

Speak to Aaron and say to him: When you ignite the lamps, the seven lamps should shine facing the [center of the] menorah. --- Numb. 8:2

The seven lamps should shine. [That is] the six [lamps] that were on the six branches. The wicks of the three in the east would incline towards the middle and similarly the three on the west, the tips of the wicks facing the middle. And why? So that they would not say that He needs its light. --- Rashi on the verse

Why are the wicks to be lit on either side of the menorah? This teaches us that the light of those on the right and the light of those on the left are focused and directed on the center lamp, which is the essence of the menorah. --- Ovadiah Sforno, 16th c. Italy

This is as the verse stated: *Even darkness is not dark to You, the night shines like the day and the darkness like light* (Ps. 139:12) and you are telling us to light, as it says, *when you ignite the lamps!*? What is this analogous to? To a king who had a close friend. The king said to him, “Know that I will be eating with you today, go and prepare for me.” The friend went and prepared for him an ordinary chair and table. When the king came, his servants came with him, surrounding him with lamps of gold. When the friend saw all of this extravagance, he was embarrassed and hid what he had prepared [for the king] which was all just ordinary. The king said to him, “What is this?! I said that I was eating with you today, why didn’t you prepare anything for me?!” His friend replied, “My lord, the king. When I saw all of this extravagance, I was embarrassed and I hid everything that I had prepared for you, since they were all ordinary furnishings.” The king said to him, “By your life! I will discard any item that I brought with me and out of love for you, will only use what is yours.” So too the Holy Blessed One is entirely light, as it says, *light is with Him* (Dan. 2:22) and He says to Israel, “set up a lamp and lights.” --- **Midrash Tanchuma** (Warsaw) on Numb. 8:6

So you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: God will bless and keep you. God will shine His face towards you and show you favor. God will lift His face to you and give you peace. And they will place My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. --- Numb. 6:23-27

*God will shine His face towards you: He will give you brightened eyes. Rabbi Natan says: This is the light of the **Shekhinah**, as it says, *arise and shine for your light has come and the glory of God* (i.e. the **Shekhinah**) *has shone upon you* (Isa. 60:1). --- **Sifrei Bamidbar**, #41*

When the Holy Blessed One said to Aaron and his sons: *So you shall bless the Israelites*, Israel said to the Holy Blessed One: Master of the universe, You are telling the priests that they should bless us?! We do not need their blessing, what we need is to be blessed by Your mouth. As it is written, *Look out from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel* (Deut. 26:15). The Holy Blessed One said to them: Even though I told the priests that they should bless you, I am standing with them and am blessing you. Therefore the priests spread out their hands as if to say, “the Holy Blessed One is standing behind us.” Therefore it says [that God] (represented by the male lover in Song of Songs) is *gazing through the window* - between the shoulders of the priests - *peeking through the lattice* - between the priests’ fingers (Song of Songs 2:9). *My beloved responded and said to me* (2:10): *and I will bless them*. --- **Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah** 11:2

It says in the book of **Heikhalot**, “You are welcome by God, those [who dwell in] heaven and who ride on the chariot, what should you say to My children? What am I doing at the time that they sanctify and say, *Holy Holy Holy* (Isa. 6:3)?” (And they taught them that their eyes should be raised to heaven, to the house of prayer and that they raise themselves up, i.e., as in **Kedushah**) That I don’t have any pleasure in the world greater than that time when their eyes are raised to Me and My eyes [look] into their eyes. At that time I grab on to My throne which has the likeness of Jacob and I hug and kiss it, and I am reminded of their merit and I hasten their redemption.” --- **Mishnah Berurah**, **Orach Chayyim** 125:5

The menorah is **miksha zahav**, a hammered work of gold. The menorah’s purity and wholeness is found only when the raw materials are hammered and worked into a state of holiness. It can only reach its necessary level of holiness through the labor of human hands on its surface, a reminder of the human effort required in a life of committed spiritual practice. --- Rabbi Isaac Arama, **Akeidat Yitzchak**, 15th c.

The Sages wrote that the menorah represents wisdom and enlightenment (**Baba Batra** 25b). All wisdom has a common source, but there exist different approaches to wisdom. Every individual pursues those spheres of knowledge to which he is naturally drawn.

The Midrash (**Bamidbar Rabbah** 15:7) compares the seven lamps of the menorah to the seven planets in the solar system, illuminating the nighttime sky. What is the meaning of this symbolism?

Many of the ancients understood that the planets and constellations influence our nature and personality traits. A person under the influence of Mars, for example, will have different traits than one under the influence of Jupiter (see **Shabbat** 165a). In other words, God created each of us with a unique character in order that we should perfect ourselves in the particular path that suits us. In this way, all of creation is completed; through the aggregation of all individual perfections, the universe attains overall perfection. Just as each planet symbolizes a distinct character trait, each branch of the Menorah is a metaphor for a specific category of intellectual pursuits. God prepared a path for each individual to attain wisdom according to his own character and interests.

However, we should be careful not to follow our natural intellectual inclinations exclusively. The Torah stresses that *when you light the lamps* -- when we work towards that individual enlightenment that suits our particular character -- we should take care that this wisdom will *shine towards the center of the menorah*. What is the center of the menorah? This is the wisdom of the Torah itself. We need to draw specifically from the light of Torah, whose source is the underlying unity of all wisdom.

In truth, the seven branches of the menorah are not truly distinct, separate paths. All seven receive light from the unified wisdom with which God enlightens His world. For this reason, the menorah was fashioned from a single piece of gold, **miksha zahav**. The special manner in which the menorah was formed reveals the underlying unity of all forms of wisdom. --- Rav Kook, 20th c. Israel

The three branches of the menorah on one side represent scientific disciplines, and the other three branches represent academic disciplines, and the center stalk represents the light of the Torah. --- Isaac Luria, 16th c. Tzefat