “small jars” – nothing very substantial or glamorous. We may meet a lonely soul in need of help. Perhaps a little child who can use a smile, or an older person lying in a hospital bed.

We may think that what we do is insignificant. But the “small jars” contain potent energy, pure oil, perhaps the most potent energy of them all. And it may well be that the entire purpose of our existence is to uncover these “small jars” that will come our way.

BIG MIRACLES IN SMALL JARS

1. An Amazing Mosaic

In this week's Torah reading, an amazing mosaic of events comes together. It is as if all through the past weeks' readings – which have been detailing events in the life of Jacob and his sons, the Twelve Tribes of Israel – we have been collecting pieces of a puzzle that now come together to reveal a fascinating picture. And as an added bonus, all this relates to the miracle of Chanukah, and – like all of Torah – packs powerful lessons deeply relevant to our modern lives. As the sages teach us:

Everything that transpired in the lives of the Patriarchs is a sign for their children ... All the events that took place in their lives come to teach us about the future ... [for] they were shown what would happen to their descendants.¹

Let us go back in time and re-examine some of these events, in order to reveal the picture in all its detail.

2. The Battle Between Jacob and Esau

As we might recall, the twins Jacob and Esau were already fighting in the womb. Their troubled mother sought an explanation for what she was experiencing only to learn that “two nations” were at war within her.²

These two nations – or archetypes – represented the physical/material and the intellectual/spiritual, which were destined to do battle throughout time. Jacob, the scholar, represented the spiritual. Esau, the warrior, represented the physical.

¹ Midrash *Tanchuma Lech Lecho* 9; Bereishis Rabba 40:6, also Nachamanides *Lech Lecho* 12:6. Bechayei *Vayeitzei* 28:12.

² Genesis 25:23.

When Jacob deceived their blind father and appropriated Esau's blessing, his brother vowed to kill him and Jacob had to flee for his life.

And this is where we find the first piece of our mosaic.³

3. A Small Jar of Oil

During his journey to his uncle's house, Jacob fell asleep on the stony ground of Mount Moriah – not knowing that this would be the site of the future Temple. There, he had his famous dream of a ladder reaching into heaven, with angels ascending and descending.

According to the Midrash, in the dream God showed Jacob the rise and fall of the empires to come and the persecutions and redemptions of his descendants.⁴ So certainly, Jacob saw the religious persecutions of the Jews by the Greeks, their war to preserve the ways of Torah, and the miraculous victory which we celebrate today as Chanukah.

When Jacob awoke, he exclaimed: "God is truly in this place but I did not know it ... This must be God's Temple. This must be the gate to heaven." He then erected the stone on which he had slept into a makeshift monument and poured oil on it.⁵

Where did Jacob get the oil? The Midrash explains:

When he picked up the stones from under his head ... he found one stone that had a small jar of oil in it, and he used it to pour on his monument. [Though now empty,] the jar refilled itself, and Jacob knew it was set aside for God. He thus said, "It's not right to leave this jar behind" [and he took it with him].⁶

And so the plot thickens.

³ Genesis 28:10-22.

⁴ Midrash Tanchuma on *Vayetztei*. *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer* ch. 35. See also Maimonides, *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 7:3.

⁵ Genesis 28:11-18.

⁶ *Yalkut Reuveni*.

By the way, speaking of jars have you heard the joke about the man who goes into a bar and orders a martini? When it's put in front of him, he carefully removes the olive with a spoon, places it into a small jar, and downs the martini. And then he orders another, and does the same thing. After a couple of hours, he is completely sloshed. He closes the small jar which is now full of olives and staggers out. "That's the strangest thing I've ever seen," remarks another drinker. The bartender just shrugs. "What's so strange about it? His wife sent him out for a jar of olives."

4. A Night Spent Alone

The next piece in the mosaic comes twenty years later into the story. Having married his cousins, Leah and Rachel, and fathered twelve children,⁷ Jacob returns to his homeland. He is full of trepidation as he braces for the encounter with his brother Esau, who had once sworn to kill him. Having taken measures to protect his vast household – his wives, children, servants, and livestock – Jacob spends the night by himself.

