

TANSTAAFL

by Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

In 1911, electrical power finally came to the small town in Poland where dwelt a great spiritual master, the acknowledged religious and spiritual leader of the town. The town's residents rejoiced in the life-brightening innovation, and all the homes in town glowed with the light of electricity, brighter by far than the kerosene lights that had previously illuminated the community.

One day, however, a power failure struck, and the town was plunged into darkness. Frantically, the residents scurried to and fro, searching for the kerosene lanterns which they had so gleefully discarded a month before.

The master commented, "When each home was illuminated by its own fuel, the light was far dimmer and less convenient, but, when one lamp did not function, the thousands of others were unaffected, and, indeed, the families with light could share it with the one whose lamp had failed. Now the quality of the light is many times greater, but, when something goes wrong, every light in town is extinguished."

He continued, "There is a lesson here for all of us. Certainly, the centralization of power can bring great benefits and can enable us to accomplish far more than we could with each individual acting separately. But we must also be aware of the danger. When things do not go as they should, the damage can be far greater as well."