

# Weekly Teaching

## December 7, 2018

A story is told of a rabbi who is asked by his student: “What is a Jew’s task in this world?”

Rabbi: “A Jew is a lamplighter on the streets of the world. In olden days, there was a person in every town who would light the gas street-lamps with a light he carried at the end of a long pole. On the street corners, the lamps were there in readiness, waiting to be lit; a lamplighter has a pole with a flame supplied by the town. He knows that the fire is not his own, and he goes around lighting all the lamps on his route.”

Student: “But what if the lamp is in a desolate wilderness?”

Rabbi: “Then, too, one must light it. Let it be noted that there is a wilderness, and let the wilderness feel ashamed before the light.”

Student: “But what if the lamp is in the midst of a sea?”

Rabbi: “Then one must take off one’s clothes, jump into the water and light it there!”

Student: “And that is a Jew’s mission?”

Rabbi: “Yes, that is a Jew’s calling.”

The student continued: “Rabbi, I see no lamps!”

The rabbi answered: “That is because you are not yet a lamplighter.”

The student asked: “How does one become a lamplighter?”

The rabbi replied: “One must begin with oneself, cleansing oneself, becoming more refined, and then one sees the other as a source of light, waiting to be ignited. When, Heaven forbid, one is crude, then one sees but crudeness; but when one is noble, one sees nobility. Today, the lamps are there, but they need to be lit. It is written, ‘The soul of the human is a lamp of God’ (Proverbs 20:27) and it is also written, ‘A mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light’ (Proverbs 6:23). A Jew is one who puts personal affairs aside and goes around lighting up the souls of others with the light of Torah and mitzvot. Jewish souls are in readiness to be lit. Sometimes they are around the corner. Sometimes they are in a wilderness or at sea. But there must be someone who disregards personal comforts and conveniences and goes out to put a light to these lamps, to ignite these souls. That is the true calling of a Jew—to be a lamplighter, an igniter of souls.”

Our sacred responsibility as Jews is to be a lamplighter so as to successfully brighten up the streets of our world.

When we engage in mitzvot, we light up the souls of those with whom we interact.

The message of Chanukah asks us (even during the darkest nights of the year) to bring more light into the world.

Each of us has to see ourselves as lamplighters. We have to look for the lamp posts that could be lit.

Happy Chanukah and Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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