How is it that Jacob came to spend the night alone?

He had turned back to retrieve some "small jars" that he inadvertently left behind.⁸ One of these small jars contained the miraculous oil that he poured on the site of God's Temple, and so again he knows that "It's not right to leave this jar behind."

The Midrash informs us that God approved of his actions and said to Jacob, "In the merit of you endangering yourself for a small jar, I will repay your descendants with a small jar to the Hasmoneans [i.e. Maccabees – the heroes of Chanukah]."⁹

How did Jacob endanger himself?

⁷ Eleven sons and one daughter; the twelfth son, Benjamin, would be born upon Jacob's return to Israel.

⁸ *Chulin* 91a cited in Rashi.

⁹ *Tzeidah LaDerech*.

5. The Struggle with the Stranger

Because Jacob returned for the small jar of pure oil, he was accosted by a stranger in the middle of the night and forced to wrestle with him. This is how the Torah tells it:

Jacob remained alone. And a stranger wrestled with him until just before daybreak. When he [the stranger] saw that he could not defeat him, he struck the upper joint of Jacob's thigh and his hip became dislocated, as he [continued to] wrestle with the stranger.

"Let me leave!" said the stranger. "Dawn is breaking."

"I will not let you leave, unless you bless me," [said Jacob.]

"What is your name?"

"Jacob."

"Your name will no longer be called Jacob but Israel, for you have contended with God and man, and you have prevailed."¹⁰

...

[Afterwards, Jacob] was limping because of his thigh. Therefore, the Israelites do not eat the sciatica nerve on the hip joint to this very day. This is because [the stranger] struck Jacob's thigh on the sciatica nerve.

The stranger with whom Jacob wrestled was the angel/spirit of his brother Esau¹¹ who had once vowed to kill him. But Jacob had prevailed over him, and received a blessing in the end. (The next day when he met Esau in person, his brother hugged and kissed him, and offered to live in peace with him.)

Because Jacob took this huge risk for the sake of the small jar, some 1,400 years later his descendants would be repaid by God. Victorious over the Greeks (the descendants of Esau), they would enter the desecrated Tem-

¹⁰ Genesis 32:25-33.

¹¹ *Bereishit Rabba* 77:3, 78:3. *Tanchuma Vayishlach* 8. *Zohar Bereishit* 170a. Rashi. See Hosea 12:4-5

ple and find pure oil in exactly the same place where Jacob found oil the morning following his dream.

And though Jacob was wounded in the process – reflecting the fractured world in which we live – he prevailed over the angel, and ultimately was healed. So, too, through the discovery of the small jar of pure oil on Chanukah to kindle the menorah, the Jews conquered (and continue to conquer) the darkness and repair the original wound, the dislocated hip.

Yet another piece of the mosaic falls into place. But there is much more.

6. The Sale of Joseph

One of the consequences of Jacob's wound was the selling of Joseph into slavery by his own brothers.

How was it possible that such great men – the founders of the tribes of Israel, and forbearers of the entire Jewish nation – should stoop to petty jealousy? And then that this jealousy would drive them to want to sell their own brother into slavery?

Jacob's ten older sons saw Joseph as a formidable threat to their family and descendants in fulfilling their divine mission.

They knew that Judah was designated to be the leader, the progenitor of kings, most notably of the House of David from which the future Messiah would come. When the brothers heard that Joseph dreamt that he would be their leader, they saw this as mutiny against the divinely ordained leadership of Judah. They foresaw the split that the descendants of Joseph would create in the future when the Jewish kingdom would be split into two – the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel. To preempt this future tragedy they tried to remove Joseph from the family.

Why is Judah the appropriate leader and not Joseph? The archetype of Judah embodies humility (as the meaning of his name attests), and hu-

³ See Jeremiah 10:10. Jerusalem Talmud *Sanhedrin* 1:1. Midrash *Devorim Rabba* 1:10. *Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1 (9:1).

⁴ Exodus 25:8.

mility is the single most important ingredient in a true leader. He does not see himself as great, only as transparent channel of God's will, and he is completely dedicated to serving his people. His ego and personality do not stand between the nation and God. If there is no faith, humility and selflessness, then leadership and the power that it wields is just plain dangerous.

