

OUR POWER IS FOUND

by Rabbi Label Lam

A candle is a Mitzvah and Torah is light. (Mishlei 6:23)

These candles we light for the miracles and for the wonders and for the salvations and for the wars that You did for our fathers in those days at this time through Your holy Kohanim. And all eight days these candles are holy and we have no permission to make use of them but rather only to view them in order to acknowledge and praise Your Great Name on Your miracles and on Your wonders and on Your salvations. (Recitation after lighting the Chanukah Menorah)

Why are we so careful not to make use of the Chanukah Menorah? What praise and acknowledgment is there beyond simple symbolism? What breathes the fire of "holiness" into that tiny act of lighting a Chanukah candle? Anybody can do that!

The answers may lie at least partially in gaining an appreciation of one word. When we step up to the task of lighting the Menorah and other Mitzvahs, a grand declaration is made: "You are the source of blessing HASHEM, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His Mitzvahs and commanded us to light the candle of Chanukah!" We say that we are sanctified by the performance of doing a Mitzvah! What dynamic is at play here?

Let's say I was to approach the Governor's mansion at 3:00 o'clock AM and begin to knock on the door and demand a meeting with the Governor. Somebody would likely shout out, "Who goes there?" I might sheepishly answer, "Label Lam!" "Go away you fool!" they would appropriately respond and I would be made to leave. However if I was carrying a message from the President I would bang on the door more emphatically and when asked what the racket was all about I would forget at that moment about myself and I would answer with a sense overpowering urgency, "It's a message from the President!" The door would open wide!

There's a Talmudic concept, "The messenger is like the one who sends him." An act is greatly enlarged due to the "power of attorney" granted by the sender. Even a simple task like lighting a Chanukah Menorah is enhanced not so much by the originality or genius of the performer but by the connection to The One Who commands him. The deed is not less than an extension of the will of HASHEM, our G-d, King of the Universe. That is what shines forth in the context of a Mitzvah!

From a slightly mystical vantage point the Nefesh HaChaim explains: "You should know my brother that at the time it enters the mind of a person to do a Mitzvah, immediately an impression is made

above in his highest source building and planting many worlds and yielding supernal powers. From there is drawn to the person a force-field of light and a high and holy light hovers over him and surrounds him.

Through the holiness and the surrounding light he becomes attached, so to speak, with Him and His life force. It is this force of light that helps him to complete the Mitzvah. Through the completion of the task he becomes even more empowered. When he takes it to heart at the time of the performance of a Mitzvah and he understands and feels in his soul that he is surrounded and clothed at that moment in holiness and a spirit of correctness is renewed within him."

Greek culture sought to tailor Judaism to fit only that which made practical sense to them cutting away the essence. In defiance, for thousands of years, we light a candle with no utility other than its function as a Mitzvah, and flickering within that delicate Mitzvah -flame our power is found.

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