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להודות ולהלל

CHANUKAH

AND THE IMPORTANCE OF

GRATITUDE

**Dedicated by Dr. David and Barbara Hurwitz
in honor of their children and grandchildren**



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלהנן

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THE CONFIDENCE TO SHINE AND ILLUMINATE

Jim Collins in his book, *From Good to Great*, prescribes a number of secrets to corporate success. One of them, coined the Stockdale Paradox, is based on the life of Admiral Jim Stockdale who was the highest ranking United States military officer in the “Hanoi Hilton” prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. As Collins tells the story, the secret to Stockdale’s survival of a brutal eight year imprisonment was that he both confronted the harsh reality of his daily situation and never relinquished the belief in his eventual freedom. In his interview with Collins, Stockdale explained, “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade.”

Finding the resources to succeed even when one’s resources are all spent is the defining characteristic of the Chanukah holiday. The miracle that we celebrate of one small vial of oil not being consumed is really the story of a fire that stayed lit without burning its fuel. In the Torah, this is presented as the outstanding characteristic of Hashem. God appears to Moshe in the *s’neh asher einenu ukal* (Exodus 3:2), as a fire in a bush that is not consumed, and responds to Moshe’s inquiry of God’s name by stating that “I will be that which I will be.” This introduction, which references an eternal state of being and becoming, runs parallel to the image of a live flame that does not need fuel in order to stay lit. Only such a fire, alive and flickering, can stay lit forever.

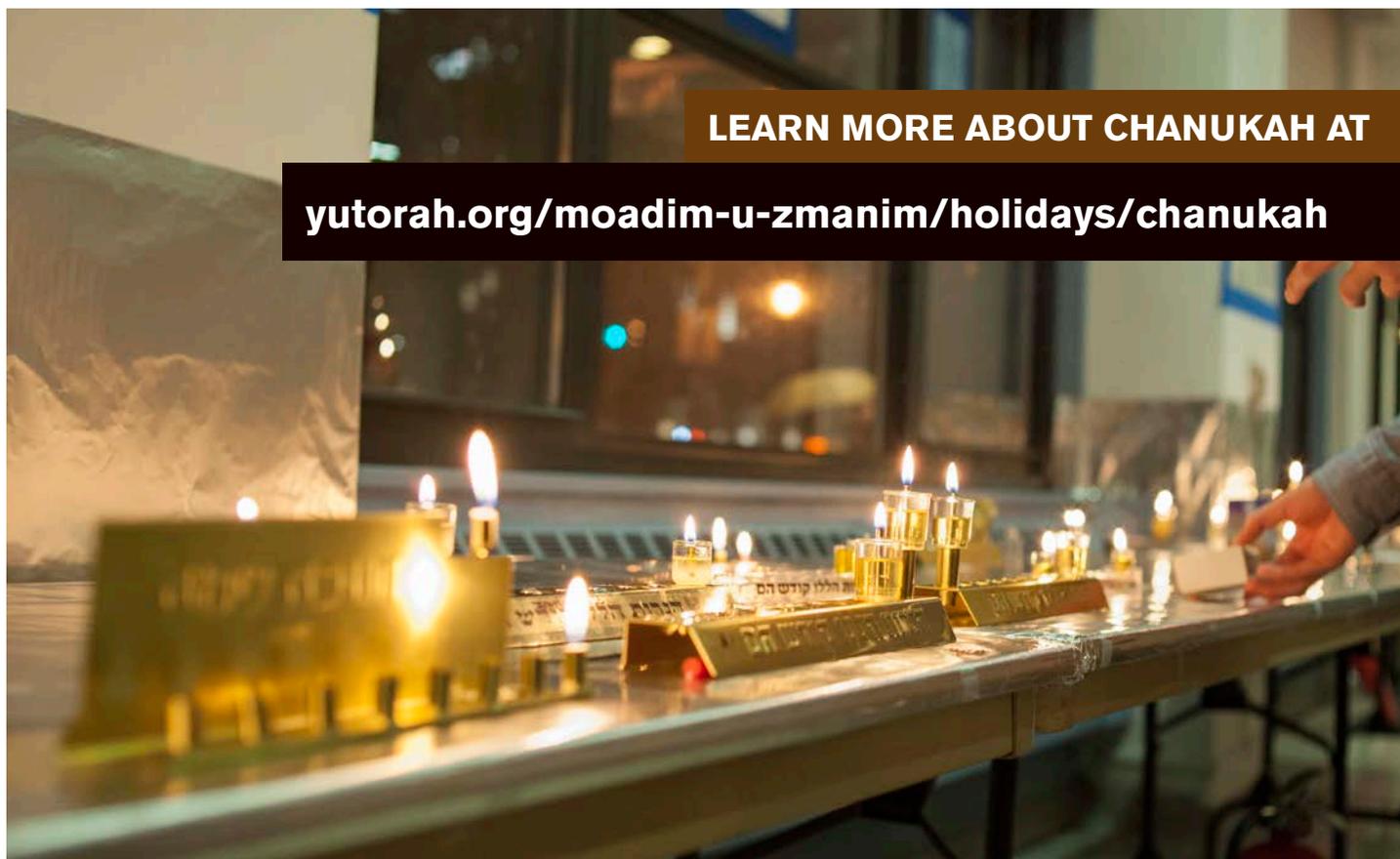
No doubt the message of the menorah flame that was not extinguished

represents Hashem’s presence during the time of the Macabean revolt. This is a continuation of a theme expressed poignantly by the prophet Zecharia when God instructs Zerubavel, the political leader at the beginning of the Second Temple period, that the menorah reminds us that it is “not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit” (see Zechariah 4:6). The Maccabees who might have fallen prey to the hubris of thinking that their ingenuity and strength alone won the war needed to hear that Hashem was present and supportive all throughout the dark winter periods of their subjugation and revolt.

This message potentially carries a second layer of meaning in the rabbinically mandated annual commemoration of this miracle to light a menorah in each of our homes. The enduring candle which is lit year

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to year reflects that Hashem's eternal presence rests in our lives and homes as well. This in fact is the secret to our continuity and ever replenishing resources as a community and as individuals. For the recognition of the *tzelem Elokim*, divine spark, in each other enables us to form a sacred community that is more rich and holy. And when we recognize and develop what is distinct and divine within each of ourselves, then we can withstand all troubled times, even when it appears that our internal resources are depleted.

Over the past two years, people have been feeling depleted. Our emotional resources, through all of life's difficulties, might feel consumed. Chanukah is a reminder that even when we are spent, we still shine. "The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us," writes G.K. Chesterton, "has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us." Progress is not about leaving the past behind, it is about developing a richer and more substantive interiority, where our very sense of self emerges more fully and wholly.

The belief in himself and his future is what gave Stockdale the strength to survive. Our belief in Hashem, ourselves and each other, messaged by the menorah, gives our community the confidence to shine and illuminate.

May our candles shine bright and light the way for our future redemption.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Dr. Berman at <https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-dr-ari-berman/>



GRATITUDE: A CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE

Fundamentally, Chanukah is a holiday of thanksgiving and praise. While the menorah and candle lighting get much of our attention, the argument can be made that it is actually Hallel and *hodaah*, thanking and praising God for the miracle of our salvation, that are most central to our observance of Chanukah. The Gemara in *Masechet Shabbat* 21b states, “A miracle happened and the oil lasted eight days, so the next year they established these eight days as a holiday with Hallel and *hodaah*, praise and thanksgiving.” This requirement to somehow perform Hallel and *hodaah* is mentioned in the Al HaNissim prayer as well. We say, *v’kavu shemonat yemei Chanukah eilu l’hodot ul’hallel l’shimcha hagadol* — They established these eight days of Chanukah in order to give thanks

and praise Your holy name. It may seem surprising that neither of these fundamental texts on Chanukah refer to a ritual lighting of candles. Instead, it seems that the crux of our observance of Chanukah is our obligation to praise and express our thanks to God. Because when given the miracle of our salvation, the proper response is to turn to God, acknowledge the miracle He has done for us, and praise Him.

It appears that the lighting of the candles was given to us as a conduit for the main purposes of Hallel and *hodaah*, in which the candles are the tangible expression of our gratitude.

In recent years, researchers have studied our experience of gratitude, looking at the parameters of gratitude and the ways in which it is distinct from other positive emotions such

as optimism and hope. In order to experience gratitude, researchers explain that we need two things. First, we must affirm that there are good things in our life. Second, we must recognize that those good things have come from someone or something other than us.

In the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Dr. Robert Emmons notes that gratitude has a dual meaning; a worldly meaning and a transcendent meaning. In a worldly context, we experience gratitude when we acknowledge that we have received something of value from another person. This is the interpersonal component of gratitude. We recognize that our emotional state is only possible due to a positive engagement with another person. Transcendent gratitude can be a religious spiritual

experience, but it is also experienced even by those who aren't religious. We label these forces as acts of God and others may label it as fate. What we have in common is that we recognize that we are graced with the goodness in our lives. This appreciation motivates us to turn outward, to reflect back into the world the goodness that we have received. In this way, gratitude is the complete opposite of a narcissistic outlook, wherein one believes that he is owed or entitled to all the blessings he has been given.

