

Shabbat Parashat B'ha'alot'kha
Let the Light Shine Through and Go Canucks Go!!

At the beginning of this week's *parasha*, Aaron receives the laws for the lighting of the *menorah* in the *mishkan* (the Tabernacle or "portable desert Temple"). Each day of the week, one of the seven lamps was to be lit until the entire candelabra burned brightly. The *menorah* itself was hand-crafted of fine gold, a sign of the object's central role in Israelite worship. Even though the Jewish people no longer has its *mishkan* or its Holy Temple in Jerusalem, lamps and candles continue to play a major role in Jewish religious life.

In our tradition, fire and light serve as powerful reminders of many religious messages. Light is the first thing that God created in the Creation story. Therefore, light reminds us of God's and our own creative powers when we strike a match and kindle a flame. The light of the Shabbat and festival candles serve as reminders of the requirement for us to cease from creative work on these days, just as God ceased and completed the work of Creation on the seventh day. We light candles when we remember lost loved ones or fallen martyrs of Jewish history as a symbol of our wish that the light of their lives and their memories stay bright for us as we move forward. The eternal light of the Temple and synagogue remind us of God's everlasting presence in our lives. Finally, God commands the Israelites in the desert to act as an "*or l'goyim*" a light unto the nations of world, setting the example of moral and ethical behavior motivated by faith in God and Jewish values. Therefore, going back as far as the beginning of the world and our religious understanding of its origins, light fills a deeply rooted place in our behavioral existence.

The ritual and practical connections of light to Jewish life is the surface level of what light means within Judaism. Going deeper, it also represents emotional and spiritual energy. As the opposite of darkness, which symbolizes loneliness, depression, pessimism, and sadness, light stands for emotional warmth, closeness, community, hope, and optimism. When we "see the light" in our Jewish lives, we are connecting ourselves to other Jews in our community and around the world and bringing a symbol of things positive and creative into our lives. Lighting candles is intended to remind us of all that was and is good from the original Creation and inspire us to promulgate the spirit and emotions represented by light.

Over the past 10 days, I have been struck by the communal highs and lows resulting from the results of Vancouver Canucks Stanley Cup Finals games. Those of you that know me well will know I was not only "observing" these reactions, but living and breathing them myself. The clearest examples occurred these past Saturday and Wednesday nights. Before the end of last Shabbat, the Canucks had won Game 2. However, I had not been able to watch the game during my observance of Shabbat. Yet, as I was in the backyard with my family at 8:00pm, the results of the game were clear. The honking of horns and cheering that could be heard all around town reflected the warmth, light, and celebration of victory. Then, on Wednesday night, as my family and some friends were bringing in the second day of Shavu'ot, the evening was absolutely silent. It could only have meant that our team had lost. The light energy had been sucked out of our city. There was no need for me to watch the game after the end of Shavuot on Thursday night to find out what had happened. And while in school today, the nervous energy for tonight's Game 5 is palpable. The confidence from a 2-0 series lead has been replaced with doubt...

Game 5 or no Game 5, Shabbat will be upon us this evening. Jewish families around the world will gather together for the rituals that begin our Sabbath of rest. Remarkably, by the time you read this, it will already be Shabbat in most places around the world and the light of the Shabbat candles will be doing its work not only to recall Creation and remind us of the lighting rituals of the Temple, but also to bring in that positive warm and hopeful energy into people's lives and experiences of Shabbat.

This evening, sunset will not occur until long after the game has begun. However, with each time that I think about bringing in Shabbat with my family, the less I am worried and anxious about how tonight's game will go. The thought of Shabbat brings me peace and my vision of the Shabbat candles brings me hope. We cannot know what the outcome of tonight's game will be, but we can be sure that Shabbat, and all that is good about it, is certainly coming. We can be positive and hopeful regardless of how the results go.

May we all use the positive aspects of Shabbat and its light to raise our spirits in whichever ways necessary. And with the thousands upon thousands of others who are hoping for a positive outcome in Game 5, may the optimistic energy of Shabbat that we are channeling and sending out into the universe help to bring us a final score that we desire. Then, at sunset, may we all find the warmth, hope and peace of a Shabbat Shalom!

Shabbat Shalom!
Go Canucks Go!