

Rabbi Yoel Gold, rabbi of Congregation Bais Naftoli in Los Angeles, California, and a ninth-grade rebbe at Mesivta Birkas Yitzchok, has inspired hundreds of thousands of people with his stories. To watch some of his videos or to share your story with him, please visit InspireClips.com.



BY RABBI YOEL GOLD

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Rabbi Dovid Newman of Monsey is the founder of V'Haarev Na, a *chazarah* program that aims to develop boys' relationship with the Gemara in an environment of unconditional love and trust. He is also a 12th-grade *rebbe*. He has heard hundreds of stories from boys whose lives have been changed by the program, but one in particular stood out to him.

Before every weekend or school vacation, Rabbi Newman's practice was to have students go around the room and commit to learning or reviewing the amount of material of their choice. There was no judgment, only pledges. After the break, they would report back about whether they were successful.

One year before Chanukah vacation, one student after another made a pledge, some promising to learn more, some less. Then it was Moshe's* turn.

"Rebbe, I won't be able to learn a lot," he said. "I really want to do three *blatt* a day, but we're going camping, and I won't have any light at night. So for Chanukah vacation I'm making a really minimal pledge based on learning in the daytime—only one."

Rabbi Newman didn't react to this statement and went on to the next boy. But after school, he went to a nearby Lowe's and bought a good-quality camping lantern for \$50. He took it back to *yeshivah* and said, "Moshe, I have a gift for you."

Not wanting to pressure Moshe, he didn't elaborate. But Moshe got it. "Rebbe," he said, "I'm going to do three *blatt* a day."

The boys returned to *yeshivah* after Chanukah. "How did it go?" Rabbi



"The lantern is yours. Do whatever you want with it. If you want to return it to Lowe's fine, but I'm not taking it back."

Newman asked.

"Amazing," Moshe said. "The guy who organized the trip brought a generator. I did three *blatt* a day and I didn't even need the lantern! Rebbe, here's your lantern back. I don't need it."

Rabbi Newman's policy is to give. He shows the boys unconditional love and support. There was no way he would take back the gift. "It's yours," he told Moshe. "Do whatever you want with it. If you want to return it to Lowe's, fine, but I'm not taking it back."

Over the next few months, Moshe would remind him every so often of the

brand-new camping lantern sitting in his home. "Do you want it back?" he would ask. And every time, the *rebbe's* answer was the same: "It's yours. You keep it. Do whatever you want with it."

Teves and Shevat passed, and then came Adar. That year, Purim fell on Motzaei Shabbos and Sunday. But on Friday there was a tremendous blizzard, dumping two feet of snow across the Monsey area and knocking out the electricity in almost every Jewish community. Stores sold out of candles and flashlights. In Rabbi Newman's neighborhood of South Monsey, there was a total blackout. His family went away for Shabbos, and so did many others.

One area, Moshe's neighborhood of Olympia, still had power. The residents tried to help out others, hosting people from nearby communities for Shabbos. And then, five minutes before *shekiah*, Olympia too went dark. Needless to say, it was a stressful Shabbos.

Rabbi Newman returned home on Motzaei Shabbos, ready to salvage some Purim joy from the disastrous weather. And that night he had a visitor—Moshe, who had driven across the neighborhood to speak to him.

"Rebbe, I have to tell you something!" The excitement and joy on his face were clear. "There was only one person learning on Friday night in Olympia—me! I learned two *blatt* with that lantern you bought me two months ago!

"You know we lost power five minutes before Shabbos? No one in Olympia was prepared for a blackout. The people who stayed home in other neighborhoods went out and bought candles, but not us—we thought we had electricity. There was only one light in the neighborhood and only one Gemara open—mine!" ●