

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Tetzaveh

What is the Inner Connection Between the Menorah and the Land of Israel?

How Can We Connect with Eternal Light?

From the earliest moments of my spiritual journey, I have felt a deep, intrinsic connection to the concept of light. Light is not merely an external phenomenon but an inner force that guides, uplifts, and transforms. I have always been drawn to the idea that light represents Divine wisdom, clarity, and the ability to illuminate even the darkest circumstances. The Torah is replete with light imagery – linking it to the Torah as the source of creation, the essence of wisdom, and the very presence of the Divine in the world. The very first word my youngest granddaughter said when she was barely one was אור/Ohr – “light”! She was standing on a stool, pointing to the Shabbat candles I had just ignited. Since then, I have been praying for her to remain deeply connected with light. What does it mean to be connected with light? First and foremost, it is about walking the Torah path, as it states, כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר, – “For a mitzvah is a candle, and the Torah is light” (*Mishlei* 6:23). Walking in Torah is the light of my life. Some people can’t understand why I labor so hard to produce yet another Torah book – I certainly don’t do it for the money. I am addicted to expressing the light of Torah, for the more Torah we share, the more Torah we receive – like nursing a baby or drawing water from a wellspring. This is why I love to teach Torah, living for those moments of epiphany when Hashem grants me a *chiddush* – a new Torah insight. נֵר הַשֵּׁם נִשְׁמַת אָדָם – “The candle of Hashem is the soul of a person” (*Mishlei* 20:27). When we live with Torah, we awaken our Divine soul. We become less obsessed with fleeting pleasures – gold and diamonds, fancy clothes, extravagant travels, and gourmet food and wine. We evolve from being like a child who rushes to gather as many sweets as possible in a candy store to a spiritually mature person who learns to pursue the eternal rather than the ephemeral. And yes, light is all about eternity. Darkness will ultimately give way to eternal light, as expressed in the Temple Menorah, whose middle candle never extinguishes (*Babylonian Talmud, Menachot* 86b). We can tap into this divine light, especially in the Land of Israel – the Land of Light – where the Shechinah dwells and Divine wisdom shines most brightly. The more we connect with Torah in the Holy Land, the more we internalize and reflect this everlasting light, aligning ourselves with the ultimate destiny of creation – when “Hashem will be an everlasting light” (*Yesha’yahu* 60:19).

How Does the Land of Israel Reflect the Light of the Menorah?

Parashat Tetzaveh does not explicitly mention the land, yet concealed within its intricate descriptions lies a deep connection to the Land of Israel. Its themes of spiritual leadership, Divine service, and sanctity are inextricably tied to Eretz Yisrael – the ultimate place where these ideals find full expression. Our *parasha* opens with the mitzvah to bring pure olive oil for the *Ner Tamid*, the eternal flame of the Menorah.

סֵפֶר שְׁמוֹת פָּרַק כֹּז פֶּסוּק כ וְאֵתָה תִצְיֶהָ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זַיִת זָךְ כְּתִיב לְמֵאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד:
 “You shall command the children of Israel, and they shall take to you pure olive oil, crushed for lighting, to kindle the perpetual candle (*Shemot* 27:20).

Olive oil is one of the seven species of Eretz Yisrael, symbolizing the land’s spiritual and material richness. It embodies the purity of Israel and the light that the land provides to the Jewish people and the world. The eternal flame of the Menorah is ultimately kindled in the Holy Temple in the heart of the Land of Israel. Furthermore, the Menorah’s light represents Divine wisdom and the mission of Israel to be a light unto the nations – a mission that can only be fully realized within the Land of Israel:

“They shall bring you pure olive oil...” (*Shemot* 27:20). Just as oil provides light, so too does the Beit Hamikdash illuminate the entire world as Scripture states: “The nations shall walk by your light” (*Yesha’yahu* 60:3). Therefore, G-d said to Moshe, “They shall bring you pure olive oil” (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 36:1).

How Does the Eternal Flame of the Menorah Shine Forth from Israel to the World?

