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Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

# Chanukah To-Go

# 5771



## Featuring Divrei Torah from

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Rabbi Joshua Flug  
Rabbi Moshe Lichtman  
Rabbi Yona Reiss  
Rabbi Michael Taubes  
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Dear Chaverim,

We are so excited to present you with Chanukah To Go.

This edition introduces you to some of our Yeshiva's Torah personalities, including contributions from our two recently established kollelim in Toronto and Chicago and divrei Torah from Rebbetzins around the country. The Holiday To Go series brings you Torah from the ever expanding universe of our Yeshiva.

Baruch Hashem, we are encouraged by the thousands who have downloaded these pamphlets. We hope that through this virtual shared learning, we are empowered to create lights, dispelling the darkness in our Jewish community and the world around us.

*Bivracha,*

**Rabbi Kenneth Brander**

The David Mitzner Dean,  
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# Understanding the Miracles of Chanukah

Rabbi Azarya Berzon

*Co-Rosh Beit Midrash, Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov of Toronto*

There are a number of questions to be asked regarding Chanukah:

1. Why was the celebration of the eight days of Chanukah instituted to commemorate the miracle of the *pach hashemen* (jug of oil)? After all, the military victory was by far a more significant miracle. How do we classify these two miracles?
2. The **Tz'lach**, in his Drashot (#34) asks: Since the *Yevanim* contaminated many items in the Mikdash, for example, the *solet l'minachot* (flour for the flour offerings) and the *yayin l'nisachim* (wine for the wine libations), why was the *shemen* (oil) singled out by Hashem for the *nes* (miracle) of Chanukah?
3. Why does the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah, 4:12) call the mitzvah of Chanukah, a “*mitzvah chavivah ad me'od*” (a very beloved mitzvah)? After all, there are other mitzvot whose purpose is to publicize a miracle, e.g. *mikrah Megillah* (reading of the Megillah)?

The concept of a *nes* is central to Chanukah. What is a miracle? Of course, the Ramban says in his commentary on the Torah at the end of *parshat Bo* that even *tevah*, nature, is a *nes*; everything is a result of and an expression of God's will. However, we would say that a miracle is a change in the normal course of events, a happening which contradicts the laws of physics or astronomy.

The idea of a miracle is problematic. The foundation of all science is the Law of Causality. This law states that whatever happens in the world of Nature is a result of a cause which both preceded it, and which brought about the effect in a necessary way. The laws of Nature have a power unto themselves. Whatever is, is a result of a previous cause. And that cause, in turn, is the result of a cause that preceded it. And so on. This chain of cause and effect doesn't lend itself to change; it is not subject to alteration. All of science is based on this principle.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note Moshe Rabbeinu's response to the “*s'neh boer ba'eish v'eineinu ochal*” (the bush is burning but is not consumed). Moshe Rabbeinu does not respond by shouting “Miracle, miracle!” Rather, he comes close to investigate the situation. He is curious, and wants to understand “*asura nah ve'er'eh*” (I will turn aside now and look).

Were we to accept the empirical argument and reject the principle of Cause and Effect, we could

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<sup>1</sup> The British philosopher, David Hume, questioned the belief in the principle of causality. He demonstrated that the principle of Cause and Effect cannot claim for itself any scientific, empirical proof. Empirical evidence can merely demonstrate that Event A took place **prior** to Event B, but cannot establish that Event A **caused** Event B.

suggest a simple understanding of a miracle. There are no definite laws of nature. A miracle is any event which is a result of the intervention of God in the course of events. Only after Moshe hears the voice of Hashem addressing him, does he recognize the burning *s'neh* as a miracle.

However, even if we accept the classical approach to Causality and the Laws of Nature, we can still maintain that the philosophical problem is really not severe. To one who believes in God as Creator, it is simple enough to say that He, who is the Author of nature and its laws, has the power to change nature, and bring about miracles.

However, the real problem regarding our understanding of the concept of *nes* is not the **possibility** of miracles (as a philosophical question), but rather, the **necessity** of miracles (as a theological dilemma). Why is a miracle necessary? Doesn't the concept of miracle imply that God's intervention in a miraculous manner is a result of some "mistake" or "failure" in the mechanics of nature, i.e. in the "original plan" of the Creation? How are we to understand this?<sup>2</sup> If imperfect man creates a plan based on his understanding of certain rules and principles, the plan must be changed when imperfect man becomes aware of his mistakes in understanding these rules. But it's quite another thing when God creates; when He produces a natural order. Could there be "mistakes" in the creative act and the Divine plan of the Perfect Being?<sup>3</sup>

The resolution of this dilemma is that our belief in miracles is based on another belief, namely, man's freedom of choice. There is one area of movement within the vast endless universe, which is uncontrolled by the Laws of Nature. Freedom of will in the human sphere is a fundamental belief in Judaism. It is this principle which underlies the tenet of *schar v'onesh*, reward and punishment. What sense would punishment and reward make if man's actions are determined, if everything we do is a result of a previous cause which makes our actions necessary?

The belief in Free Will is based not only on our Torah, but on our intuition as well; we experience freedom of choice on a daily basis, constantly. Therefore, it is impossible to say that the Universe is perfect. In order for there to be Free Choice, *man must be imperfect*. If man were perfect, there could be no Good and Evil. It is only because of the imperfection of man, that responsibilities and challenges are imposed upon him to achieve higher levels of existence.

If man is to be challenged, he must exist in an imperfect universe. What challenge would face man if he lived in a perfect world? We say that man must perfect ('*mitaken*') himself and the world in which he lives, and this demand is a result of the imperfection of the world. As the kabbalists would have it, a "corner" of the created universe was left in a state of "*tohu va'vohu*," and man is called upon to perfect this chaos - "*asher bara Elokim la'asot*."

Now we can understand the necessity for miracles. Since God created man as an imperfect being, there is a need, on occasion, for God to intervene in the course of human events through the medium of a miracle. The freedom granted to man can sometimes lead man to the abyss of a

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<sup>2</sup> There was a theological movement called the Deists, who actually denied the possibility of miracles. Since the Universe is an expression of the Wisdom of God, and God's Wisdom is perfect, therefore the Laws of the Universe are perfect and could never be altered.

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. Eliezer Berkowitz, "The Scientific and the Religious Worldview", Geshet, 1976, vo. 5, pp 75-87

bottomless pit, to the point of destruction, not only of himself, but also of the world around him. When man abuses his Free Will, he may bring the universe to the brink of devastation. God is very tolerant of man. God waits patiently, “*Ki lo yachpotz b’mot ha’mait ki im bishuvo*” (Hashem does not desire the demise of the wicked, but rather his repentance). But sometimes, man goes too far, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will not stand by and allow history to take its course. If He were to do so, His purpose in creation would be undermined. The underlying purpose of “*nes*” is to preserve the possibility of the fulfillment of the teleological goal of creation. We can never know when the situation will arise which will precipitate a miracle. But we know that the purpose of the miracle is to stop man before he goes too far.

This is the explanation for the miracle of the military victory against the Greeks. The Greeks wanted to destroy the Jewish ideology. The Greeks emphasized only the *chitzoniut*, the physical aspects of man, whereas the Torah says that man is essentially a spiritual being, and sanctity (*kedushah*) defines the essence and purpose of man. Had the two cultures, the two ideologies, been able to co-exist, there would be no need for a *nes*. Only when the existence of Klal Yisrael, as a unique People, was in danger did Hashem intervene and bring about a miracle. Only when religious persecution became so severe that the survival of Klal Yisrael as the spiritual force of the universe was jeopardized, did God get involved in altering the natural law. Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought about the miracle of “*rabim be’ad me’atim*” (the many in the hands of the few) and “*t’meyim b’yad t’horim*” (the impure in the hands of the pure). Chazal constantly emphasize that the ultimate purpose of God’s creation was and is Klal Yisrael.<sup>4</sup> It is by means of the One People who proclaim the existence of the One God that the Divine purpose is achieved. Without this People, there could be no universe. The *nes ha’nitzachon*, the miracle of the victory, was necessary in order to facilitate the fulfillment of the Divine plan of creation.

But there had to be a second *nes*. The message of the first miracle had to be “loud and clear.” There was a need to demonstrate that it was the *taharah*, purity, of Klal Yisrael that was at stake in the battle between the Jews and the Greeks. It was crucial to publicize that the *nes ha’nitzachon* was implemented for the sake of the special role of Israel in this world and in order to sustain the unique covenantal relationship between God and Knesset Yisrael. The miracle of the *pach hashemen* would reveal that God had intervened to change the course of natural history on behalf of His People.

How was this demonstration achieved through the miracle of the oil? What did the *menorah* symbolize? The *Gemora* (*Shabbat* 22b) establishes the unique essence of the *menorah* service: “*Edut he liba’ey olam she’hashechinah shorah b’Yisrael*”, i.e. the *menorah* testified to the world that God’s Divine Presence rests upon Klal Yisrael. No other dimensions of the *Mikdash* service embody this testimony. This explains why *hashgacha* singled out the *menorah* for the *nes* of Chanukah.

It is for this reason that Chanukah is described as a *mitzvah chavivah ad me’od*. Jews the world over identify with Chanukah. In the Chanukah experience we publicize the unique role of our People in the Divine scheme of creation. The light that shines forth from the *pach hashemen* reveals the essence of our nation and its purpose in this world.

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<sup>4</sup> See Brachot 6a: The tefilin of God contain the posuk “*Mi ke’amcha Yisrael goy echad ba’aretz.*” See also Rashi’s commentary at the beginning of *B’raishit*.

# Beit Shammai & Beit Hillel: Two Fundamentally Different Approaches to Chanukah

Rabbi Joshua Flug

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One of the more famous disputes between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel is regarding the practice of the extremely scrupulous (*mehadrin min hamehadrin*) on Chanukah.

*Our Rabbis taught: The precept of Chanukah [demands] one light for a man and his household; the scrupulous [kindle] a light for each member [of the household]; and the extremely scrupulous, — Beit Shammai maintain: On the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but Beit Hillel say: On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased. Ulla said: In the West [Palestine] two amoraim, R. Yosi b. Avin and R. Yosi b. Zevida, differ therein: one maintains, the reason of Beit Shammai is that it shall correspond to the days still to come, and that of Beit Hillel is that it shall correspond to the days that are gone; but another maintains: Beit Shammai's reason is that it shall correspond to the bulls of the Festival and Beit Hillel's reason is that we promote in [matters of] sanctity but do not reduce.*  
**Shabbat 21b (Adapted from Soncino Translation)**

מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד והמהדרין מן המהדרין בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך אמר עולא פליגי בה תרי אמוראי במערבא ר' יוסי בר אבין ור' יוסי בר זבידא חד אמר טעמא דב"ש כנגד ימים הנכנסין וטעמא דב"ה כנגד ימים היוצאין וחד אמר טעמא דב"ש כנגד פרי החג וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.

**שבת כא:**

Beit Shammai are of the opinion that the lights are lit in descending order, either to correspond to the number of days that are left or to follow the model of the *mussaf* offerings on Sukkot (*parei hachag*), when each day, one less bull is offered.<sup>5</sup> Beit Hillel are of the opinion that the lights are lit in ascending order, either to correspond to the number of days that have been observed or to

<sup>5</sup> Bamidbar 29:12-34.

follow the model that one always ascends in matters of holiness (*ma'alin bakodesh*).<sup>6</sup> There is a lot of Torah literature that discusses this passage in the Gemara, both from the perspective of Jewish law and the perspective of Jewish thought. In this article, we will collect a few of those ideas.

## A Halachic Analysis of the Passage

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797), *Bei'ur HaGra*, *Orach Chaim* 671:4, notes that the dispute between R. Yosi bar Avin and R. Yosi bar Zevida has a practical ramification. In *Chanukah-To-Go* 5770, we noted the opinion of Tosafot, *Shabbat* 21b, s.v. *VeHaMehadrin*, who state:

*It seems to Rabbeinu Yitzchak that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel only refer to [adding] to the one light per household because there is a greater fulfillment when it is recognizable when one increases or decreases corresponding to the days that are coming or the days that are going. However, if one lights one light for each member of the house, even if one adds lights each night, it is not recognizable, for the onlooker will think that it corresponds to the number of people in the house.*

**Tosafot, Shabbat 21b, s.v. VeHaMehadrin**

נראה לר"י דב"ש וב"ה לא קיימי אלא  
אנר איש וביתו שכן יש יותר הידור  
דאיכא היכרא כשמוסיף והולך או  
מחסר שהוא כנגד ימים הנכנסים או  
היוצאים אבל אם עושה נר לכל אחד  
אפי' יוסיף מכאן ואילך ליכא היכרא  
שיסברו שכן יש בני אדם בבית.  
תוס' שבת כא: ד"ה והמהדרין

The Vilna Gaon notes that the concern of Tosafot only applies if one follows the opinion that the primary argument between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel is contingent on whether one marks the days still to come or the days that are gone. If this is the basis for *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, one can understand why the number of days must be recognizable in the lights. However, if one assumes that the primary dispute is contingent on whether one follows the *parei hachag* model or the *ma'alin bakodesh* model, then there is no need for the number of days to be recognizable in the lights.<sup>7</sup>

R. Yosef B. Soloveitchik (1820-1892), *Beit HaLevi* on *Chanukah*, takes the Vilna Gaon's idea a step further. R. Soloveitchik discusses the case of someone who is missing one candle in order to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. For example, someone only has two candles for the third night. Is it preferable to light both of the candles or only one? R. Soloveitchik notes that according to Tosafot, the primary factor of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is to represent the number of days of Chanukah. If one cannot accurately represent the number of days, there is no *mehadrin min hamehadrin* fulfillment. As such, one should only light a single candle. However, according to the approach that one should always ascend and never descend, even in a situation where one

<sup>6</sup> The Gemara, *Menachot* derives this concept from verses in the Torah. R. Yosef Teomim (1727-1793), *P'ri Megadim*, M.Z., O.C. 42:1, writes that this is a biblically mandated concept.

<sup>7</sup> In *Chanukah To Go* 5770, we noted the opinion of Rambam (1138-1204), *Hilchot Chanukah* 4:1-2, who disagrees with Tosafot and maintains that *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is fulfilled when the lights reflect the number of members of the household and are increased each night. The Vilna Gaon tries to prove that R. Yitzchak Alfasi (1013-1103) agrees with Rambam on this matter from R. Alfasi's comments, *Shabbat* 9b, where he seems to prefer the *parei hachag* vs. *ma'alin bakodesh* approach. R. Alfasi generally doesn't record matters that have no halachic ramifications. The Vilna Gaon concludes that R. Alfasi views the dispute between R. Yosi bar Avin and R. Yosi bar Zevida as a halachic dispute. R. Alfasi prefers the *parei hachag* vs. *ma'alin bakodesh* approach because he is of the opinion that *mehadrin min hamehadrin* does not require that the lights correspond to the number of days.

cannot ascend, one should still not descend. Therefore, one should light both candles.<sup>8</sup>

R. Ya'akov Yehoshua Falk (1680-1756), *P'nei Yehoshua*, *Shabbat* 21b, has an alternative analysis of the opinions of R. Yosi bar Avin and R. Yosi bar Zevida. R. Falk suggests that the reason why having a different number of lights each night is considered *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is that it further publicizes the miracle. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel dispute the focus of the miracle of the oil. According to Beit Hillel, the miracle was more spectacular each day and each day's miracle was built on the miracles of the previous days. *Mehadrin min hamehadrin* commemorates the spectacular nature of the miracle. This idea is supported by the statement that Beit Hillel's opinion corresponds to the days that are gone. According to Beit Shammai, the lights themselves were not an inherent testament to the miracle because each day, the lamps were cleaned and new oil was placed in them. The only inherent testament to the miracle was the flask of oil that was found. On the first night, the flask containing only one portion of oil was poured and miraculously, only one-eighth of the oil was needed and seven-eighths remained. On the second night, only another eighth was needed and six-eighths remained. Thus, the flask's testament to the miracle was in the oil that remained and therefore, *mehadrin min hamehadrin* should be commemorated in descending order. This idea is supported by the statement that Beit Shammai's opinion corresponds to the days still to come. The *parei hachag* and *ma'alin bakodesh* models are not relevant to *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Rather, the *ma'alin bakodesh* model was used to support Beit Hillel's opinion because it is a model that is used in many areas of halacha and should override Beit Shammai's concern for displaying an inherent testament to the miracle. To this, Beit Shammai would respond that the *parei hachag* serve as a precedent to a model of descent and therefore, one should not be concerned about the *ma'alin bakodesh* model.<sup>9</sup>

R. Ya'akov Y. Kanievski (1899-1985), *Kehillot Ya'akov*, *Shabbat* no. 17, notes that according to R. Falk, the idea of corresponding to the days still to come or the days that are gone refers to the original miracle. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel dispute whether it is preferable to publicize the miracle by focusing on the ascending aspect or the descending aspect. Tosafot's requirement to publicize the miracle by ensuring that the number of days is recognizable in the lights is not necessarily based on the statement of R. Yosi bar Avin or R. Yosi bar Zevida. Furthermore, R. Yosi bar Avin and R. Yosi bar Zevida do not seem to dispute whether the number of days must be recognizable in the lights. As such, one is not compelled to accept the Vilna Gaon's analysis (or R. Soloveitchik's analysis).

## A Global Approach to the Dispute

Some commentators explain that the dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel is not a localized dispute about *mehadrin*, but reflects two global perspectives on Judaism. The Zohar,

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<sup>8</sup>R. Avraham Y. Kook (1865-1935), *Mishpat Kohen* no. 95, disagrees with this premise. He contends that *ma'alin bakodesh* was the factor in the original determination of how *mehadrin min hamehadrin* should be fulfilled. It is not a factor in specific cases where one cannot fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* properly. If one cannot fulfill it properly, one should simply perform *mehadrin* or the basic mitzvah.

<sup>9</sup> R. Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, *Binyan Av* 2:18, explains that *ma'alin bakodesh* as a determinant of order does not apply when there is another reason to choose a different order.

*Reiyah Mehemna* (page 245a), notes that the rulings of Beit Shammai follow the character trait of *din* (strict judgment) and *gevurah* (inner strength) and rulings of Beit Hillel follow the character trait of *chesed* (kindness) and *rachamim* (mercy).<sup>10</sup>

R. Tzvi Hirsch Morgenstern, *Ateret Tzvi* (Chanukah 5669), notes that Beit Shammai prefer to highlight the strength of the miracle of Chanukah, the defeat of the enemy. This occurred on the first day of Chanukah and its impact diminished over time. Therefore, *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is performed to highlight the diminishing strength of the miracle. Beit Hillel prefer to highlight the holiness that resulted from the miracle. Just as the holiness increased each day because of the rededication of the Temple, so too, the lights should reflect an increase in holiness.

R. Chaim Friedlander, *Siftei Chaim, Moadim*, Vol. II (pp. 118-120), explains that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel have two different approaches to the exile. Beit Shammai focus on the shortcomings of each individual and view spirituality in the exile as having a diminishing return. Every generation becomes weaker in its relationship with G-d. Beit Hillel focus on the positive aspects of each individual and view the exile as a testament to the endurance of the Jewish People. As each generation continues to observe mitzvot, a greater recognition of the endurance of the Jewish People is realized.

R. Chaim Halberstam (1793-1876), *Divrei Chaim Al HaTorah, Chanukah* (page 18a), presents a mystical explanation of the dispute. Beit Shammai are focused on strict judgment and their approach tries to remove or diminish any bad judgments or decrees. Lighting in descending order represents removal or diminishment of these judgments. Beit Hillel are focused on mercy and their approach tries to "sweeten" any bad judgments or decrees. This is accomplished by elevating oneself each day. Lighting in ascending order symbolizes that daily elevation.

## The Effect of an Inspirational Moment

R. Shmuel Borenstein (1856-1926), in his *Shem MiShmuel* explains that the dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel relates to the inspiration and joy that one experiences from an event as time goes on. In one of R. Borenstein's essays (Chanukah 5677), he explains that for some, inspiration can have a diminishing effect. The inspiration wears off over time. This is the basis for Beit Shammai's opinion. For others, a moment of inspiration is an opportunity for growth and one can use that moment as a stepping stone for further growth if one doesn't allow the inspiration to dwindle. This is the basis of Beit Hillel's opinion.

R. Borenstein (Chanukah 5674) also explains that Beit Shammai are of the opinion that the Chanukah lights commemorate the defeat of the enemy and the salvation. As each generation passes, it becomes more difficult to relate to the joy experienced at the time of the miracle. Therefore, the Chanukah lights are lit in descending order to commemorate the diminishing joy. Beit Hillel are of the opinion that the Chanukah lights also commemorate the rededication of the Temple. A rededication implies that the old is renewed continually. Renewal is a major

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<sup>10</sup> See R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah* no. 34, and R. Ya'akov Bruchin of Karlin, Introduction to *Kohelet Ya'akov*, who develop this idea.

theme of Chanukah and each day a new light is lit to add a new quality of holiness to the day.

## Other Approaches to the Dispute

R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntchitz (1550-1619), *Olelot Ephraim*, Vol. II, no. 44, notes that the body and the soul have opposite properties regarding maturity. The body ages over time and gradually deteriorates.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the soul begins with no merits and matures over time. Beit Shammai are of the opinion that the Chanukah lights represent the body. We light Chanukah lights to commemorate the victory over the enemy that wanted to physically destroy us. Just as a candle dwindles over time, so, too, the human body dwindles over time. For this reason, the *mehadrin min hamehadrin* practice serves to remind us not to pursue worldly pleasures because the body is only temporary. Instead, a person should pursue spiritual matters that remain with the person forever. Beit Hillel are of the opinion that the Chanukah lights represent the soul. The Chanukah lights celebrate the spiritual victory over an enemy that was intent on causing physical and spiritual destruction of the Jewish People. Since the soul always matures, the Chanukah lights are lit in ascending order.

R. Avraham Y. Kook (1865-1935), *Ein Ayah, Shabbat 21b*, suggests that the dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel relates to how the Jewish People can influence the rest of the world. The world is full of people and nations with many different views. Some of those differences are natural and bring good to the world and some of those differences cause dispute, evil and destruction. As the Jewish People assert a greater influence on the world, the differences between people of the world become limited to the natural differences and the people of the world become unified. Beit Shammai are of the opinion that the miracle of Chanukah was a step towards unification of the world. Therefore, the Chanukah lights are lit in a way that symbolizes unity- descending from eight parts to one part. Beit Hillel are of the opinion that unifying the world is one of the goals of our service of God. The means of doing so is by bringing light to the world. That light must be increased continually and this is why the Chanukah lights are lit in ascending order.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> R. Luntchitz writes that the body melts from solid to liquid over time and eventually causes death. This idea is based on Galenic medicine which subscribed to the theory that there was "innate heat" in the body and over time, the body becomes cool and dry, eventually leading to death. See Edward Reichman, "The Halakhic Definition of Death in Light of Medical History," *Torah UMadda Journal* 4 (1994): 148-174, who cites numerous rabbinic authorities who subscribed to this idea. Thomas S. Hall, "The Biology of the Timaeus in Historical Perspective," *Arion* 4 (1965): 109-122, notes that the idea of "radical moisture" was popularized during the renaissance period.

<sup>12</sup> R. Moshe Feinstein, *Darash Moshe, Drush* no. 30, also explains that Beit Shammai focus on unity of the nations and Beit Hillel focus on bringing light to the world.

# Chanukah in Hashkafa and Halachah: Peninei Halacha on Chanukah

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## The Holiday of Chanukah is Eternal

During the Second Temple era, “The Greeks entered the sanctuary and defiled all the oil that was there. When the Hasmonean dynasty gained power and defeated them, they searched [for pure oil] and found only one flask that was marked with the seal of the High Priest, but it had enough oil only to light [the Menorah] one day. A miracle occurred and they lit [the Menorah]

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<sup>13</sup> The following article is translated from *Peninei Halachah* by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed *shlita*. R. Melamed is the Rosh Yeshiva and communal rabbi of Har Berachah in the Shomron and is a prolific author on both halachic and hashkafic issues. To date, he has written eleven volumes of *Peninei Halachah*, on a wide range of halachic topics, and three volumes of *Revivim*, on hashkafic issues. The *Peninei Halachah* series passes down the tradition of generations of halachic decisions in a refreshing, Israel-spirited fashion. The books are written in a clear and modernized language, clarifying the *halachot* with their spiritual meanings, and relating to the customs of the various ethnic groups. The *halachot* are explained starting from the general rules down to the minor details, with an emphasis on relevant issues that have arisen in the recent past. R. Melamed’s goal is to strengthen the knowledge of *halachah* amongst the Jewish nation, so that it can serve as a bridge between the lofty morals of the Torah and everyday life.