Hassidic thought applies this to our personal lives. In us, the archetype of Judah represents action and implementation, while the archetype of Joseph represents scholarship and knowledge. Joseph's great virtue, as his name implies, is the power of growth through wisdom. But for all its strengths, scholarship without humility, knowledge without action, reason without faith, leads to arrogance and ultimately can become destructive. An absolute commitment to truth is built upon the unwavering foundation of faith.

Speaking of faith, a story is told about a rabbi, a priest and an atheist who were all sentenced to death during the French Revolution. First the rabbi was marched up to the guillotine, and as he was made to kneel on the platform below the blade, he cried out: "I believe in the one and only true God, who shall save me if He so desires." The executioner then pulled the cord and the blade fell, but – lo and behold – it jammed inches from the rabbi's neck. "It's a miracle!" the mob shouted, and the executioner had to let the rabbi go.

Next in line was the priest. Having seen what happened with the rabbi, he too cried out: "I believe in the one and only true God, who shall save me if He so desires." And, just as before, the guillotine jammed. He, too, was let go.

And then it was the atheist's turn. "What final words have you to say?" asked the executioner. But the atheist was totally absorbed in studying the machinery of the guillotine. Finally, he broke out in a wide grin. "It's not a miracle at all, you've got a blockage in the gear assembly, right there!" The blockage was promptly repaired, and his execution went off flawlessly.

Poor atheist! He was so committed to his ambition to disprove the power of faith that he deprived himself of the "miracle" which would have saved his life.

Faith is an essential pillar of existence, and Jacob's children saw Joseph's dreams of grandeur as a threat to the divine plan.

However, they were mistaken, because faith alone can also be dangerous, and Joseph's leadership was a necessary prerequisite to Judah's kingship. In a perfect world Judah (in the person of the Messiah, the son of David from the line of Judah) is the ultimate leader. But, while we still live in an imperfect world, ignorance – particularly ignorant faith – can cause grave harm. The passion of absolute faith without knowledge, humility without the direction of wisdom, action without information, can become misguided and misdirected, to the point of harming others in the name of blind faith.

Thus, there is absolute need for Joseph's leadership to temper and balance the passion of Judah. Wisdom is needed to direct and guide actions; knowledge is necessary to channel the power of faith. Joseph's leadership (through Messiah, the son of Joseph) prepares and refines the world for the ultimate leadership of Judah, as explained by the Prophet Ezekiel.¹²

This dichotomy between knowledge (Joseph) and implementation (Judah), between scholarship and faith, is reflected in the action of the stranger (Esau's angel) in displacing Jacob's hip. The hip connects the higher part of the body with the lower part. When the stranger displaced Jacob's hip, he severed the connection between mind and action.

7. Lunch with Joseph

Now we come to the last piece of the mosaic, which is the essential piece that completes the picture.

Let us recall the maxim of the sages: "Everything that transpired in the lives of the Patriarchs is a sign for their children." Therefore, everything that happened to Jacob was in some way reflected in the life of his son Joseph.

One task Joseph had in Egypt was to begin the process of healing all that had gone before. As a good son of Jacob, Joseph recognized the

¹² Ezekiel 37:15-28.

wound that had ruptured his relationship with his brothers. Therefore, he prepared to repair it when his brothers arrived in Egypt seeking to buy grain during a time of famine. Of course, the brothers had no way of knowing that Joseph was no longer an Egyptian slave but – thanks to his dream interpretation powers – had risen to become the Pharaoh’s right hand man, the viceroy of the empire.

As part of the healing, Joseph prepared a special meal for his brothers. This is how the Torah relates what he did in this week’s reading:

When Joseph saw [they were all there] ... he said to the overseer of his household, “Bring these men to the palace. Slaughter an animal and prepare it. These men will be eating a meal with me.”¹³

Why does the Torah make such a fuss about a meal that Joseph served his brothers?

