

A LASTING IMPRESSION

by Rabbi Label Lam

And you should keep My commandments and do them, I am HASHEM. And you should not profane My Holy Name so that I may be sanctified among the Children of Israel, I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you. (Vayikra 22:31-32)

The apocryphal story is told that Mrs. Einstein was once asked if she understood what her erudite husband says. She is reputed to have replied, "Every word! It's just the sentences I'm having trouble with!"

My experience in Jewish education is just the opposite. Words without associated experiences ring hollow. Yiras Shemaim-Fear of Heaven, Gemilas Chassadim- Deeds of Kindness, Kiddush HASHEM-Sanctifying G-d's Name, even when translated, fail to resonate with audiences that have had little live contact with the subject. No pictures appear in the file when those icons are clicked. They remain cliché' phrases, buzz words, but with little emotional registry. One may understand the sentences but certain words remain as empty vessels. Can we define or breathe meaning into the concepts of "desecration" and "sanctification" of G-d's Name? They are of such grandiose proportion that failing to do so would be the equivalent of flying a plane before having completed the course on landing. Sounds risky!?

One of my earliest jobs was as an English teacher at a local Yeshiva. The main strategy for ensuring good behavior I had borrowed from a behavioral psychology text book. It employs a tool that is still known today by the same general term, "candy". (We all know what that means.) I would enter with my pockets full and leave with them almost empty, but the investment was well worth the peace of mind and classroom control it afforded me. One day after school I noticed two little boys not more than six years old, about to cross a dangerously busy street in front of the Yeshiva. I ran over to help them. One of them was the young son of one of my Rebbeim. Before reaching to grasp their hands I first fished in my pocket and put a candy in each into each of their little hands. While crossing, one boy looked up at me with a smile of thanks. When we got to the other side he blurted-out, "Thank you!" and happily ran home.

The other boy, my teacher's son, looked up at me and with all earnest and asked, "What's the Heksher (Kosher Standard)? I took out the package and it was a clear cellophane bag. I explained to him that I had removed the wrapper with the writing from the top and that it was probably Blooms or Pazkeez or one of the standard Kosher candy vendors and that I had bought it in one of the local Kosher stores. He knew who I was. I was no stranger offering him a candy. He looked up at me after

hearing what I thought was a credible explanation and without the slightest hesitation and even with a joyful decisiveness handed me the candy and said, "No thanks!" And off he went! I was stunned and still am today. What clarity! What poise! (Not surprisingly that boy is the father of a growing family and a dedicated educator today)

What amazing thing had he done? All he did was "the right thing". That is the definition of a Kiddush HASHEM. Immediately preceding the requirement to make a "Kiddush HASHEM" we are reminded to keep and do HASHEM's commandments. This little fellow, all of six years old, did just that, even though it was difficult for him on some basic level. That temptation once resisted strengthens us all and creates a lasting impression. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.