*Peninei Halachah* has received wide-acceptance among students in numerous institutions. In *yeshivot*, pre-military academies, and women’s seminaries, the books are learned joyfully and studiously. In Israeli high schools, as well, the books have made their mark, enabling students to strengthen and grow in the study of *halachah*. The books have even been incorporated into various educational programs, and the Ministry of Education has approved matriculation exams based on the series. Over 150,000 copies are in print.

The current article is from the volume entitled *Zemanim*, on the minor holidays. It covers approximately three-quarters of the eleventh chapter, focusing mainly on the history and *hashkafah* behind Chanukah. The complete translation is due out towards the end of 2011. Several other volumes are currently being translated into English and other languages.

The translator, Rabbi Moshe Lichtman, is a graduate of Yeshiva College, RIETS, and the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education. He also received *semichah* from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. R. Lichtman has translated and/or written several popular volumes, mostly on Religious-Zionist philosophy. They are: *Eim HaBanim Semeichah*, *An Angel Among Men* (a biography on Rav Kook), *A Question of Redemption*, *Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah*, *What’s the Purpose?* and *Rise From the Dust*. For more on Rabbi Melamed and Yeshivat Har Berachah, visit [yhb.org.il](http://yhb.org.il)

for eight days with this oil. A year later, [the Sages] established [these days] as a holiday, making them [a time] for praise and thanksgiving,” and one may not fast or deliver eulogies on these days (*Shabbat* 21b, *Megillat Ta’anit* 9:2).

The Sages established many more holidays for the Jews during the Second Temple era, to thank God for and rejoice over the salvations He performed for them. They are all mentioned in [an ancient scroll called] *Megillat Ta’anit*. Many of these holidays commemorate the victories of the Hasmoneans, like Nicanor Day – the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar – on which the Hasmoneans defeated a large Greek army and killed their commander, Nicanor. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, they conquered Caesarea. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Elul, they killed the apostates who refused to repent. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of Mar-Cheshvan, the Hasmoneans destroyed the brothel that the Greeks had built near the Holy Temple. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month, they conquered Samaria and began settling it.<sup>14</sup>

However, the halachic authorities determined that [the holidays enumerated in] *Megillat Ta’anit* were annulled after the destruction of the Second Temple (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 573:1). After all, once the Temple was destroyed, all the good things that happened on these days faded away and there is no longer any reason to celebrate them. It is even permissible to fast and deliver eulogies on these days. Chanukah is the only holiday that retained its special status and remains in effect throughout the generations. The Sages explain that this is because of the special miracle that took place with the oil-flask and the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles that the Rabbis enacted to publicize the miracle. And once we already keep the *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah candles, we also preserve the other aspects of the holiday: we insert *Al HaNissim* into our prayers, recite *Hallel* to praise and thank God for saving His nation, and refrain from fasting and delivering eulogies throughout the holiday (see *Rosh HaShanah* 18b, with Rashi and Ritva).

In order to better understand the significance of Chanukah and the miracle of the oil-flask – the only remnants of all the holidays that existed during the Second Temple era – we must elaborate a bit on the events that occurred in those days and explain their meaning.

## The Greek Empire

Over the course of hundreds of years, the Greeks developed a culture that realized great achievements in science, philosophy, literature, art, architecture, military strategy, and politics. And its strength grew ever greater. After defeating his adversaries, Philippos, King of Macedonia, succeeded in uniting all of the Greek states under his rule. He invited the greatest

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<sup>14</sup> Additional examples: Because of the Hasmonean revolt, the wicked Antiochus went up to Jerusalem to destroy the city and annihilate the Jews. Upon hearing troubling reports of rebellion in the eastern part of his kingdom, however, he was forced to end the siege on Jerusalem, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Shevat (167 BCE). He was eventually killed in the rebellion. The 3<sup>rd</sup> of Kislev: on this day, the Hasmoneans removed the emblems of the Greek troops from the Holy Temple. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of Av, they reinstated Torah law as the law by which the Jews adjudicate themselves, instead of Greek law. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of Iyar marked the day on which Shimon son of Matityahu the Hasmonean conquered the Fortress of Chakra, in which there remained a Greek garrison even after Jerusalem was liberated. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of Iyar the Hasmoneans (apparently during the rule of Yonatan son of Matityahu) abolished the signs of idolatry that hung upon the entrances of the houses and stores. The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of Sivan: this is when the Hasmoneans conquered Beit Sha’an and drove out the heathens who oppressed the Jews. The Sages also established holidays when the evil kings who persecuted them died: King Yannai on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Shevat and King Herod on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Kislev. Many other dates are mentioned in *Megillat Ta’anit*.

Greek philosopher and scientist [of the time], Aristotle, to teach his son Alexander. When Alexander [the Great] ascended the throne, he began a campaign of conquests, and within three years (3426-3429, 334-331 BCE), the Greeks conquered vast expanses of territory – Asia Minor, *Eretz Yisrael*, Egypt, and the entire mighty Persian Empire, until India.

After Alexander of Macedonia died, the generals of the Greek army began fighting over the throne. In the end, they divided the vast territory under their control into several Greek kingdoms.

As a result of the conquests, Greek culture spread throughout the world, consuming all the other cultures and forming a singular Hellenistic civilization. The system of government, language, culture, and sporting competitions in every country were Hellenistic. The rich and dignified people in every land assimilated with the Greeks and imitated their ways.

Judea, as well, was ruled by the Greeks, and there, too, Hellenism spread. The Jews, however, were different from all the other nations, and the process of Hellenization proceeded relatively slower in Judea. Nevertheless, over the course of 160 years of Greek rule, their influence grew stronger and stronger, mostly over the rich. It reached the point where the High Priests, Jason and Menelaus, were leaders of the Hellenists, working to increase Greek influences in Judea. They built a wrestling stadium near the Holy Temple and preferred watching the matches over performing their sacrificial duties in the Temple.<sup>15</sup>

## Evil Decrees and Rebellion

In the year 3591 from creation (169 BCE), around 160 years after the Greeks conquered *Eretz Yisrael*, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) began oppressing the Jews. Under his rule, the Greeks despoiled the holy vessels of the Temple, breached the walls of Jerusalem, murdered thousands of Jews, and enslaved many others. In 3593 (167 BCE), Antiochus decreed that the Jews must forsake the Torah and its *mitzvot* and worship idols. He made it a capital crime to perform *mitzvot*, abolished the sacrificial service in the Temple, and turned the Temple into a place of idolatry. Torah scrolls were torn and burnt. Antiochus' soldiers went from town to town forcing the Jews to eat pig and erect an altar for idol worship. Ritual circumcision was outlawed and Jewish women who insisted on circumcising their sons were executed. As a result of these decrees, many pious Jews fled to the deserts, caves, or other countries; and many were murdered in sanctification of God's name.

The intense pressure that the Greeks exercised against the Jews enkindled a spark in their souls,

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander the Great died in 3437 (323 BCE). At first, Ptolemy and Seleucus fought Antigonos, defeating him in a battle near Gaza in the year 3448 (312 BCE). The winners divided the spoils, and Ptolemy took Egypt, while Seleucus received Syria and Babylonia. Later on, the two fought each other over *Eretz Yisrael*, and the Ptolemy dynasty prevailed, taking control of the Holy Land for over a hundred years, starting in 3459 (301 BCE). In the year 3562 (198 BCE), Antiochus III, a descendant of the Seleucus dynasty, conquered *Eretz Yisrael*, but his power waned toward the end of his life. He attempted to conquer the Pergamon kingdom in Asia Minor, but the Romans intervened on their behalf and defeated Antiochus, who was forced to pay heavy compensation fees. Antiochus Epiphanes, the wicked king who enacted evil decrees against the Jews, took the reigns of power after his namesake's demise (3584-3596, 176-164 BCE). (Most of the information in this and the following footnotes is taken from Dr. Mordechai Breuer's *Divrei HaYamim LeYisrael U'leUmot HaOlam*, Mossad HaRav Kook Publishers.)

and when the Greeks arrived in the village of Modi'in, with the intention of forcing Matityahu son of Yochanan the High Priest to worship idols, Matityahu rose up and killed the Greek officer and his Hellenized collaborators. The novelty of his action was that instead of dying in sanctification of God's name, like the other pious Jews, he decided to kill the oppressor. By doing so, he, together with his sons, raised the banner of rebellion against the Greeks and Hellenism.

The war was difficult. Yehudah the Maccabee, the bravest of Matityahu's sons, led the fighters. With courage and skill, the Hasmoneans overcame the Greek forces, and after two years of fighting they succeeded in conquering Jerusalem. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, 3596 (165 BCE), they began purifying the Temple and restoring the sacrificial service to its original state. This is when the oil-flask miracle took place.

Later on, the Greeks returned to *Eretz Yisrael* with reinforcements, conquered Jerusalem, and put Hellenized *kohanim* (priests) in charge of the Temple. However, in order not to exacerbate tensions with the Jews, they abolished the evil decrees and allowed the Jews to keep the Torah and its *mitzvot*. But this did not stop the rebellion; the Hasmoneans continued to fight against the Greeks and Hellenism. The war effort knew ups and downs, but the Hasmonean brothers combined strength, diplomacy, and cunning to eventually gain political independence, decades later. Granted, the Jews lived under the aegis of the mighty empires – first the Greeks and then the Romans – but the governance of the Land was controlled by the Jews for the Jews.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On the thirteenth of Adar 3599 (161 BCE), the troops of Yehudah the Maccabee defeated the army of Nicanor; Nicanor was killed and the remnants of his troops retreated. This day was celebrated for generations. Immediately thereafter, the Greeks sent Bacchides at the head of a large army. Yehudah, unable to mobilize a great number of fighters, stood against him with a mere 800 soldiers. Yehudah was killed in this battle (3600, 160 BCE). Bacchides conquered the entire Land and awarded the position of High Priest to Alcimus, a Hellenist, who executed sixty of Israel's elder sages. Yonatan, Yehudah's brother, assumed command of the remaining Hasmonean fighters, who fled and went into hiding. Over time, the Hasmoneans regained their strength and managed to harass the Greeks, but they were unable to re-conquer Jerusalem. Then, a threat arose against King Demetrius' rule, and [in order to maintain his power] he made a pact with the Hasmoneans, giving them Jerusalem and autonomy. Yonatan took advantage of the struggle for power in the Seleucid dynasty and received additional benefits from Demetrius' rival. Thus, in the year 3608 (152 BCE), the Hellenist administrators of the Holy Temple were deposed and Yonatan began serving as High Priest. Diodotus Tryphon, one of the Greek rulers who opposed Yonatan's increasing power in Jerusalem, lured him into joining him for friendly talks and then murdered him (3618, 142 BCE). Shimon inherited his brother's command and made a treaty with Tryphon's rival, in exchange for a tax exemption for the Jews of Judea. While the Greek kings were preoccupied with internal battles, Shimon cleansed the Land of the vestiges of Greek influence, conquered the Fortress of Chakra (Iyar 23, 3619; 141 BCE; the date was established as a holiday), conquered additional cities surrounding Judea, and fortified its political independence. When Antiochus Sidetes defeated his enemies and no longer needed Shimon's aid, he instigated a conspiracy against him, and indeed, Shimon's son-in-law, Ptolemy, rose up and murdered Shimon, along with two of his sons (3625, 135 BCE). With Antiochus Sidetes' help, Ptolemy tried to take control of Judea, but Yochanan Hyrcanus, Shimon's faithful son, fought him. Then, Antiochus Sidetes came to assist Ptolemy the murderer, pillaging Judea and bringing Jerusalem under heavy siege. However, Sidetes was forced to retreat because of revolts that sprang up against him elsewhere. He accepted Yochanan's peace proposal, which stated that the Jews would pay a heavy tax to the Greeks in exchange for partial autonomy. Yochanan was appointed High Priests and Nasi (President). Shortly thereafter, Antiochus Sidetes' army was crushed by the Parthians and Sidetes himself was killed. At this time, Yochanan began conquering additional territory in *Eretz Yisrael*, in order to expand Jewish settlement, at the expense of that of the Gentiles, and to cleanse the Land of idolatry. These conquests brought the Jews wealth and

It seems quite evident that had the Greeks been more patient, Judea would have succumbed to Hellenism, just like the other nations did. But the hand of God, which conceals itself in the historic process, generated the conflict. Just as He hardened Pharaoh's heart during the Exodus, so too, He hardened Antiochus' heart, and in the process helped Israel reveal the faith, self-sacrifice, and courage [hidden deep inside its collective soul].

## Trouble in the Hasmonean Dynasty

After the war against the Greeks ended in a military and political victory, the cultural struggle returned to the fore. We still needed to defend ourselves against the tremendous sea of Hellenism that engulfed all of the surrounding cultures. Greek culture was very powerful. Its methods of scientific research were advanced; its military strategy was excellent; its system of government was efficient; its sculptures and architectural designs impressed all who saw them; its plays were enchanting; and its sporting events thrilled everyone. This is why Greek culture succeeded in spreading so vigorously throughout the inhabited world. Hundreds of years later, when Rome had already become the major [military] power in the world, Greek culture still dominated the world, culturally speaking.

Even though the [Hasmonean] rebellion impeded the process of Hellenization, it did not stop it entirely. A few decades later, Hellenism once again struck deep roots among the wealthy Jews and among those who came in close contact with the Gentiles. The Hellenists of the Hasmonean era were called *Tziddukim* (Sadducees). They did not advocate total assimilation; rather, they believed that it was possible to combine, within a Jewish national framework, loyalty to the Written Law and Greek culture.

One of the great tragedies of Jewish history is that the descendants of Matityahu, who sacrificed his life to fight Hellenism, got caught up with the Hellenists and persecuted the Sages of Israel, those defenders of our tradition. Matityahu's great-grandson was King Yannai, who also served as High Priest. He was an evil man, and he reckoned that his death would gladden the Rabbis and their supporters. In order to spoil their joy, he commanded that immediately following his death a large number of Rabbis be executed. After he died, however, his heirs, led by his wife Shlomtzion, disobeyed his orders. The Rabbis established the date of his death as a joyous day of thanksgiving, marking the demise of an evildoer and the salvation of the Sages.

Eventually, the Hasmoneans' servants – foremost among them, Herod – overpowered their masters, annihilated them, and ruled in their stead. It came to the point that *Chazal* said, "Anyone who claims to be from the Hasmonean dynasty is either a slave or a liar" (*Bava Batra 3b*).<sup>17</sup>

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economic prosperity. Yochanan ruled Judea for thirty-one years (3625-3656, 135-104 BCE), acting righteously most of his days and strengthening the *Sanhedrin*. At the end of his life, however, he joined the Sadducees.

<sup>17</sup> After the death of Yochanan Hyrcanus (3656, 104 BCE), troubles began. His heirs did not obey his last will; his oldest son, Yehudah Aristobulus, an ally of the Sadducees, acted like a Hellenist ruler, throwing his mother and brother in jail and declaring himself King and High Priest. He died a year later, after which his brother Alexander Yannai reigned for 27 years. He was a Sadducee, who favored the Hellenists and fought against the Pharisees (rabbinic Jews). However, he continued to extend the borders of Israel. He repented towards the end of his life, realizing that his ties with the Sadducees undermined Jewish nationalism. He therefore commanded that his righteous wife, Shlomtzion, sister of Shimon ben Shetach, inherit his throne. She reigned for nine years (3684-

Now we can understand the criticism that certain sages leveled against the Hasmoneans, accusing them of failing to appoint a king from the tribe of Yehudah, as the Torah prescribes: *The staff shall not depart from Yehudah* (*BeReishit* 49:10; see Ramban there). At first, the Hasmonean leaders were called *nesi'im* (princes), but they eventually crowned themselves as kings. They also reserved the position of High Priest for themselves. Clearly, their involvement in matters of state interfered with their priestly duties, blemishing the holy service, which was supposed to be performed in sanctity and purity, and strengthening Hellenism's influence. From a political standpoint, as well, their kingdom was lacking, for it existed in the shadow of the mighty empires and, more often than not, under their auspices. This political weakness also strengthened Hellenism's influence over Judea.

## Lasting Spiritual Accomplishments

Despite all the shortcomings, the Hasmonean victories had great value. The political independence that they won, albeit limited, contributed to the prosperity of the Jewish population in *Eretz Yisrael* in every way. Previously, around forty percent of Judea's produce was taken by the Greeks as a tax; now all of it remained in the Land, stimulating economic growth. By virtue of the victories, Jewish settlements sprung up throughout the country, Jews immigrated from the Diaspora, birthrates rose, and the Jewish nation, which had undergone destruction and exile, rehabilitated itself, to a large degree.

Through the medium of political independence, *Eretz Yisrael* became, once again, the national and spiritual center of the Jewish people. Study halls flourished and expanded, fulfilling completely the behest of the Men of the Great Assembly: "Produce many disciples and make a fence for the Torah" (*Avot* 1:1). The spiritual foundations of the Oral Law, which enabled Jewry to safeguard its beliefs and its Torah for 2,000 years of harsh exile, were laid in those days.

This is why the miracle of the oil-flask symbolizes the days of Chanukah more than anything

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3693, 76-67 BCE). After her death, a bitter civil war broke out between her two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus (who were educated by their father, Yannai the Sadducee). In the year 3695 (65 BCE), the two brothers turned to Pompeius, the Roman delegate, to mediate between them. Two years later, Pompeius and his army invaded Judea, abolished the Hasmonean dynasty, and diminished the boundaries of the Land. He allowed Hyrcanus to retain his position of High Priest and leader of the Jews in Judea, giving over the rest of *Eretz Yisrael* to autonomous gentile rule, subordinate to agents of Rome. In the course of time, Antipater the Idumean (from Edom), who was one of Hyrcanus's adherents, established ties with the Romans and became their trusted ally, eventually taking control of Judea. After he died, his son Herod continued in his ways. Since Herod helped Hyrcanus defeat his nephew, Hyrcanus gave him his granddaughter Miriam's hand in marriage. This enabled Herod to eventually claim the Hasmonean throne. In the year 3720 (40 BCE), the Parthians conquered *Eretz Yisrael* and Aristobulus's son seized control of Judea, all the while taking revenge on his uncle Hyrcanus. Herod fled to Rome, where he was [officially] appointed King of Judea. Armed with Roman troops, he returned to the Holy Land and re-conquered it. This began his 36-year reign. He murdered his opponents and anyone else who might be a threat to his authority, including the members of the Hasmonean family, and even some of his own sons. When Herod died, in 3757 (4 BCE), the Sages established the day of his death – the seventh of Kislev – as a holiday. Nevertheless, the Rambam considered his kingdom to be [genuine] Jewish sovereignty, as he writes in *Hilchot Chanukah* (3:1): In the merit of the Hasmonean victory, "sovereignty returned to the Jewish people for over two hundred years." The Rambam teaches us here that even Herod's reign was better than the oppression that preceded the rebellion and the subjugation that followed the destruction of the Second Temple.

else. Even though the Second Temple was destroyed and all the political achievements of the Hasmoneans were lost, the study of the Oral Law, which developed and intensified in those days, remained forever. The miracle of the oil-flask revealed the eternal quality of the Torah, its ability to illuminate the darkness in a supernatural way. By virtue of the Torah, we managed to survive the long and dark exile. The miracle of the oil-flask also revealed the Jewish nation's unique character. It showed that we are different from all other nations and that it is impossible to subdue us or extinguish our faith.

In the merit of their self-sacrifice, Matityahu and his sons were privileged to bring to light the deep foundations of the Torah and the uniqueness of the Jewish people. The Hasmonean dynasty, however, with all its problems and complexities, was a short-lived kingdom, and we do not commemorate it in a particularly celebratory manner.

This explains *Chazal's* statement (*Rosh HaShanah* 18b) that the holiday of Chanukah is everlasting because of the miracle of the oil-flask and the Rabbinic *mitzvah* of lighting the candles. The oil-flask miracle showed that the military victory over the Greeks did not benefit that generation alone, but all generations. Therefore, the Rabbis determined that we continue observing the days of Chanukah, even though the other holidays mentioned in *Megillat Ta'anit* were abolished after the Temple was destroyed. Thus, in addition to the *mitzvah* of lighting the Candles all eight nights of Chanukah, we say *Al HaNissim* and *Hallel*, to thank and praise HaShem for saving us and allowing us to defeat our enemies.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> We express our thanks by saying *Al HaNissim* in *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Birkat HaMazone* (Grace After Meals). This prayer emphasizes the victory over the Greeks, who wanted to make us forget the Torah and its commandments. HaShem came to our aid and delivered the strong and wicked into the hands of the few and righteous. Afterwards, we purified the Temple and lit the lamps. No mention is made of the miracle of the oil-flask.

The Rambam (3:1) further emphasizes the national-political victory: "During the Second Temple [era], the Greek kings enacted [evil] decrees against the Jews. They abolished their religion, prevented them from engaging in [the study of] Torah and [the performance of] *mitzvot*, stole their money and daughters, entered the Sanctuary, made breaches in it, defiled that which was pure, caused the Jews great distress, and pressured them sorely; until the God of their forefathers had mercy on them, delivered them from the hands [of the Greeks], and saved them. The Hasmonean High Priests overpowered [the Greeks], killed them, and delivered the Jews from their hands. They then appointed a king from among the priests, and sovereignty returned to the Jews for over two hundred years, until the second destruction."

That is, the miracle of the oil-flask symbolizes the triumph of faith and Torah [over Hellenism]. It is the basis for the fact that Chanukah is a perpetual holiday. However, we would not have been privileged to receive the everlasting [*mitzvah* of] lighting the candles or the triumph of faith if not for the miracle of the [military] victory – the righteous defeating the wicked – and the [other] national achievements, as described in *Al HaNissim*. This is why we praise God [specifically] through the recitation of *Hallel*. After all, [the Rabbis] prescribed the saying of *Hallel* mainly to commemorate times when the Jews were delivered from bondage or saved from death. Hence, the Rambam emphasizes the nationalistic aspects [of Chanukah]. This also explains why the Rambam emphasizes the joy of Chanukah, as he writes in *Halachah* 3: "Because of [these events], the Sages of that generation decreed that these eight days, beginning with the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, be days of joy and praise (*hallel*); and we light the candles on them..." (It is possible to say that the Rambam considers the [military] victory to be the primary miracle, contrary to what I wrote in the first *halachah* [of this chapter] based on [the opinion of] several *Rishonim*.)

For more on this issue and the following discussion, see *Orot*, essay *LeMahalach HaIdi'ot*, where [Rav Kook] explains that the Second Temple era prepared the Jews for the [subsequent] exile, by absorbing sacred vitality

Over the years, it became clear that the miracle was even greater [than we originally thought it was]. Not only did we manage to survive in the ocean of Hellenism that inundated the world, but Judaism shattered – through a long and complicated process – most of the pagan foundations of Hellenism. The abstract belief in one God, ethical values, the aspiration to fix the world – all fundamentals of the Torah – increasingly spread among the nations of the world, eventually becoming, through both straight and crooked (Christianity, Islam) means, the foundations of all that is good and pleasant in human culture.

The longer the exile lasts, the longer and brighter the light of Israel and its Torah shines. And it will continue to illuminate [the world] until we are privileged to bring new and pure oil from the olives of *Eretz Yisrael*, from which we will light the *Menorah* of the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the world will be filled with the knowledge of God, speedily in our days. Amen.

## The Oral Law: The Light that Illuminates the Darkness

It is no coincidence that the holiday of Chanukah falls out at a time when the darkness of night reaches its peak. This period of the year is when the nights are longest and the cold of winter permeates the land. Moreover, the moon barely shines, since Chanukah coincides with the days immediately before *Rosh Chodesh*, when the moon wanes.