Moshe delivered this message to the Jewish people upon their impending exit from the desert. He cautioned them,

הַשְׁמֹר לָךְ ... פֶּן הָאָכַל וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבָתִּים טוֹבִים תִּבְנֶה וְיִשְׁבַּעְתָּ ... וְרָם לְבָבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ ... וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ כִּי יָעֲצָם יְדֵי עֲשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה.

"When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses... and your silver and gold is multiplied... beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the Lord your God... do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'"

Devarim, 8:11-17

Gratitude is the very opposite of "My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth," for we can only truly experience gratitude when we recognize that the goodness we have has come not by the strength of our own hands, but has been bestowed upon us by another. This aspect of gratitude makes it interpersonal and/or spiritual in a way that sets it apart from other positive emotions that lack this relational component.

In his book on morality, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks states that above all else, it is the quality of our

relationships that give us a sense of meaning and fulfillment. In particular, it is our ability to recognize and care about others that lifts us out of our exclusive focus on ourselves, and redeems us from our solitude. The absence of gratitude is ego. When we fail to appreciate the gratitude we owe to others and to God, all that is left is self-congratulation and entitlement. But the opposite is within reach. Herein lies the power of gratitude. When we are truly grateful, we seek out ways to engage with the world that has bestowed upon us so much goodness. We are better off when we turn outward.

Researchers also note that a person experiencing gratitude typically believes that the benefit he received was more than he sought after or deserved. He believes that the giver went above and beyond, giving him more than he expected or earned. We see nods to this aspect of gratitude in the Biblical story of Leah and Yehuda. The Gemara in *Brachot* 7b states that from the time of creation, no one had expressed gratitude to God until Leah did upon the birth of Yehuda. However, the Torah does in fact list several instances where various people did express thanks to God before Leah did. From this we can infer that there must have been something different about Leah's thanks to God that made it a unique act of gratitude, and set it apart from all earlier examples.

Indeed, looking more closely at Leah's response to the birth of each of her sons, a lesson does emerge. When Leah was pregnant with her first three sons, she asked God to give her children so that her husband would recognize and love her. When she had her first son she said, "God has seen (*ra'ah*) my affliction," and she called

him Reuven. She called her second son Shimon, saying, "God has heard (*shama*) that I was unloved." When she gave birth to her third son Leah said, "This time my husband will become attached (*yilaveh*) to me, because I have borne him three sons." In these three instances Leah felt thankful to God for giving her these sons, because she believed they would help bring her what she needed, which was attention and love from her husband.

With Yehuda, Leah's perception and expression was different. Upon giving birth to Yehuda, Leah said, "*HaPaam odeh et Hashem*," "This time I will thank God." Yehuda felt like a bonus, a gift that was above and beyond what Leah needed to be recognized. Having given birth to four out of Yaakov's twelve sons, Leah was able to experience Yehuda's birth as a gift in itself, as opposed to something she needed to further another goal. It was not a means to an end, but a gift in its own right. This is what true gratitude entails. Being present in the moment, not focused on what is next, able to recognize the miracle of the gift that is before us. The *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei* no. 6, states that because Leah expressed true gratitude, her offspring did as well. Yehuda was praised by his brothers (*Bereishit* 49:8), and David too praised God (*Tehillim* 118:1). Gratitude is a muscle that must be exercised and can be taught. Leah initiated true gratitude, and generations after her carried it forward. Today, so many generations later, we remain "Yehudim." It is our task and our inheritance to be people of gratitude.

Benefits of gratitude

Looking at the empirical research, as well as our own anecdotal experience, the benefits of gratitude are clear.

Gratitude is linked to positive outcomes in mental health and life satisfaction, even more so than other positive personality traits such as optimism, hope, and compassion. Researchers have found that grateful people are more joyful, optimistic, enthusiastic, and experience more love and happiness than people who are less grateful. This is true not only because gratitude spurs these positive emotions, but also because the experience of gratitude is protective. Feeling grateful acts as a preventive agent against negative emotions such as envy, resentment, greed, and bitterness. As a result, grateful people are better equipped to cope with everyday stressors and are more resilient when faced with trauma.

In reality, the backdrop of pain often provides fertile ground for the emergence of gratitude. Pain is often, hopefully, followed by healing. From suffering grows meaning, when we can recognize the sparks of goodness that still exist even amidst our pain. When we are able to contrast difficult times we have endured in the past with the relief we feel when they are behind us, our overall sense of well-being increases and we are grateful for our present state. Researchers are increasingly attuned to what has been termed “post traumatic growth,” or the psychological benefit some people experience after overcoming a trauma. It seems that for some, gratitude is integral to their process of recovery. These individuals describe themselves post trauma as having a greater sense of well-being than before, valuing each day more, and having a greater

appreciation for their family and friends (Wood, et al. 2010).

It is important to note that gratitude is not meant to deny the pain that one has experienced, or is still enduring. On the contrary, gratitude is an emotional state that is meant to be experienced alongside the pain, not in place of it. In fact, our emotional states are not black and white, or all or nothing. We can hold seemingly contradictory feelings simultaneously, recognizing beauty amid pain and meaning within loss. In the context of gratitude, this may mean acknowledging the pain that one is experiencing while affirming the glimmers of goodness, the hope of future happiness, that remain. True gratitude is not a Pollyannish state that can only exist when one is blinded to the cruelties of life. Instead, true gratitude is an affirmation of the reality that there are opportunities for thanksgiving even in the wake of heartbreak.

What is key is that gratitude is not dependent on one’s particular life circumstances. They need not be “good” by any objective measure. Gratitude can be cultivated in any life, when we train ourselves to seek it. Of course, this is challenging work. And herein lies what Emmons refers to as the “paradox of gratitude.” While the evidence is clear that cultivating an attitude of gratitude makes us happier and healthier, doing so can feel like a difficult and even tedious process.

How to Grow Gratitude

The first step in cultivating an attitude of gratitude is to train ourselves to notice and attend to the good things in our lives that we would otherwise tend to take for granted. These can

be as “ordinary” as a job we love, friends in our lives, or a clean bill of health. Though of course these things and others like them are far from ordinary for some, those of us who are lucky enough to enjoy the mundane pleasures of life can fall into the habit of not seeing them for what they are — true gifts. Intentionally focusing on such things not only increases our experience of gratefulness, it serves the dual function of impeding thoughts that are antithetical to gratitude, such as entitlement or bitterness.

How, then, do we focus our thoughts in this way? Research has shown that writing thoughts down has greater impact than simply thinking them. Doing this in a systematic way produces even more consistent and longer lasting rewards.

In research studies on gratitude, participants are randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group is asked to keep written gratitude journals, while the other is told to complete a similar but neutral task. Time and again studies have found that participants who keep gratitude journals benefit from a wide range of positive outcomes. To name a few, the journaling participants have been shown to exercise more frequently, get more sleep, report fewer physical ailments, express more optimism about the future, and feel more positive about their lives as a whole (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). The task of journaling forces us out of our narrow focus, which often is consumed with what we do not yet have and what we need. Seeking gratitude necessitates turning outward, and searching for the good.

When a similar study was done with young adults, the findings

were similarly encouraging. The young adults who kept gratitude journals reported greater enthusiasm, determination, and energy as compared to those who were not assigned the gratitude journaling task. Furthermore, researchers identified an interpersonal benefit to the gratitude exercise. Participants who journaled their gratitude daily were more likely to have helped a friend with a problem or provided someone else emotional support than the non-journaling group (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). This is a prime example of gratitude motivating us to turn outward, to spread the benefit of our good feelings to those around us.

It is interesting to note that these benefits were not only identified by self-report, as is often a limitation in such research. In the study of gratitude, researchers have found that family and friends of those who practice gratitude regularly note that they are happier, more helpful, and more pleasant to be around than control group participants. (McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang, 2002)

In another study, participants were instructed to go on a “gratitude visit,” on which they wrote a letter to someone who had given them a meaningful gift and then read that letter of thanks aloud to the benefactor in person. Individuals who went on the gratitude visit reported more happiness and less depression than members of a comparison control group (Wood, et al. 2010). Here, the interpersonal component to the experience of gratitude is clear. Not only did these participants affirm that they had been given a gift, they recognized that it was the work of another person who was deserving of

their thanks. While no further data was reported from the study, one wonders if these participants were more likely than others to want to “pay it forward,” extending the benefits that they had been given to others.

