

## LightWorks Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Our children are our greatest resource, the hope of the world, the next generation. When we're "too busy" to explain a point of faith or theology, when we're afraid they'll find it "too boring," we risk nothing less than the work and witness of all the saints who have gone before us because we've chosen *not* to pass on the precious jewel of our faith.

When a star explodes in some distant galaxy, we don't hear it, we don't feel it, we don't even see it for thousands and thousands of years. The great distance of that star from planet earth means that even though the brilliance of the explosion travels at the speed of light (180,000 miles/second), it takes generations to reach even our most powerful telescopes.

Only when the light finally reaches us can we acknowledge that distant star's explosive beauty. Without the continuity of the light, tirelessly, steadily traveling towards us for millennia, we might never know that that star had existed at all.

Why am I talking about our youth and exploding stars? Because **communities of faith must be able to produce light** with the same intensity, tenacity and brilliance of that distant star - light that can be trusted to stay so true to its trajectory that the image it conveys is a vital, vibrant, distortion-free representation to generation after generation of the original faith community.

And communities of faith can only produce that light with intensity, tenacity, and brilliance, if it passes that faith on to the next generation in order to have an *impact* on a new generation of believers, all of which is done through our intentional and sacrificial tithe to God.

It was Benjamin Franklin's least known, but perhaps most important political insights: "America's destiny is not power, but light." And while Franklin's fixation was on the body politic, his prediction is even more true for the body of Christ.

**The church's destiny is not programs or power or music or musings, but light - to be a community of light.** And a church that is true to the True Light (Jesus Christ) must always be willing to trade its striving for "power" for its standing in the "light."

"I never saw an ugly thing in my life," John Constable wrote. "For let the form of an object be what it may, - light, shade, and perspective will always make it beautiful".<sup>1</sup> When we, singularly as individuals and collectively as a church, stand in God's light, there is no such thing as ugliness. Beauty is everywhere, and the Light that is Christ makes all things beautiful.

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<sup>1</sup> C. R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, ed. Jonathan Mayne [London: Pahidon Press, 1951], 280

This morning's lesson from Deuteronomy 6 is known as the Shema. The Shema not only encapsulates the heart of Jewish monotheism, it also specifies directives for generational revitalization of its brilliance and power through day-to-day practices.

Our Great Commandment found in Mark 12 as recited by Jesus is one of the most dazzling rays of light guiding the church from generation to generation. The Great Commandment is modeled after the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. After Deuteronomy 6:4 entreats Israel to "hear" and to repeat the oneness of God, verse 7 calls for the instruction of the next generation - "recite them to your children."

The commandment also calls for the Shema's truth to be proclaimed whether the Israelites were "at home" in Israel or "away," dispersed in some strange, alien land. Deuteronomy goes on to translate into powerful and pervasive symbols of light the truth of God's presence and the imperative to love.

For centuries a Jewish home has always been recognizable from the outside by the presence of a mezuzah. The mezuzah is a small enclosed container affixed to the upper third of the doorway of a Jewish home - size, shape, and design is completely variable.

The mezuzah literally fulfills the Shema commandment to "write ... on the doorposts ..." because rolled up inside each mezuzah is a scroll inscribed with Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 on one side, and the single word *Shaddai* (Hebrew for "Almighty") lettered on the other. A small window in the mezuzah allows the word *Shaddai* to be viewed from the outside.

In an observant Jew's home a mezuzah is hung on the doorway of every room, welcoming and reminding all who enter that the Lord's presence is there. The mezuzah's presence literally makes it visible to all that those who live in that house have committed their lives to upholding Torah and continuing their lives under its laws.

Another symbol connected to the Shema are *tefillin* or *phylacteries* - leather boxes worn as reminders of faith that are bound "on your hand and ... as a symbol on your forehead" (Deuteronomy 6:8). Specifically, one leather box (*tefillin shel yad*) is bound to the arm and hand, while the other (*tefillin shel rosin*) is tied to the forehead.

Both contain parchments inscribed with the scriptural passages stipulating the practice of wearing the tefillin (Exodus 13:9 and 13:16, Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18). The tefillin are worn every day when the morning service is prayed. Visible, everyday symbols of faith which are passed on from generation to generation.

Abraham Isaac Kuk, first Chief Rabbi of modern Israel, emphasized the divine spark present in each and every person, which through proper care and nurture could be fanned into a bright light of spiritual power.

Observing the commandments, the ceremonies and symbols associated with them was the primary aid in bringing this light to bear on the life of the believer and the whole community of faith.

Kuk maintained that: "All practices, commandments and customs are nothing but so many vessels, containing a few sparks of this great light from above, and in proportion to the spiritual power inherent in these vessels, their purity and fitness in thought and their exactitude in expression - the light concealed in them grows and expands."<sup>2</sup>

**Every generation must put up its own mezuzah and commit itself to daily donning the *tefillin* for prayer.** Only when these traditions are successfully passed from father to son, mother to daughter, do they pass the light of faithfulness to future generations.

No matter how important any sign of our faith may be it will disappear from sight in the twinkling of an eye if there is no new generation to pick it up and keep it in the light.

Can we insure that our tithes to this congregation will have an impact on the next generation - the faithful who will become "stargazers," those fascinated and inspired by the Light of faith that shines on them from a great distance, yet shines with intensity and clarity in the present world?

The act of "stargazing" is nothing less than reaching out to the stars and touching the great faithfulness and love of those whose ministry came before us, and radiating that Light to others through our own lives and love.

Don't let the lights go out!

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<sup>2</sup> as quoted in Abraham Karp's *The Jewish Way of Life and Thought* [New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1981], 230.