

A DOUBLE LOSS!

by Rabbi Label Lam

The Candle of Chanukah is not just a distinct Mitzvah. It's a Mitzvah that represents all Mitzvahs as King Solomon tells us in Mishle', "The candle is a Mitzvah and the Torah is light..." Therefore we can learn sweeping life principles from the simple Laws of lighting the Menorah of Chanukah. For example, "Hadlakah Oseh Mitzvah!- Lighting makes the Mitzvah!" This informs us that doing the lighting is already the accomplishment of the Mitzvah. If a candle, fit to burn, is blown out and did not last for the requisite half hour even still the deed of lighting the Chanukah Menorah was accomplished.

Yaakov asked his father in-law Lavan, "What did I do so wrong that you "dalaktah"- chased after me?" Chasing and lighting here share the same root. Sometimes pursuing the Mitzvah is also a full accomplishment.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto ztl. in the Path of the Just describes man as being in the midst of a battle "from in front and from behind". I can understand how the battle for the next bold step of life faces resistance from the front lines. What does it mean to be embattled from behind? Similarly in the blessing leading up to the evening Amida we ask that the opposing force be removed from in front of us and from in back of us.

Here is a tale of two Mitzvos. Two Yeshiva boys- brothers, on short notice are informed about the passing of a near relative. They immediately move into action to attend the funeral from hours away by connecting with a number of trains. Half way there it becomes apparent that they are not likely to catch the funeral service and the procession leading out to the cemetery.

They call their father and ask what they should do. He informs them that they have already fulfilled the Mitzvah. Although their attempt was thwarted HASHEM counts the good intentions as if it was already an action because they had done all they could. Later they make the effort again and successfully console the mourner with a timely visit.

Another relative drives from hours away on the eve of Shabbos to make a Shiva call. Very nice! There is a misunderstanding about the timing of the visit. The bereaving widow has decided to be with family for Shabbos rather than sit alone in her empty house. As she is about to leave a call comes from the relative that had already invested hours of travel time. They would be arriving in an hour. The recently widowed woman apologizes for the misunderstanding and regretfully informs the relative that she cannot tempt Shabbos and wait. On Sunday the widow herself calls the relative

who had been frustrated and inconvenienced. As soon as he picks up, he says abruptly, "Don't ever call here again!" He hangs up! She bursts into tears!

When Avraham went to the mountain with Isaac on a three day trek he was ultimately prevented from carrying out that deed but it was considered such a great accomplishment that we are chewing on its merits till this very day. However it remained at risk even afterward. As a result of that attempted sacrifice, our sages tell us, Sara died. Had Avraham mourned the deed he could have washed it away after the fact. Just as one can do Teshuvah and regret a misdeed so can one uproot a Mitzvah.

I know of a rich fellow who gave away amazing amounts of money before his business went bust. Afterwards he was almost tackled from behind by the haunting notion that had he only not given all that money to charity he would still be a rich man today! Immediately he realized the foolishness and fruitless of that thought. Not only would it not bring back the money but it might cost him the Mitzvah. Then he would have neither.

"Lighting makes the Mitzvah". That's the paradigm for Mitzvahs. We do our very best and if for some reason beyond our control our efforts are repelled, Mazel Tov, it's a Mitzvah. There is still a lurking danger though that it can be fumbled. Indulging in regret about the wrong things can trigger a double loss! Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.