

The Haftorah read on Shabbat Chanukah is the same as the one read for Parshat Bhalotcha. The first common idea is the lighting of the Menorah. Parshat Bhalotcha commands Aaron and his children to light the Menorah on a daily basis. The kindling of the Menorah was a central aspect of the daily service in the Mishkan and in the Beit HaMikdash. As Rashi notes, Aaron was distressed that neither he nor his tribe, Shevet Levi, were included in the dedication of the Mishkan that was done through the bringing of a sacrifice per tribe. He was informed that his role, and by extension his family and tribe's, would be special for he was responsible to light the candles daily. Even after he passed on, he was guaranteed that his children and their descendants would continue this important function and they could not be replaced or substituted for. His descendants, the Hamonean, fulfilled that responsibility many generations later after defeating the Assyrians.

It is interesting to note that Parshat Bhalotcha and Chanukah have something else in common. Although the Chanukat HaMishkan, the dedication of the Tabernacle, and the per-tribe dedication sacrifices were brought beginning with the first of the month of Nissan, the original date for the dedication was supposed to have been the twenty fifth of the month of Kislev, when Chanukah begins. Had the Jews not sinned with the golden calf and had Moshe not spent an additional eighty days pleading for the survival of the Jews and a new set of Luchot, the work to build the Tabernacle would have commenced immediately on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, the day Moshe originally descended Mount Sinai, and the culmination would have been at the end of Kislev. Because of the terrible sin of the golden calf, the building of the Mishkan and the dedication process were delayed till the end of Adar and the beginning of Nissan. Both events were connected with a dedication process where the Kohen Gadol and his family played a central role.

Ramban in Parashat Bhalotcha (Bamidbar 8:2) notes there is a hidden meaning to the command to Aharon to light the candles that relates to Chanukah. With this command, Gd foreshadowed the events of Chanukah that would transpire

hundreds of years later. The important role of the priests in the Chanukah story and victory were put in place. After all, it was the Priests who led the military victory and led the rededication of the Beit HaMikdash after their victory over the Assyrians and the removal of the idols that defiled the holy Temple. Chanukah, meaning dedication, was spearheaded and performed by Aharon's descendants. They carried on the tradition of Aharon, and in this case they were at the forefront and conclusion of the dedication process.

Chanukah was not the only time that the children of Aaron were called upon to re-dedicate the Temple and re-assert the role of the Kohanim. In the midst of the first Galut, exile, the prophet Zechariah tells about the encounter of Yehoshua Kohen Gadol with an angel who commanded him to remove his dirty clothes and be re-clothed with proper priestly garments. Yehoshua is given the mission to keep the Mitzvot and administer the Temple appropriately, to teach and judge the children of Israel properly. After this scene, Zechariah is told to prophesy about the Menorah and its shape and constitution. What is the connection between these 2 visions?

After the destruction of the first Temple and the exile of the children of Israel to Babylonia, many Jews assimilated. Few families were immune from the plague of assimilation and intermarriage, it even reached the house of Yehoshua Kohen Gadol, whose children had intermarried. The angel told him that in order to properly dedicate the Temple and carry out his mission as Kohen Gadol he had to make changes in his own family. He had to remove the artifacts that defiled him and his family before he could assume his role. His sons had to divorce their non-Jewish spouses. Only after complying would he be able to assume his role as Kohen Gadol and leader.

However the symbol of the Kohen Gadol and the priestly family was their service in the Temple and their responsibility to light the Menorah daily. Where would they get a Menorah for the second Temple? The angel showed Zechariah a

beautiful golden Menorah and asked Zechariah if he understood the image he was shown. What was so odd about the image he was shown that would have made it difficult to interpret? Apparently, the people at that time lived in such abject poverty that a golden Menorah was so far beyond their means and imagination. The sight of the beautiful Menorah was clear but incongruous with the economic standards of the people. The angel informed him that even though times were difficult, ultimately they would improve and the people would indeed be able to afford and build a beautiful Menorah that would be lit daily by the Kohen Gadol.

Parshat Bhalotcha and the Haftorah for Parshat Bhalotcha share the theme and prophecy of the important role to be played by Aaron's descendants, both at the time of the dedication of the second Temple as well as in the events of Chanukah and the subsequent re-dedication after defeating and expelling the Assyrians.

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