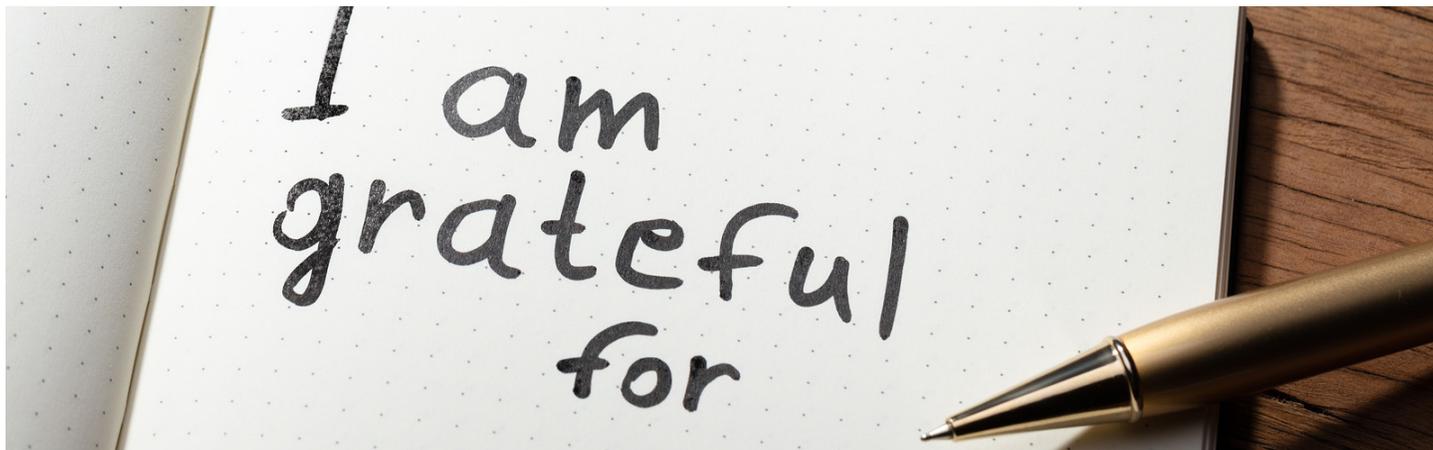
When attempting any gratitude-building intervention, stimulating gratitude in the short term is not the same as transforming oneself into a person who feels grateful on a consistent basis. While situational or occasional gratitude no doubt has its benefits, developing an innate predisposition to see opportunities for gratitude everywhere is transformational, with more far-reaching effects.

If the central obligation of Chanukah is Hallel and *hodaah*, and lighting the Chanukah candles is one behavioral conduit for this expression, we must wonder, what it is about the lighting of the candles that helps us discharge this obligation? At a basic level, lighting candles and watching them burn over the eight days of Chanukah is a physical reminder of the oil that miraculously burned for eight days when there should have only been enough for one. And perhaps this alone is sufficient to trigger our desire to praise God, and our gratitude toward Him. Indeed, the burning of the oil for eight days was a benefit above and beyond what we would have expected or felt entitled to, based upon the observation that there was only enough oil left for one day. I would like to suggest that there is another lesson to be found in the way that we light the menorah today. The element of *pirsumei nissa*, publicizing the miracle, is key to the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles. Unlike other areas of observance that take place in the confines of our own

homes, to be viewed by only ourselves or our families, on Chanukah we turn the candles outward. When we light our candles, we are reminded of the miracle that allowed for our victory in the days of Chanukah, as well as our very existence today. And then with that gratitude, we turn outward. We strive to achieve the truest form of Hallel and *hodaah*; one that propels us to connect with others and spread goodness to those around us. May this Chanukah be one of abundant blessings, and may the gratitude they inspire spread some light out into the world.

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GRATITUDE IS THE FOUNDATION OF ALL CHARACTER TRAITS

In his introduction to *Sha'ar Avodas Ha'Elokim*, the *Chovas Halevavos* writes that *hakaras hatov*, gratitude, is the foundation of all character traits. *Hakaras hatov* is most important because someone who lacks gratitude will often experience challenges in other *middos* as well. This article will present eight ideas relating to *hakaras hatov*.

Gratitude is a Core Aspect of Jewish Identity

The Jewish people are called “Yehudim,” which is rooted in the word *hoda'ah*, to give thanks. The very essence of being Jewish is to be grateful. *Hoda'ah* also means admission. We use the term *modeh b'miktzas* to describe someone who admits that he owes a portion of the total claim. Saying “thank you”

sometimes requires admission; we must make ourselves vulnerable and admit that we owe a debt of gratitude to someone else, even in situations where we feel that the favor wasn't needed or that we could have done it on our own.

We often talk about Jewish pride. In today's times, in many places, we are blessed to walk the streets without having to hide our Jewish identity. There are even situations where denying our Jewish identity and pretending we belong to another religion would be tantamount to idol worship (see *Yoreh De'ah* 157). What does it mean to identify as being Jewish? From a certain perspective, “*ani Yehudi*,” which translates as “I am Jewish” means that I am someone who is grateful to Hashem and grateful to others, because the essence of a Yehudi is the trait of *hakaras hatov*.

No Statute of Limitations

There is no “statute of limitations” on *hakaras hatov*. Even if circumstances change or much time has passed, there is still an obligation of *hakaras hatov*. We find that Avraham Avinu, after going down to Egypt during a famine, returns on the same route:

וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֵהוּ בַכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב. וַיָּלֶךְ
לְמִסְעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד בֵּית אֵל עַד הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
הָיָה שָׁם אֹהֶלָה בְּתַחֲלָה בֵּין בֵּית אֵל וּבֵין הָעֵי.
*Now Abram was very rich in cattle,
silver, and gold. And he proceeded by
stages from the Negev as far as Bethel,
to the place where his tent had been
formerly, between Bethel and Ai.*

Bereishis 13:2-3

Rashi comments:

כשחזר היה לן באכסניות שלן בהן כשהלך
לשם. למד דרך ארץ שלא ישנה אדם
מאכסניא שלו.

When he returned, he slept in the same inns that he slept in when he went there. This teaches us proper values that one should not switch to a different inn. When Avraham Avinu went down to Egypt, there was a famine. He had no money, and he must have stayed at the “one-star motels.” On the way back, he was wealthy, and he had a lot of cattle to take care of. He could have easily justified spending more money on nicer, roomier accommodations. However, because he had *hakaras hatov* to those innkeepers, he made sure to stay at the same inns on his return from Egypt. *Hakaras hatov* doesn’t go away because circumstances change. There is no “statute of limitations.”

Hakaras Hatov is not Based on Quid Pro Quo

The concept of *quid pro quo* is that A does a favor for B and then B repays in kind with a different favor. This is not what *hakaras hatov* is about. We aren’t discharged from our obligation of *hakaras hatov* just because we did something for someone who did a favor for us. In fact, the Torah states:

לֹא יָבֹא עִמּוֹנֵי וּמוֹאָבִי בְּקֹהֶל ה' גַּם דּוֹר עֲשִׂירִי
 לֹא יָבֹא לָהֶם בְּקֹהֶל ה' עַד עוֹלָם. עַל דְּבַר אֲשֶׁר
 לֹא קָדְמוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּלָחֶם וּבִמַּיִם בְּדַרְוֹ בְּצִאֲתְכֶם
 מִמִּצְרָיִם וְאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַר עֲלֵיךְ אֶת בְּלָעַם בֶּן בְּעוֹר
 מִפְּתוֹר אֲרָם נְהָרִים לְקַלְלָךְ.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.

Devarim 23:4-5

The Ramban explains:

והנראה אלי כי הכתוב הרחיק שני האחים האלה שהיו גמולי חסד מאברהם שהציל אביהם ואמם מן החרב והשבי (בראשית יד טז) ובזכותו שלחם השם מתוך ההפכה (שם יט כט) והיו חייבין לעשות טובה עם ישראל והם עשו עמהם רעה האחד שכר עליו בלעם בן בעור והם המואבים והאחד לא קדם אותם בלחם ובמים כאשר קרבו למולו.

It appears to me that Scripture banned these two brothers [Ammon and Moab, sons of Lot — from the congregation of Israel] because they were the beneficiaries of the loving-kindness of Abraham who saved their father and mother from the sword and captivity and, by virtue of Abraham’s merit, G-d sent them out of the midst of the overthrow [of Sodom] — hence they were obligated to do good to Israel and instead they did them evil. One of them [the Moabites] hired Balaam the son of Beor against Israel, and one [the Ammonites] did not meet them with bread and water as they approached their territory.

Ramban, Devarim 23:5

The Ramban’s comments need to be understood in the context of another comment of the Ramban (Bereishis 19:29) that Avraham had *hakaras hatov* toward Lot for accompanying him when he left Charan. This is why Avraham risked his life to save Lot. Yet the Torah doesn’t assume that the debts of gratitude are completed — Lot accompanied Avraham and Avraham saved Lot — rather each one must be grateful to the other forever. Since the descendants of Lot ended the cycle of *hakaras hatov*, we can’t allow them to fully join our nation.

Hakaras Hatov and the Key to Techiyas Hameisim

The Gemara, *Ta’anis* 2a, states:

אמר ר' יוחנן: ג' מפתחות בידו של הקב"ה שלא

נמסרו ביד שליח. ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים ומפתח של חיה ומפתח של תחיית המתים.