The entire encounter of Joseph and his brothers is all about reconnecting the two forces of Joseph and Judah. So, when Joseph saw his brothers return with the youngest Benjamin – who was his full brother by Rachel and not involved in the plot to sell him into slavery – he immediately ordered a meal to be prepared in a special way.

The Talmud explains that Joseph’s instruction specified that “the sciatic nerve (*gid hanashe*) be removed in front of [his brothers].”¹⁴ Joseph was making sure that his brothers could see how the meat was being prepared for them, and in this way he reminded them about the schism caused by the stranger (Esau’s angel), which was at the root of their estrangement.

When the brothers realized that something strange was happening, they became frightened. (Although they didn’t know that he was Joseph, they sensed that the meal he prepared was sending them a message from above.) They began to understand their grave error in selling Joseph, and how it was another terrible expression of the split between faith and reason.

¹³ Genesis 43:16.

¹⁴ Chulin 91a.

8. Kabbalistic Insights

Yet another manifestation of the wound of Jacob occurred when the Greeks defiled the Temple and most of the pure olive oil (though not all) used to kindle the menorah.

The great 16th century Kabbalist, the Ari, teaches that the miracle of Chanukah came to repair this wound.¹⁵ And another 16th century mystic, the Shaloh,¹⁶ explains that all this is alluded to in the phrase *kaf yereicho* (meaning “joint of his hip”),¹⁷ since the word *yereicho* (which can also mean “base”)¹⁸ is also used to describe a part of the menorah.

Furthermore, when the letters of the word *kaf* (meaning “joint”) are reversed, they spell *pach* (meaning “jar”). And when we relate this to Chanukah, we see that the small jar of pure oil helped repair the wound Jacob suffered to his hip joint.

In other words, the small jar of pure oil (*pach*), which represents the pure essence of the soul, transforms the dislocated hip (*kaf*). And kindling the menorah with pure oil, reconnects the base (*kaf*) of our beings – that is, our actions (represented by Judah) to our branches and higher faculties (represented by Joseph).

And as for the meal, Joseph prepared for his brothers, this is explained by the 13th century scholar Rabbi Mordechai Ben Hillel (also known as the Mordechai).¹⁹ He states that the meal Joseph shared with his brothers alludes to the Chanukah meal.²⁰

8. Lesson for Us

We thus see how seemingly unrelated events transpiring in different times and places – in the lives of Jacob and his sons, as well as in the

¹⁵ *Siddur HaArizal, Kol Yaakov*. See *Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar Chanukah* ch. 4.

¹⁶ *Drush Tzon Yosef*.

¹⁷ Genesis 32:26, 32:32-33.

¹⁸ Exodus 25:31.

¹⁹ Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel (1250-1298), also known as The Mordechai, is best known for his legal commentary on the Talmud.

²⁰ Cited in *Matah Moshe* sec. 996; also see *Shaar Yissachar, Chanukah*.

lives of Jews who suffered under Greek domination in the 2nd century BCE – all these events come together in a fascinating mosaic. And this mosaic – when it is revealed before our eyes – tells us how we can transcend our own wounds and move past them to reintegrate our lives.

Jacob's wrestling with Esau's angel through the night represents the battles with all forms of darkness in our own lives. Throughout the long night of exile – in all its shapes and forms, external and internal, physical and psychological – we have fought and continue to fight many battles against those that would try to extinguish our spiritual light.

Often, very often, we “remain alone” and have to fight a lonely fight. At times we may feel resigned and demoralized. We may ask: Is anybody watching over us? Does anybody care? Or are we trapped in our own existential solitude, left to struggle by our lonely selves? And if so, why should we bother? Why make the effort to retrieve the “small jars,” why search out a seemingly trivial detail?

Our forefather Jacob's battle teaches us that life's challenges are often experienced “alone.” But that is precisely the ultimate purpose of our lives – to redeem the pure oil of the soul that is concealed in the “small jars.”

We may like to score great achievements; we may prefer to gravitate to major events and dramatic experiences. But often we will encounter “small jars” – nothing very substantial or glamorous. We may never suspect what potent energy, what great miracle hides in each small jar. For example, we may meet a lonely soul in need of help, or perhaps a little child who can use a smile, or an older person lying in a hospital bed, or a parched hiker in need of a drink...

