

A LASTING FLAME

by Rabbi Label Lam

Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they should take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continuously. (Shemos 27:20)

Pressed: He presses the olives in a mortar and does not grind them with millstones so that there should not be any sediment. After he has obtained the first drop he puts them into a mill and grinds them. The second oil is unfit for the Candelabra but fit for meal offerings. (Rashi)

From all that you protect, guard the mind, because from it comes out life. (Mishlei 4:23)

The candle is a Mitzva and Torah is light. (Mishlei 6:23)

Is there a present value to knowing what kind of olive oil qualified to be used in the Temple Menorah? Is there not some basic message we can glean from the formula for obtaining that first pure drop of oil?

The Maharal comments on the Talmudic edict, "One who is regular with candles will have children who are Talmud Scholars!" (Tractate Shabbos) He says that one who is accustomed to looking at the whole world like it is a candle will have children that are candidates to become Talmud Scholars. What does that mean?

We make all kinds of investments in life. Some seem to make little sense. When we light Shabbos or Chanukah Candles the light disappears after a period of time and we are left with an empty vessel. What did we get out of it? We spend good money on expensive Matzos but when Passover ends the market value drops through the floor. One's child goes to Yeshiva and tuition is steep. He doesn't become a Rabbi. Did we appropriate our resources wisely?

Emphatically, yes. The light that runs off the edge of the candle at 186,000 miles per second goes on forever. It never tires. It never ceases. The one who looks at the entire world like a candle appreciates that each expenditure in the production of that light yields endless dividends. When a child senses his parents' glee to spend money to engage a Torah teacher, to purchase Tefillin, to acquire a Lulav and Esrog, some of that excitement is transferred directly to his psyche. He becomes a seeker of Mitzvos as well, and that's what ultimately drives the Talmud Scholar to wade deeper into the sea of the Talmud.

That we are told to extract a single pure drop from each olive and the rest can happily go on to join other Mitzvos is an open endorsement for the importance and the preeminence of Torah study,

symbolized by the light of the Temple Menorah. The first and the best are to be invested to support and promote this holy activity. The mind is the engine of each individual and the driving force of nation. It needs the purest and most powerful form of fuel.

A bunch of years ago my wife and I merited to make a shidduch- a match. A suggestion we made actually worked. The couple was married and we were delighted to have a hand in the happening. A few months later, we received a handsome check in the mail from the groom. I didn't know what to do with the money. The fellow was a friend of mine and we were only trying to help. We were not looking to make a living as matchmakers. It's a good thing because we haven't been successful to make one since.

I went to one of my Rebbeim and presented the problem. He told me that I should accept the money. It was entirely appropriate for him to offer a finder's fee. He also said that it was the cleanest money that one can earn. In other deals there may be some under or over selling and the commission may be less deserved. "This was a deal from heaven and you were privileged to be the broker." The deal was clean and true and good and so is the money.

Then he advised me to use the money to pay for my son's tuition. My oldest child was in first grade at the time. That's when they were teaching him to read. We set aside an account and paid tuition monthly from that fund that entire year.

Oddly that child has become quite a competent Baal Kriah, a Reader of the Torah in Synagogue, each week. Someone asked me recently if it was me who taught him. Not me! Looking back, I think his interest and talent in this area can be attributed mostly to the purity of that fuel that can create a lasting flame.

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