

# THE WORLD OF LEARNING

by Rabbi Label Lam

*Then he (Joseph) instructed the one in charge of his house, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. And my goblet- the silver goblet- place in the mouth of the youngest one's sack along with the money of his purchase." And he followed Joseph's word exactly! (Breishis 44:1-2)*

The Talmud says, "If we are not prophets we are at least the sons of prophets." Meaning to say that if congregations of holy Jews throughout the world have been doing something for so many generations there must be some good reason that may be deeper than the eye alone can perceive.

There is a widespread custom for Jews to give money to little children on Chanukah.

I was witness to Rabbi Yakov Kaminetzky giving coins to the young children who had joined us on our Chanukah visit to him. Till this day I can remember the scratchy beard and the kiss of my great grandfather when he gave us each five dollars for Chanukah.

Ziv HaMinhagim explains that the intention in giving children money on Chanukah is to encourage them to learn. It also sweetens the child's memories of the holiday and grants a greater assurance that the goodness will continue from generation to generation. The question is why money and not something else? Why not just get swept up in the shopping craze? What's the difference?

At his son's Bar Mitzvah a father stood up and told to the guests in attendance a story that was most likely directed to his son. He said that when he was in Yeshiva they had a practice to chip in and buy a set of the Talmud or Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) or even a handsome Kiddush Cup for any one of their group who was about to be married. There was one fellow who was notoriously lax in his studies and was definitely more interested in playing basketball than picking up a book to learn. When he was about to be married they decided to be practical and not waste good money on a set of books that would crowd his shelf and collect dust so they bought him a toaster oven.

When the head of the Yeshiva caught wind of this he took immediate action. He rebuked the fellows and forewarned them of the potential damage that could result from the giving of such a gift. "You're condemning this man to be nothing more than a toaster for the rest of his life! Give him a Talmud and maybe he'll yet become a Talmud Scholar."

The father concluded with a report, believe it or not, that this fellow today heads a Yeshiva and has produced numerous students of his own. Imagine had they given him that toaster. He might have

been cast into a static role and become "toast".

Included in the word "Chanukah" is the idea of chinuch-education. When one gives a gift within defined parameters, like an appliance, the customer maybe happy for a short time but an educational opportunity has been lost and that may be the whole point for the giving of the gift on Chanukah.

The implication of money and/or a Torah book is "potential". Time and thought, like AAA-batteries, are not included Along with it, though, come a grant of trust and a bundle of lessons about the art of applied discretion.

A good educator provides a floor and not a ceiling for the student. Therefore, a present, in the spirit of Chanukah, as Joseph's gifts to his brothers, challenges the recipients with new responsibilities to exit the comfort zone and enter the world of learning. Text Copyright © 2004 Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.