When the sun sets and darkness begins to envelop the land, and the long night casts its ominous, icy shadow upon the world, Jews go out with candles in their hands and light the Chanukah lamps. This symbolizes the mighty Jewish faith, which breaks through all forms of darkness. Even in the darkest times, when the mightiest empires ruled the world ruthlessly, we did not despair of the light of Torah and faith, and we continued learning and teaching. A small ray of our light repels a great deal of their darkness.

Chanukah is the time to rejoice over the Oral Law; firstly, because it was established [as a holiday] by the Sages [the expounders of the Oral Law], and also because the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles was one of the first *mitzvot* the Sages enacted. Moreover, it symbolizes, generally speaking, the essence of the Oral Law. During the First Temple era, prophecy abounded among the Jewish people, and they studied primarily the Written Law. After the Temple was destroyed and prophecy ceased, however, the time came for the Oral Law [to take precedence]. The Oral Law displays the high stature of the Jewish people, who share in the revelation of the Torah's light. The principles are set in the Written Law, but the Sages of the Oral Law pave the way for the realization of these principles. Granted, the light of the Written Law shines brighter, like the midday sun, while the light of the Oral Law resembles that of the moon and the stars. However, the Oral Law has the ability to descend to the hidden recesses of man's soul and illuminate all the dark corners of the world. The foundations for the study of the Oral Law were laid during the Second Temple era – including all the edicts, [protective] “fences,” and customs. The unique light of the Oral Law, which is like the Chanukah candles that illuminate the darkness, helped us cope with all the tribulations of exile.

Apparently, these ideas hidden in the holiday of Chanukah are the deep-seated reason why Jews

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[from the Temple and integrating it] into the Oral Law [which accompanied the Jews into exile]. See also the essay entitled *Chacham Adif MiNavi*, and *Orot HaTorah*, chap. 1.

love and cherish it so much, to the point that almost every Jew, no matter how far he is from Torah observance, lights Chanukah candles. Moreover, everyone follows the custom of fulfilling this *mitzvah* in the best possible way – *Mehadrin min ha'mehadrin*.

## A New Candle Every Day, Culminating with Eight

Everything in the world is fleeting and eventually withers away. This is true of ideas and memories, as well; they lose their strength and vitality over time. But behold, when it comes to lighting the Chanukah candles, we discover that faith in HaShem never wanes. On the contrary, it continues to exist and even thrive, despite the troubles and darkness all around. The pure spirituality that is manifest in the Torah is eternal; therefore, it constantly increases. Other ideas which are transient, however, fade away and expire. Because of this wondrous idea, all of Israel follows the custom of *Mehadrin min ha'mehadrin*, in which one adds a new candle every night, eventually lighting eight candles on the final night.

As is well-known, the number eight alludes to what is beyond physical nature. After all, the world was created in seven days, and there are seven days in a week. The number eight, on the other hand, hints to the supernatural, like *brit milah* (ritual circumcision), whose purpose is to rectify and elevate nature to a higher level, which is why it is performed on the eighth day. The Torah, as well, belongs to the eighth dimension, for it comes to elevate nature to a divine level. This is why the Torah was given after the seven-week [*Sefirah*] count, which represents the wholeness of nature. After [the seven weeks of *Sefirah*], we rise to a level above nature – the holiday of *Shavu'ot*, when the Torah was given. Similarly, we complete the reading of the Torah on *Shemini Atzeret* (the eighth day from the beginning of *Sukkot*), which is *Simchat Torah*.

Chanukah, as well, belongs to the realm of the supernatural, for it reveals the lofty stature of the Oral Law. Therefore, we light candles for eight nights, adding a new one each night.<sup>19</sup>

## Laws of Al HaNissim and Hallel

The Sages instituted the holiday of Chanukah in order to thank and praise HaShem for delivering Israel [from oppression]. For this purpose, they formulated the *Al HaNissim* prayer, which we insert in the blessing of thanksgiving in *Shemoneh Esrei*. We also say it in *Birkat HaMazone* (Grace After Meals), in the blessing of *Nodeh Lecha*. We do not, however, mention Chanukah in the abridged *Birkat HaMazone* [called *Al MaMichya*, which is said after eating the seven special fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*, food made from the five grains, or wine]. If one forgot to say *Al HaNissim*, in *Shemoneh Esrei* or *Birkat HaMazone*, he need not pray again. If one remembers before concluding the blessing in which *Al HaNissim* is inserted, he should go back and say it,

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<sup>19</sup> See the Maharal's *Tiferet Yisrael*, chap. 2 and 25 (end), and *Ner Mitzvah* p. 23. The Greeks' worldview stemmed from nature, and since nature has different forces, they believed in multiple gods. In addition, since nature has no values, just strength, beauty, and external wisdom, they yearned for these things. In contrast, Judaism is based on the belief in one God, Who created and transcends nature. The goal is to discover God's oneness in the world, to reveal the image of God within man by way of morals, Torah, and *mitzvot*. The Greeks cannot coexist with us, because our belief in one God and our ethical values undermine the foundation of their worldview. Judaism, however, can coexist with Greek culture and use it as a tool for research, classification, and the revelation of Jewish concepts. For more on this, see *Binah LeItim*, vol. 1, chap. 25-27.

unless he has already said God's name at the end of the blessing (*Shulchan Aruch* 682:1). In such a case, though, it is proper to say *Al HaNissim* at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, after all the blessings, because one may add there supplications and expressions of thanks to his heart's desire. Similarly, one who forgot to say *Al HaNissim* in *Birkat HaMazone* should say it after concluding the blessings, together with the *HaRachaman* paragraphs, where one may add as many prayers as he wants (*Rama* 682:1, *Mishnah Berurah* 4).<sup>20</sup>

It is a *mitzvah* to recite the full *Hallel*, with a blessing, on all eight days of Chanukah (*Arachin* 10a). For the *halachah* states that whenever the Jews are in dire straits, such as bondage or the threat of death, they must say *Hallel* when they are delivered from distress (*Pesachim* 117a, *Megillat Ta'anit* 9:2). The *mitzvah* to say the full *Hallel*, with a blessing, on all eight days of Chanukah attests to Chanukah's prominence. After all, we say the full *Hallel* on Pesach only on the first day, while we say it every day of Chanukah.<sup>21</sup>

Women are exempt from saying *Hallel*, since it is a time-bound *mitzvah*. Nonetheless, a woman who would like to say *Hallel* on Chanukah is worthy of blessing. According to Sefardic custom, however, she should not recite a blessing over it, while according to Ashkenazi tradition, she should (see *Peninei Halachah, Tefillat Nashim* 2:9).

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<sup>20</sup> Actually, Rabbeinu Tam holds that if one did not yet dislodge his feet [at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*], he returns to the blessing of *Modim* in order to say *Al HaNissim*. The *halachah*, however, does not follow his opinion. Rather, once a person says God's name at the end of the blessing, he no longer goes back, and he should not even conclude the blessing with the words *lamdeini chukecha* (*Mishnah Berurah* 294:7; see also *Torat HaMo'adim* 10:3).

Regarding *Birkat HaMazone*: the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 24) implies that the recitation of *Al HaNissim* is merely a custom, not an obligation. The Rashba and Ritva agree. The Rambam, on the other hand, seems to hold that one must say it, and the Or Zaru'a writes that the masses have accepted it as an obligation. The Ra'avyah believes that one is obligated to eat a meal with bread on Chanukah and, therefore, must repeat *Birkat HaMazone* upon forgetting *Al HaNissim*. However, the *halachah* follows those who say that one need not repeat the prayer if *Al HaNissim* was omitted. See *Yemei Hallel VeHoda'ah* 40:2-3.

<sup>21</sup> We say *Hallel* on two different types of occasions: on an appointed festival (*mo'ed*) and [in commemoration of] a miraculous salvation. *Sukkot* is a *mo'ed*, and according to the *Gemara* (*Arachin* 10b), we say a full *Hallel* all seven days of the holiday because each day has a different set of sacrifices, making it unique... On Pesach, however, we offer the same sacrifices every day. The reason we say *Hallel* on Chanukah is [to commemorate] the miraculous salvation, and we recite the full *Hallel* all eight days because the miracle intensified every day. This is also why we light an additional candle every night (*Shibolei HaLeket* 174, *Beit Yosef* 483). It is clear that the primary basis for saying *Hallel* on Chanukah is the [military] victory, as the *Gemara* states in *Arachin* and *Pesachim*, and as Rabbeinu Gershom posits. Nevertheless, the miracle of the oil-flask, which accompanied the [military] victory, revealed the greatness of the victory. See also *Yemei Hallel VeHoda'ah* 41:3 with notes 22-25. See above, 4:6, [where we discussed] whether the recitation of *Hallel* is biblically or rabbinically ordained.

# My Chanukah

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The Gemora in Masechet Shabbos (21b) famously asks the question מאי חנוכה (“*Mai Chanukah*”) - what is Chanukah all about – and answers as follows:

*For our Rabbis taught: on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev [commence the] eight days of Chanukah, on which it is not permitted to eulogize or fast during these days. Because when the Yevanim [Syrian-Greeks] entered into the holy sanctuary they defiled all of the oils therein, and when the Royal Hasmonean House emerged triumphant over them, [the Chashmonaim] examined [the area] and found only one flask of oil that was stored with the seal of the High Priest, which only had sufficient oil to kindle [the menorah] for one day. [However,] a miracle occurred with it and they were able to light from the oil for eight days. In the following year they established and made these days into festival days with the recital of Hallel and thanksgiving.*

(translation adapted in part from the Schottenstein Talmud and Soncino Talmud)

דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי  
דחנוכה תמניא אינון, דלא  
למספד בהון ודלא להתענות  
בהון. שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל  
טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל,  
וכשגברה מלכות בית  
חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא  
מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן  
שהיה מונה בחותמו של כהן  
גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק  
יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו  
ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה  
אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים  
טובים בהלל והודאה.

This passage appears to underscore the miracle of the flask of oil as the centerpiece of the celebration of the holiday of Chanukah. By contrast, the “*Al HaNissim*” prayer that is recited during the prayer service on Chanukah appears to focus more on the miracle of the military victory over the *Yevanim*:

*You in your great compassion stood by them in their time of distress. You championed their cause, took up their grievance, judged their claim and avenged their wrong. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous and the arrogant into the hands of the diligent students of your Torah.*

(Translation adapted from the Koren Siddur and the Art Scroll Siddur).

ואתה ברחמיך הרבים עמדת  
להם בעת צרתם רבת את  
ריבם דנת את דינם נקמת את  
נקמתם מסרת גבורים ביד  
חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים  
וטמאים ביד טהורים ורשעים  
ביד צדיקים וזדים ביד עוסקי  
תורתך

There are three questions that immediately come to mind:

(1) Why does the passage in the Talmud brush aside the miracle of the military victory and focus primarily on the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days? Wasn't the military victory was much more critical for the continuing survival of the nation and therefore a much more compelling reason for the celebration of the holiday?

(2) Within the “*Al HaNissim*” prayer, there is clearly a miraculous quality to the fact that the “strong” were delivered into the hands of the “weak” or that the “many” were delivered into the hands of the “few.” However, what is particularly miraculous about the fact that the “wicked” were delivered into the hands of the “righteous” or that the “impure” were delivered into the hands of the “pure?” Couldn’t there have been certain “impure” warriors who were sluggish in battle and certain “pure” warriors who were comparatively mighty?

(3) Why did it take until “the following year” (literally, “another year”) for the days of Chanukah to become established as a permanent holiday?

To answer these questions, it may be helpful to analyze an obscure and fascinating *midrash* to a verse in *Shir HaShirim* (7:14) which is cited by the *Chassam Sofer* in his commentary to the Talmud (*Shabbos* 22a, s.v. “*BaTefach*”):

“*The mandrakes emitted a fragrance*” – this is [a reference to] *Reuven* (see *Bereishis* 30:14) ... “*And on our doorways are all delicacies [precious fruits]*” – this is [a reference to] the *Mezuzah* and the *Chanukah candle[s]*.

הדודאים נתנו ריח זה ראובן  
שנקרא דודאים ועל פתחינו כל  
מגדים זה מזוזה ונ"ח

The *Pardes Yosef* (*Bereishis* 37:21), commenting on this *Midrash*, ponders the contrast between *Reuven* and *Chanukah*. He explains that *Reuven* is associated with fragrance but not taste because while *Reuven* attempted to rescue his brother *Yosef* from the hands of *Yosef*'s other brothers, he was not truly successful as the result of his suggestion that *Yosef* be tossed in a pit was that his brothers tossed *Yosef* into a pit full of snakes and scorpions (see *Rashi*, *Bereishis* 37:24) who could have killed him as well. Thus, while *Reuven* had the sweet fragrance of one who desires to do the right thing, he did not possess the delicious taste of one who actually succeeds in accomplishing his goal. By contrast, the *Chashmonaim*, who precipitated the miracle and observance of the *Chanukah* candles, had both the righteous intention and ultimate success in vanquishing their enemies who sought to destroy the Jewish religion and defile the Holy Temple. Thus, they had both the fragrance and the delicious taste associated with the “delicacies” described in the *Midrash*.

Interestingly, this explanation of the *midrash* seems to underscore a deficiency in the efforts of *Reuven* on behalf of his brother *Yosef*. Indeed, this understanding is reinforced by the following passage in the *Midrash Rabbah* on *Megilat Ruth* (*Parsha* 5):

*Rabbi Yitzchak son of Meryon said that the Torah comes to teach us that is a person does a Mitzvah he should do it “Be’levav Shalem” – with all of his heart, for if Reuven had known that HaKadosh Barukh Hu would write about him (Bereishis 37) that “Reuven heard (his brothers’ plans to kill Yosef) and rescued [Yosef] from their hands” he would have taken Yosef on his shoulder to his father.* (translation adapted in part from *Soncino* edition of *Midrash Rabbah*)

א"ר יצחק בר מריון בא הכתוב  
ללמדך שאם אדם עושה מצוה  
יעשנה בלבב שלם שאלו היה  
ראובן יודע שהקב"ה מכתוב  
עליו (בראשית ל"ז) וישמע  
ראובן ויצילהו מידם, בכתפו היה  
מוליכו אצל אביו

This passage at first glance seems troubling because it appears to suggest that *Reuven* was not sufficiently sincere in his efforts to rescue *Yosef*, and that he would have been motivated more

had he known how much praise would be heaped upon him for his efforts. Can it be that Reuven was essentially a headline-seeker who would only perform *mitzvot* based on the honor that he would be accorded for them?

The commentary *Siach Yitzchok* on the *Siddur* (published in the *Siddur HaGra*), in his comments to the phrase “*U’Le’avdo Be’levav Shalem*” (in the prayer *U’Va L’Tzion*) - “that we should merit to worship Hashem with a perfect heart” – explains that Reuven unquestionably was sincerely motivated in his efforts to rescue his brother. However, it is possible that Reuven did not sufficiently appreciate the cosmic significance related to the rescue of his brother Yosef. Had he realized the true significance and Divine approbation of this heroic deed, as reflected by its recordation in the Torah, he would have performed his actions on a higher level of לב שלם – of full energy and excitement, which would have enabled the fulfillment of the mitzvah to reach its fullest potential.

Based on this insight we can appreciate the contrast between Reuven and the miracle of the Chanukah candles. Unlike Reuven, the *Chashmonaim*, exemplifying the “delicacies at the doorways,” performed the mitzvah of the lighting of the candles of the Menorah with a full appreciation of the epic significance of their actions. Therefore, they acted with ardent passion and unadulterated zeal. Had they only focused on the narrow needs of the moment, they would have been content to celebrate their military conquest over the *Yevanim*. However, the military victory did not require special zeal. Of course the Jewish people would be saved from their prospective conquerors based on the principle of רוח והצללה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר – if not through the *Chashmonaim*, Hashem would have employed other means to save His people from annihilation. However, the miracle of the flask of oil was only made possible because of the zeal of the *Chashmonaim* in ensuring that, even in the aftermath of their victory, they performed the mitzvah of the lighting of the menorah in the optimal fashion.

In truth, as the *Pe’nei Yehoshua* (*Shabbos* 21b, s.v. “*Mai Chanukah*”) famously points out, טומאה הותרה בצבור – “ritual impurity is permitted when dealing with the entire congregation” – according to the *halakha*, impure oil can be used when pure oil is not available for the lighting of the menorah. Why then, asks the *Pe’nei Yehoshua*, was there such a necessity to require a miracle for the pure oil to last eight days when impure oil would have sufficed?

The *Chochmat Shlomo* (*Orach Chaim* 670:1), in response to the question of the *Pe’nei Yehoshua*, explains that the dispensation of הותרה בצבור טומאה only applies once the Holy Temple has been put into operation. In the inauguration of the Temple, everything must be absolutely perfect and impeccably pure. Accordingly, since the *Chashmonaim* were re-dedicating the Temple (the very name “Chanukah” – “dedication” is predicated upon this fact) they could not rely upon the utilization of impure oil even when there was an insufficient quantity of pure oil, and therefore needed the Divine intervention of a miracle to sustain the burning of the menorah with the limited quantity of pure oil for eight days.

This answer of the *Chochmat Shlomo* reinforces the message regarding the mindset of the *Chashmonaim* in the performance of the mitzvah. The lighting of the menorah was not just a regular mitzvah to be treated within the framework of typical *halakhic* rules; the *Chashmonaim*

understood that the proper performance of this mitzvah was of immense historic significance. They were re-consecrating the Temple grounds and laying the groundwork for the future spiritual existence of their people. Their recognition of the significance of the moment and of their actions is what led them to have the zeal – the *לב שלם* – that triggered the miracle of the oil. Their zeal enabled the mitzvah to be performed *בהידורה* – to reach its greatest heights. It was this *מצוה בהידורה* – this mitzvah performed in the optimal fashion – that defined the magnitude of the military victory as well and ensured the lasting effect of their efforts. They recognized that at this moment in time when the Temple had become defiled – *ובאו בה פריצים וחללוה* – the only way to overcome the spiritual desecration in a lasting and meaningful fashion was to light the sacred menorah with oil of pristine purity, sealed with the signet of the High Priest.

We therefore understand why the essence of Chanukah, as described by the *Gemora*, was not the military victory but rather the miracle of the pure oil that burned for eight days. The military conquest alone would not have ensured a lasting imprint of holiness to overcome the defilement wrought by the *Yevanim*. It was only the realization of the *Chashmonaim* that they needed to “finish the job” by zealously and uncompromisingly re-dedicating the Temple in accordance with the utmost sanctity, that their actions led to an enduring victory.

In this vein, we can better appreciate the terminology of the “*Al HaNissim*” prayer. Had the *Chashmonaim* not appreciated the significance of their task, and therefore not have achieved the same enduring victory, it would indeed have been inconceivable that the “impure” would have been vanquished by the “pure” or the “wicked” by the “righteous.” The exposure to a culture of defilement would have had a detrimental effect even upon those who waged battle with it, unless the warriors recognized that their job was not yet done, that even after the military victory had to come a rejuvenated spiritual dedication to the performance of *mitzvot*. Therefore, we celebrate the miracle that even after exposure to the “impure” the pure remained pure and the righteous remained righteous.

It is hence not merely as an afterthought that the “*Al HaNissim*” prayer mentions in its conclusion:

*And afterwards your children entered the holiest part of your house, cleansed your Sanctuary and purified your Temple, kindled candles in your holy courtyards, and established these eight days of Chanukah to express thanks and praise to your great Name*  
(Translation adapted from the Koren Siddur and Art Scroll Siddur)

ואחר כך באו בניך לדביר ביתך  
ופנו את היכלך וטיהרו את מקדשך  
והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך  
וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה אלו  
להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול

This passage represents the climax of the *Al HaNissim* prayer, clarifying that the reason we “established” the holiday of Chanukah for future generations was because the *Chashmonaim* did not stop with the military victory but rather “afterwards” recognized that they still needed to purify the Temple and ensure that the mitzvah of lighting the candles was fulfilled in the optimal fashion. Only then could a true spiritual re-birth take place and only then could their efforts have had an enduring effect sufficient to warrant the establishment of a permanent holiday.

Based on this insight, we can resolve our final question. Why was it necessary to wait for “the following year” before establishing a permanent holiday? The answer is that it is not always clear

when a miracle occurs whether there will be a lasting and enduring effect that truly creates a spiritual elevation for *Klal Yisroel*. If an effort, even when resulting in a miracle, is not performed with the requisite *לב שלם* – with all of one’s heart, it may yield a fine smell but not a lasting taste. It was only after another year had elapsed and it became clear that the efforts of the *Chashmonaim* were indeed enduring (just as the mitzvah of *Mezuzah* described in the *Midrash* is perennially affixed to the doorpost), that their zeal had transformed the environment of the Temple from defilement to sanctity, that it was deemed appropriate to establish the days of Chanukah as festive days for future generations.

However, it is important to note that the *Gemora* states *קבעום ועשאום* – the festive days were not merely “established,” they were “made” to be days of praise and thanksgiving. Future generations were given the task to “make” Chanukah in its original image - to perform the mitzvah of the lighting of the candles with the same zeal as the *Chashmonaim* so that the victory of Chanukah continue to endure in modern times, so that the forces of purity continue to overwhelm the forces of defilement and contamination in the surrounding universe. Every generation must do battle with values antithetical to those of the Torah and settle for nothing less than the pristine holiness of perfect Torah observance. This explains why there is a special emphasis on Chanukah of performing the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles in the manner of *מהדרין מן המהדרין* – in the most superlative possible fashion. When faced with the constant challenges of shifting moral values that threaten to unravel the fiber of Torah observance, we cannot settle for mediocrity in our religious and ethical conduct.

The *מהדרין מן המהדרין* standard, as commonly observed, requires all members of the household to participate in the lighting of the Chanukah candles (see *Rema* 671:2). In this sense, for each of us, *מאי חנוכה* must become “my Chanukah” – all of us must internalize the message of Chanukah and utilize the holiday to re-energize our batteries to engage the universe as proud bearers of our holy heritage. Through this re-dedication every Chanukah, we strive to fulfill the level of *ועל פתחינו כל מגדים* – to provide illumination to all of mankind, in a manner that is fragrant and tasty, meaningful and enduring, and which inspires us to appreciate the significance of each mitzvah opportunity that presents itself throughout the entire year.

# Lighting Chanukah Candles in Shul

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In formulating the *mitzvah* to light candles on Chanukah, the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) uses the term "*ner ish u'beiso*" meaning, in effect, that the basic requirement is to light one candle per home, as explained by Rashi (*ibid. s.v. ner*); the Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah 4:1*) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim 671:2*) rule accordingly. The Gemara then explains that the candle must be placed outside the doorway of the house which opens to the street; again, the Rambam (4:7) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (671:5) rule accordingly. The Gemara later (23a) discusses the status of an *achsenai*, that is, one who is a guest at the home of another during Chanukah, and the Rambam (4:11) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (677) elaborate on the *halachos* which apply to such a person, noting, as the Gemara itself says, that there is significance to having someone light in one's home even if he himself will not be there. It is clear from these sources, among others, that the primary fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is when one lights, or has someone else light, in one's own home.

The *Tur*, however (OC 671), indicates that there is a practice to light Chanukah candles in Shul as well. The *Shibolei HaLekket* (185) also cites this practice, but he questions its validity, asking why it should be necessary to light in Shul when the fact is that the people in Shul all light in their homes anyway. He justifies the practice only if there are guests who sleep in the Shul, who would then have to light there because the Shul becomes like their home, or if the person in charge of maintaining the Shul lives there, in which case it is his home, but not if nobody lives or sleeps there. Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann (*Teshuvos Melamed Leho'il* OC 121) asserts that indeed none of the well known earlier *Rishonim*, such as the Rif, the Rosh, and the Rambam, even mention this practice at all. Other *Rishonim*, however, such as the Baal HaIttur (Part II *Hilchos Chanukah 114b*), do cite this practice without challenging it, and some offer suggestions as to its purpose.

