

HOW EXTRORDINARY THE RESULT

by Rabbi Dovid Green

One who is accustomed with a candle will have children who are Talmud Scholars...(Talmud Shabbos)

This refers to the candles of Shabbos and the candles of Chanukah...(Rashi)

The candle is a Mitzvah and Torah is light... (Proverbs)

The Maharal from Prague explained that the candle is, in the language of symbolism, representative of the whole world. He explains the statement paraphrased in the following way: "One who is accustomed to looking at the whole world as a candle..." What does it mean to "look at the whole world like a candle."

The components of a basic candle are the oil, the wick, and the vessel. The oil is the energy source that requires continuous replenishment where as the other two may be fixed cost investments, so to speak. As the Mitzvah candle of Shabbos or Chanukah burn down and the flames are dancing their last we might be tempted to ask ourselves, "What has been gained or what is accomplished through this exercise of lighting? The good oil is gone the money is spent but what actually remains?"

The Maharal states that although the oil has been consumed the light generated from the candle continues to run its eternal course. It goes on forever. What have we accomplished by performing a Mitzvah? Not only symbolically, but in reality, we have taken a piece of this temporal world and unlocked its eternal essence.

Therefore when one is in the business of "looking at the entire world like it is a candle", the whole world is seen as being packed with endless spiritual potential. Any item, each person, and every moment is dense with limitless possibility.

The great sage Reb Yochanan was taking a ritual bath in the river when Reish Lakish who was a gangster type leapt across the expanse of the river to steal the bathing Rabbi's possessions. When Reb Yochanan saw the athletic prowess of this criminal he didn't shout "thief" but rather declared, "Your power should be used for Torah!"

When Reish Lakish saw the beauty of the Rabbi's countenance he retorted that it's a shame that such beauty is wasted on a man. "It is more fitting for you to be a woman." Reb Yochanan answered once more to the thieving Reish Lakish, "If you think I am so beautiful, I have a sister who is even more beautiful and if you commit yourself to learning Torah then I will give her to you for a wife."

Reish Lakish, in one astonishing moment agreed and in time became a great scholar and a dearly beloved colleague of his brother-law.

Reb Yochanan was in the middle of being mugged but he was less affected by the present danger than by the tragic vision of such misappropriated greatness. That's one way to "look at the world like a candle".

Another application is when we pay good money or invest precious time in Mitzvos like Jewish Education or Charity, it's worth knowing that long after the classes are over or the money spent something greater persists.

When buying Tefillin for my oldest son, in order to include him in the process I told him that there were two different pairs that I was considering for purchase. One cost \$1,200.00 the other \$1,000.00. He asked me with deep sincerity which one I had ordered. I told him that I had chosen the more expensive pair. I'll never forget the look on his face. If a look could hug.. It was not only the money, though.

Here was a Mitzvah item he would be using almost every day for his entire life. By trying to save a few bucks on it his appreciation of the Mitzvah would have been greatly diminished. Withholding precious drops of oil implies the investment is not worth the potential yield. That attitude sabotages the result creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

How great is then is the statement of the sages and how wise the one who actually "looks at the whole world as a candle" and how extraordinary the result?!

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