

The Long Pole

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Here's the problem: you're here, and you want to be there ("there" being someplace better, loftier, more spiritual than "here"). But you're not there, and won't be there for a good while, perhaps ever.

So do you act as if you're already there? Or do you tell yourself that here's just fine, and who needs there anyway?

You can become a hypocrite, or you can come to terms with your limitations. But there's also a third way--the way of the Long Pole.

In the outer chamber of the *heichal* (Sanctuary) in the Holy Temple stood the menorah--a five-foot, seven branched candelabra of pure gold. Every morning, a priest filled the menorah's seven lamps with the purest olive oil; in the afternoon, he would climb a three-step foot-ladder to kindle the menorah's lamps. The seven flames burned through the night, symbolizing the Divine light which radiated from the Holy Temple to the world.

Actually, it did not have to be a priest (*kohen*) who lit the menorah--the law states that an ordinary layman can also perform this mitzvah. But there is also a law that restricts entry into the Sanctuary to priests only--ordinary Israelites could venture no further than the *azarah*, the Temple courtyard.

These two laws create a legal paradox: a layman can light the menorah; but the menorah's designated place is inside the Sanctuary, and a layman cannot enter the Sanctuary.

Technically, there are solutions: a layman can light the menorah by means of a long pole, or the menorah can be carried out to him by a *kohen* and then replaced in the Sanctuary. But the inconsistency remains: if the Torah believes that an ordinary person should be able to light the menorah, why doesn't it place the menorah in a part of the Temple accessible to ordinary people? And if the sanctity of the menorah is such that it requires the higher holiness of the Sanctuary, why does the Torah permit someone who cannot attain this level to light it?

This paradox, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is intentionally set up by the Torah in order to convey to us a most profound lesson: the lesson of the long pole.

The lesson of the long pole says that we should aspire to spiritual heights that lie beyond our reach. Not that we should presume to be what we are not--that would be like an ordinary person entering the Sanctuary--but neither should we

11 February | 7 Adar I

Tetzaveh

Shabbat Begins: 4:53 pm

Shabbat Ends: 5:58 pm

desist from our efforts to reach that place. Even when we know that we, ourselves, will never be "there", we can still act upon that place, influence it, even illuminate it.

At times, this means that someone from that higher place reaches down to us. At times, it means that we contrive a way to reach beyond what we are at the present time. In either case, we are what Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch calls a "**lamplighter**": a person who carries a long pole with a flame at its end and goes from lamp to lamp to ignite them; no lamp is too lowly, and no lamp is too lofty, for the lamplighter and his pole.

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