

# THE MENORAH - A LESSON IN PARENTING

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Lighting the menorah - the great candelabra - in the Temple seems to be a very straight forward, cut and dried matter. One needs little skill or training apparently to light a candelabra. Yet the Torah's emphasis in this week's parsha insures that a deeper meaning is also present to this seemingly mundane and simple act.

Rashi already indicates the presence of this deeper idea by his comment that the obligation of the kohein was to keep his fire at the candelabra's wick, "until they caught and burned brightly on their own." This is a rule not only in lighting a menorah but also in life generally - in raising and educating children and students, in inspiring others with ideals, skills and knowledge.

It is a rule in the home, the classroom, the workplace and anywhere else in human life where people intersect and influence one another. It applies in those areas of life that are also subject to this challenge - that the wick has to catch fire and rise on its own.

The ability to let the "wick" catch fire and flame eventually on its own is a necessary trait in successful parenting and teaching. It is always difficult to let go of a child and a student. One becomes so emotionally involved that letting go becomes increasingly impossible. But the truth is that only by letting go and allowing the "wick" - child, student, etc. - to flame on its own is one's parental and educational responsibility fulfilled. We cannot live another person's life for that person. We can only attempt to provide that other person with the wherewithal to succeed and accomplish.

The other side of the coin in this matter is equally valid and important. The kohein may not remove the flame from the wick prematurely. He must make certain that the flame of the wick will not sputter out when he removes his flame from the wick.

The responsibility of parents and teachers remains as long as the child or student is still unable to flame on its own. Many times in life it is difficult to light the flame in others. It always seems never to catch and flame on its own efforts and abilities. The tendency therefore is for the flame giver to despair and eventually give up on the effort.

Students are expelled from schools and parents and children remain distant. No two instances in life are alike and there are therefore no real general rules that can be imposed in such situations. Yet it must be obvious to all that infinite patience and untiring efforts must first be expended before reaching a point of impasse and no return.

Some people are late bloomers and thus the flame has to be kept to their wick longer than usual. These are all naturally individual judgments and uncertain decisions. Perhaps that is why the Torah emphasizes this seemingly ordinary act of lighting the menorah in the Temple because it represents the ambiguities that lie at the heart of many basic issues in life, family and community affairs.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)