And speaking of parched hikers ... a famous story is told about Dr. Howard Kelly, the distinguished physician who was a founder of Johns Hopkins Hospital. While hiking through Northern Pennsylvania one spring, Dr. Kelly became very thirsty and stopped at a farmhouse to ask for a drink. A little girl answered the door and brought him a glass of fresh milk. After a short friendly visit, he went on his way. Some years later, the same little girl came to him for an operation. He was by then a famous surgeon and medical pioneer in the field of gynecology. Not only

did he save her life, but before she left the hospital, she received his bill across the face of which he had written, "Paid in full by one glass of milk."²¹

There is no small jar that should be left behind. It may well be that the entire purpose of our existence is to uncover this very one and release its potent energy.

By returning for the small jar of undiminished oil, Jacob battled the angel all night long and prevailed. He thus imbued us with the power to fight and win our battles, until we reveal the ultimate light of personal and global redemption.

So, next time a "small jar" situation comes your way that may not seem very significant, remember: The jar contains powerful fuel. Go redeem it. "It's not right to leave this jar behind."

²¹ *Dr. Kelly of Hopkins* by Audrey W. Davis, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959



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ABSTRACT

As much as we try to be positive, at times it seems so difficult to bring light into our dark world, to find peace amidst the chaos. Yet we all have that capacity. Within us all lies an eternal spring of hope - a “pilot flame” that burns continuously. But on the other end of things, we are also consumed by our material concerns and survival - let’s call that the “wick.”

The physical wick and the spiritual flame constantly compete for our attention. That struggle is the story of our lives - to be the wick or to be the flame? The fascinating thing is that both are necessary, as indeed no flame can burn without the wick which provides its fuel. Some of us may be more wick-oriented and others flame-oriented, but each of us contains both and requires both to accomplish our mission in this world.

This sermon discusses powerful lessons from Chanukah’s flames, explaining how to take these lessons and put them to relevant use in our lives - in the business world, in our closest relationships, in educating our children - how to ignite our wick, reveal our unique light and illuminate our surroundings, even the darkest crevices.

world.

TO BE THE WICK OR THE FLAME? LIFE TRANSFORMING CHANUKAH LESSONS

1. Happy Chanukah

Happy Chanukah everybody! Stuffed with latkes? Looking forward to being stuffed with latkes? To gathering around the menorah? Singing those old favorites like *Oy to the World?* Or, *Schlepping through a Winter Wonderland?*

And did you all receive a lot of Chanukah cards this year?

I find that with e-mail hardly anybody sends Chanukah cards anymore. But about a week ago I was standing in line at the Post Office behind an elderly woman, and I heard her request fifty stamps for her Chanukah cards. The postal clerk asked her, "What denomination?" Upon hearing the question, she gasped, "Has it come to this? Well, okay then. Give me 6 Orthodox, 12 Conservative, and 32 Reform."

Fortunately, though the different denominations have different ways of doing things, we all celebrate Chanukah pretty much the same way.

2. The Relevance of Chanukah

On Chanukah we light an eight-branch menorah for eight consecutive nights. And most of us love this holiday.

We all know the miraculous Chanukah story ... that some 2,150 years ago, the Greeks had unleashed the first campaign of religious persecution in recorded history and, in reaction, the Jews went to war. Against all odds, they won. When the victorious Jews recaptured the desecrated Temple in Jerusalem, they set up a make-shift menorah, but only one cruse of pure oil – enough to keep the menorah lit for one day – could be found. Miraculously, that oil stayed lit for eight days until more pure oil could be produced and delivered. And this is the miracle we celebrate to this day.

All that is very nice. We bask in the shining candles, recalling warm childhood memories. And so Chanukah is a pleasant and nostalgic experience for most of us. But truthfully, what way does it matter today? Just how relevant is Chanukah to our modern lives?

To find the relevance, said one Hassidic Master, “You have to listen to the flames.

There is a message in these flames, and they are whispering to us. What are they telling us?

