

LET'S LEARN CHASSIDUS

With Rabbi Shais Taub



SHINE A LITTLE LIGHT

THE FRIDAY NIGHT DILEMMA

Three *chassidim* were arguing about whose Rebbe is the biggest miracle worker. The first one says: “We were all walking home from shul on Shabbos and it was very hot. We said, ‘Rebbe, it is so hot, what can we do?’ The Rebbe stopped and prayed, and to the left of the Rebbe and to the right of the Rebbe there was heat, but in the area around the Rebbe it became cool and we all walked home.”

The second one says: “That’s nothing! We were all walking home from shul on Shabbos and it started to rain. And we said, ‘Rebbe, we’re going to get soaked, what should we do?’ The Rebbe stopped and prayed, and to the left of the Rebbe and to the right of the Rebbe there was rain, but in the area around the Rebbe there was no rain and we all walked home.”

The third said, “Is that all? We were all walking home from shul on Shabbos, and we spotted a bag full of gold coins in the street. And we said, ‘Rebbe, so much money, we could do so much for the *chassidim*, but it’s Shabbos! What should we do?’ The Rebbe stopped and prayed, and to the left of the Rebbe and to the right of the Rebbe it was Shabbos...”

Obviously, there is no way to actually stop or limit Shabbos. And that is precisely why we have a dilemma every Friday of Chanukah. And since Chanukah is eight days, there is always a Shabbos in it, and we always have this problem. What’s the problem?

The time for lighting the *menorah* is at night, starting “when the sun sets” (*Shabbos 21b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 671:2.*) But Shabbos begins before the sun sets. See the conflict? On Friday, the proper time to light the *menorah* for Chanukah is *after* the time that we’re no longer allowed to kindle a flame because of Shabbos!

AN UNUSUAL SOLUTION

The solution directed by *halachah* is to light the *menorah* early on Fridays, before sunset. Yes, as we said, the proper time to light the *menorah* begins at sunset, however, *b’dieved*, as long as you have lit within one hour and 15 minutes of sunset, you have technically fulfilled your duty, albeit in a less than ideal manner.

The Rebbe spoke about this at the Shabbos Chanukah *farbrengen* in 5745 and asked the following question.

On the Shabbos of Sukkos, we don’t shake *lulav*. And if Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbos we don’t blow *shofar*. And those are both Biblical commandments! Yet we defer them for the sake of Shabbos. Lighting the Chanukah lights is a Rabbinic commandment. So the same Sages who instituted the lighting of the *menorah* could easily have canceled the lighting of the *menorah* on Fridays and thereby avoided the whole dilemma.

This solution would seem more reasonable than lighting early. After all, there is a very simple and logical reason why the *menorah* is

lit at night. The whole purpose of the Chanukah candles is *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle, and as the Talmudic adage goes, “*Shraga b’tihara mai ahanei*, of what use is a candle in broad daylight?”

THE RABBI ON THE STREET CORNER

I want to tell you a story. The Rebbe didn’t tell this story (at least not to my knowledge) but I think this story helps us understand the Rebbe’s answer to the question we asked above.

There was once a lone *chossid* living in a small village. Not only was he the only *chossid* in town, he was the only Jew there as well. Now, this lonely, isolated little *chossid* had a beloved daughter. Being surrounded by non-Jews, she developed a relationship with a non-Jewish young man. Not only was this young man not Jewish, he was also a heavy drinker and a ruffian. Yet the poor girl wanted to marry him. The young man’s family insisted, however, that before they could marry, the Jewish girl would have to convert. So she moved into a convent where she was being educated in their religion in preparation for baptism—*Rachmana litzlan!* Needless to say, her father was heartbroken. So he did the only thing he could do. He traveled to his Rebbe, the holy *tzadik*, Reb Shimon Skernovitzer.