The *Kol Bo* (44), for example, writes that the custom is to light Chanukah candles in Shul for the benefit of those who are not able or are not careful to light their own candles at home, as well as to enhance the overall *mitzvah* (the notion of *hiddur mitzvah*), to provide for additional publicizing of the miracle (*pirsumei nisa*), which the *Beis Yosef*, commenting on the *Tur* (*ibid*), says is a sanctification of Hashem's name when so many people can bless Him in public, and it also commemorates what used to happen in the *Beis HaMikdash* (*zecher l'Mikdash*), where lights

were lit each evening. Similarly, the *Sefer HaManhig* (*Hilchos Chanukah* 148) writes that there is a custom to light in Shul because a Shul is a *Mikdash Me'at*, a "miniature version" of the *Beis HaMikdash*, as stated by the Gemara in *Megillah* (29a), based upon a verse in *Yechezkel* (11:16), and it is therefore appropriate to commemorate this miracle which took place in the real *Beis HaMikdash* specifically there, especially since the miracle can be further publicized because so many people assemble in Shul.

The Rivash (111) states that the custom to light in Shul is an old one, and he mentions the idea of further publicizing the miracle, but he adds that since in his days, the Jews were living under the strong control of non-Jews and thus could not fulfill the *mitzvah* at home in the proper fashion, that is, by lighting the candles outside, as described above, the practice became to light the candles at one's home indoors, in which case the miracle could be publicized only to the members of one's household. In order, therefore, to have a more encompassing and demonstrative expression of the publicizing of the miracle, the custom was instituted to light in Shul as well. The Rivash also notes that the *berachos* over the Chanukah candles are recited prior to the lighting of the candles in Shul, even though this lighting is only a *minhag*, a custom, and not a real *mitzvah*. He explains that the usual *halachah* of not reciting a *berachah* before performing an act which is done only as a *minhag* applies specifically to less significant *minhagim*, but this *minhag*, which involves publicizing a miracle of Hashem in the presence of the community in Shul, is observed with the recitation of a *berachah*, similar to the practice of saying a *berachah* before the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, although that recitation of Hallel is, as stated by the Gemara in *Taanis* (28b), only a *minhag*.<sup>22</sup>

The *Shulchan Aruch* (671:7) thus rules that Chanukah candles are to be lit in the Shul, and that the appropriate *berachos* should be recited, and the reason given is in order to publicize the miracle; the *Mishnah Berurah*, in his *Biur Halacha* (671 s.v. *ubebeis haknesses*), notes that this is true regardless of how and where people are able to perform the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles in their own homes, apparently rejecting the reasoning cited above from the Rivash. The Ramo (*ibid*) then writes, quoting the Rivash, that one cannot fulfill his personal obligation in this *mitzvah* through the candles lit in Shul, because, as the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra ibid. s.v. v'ein*) explains, the *mitzvah* is to light in one's home, and one must therefore light again at home; the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:45) adds that this applies even to the *Chazzan* who actually recites the *berachah* and does the lighting in Shul. He then asserts, though, as does the *Shaarei Teshuvah* (671:11), that on the first night, one should not repeat the *berachah* of *Shehecheyanu* at home if he recited it in Shul, unless he is reciting it on behalf of other members of his household; Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe* OC 1:190) however, appears to disagree, and thus rules that in any case, one should repeat all the *berachos*, including *Shehecheyanu*, when lighting candles at home.

The Chacham Tzvi (88) raises an interesting question on the decision of the *Shulchan Aruch* that Chanukah candles should be lit in Shul with a *berachah*. As mentioned above, the Rivash explains that although lighting in Shul is only a *minhag*, a *berachah* may nevertheless be recited, just as a *berachah* is recited before saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh which is also only a *minhag*.

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<sup>22</sup> See *Tosafos ibid s.v. amar, Shulchan Aruch* OC 422:1 with poskim there.

The problem raised by the Chacham Tzvi is that the *Shulchan Aruch* elsewhere (OC 422:2), following the position of the Rambam (*Hilchos Berachos* 11:16 and *Hilchos Chanukah* 3:7), actually rules that a *berachah* is *not* said before the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh; why then may a *berachah* be recited before lighting Chanukah candles in Shul? The Chacham Tzvi suggests that perhaps the *Shulchan Aruch* accepts the aforementioned view of the *Kol Bo* that lighting candles in Shul constitutes a kind of public sanctification of Hashem's name, and therefore a *berachah* is warranted, though he believes this answer is difficult, noting that there is no mention of this idea in the Gemara. He then proposes that perhaps the *Shulchan Aruch* accepts a combination of the reasons suggested by the Rivash and the *Kol Bo*, as presented above, but he leaves the matter in some doubt.

The *Beis Yosef*, in his commentary on the *Tur* cited above, presents an additional reason to light Chanukah candles in Shul, namely, that it is for the sake of the guests who stay in Shul because they have no home, which makes this similar to the practice instituted to recite *kiddush* in Shul on Friday nights for the sake of the guests who are staying there, as discussed by the Gemara in Pesachim (101a), and codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Shabbos* 29:8) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 269:1). The implication is that just as the practice to recite *kiddush* in Shul on Friday night remains (in some communities) even though guests no longer stay in the Shul, so too, perhaps, the custom to light Chanukah candles in Shul remains even without guests staying in the Shul. The Chacham Tzvi, however, notes that this will not really solve our question, because the *Shulchan Aruch* seems to prefer that *kiddush* should *not* be recited in Shul in our days, when no guests stay there; the *Pri Chadash* (OC 671:7), though, draws a distinction between the two practices, and says that one can hold that *kiddush* should not be recited in Shul, but that candles should still be lit in Shul. The *Sdei Chemed* (*Asifas Dinim, Chanukah* 24) discusses other questions raised on this viewpoint; he concludes that the primary reason to light candles in Shul is for the benefit of those less observant Jews who may not fulfill the *mitzvah* at their homes.

It is worth noting that the Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra* OC 671:7) compares lighting candles in Shul to reciting Hallel in Shul on Pesach night for the sake of publicizing the miracle; the *Shulchan Aruch* (487:4) rules that this Hallel is recited with a *berachah*, although the Ramo disagrees with the entire practice, and thus it may be parallel to lighting Chanukah candles in Shul with a *berachah*. The *Kaf HaChaim* (OC 671:70) quotes this as well. Rav Ovadyah Yosef (*Yabia Omer* 7, OC 57:4) suggests another approach, pointing out that although lighting candles in Shul is a *minhag*, the notion of lighting candles on Chanukah (at home) is a *mitzvah*; it may thus be permissible to make a *berachah* before lighting in Shul since this is just an extension of an already existing *mitzvah*, unlike reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, which is not a *mitzvah* anywhere. He also adds (*ibid.* 5) that the practice to light in Shul was a practice originated by the *Chachomim* and the *Rabbonim*, and thus can be accompanied by the saying of a *berachah*, as opposed to the recitation of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh which was instituted by the people themselves, and thus can not be accompanied by a *berachah*. He concludes (*ibid.* 6, 7) that it may even be permissible to light candles with a *berachah* not only in Shul, but at other public gatherings during Chanukah as well, because this too publicizes the miracle.

The Ramo (671:7) writes that the practice is to light the candles in Shul between Minchah and

Maariv; the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:45) explains that this is the time when everybody is assembled in Shul, and if we would wait until after Maariv, people would be detained from getting home to light their own candles. The *Kaf HaChaim* (671:77) quotes that this time is literally the very beginning of the next day. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*ibid.*) rules that the *menorah* in the Shul ought to be placed along the southern wall of the Shul because, as the *Mishnah Berurah* (671:40) explains, the *menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was on the southern wall: the *Baal HaIttur* cited above writes that it should be in the middle of the Shul, while the Ramo, in his *Darkei Moshe* on the *Tur* (671:6), quotes an opinion that it should be placed on the northern side. In the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Ramo adds that the candles should be arranged from east to west, as stated by the *Terumas HaDeshen* (104), quoted by the *Beis Yosef* on the *Tur*, although he writes that there are different practices about all of this,<sup>23</sup> revolving around the dispute cited in the Gemara in *Menachos* (98b) about how exactly the *menorah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was positioned and lit, and he actually concludes that one should follow the *minhag* of his community, a decision accepted by the *Magen Avraham* (671:9). Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann, in his *teshuvah* cited above, as well as the *Sdei Chemed* cited above and the *Pri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* 670:2), among others, make reference to a custom to light Chanukah candles in Shul during the daytime as well; for this lighting, however, no *berachah* is recited, as stated in the *Sefer She'arim Metzuyanim BeHalachah* (139:19) and elsewhere.

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<sup>23</sup> See Teshuvos Maharshal 85, Radbaz 1045 (3:610)

# Chanukah's Pursuit of Beauty

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Judaism is of two minds regarding beauty, at times according it a place of honor, and at times denigrating it as superficial and without meaning. To take but one example, the Torah presents contradictory views of whether beauty indicates righteousness. Scripture and sages emphasize that our matriarchs must have been women of surpassing beauty – but regarding would-be leaders like Eliav and Avshalom, we are warned not to be impressed by aesthetics. Judaism both promotes and denies the value of beauty.

The rites of Chanukah, on the other hand, seem to demonstrate that the debate is closed: Physical beauty is a goal to be sought. Our celebrations are thoroughly invested with an impulse for beauty, directed by an imperative which values the attractive.

## Chanukah's perennial emphasis on beauty

Witness the talmudic description of the menorah constructed by the impoverished Chashmonaim in the wake of their military victory:

*The branches of their menorah were iron rods, and the Chashmonaim coated them with tin. When they became wealthier, they made the branches of silver. When they became still wealthier, they made the branches of gold.*

**Menachot 28b**

שפודים של ברזל היו וחיפום  
בבעץ העשירו עשאום של  
כסף חזרו והעשירו עשאום  
של זהב  
מנחות כח:

Although the iron and tin menorah was halachically acceptable, the Chashmonaim sought to beautify the menorah of the Beit haMikdash with gold. And lest one argue that this was only because the Menorah's biblical predecessor was made of gold, note that the same impulse for *hiddur*, for beauty, applies to our own Chanukiah. Citing the biblical<sup>24</sup> principle of “שלא יהיו מצוות בזויות עליון, מצוות בזויות עליון” that one must ensure that his mitzvot are not degraded,” they ruled<sup>25</sup> that we must make sure to use a clean, fresh Chanukiah.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See the many rishonim cited in Sdei Chemed 2:38 who argue that this is a biblical principle, extrapolated from the rule that one may not fulfill the mitzvah of הדם כיסוי (covering the blood of a slaughtered bird or beast) with one's foot.

<sup>25</sup> Masechet Sofrim 20:3, Tur Orach Chaim 673

<sup>26</sup> The Talmud Shabbat 22a also notes that we may not examine coins by the light of the Chanukiah, and that we may not light a non-Chanukiah flame from the Chanukiah itself, under this same principle.

This same desire for impressive appearances informs the candle-lighting options presented in the gemara:

*The mitzvah of Chanukah is for each family to light one lamp. Those who beautify<sup>27</sup> light one lamp for each individual. According to Beit Shammai, those who beautify still more light eight lamps on the first day, and then reduce by one per day. According to Beit Hillel, they light one lamp on the first day, and then increase by one per day.*

### **Shabbat 21a**

מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו והמהדרין  
נר לכל אחד ואחד והמהדרין מן  
המהדרין בית שמאי אומרים יום  
ראשון מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך  
פוחת והולך ובית הלל אומרים יום  
ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך  
מוסיף והולך  
**שבת כא.**

The weight assigned to aesthetics informs our choice of fuel for the Chanukiah, too. Malachi<sup>28</sup> rebuked the Jews of his day for bringing inferior animals as korbanot, and he dared them, “הקריבנהו נא לפתחך,” “Bring it now to your [human] ruler! Would he be satisfied, would he show favor to you?” The sages applied this principle to various elements of korban activities: Using water which has been left exposed for Succot libations,<sup>29</sup> using inferior klei sharet [service implements] in the Beit haMikdash,<sup>30</sup> bringing an offering with excrement upon it<sup>31</sup> or in it,<sup>32</sup> and tearing open a korban’s limb before bringing it on the mizbeiach.<sup>33</sup> They also extended the principle to kiddush wine, which is compared to the wine poured on the mizbeiach.<sup>34</sup> And, invoking this principle, Rav Yosef Teumim<sup>35</sup> ruled that one may not use fouled oil for the Chanukiah.<sup>36</sup>

## Using beauty to defeat the Greeks

Perhaps this emphasis upon beauty in our Chanukah celebration is not a definitive statement on Judaism’s approach to the physical, but rather a Chanukah-specific product of our ancestors’ victory over the Greeks. Each Yom Tov which celebrates the defeat of a foe includes some denial of that enemy’s approach, a message designed to counter the ethos of our antagonists. Our Pesach celebration includes the slaughter of the lamb, one of Egypt’s gods,<sup>37</sup> and Purim incorporates elements of unity, countering Haman’s description of the Jews as מפורד ומפרד,

<sup>27</sup> This is the translation of מהדרין according to Tosafot Shabbat 21b והמהדרין. Rashi, on the other hand, renders מהדרין as “those who pursue.”

<sup>28</sup> Malachi 1:8

<sup>29</sup> Succah 50a

<sup>30</sup> Sotah 14b

<sup>31</sup> Zevachim 85a

<sup>32</sup> Menachot 69a

<sup>33</sup> Chullin 90b

<sup>34</sup> Bava Batra 97b, and see Rashbam there

<sup>35</sup> Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham Orach Chaim 154:19, based on Ran, Chullin 36b דפי הרי"ף

<sup>36</sup> The aforementioned rabbinic principle of avoiding degradation of mitzvot appears to be distinct from the biblical mandate of avoiding the use of inferior items for mitzvot. The former prescribes behavior, where the latter is about mitzvah objects.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Shmot Rabbah 16:2

scattered and divided.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Chanukah employs beautification of Divine service in order to counter the Greek emphasis on the beauty to be found in the elements of this world.

In a 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE discussion of love, Plato put the following words into the mouth of Socrates: “Only in the contemplation of beauty is human life worth living.”<sup>39</sup> True, he was referring to internal as well as external elegance, but his definition of beauty did not extend to the beauty of ritual mitzvot. This aesthetic emphasis persisted in Greek culture and values into the Hellenistic period, and Jews who were attracted to the world of Plato’s descendants may have been drawn to this ideal.

To this influence our Chanukah celebration replies: Find beauty in mitzvot! Kindle a splendid Chanukiah, pour pure fuel into its lamps, and honor the mitzvah with increasing levels of splendor. With this you will encourage your generation and the generations of your descendants to avoid the errors of the mitvavim, and to embrace a life which sees beauty in mitzvot. Like the korban for Pesach, like mishloach manot for Purim, the beauty of Chanukah’s celebration will perpetuate the lessons of the original victory.

To take this a step further: Our ancestors may have rejected Hellenism, but who can doubt that the values of Chanukah’s vanquished yet survive and thrive? Our present reality seeks and rewards beauty - and we are undoubtedly influenced. Our eyes, and therefore our hearts, are drawn to beautiful things. Seen against this backdrop, the drive to beautify our mitzvot is about more than continuing the victory over the Greeks; throughout the year, the elegance of our Torah can serve as a magnet to attract our focus and inspire our commitment. The greater our efforts to demonstrate a Jewish life which is glorious and worthy of honor, the greater will be the reward in its lasting influence upon us and upon our children.

May we be מן המהדרין in all of our mitzvot, on Chanukah and throughout the year, reveling in the beauty of our Torah, countering the influences of the Hellenic world and creating a Judaism for all to admire.

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<sup>38</sup> Shut Chatam Sofer 1:196 citing Manot haLevi to Esther 9:19

<sup>39</sup> Nehamas translation of Plato’s Symposium, 211d

# Chanuka: The Unheralded Sacrifice

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The transcendence of the candle lights and the miraculous victory of the few over the many (רבים ביד מעטים) often dominate the thematic discussions of Chanuka. Yet lying just below the surface exists the oft-overlooked, but nonetheless powerful, altruism of the Maccabees. At a moment in history when Torah commitment was threatened and assimilation cast its shadow over the Jewish people, Matityahu, Judah, and a band of brave Jews risked their lives for our tradition. While the miraculous hand of God assisting the Hasmoneans in their victory and then the simple cruse of oil's ability to last a full eight days captivate us, it is the gumption of the Maccabean soldier that retains immense potential to inspire and offers a novel perspective on the Chanuka experience.

Tosafot in their commentary to the Talmud question the Talmudic dictum אף הן היו באותו הנס (women too were included in the miracle). The Talmud utilizes that rule to insist upon women's requirement to light the Chanuka candles even though it is a time-bound positive mitzvah. Tosafot wonder why this principle is not applied to the numerous other commandments that are inspired by miracles. While numerous answers are offered, Rashbam notes that the אף הן principle is applied only in cases where the miracle happened because of direct female involvement. Regarding Chanuka, Rashbam notes the *mesirut nefesh* of the women of that generation, noting Yehudit who, according to tradition, sacrificed her virtue in order to capture a Greek general and turned the tide of the war. Rashbam's solution highlights the central quality of altruism in the Chanuka holiday and leaves us to wonder what role the theme of sacrifice plays in our observance and celebration.

From Avraham to our present day, self-sacrifice represents an essential trait of the Jewish nation. Our success throughout the numerous challenges of our history stems in no small part from our willingness to risk our lives for the sake of our beliefs. Often going underreported in our historical discussions of sacrifice is the bravery of the three compatriots of Daniel: Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah. This event preceded the miracle of Chanuka, but the experience of these three men represents a valuable model for comprehending the place of altruism in our Chanuka experience.

The Book of Daniel describes the experiences of Shadrech, Meshach, and Abed Nego, the aramaic pseudonyms for Daniel's three friends, as they confront the Babylonian king

Nebuchadnezzar responding to his decree demanding idol-worship:

*Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits; he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.*

**Daniel 3:1**

נבוכדנצר מלכא עבד צלם די דהב  
רומה אמין שתין פתיה אמין שת  
אקימה בבקעת דורא במדינת בבל:  
דניאל ג:א

A punishment was guaranteed to all those who refused the Babylonian King's edict:

*And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, harp, trigon, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.*

**Daniel 3:6-7**

ומן די לא יפל ויסגד בה שעתא  
יתרמא לגוא אתון נורא יקדתא: כל  
קבל דנה בה זמנא כדי שמעין כל  
עממיא קל קרנא משרוקיתא קתרוס  
שבכא פסנטרין וכל זני זמרא נפלין  
כל עממיא אמיא ולשניא סגדין לצלם  
דהבא די הקים נבוכדנצר מלכא:  
דניאל ג:ו-ז

Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah refuse to bow:

*There are certain Jews whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then were these men brought before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said unto them: 'Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye serve not my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the horn, pipe, harp, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, [well]; but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is the god that shall deliver you out of my hands?' 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king: 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, He will deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' Then was Nebuchadnezzar filled with fury, and the form of his visage was changed, against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; he spoke, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated.*

איתי גברין יהודאין די מנית יתהון על  
עבדת מדינת בבל שדרך מישך ועבד  
נגו גבריא אלך לא שמו עלך מלכא  
טעם לאלהך לא פלחין ולצלם דהבא  
די הקימת לא סגדין: באדין נבוכדנצר  
ברגו וחמה אמר להייתה לשרך מישך  
ועבד נגו באדין גבריא אלך היתיו קדם  
מלכא: ענה נבוכדנצר ואמר להון הצדא  
שרך מישך ועבד נגו לאלהי לא  
איתיכון פלחין ולצלם דהבא די הקימת  
לא סגדין: כען הן איתיכון עתידין די  
בעדנא די תשמעון קל קרנא  
משרוקיתא קתרוס שבכא פסנטרין  
וסומפניה וכל זני זמרא תפלון ותסגדון  
לצלמא די עבדת והן לא תסגדון בה  
שעתה תתרמון לגוא אתון נורא יקדתא  
ומן הוא אלה די ישיזבנכון מן ידי: ענו  
שרך מישך ועבד נגו ואמרין למלכא  
נבוכדנצר לא השחין אנחנה על דנה  
פתגם להתבותך: הן איתי אלהנא די  
אנחנא פלחין יכל לשיזבותנא מן אתון  
נורא יקדתא ומן ידך מלכא ישיזב: והן  
לא ידיע להוא לך מלכא די לאלהך  
לא איתנא פלחין ולצלם דהבא די  
הקימת לא נסגד: באדין נבוכדנצר  
התמלי חמא וצלם אנפוהי אשתני על  
שרך מישך ועבד נגו ענה ואמר למזא  
לאתונא חד שבעה על די חזה למזיה:

*And he commanded certain mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, and their robes, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's commandment was peremptory, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.*

**Daniel 3:12-23**

It is only through a miracle of God that they are spared:

*Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was alarmed, and rose up in haste; he spoke and said unto his ministers: 'Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?' They answered and said unto the king: 'True, O king.' He answered and said: 'Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.' Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace; he spoke and said: 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of God Most High, come forth, and come hither.' Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, and the king's ministers, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their cloaks changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.*

**Daniel 3:24-27**

This miracle inspires the king of Babylon:

*Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said: 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent His angel, and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and have changed the king's word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.*

**Daniel 3:28**

The Talmud in the final chapter of Sanhedrin notes the inherent power of this event yet wonders what ultimately happened to these men. Following this miracle, Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah disappear from Tanach, never to be heard from again. The Talmud continues to

ולגברין גברי חיל די בחילה אמר  
לכפתה לשדרך מישך ועבד נגו  
למרמא לאתון נורא יקדתא: באדין  
גבריא אלך כפתו בסרבליהון פטשיהון  
וכרבלתהון ולבשיהון ורמיו לגוא אתון  
נורא יקדתא: כל קבל דנה מן די מלת  
מלכא מחצפה ואתונא אזה יתירא  
גבריא אלך די הסקו לשדרך מישך  
ועבד נגו קטל המון שביבא די נורא:  
וגבריא אלך תלתהון שדרך מישך  
ועבד נגו נפלו לגוא אתון נורא יקדתא  
מכפתין:

**דניאל ג:יב-כג**

אדין נבוכדנצר מלכא תוה וקם  
בהתבילה ענה ואמר להדברוהי הלא  
גברין תלתא רמינא לגוא נורא מכפתין  
ענין ואמרין למלכא יציבא מלכא: ענה  
ואמר הא אנה חזה גברין ארבעה שרין  
מהלכין בגוא נורא וחבל לא איתי בהון  
ורוה די רביעאה דמה לבר אלהין:  
באדין קרב נבוכדנצר לתרע אתון  
נורא יקדתא ענה ואמר שדרך מישך  
ועבד נגו עבדוהי די אלהא עלאה פקו  
ואתו באדין נפקין שדרך מישך ועבד  
נגו מן גוא נורא: ומתכנשין  
אחשדרפניא סגניא ופחותא והדברי  
מלכא חזין לגבריא אלך די לא שלט  
נורא בגשמהון ושער ראשהון לא  
התחרך וסרבליהון לא שנו וריח נור  
לא עדת בהון:

**דניאל ג:כד-כז**

ענה נבוכדנצר ואמר בריך אלההון די  
שדרך מישך ועבד נגו די שלח מלאכה  
ושיזב לעבדוהי די התרחצו עלוהי  
ומלת מלכא שניו ויהבו גשמהון די לא  
יפלחון ולא יסגדון לכל אלה להן  
לאלההון:

**דניאל ג:כח**

offer three answers:

*What happened to those Rabbis [Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah]? Rav said they died from the evil eye. Shmuel said they drowned in spittle. R. Yochanan said they went up to the Land of Israel married women and begat boys and girls.*

**Sanhedrin 93a**

ורבנן להיכא אזלו? אמר רב בעין הרע  
מתו ושמואל אמר ברוק טבעו ור'  
יוחנן אמר עלו לארץ ישראל ונשאו  
נשים והולידו בנים ובנות  
סנהדרין צג.