They are telling us that, with God on our side, though we are few and weak, we can be victorious over the many and the strong. They are telling us that no matter how potent are the forces of evil and injustice, goodness, kindness and righteousness can triumph. And they are telling us that no matter how dense the darkness, it can always be transformed into light.

3. Light and Modern Physics

It is the relevance of light that I want to talk about today.

In modern physics, light represents a unique force. Not only is it the fastest entity – is there anything faster than the speed of light? – but it is also paradoxically both a wave and a particle. As such, light is endlessly fascinating to science.

Long before the advent of science, light was endlessly fascinating to Jews. In the Temple in Jerusalem, the menorah was so positioned that its light would shine out through specially constructed funnel-shaped windows. And, far and wide, everybody could see it shining bright.

Besides the menorah in the Temple, Jews always kindled lights at home – whether at the start of Shabbat or holiday, or at its end, or in memory of a deceased love one. So kindling flames was always an important Jewish ritual steeped in deep significance.

¹ Midrash *Bereishit Rabba* 1:2. *Zohar* I, 134a.

² Midrash *Tanchuma*, *Pekudei* 3.

And this is because in Judaism the flame is symbolic of the human soul.¹ And if the flame represents the soul, then the wick represents the body. Because it takes both these elements – the flame and the wick – to create light. The wick alone is an inanimate object, but the flame which flickers with life cannot exist without the wick feeding it fuel.

4. Two Archetypes

So the wick and the flame are metaphors for the two archetypes within us:

- The wick is essentially our physical aspect, our body, our materialistic pursuits which engage us in this world.
- The flame is our spiritual aspect, our soul, always reaching upwards in defiance of gravity.

Without the wick, the flame would fly into the night and disappear. When you take away the wick, the flame expires ... just as when you take away the body, the soul expires. The flame needs the wick, not only to nourish it, but to keep it attached to this earth, to keep it grounded.

And, of course, this applies to any kind of energy. To use it for our benefit, we have to contain it, ground it. Otherwise, it dissipates or is destructive. Electricity, for example, needs a container – a light-bulb, an appliance – to be useful. Without a ground, electricity is at best useless and at worst a killer.

5. Balance of Wick and Flame

In a perfect world, there is a balance between the wick and the flame. In balance, the wick does its job, and the flame gives off light. Out of balance, either the wick dominates – and then we are like dead matter, like static fuel that is yet to be ignited, because our soul is trapped and not actualizing its potential. Or, the opposite can happen. The flame dominates and a spiritual fire burns out of control, destroying rather

¹ “The soul of a human being is a candle to God.” Proverbs 20:27.

than illuminating. It is only when the two are in balance that there can be a light that illuminates and warms the world.

These two forces within us – the physical and the spiritual – are constantly involved in a tug of war. And it is up to us to keep them in the proper balance.

Unfortunately, most of us spend more time paying attention to the demands of our physical side, which is chiefly concerned with survival. Survival includes eating, sleeping, working and so forth – all of our existential needs which are so consuming and which occupy most of our time. They represent the wick of our lives.

But the other side – the flame side – will not be denied. This is the yearning for meaning, the yearning for a deeper understanding, the yearning for love, the yearning for transcendence. If stifled inside the body, this side is going to make itself felt, in a desperate attempt at finding expression.

If you become entangled in the rat race, and your transcendent side is ignored and suppressed, you will feel the side-effects. You are bound to feel a tremendous frustration at not being able to please everybody who is insisting that you satisfy their needs and demands – your boss, your spouse, your family. You will feel consumed by the materialistic world, while a part of you feels starved.

But if you go too far in the other direction, you will experience other problems.

If you become so focused on transcendence that you ignore your basic needs, you can lose grounding in a very real way. Certainly hermits and ascetics who eschew the world to live alone on the mountain top lose touch with this world and sometimes with sanity.

The Torah warns against this in the story of the spies/scouts who were sent to reconnaissance the Promised Land in order to assess the Israelites' readiness to enter in. The scouts were spiritual, flame-driven people. And there they saw so many wick-driven people, they decided this was not the place for them. They said they'd rather stay in the

pristine wilderness, in an oasis of spirituality.² But God condemned their attitude.

