

Do It With Mirrors

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Rebbe Nachman told the story of a king who built a palace and asked two men to decorate it. The king divided the palace into two parts and assigned one part to each of them. He also fixed a time limit to complete their work. The first man toiled to teach himself the art of painting and plastering and was able to paint his part of the palace with the most beautiful and unusual murals. But the second man paid no attention to the assignment and did nothing about it whatsoever. As the deadline approached, he realized he had little time left. So he plastered his entire portion with a black substance called *pakist*, a kind of shiny pitch. The *pakist* acted like a mirror, reflecting everything around it.

The king came and admired the first man's part, with its wondrous and beautiful paintings executed with extraordinary skill. The second part was covered with a curtain. When the

king approached, the second man stood up and drew aside the curtain. The sun was shining, and all the remarkable paintings appeared in his section in their entirety because of the *pakist*, which reflected everything like a mirror. This found favor in the eyes of the king. (See full story in *Tzaddik* #224.)

Although the second man in this story seemed to come up with a clever solution, wasn't he really just cheating? Why was the king happy with his work?

We find a similar idea in our *parashah*. Moshe was commanded to construct the Menorah out of a single piece of gold. From the upper flower ornaments until its base, the entire Menorah was to be chiseled out of a single piece of gold. The expertise necessary for this eluded Moshe. So he took a large piece of gold, tossed it into a fire, and the fire produced the Menorah all on its own (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:4). Yet if this is the story of the construction of the Menorah, what does the Torah say, "According to the form that God showed Moshe, so did he construct the Menorah" (Numbers 8:4)? Seemingly, the fire had more to do with creating the Menorah than Moshe!

"For a candle is a mitzvah, and Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). The light of the Menorah symbolizes Torah and spiritual growth. While we have the option to make spiritually positive choices so we can grow and better ourselves, it's extremely difficult to do so because of the awesome power of our *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Our Sages thus explain, "Were it not that God personally intervenes to help, we would succumb" (*Kiddushin* 30b).

The paradox of Moshe's commandment to personally construct the Menorah out of a single piece of gold is the challenge of our lives. In truth, we do not have the strength to motivate ourselves and completely overcome our *yetzer hara*. But at the same time, just as Moshe did what he could by throwing the gold into the fire and praying to God, we are also required to

put in our efforts and turn to God for help.

Our generation is the final one preceding the arrival of Mashiach. The last of the seven *sefirot* is Malkhut (kingship) and its color is black. Just as in Rebbe Nachman's story, our power is weak and we feel lazy. However, we do have recourse: we can create a black mirror and reflect the strength that preceded us. By praying to God and emulating the right path by putting in the effort we are capable of, we can reflect the vision of all the true tzaddikim who preceded us. And the real King will have much *nachas*. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Kriat Shema 5