Rav Yochanan said: Three keys are in the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and are not given over to an emissary, and they are: the key to rain, the key to childbirth and the key to revival of the dead.

Tosafos point out that while the keys were never given over to anyone on a long-term basis, two people received the keys to *techiyas hameisim* (reviving the dead) on a temporary basis: Eliyahu Hanavi (Melachim I ch. 17) and Elisha Hanavi (Melachim II ch. 4).

How did these two people — of all the righteous people in Tanach — merit receiving the key? If we look at both stories and what led to the great miracle of *techiyas hameisim*, we find that both of them were recipients of hospitality. Both Eliyahu (Melachim I 17:20) and Elisha (Melachim II 4:13) expressed their debt of gratitude toward their hosts. Perhaps in the merit of their *hakaras hatov*, they were the lone recipients of the key of *techiyas hameisim*.

Hakaras Hatov forced Moshe Rabbeinu to Reinterpret Hashem’s Commandment

When it was time for the Jewish people to wage battle against Midyan, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to exact revenge against the Midyanites (Bamidbar 31:2). Yet we find that Moshe Rabbeinu appoints Pinchas to lead the battle:

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה אֶלְפֵי לַמִּטָּה לְצַבָּא אֹתָם
 וְאֶת פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֱלִעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן לְצַבָּא וְכָלִי הַקֹּדֶשׁ
 וְהַצִּצְרוֹת הַתְרוּעָה בְיָדוֹ.

Moshe sent them, a thousand from each tribe and Pinchas the son of Elazar the Kohen with the holy vessels and the trumpets in his hand.

Bamidbar 31:6

The Midrash wonders why Moshe Rabbeinu didn't lead the battle himself and states:

וישלח אותם משה אמר הקב"ה למשה נקם נקמת אתה בעצמך והוא משלח את אחרים אלא מפני שנתגדל בארץ מדין אמר אינו בדין שאני מצר למי שעשה בי טובה.

[The verse states] "Moshe sent them," Hashem told Moshe "go avenge," [meaning] you personally, and he sent others? Rather because he was raised (as a young adult) in the Land of Midyan, [Moshe] said, it is not proper that I should cause suffering to those who were kind to me.

Bamidbar Rabbah, Matos 22:4

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to do something and he didn't listen! When it comes to character traits, the Rambam, in the first two chapters of *Hilchos Deios*, writes that all traits must be balanced. Even a trait such as anger can be displayed in limited circumstances. If Hashem tells someone to express a certain trait in a way that is normally considered a negative use of that trait, there would be no reason to question Hashem's request. Yet when it comes to *hakaras hatov*, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar* (5732 no. 32), suggests that the trait is so important that Moshe Rabbeinu felt that he could have the audacity to interpret Hashem's command to "go avenge" as a directive to others and not to Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

Being Grateful to a Wrongdoer Who Indirectly Caused Good

R. Chaim Shmulevitz shows us another example of the importance of *hakaras hatov*. After Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian taskmaster who

was beating a Jewish slave, he fled to Midyan, where he encountered a struggle between the daughters of Yisro and some shepherds. Moshe Rabbeinu chased away the shepherds and gave water to Yisro's sheep. When Yisro asks his daughters why they came home earlier than usual that day, they respond:

ותאמרן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים וגם דלה דלה לנו וישק את הצאן.

They said, an Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds and he drew [water] for us and gave water to the sheep.

Shemos 2:19

Why did Yisro's daughters refer to Moshe Rabbeinu as an Egyptian? Wasn't he an *Ivri* (a Jew)? The Midrash states:

משל לאחד שנשכו הערוד והיה רץ ליתן רגליו במים נתנן לנהר וראה תינוק אחד שהוא שוקע במים, ושלח ידו והצילו, אמר לו התינוק אילולי אתה כבר הייתי מת, אמר לו לא אני הצלתוך אלא הערוד שנשכני וברחתי הימנו הוא הצילך, כך אמרו בנות יתרו למשה ישר כחך שהצלתנו מיד הרועים, אמר להם משה אותו מצרי שהרגתי הוא הציל אתכם, ולכך אמרו לאביהן איש מצרי, כלומר מי גרם לזה שיבא אצלנו איש מצרי שהרג.

This is comparable to someone who was bitten by a donkey and ran to the river to wash his legs in the water. When he put his legs in the water, he saw a child drowning and saved the child. The child said to him, "If not for you, I would have died." The man responded, "It wasn't me who saved you but rather the donkey who bit me and chased me away. He saved you." Similarly, when the daughters of Yisro said to Moshe, thank you for saving us, Moshe said, the Egyptian that I killed is the one who saved you. Therefore, they told their father, "An Egyptian man," meaning, who caused him to come to us, the Egyptian man that [Moshe] killed. Shemos Rabbah, Shemos 1:32

The Egyptian taskmaster was beating a Jewish slave. What he was doing at the time was so evil that it warranted Moshe Rabbeinu killing him. Yet Moshe Rabbeinu's deep sense of gratitude allowed him to see that the Egyptian taskmaster deserved some credit for indirectly causing something good.

Gratitude must be a Personal Expression

Chazaras Hashatz, the Chazzan's Repetition, is a prayer recited by the chazzan on behalf of the whole congregation. Rav Soloveitchik stressed the fact that even though we already fulfilled our personal obligation of reciting the Amidah, *Chazaras Hashatz* is a different type of prayer. It is a *tefillas hatzibbur*, a prayer offered by the whole congregation (see *Nefesh Harav* pp. 124-127). We are supposed to listen to every word of the chazzan (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 124:4). Nevertheless, there is one prayer that we recite on our own: *Modim D'rabbanan*. Why don't we follow the normal protocol by listening to the chazzan's recitation of *Modim*? Rav Dovid Avudraham explains:

וכשיגיע ש"ץ למודים וכורע כל העם שוחין ואומרין הודאה קטנה המתחלת כמו כן במודים שאין דרך העבד להודות לרבו ולומר לו אדוני אתה על ידי שליח אלא כל אדם צריך לקבל בפיו עול מלכות שמים ואם יקבל על ידי שליח אינה קבלה גמורה ... אבל בשאר התפלה שהיא בקשה יכול לתבוע צרכיו על ידי שליח.

When the chazzan reaches Modim and bows, the entire congregation bows and recites a small expression of gratitude, which also begins with the word Modim (we are grateful), because it is not the way of a servant to thank his master and tell him "you are my master" through an

agent. Rather each person must verbally accept the yoke of Heaven personally and if one uses an agent, it is not a full-fledged acceptance ... However, regarding other prayers that are requests, one may use an agent to request one's needs.

Sefer Avudraham, Shemoneh Esrei

Hakaras Hatov Towards Inanimate Objects

Moshe Rabbeinu was Hashem's emissary to carry out the Ten Plagues and lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. Yet it was his brother, Aharon, who hit the water to initiate the first two plagues and the land to initiate the third. Why? Rashi explains:

לפי שהגן היאור על משה כשנשלוף לתוכו, לפיכך לא לקה על ידו לא בדם ולא בצפרדעים, ולקה על ידי אהרן.

Because the river had protected Moses when he was cast into it, therefore it was not smitten by him neither at the plague of blood nor at that of frogs, but it was smitten by Aaron.

Rashi, Shemos 7:19

לא היה העפר כדאי ללקות ע' משה, לפי שהגן עליו כשהרג את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול, ולקה על ידי אהרן.

The dust did not deserve to be smitten by Moses because it had protected him

when he slew the Egyptian, for "he hid him in the sand"; and it was therefore smitten by Aaron.

Rashi, Shemos 8:13

Moshe couldn't hit the river because he was saved by the river and he couldn't hit the land because he was saved by the land. In more recent times, Rav Yisrael Zev Gustman (1908–1991) had the practice of personally watering the bushes of Yeshivas Netzach Yisroel where he served as rosh yeshiva. When his students asked why he insisted on watering the bushes himself, he responded that when he was in Vilna during the Holocaust, he hid in the bushes to save himself from the Nazis. As a way of showing *hakaras hatov*, he wanted to water the bushes personally.

What is this about? What is the point of showing *hakaras hatov* to inanimate objects? The idea is that we are thanking Hashem for providing us with our needs. The inanimate objects are tools that can serve as a reminder for specific events in our lives that we are grateful for.

Hakaras Hatov and Chanukah

The Gemara, *Shabbos* 21b, tells us that the days of Chanukah were

instituted as days of Hallel and *hoda'ah* (thanksgiving). We may be familiar with Rashi's interpretation of the Gemara that *hoda'ah* refers to the recitation of Al Hanisim. This is the way we normally express our gratitude — through verbal statements.

R. Betzalel Zolty, *Mishnas Yaavetz*, OC no. 73, notes that according to the Riaz and the Rambam, when the Gemara mentions "*hoda'ah*," it does not mean Al Hanisim, but rather the lighting of the candles. The message that emerges from the Riaz and the Rambam is that gratitude is so central to Chanukah that we don't only express our gratitude through words. We express it through action — the mitzvah of lighting candles.

