Thought Tools 51
Light Up Your Life

December 18th, 2008
21st day of Kislev, 5769
Issue # 51

Forward to a Friend

This coming Sunday night Jews around the world will greet the holiday of Chanukah by lighting one flame. On each night of this eight-day festival we add one additional flame, culminating on the eighth night with a fully lit eight-branch menorah.

It always saddens me that so many Jews mistakenly think of Chanukah as a children’s holiday. In reality, Chanukah is chock-full of invaluable and practical insights for passionate adults eager to enhance their lives.

Because we are so accustomed to the standard practice of lighting one candle on the first night, two on the second, all the way up to eight candles on the final night of Chanukah, we fail to ask WHY this progression?

After all, one way to commemorate an eight-day holiday involving light would be to keep one big flame burning for the entire eight days. Alternatively, you could light one candle each evening. You could even light eight candles each night of the festival. Surely that would make an impression, don’t you think?

Maybe you want to make each night distinct, showing a progression through the eight days. Fine, I have a solution. Light eight candles the first night to signal that this is an eight-day festival. Then on the second night, light seven flames, signifying the remaining seven days of the holyday, until finally, on the last night you light only one candle.

What ultimate meaning for us is there in ancient Jewish wisdom’s requirement that we light one flame the first night, two the second, until night eight when the menorah’s eight candles fling out a brilliant blaze of light?

Quite a bit once you understand that lighting candles does not merely commemorate a past miracle with a jar of oil, or a long-ago military victory any more than filling my car with gas commemorates Henry Ford’s Model T. Both activities enhance my present life. There are practical benefits both to filling my car with gas and to observing this Festival of Lights by adding a light each night.

What is terrifyingly easy for one’s life to become suffused with darkness. In fact, it is the default condition for humanity. One need only dwell on the problems that we all face for life to be overwhelming. Family issues, health and...
I am losing the residual battle of trying to leave God out of the picture here and am developing a desire to abstain from this problem until we do indeed get married.

If we willingly abstain from this practice, out of genuine respect for God, will we get his blessing once we do get married and will our guilty feeling be lessened knowing that at least we both gave the effort?

Mark F.

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Ask a Question

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Susan's Blog

Susan Lapin has prepared a special word for this week’s Thought Tools.

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financial crises, even matters of personal faith. If individual challenges are not enough, consider the state of the world. That should bring waves of darkness washing over you.

With all that darkness, the roadmap to recovery is all but invisible. What is more, since it is impossible to completely rid one’s life of problems, how does one dispel darkness?

The best way is by focusing on one problem at a time. If we chip away at only one problem and make certain that each passing day reduces the scope of that problem, we see hope. As the figure of speech goes, we see ‘light at the end of the tunnel.’ The key is to make each day a little brighter than the day before. Are you beginning to see the infusion of hope that the Chanukah experience reflects?

As my friend Dave Ramsey (www.daveramsey.com) teaches, if one of the causes of your darkness is debt, select one credit card and chip away at its balance. Make each passing day a bit brighter. This will help you shine light and dispel gloom on the next area you need to confront.

Trying to tackle everything at once – the equivalent of lighting eight flames each night – can quickly lead to chaos. Starting with a huge chunk and despondently recognizing that you have undertaken too much is demoralizing – somewhat like lighting eight candles, then seven, then six. You’re moving depressingly toward darkness. Instead, find one limited area to which you can consistently add a little more light. Needless to say, seeing that one dark area brighten up a little each day equips us to confront other problem areas with optimism, another way of thinking of light.

Celebrating Chanukah in accordance with ancient Jewish wisdom provides an annual infusion of hope and promise. Watching that menorah become brighter with each passing night assures me that tomorrow can be lighter than today. It also offers a roadmap to bring that about.

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