Each answer offers a perspective on the lurking dangers of and a potential response to altruism and miracle. For Rav, they perished because of “the evil eye.” Others envied the success and passion of Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. Rather than exacting succor and inspiration from the sacrifice and salvation of their leaders, the Israelites cast aspersions toward these recipients of God's miracle. The willing sacrifice of these three men highlighted the failures of a generation that could not achieve that commitment. The “ayin hara” is merely a projection of the misgiving of the contemporary Israelites about their own commitment.

Rashi explains Shmuel's opinion - “they drowned in spittle” - as a reference to the derision of the Babylonians. They looked askance upon the Jews who continued to sin even in the wake of this immense miracle. The surrounding gentiles declared: “you have such a God. Yet you continue to worship idols?” The miraculous salvation of Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah thus became not a badge of pride, but a source of shame. The status of the Israelites sank in the eyes of the Babylonians who saw Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah as exceptions rather than the rule of the nation of Israel.

Finally, the opinion of the Chachamim offers a subtle happy ending to the story of Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. They went up to the land of Israel. The Maharal explains that following their miracle, they could not live just anywhere, but needed to embrace the holiness of the Land of Israel. Similarly, he posits, the women they married and the children they bore achieved a unique holiness and transcendence. In this case, the miracle of their salvation became not an albatross around their necks, as suggested by the two preceding opinions, but an inspiration. Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah achieved greater sanctity and similarly inspired sanctity in those who surrounded them.

The similar altruism and salvation of the Maccabees created perhaps even broader challenges to the Jews of that generation. Matityahu's commitment might have shamed the Jews of his generation that so voraciously embraced Hellenism, leading them to project and to deride the Maccabees with *ayin ha-ra*. Further, the miraculous victory of the many in the hands of the few might have struck a blow to the pride and status of the Jewish people who assimilated and failed to uphold the traditions of their forefathers. The other nations might spit and look down upon the Jewish people when comparing this singular victory to the many other spiritual defeats.

The forethought and inspiration of Judah Maccabee and Chazal, however, preempted the potential failures. In the wake of victory, the Hasmoneans insisted upon lighting a Menorah of unadulterated purity, though Halacha may have allowed them to compromise, *טומאה הותרה* בקביור. They declared a holiday for future generations – *ולהלל* – lest this salvation go to waste. Each year Hallel is recited to embrace the miracle of

our past that it should resonate in the future. Further, though our mitzvah is fulfilled with a mere single candle, we insist upon adding a light each night, מִהַדְרִין מִן הַמַּהְדְרִין, to take everlasting hold of a miracle as a source of inspiration. Finally, the essence of this mitzvah is פְּרִסוּמֵי נִסָּא, the publication of the miracle. The mitzvah must expand beyond the limits of simple fulfillment and inspire commitment of others and future generations. It is not for the performed alone, but for the commitment of all the people of Israel.

Chanuka rejects the potential deleterious ramifications of its altruism and demands spiritual growth and progression, the aliyah and not the spittle and evil eye that may have plagued the destinies of Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. Upon witnessing the Chanuka lights, we declare שְׁעֵשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנָה זֹאת. The altruism of our forefathers and the miracles that brought about their salvation are not to our detriment, but inspire us to new heights.

Each year our homes are blessed with the glowing lights of our mitzvah. We commemorate the miracle with songs and prayers. As we sit with our families in celebration, recalling the miracles of victory and light, yet at the same time recognizing the altruism of our Maccabean ancestors who risked their lives for the principles of Torah and Mitzvot. Moreover, it was those very risks that were co-opted as inspiration; our candle lights declare that the sacrifice and salvation of the past will propel us to the heights of the future.

# The First Hanukah Bush: Entropy, Jewish History & the Meaning of Burning Without Consumption

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The eminent chemist and avowed atheist Peter Atkins considers the philosophical and not just scientific implications of entropy in his book, *The Second Law*. He opens with the following glum observation:

*We are the children of chaos, and the deep structure of change is decay. At root, there is only corruption, and the unstemmable tide of chaos. Gone is purpose; all that is left is direction. This is the bleakness we have to accept as we peer deeply and dispassionately into the heart of the Universe.*<sup>40</sup>

The holiday of Hanukah is designed to address this disconcerting point.

Among the most perplexing elements of Hanukah is the story of the candelabra burning for eight days. While the narrative refers to what is probably the most celebrated theme of the holiday, one wonders why the miracle was necessary, and what it symbolizes. If we are to truly appreciate Hanukah, we must understand the holiday's historical and contemporary significance.<sup>41</sup>

A careful examination of the miracle reveals a surprising motif. The oil burning echoes a marvel which took place thousands of years earlier.

*And Moses approached the mountain of God, Horeb... and he gazed, and behold, the bush burned with fire, yet was not consumed.*

**Exodus 3:2**

וירא מלאך ה' אליו בלבת אש  
מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה  
בער באש והסנה איננו אכל:  
שמות ג:ב

Just as the shrub of Moses burned but was not consumed, so too the oil of Hanukah blazed but was not depleted.

<sup>40</sup> *The Second Law*. Scientific American Library (1984)

<sup>41</sup> Many of the ideas in this article are based on a *shiur* I once heard from Rav Moshe Shapiro *shlita*.

The significance of this congruence becomes striking when we consider that the burning bush marks the start of the Sinaitic Revelation and the giving of the Torah (Exodus 3.12). Thus, God begins His correspondence with the Jewish people as a nation with the emblem of a fire that does not devour.

To demonstrate that He continues to rest among Israel — that the covenant of Sinai continues — God performed the same miracle on a daily basis in the Temple. As Rashi<sup>42</sup> comments on Leviticus 24:3, the western lamp on the Temple candelabra regularly burned without normal oil consumption.

What about Hanukah? *Seder Olam*, a chronology ascribed to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century tanna Rabbi Yose, points out that the ascendancy of the Greeks, the villains of the Hanukah tale, marked the end of prophecy.<sup>43</sup> One can only imagine the feeling of despondency that must have overcome the Jews at this time. God had communicated with His people since Sinai. Did His muteness now imply a rejection?

The miracle of Hanukah answers that question with a definitive “No!” While God relates to His people differently in the post-prophetic world, He by no means abandons them. Just as God preceded the prophetic period with a miracle of burning without consumption, in order to show His love, so too He precludes the era of Divine silence with the same miracle, to demonstrate His continued affinity towards the children of Israel.

But why, specifically, the miracle of flame without fuel? Basic to the physical universe is the law of entropy. Everything has a cost; one cannot burn without expending energy. Accordingly, the universe is finite, both in time and space. Negative entropy, as expressed by the burning bush or the Hanukah candelabra, represents man’s relationship with the infinite. While earthly fire must devour, heavenly flames linger forever.

Prophecy also symbolizes man’s potential to connect to the eternal. Burning without consumption therefore symbolizes man’s capacity to relate to the Divine, and while the nature of this relationship changed in the post-Biblical world, the ability to connect continues, forming the basis of our religion. The miracle of lights tells us the great correspondence continues. But how?

Numerous sources associate Hanukah with *Torah SheBa’al Peh*, the oral law.<sup>44</sup> In light of the above we understand why. It is not simply that Hanukah is the only major Holiday not recorded in our written Bible. Hanukah reflects the shift from a religion dominated by prophesy and written law, or *Tanakh*, to a faith shaped by the dynamic and ever-changing oral law.<sup>45</sup> Through the *Torah SheBa’al Peh* the flame continues to burn. Hanukah thus celebrates man’s relationship with God in a world without revelation.

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<sup>42</sup> As understood by Gur Aryeh.

<sup>43</sup> סדר עולם רבה (ליינר) פרק ל: והצפיר והשעיר מלך יון וגו' הוא המלך הראשון (דניאל ח כא), ועמד מלך גבור וגו' וכעמדו תשבר וגו' (שם יא ג), הוא אלכסנדרוס מקדון שמלך י"ב שנה, עד כאן היו הנביאים מתנבאים ברוח הקדש, מכאן ואילך, הט אנך ושמע דברי חכמים (משלי כב יז).

<sup>44</sup> See Yoma 29a. The previously quoted paragraph from *Seder Olam* highlights this connection.

<sup>45</sup> Later we will explain how this description of the Oral Law corresponds to the fundamental belief that the entire Torah, written and oral, was given at Sinai.

For the modern Jew, the possibility of burning without consumption takes on new meaning. In a sense, Atkins is right when he claims that “we are the children of chaos, and the deep structure of change is decay.” From a purely physical perspective, “at root, there is only corruption, and the unstemmable tide of chaos.” But ultimately he errs when he concludes, “gone is purpose.” The miracle of Hanukah reminds us that there is also a heavenly flame that burns but does not consume. It is a *ner tamid*, an eternal flame. Thus, by lighting Hanukah candles we proclaim there is purpose. Indeed, decay is a property of *this* world; however, this world is but the handiwork of its eternal Creator. While the atheist sees only “bleakness” when he peers “deeply and dispassionately into the heart of the Universe,” the great prophet commands the reverse: *שְׁאוּ-מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וּרְאוּ מִי-בָרָא אֱלֹהִים* “Peer deeply into the heart of the Universe, and behold who hath created these things” (Isaiah 40.26). Flames without fuel affirm that decay is indeed reversible. Each year when we kindle the menorah we latch onto the heavenly fire and free ourselves from the clutches of entropy.

## The Transition of Hanukah

Earlier we noted the connection between Hanukah and the termination of prophesy. The overt miracle of Hanukah ushered in a new period of history in which there are no longer overt miracles. During this era God no longer communicates directly with mankind. Instead, the focus shifts from *Torah Sh’Bchtav* to *Torah SheBa’al Peh*. Let us attempt to explain this puzzling transition first by considering the evolution to a world without overt miracles.

Moshe praises God with the appellation the great, the strong, and the awesome:

*For the Lord your God, He is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the powerful, and the awesome, Who regards not persons, nor takes bribes.*

**Devarim 10:17**

כי ה' אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים האל הגדול והנורא אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד:  
דברים י"ז

Yirmiyah alters this by leaving out *נורא*, God’s awesomeness:

*[God] shows mercy unto thousands [of generations], and recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts is His name;*

**Yirmiyahu 32:18**

עשה חסד לאלפים ומשלם עון אבות אל חיק בניהם אחריהם האל הגדול הגבור ה' צבאות שמו:  
ירמיהו לב:יח

Daniel also follows Moshe’s appellation but omits *גבור*—God’s strength. Thus, the verse in Daniel 9:4 records:

*And I prayed to Hashem my God, and made confession, and said: 'Please Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and mercy with those that love Him and keep His commandments.*

**Daniel 9:4**

ואתפללה לה' אלהי ואתודה ואמרה אנא אדני האל הגדול והנורא שמר הברית והחסד לאהביו ולשמרי מצותיו:  
דניאל ט:ד

The Talmud discusses with wonder how the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, the Men of the Great

Assembly, restored the appellation of הַאֵל הַגְּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא when composing the *Amidah*:

Said R' Yehoshua ben Levi, why were they called the Men of the Great Assembly (*anshei kneset hagedolah*)? Because they returned the crown [of God's glory] to its original luster. Originally, Moshe said "the great, powerful, awesome God." Then came Jeremiah and said: Behold, strangers are croaking in His sanctuary, where are His displays of awesomeness. He therefore did not mention awesome. Came Daniel and said: Behold, strangers are enslaving His children, where are the displays of His power. He therefore did not mention powerful. But then they came and said: On the contrary, This is His magnificent display of strength, for He restrains His will [all these years that His people are subjugated] in that He shows long-suffering countenance to the wicked [by not punishing them immediately.] And these are indeed great displays of His awesomeness, because were it not for the awe of the nations of the Holy One, Blessed be He, how could one solitary nation survive among the 70 nations of the world.<sup>46</sup> Now the Rabbis [i.e. Jeremiah and Daniel] how did they act thus and abolish the institution of Moshe? Said R. Elazar: because they knew about the Holy One Blessed Be He, that He is truthful, therefore they could not speak falsehood of him.

#### Yoma 69b

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי למה נקרא שמן אנשי כנסת הגדולה שהחזירו עטרה ליושנה אתא משה אמר (דברים י) האל הגדול הגבור והנורא אתא ירמיה ואמר נכרים מקרקרין בהיכלו איה נוראותיו לא אמר נורא אתא דניאל אמר נכרים משתעבדים בבניו איה גבורותיו לא אמר גבור אתו אינהו ואמרו אדרבה זו היא גבורת גבורתו שכובש את יצרו שנותן ארך אפים לרשעים ואלו הן נוראותיו שאלמלא מוראו של הקב"ה היאך אומה אחת יכולה להתקיים בין האומות ורבנן היכי עבדי הכי ועקרי תקנתא דתקין משה אמר רבי אלעזר מתוך שיודעין בהקב"ה שאמתי הוא לפיכך לא כיזבו בו יומא סט:

The Talmud states that initially Moshe referred to God as הַאֵל הַגְּדוֹל הַגִּיבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא. However, Yirmiyah and Daniel could not utilize this appellation because they lived in a world where evil triumphed. The *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* restored the crown to its former glory when they once again identified God as הַאֵל הַגְּדוֹל הַגִּיבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא.

Questions abound when considering this passage. Firstly, what did the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* see that Yirmiyah and Daniel did not see? Moreover, how could Daniel deny God's power, and how could Yirmiyah deny God's awesomeness?

The answer is that certainly Daniel knew of God's power, and Yirmiyah knew of His awesomeness. However, it is inappropriate to praise God about a trait which one cannot see. For example, if, in the summer, one were to say מְשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמְרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם, i.e. pay tribute to God for bringing rain to the world, one would repeat Shmoneh Esreh. Why? מְשִׁיב הַרוּחַ וּמְרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם is not a request—it is praise to God for bringing rain to the world. Why can't we praise him in the summer as well? In the summer, at least in the land of Israel, it does not rain; it is therefore inappropriate to extol God for bringing rain.

Thus, Daniel felt that a world in which strangers are enslaving God's children is a world in which

<sup>46</sup> Likewise, see Tanchuma which states: Vespasian asked R. Joshua: Great is the lamb that stands among 70 wolves? He responded: Great is the shepherd that saves it.

אדרינוס שאל את ר' יהושע גדולה הכבשה שעומדת בין שבעים זאבים א"ל גדול הרועה שמצילה...

God's strength is not being displayed. To praise God's strength is almost hypocritical—not because it isn't true, but because he didn't see it.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Yirmiyah recognized the falsehood of extolling God's awesomeness in a world in which idolaters were croaking in His sanctuary.

So we must consider what changed for the Anshai Knesset HaGedolah. If anything, the dominance of evil only proliferated during their tenure. To answer this, let us turn to another passage in the Talmud.

*What did Titus do? He seized a harlot in his hand and entered the holy of holies. He spread out a Torah scroll and committed a sin upon it. Then he took a sword and slashed the curtain, and a miracle happened and blood bubbled out of the curtain. Titus thought that he killed God... Abba Chanan says: [scripture states] Who is like you, O Strong One, God? [meaning to say] Who is like You strong and firm for You hear the insult and blasphemy of that evil man and yet You remain silent? In the academy of R. Yishmael it was taught: [scripture states:] Who is like You among the mighty ones Hashem? [This is homiletically interpreted to mean,] who is like You among the mute ones?*

**Gittin 56b**

מה עשה [טיטוס] תפש זונה בידו  
ונכנס לבית קדשי הקדשים והציע  
ספר תורה ועבר עליה עבירה ונטל  
סיף וגידר את הפרוכת ונעשה נס  
והיה דם מבצבץ ויוצא וכסבור הרג  
את עצמו... אבא חנן אומר  
(תהילים פט) מי כמוך חסין יה מי  
כמוך חסין וקשה שאתה שומע  
ניאוצו וגידופו של אותו רשע  
ושותק דבי רבי ישמעאל תנא  
(שמות טו) מי כמוכה באלים ה' מי  
כמוכה באלמים  
גיטין נו:

The Talmud wonders how are we to portray God at the moment of Titus's most despicable abomination. It answers with a play on the verse praising God for the most stupendous of miracles—the splitting of the sea. After the Jews victoriously crossed *Yam Suf*, witnessing the termination of their evil oppressors, they triumphantly declared to God: “Who is like You among the mighty ones.” How does this relate to God at the moment when Titus sins with a harlot on the floor of the Holy of Holies?

The answer emerges from our thesis above. Jewish history can be divided into two broad stages. The pinnacle of the first stage, which was marked by prophesy and miracles, was the splitting of the sea. When the Jews witness this marvel, they declared ה' מי כמוך באלים—who is like You among the mighty ones, O God. In the second stage, however, God no longer speaks directly to people. Likewise, He no longer performs overt miracles. However, even as He hides His face we must endeavor to see Him. Not only that, but we can see His greatness by considering His restraint. His might and awesomeness emerge not from His intervention but from His discipline. The pinnacle of this restraint is His silence during the despicable act of Titus. Thus we declare ה' מי כמוך באלמים—who is like You among the mute.

Yirmiyah and Daniel still lived during the first stage, albeit during its demise. Therefore, in a world of divine manifestation they could not declare His might and awesomeness when idolaters were enslaving His children and croaking in His Temple. The *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, however, lived during the second stage. During this phase we glimpse greatness in hiddenness--

<sup>47</sup> This is because, in general, we as finite beings are unable to relate to God's infinite essence. We therefore can only perceive Him through the manner in which He relates to us.

not in revelation. Therefore, it once again becomes appropriate to declare האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא. Today we do see His might and His awesomeness, though not in the traditional way.

Just like our current era demands that we must find God within nature and not above it, it demands as well that we must seek to hear God within Torah, and not through prophesy. R. Zadok HaKohen of Lublin argued that this encounter with God occurs through the proliferation of the *Torah Sh'Ba'al Peh*, the oral law.<sup>48</sup> At Sinai, Moses received the Torah, but according to R. Zadok, the human intellect was not the critical factor in the interpretation of the Torah, because the entire Torah was received prophetically. R. Zadok presents two systems of Torah knowledge, one rooted in prophecy and the other in intellect. Although the Talmud states that a sage is superior to a prophet, nevertheless, the sage's understanding lacks the absolute certainty of a prophet. On the other hand, while a prophet knows the absolute truth, his knowledge is inherently limited to the specific cases in which he received prophecy. Since it was not derived through intellectual efforts, this knowledge could not be reapplied to other contexts, so no general precepts could be established. Even more importantly, the human initiative in the derivation and interpretation of the law allows the student to acquire the Torah and internalize it in a way not possible with prophesy. As opposed to prophesy, which comes only from above, as a gift, Torah study allows one to arrive at the truth from within.<sup>49</sup>

The Jews who lived during the intensive period of prophecy were not suited to deep analysis of the Oral law. R. Zadok explains that "All the wisdom of the Oral Torah [consists] of apprehending truth from darkness and hiddenness, but in the era of the indwelling of the Divine Presence in Israel, the [Israelites] did not condescend to perception through darkness at all".<sup>50</sup> Therefore, after the termination of prophecy the Oral Torah was neglected and largely

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<sup>48</sup> R. Zadok's position is beautifully presented in "R. Zadok Hakohen On the History of Halakha" by Dr. Yaakov Elman in *Tradition* 21.4 (1983): 1-26.

<sup>49</sup> We do not wish to imply that the oral law is simply the invention of the Talmudic scholars. Heaven forbid. Certainly the entire Torah and its interpretation were given at Sinai. However, as Rambam explains in his introduction to *Mishneh Torah* this basic premise does not preclude further elaboration and interpretation. Thus he writes: "Behold, we cannot say that everything the Sages brought forth through the Thirteen Principles of Torah Interpretation were said to Moses at Sinai -- נאמר שהוא -- **לא** כל מה שנמצא לחכמים שהוציא בהיקש משלש עשרה מדות נאמר שהוא -- נאמר למשה בסיני."

The exact role of human initiative in this process is subject to great debate. Some, like *Sefer Ha-Ikharim* (3:23), place great emphasis on the scholar's interpretation and extrapolation. Thus, *Shmot Rabba* 41:4 states וכי כל התורה למד משה כתיב בתורה (איוב יא) ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים ולא רבעים יום למדה משה אלא כללים למדהו הקב"ה למשה. R. Albo explains that based on these general principles המתחדשים הדור הפרטים שבכל דור ודור הפרטים המתחדשים. Others, such as the Geonim (as expressed by R. Abraham ibn Daud in his introduction to *Sefer ha-Kabbalah*, R. Nissim Gaon in his introduction to *Mafteach le-Man'ulei ha-Talmud*, and R. Shriria Gaon) adopt a more conservative approach in which the debates of the Talmud are forms of retrieval. Many approaches between that of the Geonim and that of the *Ikharim* have also been suggested. (For example, consider the comments of *Ritva Erubin* 13b, *Shelot u-Tshuvot min ha-Shamaim* 3, *Yam Shel Shlomoh* introduction to tractate *Hulin*, and *Havot Yair* 192.) I believe that R. Zadok's thesis, albeit with slight modifications, maintains even within the view of the Geonim. This is because whether we see the Talmudic discussions as retrieval or as constructive they are nevertheless products of human ingenuity and intellect.

<sup>50</sup> Resisei Laylah (Lublin, 5663, repr. *Bnei Brak: Yahadut*, 5727), pp. 160-61 translated on page 12 of Dr. Elman's article

forgotten. However, from this period of darkness shined the genius of the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* and the Oral Torah flourished. All this was only possible in a world without prophesy and overt miracles.<sup>51</sup> The holiday of Hanukah commemorates this transition.

Besides the obvious sociological theories, perhaps the deeper reason why Hanukah is so widely celebrated is because Hanukah relates to our current existence more than any other holiday. It is the holiday of the Jew in the world without prophesy and without overt miracles. Each year when we light candles we therefore remember that entropy is not inevitable, and that God continues to communicate even though He is sometimes hard to hear.

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<sup>51</sup> R. Zadok further argued that based on the verse (Kohelet 7:14), which indicates that the world is always marked by parallel and opposite forces, the first stage of Jewish history, that was defined by miracles and prophets also experienced *kishuf* (magic/sorcery) and false prophesy. In the second stage, marked by the development of the oral law through the intellect, there was a parallel advancement of wisdom in the non-Torah world, beginning with Greek wisdom and continuing through the various intellectual movements continuing to our time. Thus he writes:

ר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין - פרי צדיק בראשית לראש חודש כסלו: שכבר אמרנו שבמצרים שהיה הכנה למתן תורה והיה אז חכמת מצרים כישוף בלא שכל אנושיי רק חכמה עליונות מהקליפה. והוא זה לעומת זה נגד חכמת תורה שבכתב שהוא מן השמים. וחכמת יונית דשם התחילה הפילוסופיא שהוא חכמה שכליית דעות כוזבות ומינות והיה אז בזמן אלכסנדרוס מוקדון. והוא זה לעומת זה נגד חכמת תורה שבעל פה בקדושה שהוא גם כן מתחדש בלב חכמים אשר מופיע בלבם דברי אלהים חיים מטלא דעתיקא. ואז בזמן אלכסנדרוס מוקדון היה שמעון הצדיק כמו שאמרו ביומא (ס"ט א) שהיה משיירי כנסת הגדולה ואז התחיל התפשטות תורה שבעל פה. וזה עסק חודש זה לתקן האש של היצר הרע הרוב כעס. ברוגז האש של תורה שבעל פה שהיא אש אוכלת אש כאמור:  
ר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין - פרי צדיק דברים פרשת נצבים: ואם ישתו בני נכר תירושך אשר יגעת בו הענין הוא שבכל פעם שמתגלה בעולם דרך חדש בתורה שבעל פה מתגלה לעומת זה חדשות בחכמות חיצונות באומות. כמו שמצינו בזמן שמעון הצדיק שהיה משיירי אנשי כנסת הגדולה שהם יסדו התורה שבעל פה אז היה כנגדו אלכסנדרוס מוקדון ורבו שהפיצו החכמת יונית שהוא מינות ואפיקורסות שזה לעומת זה וכמו שנתבאר במקום אחר שבזמן שהיה צריך להיות התגלות התורה שבכתב היה אז חכמת מצרים ואחר כך בבבל היה עוד אשפים וחרטומים לעומת שהיה אז בישראל נביאים. ובזמן שהתחיל להתפשט חכמת תורה שבעל פה שהוא על הגוון משכל החכמים שבאמת הוא מה שמופיע בהם ה' יתברך. התחיל אצלם לעומת זה חכמת יונית שהוא גם כן מה שמחדשים משכלם. ועל זה נאמר ואם ישתו בני נכר שהם האומות העולם תירושך שמרמו לתורה שבעל פה. וכן איתא בתיקונים (תיקון ח') ובושה החמה ס"מ וחפרה הלבנה נוקביה דס"מ שהם אומרים שלהם הוא התורה שנמשלה לחמה וכעין שמובא בזה"ק (ח"ב קפ"ח א) שאמר ההגמון שאצלם הוא השפת אמת שתכון לעד וזה נגד בחינת תורה שבכתב ועל זה אמר ובושה החמה. וחפרה הלבנה הוא מה שמחדשים הם בשכלם ועל זה אומרים שהוא הלבנה שלהם סיהרא דמקבלא משמשא. על זה אומר ואם ישתו בני נכר תירושך. כי מאספיו יאכלוהו הוא נגד אם אתן דגנך וגו' שבאמת על ידי האכילה יבואו לדברי תורה והללו את ה' ומקבציו ישתוהו הוא נגד התירוש וזהו ישתוהו בחצרות קדשי שיהיה בבחינת היין שזכה משמחו שהיא סוד תורה שבעל פה וכאמור:

# Collected Insights into Chanukah

## Shine Brightly

Rebbetzin Rivka Alter

DAT Minyan, Denver, CO

The light of Chanukah, *chag haurim*, as manifested in the lighting of the candles of the Chanukah, is a central symbol of the holiday. It is this special light which provides illumination during the longest nights of the calendar year. Our rabbis have equated light with the Torah and mitzvot, “*ki ner mitzvah v’torah or*” (*Mishlei* 6:23). In the story of Chanukah, it is the miracle of the oil, used for lighting the menorah, which symbolically represents the return of the nation to its spiritual roots and a renewed dedication to Hashem’s Torah and mitzvot, as sharply contrasted with the efforts of the Greeks to force our neglect of the Torah and observance of mitzvot.