Chanukah is a time for us to focus on gratitude. It is not enough to feel a sense of gratitude toward those who have been kind to us. We must communicate it to them regularly and in a personal way. We also concretize it through our actions, whether it is an expression of *hoda'ah* to Hashem through a mitzvah or using acts of kindness to thank others.

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AL HANISIM IN BIRKAT HAMAZON: A WINDOW INTO THE NATURE OF CHANUKA

The Gemara (*Shabbat 24a*) raises the question as to whether we should recite Al HaNisim in the Birkat HaMazon of Chanuka. Perhaps since Al HaNisim is rabbinic, it is not mentioned; on the other hand, since there is an obligation of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle, on Chanuka, Al HaNisim should be recited in *benching*. The Gemara concludes that we need not recite Al HaNisim in *benching*; however if one decides to recite it, it is recited in the bracha of *hodaah* (Nodeh Lecha).

The Gemara only questions reciting Al HaNisim in Birkat HaMazon. It is taken for granted that Al HaNisim is recited in tefilla. Why tefilla differs from *benching* is not clear, and three explanations are offered. These three explanations have halachic

implications and can shed light on what Al HaNisim, and perhaps even what Chanuka is really about.

She'iltot

Behag and *Sheiltot* understand that tefilla differs from Birkat HaMazon in that tefilla is necessary on Chanuka while Birkat HaMazon is not. We are required to pray on Chanukah. We are not obligated to eat bread. Given the voluntary nature of Birkat HaMazon, perhaps there is no need or obligation to recite Al HaNisim.¹

What should emerge from this explanation is that Al HaNisim in Birkat HaMazon is only an option on Chanuka. On Purim, where there is an obligation of *seuda*, Al HaNisim would be required in Birkat HaMazon. One who omits Al

HaNisim in Birkat HaMazon would be required to repeat *benching*, much as one who omits *Retze* on Shabbat or *Yaale Veyavo* on Yom Tov, days when eating is mandatory, needs to repeat *benching*.² This position is noted in *Magen Avraham* 695. However, *Magen Avraham* does not ultimately endorse this position.³

Tosafot

Tosafot, *Shabbat 24a*, s.v. *Mahu*, offer a different explanation. According to Tosafot, one needs to add Al HaNisim in tefilla since tefilla is held in public and there is *pirsumei nisa*. *Benching*, which is recited privately in one's home, does not have a *pirsumei nisa* element to the same extent that tefilla does. Therefore, the Gemara questions if we need to recite Al HaNisim in *benching*.

For Tosafot, Al HaNisim is yet another way to publicize the Chanuka miracle. Not only does kindling the Chanuka candles fulfill *pirsumei nisa*, reciting Al HaNisim is also a fulfillment of *pirsumei nisa*.

It should be noted that according to Tosafot, the public nature of prayer mandates the recitation of Al HaNisim even in the silent Shemoneh Esreh. We never see Tosafot distinguish between the Chazan's repetition and the silent Shemoneh Esreh. We also never see Tosafot distinguish between Maariv, when there is no chazarat hashatz, and Shacharit and Mincha, when there is a public repetition of Shemoneh Esreh. It seems that for Tosafot, even private prayer counts as *pirsumei nisa*. The conclusion of the Gemara that one can or perhaps should recite Al HaNisim in Birkat HaMazon, indicates for Tosafot that *pirsumei nisa* is not as it is commonly understood: a public declaration of the miracle. Instead, even a personal awareness of the *neis* can constitute *pirsumei nisa*. *Pirsumei nisa* is as much to oneself as it is to others.

In American culture, the *pirsumei nisa* dimension of Chanuka has been interpreted as a requirement to proudly articulate our values. This may or may not be a correct understanding of *pirsumei nisa* according to some Rishonim. For Tosafot, however, *pirsumei nisa* may refer to articulating the reason for the festival to oneself, and does not need to be public in any way.

Rashi

Rashi, *Shabbat* 24a, s.v. *Mah Tefilla*, offers yet another explanation. According to Rashi, the Gemara never questions reciting Al HaNisim in tefilla, since Al HaNisim in davening is core to the Yom Tov of Chanuka. It may even be that the original Chanuka consisted of reciting Al HaNisim in tefilla and did not include *hadlakas neiros*.⁴ The Gemara (*Shabbos* 21b) tells us that when that small cruse of oil was found, *keva'um v'asa'um yamim tovim b'hallel v'hoda'ah* — they established and made them holidays of Hallel and thanksgiving. The message of Chanuka according to Rashi, the real reason the Yom Tov was established, is to recite Hallel and for *hodaah*, reciting Al HaNisim in Shemoneh Esreh.

Hodaah

To my mind, there are three ways in which Chanuka epitomizes *hodaah*: First, recognition that we received more than our due and admitting that we are undeserving. Second, the need for thanks to be ongoing. Third, the attention to fine details that underlie genuine *hodaah*.

Hodaah means much more than simply offering thanks. The Gemara (*Brachos* 7b) teaches that until the birth of Yehuda, no one expressed thanks to Hashem. Of course, on a literal level, this is not true. As *Torah Temima* (to Bereishit 29:35) notes, many before Leah expressed thanks. However, there was something special

about Leah. When Leah named her son Yehuda, she was demonstrating her awareness that she received more than her due. Theoretically, each of the four *imahos* should have borne three children. Now that Leah bore child number four and received more than her due, she expresses *hodaah*.⁵

Hodaah reflects the awareness that we received more than our due. By recognizing that we received more than what was due, we admit that we are underserving. The word *hodaah* means to give thanks, but it also means to admit (*hodaah* in a monetary context means that one admits to owing money).

Admitting that we were undeserving and recognizing that we received more than we were due are central themes in Chanuka. The entire *neis* was unnecessary. We could have lit the Menorah with *tamei* oil, we could have obtained *tahor* oil from a closer location, we could have cut each wick to one-eighth of its size and lit the Menorah for eight nights with only that one jug of oil. However, that is not what actually happened. We received a special gift, not a gift that comes on a birthday or anniversary and is expected, but a gift that comes out of nowhere and reflects true love. For these extra gifts, Chanuka was established. Because we received much more than we needed, we must offer genuine thanks, *hodaah*.

The name Yehuda also shows that the thanks Leah gave was not a one-time occurrence. She said *ha'pa'am odeh et Hashem* — Should I only thank



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Hashem now this one time? No, thanks must be ongoing. That boy was called Yehuda throughout his life to demonstrate that thanks must be ongoing. In a similar vein, the Al HaNisim of Chanuka goes out of its way to note how the victory at that time remains with us, on some level, to this very day, *ule'amcha Yisrael asita teshu'a gedola ufurkan kahayom hazeh* — and for Your nation, Israel, you brought about a great salvation as this very day.

The more sensitive our soul is, the more we recognize all the good that has come our way. The more we feel that we are undeserving, the more *hodaah* we offer.

Here lies another Chanuka lesson. Anyone can appreciate the military miracle of Chanuka. How the few weak yeshiva bochrin defeated the Selucid Greek Army with its elephants and weapons. However, it takes a sensitive soul to recognize that locating a pure cruse of oil was

also miraculous. It was not simply a coincidence that a jug of oil was hidden. The jug was not simply overlooked. It was miraculously saved. And for that we give thanks.

Genuine *hodaah* involves recognizing the small things, in particular those small things that too often get overlooked. A card that says “thank you for everything” means nothing. However, when we spell out, in detail, the many favors that were performed and all the benefit that these favors brought, that is genuine *hodaah*. The Gemara (*Brachos* 59b) teaches that when the first rains fall in Israel after a long drought, we recite a special tefilla — *modim anachnu lefanecha al kol tipah utipah shehoradeta lanu* — We express gratitude for each drop of water. Thank you alone doesn't cut it. On Chanuka, we thank Hashem not only for the big miracle of the war; we recognize the small miracle of locating a jug of oil. This attention to a seemingly small and trivial detail is a demonstration of genuine *hodaah*.

Endnotes

1. This explanation has a basis in *Berachot* 49a.
2. Netziv in his commentary on *Sheiltot* 26:13, makes this point. However, this does not ring true with regard to the *Behag*. Although *Behag* in *Hilchot Chanuka* understands the difference between Birkat HaMazon and tefilla based on whether one has an obligation to eat, he nonetheless writes that one who omits Al HaNisim in Birkat HaMazon on Purim need not repeat *benching*. Apparently *Behag* assumes that one must eat on Purim, but one need not eat bread.
3. Raavya believes that one who omits Al HaNisim (even on Chanuka) needs to repeat *benching*, but this is for an entirely different reason. See Mordechai, *Masechet Shabbat* #279.
4. See my article, “My Chanuka while the Beit Hamikdash Stood,” *Torah To-Go*, Chanukah 5774.
5. See Rashi Bereishis 29:35.



