

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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## HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

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This year, Hannukkah didn't go so well. We've been using the menorah I bought in 1984: a nice one that spells Israel in Hebrew and the lights coming out of the Hebrew letters. It's not a fancy menorah but it's the one that's in our pictures, year after year.

However, we've banged it up over the years and this year it was hard to get the candles to stand up straight and last night we nearly burned the house down (not to mention some fingers) trying to light it at all. Clearly, it's time for the menorah to go. But it's a bit of a wrench.

There are two conflicting principles at play here. One is called yeiush, which literally means "despair". When you lose a piece of property it is not considered ownerless until you give up hope of finding it. If you leave your umbrella in a cab in New York City and don't realize you've lost it until you arrive home, the umbrella cannot be legally claimed until you despair of ever retrieving it. Then it is considered ownerless property and it's "finders keepers". Acquisition of the umbrella before this point is considered theft. So on the one hand, in my heart, I've done yeiush on ever using this menorah at Hannukkah again. It's a danger and there's not much joy in the mitzvah when you're nursing burnt fingers.

But should we just throw the menorah away? Ah, that's where the holding on comes into play and the sages give us some backup for recognizing this menorah's holiness:

**Rabbi Yehudah said: If a synagogue becomes a ruin, they do not deliver eulogies in it, nor twist ropes in it, nor spread out nets, nor spread out produce under its roof to dry nor make of it a shortcut for its holiness remains, even when it becomes a ruin. (M. Megillah 3:3)**

The sages recognize that even though something has become derelict, if it once had some holiness in it, it retains an essence of that holiness forever. Even worn out Torah coverings retain their holiness. In the end, they are used to make shrouds for those who the community must bury. They "die" as they "lived": engaged in holy work.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever faced this problem of "holding on and letting go"? What did you want to keep? Did you? How did you solve the problem?
2. Do you have any creative ways in which we might "re-purpose" our menorah in some holy way?

3. Judaism recognizes, with these two opposing concepts, despair and abiding holiness, that there is a spiritual aspect to physical property. Have you ever experienced this "non-physical" side of physical items? How and what was it?

As always, looking forward to your answers!