

**Parshat B'haalotcha**

**Light**

**9 June 2012**

**One of the most familiar and enduring symbols of Judaism is the Menorah. At the outset of our Parasha of this week, Aaron, the high Priest, is instructed to light the seven wicks of the Menorah. The flame thus created becomes a symbol of God's presence in the Mishkan – the Tabernacle – the earliest form of “sacred space” that we have in Judaism.**

**Later, in the First and Second Temples, the Menorah also assumed a prominent role. Fast forward to the contemporary Synagogue – ours included – and once again, the Menorah – with its aura of light – is a powerful aspect of the design.**

**Not so surprisingly, when the founders of the State of Israel wanted a fitting emblem for their enterprise, they selected the Menorah. Directly in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem, the panels of a 15-foot high Menorah, created by the sculptor Benno Elkan, provide a sweeping narrative of Jewish history.**

**The purpose of a Menorah is to project light – and light is interwoven into so many of our most important Jewish experiences.**

**We inaugurate Shabbat by kindling candles – pushing back the stresses of the week – and bringing a tone of hope, joy and peace to our homes and our hearts.**

**As Shabbat ebbs, the Havdalah candle becomes the bridge between the spirit of Shabbat and the inevitable challenges of the week ahead.**

**When the hours of the night are the very longest of the entire year, what do we do? We dispel the gloom with our Hanukkiyah – expressing our gratitude for God’s miracles and the destiny which is ours as Jews.**

**When circumstances bruise us and those whom we cherish die, we return home from the cemetery and our first act is to light a candle:**

**“Ner Adonai nishmat adam – the human soul is the lamp of the Lord.”**

**(Proverbs 20:27)**

**At a Yahrzeit, when we say Yizkor, . . . over and over again, the candle reminds us that memory transcends time – and that our values and our choices can be the most telling tribute to those whose influences remain with us.**

**The Torah itself is called a light – “Torah orah” – and we as its representatives are expected to be “or la’goyim” – literally a “light to the nations” – exemplars of civility and compassion.**

**Clearly, in Judaism, light is a source not only of illumination but of learning, insight and uplift.**

**The story is told about some Hasidim, who approached their Rabbi – troubled about the spiritual darkness besieging the world. “How can we drive it away?” they asked.**

**The Rabbi advised them that they should start by sweeping the darkness from their basements. But their brooms proved useless . . . the darkness was still there . . .**

**The Rabbi then suggested that they shout at the darkness. But no matter how much they screamed, the darkness remained.**

**Finally, the Rabbi told them to each light a small candle . . . and lo and behold, when they entered the basement, candles in hand, the darkness suddenly retreated.**

**Each of us is a candle-lighter. At its core, that is our raison d'être as Jews.**

**How meaningful it is that our Parasha reminds us of the kindling of the Menorah – for every day, ours is the responsibility of bringing a greater measure of light to ourselves, to our families, to our Synagogue, to our community, to the Jewish people and to our world.**