The father told the whole story to Reb Shimon who cried with him. Reb Shimon then asked the father where this convent was located. The father told him the location and Reb Shimon told his attendant to



prepare a horse and buggy so that they could travel to the convent.

The convent building was on the corner of two streets and was built like a fortress with very high walls all around it. Reb Shimon sat in his buggy parked on the street corner just outside those walls. Eventually, a priest walked by who was entering the convent and Reb Shimon managed to bribe him to bring a note to the Jewish girl inside. The note read simply: “I am waiting outside for you. Signed, Reb Shimon of Skernovitz.”

A day passed and there was no response but Reb Shimon did not leave that street corner. Another

day passed and the attendant suggested to Reb Shimon that they should leave as the girl was clearly not coming out. But Reb Shimon wouldn’t budge.

For three days, Reb Shimon waited on that corner next to the convent. He didn’t go anywhere, not even to shul to *daven*. He davened right there. For three days.

On the night following the third day, in the middle of the night, the Jewish girl came running out of the convent and jumped into the wagon. She said to Reb Shimon, “Take me away quickly before they come after me.” The attendant grabbed the reins and they traveled into the

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forest at top speed, and when they were finally far enough away from the convent that it was safe to slow down, the attendant asked the girl what had made her suddenly come out of the convent. She was ready to marry this young man. She was even ready to change her religion. What had made her change her mind after three days?

The girl, who knew who Reb Shimon Skernovitzer was from her father and knew he was a holy man, said to the attendant, “For three days I saw the Rebbe waiting for me and not going anywhere. I finally realized that there was no way the Rebbe was going to leave that street corner without me. That’s when I came out.”

LONG DISTANCE CALL

Now we can answer our question about why we light the *menorah* on Fridays before sundown.

What’s the deeper idea behind lighting the *menorah* when it’s dark out? It’s about bringing the light to every Jew even and especially if they are in a spiritually dark place.

There are, however, limitations. Even as we march boldly toward the darkness to shine our light, there are levels within darkness. Some places are simply off limits, for as the *Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17a)* tells us, a Jew may not come within four cubits of a house of idolatry or a house of harlotry.

And yet, we know there are Jews, unfortunately, who are in these very places of extreme spiritual darkness right now.

So what are we going to do about that? We are not permitted to go where they are. Yet we cannot ignore their plight. (In the original *sichah*, the Rebbe actually mentions “a Jew in some remote place like India who is caught up in an idolatrous cult.”) We need to reach these Jews, too!

And this is the lesson of lighting the *menorah* before sundown on Friday. Although we are prohibited from lighting on Shabbos, we can get as close as possible to the prohibited time and add extra oil so that it will burn into the time of Shabbos.

So too, when we need to spread spiritual light to a Jew who is in a place where we are forbidden to go, we can get as close as possible and increase our light until it reaches him there—like Reb Shimon Skernovitzer who stood on the street corner in front of the convent for three days. He could not, and would not, enter such a place. But he also could not and would not leave a Jewish girl there. So he shone his light from where he stood so that it entered the place of spiritual darkness and reached the heart of a Jewish girl!

Similarly, in war, sometimes there is up-close combat, and you fight

with a sword. And sometimes you fight with a bow and arrow. We need to launch our light into places where we ourselves cannot go.

The original *sichah* was spoken in 1984, and like so many things the Rebbe said, it makes more sense today than it did then...

The Rebbe said that in previous generations, a person would have to stretch his mind to imagine how he could possibly have an effect on someone who is in a different physical location. Today, however, all you need to do is look around and you will see countless methods by which we can reach people wherever they are without leaving our physical location.

Unfortunately, in this *galus*, we all know people who are in a spiritually dark place. This Chanukah let’s send our light to them. Pick up the phone; send a text; invite someone over; if you are on social media, post a warm, Moshiachdik message in the hopes that the person who needs to see it will see it. Do it any way you want. But get as close as you possibly can and send your light from there until it shines into their hearts. ❧

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