HAKARAS HATOV IS ONE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Chanukah is the Jewish Thanksgiving. If you are ever looking for the halachos of Hallel in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, you will not find them in *Hilchos Tefillah* (the laws of prayer), nor will you be able to locate them in *Hilchos Yom Tov* or the halachos of Rosh Chodesh. You will discover all the laws of Hallel only in *Hilchos Chanukah*.

There are three ways in which Chazal instructed us to commemorate the victories of Chanukah: Saying Hallel, lighting candles, and including Al Hanisim in *Hodaah* (the berachos giving thanks in Shemoneh Esrei and Birkas Hamazon). While Hallel has

no specific mention of the victories of Chanukah, the candles represent the miracle of the oil supernaturally lasting for eight days, and Al Hanisim is a statement of thanksgiving, *hakaras hatov*, for the military victory.

Why did Chazal institute two distinct commemorations for the victories of Chanukah? Why not say Al Hanisim when we light our candles?

Many point out that Al Hanisim contains no clear reference to the miracle of the oil. In fact, Al Hanisim is recited as part of our daily thanksgiving prayer for “daily miracles” — *al nisechah shebechol yom imanu*. The implication is that Chazal wanted us to recognize that there

are two distinct components to the victory of Chanukah that should not be blurred. In a sense, the war against Yavan had two battlefronts.

The more difficult battlefront was a philosophical battle. Yavan focused on and glorified the body, and nature in general, to the exclusion of miracle and any higher goal for it. Instead of viewing the body as a vehicle for a covenant with God, they insisted that the body was perfect and Bris Milah was mutilation. How could the Jews ever prove that nature has a master and a purpose? This battle was waged by God Himself and was won with an inexplicable demonstration of *neis*. Namely, the oil lasting far longer than

was naturally possible.

The other battlefield was a physical one. A military war for independence. The Jews won in miraculous fashion, but by physical, explainable means.

There are therefore two distinct commemorations of the two victories of Chanukah, each in its proper place. While the candles have their physical and commemorative location related to the home, Al Hanisim, the commemoration of the military victory, finds its expression alongside all our other daily recognitions of hidden miracles.

An important message we can derive from Al Hanisim is the importance of recognizing and thanking Hashem for even those things that we, so to speak, accomplished ourselves. It is critical to both recognize and thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for things He does for us in hidden ways, and thereby recognize the true source of our victories in life.

This type of *hakaras hatov* is not just a behavior; it is a *middah*, a perspective, and a life outlook that God wants us to develop. We know this, because *hakaras hatov* is one of the Ten Commandments.

The first four of the Ten Commandments are in a clear sequence. 1. Know/believe in God. 2. Do not believe in or worship any other gods. 3. Relate to the name of God with reverence. 4. Keep Shabbos as a testimony that He is the Creator. The fifth one however, is to honor one's parents. Not only does it fail to

maintain the sequence, but it is the first mitzvah that is no longer between man and God — it is *bein adam lechaveiro!*

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 33) explains how the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'eim* actually continues the sequence:

משרשי מצוה זו, שראוי לו לאדם שיכיר ויגמל חסד למי שעשה עמו טובה, ולא יהיה נבל ומתנכר וכפוי טובה שזו מדה רעה ומאוסה בתכלית לפני אלקים ואנשים. ושיתן אל לבו כי האב והאם הם סבת היותו בעולם, ועל כן באמת ראוי לו לעשות להם כל כבוד וכל תועלת שיוכל, כי הם הביאוהו לעולם, גם יגעו בו כמה יגיעות בקטנתו, וכשיקבע זאת המדה בנפשו יעלה ממנה להכיר טובת האל ברוך הוא שהוא סבתו וסבת כל אבותיו עד אדם הראשון, ושהוציאו לאויר העולם וספק צרכו כל ימיו והעמידו על מתכנתו ושלמות אבריו, ונתן בו נפש יודעת ומשכלת, שאלולי הנפש שחננו האל, יהיה כסוס כפרד אין הבין, ויעריך במחשבתו כמה וכמה ראוי להזהר בעבודתו ברוך הוא.

From the roots of this commandment is that it is fitting for a person to acknowledge and return kindness to people who were good to him, and not to be an ungrateful scoundrel, because that is a bad and repulsive attribute before God and people. And he should take to heart that the father and the mother are the cause of his being in the world; and hence it is truly fitting to honor them in every way and give every benefit he can to them, because they brought him to the world, and worked hard for him when he was little. And once he fixes this idea in his soul, he will move up from it to recognize the good of God, Blessed be He, who is his cause and the cause of all his ancestors until the first man (Adam),

and that he took him out into the world's air, and fulfilled his needs every day, and made his body strong and able to stand, and gave him a mind that knows and learns — for without the mind that God granted him, he would be 'like a horse or a mule who does not understand.' And he should think at length about how very fitting it is to be careful in his worship of the Blessed be He.

Kibbud av v'eim is more than mere behaviors, it is supposed to be the actions resulting from the correct perspective of *hakaras hatov*. When we recognize and appreciate our parents as the source of our physical existence, we integrate into our thinking a *middah*, a perspective, of recognition and appreciation for “source.” Such a perspective will then result in the same recognition, appreciation, and behavior toward our ultimate source, Hashem Himself.

Chanukah is the holiday of *hakaras hatov*. Our lives, our independence, and our religion were rescued. An important message to be annually reconsidered and integrated into our thinking is how critical *hakaras hatov* is — not just as the proper behavior of a sensitive, caring human being, but as a function of our religious personality. Every time we recognize and appreciate what another person has done for us, we are further integrating into our consciousness the *middah* of recognition of source. Ultimately this life perspective is to lead to a constant feeling of gratitude to Hakadosh Barch Hu, which transforms our *avodas Hashem* into one of *simchah*.



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DEBT, GRATITUDE, AND JEWISH VALUES FROM SHAKESPEARE'S STAGE TO THE OVAL OFFICE

I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you," declares Shylock to Antonio, the title character of Shakespeare's 16th-century dramatic comedy *Merchant of Venice*.¹ Although the Jewish moneylender agrees to loan Antonio 3,000 ducats (which his broke friend Bassanio uses to woo a wealthy heiress named Portia), Shylock declines the invitation to dine with the merchant and his companions later that evening. Shylock's rejection of the Christian's apparent hospitality no doubt stoked anti-Jewish sentiment of the time. It also echoed the refusal of another Jew residing under gentile rule nearly ten centuries earlier: "Daniel resolved not

to defile himself with the king's food or the wine he drank" (Daniel 1:8).

The life of the Hebrew prophet Daniel resonates throughout Shakespeare's conspicuously scriptural play, though it is most pronounced (literally) in the climactic courtroom scene when Shylock comes to collect the pound of flesh penalty from Antonio after he defaults on the loan. As the crowd assembled in the Venetian courtroom grows increasingly riotous, Shylock presses the state to grant his bond. Portia, now married to Bassanio, feels indebted to Antonio and rushes to his aid disguised as a young lawyer by the name of "Balthazar," the same name Daniel receives upon his arrival at the

Babylonian court (Daniel 1:7). When Portia pronounces the validity of the contract, Shylock cheers, "A Daniel come to judgment! yea, a Daniel! / O wise young judge, how I do honour thee!"²

In all of Shakespeare's works, the name of the Hebrew prophet Daniel only appears in this scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, where it is repeated half a dozen times to great dramatic effect. While the play invokes a host of biblical figures from Genesis including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Laban, and Leah, why include Daniel? What does Portia *do* that calls Daniel to Shylock's—or Shakespeare's—mind?

To make sense of Daniel's presence

in the play, we must first understand who he was to early modern English theatergoers. During the Renaissance, the biblical story of Daniel, a young Judean living under Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BCE, inspired writers and artists from Chaucer to Rembrandt, and depictions of Daniel in the lions' den became some of the most common penitential images in Christian art. Throughout the English Reformation, Daniel's struggle to maintain his religious identity in an antagonistic environment resonated with both Catholics and Protestants: when Henry VIII broke from Rome and established the Church of England; when his daughter Mary reestablished Catholicism; and when Elizabeth attempted to reestablish Protestantism and achieve a religious settlement for her people. In his commentary on the Book of Daniel, reformer John Calvin likened the predicament of the Jews in the diaspora with the state of the Protestants in the 1530s—fragile and flanked by enemies on all sides. He also cites prominent Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages including Ibn Ezra, Rashi and the Ramban. For Christian and Jewish readers throughout the ages, Daniel models the faithful fortitude needed to resist cultural assimilation. From ferocious felines to flaming furnaces, his exilic episode offers proof that God remains a loyal protector of those who remain loyal to Him.

Calvin's commentary was translated into English and widely circulated in London in the early 1570s, though a surge of publications on Daniel's eschatological prophecies in the last decade of the 16th century marked early England's anxiety over the end of days with the impending turn of the millennium. To fabricate his

Jewish protagonist in the late 1590s, Shakespeare need only turn toward Daniel—a Jew already occupying the world stage and permeating England's cultural consciousness.

