



The Western Candle

Parshas Behaaloschah

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

It was during the summer of 1971, and I spent the Shabbos on Mount Meron at the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai with my Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai of Lelov, who stayed at the site on parshas Behaaloschah every year.

The Shabbos was uplifting, and at the end of the day we all approached the Rebbe to bid him farewell. These were lofty moments during which the Rebbe shared a personal word with each person.

When it was my turn, I came to shake the Rebbe's hand, but instead he asked me to stay. Following his request, I stayed another night.

After Shacharis, I came again to bid him farewell. He again asked me to stay, and I did, although I was confused.

I went to pray again at the gravesite. I had been elected Migdal HaEmek's chief rabbi a year ago and needed G-d's blessing in succeeding in my endeavors.

I approached the Rebbe again after Mincha, and this time he said I could go. He made no request, nor did we talk any further.

Why did he want me to stay? I did not understand.

When I arrived home and went through the door the walls shook suddenly from terrible explosions, which were followed by horrible screams for help. Something had happened very close by.

I went out into the street to find an excited crowd and many ambulances. It soon became apparent that six family members were killed by a hand grenade detonated by another family member during a Bar Mitzvah celebration.

In our weekly parsha we read: "When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the menorah."

The Holy books ask – the seventh candle was set in the middle, and so it should say that six lamps shall cast their light toward the face of the menorah.

Midrash Tanchuma teaches that the three eastern ones had their wicks-facing towards the center one, and likewise, the three western ones were facing toward the center one. Why were the wicks facing inwards, thus giving off little light? "So that people should not say that G-d needs the light."

The lamps serve as testimony of G-d's presence among the Israelite nation.

Another Midrash teaches that the lamps symbolizes the souls of the Jews, and therefore, the Menorah symbolizes the hierarchy in Israel.



The six candles faced the middle one, which was lit at all times, symbolizing G-d's presence in the world and giving its light to the other candles.

Today, when we do not have the Temple and do not have a Menorah, it is this act of enlightening and inspiring that the righteous cause through their good deeds. And so, they are called by the Sages the "Western Candle," the same candle that never extinguished, and, as the ancients wrote, it was also put away while burning, because the righteous affect all

their surroundings and illuminate their way in life.

The country was stricken with sorrow. The Grenade Night had become a defining event in the history of the State of Israel, how a family conflict could cause such a loss. This story also caused Migdal HaEmek to "appear on the Israeli map," and serving as the town rabbi, I had a heavy task ahead of me, the funeral and burial arrangements and to serve as a religious and spiritual support for the broken family.

I will never forget the bar mitzvah boy's frightened look, who, with a momentary instinct, understood what was happening, and fled to the balcony, from where he slid down to the street and survived. He too needed encouragement and strengthening, as he had lost his dearest loved ones.

Late at night, after the evacuation of the victims and dozens of wounded, I returned to my home and started to process the magnitude of the horror, and then it hit me. On the refrigerator door, one invitation was hanging: the Rebbetzin and I were supposed to attend the neighbor's grandson's bar mitzvah event.

If I had come home earlier, I probably would have attended the Bar Mitzvah, and who knows what could have happened to us.

Without the far-seeing vision of the Rebbe who delayed me for no apparent reason, who knows what would have happened. It was only through his holy spirit that our souls were saved, our candle in our hand.