

The Flame

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

We can sit and gaze at it for hours.

It's luminous, it's warm, it's romantic; but most of all it's spiritual. (In what way spiritual? We can't really say, but it *is* spiritual.) A yellow droplet of light, laced with red, bright-white at the edges, and blue at the core as if dirtied by its contact with the material wick. But we didn't see all those colors until we counted them -- the flame itself is a perfect, integral whole, emanating calm and tranquility.

How, indeed, can something as agitated as the flame radiate such peace? For the flame is a clash of forces pulling in opposite directions. Look closely: see how it strains upward, striving to tear away from the wick which tethers it to the candle or lamp and lose itself in the great expanses of energy that gird the heavens. But look again, and see how it clings to the length of braided cotton that spears its heart and supplies it with the fuel that sustains its luminance and life. Back and forth, up and down it strives, vacillating between being and naught, between presence and oblivion.

"The soul of man is a candle of G-d" (Proverbs 20:27). For the soul of man, too, is a clash of divergent forces and contrary strivings.

We yearn to tear free of our "wick" -- of the body that anchors us to the physical reality and sullies us with physical needs and wants. We strive upwards, yearning to transcend the physical, the human and the particular, and fuse with the universal and the divine. At the same time, we cling to the body, to the bit of matter that sustains us as dynamic and productive participants in G-d's world.

It is this perpetual up-and-down, this incessant vacillation from selfhood to selflessness and back again, that we call life. It is this eternal tension between our desire to escape the physical and our commitment to inhabit it, develop it and sanctify it that makes us spiritual beings.

We can sit and gaze at the flame for hours, because we are gazing at ourselves.

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10 December | 4 Tevet

Vayigash

Shabbat Begins: 3:37pm

Shabbat Ends: 4:45pm