The lighting of candles and the spreading of light is seen in similar fashion in Tanach. Two examples that the Midrash highlights from the time of our early prophets relate to the husband of Devorah, the prophetess, and the grandfather of King Shaul. Both of these figures were rewarded for their “luminary” contributions to the Jewish nation.

Devorah is referred to as *ishet lapidot* (*Shoftim* 4:4). Rashi says that this name refers to the fact that Devorah’s husband made wicks for the mikdash. The Midrash in *Eliyahu Rabbah*, 9, asks why Devorah was chosen for greatness and prophesy when she lived among others, such as Pinchas, who were also capable of leading the people. The Midrash answers that Devorah encouraged her husband, a man ignorant in Torah matters, to make wicks for use in the *mishkan* in Shiloh. Her motive for encouraging him in this matter was to create a manner in which he too could merit a place in *olam habah* and be considered among the righteous. It is through light that even a commoner can have access to the spiritual realm. The Midrash continues that he fashioned thick wicks so that the light of the menorah would shine brightly, and they are therefore referred to as *lapidot*, torches. Hashem responded in turn, and said that due to their efforts to increase light in the mikdash, they would be repaid by Hashem increasing their “light” and influence among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ginsberg, author of *Mussar Haneviim*, and a former rabbi in the Jewish community of Denver, CO, expands on this idea. The story of Devorah’s husband serves as testimony that every person has a stake in the wisdom of the Torah and has the ability to rise to high levels of spirituality. Lapidot involved himself in a seemingly inconsequential mitzvah, put his full effort into this mitzvah, and as a result, merited greatness and recognition for all generations. This serves as encouragement to all Jews to find their place and make their unique

contribution in the realm of Torah.

In *Vayikra Rabbah*, 9, the matter of Shaul's kingship is discussed and we are told that it was through the merit of his grandfather that Shaul ascended to the throne. His grandfather lit candles for the masses by illuminating the dark passages between his house and the *beit midrash*, thereby enabling others to participate in Torah learning. This is why in *Divrei Hayamim I* (9:33), the father of Kish, Shaul's father, is referred to as Ner, a candle, and not by the name Aviel which is used in the book of *Shmuel I* (9:1). The Midrash refers to this as a mitzvah that could have been done by anyone and did not require special talents or intellectual capacity.

By providing light to the public, each of these figures reached the highest of levels. In the case of Devorah, she attained prophesy, and in the case of Shaul, he attained kingship. In regards to Shaul, his grandfather's merit was transferred to his progeny, while in the example of Devorah, the merit was endowed on herself.

As we light our own candles during the holiday we place them by the window so that others can be reminded of the miracles of Chanuka and of Hashem's providence. As such, Chanuka provides an opportunity for us to use light in similar ways to Devorah and Aviel, providing light for others that inspires them to grow in their Judaism, and in turn, benefits us spiritually as well. As seen above, no act is too small.

## **Advertising the Miracle**

Rebbetzin Amy A. Dubitsky

Phoenix, AZ

General advertising principles state that any message will have more impact if it has greater reach and frequency. Meaning, if you want your campaign to be successful, you need to get your message to as many people as possible as many times as possible. That being said, as we are charged with the obligation of *pirsumei nisa*, advertising the Chanukah miracle, one might think that the menorah should be lit anywhere and at any time to get the message out. Large Chanukah parties at schools and shuls would seem the perfect setting. What about a large simcha, like a wedding or bar mitzvah party? In the following paragraphs, we will explore the halachot regarding public menorah lightings.

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 671:7) states that there is an obligation to light a menorah in shul because of *pirsumei nisa*. The Mishna Berurah (671:44) states that even though lighting in shul is a minhag, you still make a bracha. The Ram" a writes that one can not fulfill the obligation of Chanuka lighting with the lighting in shul, and would need to light at home. In shul, the lighting is done in between mincha and maariv, even though many hold that at home the minhag is to light after tzais haKochavim. The Mishna Berurah (671:46) writes that this is because it is a time when everyone is gathered together, and since everyone has to go home and light their own menorah, a shul can not have the entire tzibur wait there until the shul menorah is lit.

There is a dispute as to whether the menorah can be lit in shul before mincha on Friday if there

is no minyan.<sup>52</sup> Some opinions allow lighting if it is very likely that a minyan will be there shortly. The Rav Poalim states that in this case you do not need a minyan, but merely ten people. So if women and children who have reached the age of chinuch are present for a total of ten people, the menorah may be lit with a bracha.

If there is a large gathering in the shul late at night, such as a meeting of the membership or for a shiur, under certain circumstances the menorah should be lit with a bracha even if everyone present has already lit in their homes. This would only be done if the menorah was not lit on that same night in this shul with a bracha already, and if at least ten people present did not see the lighting of a menorah in another shul.

What about outside of a shul? The Shulchan Aruch mentions the obligation of *pirsumei nisa* in a shul specifically, so if you have a large gathering of people in the street or in a community center, you would not be obligated to light the menorah, and if you did, you would not make a bracha. The Piskei Teshuvos explains that the obligation to light in a shul is to act as a remembrance for the Bais HaMikdash and any gathering outside of a shul is not in that same category. He does add, though, that in cases where there would be a great deal of *pirsumei nisa* and if there would definitely be some people present that had not lit their own menorah, that you could light the menorah and say a bracha.

Rav Soloveitchik zt”l held that you can not light candles at a gathering, such as of a men’s club, at a chagiga or at a wedding<sup>53</sup>. He based this on the opinion of his father, Rav Moshe Soleveitchik zt”l, regarding the halacha in the Shulchan Aruch of lighting on motzei Shabbos. While at home, most follow the opinion of the Taz to make havdalah first and then light the menorah, in shul most people light the menorah first and then make havdalah. (Rav Chaim Soleveitchik z”l was of the opinion that the menorah should be lit before, “Vayihi Noam”.) Rav Moshe Soloveitchik z”l explained that the difference is because the obligation of *pirsumei nisa* is on a “tzibur shel tefillah” specifically. Once maariv and havdalah have been completed, the people gathered there no longer have the status of a tzibur.<sup>54</sup> They are just a gathering of people at the same place at the same time. Only when there is still some form of liturgy that needs to be said does that group have the status of a tzibur, which would allow for lighting the menorah with a bracha.

So if you are planning a big party for Chanukah, fry up as many latkes and donuts as you can, but make sure to consider carefully if it is appropriate to light a menorah at your gathering.

## **The Truth of the Hero**

Rebbetzin Malki Feigenbaum

Young Israel of Memphis, Memphis, TN

“In the time of the Second Temple, when the Greeks ruled over Judea, they made laws for the Jews, nullifying religious life, not allowing them to learn Torah and keep mitzvos. The Greeks stole the Jews’ money and violated their daughters. They entered the Temple, made breaches in

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<sup>52</sup> Piskei Teshuvos page 472.

<sup>53</sup> Nefesh HaRav, page 223, Harirei Kedem, page 285.

<sup>54</sup> Nefesh HaRav page 222.

its walls, and unpurified that which was pure. The Jews were distressed and embarrassed by the Greeks until the G-d of our fathers had mercy on them and saved them from the Greeks. The Hasmonean high priests were strengthened; they killed the Greeks and saved the Jews from their hands. They then appointed a king from the priests which returned sovereignty to Israel for more than 200 years until the destruction of the Second Temple.” (Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:1) Indeed, “so great were the Hasmoneans that had it not been for them, Torah and mitzvos would have been forgotten from the Jewish people entirely.” (Ramban, Genesis 49:10)

It is very peculiar then that the Talmud teaches that the entire Hasmonean dynasty was killed out, so that if someone were to proclaim genealogy from the Hasmoneans you should assume they are actually a descendant of slaves. (Bava Basra 3b) How is it possible that a dynasty that is credited with saving the Torah, and in turn the Jewish nation, was completely wiped out?

Ramban suggests that despite their greatness, the Hasmoneans violated the Torah by assuming the monarchy. The blessing that Jacob bestows upon Judah (Genesis 49:10) is that once the monarchy transfers to Judah’s descendants it will not be given to anyone else. Ramban believes that any kings appointed not of Davidic descent, violating Jacob’s decree, are therefore susceptible to great punishment. Even with their great intentions and accomplishments of saving the Jewish nation from destruction and religious extinction, the Hasmoneans did not know their boundaries and took their power too far.

We should not be surprised that our greatest heroes, celebrated in every Jewish home, had flaws of character as well. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch teaches (Genesis 12:10-13) “The Torah never hides us from the faults, errors and weaknesses of our great men. Just by that it gives the stamp of veracity to what it relates. But in truth, by the knowledge which is given to us of their faults and weaknesses, our great men are in no ways made lesser but actually greater and more instructive. If they stood before us as the purest models of perfection we should attribute them as having a different nature, which has been denied to us. Were they without passion, without internal struggles, their virtues would seem to us the outcome of some higher nature, hardly a merit and certainly no model that we can hope to emulate ... From our great teachers of the Torah, and truly Ramban can be reckoned amongst the very greatest, we would accordingly learn that it may never be our task to whitewash the spiritual and moral heroes of our past, to appear as apologists for them. They do not require our apologies nor do such attempts become them. Truth is the seal of our Torah, and truthfulness is the principle of all its true and great commentators and teachers.”

Though the Hasmoneans made a great error in taking the monarchy, we should not think less of them. On the contrary, their sacrifice and dedication to Judaism is all the more instructive. They were people with emotions and flaws. They were leaders with everyday struggles and feelings. This is precisely what makes their lives and their work so great an example as we continue every year to celebrate their victories and triumphs.

# The Weak in the Hands of the Strong

Rebbetzin Yocheved Krinsky

Young Israel of Stamford, Stamford, CT

Rav Yechezkel Sarna, the famed Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, used to ask schoolchildren whether the Macabees were strong or weak. The children always responded to the sage that the sons of Matisyahu were strong. Rav Sarna would challenge the children that in the ‘*al hanisim*’ prayer for our miraculous salvation on Chanukah, we thank God that he delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, meaning the Macabees. Rav Sarna explained that the Greeks were stronger in their military might, but no army can battle against the Almighty.

In Parshas Miketz, which generally falls out during Chanukah, Pharaoh was bothered by the faulty logic of his dreams (the weak consuming the strong) and their recurrence. When Pharaoh dreamt his first dream, the Torah writes “*vayikatz*” (*Bereshis* 41:4). Rav Hirsch explains that the Hebrew term *vayikatz* (he awoke) implies that he arose in shock. What was the shock? It was the illogic of his vision. It was the weak cows consuming the strong ones. This perversion of the laws of nature shocked Pharaoh from his slumber. The meek vanquishing the resilient is nothing short of a supernatural act of God. Pharaoh knew that this was not an anomaly when the dream repeated itself. He was bothered by the altering of the holy laws of nature.

Many have connected this parsha with the festival of lights. The beginning of the parsha which describes Pharaoh’s dreams, Yosef’s interpretation and action, and Pharaoh’s response to Yosef’s interpretation epitomizes Chanukah. We experience the anomaly (albeit in dream form) of the suspension of ‘nature;’ we find the recognition of Hashem and praising of Hashem (by both Yosef and Pharaoh); finally, of course, we are inspired by the salvation that took place as a result. Is this not the story, the moral and the celebration of Chanukah?

Rav Nebenzahl cites the famous question of Rav Yosef Karo (*Beis Yoseph* on *Tur Orach Chaim* 670): if there was sufficient oil to burn for one day and it burned for eight, then the miracle was in fact for seven days. Why then did Chazal institute Chanukah as an eight day festival? Despite many answers to this question, Rav Nebenzahl chooses the answer attributed to R'Simcha Zisel Ziv zt"l the *Alter of Kelm*. The *Alter* taught that “*had Chanukah been established as a seven day festival, the impression would have been given that there is a distinction between "miracle oil" and "natural oil" - "miracle oil" was lit by Hashem, and "natural oil" can kindle with no need for Divine intervention. In order to dispel this notion, Chazal established an eight day festival highlighting the fact that there is no difference between "natural oil" and "miracle oil". Just as "miracle oil" is not bound by any laws of physics, but it burns because the King of kings commanded it to, so too "natural oil" does not burn as a result of laws of physics. In other words: the One Who declared that oil burn for eight days, is the One Who declares that oil burn for the 'usual' amount of time (see Chochma uMussar volume II, article 61).*”

In our very busy lives, may we never be too busy nor too big to recognize the truth of the natural order, the truth of God’s intervention. May we always remember that despite being a great Jewish hero, Yehudah haMakabbi represented the weaker side, not the stronger side. May we never take advantage of that ‘order’ and may we properly ‘thank and praise’ Hashem for his love, providence and compassion. After all, Pharaoh was not too big to do so.

# The Obligation of Women to Light Chanuka Candles

Rebbetzin Aliza Pilichowski

Beth Jacob Congregation, Beverly Hills, CA

Since I was a young girl, I have been inspired by the words of our Sages about great women throughout the generations. I enjoyed the beautiful explanations of the *bracha* of *She'asani kirtzono*, "that God made me in His will," and the principle of *af hein hayu b'oso hanies*, "That since women were involved in the miracle, they are obligated to commemorate it." *Af hein* obligates women of all generations in *mitzvos* and teaches their powerful role in the essence of the commands. The principle of *af hein* gave me a particular connection to the applicable *mitzvos*.

In this article I'd like to explore the principle of *af hein hayu b'oso hanies*, "That since women were involved in the miracle, they are obligated to commemorate it." How does this principle relate to the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles and to the principle that women are exempt from *mitzvas aseh shehazman grama*, time generated *mitzvos*? Did our Sages intend for women to be obligated in the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles or is there a *mitzvah* for men to light candles and because women were involved in the miracle, they have a different obligation to light candles?

The *mitzvah* of *hadlakas neiros*, lighting candles, and its history, is explained beautifully by the Rambam in his *Hilchos Chanukah*. During the time of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, the Greeks decreed oppressive laws against the Jews and offensive acts in the *Beis Hamikdash*, until God had mercy on *Bnei Yisrael* and saved them. After the *Chashmonaim* defeated the Greek army, there was only one day's worth of oil to light the *menorah*. Miraculously, that small pitcher of oil lasted for eight days. Our Sages instituted the *mitzvah* of *hadlakas neiros* - to light candles for eight days to publicize the miracle that occurred.

The *mitzvah* of *hadlakas neiros* is a time-generated *mitzvah* – the *chanukiya* must be lit during the days of Chanukah. An overriding principle that applies to *mitzvos* is that women are exempt from time-generated *mitzvos*. This principle states that any time there is a *mitzvah* that is generated by time; women are not obligated to fulfill that *mitzvah*.

Although generated by time, there are certain *mitzvos* that other overreaching principles obligate women to perform. The laws of *Shabbos* are generated by time, but women are obligated in all of the laws of *Shabbos* because of the principle that since women are obligated in some of the *mitzvos* of *Shabbos*, they are obligated to fulfill all of the *Shabbos* laws. Chanukah is another example of where another overriding principle obligates women to fulfill a command where they otherwise would be exempt due to the *mitzvah* being time generated. The *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is generated by time, but we learn that women are obligated to light candles due to the principle of *af hein hayu b'oso hanies*, "That since women were involved in the miracle, they are obligated to commemorate it."

Originally, when our Sages instituted the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles, women were obligated to publicize the miracle just as men were. It is only because lighting Chanukah candles is a time-bound *mitzvah* that women were exempted. To "re-obligate" women in lighting

candles, our Sages stated since they benefited from the miracle, women are obligated to light candles as well.

Today, women have a double obligation to publicize the *Chanukah* miracle. Whenever God relates to *Bnei Yisrael* through *hashgacha pratis*, specific Divine providence, we must recognize the miracle in a public fashion by publicizing it. There is a second obligation unique to women which stems from the principle of *af hein*, to publicize the personal miracle that they were involved in.

Lighting candles in order to reflect the personal benefit the woman gained from the *Chanukah* miracle gives a special rush of personal redemption that connects women to the *mitzvah* of lighting *Chanukah* candles.

# Insights from Members of the Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Chicago Community Kollel

## The Importance of Perception

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel

The notion of perception is mentioned often in a discussion of the mitzvah of Nerot Chanuka. Halacha in general takes into consideration people's perceptions, and this is highlighted in multiple instances in the Gemara's treatment of the laws of Chanuka in Massechet Shabbat.

Halacha's concern for negative public perception, known as חשדא (suspicion) is rooted in the laws of Chanuka. Hence, the Talmud (Shabbat 23a) teaches that one who has a home with entrances to two sides of a courtyard requires lights on each side, lest a passerby suspect that the homeowner neglected to light. More fundamentally, the lights themselves must be perceptible to the public. Hence, the Talmud (ibid. 22a) rules that they must be placed below a height of twenty amot. Rashi explains that "the eye does not rule above twenty amot." The most dramatic manifestation of the concept of perception is the beracha recited by one who sees the lit candles:

*R. Hiyya b. Ashi said: He who lights the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing; while R. Jeremiah said He who sees the Hanukkah lamp must pronounce a blessing. R. Judah said: On the first day, he who sees must pronounce two, and he who lights must pronounce three blessings; thereafter, he who lights pronounces two, and he who sees pronounces one.*

אמר רב חייא בר אשי אמר רב: המדליק  
נר של חנוכה צריך לברך. ורב ירמיה  
אמר: הרואה נר של חנוכה צריך לברך.  
אמר רב יהודה: יום ראשון - הרואה  
מברך שתיים, ומדליק מברך שלש. מכאן  
ואילך - מדליק מברך שתיים, ורואה  
מברך אחת

The Shulchan Aruch codifies this law (O.C. 676) within specific parameters: only one who has not and will not light on that evening recites the beracha of she'asa nissim upon witnessing a lit menorah. The Ran (on the Rif, ibid) explains the rationale for this, noting that nowhere do we find someone who performs a mitzvah and also recites a beracha on observing someone else's mitzvah. Despite this caveat, this Halacha is still anomalous. Where else do we find an avenue for one who is unable to fulfill a mitzvah to connect with the mitzvah through the recitation of a beracha just by perceiving it! This undoubtedly highlights a unique role of perception.

Perhaps these halachos and their emphasis on the role of perception are meant to underscore the central motif of the holiday: miracles. Chanuka is the commemoration of two miracles, one of war and the other of oil, which are reflected in our tefillot (al hanisim) and our Menorah. The entire notion of a miracle, of

attributing an event to Divine intervention, is a matter of perception. While one may argue that a small band of Maccabees outmaneuvered their powerful enemies against all odds due to cunning strategy, we perceive it differently. We see the Providential Hand of the Almighty guiding the Chashmonaim to victory, much as we see the continuous burning of oil for eight days as a heavenly act- not an unusual scientific phenomenon. Often the line between the miraculous and natural is clouded, but the holiday of Chanuka reminds us to perceive the hand of Hashem in our lives, both in the overt miracles- like the burning of the oil- and in His covert assistance, such the miracle of the successful revolt of the Chashmonaim.

## The Role of Miracles in Judaism

Rabbi Dovid Asher

Kollel Fellow

Chanukah commemorates the miracle of our military victory and the phenomenon of the oil lasting seven days longer than it was supposed to. How is a Jew supposed to view miracles in general? How are miracles meant to affect our belief?

As indicated by the *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 318), one should bless *Hashem* upon experiencing a miracle. However, the Gemara (Taanis 24a) notes an interesting case where the reaction is quite different. R' Elazar Ish Birta was notorious for giving too much charity. When the collectors would make rounds, they would hide from him to prevent his own financial demise. On one such occasion, they were unable to elude him. Sure enough, he gave everything on him except one coin. He bought one stalk of wheat and deposited it. When his wife peeked in, she found the whole storage area jam packed with wheat. Surely, a miracle had occurred, and her husband was informed. The husband retorted one should not gain benefit from a miracle.

There are many interesting facets of this story, but let us focus on why R' Elazar was so resistant. An investigation into the function of miracles leads us to the period of B'nei Yisrael's wandering in the desert. The *Rambam*<sup>55</sup> cites the miracles of *krias yam suf*, of the *manna*, and of the water gushing from the rock as miracles that needed to take place to ensure our survival. The *Rambam* explains that miracles are necessary for our continued progress, but they are not meant to be evidence. They are not meant to substantiate our faith as much as they are meant to sustain us, and enable our advancement. In fact, the *Rambam* attributes Moshe's hesitancy in taking the mantle to his concern that *Klal Yisrael* would not permanently believe in him just because he could perform "tricks" with his staff and his forearm. The *Rambam* concludes that Moshe was reassured when Hashem told him that the nation was to be convinced only until they left Egypt and experienced *Mattan Torah* at *Har Sinai*. When they would personally encounter the Almighty, no more verification would be needed.

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<sup>55</sup> Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, 8:1

Rabbi Yisroel Chait, *Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Bnei Torah*, writes (“Torah from Sinai”, YBT.org) that, “the essence of Judaism is not realized through religious fervor over the miraculous but through an appreciation of G-d’s wisdom as revealed both in *Torah* and the natural world.” A miracle is a break from natural law. In fact, G-d is only willing to break natural law when there is great need.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, it is best to look at the natural world in order to deepen one’s faith and not to look at a miracle. We can purely encounter G-d solely through the Torah and the natural world. It is like trying to connect to another person when he is out of character. It is best to know someone when he is being himself.

At a wedding ceremony, the great excitement surrounding the matrimony is not a celebration of a ring being placed on the bride’s finger by her husband. On the contrary, it is focused on the context of marriage where life’s journey begins anew. So too when it comes to a miracle, we do not celebrate the miraculous event as much as we celebrate our being G-d’s nation. Following a miracle, this notion ought to be strengthened within us, but at the same time we should recognize the shortcomings of atypical miracles in that they should not be the basis of our faith. R’ Elazar Ish Birta distanced himself from his miracle and deemed its benefits off-limits because living by way of miracles is not ideal. On Chanukah, we are not celebrating the supernatural phenomenon of oil lasting longer than was possible as much as we are celebrating G-d’s saving us as a nation and thereby enabling us to continue in our mission to enlighten the world with Torah.

