

# MASTER THE TORAH

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"You shall command the children of Israel, that they take for you pure pressed olive oil, for lighting, to make a light shine out continuously; in the tent of meeting, outside the dividing curtain which is over the Testimony..." (27:20-21)*

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsh looks at the *Menorah* as a parallel to the human mind and its enlightenment. For all of our efforts, we must always realize that we stand apart from *Torah*, unable to penetrate the curtain that covers it. We can learn from *Torah*, but we cannot claim to be its master.

Two people can "learn" the *Torah* and yet be doing entirely different things. One can either sit down, set aside one's preconceptions and attempt to learn; or on the other hand, one can try to rewrite the *Torah* to conform to his or her own ideas of right and wrong. Rabbi Hirsch tells us that only the former is appropriate - for as one of my teachers said, "you can make the *Torah* come out like The Iliad if you try hard enough!" Only a person capable of setting aside his or her own "agenda" is going to emerge with insight from the *Torah* itself.

A young man once came to Rabbi Israel Salanter, the father of the modern "*Mussar*" (Jewish ethics) movement, and proudly said that he had learned the entire Talmud. "Good!" replied Rabbi Salanter - "now what did the Talmud teach you?"

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