The Menorah’s glow in the Beit Hamikdash was more than a physical light; it was a beacon of spiritual enlightenment emanating from Eretz Yisrael to the world. The Menorah’s seven branches correspond to the seven lower Sefirot, which mirror the seven species of Eretz Yisrael. The oil represents *Chochmah* (Divine wisdom), which flows freely only when Israel is in its rightful place (*Zohar* Part 2:158a). Israel is compared to olives. Just as the olive only brings forth its oil when beaten, so does Israel only return and become refined through difficulties and hardships (*Babylonian Talmud, Menachot* 53b). The process of refining oil, crushing it to extract its essence, parallels how the Jewish people undergo challenges and refinement in exile, during our long winding exile preparing us for the spiritual refinement necessary to access the holiness of the Eretz Yisrael. The crushing hardships we have endured return us to Eretz Yisrael as a purer, more radiant nation. The oil of the Menorah is linked to the righteousness of Israel: Just as olive oil rises above other liquids, so too will Israel rise above all nations (*Midrash Devarim Rabbah* 7:3), when we return to our land and fulfill our mission, as it is written: “Hashem your G-d will place you supreme above all the nations of the earth” (*Devarim* 28:1). The light of the Menorah is a reminder that our ultimate source of clarity and inspiration comes from our bond with Hashem in Eretz Yisrael – where His presence dwells most fully and where the Jewish mission reaches its highest potential.

The Land of Israel – Source of Our Inner Light

The Menorah was not merely a source of light within the Temple but a reflection of the spiritual illumination that flows from Eretz Yisrael. As we have learned, the Menorah’s light symbolized Hashem’s presence dwelling among Israel, spreading its glow to the entire world (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 36:1). In Chassidut, the Menorah represents the innate holiness of the Jewish soul, which, like the flames, continually strives upward, reaching toward the Divine. Just as the flames are kindled anew each day, so too is our spiritual mission in Eretz Yisrael constantly renewed, reaffirming our role as bearers of Divine light. The word **תְּצַוֶּה** /*tetzaveh* connotes connection and attachment. True unity is obstructed by impurities and unclarity. Just as the process of pressing olives removes impurities and refines the oil, so too do the Jewish people achieve spiritual refinement through humility and unity. Becoming free of arrogance and divisions enables us to kindle the eternal flame, for personal spiritual achievements are temporary, while illumination that stems from the collective soul of Israel is everlasting. True, enduring light comes through integrating oneself within the general community of Israel – becoming part of the whole rather than seeking individual elevation alone (Sefat Emet, *Likutim, Parashat Tetzaveh*). This alludes to a profound insight into the connection between the Menorah and Eretz Yisrael. The light of the Menorah represents the unity and refinement of the collective soul of Israel, which reaches its highest fulfillment in the Land of Israel, where the Shechinah dwells. Rav Kook further expounds: “The return to a life of full Israeli expression, to a life illuminated by Torah in its highest revelation, occurs in Eretz Yisrael, the land of our life. The Spirit of G-d in the inner Israeli soul unites with the Spirit of G-d in the land, and the outcast lover returns to her original love, renewing the holy marriage of yore. This happens when the nation, the Torah, and all of the mitzvot are reunited with the life-giving Spirit of G-d in the land” (*Orot, Eretz Yisrael* Chapter 8).

The Emblem of the Land of Israel – The Light of our Mission

The Menorah is a powerful symbol of the Jewish people’s role in the world – illuminating the darkness

with Divine wisdom and righteousness. Just as the light of the Beit Hamikdash shone forth, so too does the spiritual radiance of Eretz Yisrael continue to guide us. The Land of Israel is not merely a physical homeland; it is the center of our spiritual identity, where our connection to Hashem reaches its fullest expression. Just as the Menorah's light was fueled by pure olive oil, so too is the Jewish faith and clarity nourished by the sanctity of the land. In this way, the Land of Israel is not only the physical home of the Jewish people but the very source of their inner light and spiritual awakening. By dwelling in Eretz Yisrael, we embrace our mission as a light unto the nations, bringing Hashem's presence into the world. Thus, it is fitting that the modern State of Israel emblem is a Menorah flanked by olive branches, symbolizing the eternal connection between Eretz Yisrael and the divine light it radiates to the world.