## Why Are You Fighting?

Rabbi Noah Baron

Kollel Fellow

A very simple question must be asked about the events of Chanukah. We know that Chanukah was a religious war. In the Purim story, Haman wanted to physically kill us, whereas the Greeks wanted us to leave our religion and become Hellenists. However, in the beginning of Hilchos Chanukah, while telling the history of Chanukah, the Rambam writes that the Greeks both tried to nullify the Jewish religion and grabbed our money and our daughters. Why would they do that? If they just wanted us to forsake our religion, how would it help to take our money and our women? Wouldn’t that just antagonize us and cause us to rebel? Why did they even need our money and women? Didn’t they have plenty of their own?

Rav Yochanan Zweig suggests a very fundamental answer. The Greeks wanted a good fight. They sought a challenge. If the Greeks took away the Jews’ religion, only the rabbis and kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash would fight. What kind of fight is that? But if they took their women and money, then everyone would fight and it would be a decent match.

The Jews are the exact opposite. We fight with a certain goal in mind. If we can accomplish that goal without fighting, even better. We came to Canaan to conquer it but before every battle, we said to the inhabitants that if they accepted the Noahide laws, then they would be spared. We avoid fighting at all costs. If we have no other choice, we will fight, but solely with a certain

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<sup>56</sup> Rabeinu Bachya – Shmos 11:4

objective in mind. We will not fight so that we can have a sense of victory. This is one of the messages of Chanukah. When we deal with our spouses, children or others, it is not about the fight, but simply about accomplishing our goals.

## **The Real War Between the Jews & the Greeks**

Rabbi Dovi Bergman

Kollel Fellow

For a considerable time now, I have found the celebration of Chanukah philosophically challenging. I ascribe to a tradition within Orthodox Judaism which views secular wisdom as complementary to Torah learning. Call it Torah uMadda, call it Torah im Derech Eretz, call it whatever you will, the attitude that our community by and large holds dear is one that embraces the challenge of bridging the gap between the sacred and the mundane, of allowing what we know about the world to meaningfully contribute towards our authentic Jewish religious experience.

At first glance Chanukah seems to fly in the face of this tradition. Chanukah is a holiday that celebrates the Jewish victory over the Greeks. These same Greeks are usually regarded as the founding fathers of the modern rationalist tradition within Western civilization. The Rambam, among other Torah giants, heavily involved himself in the study of Greek philosophy and science. Contrast this with Chanukah. The holiday, as traditionally interpreted, seems to celebrate the victorious rejection of all things Greek. How are those of us who follow in the tradition of the Rambam supposed to understand this celebration? Moreover, one could pose this same challenge to the Greeks themselves. Why did they find the Torah to be such an anathema to their culture that they openly persecuted those who studied or observed it?

The Mahara”l, in his essay *Ner Mitzvah* on the story of Chanukah, (Section 1 ד"ה ודע כי החומר) explains that the Greeks, hand in hand with their scientific and philosophical superiority over the rest of the ancient world, possessed the trait of brazenness. He points out that brazenness is both the driving force behind and the natural potential byproduct of the pursuit of knowledge. To acquire knowledge, one must brazenly leave no stone unturned, fearing neither the tremendous effort nor the necessary controversy required for intellectual growth. At the same time, the more one knows, and the more certainty with which one knows it, the more confidence and even pride one takes in their own understandings. The Greeks prided themselves on their cultural and intellectual advancement, and that pride led to a definite national brazenness in their interaction with foreign nations.

It was thus that nothing insulted Greek national pride more than encountering a Jewish people that not only stubbornly refused to “admit” to Greek cultural superiority, but claimed to possess a body of Divine wisdom, the Torah, that stood beyond any human challenge. The Jewish sages could reply to Greek missionaries that “What you have is nice, and we’re fine with it, but at the end of the day it’s only human wisdom. We have something more, something that no matter how hard you try you will never eclipse.” Not only did the Torah challenge Greek superiority, it stood in opposition to their entire concept of man’s place in the world. For while the Greeks brazenly celebrated human intellectual achievement, the Torah demanded a perspective of humility, of surrendering oneself before the infinite, ultimately unknowable Divine. The conflict

between Jew and Greek was far more than simple culture clash; it was a conflict between two diametrically opposed perspectives on man's place in the world.

This now resolves our initial question. The victory we celebrate on Chanukah was not over Greek wisdom, but over Greek attitudes. In repelling the Greek onslaught, the Jewish people declared once and for all not the invalidity but rather the subservience of human knowledge to God's Torah. The Jewish approach to understanding the world, one that humbly seeks to find God and to serve Him through every new insight into His wondrous creation, proved victorious 2200 years ago, and that same approach continues to guide us to this day.

## חנוכה – איך שומרים על הזהות היהודית

ר' חגי אליצור

חבר כולל

שני חגים תיקנו לנו חז"ל – פורים וחנוכה – בשניהם עמד עם ישראל בפני מעצמה המבקשת להשמידו וה' בחסדו, בנסים נסתרים, הצילנו מידם וגברה ידינו על שונאינו.

### מרדכי בדורו כיוסף בדורו

חג החנוכה חל תמיד כאשר קוראים בפרשות השבוע על יוסף במצרים. פרשות יוסף במצרים מקבילות בסגנון ובתוכן למגילת אסתר. אנשי כנסת הגדולה שכתבו את מגילת אסתר (בבא בתרא טו.) ביססו את הסיפור על סיפור יוסף במצרים. בפשטות ניתן לומר, שהם באו לכתוב את פרשת גדולת מרדכי בבית המלך הגוי והסיפור המקביל היחידי בתורה הוא סיפורו של יוסף. אך ישנו עומק נוסף בהקבלה זו: חז"ל עומדים על הסגנון הדומה בין סיפורי יוסף ומגילת אסתר, ובנוסף מדגישים גם את הדמיון בסיבתיות האירועים. הם קושרים בין הניסיונות שעמדו בהם יוסף ומרדכי ובין השכר שקיבלו (בראשית רבה פז):

"ויהי כדברה אל יוסף וגו' ר' יודן בש' ר' בנימין בר לוי: בני רחל ניסן שוה וגדולתן שוה, ניסן שוה, ויהי כדברה אל יוסף יום יום, ויהי באמרם אליו יום יום (אסתר ג ד), ולא שמע אליה, ולא שמע אליהם (שם שם /אסתר ג' /), גדולתן שוה, ויסר פרעה את טבעתו וגו' (בראשית מא מב), וכת' ויסר המלך את טבעתו [אשר העביר מהמן] ויתנה למרדכי (אסתר ח ב) וגו'".

אמנם, ההקבלה בולטת מאוד בעניין השכר, אבל הניסיון היה שונה – ניסונו של יוסף היה בעריות ואילו ניסונו של מרדכי היה בעבודה זרה. לכאורה, זהו הבדל גדול מאוד כי ניסונו של יוסף היה בדבר שבחדרי חדרים ואילו ניסונו של מרדכי היה בפרהסייה. לכן, ראוי כי השכר יהיה שונה גם כן. אלא שאנו לומדים מכאן כי הניסיונות של מרדכי ויוסף<sup>57</sup> היו בשני הכוחות העיקריים המניעים את העולם – בעולם הטבעי ובעולם הרוחני – כפי שמלמדת האגדה הידועה (יומא סט.) על ביטול יצר עבודה זרה (שהתרחש בזמן כנסת הגדולה, כלומר בזמן מגילת אסתר) – אנשי כנסת הגדולה בקשו וקיבלו את יצר עבודה זרה, ואחר כך את יצר עריות. יצר עבודה זרה נמסר בידיהם אך יצר עריות שוחרר בחזרה לעולם כשכחו מוחלש. באגדה זו מתואר התהליך וההחלטה של אנשי כנסת הגדולה להפוך את העולם היהודי להיות רציונלי יותר: להעמיד במרכז העולם הרוחני היהודי את עמל התורה ולא את חוויית הדבקות בה! המחיר הוא שהאש יוצאת מבית קודשי הקודשים. האש לא תהיה שם, וגם לא בלבות עם ישראל. המוקד עבר מאש בוערת בלב, ללימוד שכלתני אינטלקטואלי. (העולם המערבי עבר את התהליך הזה רק במאה ה-19. הסוציולוג מקס וובר קרא לזה "הסרת הקסם מן העולם" וכניסה ל"כלוב הברזל של הרציונליות").

שמירה על הזהות היהודית מותנית ביכולת לעמוד על הזהות שלנו בשני התחומים האלו. ועל כן הם בייהרג ובל יעבור. כלומר, אין משמעות לחיים אם עוברים עליהם, כי הם סותרים את הייעוד הבסיסי של החיים היהודיים<sup>58</sup>.

פורים הוא חג שחוגג את המלחמה של מרדכי לשמירה על מהות הזהות היהודית: נגד המן ופיתויי עבודה זרה.

<sup>57</sup> המדרש מדגיש את נקודה חשובה: שני הניסיונות לא היו חד פעמיים אלא ניסיונות יומיומיים, כי העולם היומיומי בנוי על שני כוחות אלו.  
<sup>58</sup> ניתן לומר ששפיכות דמים שווה להם בכך, אך ניתן גם לומר שהוא ב'יהרג ובל יעבור' מסיבה פשוטה יותר: חייך אינם שווים יותר מחיי חברך. לפיכך, רשאי להרוג מישוהו כדי להציל את עצמך.

ההשראה לסיפורו הוא הסיפור של יוסף ששמר על זהותו נגד פיתויי העריות.<sup>59</sup>

### על מה התמרד מתתיהו?

"ויהי כאשר באו פקידי המלך עיר מודעית להעביר את העם מתורת ה' לעבודת האלילים ולזבח להם... ויהי ככלותו לדבר, ויגש איש מבני ישראל לעיני כל הניצבים אל הבמה אשר במודעית לזבח זבח כאשר ציוה המלך. וירא מתתיהו, ויחם לבבו ותבער קנאתו על תורת אלוהיו. וירוך בחמתו אל האיש, וימיתו אצל הבמה, וגם את הפקיד המית, ויתוך את הבמה." **ספר מכבים (א, פרק ב):**

כמו מרדכי לפניו, מתתיהו מתמרד נגד הצד הרוחני שביוון ובהתייוונות, הצד של התבוללות רוחנית. אבל, במגילת תענית הסיפור שונה:

"ובמה היו מצרים להם מלכי יון? היו מושיבין קסטריאות בעירות להיות מענין את הכלות... ובת אחת היתה למתתיהו בן יוחנן הכהן הגדול וכשהגיע זמנה לינשא בא הקסטריין לטמאה ולא הניחו אותו וקנאו מתתיהו ובניו וגברה ידם על מלכות יון ונמסרו בידן והרגום ואת היום שבטלום עשאוהו יום טוב".

מתתיהו מוביל מרד נגד הנסיונות לקעקע את הזהות היהודית. ממלכת יון פעלה בשני המישורים – בעולם הטבע והיצר ובעולם השכל והרוח: בעריות ובעבודה זרה. מתתיהו מקנא לה' ושומר על הזהות היהודית כמו יוסף ומרדכי לפניו.

שני חגים תיקנו לנו חז"ל – פורים וחנוכה – בשניהם עמד עם ישראל בפני מעצמה המנסה להשמידו. אך בשניהם גזירת השמד וההצלה באו בעקבות אדם אחד, גדול, שעמד על זהותו היהודית.

## נר חנוכה איש וביתו

### ר' אפרים רימל

חבר כולל

בשבת חנוכה אנו זוכים לקיים שתי מצוות הקשורות בהדלקת נרות אך מהותן שונה. אמנם, שתי ההדלקות מתרחשות בתוך הבית, אלא שהכיוון אליו מכוון האור שונה.

מצות נרות שבת היא מצוה המתקיימת בכל שבוע, מטרתה היא להאיר את הבית ולהשרות שלום בבית: "דאין שלום בית בלא נר" (שולחן ערוך רסג, ג). גם נרות חנוכה תלויים בביתו של האדם "נר איש וביתו" (מסכת שבת כא:). אולם, להדלקת נרות חנוכה מטרה שונה בתכלית, כמעט הפוכה: נרות חנוכה פונים מתוך הבית החוצה – לפרסם את הנס שעשה לנו הקב"ה.

וכך כותב השפת אמת (תרל"ד):

מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו. וקשה מה נשתנה מכל המצוות ומה ענין המצוה להבית? ונר שבת שאני משום שלום בית. וגם שם המצוה רק להיות נר דולק אבל בכאן הדלקה עושה מצוה ואם הדליקה חרש, שוטה וקטן פסול. אם כן, למה לא ידליק כל בר חיובא בפני עצמו?

השפת אמת שואל מה ייחודה של מצוה זו שהיא קשורה לבית, ובנוסף, מה הקשר של מצות חנוכה לבית עד כדי כך שהמצוה היא על הבית ורק המהדרין מדליק כל אחד ואחד.

עונה השפת אמת – "וי"ל כי בהתאסף כל כחות האדם ובני ביתו השייכין אליו יוכל לקיים המצוות בשלימות יותר. ומצות נר חנוכה מבחון והוא שיוכל האדם להביא במעשיו הארה במקום החושך ולזאת צריך האדם ליקח עמו כל התלוי בו".

כדי להאיר החוצה על האדם לאסוף את כל כוחותיו – את כל אנשי ביתו, ואז יש לו כח להאיר בשלימות החוצה. וממשיך השפת אמת להסביר –

"והשי"ת ברא האדם בעוה"ז כדי שיוכל להביא הארת התורה בכל מעשה גשמי כשעושהו עפ"י התורה

<sup>59</sup> במדרש (פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) בראשית פרק לט): "שנראתה דמות דיוקנו של אביו בחלון, אמר לו יוסף עתדין אחיך להיות חקוקין על אבני השהם, שנאמר ששה משמותם על האבן האחת (שמות כח י), רצונך שלא תמנה עמהם, ומיד ותשב באיתן קשתו (בראשית מט כד), מלמד ששבה קשתו לאיתנה" – יוסף התגבר על יצרו משום שרצה להיות חלק מעם ישראל הוא בחר לשמור על זהותו.

כראוי... וכן נר חנוכה מבחוץ... איש וביתו, ומהדרין נר לכל אחד הוא מדריגה גבוהה לתקן כל פרט ופרט מהתלויים בו. ואנחנו הלואי שנוכה לתקן בכלל"

מטרת האדם היא להאיר את כל העולם. הצעד הראשון הוא תיקון פנימי של כוחותיו ושל אנשי ביתו ומתוך כך לצאת החוצה ולהשפיע. בכל שבת אדם בונה את ביתו, מתוך השגרה והעבודה היומיומית ומתוך כך יש לו כח לצאת החוצה ולהשפיע וכן פוסק השולחן ערוך להלכה (רסג, ג):  
"אם אין ידו משגת לקנות נר לשבת ונר לחנוכה, נר שבת קודם משום שלום הבית".  
וכמו שכתב השפת אמת בסיום דבריו: ואנחנו הלואי שנוכה לתקן בכלל.

## Celebrating the Dedication

Rabbi Michael Teitcher

Kollel Fellow

As names tend to capture the essence of the subject described, it is instructive to consider the name of our holiday. Noting that "Chanukah" means "dedication" or an

"initiation" of something for an intended purpose, the Midrash weaves the term Chanukah into a few critical "dedications" in Jewish history:

*How many dedications [Chanukahs] were there? Seven, and they are: The dedication of Heaven and Earth... the dedication of the wall [of Jerusalem] ... the dedication of the returning from the Exile ... the dedication of the Priests that we commemorate through our lighting ... the dedication of the World to come ... the dedication of the princes of the Mizbeach ... and the dedication of the Mikdash ...*

**Psikta Rabti [Ish Shalom] 2**

וכמה חנוכות הם? שבע חנוכות הם, ואילו הן: חנוכת שמים וארץ שנאמר ויכולו השמים והארץ (בראשית ב' א') ומה חנוכה היה שם ויתן אותם אלהים ברקיע השמים להאיר (בראשית א' י"ז) וחנוכת החומה שנאמר ובחנוכת חומת ירושלים (נחמיה י"ב כ"ז) וחנוכת של [עולי] גולה שנאמר והקריבו לחנוכת בית אלהינו דנא וגו' (עזרא ו' י"ז) וחנוכת הכהנים זו שאנו מדליקין וחנוכת העולם הבא שנאמר אחפש ירושלים בנרות (צפניה א' י"ב) וחנוכת הנשיאים זאת חנוכת המזבחה (במדבר ז' פ"ד) וחנוכת המקדש מה שקראו בענין מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד.  
**פסיקתא רבתי [איש שלום] פסיקא ב**

The first "chanuka" was that of the world's natural phenomena, designated for the purpose of maintaining the order and consistency of God's creation. During creation itself, the laws of nature were yet to be fixed, and as a result the world was an unpredictable place. The establishment of natural forces solidified the fact that *He fixed them in place forever, a decree that is never transgressed* (Tehilim 148). This was a critical moment in creation: both consistency and ubiquity of natural law are fundamental to science and human understanding. Without fixed laws of nature, there would be no science to speak of and no basis for human beings to understand, and thereby shape, the natural world.

The next *chanukah* was the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem in *Sefer Nechemia*, which symbolized the first truly autonomous act the Jews were able to effect upon returning from the Babylonian exile. Despite having won the right to rebuild their homeland, the Jews had continuously faced disruption from within and without, which prevented the establishment of the true security (Ezra, Ch. 4). Dedicating the walls was a game-changer in the politics of the

region: the capital was secured and Jewish sovereignty was restored.

The dedication of the **בְּנֵי אֵלֹהִים**, the tribal princes, was the culmination of the building of the Mishkan, and set the wheels in motion for the new place of worship to fulfill its purpose. The Ramban notes that this was the culmination of the entire experience of the Exodus, the moment that allowed the newly formed nation to fully transition from exiled slaves to a people redeemed in the true sense of the term - a people freely serving God. Likewise, the final journey into the land of Israel was only complete with the building of the Beit Hamikdash. The same can be said of the culmination of the Babylonian exile.

Our holiday of Chanukah, which the Midrash terms the *chanukat haKohanim*, also commemorates a watershed moment in Jewish history, one that is comparable to the other *chanukot* described above. Most simply, political sovereignty was returned to the Jewish state in the form of Hasmonean rule. But the real paradigm shift was cultural, not political.

The Haftarah of Shabbat Chanuka describes the famous vision of the *menorah* of Zecharia (Zecharia, Ch. 4). In his vision, Zecharia is shown a *menorah* of singular description. This was no ordinary candelabrum, nor was it simply a vision of the seven-stemmed lamp used in the Beit Hamikdash. It was fully equipped with a circular fuel basin, lamps, and tubes to siphon the oil to the wicks. Even the source of the fuel itself, the olive trees, was attached to the *menorah* at its sides. As expressed in Rav Hirsch's teachings on the Haftarah, it was a self-contained system, "a candelabrum which, independent of everything else, bears and maintains everything that is required for giving light."

It was this independence that was the turning-point in Jewish destiny. On Chanukah, we celebrate the strength of spirit that only comes from pure immersion in Jewish experience, an encounter that looks no further than the Torah itself to provide the kindling for the illumination of the world around us. Like the other *chanukot* in history, the victory over the Greeks marked the initiation of a new era, one in which we are able to take pride in our ability to be culturally and morally self-sufficient. On Chanukah, we celebrate our *Torat Hashem* that is *temimah* in the full sense of the term - perfect and fully equipped to provide the fuel we need to be the light for the nations envisioned by our prophets.

## The Message of the Mizbeach

Rabbi Mordecai Turoff

Kollel Fellow

During the holiday of Chanukah the Menorah casts a giant shadow. We are taught, from a young age, of the miracle of the small jar of oil which kept the Menorah burning for eight days. In fact, the primary mitzvah of the holiday, the lighting of the "Chanukiah" serves as a public reminder of the miracle of the kindling of the Menorah and the restoration of the Beit Hamikdash. But with all the focus on the Menorah we lose sight of the stories of the vessels that didn't have as happy an ending. More specifically, we lose sight of the story of the Mizbeach.

The Maharsha on Shabbos 21b says "ונראה לפרש דנקרא חנוכה ע"ש חנוכת המזבח" "The very name Chanukah, according to the Maharsha, comes from the rededication of the Mizbeach. It would

appear that the thematic symbol of the holiday is not the Menorah but is, in fact, the Mizbeach. What does the Mizbeach teach us about the nature of Chanukah?

The Gemara in Avodah Zara 52b recounts that when the Greeks breached the sacred walls of the Beis Hamikdash, they offered pagan sacrifices on the Mizbeach. Their offerings rendered the Mizbeach unfit for future service in the Beis Hamikdash. When the Chashmonaim miraculously prevailed over their foes and reclaimed the Beis Hamikdash, they stowed the unfit Mizbeach in a North-East chamber of the Heichal. A new Mizbeach was built and consecrated. The Gemara was troubled by the fact that the Chashmonaim went through the trouble of stashing away the old Mizbeach and replacing it with a new one, a very tedious process, when they had a much simpler option at their disposal. Why didn't the Jews ask a non-Jewish pagan to break the stone of the Mizbeach, thereby nullifying the prohibited nature of the Mizbeach? The Gemara answers that while breaking a stone of the Mizbeach would indeed nullify the prohibited nature, the Torah requires smooth stones for the Mizbeach. A single nick in its stone renders it unfit for use. So why not use a tool to smooth out any nicks? The Gemara cites the Pasuk in Sefer Devarim (27, 5) "תניף ברזל לא עליהם ברזל", an iron tool that touches the Mizbeach would also render it unfit. The only option was to stow away the old Mizbeach and build a new one.

The Mishna in Midos (3, 4) sheds light onto the Gemara. The Mishna says that the reason why no metal implement can touch any stone of the Mizbeach is because "שהברזל נברא לקצר ימיו של אדם והמזבח נברא להאריך ימיו של אדם אינו בדין שיונף המקצר על המאריך (Iron was created to curtail the life of man, while the Mizbeach was created to lengthen the life of man. It is not proper to raise that which shortens against that which lengthens.) Iron, the metal of weaponry, symbolizes war and destruction. The Mizbeach, on the other hand, is the conduit through which man connects to God and brings peace and longevity into the world. While implements of war have their practical uses, they cannot reach the level of implements of peace.

Now let's revisit the Gemara and try to imagine the scene. The Chashmonaim heroes have just accomplished the impossible; with the help of God they handily defeated the mighty Greek army. With a victorious cheer they re-enter the Beis Hamikdash and attempt to salvage all they can. Unfortunately, in their search they discover the defiled Mizbeach. Ultimately they cannot salvage the Mizbeach because iron, the implement of war, cannot be used to fix the Mizbeach the conduit of peace and connection to God. These same warriors, whose bravery and military prowess helped save the Jews, concluded that there were some things their weapons just could not touch.

On Chanukah we do celebrate the military victory of **מְסַרְתָּ גְבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים. וְרַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים**. However, while we celebrate military might and victory, it is not an end in and of itself. Rather, we cherish peace and treasure **וְלֶךְ עֲשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמְךָ**. We strive to connect to God in this world.

Perhaps this is what is meant by **דַּנְקָרָא חֲנוּכָה ע"ש חֲנוּכַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ**. It is the Mizbeach that symbolizes the true essence of Chanukah.

# Insights from Members of the Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov of Toronto

## Look on the Bright Side

Rabbi Netanel Javasky

Beit Midrash Fellow

The victory of Chanukah and our subsequent celebration is something which we make known to all. Our menorahs shine bright in the darkest of nights, for all who pass by to witness and appreciate. In fact, the broadcasting of the miracle is such an intrinsic component of this holiday that it completely defines the nature and guidelines of its lone *mitzvah*. The *gemara* (Shabbat 21b) therefore concludes that the appropriate time for lighting the menorah lasts, עד שתכלה רגל מן השוק, “until the walking in the marketplace ceases.” There is even discussion amongst later authorities if one is permitted to make a blessing on the menorah if there will be nobody else to see it. All of this points to the magnitude of the miracle which we experienced and the resulting desire to share that miracle experience with others. As we read in the *Al Hanisim*; these eight days of Chanukah were established “to give thanks and praise to Your great name.”