While the Hebrew Bible provides several instances of Israelites living among idolatrous, hostile peoples, Daniel, unlike Joseph and Moses, wears his Jewish identity on his gabardine sleeve. What sets Daniel apart, however, is unparalleled interpretive dexterity. He alone can read the writing on the wall. When the fingers of a human hand appear and write on the plaster of King Balthazar's palace, Daniel is summoned and translates the message as follows: "Menay: God has counted the years of your kingship and terminated it. Tekel: You have been *weighed* in the scales and found *wanting*. Peres: Your kingdom has been broken up and given to Media and Persia" (Daniel 5:25–8).

Throughout *Merchant*, Shakespeare equips his Jewish protagonist with the most basic approach to biblical interpretation by having him pronounce allegorical relationships between the Bible and lived experience. Early in the play Shylock fancies himself a "Jacob" due to his ingenuity and prosperity. And when he extols Portia (disguised as a youthful judge) as a "Daniel," it is because she alone seems to recognize that Antonio's debt has been counted and his bond is forfeit. His "kingdom" or wealth has been broken up with the loss of his ships and now his flesh must be *weighed* because his contract has been found *wanting*. When the well-meaning Venetians beg Portia to dissolve the deed unlawfully, her reluctance bears resemblance to Daniel's decision not to forsake

Torah law and comply with the larger (corrupt) social world.³

Yet Shylock's "reading" of Portia does not stand. After Portia rules that the Jew may have his "bond" but draw no blood, Antonio's friend Gratiano heckles Shylock while simultaneously praising Portia: "A Daniel, still say I, a second Daniel! *I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.*"⁴ Gratiano mocks the Jew by turning his own words against him, and the declaration of a "second Daniel" announces the arrival of a revisionist Christian approach. Several keen critics have argued that Shakespeare dramatizes the supersession as the Jew's law becomes the "Old" Testament, overridden with the "New" Testament of Venetian jurisprudence.⁵ American scholar and Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether has argued that anti-Semitism has its very roots in the development of a hermeneutical method that legitimizes Christian faith by appropriating Jewish scripture, while simultaneously demonizing its original inheritors.⁶

Like most jokes, Gratiano's scornful jest springs from an underlying truth and acute self-awareness. Indeed, Gratiano owes the Jew thanks for "teaching" him the word "Daniel" through the provision of the Hebrew Bible. Although the dramatic tension in the scene is broken, this seemingly minor exchange hits an Early Modern nerve: Christianity's sense of indebtedness to Judaic scripture and its exegetical traditions.

The theme of indebtedness pulses throughout the Book of Daniel, which begins with King Nebuchadnezzar enriching his court by carting off the most promising young minds from Jerusalem to Babylon where he can benefit from their brilliance.

The narrative of Daniel repeatedly features the gentiles' appreciation of Israel's wisdom, and the gratitude the Jew must show his Creator for that endowment. Shortly after Daniel's arrival, he is summoned to recall and interpret a dream the king has forgotten. When Nebuchadnezzar is satisfied with the interpretation offered, Daniel proclaims, "I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, that thou hast given me wisdom and strength" (Daniel 2:23). Daniel's expression evinces the essence of the "Jew" (*yehudi*), derived from the word "*hodu*" meaning praise, glorify and extol. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar insists on demonstrating gratitude to Daniel, much like Antonio and Bassanio insist on "paying" Portia for her "wisdom" and "courteous pains."⁷ Daniel disdains the proffered titles and riches, but succeeds in making the king pay his "debt" in a form of currency Daniel willingly accepts: encomium to God. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan ruler touted as the "king of kings" (Daniel 2:37), finds himself in the paradoxical position of acknowledging the Hebrew God's power as superior to

1290.⁸ Attending to Shakespeare's biblical references illuminates the play's preoccupation with the pervasive presence of Jews through the potency of their Scripture, which early modern Christians encountered daily. Gratiano's sarcastic "I thank thee, Jew" and appropriation of the term "Daniel" reveals the paradox of gratitude Shakespeare uses to power his play: ever-present in the declaration of thanks is some admission of dependence. In response to the anxiety of being indebted to earlier claimants, Reformation theologians, writers, and policymakers alike deployed a strategy of legitimating through denunciation, which Shakespeare enacts here. With the *Merchant's* substitutions of financial capital with flesh and a "hoop of gold" with a husband's heart, the play is not subtle in its consideration of the various forms of material, intellectual, and emotional debt accrued in routine human interactions.

In the Book of Daniel, *Merchant*, and Elizabethan England at large, the Jew himself might be scorned, but

in his redemption, Antonio remains indebted to Judaism by virtue of its exegetical approach. However, once Portia's skill has been used to achieve the desired end, the court slips back into prejudiced and hypocritical practices, granting Antonio a "favour" by declaring that the Jew "presently become a Christian."⁹

Had the Hebrew prophet Daniel, instead of Portia, adjudicated Shylock's case, I imagine he would have come to the same conclusion as Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in the early 20th century, who finds the contract unenforceable because wounding another is prohibited by Torah law, even if the other person grants advance permission, since the human body is not the property of the individual—it is holy and belongs to God.¹⁰ In a mock appeal of Shylock's case commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Venice ghetto in 2017, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg and her fellow judges unanimously granted Shylock's principal be returned, since otherwise Antonio would have been "unjustly enriched," and "the conversion be vacated," upholding a right to religious freedom that was unfathomable in Shakespeare's time.¹¹

While the *Merchant of Venice* is a play with many troubled afterlives and cruel applications, the questions it raises about ethics, interfaith relations, and how to pursue the truth of a text—whether sacred or secular—are still being pursued today. I believe Shakespeare's habit of justly enriching his works with echoes and invocations of the Hebrew Bible contributes to their enduring impact and prominence in Western literature. Of course, this prudent practice extends far beyond playwrights. As

I believe Shakespeare's habit of justly enriching his works with echoes and invocations of the Hebrew Bible contributes to their enduring impact and prominence in Western literature.

his own.

While most critics have read *The Merchant of Venice* as deeply concerned with the *physical* presence of Jews/*conversos* in Europe in the late 16th century, James Shapiro has shown Londoners had scarce contact with Jews since their expulsion in

his Scripture and its teachings are valued since they explore universal concerns such as moral practice, civic duty, religious reverence, and textual interpretation. This is perhaps most evident in Portia employing the law, a traditionally Jewish exegetical mode, to save Antonio. Thus, even



my colleagues at YU’s Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought have tracked in *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States*, “Turning to the Hebrew Bible for inspiration, solidarity, comfort, and purpose, as the men of the First Continental Congress did, is a common *theme* in American history.” Nearly two hundred years after Bassanio pursued Portia, another young, scrappy and hungry bachelor raised money to travel abroad and married a woman of worth above his station. Alexander Hamilton, reflecting on the miraculous success of the America experiment, expressed in awe and gratitude, “I sincerely esteem it a system which without the finger of God, never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests.”

America has struggled with and been strengthened by the diverse interests

of its inhabitants since its infancy, but the importance of expressing thanks to God remains present throughout the ages and stages of its development. In 1621, one year after arriving on the Mayflower and enduring a devastating winter and the loss of his wife, Edwin Winslow recorded a thanksgiving feast celebrated with the indigenous peoples in his travel memoir, noting that “although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want.” For the next two centuries, annual Thanksgiving gatherings were celebrated informally in many American homes until 1863, when Lincoln established a national day of “Thanksgiving and Praise,” calling upon Americans, even in the midst of a civil war, to “remember the most high God who has given us so much.”

In another presidential

pronouncement in 1985, Ronald Regan wished “His choicest blessings on all who observe this holiday” of feasting, which “provides a fitting opportunity to reflect on the gifts a generous God ever wills to bestow on those who are faithful to Him.” But the holiday was not Thanksgiving, it was Chanukah. Approximately one year later, during Yeshiva University’s centennial, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm and a delegation from YU presented President Regan with an honorary Doctor of Laws and “a handsome silver Menorah” (as Regan observes in his diary). Two days later, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, delivered a talk in which he noted President Regan’s endorsement of public menorah lightings in keeping with the “spirit of the Founders, whose lives in this country began with a public expression of gratitude to the Almighty.”¹²

While sharing food and drink can facilitate fellowship, ultimately what is shared is depleted. However, as demonstrated by Daniel and subsequent leaders through the centuries, when we gift gratitude, knowledge, friendship, and influence, “the more we share, the more we have,” as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks argued, “because social goods are not about competition. They’re about cooperation.”¹³

Perhaps this is why Shakespeare fails to produce a completely satisfying resolution for a play so attentive to the ways in which we become bound to others. The fathers, daughters, husbands, wives, and cohabitants in *Merchant* are all-consumed by contracts. As Rabbi Sacks taught, “A contract is a *transaction*. A covenant is a *relationship*. A contract is about *interests*. A covenant is about *identity*. That is why contracts *benefit*, but covenants *transform*. A covenant creates a moral community. It binds people together in a bond of mutual responsibility and care... In a covenant, what matters is not wealth or power but the transformation that takes place when I embrace a world larger than the self.”¹⁴

Upon returning from her covert

Venice visit, Portia sees a light coming from her house in the distance and reflects, “How that little light throws its beams. So shines a good deed in a naughty world.”¹⁵ The Hebrew Bible—and the acts of thanksgiving and fellowship it has inspired—indeed throws its beams far and wide, inviting readers then and now to consider the shared experience of indebtedness, whether linguistic, legalistic, cultural, or theological, and to see with more clarity the bonds that exist between and among all peoples. And for that, I believe we owe thanks.

