

Weekly Column by

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Endless Light of Education

Chanuka 5774

There is an interesting Talmudic passage in Tractate Shabbat: 23: "One who is careful about the Chanuka lights will have children who are talmidei Chachamim (scholars)." Rashi explains this enigmatic passage by referring to the verse in Mishlei 6 which says: "A candle is a mitzva and the Torah is light." On the basis of the mitzva of the candles of the Shabbat (Yom Tov) and Chanuka, the light of Torah will come. This explanation still leaves the passage unclear. We will come back to it.

Some of the laws of Chanuka also seem somewhat strange – e.g., even a poor person is required to light the Chanukiya, even if this entails begging from door to door to get enough money to purchase the oil. A question is asked: if a person can only afford to purchase either wine for Shabbat Kiddush or oil for his Chanukiya, which should he buy? The answer is that he should purchase the oil for Chanuka.

Why is there such a tremendous stress on the lighting of the Chanuka lights? How can it be that this simple mitzva should take precedence to buying wine for kiddush? And how can it be that by observing this mitzva, we can, in some

way, guarantee that we will have worthy and learned children?

To answer these questions, we must face one very simple reality: lights burn out. It was a miracle that the oil lasted for a week longer than expected. The Menorah of the Temple had to be tended and refueled daily. When the little oil lasted for eight days, it was considered miraculous. This seems like such an obvious fact, but it often passes us by. The mitzva of Chanuka is so important because it reminds us of this elementary fact of life: We must constantly provide fuel if we expect lights to burn. And this fact is also true regarding the Light of Torah. Because whatever is true in the physical world is certainly true in the spiritual world. Chanuka teaches that in matters of spirituality there is no status quo. If we are not progressing spiritually, we are automatically regressing. This is what Shlomo Hamelech means in Mishlei: The candle of G-d is the soul of the human being. That just like a candle needs constant refueling in order to give light, so too the G-dly soul needs the constant light of Torah.

Chanuka is related to the word, chinuch – education, teaching, and dedication through understanding. Our existence as a people depends on chinuch – on education, on communicating our beliefs, observances, and feelings on a constant and continual basis.

Chanuka reminds us to light the candles; it reminds us that we must be

involved daily in matters of spirit. Therefore the Talmud tells us that if we are careful in the mitzva of Chanuka, our children will be scholars, will be worthy Jewish people. And perhaps the reason now becomes clear – because our children will understand what the meaning of total constant commitment to Torah is. For a candle is a mitzva, and the Torah is light. And as Rashi explains, on the basis of the mitzva of the candles of Shabbat and Chanuka, the light of Torah comes continuously into our homes. From these very elementary mitzvot, lighting candles, we come to the realization that we need a constant refueling of spirituality and mitzvot. Chanuka is related to chinuch (Education) – it is never too late to learn.

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