



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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## Light Insight

### *My Yiddishe Momma*

One of today's most offensive and inaccurate canards must be the "Jewish Mother." The "Jewish Mother" emasculates her offspring with suffocating affection, refusing to sever the apron-strings that bind her brood. She wields emotional blackmail with the accuracy of a surgeon's knife and the mercilessness of a Machiavelli.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Talmud teaches us that someone who does the mitzvah of lighting the lamps of Shabbat and Chanuka will have children who are *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars).

What is the specific connection between lighting lamps and being blessed with children who will be Torah scholars?

One of life's great temptations is to think that we control events. "I got up at five every morning and that's why I made a million." "I practiced 12 hours a day and that's why I'm a concert violinist." Who do you think gave you the strength and determination to get up early? Who do you think

gave you the gift of music? There are plenty of people who get up at four-thirty who are still paying their mortgage.

Even when we do a mitzvah, we think: It's me doing the mitzvah. It's me putting on tefillin. It's me making kiddush on Friday night. Me. I'm doing it, aren't I?

The mitzvah of lighting Chanuka lights isn't just to light. The Chanuka menorah must also contain enough fuel to stay lit for a half hour into the night. Although I might feel that I'm the one lighting the candle, but I can't make it stay lit. No amount of encouragement from the sidelines will make that candle burn. No rooting, no cheer-leading will keep it lit if the Master of Creation doesn't will it.

Shabbos candles, too, are meant to remain lit. Without their light, someone might trip and fall. Lighting the lamps is only part of the mitzvah. The lamps must also give us pleasure and benefit; and for this, they need to stay alight.

The lights of Shabbos and Chanuka help us realize that we only start the process. The rest up to G-d.

Every parent hopes his children will grow to be healthy, wise and

upright, but we get no guarantee. We protect our children as much as is reasonable, but we cannot lock them in a padded room. All we can do is to kindle in them the spark. The spark of loving G-d; of loving their fellow Jew. We cannot complete the process. It's up to them — and to G-d. Eventually, all we can do is stand on the sidelines with prayers and tears.

In this week's Parsha, Jacob reluctantly allows Benjamin to go to Egypt. There was no guarantee Benjamin would return, yet Jacob let him go. After doing everything reasonable, Jacob put his trust in G-d.

After lighting Shabbos candles Friday afternoon, women customarily say a prayer which concludes: "Privilege me to raise children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, who love G-d and fear G-d, people of truth, holy offspring, attached to G-d, who illuminate the world with Torah and good deeds... Hear my prayers at this time, in the merit of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, our mothers, and cause our light to illuminate, that it not be extinguished ever, and let Your Countenance shine..."

Now that's a Jewish mother.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

*The “sting” of being misjudged can last for years, like in the story of...*

### *The “Sting” of the Bee*

I come from a family of picky eaters. When I was growing up, my mother knew what she was up against, and only served us “plain” food, chicken, rice, potatoes and spaghetti.

In sixth grade, I was a conscientious student, but one subject that I found a little difficult was *Brachos* (Blessings to be made before and after eating foods). I had never even heard of many of the foods in the little “Brachos booklet,” and it made the studying a lot harder.

Instead of being able to apply the Brachos fundamentals when studying, I had to memorize the Brachos for the unfamiliar foods.

We used to have “Brachos Bees” (same idea as spelling bees) in school about once a week. I remember that at one “Brachos Bee” the teacher asked me the blessing for “shnitzel” (breaded, fried chicken cutlet). I wasn’t familiar with this food, and my memory had failed me. I thought maybe it was some kind of fruit dessert, so I guessed “*Ha’eitz*.” The teacher got very angry, and said “I am going to give you a zero on your report card, because I can tell that you’re not even trying.” I remember feeling very hurt and confused. Many years later, when I recall the incident, I understand why the teacher reacted this way: She would have accepted an educated guess, but my answer was so far off it seemed like a “cop out.” Her mistake was that she assumed I knew what shnitzel was.

Now, as a teacher myself, this has taught me an important lesson: To be careful to give students the benefit of the doubt. Because you never know... falsely accusing your student may just be the only thing she’ll remember years later.

## Response Line

### What the Dead Know

*Chava Gordon wrote:  
What do we believe about the knowledge people who have passed away have of events in this world? My father passed away almost two years ago. My sister just got engaged, thank G-d. Does my father have any knowledge of this? I thank you for your time.*

Dear Chava,

Yes, the dead can sometimes have awareness of what goes on in this world. There’s actually a custom to try to get engaged and married soon after the passing of a parent in order to bring joy to the deceased parent. So, it’s possible that your father

*<email@withheld> from Alabama wrote:*

*Would you please tell me what the writing is around the neck of the tallit? Could you please write it in English and in Hebrew/English? I’m not sure I worded that correctly, but I can’t read the “Hebrew” writing too well. Thanks!*

Dear <email@withheld>,

Before putting on a tallit, we say the following blessing: “*Baruch Ata Ado - nai Elo - heynnu Melech ha’olam, asher kidishanu b’mitzvotav vetzivanu lehit’atef batzitzit*” which means “Blessed are You L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, Who made us

knows about your sister’s engagement and that it’s bringing him joy.

holy with His commandments and commanded us to wrap ourselves in a tallit.”

Recently, some people began writing this blessing on the neck of the tallit. This has a practical advantage for someone who doesn’t know the blessings by heart: He can hold up the tallit, read the blessing and then put it on. Jewish law doesn’t require that there be any writing around the neck of a tallit, however, and traditionally the tallit has no writing on it. Indeed Maimonides in one of his letters maintains that it is forbidden to embroider verses from the Torah and blessings on a tallit. He gives a few reasons — one reason is that a person may inadvertently wear the tallit in a place like a bathroom, where it is forbidden to bring written words of Torah. Another reason is that it’s incorrect to use verses of the Torah as decoration.