

FROM THE EDITOR

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We have just returned from our own travels, following the advice offered in this issue (see Travel Light on page 50) of travelling during off-peak times and having the good fortune to stay with close friends for Sukkos. It's always a bit stressful staying with someone, uncertain whether everyone will get on, whether close quarters and changes in routine will leave everyone feeling a bit too crowded for comfort, and even whether the friendship will survive the ordeal.

We recently read in shul about Avraham Avinu literally running to serve his guests – strangers, idolaters no less! – and about him giving each one the very best that he could, doing so happily, and getting his whole family to participate in the mitzvah, even training his children to

do it. But it's another thing entirely when you're actually on the receiving end of such incredible hospitality. In terms of the mitzvah of providing hospitality to guests, friends invited over for social reasons do not, strictly speaking, have the status of "guests". This didn't matter to our hosts, however, who treated us as their "guests" nonetheless, giving us their very best, again and again.

Without guest rooms or a cottage to offer, the parents instead displaced their children from their bedrooms, making those children crowd into siblings' rooms, as well as the parents' own bedroom. More than this, they literally cleaned out the closets in those bedrooms for us, not just making a couple of inches for our hanging clothes and giving us a bit of shelf space, but actually emptying out their children's closets entirely! The children couldn't even find all of their things, which got temporarily stored here, there, and everywhere. Were the children upset? Did they complain? Not even for a second. It didn't even faze them.

Our hosts made us feel right at home, making us entirely comfortable to be there and sharing everything they had with us. Even more than this, they completely changed the way they ate. Our children have food allergies, some of them quite severe, especially to grains. We can't even bring bags of flour into our home, as having the dust in the air is a problem. Our hosts inconvenienced themselves and their children to accommodate all of these many food allergies, cooking so that our children could partake of whatever was made. On Chol Hamo'ed and weekdays, the toaster, a staple in almost every home, but a source of real danger for us because of the tremendous amount of crumbs that it creates, was banished to another room. We would go on Chol Hamo'ed family outings, spending the entire day out, only to be surprised with hot, freshly made dinners. When flour did have to be used, they did all such food preparation in their garage or in the cottage where their maid lived – and even she was only too happy to accommodate our unusual needs, despite the inconvenience.

It was a truly humbling experience and our constant refrain to our children was: "We have so much to learn about doing this mitzvah; take note of everything you see – and the joy with which this family is doing it! When we do things, do we do them to our fullest? And with sincere smiles on our faces (smiles that reflect what's really taking place in our hearts)?"

Of all of our festivals, Chanukah is about doing things in the best way possible, even under the most difficult circumstances. Our Sages¹ teach that there actually did not need to be a miracle with the single jug of oil that was found. Why? Because the Chashmonaim could have just used thinner wicks than normal in order to make that one jug last the eight days that they needed to obtain a new supply of suitable oil for the menorah. Instead, they chose to do the mitzvah as it is meant to be done – and, in so doing, merited an open miracle as that oil lasted as long as it needed to, despite using the normal wicks. As a result, Chanukah is the only festival where we see varying levels of beautifying the mitzvah, from the basic mitzvah of lighting a single candle per night, all the way to the nicest way possible of lighting a number of candles that corresponds to the count of the days.

Doing things the best way possible, despite the circumstances in which we find ourselves, is what serving Hashem is all about, be it when it comes to doing chesed or for any mitzvah.

From everyone at JL, a freilichen (happy) Chanukah to you and your family – and safe travels!

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

¹See Iturei Torah, citing the Chiddushei HaRim and the Sfas Emes

ON THE COVER: A CHANUKAH MENORAH - AKA A CHANUKIAH - WITH ALL EIGHT CANDLES PLUS THE SHAMASH CANDLE LIT IN HONOUR OF THE LAST NIGHT OF CHANUKAH. SHOWN IN FRONT ARE DREIDELS, SPINNING TOPS WHICH ARE CUSTOMARILY PLAYED WITH ON CHANUKAH. THE DREIDELS ARE INSCRIBED WITH THE HEBREW LETTERS **NUN, GIMEL, HEH, AND PEH**, WHICH STAND FOR: **NEIS GADOL HAYAH POH** – "A GREAT MIRACLE HAPPENED HERE" OUTSIDE OF ERETZ YISRAEL, THE **PEH** IS REPLACED WITH A **SHIN**, THE INITIAL LETTER OF THE WORD **SHAM** – "THERE" (IE REFERRING TO ERETZ YISRAEL).

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Printers Paarlmedia kzn

Distribution

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JEWISH LIFE is published by Total Publishing
(Pty) Ltd ©2008.

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ISSN 1994-8670

Total Publishing (Pty) Ltd

P.O. Box 52339, Saxonwold 2132

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Jewish Life are not necessarily those
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abc
ABC 100% AUDITED
CIRCULATION

Certified for the period
July - September 2016: 13 433