Why? Because that is not the purpose of existence. The purpose of existence is to enter into the world of the wick and turn it into a flame. Not to escape into the world of the spirit.

6. We Need Each Other

Now comes Chanukah to teach us just how much the wick needs the flame and vice versa. How much we need each other. Because some of us are more wick than flame, and some of us are more flame than wick. But we can help each other to achieve balance.

For example, educators and mentors are flame-oriented, they are the lamp-lighters, while business people are wick-oriented – they are the ones who are turning wicks into cash and helping support the lamp-lighters. Of course, we all embody some of this and some of that, but I am talking about which side dominates.

So, if we find that we are constantly tipping to one side or the other, and having a hard time maintaining a balance, we can find partnerships that help us achieve it. For example, an artist – consumed by the flame of creativity – needs a businessman to ground him and get his work out to those who will be inspired by it. And the businessman, if his life is only about selling wicks, needs to divert some of his God-given talents toward more spiritual pursuits, such as fundraising for charity, for example.

Exactly how it is meant to work, we see from the example of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, especially from the partnership of the tribes of Issachar and Zebulon.

The members of the tribe of Issachar were known to be primarily scholars, while those of Zebulon were primarily sea-faring merchants.³ So they made a partnership. And each understood their blessings – Issachar

² Numbers 13:27-31.

³ Genesis 49:13-14 and Deuteronomy 33:18-19.

understood they were more flame-oriented and that they needed the wick for balance. And Zebulun understood that they were more wick-oriented and that they needed the flame. So Zebulun agreed to support the scholars of Issachar and the scholars of Issachar agreed to trade some of their accrued merit in exchange.⁴ Of course, both studied and worked, but each allowed their God-given proclivities to dominate while recognizing that they needed balance – hence their partnership.

7. Givers and Takers

In our world, we see tremendous imbalance and very little partnership. The wick people tend to hoard and hold onto the material. And the flame people tend to want to live insulated from the material world, being selfishly spiritual. But it is only when they are balanced that either type can truly give to others.

Which brings us to the question: Are you a giver or are you a taker? Most people are actually some of both, but the question is what are you more of?

The theory of social evolution, also known as social Darwinism, sees the driving force of humanity as survival, because only the strongest/fittest ultimately survive. This theory considers any seemingly altruistic act as inherently selfish. It posits that some people realize that to survive they need to be nice to others and share with them, therefore – for that selfish reason – they are inclined to engage in unselfish acts.

The Torah couldn't disagree more. While the Torah acknowledges that the body is driven by survival, it unequivocally denies that that's all there is to a human being. The Torah maintains that the human being – at the core – is divine, having been created in the divine image.⁵ Therefore, the human being is fundamentally good, altruistic, a giver.

Yes, the giving soul is trapped in a taker's body, but that is the challenge of life. We are constantly trying to achieve the right balance, because we cannot be satisfied or fulfilled if we are too skewed.

⁴ *Midrash Rabba Bereishit* 99:9, cited in Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:18. See also *Ramah Yoreh De'ah* 246:1, and in the commentaries there.

⁵ Genesis 1:26-27.

On Chanukah, as we watch the wick and the flame, we see that the body and the spirit can join forces, become balanced and give off a beautiful light that not only illuminates, but warms. The lights of Chanukah illustrate this perfect balance in a most beautiful way.

Let us now examine how we can apply this lesson of Chanukah and make it relevant in our lives – whether in our closest relationships, in the business world, or in educating our children. How we can ignite our wick, reveal our unique light and illuminate our surroundings, even the darkest crevices.

8. Wick and Flame in Relationships

First, let's talk about relationships.

There is a technique in marital therapy where partners at odds with each other are asked to list their needs and examine how the other partner is meeting those needs. Then they are asked to compare their lists and see how far off they are in understanding each other.

While it is helpful to see what the other thinks he or she is missing, there is a basic flaw to this approach – the assumption that a relationship is primarily about need-fulfillment.

A relationship is about giving. Not about taking.

As Katherine Hepburn so famously said: "Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get – only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything."

The essence of any relationship is giving. Because the essence of the soul is to be a giver. If you are revealing your soul – if your flame is giving off warmth – then you are naturally giving. And you are giving to many people, not just your spouse and family, though first and foremost to them.

