

# THE SECRET OF THE SHAMASH



In Constantinople there lived an Orthodox Jewish physician by the name of Nissim Rahamim. He was a scholar as well as a greatly respected doctor of medicine. This doctor's fame reached the ear of the Sultan and he was invited to the palace to engage in a dialogue with him. The Sultan was duly impressed with Nissim, for he saw that his praises were even greater than he had heard and the Sultan appointed Nissim to the position of Royal Physician.

One time, on the last night of Chanukah, the Sultan dropped in to Nissim Rahamim for a visit. The Sultan found his home enveloped in the warm aura of the Chanukah lights, everyone's faces shone with the joy fitting the festive mood. Nissim Rahamim and his family were sitting around the

table sipping hot coffee, eating latkes and playing dreidel. Nissim invited the Sultan in and sat him down at the head of the table.

The Sultan glanced around absorbing all that was going on around him. He noticed the menorah with its small lights burning and asked about the nature of the Holiday. Nissim told the Sultan all about the war with the Syrian-Greeks and the miracle of the small jug of oil that burned for eight days straight. The Sultan was impressed with the story. He gazed at the Chanukah lights and noticed one light was taller than the others. He asked Nissim about this additional light. Nissim explained that the additional light is called the Shamash and since the eight lights of Chanukah are only to be used for the mitzvah, an additional candle is placed out of line with the rest to be used for ordinary purposes.



The Sultan contemplated the Shamash, but wasn't satisfied with the reason Nissim offered. The Sultan thought that Nissim was withholding a secret behind the Shamash. He challenged Nissim to reveal the true secret of the Shamash within three days or else there will be much trouble for Nissim and his fellow Jews. With that he abruptly arose and left the house.

For the next three days Nissim was completely distraught. He wracked his brain to come up with an acceptable answer for the Sultan. The third night arrived and he still didn't have an answer. He decided to take a walk, maybe the cool evening air could clear his mind and he will arrive at an acceptable answer.

As he was walking an old man joined him greeting him, "Good evening Reb Nissim!" Nissim who was deep in thought uttered a weak "good evening" to the man.

The two men walked together without a word to each other.

After a while the man spoke and said, "Nu, Reb Nissim who will carry whom?"



Nissim looked at the man strangely; what the man said didn't make any sense. The old man and Nissim kept walking. At various points in the stroll the old man made some unusual remarks.

As they passed a funeral in session, the man commented, "What do you say my friend? Do you think he is really dead or alive?"



As they passed a field, the man observed, "Looks like tall, healthy stalks standing there. I wonder if they have been eaten already?"

Finally, they were standing in front of Reb Nissim's stately home. The man looked at the house and commented, "That's a beautiful residence, I wonder if there are living creatures in it".

Throughout the stroll, Nissim paid no attention to the man's remarks, he just politely smiled. But upon hearing this last comment, Nissim could hold back no longer, he offered, "Excuse me, Sir, This is my house. Would you like to come in and rest a bit from our long walk? Nissim wanted to query this strange man about his ridiculous questions. He asked about each comment the man uttered. Nissim was surprised to find that all of the old man's comments were spoken with wisdom.

The man explained the "living creatures" that he was referring to by Nissim's house were Nissim's children; "children are always happy and full of life. When parents train their children in the ways of the wisdom of the Torah, the parents live on eternally through their children".

The fine-looking stalks of which the man remarked if they had "already been eaten" meant; "Many people live beyond their means until they must use up the source of their revenue as security to pay off the debts they have incurred".

As to why the man commented upon observing the funeral, "Is he really dead", he quoted the maxim of the Rabbis that teaches that "wicked people are considered dead even when they are alive and one who studies Torah, observes mitzvos and works on his character is called alive even after he is deceased", since such a person's legacy of righteousness lives on through his deeds and children, far after he passes from this world.

When they met and the man remarked, "Who will carry whom;" he meant that when two people are walking together, and a lively conversation passes between them, it makes the way lighter, as if one is carrying the other, so I asked "who will carry whom", meaning who will start the conversation.

By now, Nissim saw a different person than when he started. He saw a sagacious individual who possessed deep wisdom. He began to tell the man of his current dilemma how the Sultan is displeased with him and demanded a satisfactory answer about the reason for the Shamash, the ninth candle and how the Sultan invented that Nissim was hiding some dark secret behind the extra candle.



The old man proceeded to answer the question as if he was prepared for it and was anxiously waiting to relate the answer. “Tell the Sultan that the secret of the Shamash is this: The Shamash-candle stands taller than the rest projecting its (clear) pure light and proclaims. Pay heed young and old, I was originally confined in the fruit of my essence, the majestic olive; I grew and became quite plump until I dripped out, bursting from my shell. Of what worth is such an existence? I then called out, ‘Good people, please release me from my tree, so that I may not continue to live selfishly!’ So they plucked from my tree and I was sent off to the olive press. They squeezed out my oil from me until the very last drop. Then my peel becomes useless, it is cast away, and only my essence, my oil remains. With it I illuminate the world. I spread my light and chase away the darkness! The Shamash shouts, “Son of man, learn from me and follow my example; make an effort to abandon your hard shell and help spread the light of Torah so that mankind can benefit from you. Aid the weak and oppressed; if you have silver help the underprivileged; you who has wisdom and knowledge share it with others and teach it to those who are not privileged with it. Elevate yourself and you will merit spreading the light of Hashem to your surroundings and the entire world will benefit from you!

Yes, indeed Reb Nissin thought, this will be an acceptable response to the Sultan. He warmly thanked his new friend and praised Hashem for His kindness in sending this remarkable sage to deliver the answer that he needed.