However, the Ramban in his commentary on Breishit 49:10 suggests that the victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks and their ensuing reign over the Jewish nation was not something deserving of praise. He notes that the parting wishes of Yakov to his sons included, לא יסור שבט מיהודה, the instruction that the sceptre of Israel shall remain within the tribe of Yehudah. Having the Chashmonaim, priests from the tribe of Levi, rule the nation was contrary to this dictum and was something undesirable. In fact, the Ramban adds that because of this disregard for Yakov’s final wish, the House of Chasmonai paid dearly, and was ultimately punished and destroyed.

This charge of the Ramban truly transforms the way we tend to look at the miracle and aftermath of the Chanukah story. The rosy ending of the miraculous salvation sent our way is stained with the recognition that allowing unworthy leaders to reign was a tragic mistake.

Following the victory of “the many in the hands of the few”, we had an unbelievable opportunity to re-establish Jewish life the way it should be; but this never materialized.

Nonetheless, Chanukah remains a joyous and celebrated holiday leaving no sour taste in our mouth. The *Al HaNisim* prayer paints a glorious picture of the deliverance of G-d and the rededication of the Temple, without even a hint that the Chashmonai dynasty acted inappropriately. Similarly, when one looks back at the Talmud’s description of Chanukah there does not appear to be an ounce of criticism leveled at the Chashmonaim or the nation for allowing such a travesty.

Perhaps the intentional omission of Chazal of this negative spin on the holiday of Chanukah was meant to teach us a lesson. Yes; the result of the Chashmonaim taking over the kingdom was not something which we should be proud of. And yes; this was a great opportunity to start fresh, with a clean and pure Temple, which we immediately squandered, ultimately resulting in a Jewish monarchy which was unsustainable. But that is not how Chanukah should be remembered. The grand evident miracles that we experienced in those dark days can not be clouded and soured with this misdeed of the Chashmonaim. Was the ending of the story the fairy-tale ending we were all hoping for? No. But life is never perfect and we must nonetheless appreciate the enormity of the salvation and exalt Hashem accordingly. In every positive we can always find imperfections, but that should not be our focus. We must not sacrifice the greater picture and tarnish the beautiful image at the expense of minor shortcomings. Let us celebrate the grand miracles of Chanukah and the great wonders that Hashem performs for us each day, focusing on the immeasurable positives of life.

## Hallel as a Biblical Commandment on Chanukah

Russell Levy

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R’ Yitzchak ben R’ Yosef, in mitzvah 280 of his work the *Sefer Mitzvat Katan* (Smak), explains that there is a mitzvah from the Torah to light Chanukah candles. R’ Yitzchak also connects this requirement of lighting candles to the mitzvah of reciting Hallel, which he counts as a separate mitzvah:

*To recite Hallel in the appointed times, as it is written, “This is Your praise” (Devarim 10:21). Our Sages said (Arachin 10a), that in the Land of Israel it is said eighteen days (first day of Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret, and Chanukah) and one night (Pesach night), and twenty one days and two nights in the Diaspora. Similarly, one who had a miracle performed for him must bless.*

**Sefer Mitzvot Katan, Mitzvah 146**

להלל בזמנים קבועים דכתיב (דברים י')  
הוא תהלתך ואמרו רבותינו (ערכין דף י')  
בארץ ישראל שמונה עשר יום ולילה אחד.  
ובגולה) עשרים ואחד יום ושתי לילות וכן  
מי שאירע לו נס כגון ארבע' שצריכין  
להודות יורדי הים והולכי מדברות וחולה  
שנתרפא ויוצא מבית האסורין צריך לברך.  
**ספר מצוות קטן מצוה קמו**

This opinion, that the lighting of candles and the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah has a Torah basis was previously rejected by the Rambam in his *Book of Mitzvot*: he saw it as an impossibility that an event that happened more than 1000 years after the Exodus and the giving

of the Torah could generate these new mitzvot as Torah law<sup>60</sup>.

Another peculiarity exists in R' Yitzchak's presentation of the mitzvah of Hallel: What is the similarity between reciting Hallel at the appointed times, and reciting *birkat hagomel* after Hashem, in his infinite mercy, performed a miracle on behalf of an individual?

It would seem that the answer to these two questions lies in the complete verse quoted by the Smak himself:

*He is your praise and He is your G-d, Who did for you these great and awesome things that your eyes saw.*

**Dvarim 10:21**

הוא תהלתך והוא אלהיך אשר עשה אתך את  
הגדלת ואת הנוראת האלה אשר ראו עיניך:

**דברים י:כא**

If this verse is the source of the mitzvah of Hallel, the connection between reciting Hallel on the three festivals and Chanukah, as well as at a time when a miracle was performed on our behalf is self-evident: each of the three festivals commemorates a unique miracle performed on our behalf during the Exodus and our journey to the Holy Land of Israel: the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the Clouds of Glory.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Chanukah is also a celebration of the miracle of our redemption: "And for the miracles ... which You performed for our forefathers ... and you delivered the strong into the hands of the weak..."<sup>62</sup>

According to this reading of the verse, it is clear why the Smak counted the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah as a positive mitzvah: Whenever we, as individuals or as a nation, are miraculously brought from despair to deliverance we must express gratitude to our Redeemer through Hallel.

## The Hidden Miracle of Chanukah

Rabbi Meir Lipschitz

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As we think about Chanukah we begin asking ourselves the age-old question: Why is Chanukah celebrated for eight days? If there was enough oil in the jug for one night, then the miracle was only seven days long, not eight, and as such the holiday should begin on the twenty sixth of Kislev and run for seven days. Many suggestions have been offered to solve this problem, but perhaps we should stop trying to answer the question and instead attack the premise.

The Gemara in Taanis, 25a, records the story of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and his burning

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<sup>60</sup> The Ramban, in his commentary on the Rambam's work, offers two possible justifications for a possible Torah law of reciting Hallel according to the Behag. However, neither of these reasons would apply to its recitation on Chanukah.

<sup>61</sup> There is a dispute among the decisors if there is a requirement to say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur which is superseded by the fact that it is inappropriate to recite Hallel while standing in judgement, or if there is no requirement whatsoever. According to the first view, the miracle of national atonement on the first Yom Kippur is clear; however, it is unclear to this author what would create a requirement for Hallel on Rosh Hashanah.

<sup>62</sup> On two other celebrations of national redemption we do not recite Hallel: the last day of Pesach, and Purim. Both are addressed in Masechet Megillah: regarding the last day of Pesach, Hashem responds to the angels: "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and you want to say shira?" (10b); regarding Purim, the Megilla's reading "is Hallel" (14a).

vinegar. One Friday afternoon he noticed that his daughter was upset. She explained that she had accidentally filled the candles with vinegar instead of oil and was upset that she would be unable to light shabbos candles. He responded matter of factly: “What difference does it make? He who commanded oil to burn will command vinegar to burn.” And so it was; the candles remained lit until havdalah. What we see from this episode was Rabbi Chanina’s approach to the “natural” burning of oil. He recognized that there is no greater miracle occurring when vinegar burns than when oil burns, both are expressions of HaShem’s will at a particular moment. He knew that even the burning of the oil is miraculous but most people just don’t realize that since it happens all the time.

With this in mind we can return to our question about the miracle of Chanukah: Why was the holiday established for eight days instead of seven if the miracle of the oil was only seven days? The answer is that the assumption is flawed; even the first day was a miracle! The very fact that oil burns is miraculous. The holiday of Chanukah was not established only to commemorate the *nes nigleh*, the revealed miracle—one day’s worth of oil lasting for eight days—but also for the *nes nistar*, the hidden miracle of one day’s worth of oil burning even for that one day.

One of the other, more well-known, answers to our question is that the first day commemorates the miraculous military victory, while the subsequent seven days relate to the miracle of the oil. One might have erroneously claimed that the military victory was not a miracle but rather the result of strategic brilliance and unyielding will on the part of the Chashmonaim. It is possible to attribute the victory to the power of man, not to the Power of G-d, and as such we dedicate the first day of Chanukah to the miraculous, supernatural, victory over the Greeks.

The miraculous nature of the war and the miracle of the oil’s nature to burn, two events which could otherwise be misunderstood, reflect the same basic point: we must celebrate all miracles, not only the obvious ones. [Perhaps this also is the meaning of the statement in the *Modim* section of *Shemoneh Esrei* “ועל נסיון שבכל יום עמנו” which itself gets overlooked due to its thrice-daily repetition.] Through the establishment of Chanukah for eight days instead of seven, Chazal have brought to our minds not only the *nes nigleh* of the seven days, but also the *nes nistar* of the first day.

This idea may be what the Poskim are referring to when they say that Chanukah is “Days of *Hallel* and *Hodaah*.” These are days when we recognize, give thanks, and praise HaShem for *all* His wondrous deeds, both revealed and hidden.

## The Beauty Challenge

David Teller

Beit Midrash Fellow

The Torah records the first encounter between the “fathers” of the two civilizations at the heart of the Chanuka story. After safely disembarking from the ark, Noach, in his drunken state, is taken advantage of by his son, Cham. Both Shem and Yefet, the fathers of Judaism and Yavan, respectively, come to protect their father’s dignity. The two seemingly engage in the same pious act of covering their father with a blanket, yet the blessings that Noach gives them reflects a clear

preference to the actions of Shem. Shem is granted the blessing, “Baruch Hashem Elokei Shem...” while Yefet is blessed, “yaft Elokim l’Yafet, v’yishkon b’ohalei Shem.” Something about Yefet’s blessing is dependent on Shem. What was it in Shem’s act that made him worthy of this superior blessing?

Chazal in the midrash Tanchuma highlight a discrepancy in the grammar at the beginning of the story. “*VaYikach* Shem v’Yefet et HaSimla, VaYasimu al Shchem Shenehem ... VaYachasu et Ervat Avihem” (Bereishit 9:23) The pasuk begins in the singular- “Vayikach”- and “he took the garment” but concludes in the plural “they placed it in their shoulders... and they covered the nakedness of their father.” Why the switch between singular to plural? The midrash explains that Shem acted immediately and showed more courage in the mitzvah than Yefet. Yefet joined and help out, but only after Shem’s initiative. The midrash adds that as a reward for this extra effort by Shem, his descendents merited the mitzvah of talit. Yefet’s descendents were rewarded with the promise that they will be buried in the ground. What is the connection between the actions of these two brothers and the “rewards” they earned as a result?

Rav Reuven Taragin, drawing from the works of Rav Solovetchik and Rav Hutner, explains that Yefet’s blessing is the blessing of beauty, a concept that Judaism very much values. The mishna in Megilla says that a megilla written in Greek is kosher (all other languages are pasul) because the Greek language, a reflection of their culture as a whole, is a beautiful one. The Greeks developed the aesthetics of art, music, and literature. They were experts at discovering the beauty in the world and expressing the beauty that man has within himself. However, the value of beauty also contains with it a possible danger. The whole notion of beauty is subjective-it places a tremendous amount of importance on the individual to determine what is beautiful. As the popular saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

This philosophy was at the center of Greek ideology and culture. The Greeks were the ones that put the Earth and mankind both literally and figuratively in the center of the universe. They celebrated the human body and all of its accomplishments. In Greek mythology the gods possess strong humanistic qualities: anger, jealousy and lust. These gods were created in the image of man, not the reverse. When one’s perception of reality is viewed through the lens of beauty alone, man is essentially god-his word, his thoughts, and his opinions rule.

Judaism has a simple response to this. A person must remember that there are objective values that don’t stem from man, but from G-d. Man must be able to distinguish between values that he can appreciate and determine and those that he cannot.

The difference between these two philosophies can be seen in the reaction of Shem and Yefet upon seeing their father debased and dehumanized lying in front of them. Religious man acts immediately. Wrong is what G-d says is wrong, and he must act immediately to improve it. The man of beauty, on the other hand, believes it is wrong, because he believes that it is wrong. It is wrong because his subjective set of values tells him that what he sees is wrong, and this extra step of consciousness, of mental processing, causes a delay. Shem acts immediately; Yefet needs a little bit of time to reflect.

Religious man, the descendents of Shem, is given the mitzvah of the talit. The tzitzit serve as a

continual reminder that G-d is always “above.” “U’zechartem et kol mitzvot Hashem, v’asitem otam.” Shem’s descendants earn this distinction of recognizing objective values and living their life by them. The descendants of Yefet though are given the gift of burial. For if there is one thing that runs counter to the value of beauty and the idealization of the human body, it is the phenomenon of death. Yefet, the man of beauty, is given the gift that will allow him to escape the reality of death that counters his concept of the beauty of man.

Generations later, this difference between the Greeks and the Jews played on. The Greeks were not against mitzvot or the Jewish G-d. They were against transforming those subjective ideals to an objective mandate. The Jews could continue to practice, as long as they made it about themselves, not about some G-d that was commanding them to perform. They were against “chukei retzonecha.” Chukim are the greatest expression of man submitting himself to a Higher Power. It is this same conflict that we must safeguard and defend even today; against both those that attack us from the outside and our own voices that challenge us from within.

## A Miraculous Revelation

Dovid Zirkind

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The climax of the Chanukah story, as recorded in the Gemara Shabbat (20b), occurs after the victory of the *Chashmonaim* and their return to the Beit Hamikdash to light the Menorah. The Gemara tells us how they searched for oil that was pure and sealed only to find one jug remaining. That jug lasted for eight days and was the basis for our celebration of Chanukah.

The *Pnei Yehoshua* notes that this miracle seems to be unnecessary. Although it is true that purity is a critical component of worship, when the entire congregation is impure the *avodah* must nonetheless continue. This is described in Pesachim (66b) as *tumah hutra b’tzibur*. Based on this rule we can conclude that the oil for the Menorah should have ideally been pure but when there was only impure oil it would have been perfectly acceptable. If so, there was no need to have the one jug last all eight days.

One possible solution to this question can be gleaned from a comment of Rashi on the story of Yosef. In Parshas Vayeishev the Torah describes how Yosef’s brothers sold him into slavery and details that he was sold to a group of Arab merchants selling pleasant fragrances. Rashi wonders why the merchandise of these Arabs was a necessary detail in the story. He explains that this detail teaches us of the “great reward of the righteous”, that the fragrances contributed to making Yosef’s trip a bit more pleasant.

This comment of Rashi is troubling. Can we really appreciate the great reward of a *tzaddik* from this story of Yosef? Even if we are to believe that this trip was a pleasant one, it was still a first class ticket to slavery!

It is possible to suggest that the message which Yosef received on his way to Egypt and the message the Jewish people received when they discovered the only remaining jug of oil are one and the same. The fragrance of the Arab caravan did not halt Yosef’s descent into slavery and the purity of the oil did not change the tragic reality that the Beit Hamikdash was in shambles, but

both incidents sent a powerful message. Yosef could have easily given up as result of his continued persecution but when he recognized the rare and pleasant aroma of his caravan he realized that what had happened to him was not mere coincidence. He saw that Hashem had made this decision for him because the details of his journey had not been neglected. So too, the *Pnei Yehoshua* answers, through the great fortune of discovering a jug of pure oil, the Jewish people saw Hashem more clearly than they had throughout the war against their Greek enemies. The miracle was not one of necessity but a revelation of G-d's continued presence in the lives of His people.

As we celebrate Chanukah this year, as Jews have celebrated Chanukah throughout the exile, this message remains an important one. We may not always understand why we are in the position we are in or what we are supposed to gain from it, but its critical that we always remember Hashem is with us throughout our journey. The candles of Chanukah light up the dark winter streets of the Jewish communities around the world and the knowledge of G-d's continued support inspires us to persevere until the coming of the redemption.

## כל הפתילות והשמנים כשרים

ר' איתמר זולברג

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הנרות הללו אנו מדליקים, על הניסים ועל הנפלאות ועל התשועות ועל הנחמות שעשיתם לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה, על ידי כהניך הקדושים. שבכל שמונת ימי החנוכה הנרות הללו קודש הם ואין לנו רשות להשתמש בהם, אלא לראותם בלבד...

הגמרא במסכת שבת פרק "במה מדליקין" דף כא ע"א-ע"ב מביאה סוגיא לגבי מהי טיבעה של מצוות הדלקת נרות חנוכה. ההקשר שבו הסוגיא מובאת הוא לגבי סוגי השמנים והפתילות שבהם מותר להדליק בשבת והאם אותה רשימה המופיעה במשנה תקפה גם לנרות חנוכה.

אמר רב הונא: פתילות ושמנים שאמרו חכמים אין מדליקין בהן בשבת - אין מדליקין בהן בחנוכה, בין בשבת בין בחול. אמר רבא: מאי טעמא דרב הונא - קסבר: ככתה זקוק לה, ומותר להשתמש לאורה. ורב חסדא אמר: מדליקין בהן בחול, אבל לא בשבת, קסבר: ככתה אין זקוק לה, ומותר להשתמש לאורה. אמר רבי זירא אמר רב מתנה, ואמרי לה אמר רבי זירא אמר רב: פתילות ושמנים שאמרו חכמים אין מדליקין בהן בשבת - מדליקין בהן בחנוכה, בין בחול בין בשבת. אמר רבי ירמיה: מאי טעמא דרב - קסבר: ככתה אין זקוק לה, ואסור להשתמש לאורה. אמרוה רבנן קמיה דאביי משמיה דרבי ירמיה - ולא קיבלה. כי אתא רבין, אמרוה רבנן קמיה דאביי משמיה דרבי יוחנן - וקיבלה. אמר: אי זכאי גמירתיה לשמעתי מעיקרא. - והא גמרה! - נפקא מינה לגירסא דינקותא.

ע"פ הסברו של רבא, רב הונא סובר "ככתה, זקוק לה" כלומר במקרה שהנר נכבה יש צורך להדליק מחדש עד שיכלה השמן. "ומותר להשתמש לאורה" רבא מבין זאת מכך שרב הונא מפרש ואומר בין בשבת בין בחול, כלומר שיש טעם נוסף, מיוחד לשבת, שממנו אפשר ללמוד שמותר להשתמש באור של נרות חנוכה. רב חסדא לעומת רב הונא סובר שאין בעיה להדליק בחול משמנים ופתילות שאינם מותרים בשבת אך בשבת דינם כנרות שבת. לפי שתי הדעות הראשונות אין בעיה להשתמש בנרות חנוכה לכל תכלית. על כן, לפחות בנוגע לשבת, יש צורך להשתמש רק בשמנים ופתילות הראויים לנרות שבת כדי שלא יבוא לידי הטיית הנר (נרות בימות הגמרא היו בנויים מחרס או מתכת ובתוכם היו השמן והפתילה כך שכאשר רצו להגביר את עוצמת האור היו מטים את הנר על צידו כדי לרכז את השמן בכיוון הפתילה וע"י כך תגבר עוצמת הבערה). אך הדעה השלישית, דעתו של ר' זירא בשמו של רב, אינה מקבלת את הכלל של "מותר להשתמש לאורה". רב ובהמשך הסוגיא מתברר שאף ר' יוחנן, קבעו כי "אסור להשתמש לאורה" ועל כן אין בעיה להדליק אף בכלל השמנים והפתילות כיוון שכל המצווה היא בהדלקה הראשונית ולאחר מכן אין חשיבות לאיכות האור או

לחשש שמא יכבה ועל כן כבתה אין זקוק לה ואסור להשתמש לאורה.

לכאורה, דעתו של רב אינה מובנת, מהי הבעיה להשתמש באור נרות חנוכה, מה מקום לחומרה זו ועוד ביחס לחפצא של מצווה מדרבנן, הרי אין שום פגיעה וחסרון לאור הנרות שנגרם על ידי שימוש לאורן. בנוסף אנו רואים שאכן טעמו של רב אינו פשוט ועל כן אביי, כאשר שמע את הדין של רב והסברו של ר' ירמיה לא קיבל את דעתם כיוון שאביי הכיר גם דעות אחרות, רב הונא ורב חסדא, שסברו שמותר להשתמש לאורה. לאחר זמן, הגיע עולא מארץ ישראל ומסר את אותה הלכה משמו של ר' יוחנן ואז אביי קיבלה.

מהו הטעם של רב ור' יוחנן לאסור את השימוש בנרות חנוכה? רש"י עונה בפשטות: שיהא ניכר שהוא נר מצוה. כיוון שבימי קדם, לפני שהשתמשו בחשמל, נרות היו הדרך להאיר את החשכה בבית. אם נרות חנוכה היו דולקים ומותר להשתמש לאורן, אנשים לא היו נזקקים להדליק נרות נוספים כדי להאיר את ביתם בחשכה ולא היה שום היכר שאלו נרות מצווה. הרז"ה סובר אחרת: כיוון שהם זכר לנרות ולשמן של היכל (בית המקדש) אסורות הן בהנאה כל עיקר אפילו לקרוא בספר ואפילו לסעודת שבת ולסעודת מצווה. ע"פ הרז"ה נרות חנוכה הן זכר למקדש ועל כן הדינים החלים על מנורת המקדש חלים על נרות חנוכה ואסור להנות מאורן פילו בשביל מצווה. מי שממשיך בדרך זו הינו הרמב"ן. הרמב"ן בפירושו על פרשת בהעלותך אינו מבין את פירושו של רש"י למדרש חז"ל. המדרש מתאר כי הסמיכות בין קורבנות הנשיאים בחנוכה המשכן לפרשת הדלקת הנרות באה בעקבות חולשת דעתו של אהרן שלא היה שותף לנשיאים. ה' מנחם את אהרן בכך ששלו גדולה משלהם (הזכות של אהרן גדולה מזכותן של הנשיאים בהקרבת הקורבנות) כיוון שהוא מדליק את הנרות. רש"י מפרש שמדובר בהדלקת הנרות במקדש, אך הרמב"ן לא מקבל את ההסבר ומציע פירוש מיוחד, הנרות הללו אינם רק נרות המקדש אלא גם נרות החנוכה ששנים רבות לאחר החורבן ממשיכים לדלוך בכל מקום שבו ישנם יהודים.

ע"פ השיטה שנרות החנוכה הם זכר למנורת המקדש עולה שאלה: הגמרא הנ"ל מציינת כי במנורה שבמקדש יש צורך באותם השמנים והפתילות שמותרים בשבת. אם נרות חנוכה הם זכר למקדש, מדוע מותר להשתמש בכל הפתילות והשמנים בחנוכה?

מרדכי אליאב, ניצול שואה, מספר על חג החנוכה שלו במחנה נידרארשל בגרמניה. לקראת חג החנוכה עלה בלבם של היהודים במחנה להדליק נרות ולקיים את מצוות החג. הם ידעו שעל פי ההלכה אינם צריכים להסתכן עבור מצוות אך בכל זאת רצו לקיים את המצווה. הם הצליחו להשיג מעט שמן מכוונות ופרמו סיבים מתוך שמיכה על מנת להשתמש בהן כפתילה. ליל חנוכה הגיע, כדי להשיג גפרור להדלקה היה עליהם לשחד את הטבח ולוותר על חלק ממנת המזון שלהם. מרדכי הדליק את הנר וברך את שלשת הברכות "להדליק נר", "שעשה ניסים" ו"שהחיינו". אמת, נר חנוכה זה ממש החיה יהודים, בשעה של סבל ועינוי שכזאת.

אמנם אי אפשר לומר כי ההלכה שנקבעה בימי האמוראים בדבר כל הפתילות והשמנים מותרים, נקבעה בידיעה על ימים אפלים אלו של השואה, אבל בכל זאת אפשר להציע הסבר. אכן אנו רואים קשר ישיר בין מנורת המקדש ונרות חנוכה, אך מעשה ההדלקה לא מקביל בכל למנורת המקדש. אנו מחויבים להזכר במנורת המקדש אך לא כל מצוות הדלקת נרות חנוכה נובעת ממקור זה.

נרות החנוכה אינם נחלת הכהנים בלבד, הם שייכים לכל אחד, נר איש וביתו, בכל מקום. בחנוכה כל הנרות כשרים וכך גם עלינו לראות את מדליקי הנרות הללו. בימים שבהם ניסו היוונים "להשכיחם תורתך" עלינו להגביר את אור התורה ולקרר את היהודים, לאחדם סביב נרות החנוכה, כנגד החושך הגדול שניסו היוונים להביא לעולם.

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