Now, if you are revealing your soul and you are giving, then your loved ones' needs are automatically fulfilled.

A life driven by needs is wick-driven. A life driven by giving is flame-driven.

9. Wick and Flame in Business

What about business?

Those who are blessed to understand the world of the wicks, the world of commerce, have unique skills and knowledge to deliver. They are more skilled at the existential, whereas the flame people are more skilled at the transcendental.

It is well known that business people resist investing in creative projects – such as music, art, movies, books – and when they do, they insist on various safeguards in order to maintain control, because they know that artists rarely respect the bottom line.

The artists are driven by and satisfied with expressing their art; that's their passion. No matter what it takes; no matter what it costs. But their ambition generally ends there. Yes, they want their work sold but most of their energy has been expended in the creation of the art with little left for its distribution. The business people must sell that artwork, must package it, must make it accessible and marketable, but the artists rarely appreciate and want to be involved with any of that.

So who is selfish? The artists who only care about expressing themselves or the business people who are trying to sell that art, to share it with others?

Yes, the business people want to make money, but in the process they are driven to getting the art before a larger audience.

In Kabbalah, there is a concept that the source of the container is higher than the source of the light. We assume that the flame is the more powerful force while the wick is secondary. But the Kabbalah says it's the other way around.

This suggests that the business people – who are packaging the light (so to speak) and distributing it to the widest possible audience – are doing something more profound than the artists who are transmitting the energy and giving off the light.

10. Wick and Flame in Education

And now we come to education – the process of imparting knowledge, ideas and values.

But is that all there is to education? To impart information? Or is it to ignite and illuminate?

I would suggest that true education is about illuminating and empowering the students' minds so that they can go on to learn on their own without teachers, listening to the voice of their own soul.

When you turn on the light in a dark room what happens? The room does not essentially change, but the light illuminates what was always there. So it is with students and teachers. By illuminating the students' minds, true educators bring awareness to their students, showing them the tools they already possess and only need to learn how to use.

This is what turning the wick into a flame is all about. It is taking raw matter and converting it into something that will eventually produce light. So true education is meant to teach the students to think, to gather information on their own, to prioritize, analyze and synthesize. And then to go forward and illuminate their corner of the world.

11. To Be a Lamplighter

There is a wonderful lesson in the instructions God issued to Aaron, the High Priest, when He commanded him to light the menorah in the Sanctuary.⁶ Aaron had to light each flame and then wait. He had to make sure it caught and could rise on its own. Only then could Aaron walk away and light the next flame.

Why was this so critical? Because we are not just talking about igniting flames, but about igniting lives, about igniting souls.

And, of course, that is the function of educators – to be lamplighters.

⁶ Rashi on Numbers 8:1-3.

If the educators do their part in igniting the minds of their students, they have empowered them. And then, even when the educators are not present, the students have the tools to forge on with life.

This metaphor of lighting the menorah carefully – waiting patiently as each small flame hesitates, catches, hovers and finally rises upwards – applies to all of us.

Because we are not just talking about lighting up a room – in which case we would not care how you flip the switch – we are talking about illuminating this world, and bringing light and warmth to others.

We are all lamplighters. By giving off our own light, we are helping to ignite the dormant light in others.

This is what we learn from the great men and women of the Torah – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Moses and Miriam. They were all lamplighters. They lived by the principle that the material universe has enormous potential for light and warmth.

Now if you live by this principle, you automatically convey it to others and ignite their minds. And though you pass the light from yourself to others, your own flame is never diminished. If you give away anything physical, you will have less of it, but your flame can light a thousand other flames and never be diminished in the least. Quite the contrary: every new flame lit adds power to the original flame.

You have the potential to ignite something in every person that you meet. And if you ignite another flame, you create a ripple effect – each flame igniting another flame and another flame. And when many flames come together, they join as one in generating tremendous light and warmth in the world.

As you continue to light the remaining lights of Chanukah, think about these ideas – watch the flames and listen to the story they tell. They have so much to teach you, your families and all of us. Amen.

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