Endnotes

1. Act 1, Scene 3. Although many scholars including John Gross have argued that Shakespeare’s Shylock “belongs, inescapably, to the history of anti-Semitism” (*Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy*, 1992), the play was billed as a comedy in its time and classified as such when Shakespeare’s collected works were published in the first folio in 1623. Typical of Shakespearean comedies, the central plot focuses on lovers overcoming near-tragic obstacles and resolves in multiple marriages.
2. *Merchant of Venice*, Act 4, Scene 1.
3. Although Shylock identifies the shared virtues between Daniel and Portia, he also exposes his own conditional relationship with the Bible: while familiar with its narratives, Shylock does not follow its teachings or emulate its exemplars. The Jew initially refuses to “smell pork” and violate his

dietary restrictions as Daniel did, but quickly concedes and goes to dinner at Antonio’s home, showing that he lacks the conviction of his prophetic precursor.

4. *Merchant of Venice* Act 4, Scene 1, italics added.
5. See, for instance, A. D. Moody’s *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* (1964).
6. *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, 1996
7. Bassanio offers the disguised Portia the 3,000 ducats once due to the Jew. When she refuses, he insists, “Dear sir, of force I must attempt you further: Take some remembrance of us, as a tribute, Not as a fee,” whereupon she demands (and receives) the wedding ring she gave him, which he swore never to part with as a symbol of his matrimonial bond (Act 4, Scene 1).
8. *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996).
9. *Merchant of Venice*, Act 4, Scene 1.
10. “Mishpat Shylock Lifi Hahalakhah,” published in his work *L’or Hahalakhah* (1964).
11. “Justice for Shylock: A Mock Appeal” Library of Congress, <https://youtu.be/ljFaVJ6RNpE>.
12. Yud-Tes Kislev, Thanksgiving, and Chanukah, <https://youtu.be/bguqj7VaZxk> (1986).
13. <https://rabbisacks.org/the-politics-of-hope>.
14. *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Modern Times*, pp. 313–314.
15. *Merchant of Venice*, Act 5, Scene 1.



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EIGHT PERSPECTIVES ON CHANUKA

The Nitzchiyus of Ner Chanukah

Rabbi Josh Blass

Mashgiach Ruchani, Yeshiva University

Rashi records a *Medrash Tanchuma* that espouses an idea we might not have believed had we not seen it in print, and that we certainly would never have had the temerity to espouse ourselves. The Medrash, noticing the order of the parshiyos, asks why the commandment for Aharon to light the Menorah appears at the beginning of Parshas Beha'aloscha, immediately after the section detailing the gifts that the heads of the tribes brought to inaugurate the Mishkan.

Famously, Rashi answers that:

למה נסמכה פְּרִשְׁת הַמְּנוֹרָה לְפָרֶשֶׁת הַנְּשִׂיאִים? לְפִי שֶׁשָּׂרָאָה אֶהְרֹן חֲנֻכַּת הַנְּשִׂיאִים חֲלָשָׁה אִזְ דַּעְתּוֹ, שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה עִמָּהֶם בְּחֻנְיָה לֹא הוּא וְלֹא שְׁבָטוֹ, אָמַר לוֹ הַקֹּב"ה חַיִּיד שְׁלֶךְ גְּדוּלָה מִשְׁלָחֵם, שֶׁאַתָּה מְדַלֵּיק וּמְטִיב אֶת הַנְּרוֹת.

Why is the section treating of the Candelabrum put in juxtaposition with the section dealing with the offerings of the princes? Because when Aaron saw the dedication offerings of the princes, he felt distressed because neither he nor his tribe was with them in the dedication, whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "By your life! Your part is of greater importance than theirs, for you will kindle and set in order the lamps."

Rashi, Bamidbar 7:2

The question that always bothered me was: how do we understand this concept that Aharon had a *chalishus*

hada'as — a weakening of spirit? Was Aharon some small-minded person who would become jealous of others who were given a unique contribution to Hashem's Sanctuary? This is the magnanimous and refined Aharon that we so revere.

Furthermore, the Ramban poses two other questions. First, why did this *avodah* of *hadlakas haneiros* animate *yishuv hada'as* more so than the twice daily obligation of the ketores that was also in Aharon and his family's domain? How about the Yom Kippur service or the many other responsibilities that were entrusted only to the kohanim?

Second, Aharon himself offered daily sacrifices during the days of the inauguration of the Mishkan. So why should he have felt jealous of the



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offerings brought by the nesi'im?

Famously, the Ramban quotes a medrash that says that the sacrifices and the like would no longer apply if and when the Beis Hamikdash ceases to exist — אבל הנרות לעולם אל — מול פני המנורה יאירו will burn eternally “across from the Menorah.” The Ramban explains this tantalizing Medrash as follows: While the Beis HaMikdash may no longer be standing, the lights of the Menorah continue to burn in the form of the *neiros Chanukah*. It was the eternal nature of *ner*, in the form of the *neros Chashmonaim*, that brought comfort to Aharon in a way that his normal korbanos and other obligations of service did not.

Maybe this is why Aharon felt dejected in the first place. Aharon saw the nesi'im contributing to something eternal. Even if ultimately the Mishkan ends in a state of destruction, the creation of sanctity in this world is permanent. Even if the actual structure is destroyed, every future *makom kadosh* is infused with and is modeled after the original Mishkan. That eternal quality was lacking in the acts of *avodah* that Aharon heretofore had been assigned. But once Aharon was instructed in the lighting of the Menorah, which is also fundamentally eternal, he also felt as though he was making an everlasting contribution.

This is the furthest thing from a petty jealousy. Rather, it is a desire to contribute to the eternal sanctity that is the hallmark of the *Am Hanetzach*, the Eternal People.

May we be zoche to experience the historical, eternal, and transformative beauty of the *ner Chanukah* during the days ahead.

The Mystery of the Missing Menora: A Halachic Whodunit

Rabbi Tanchum Cohen

Maggid Shiur & Rosh Chabura - Wrubel Beis Midrash Katan at MTA, YU Undergrad Chabura and Masmidim; Assistant Rabbi - Cong. Beth Abraham

If someone asked you to imagine, draw or paint a Chanuka scene, *neiros Chanuka* would most likely figure prominently in the image you create. Yet when the Gemara provides an ancient sketch of Jews keeping Chanuka, the *neiros* seem to be strangely absent.

In the midst of introducing the halachos of Chanuka, the Gemara shares the narrative background of this rabbinic yom tov:

מאי חנוכה? 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 מונח 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.

What is Chanuka? Our rabbis have taught, "The 25th of Kislev [begins] the eight days of Chanuka in which one may not eulogize and one may not fast. For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they contaminated all of the oil in the Sanctuary, and when the monarchy of the house of the Chashmonaim mustered their strength and defeated them, [the Chashmonaim] searched and found only one jug of oil marked with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. There was only enough to kindle for one day, but a miracle occurred, and they kindled from it for eight days. The next year, they

established them and made them yamim tovim, with Hallel and thanks.

Shabbas 21b

The baraisa opens with the prohibitions — fasting and eulogies are antithetical to the joy of Chanuka — and closes with the positives: the Chachamim instituted Chanuka as a yom tov celebrated with Hallel and thanksgiving. Mysteriously, this foundational description never mentions our requirement to light *neiros*, despite focusing on the narrative of the *neis ha-shemen*, the miracle of the Menora oil.¹ Why is the rabbinic mitzva of *hadlakas neiros* strikingly absent?

In a public shiur delivered in Yerushalayim during the 1970s, Rav Betzael Zolty² offered an intriguing historical-halachic solution to this mystery. Rav Zolty's approach is anchored in the discussion of the following double *sugya*. *Masseches Shabbas* offers two separate — and somewhat contradictory — discussions of the question of practical benefit from *neiros Chanuka*: may I use the light of the *neiros* to perform other tasks? At first, the Gemara presents practical benefit as a dispute among the *amoraim*:

רב הונא קסבר ... מותר להשתמש לאורה ... ורב חסדא ... קסבר ... מותר להשתמש לאורה ... רב קסבר ... אסור להשתמש לאורה

Rav Huna is of the opinion ... that it is permissible to benefit from its light ... And Rav Chisda ... is of the opinion ... that it is permissible to benefit from its light ... Rav is of the opinion ... that it is prohibited to benefit from the light. Shabbat 21a-21b

In this first passage, Rav Huna and Rav Chisda permit using the light of the *neiros*, while Rav forbids it. However, one page later, the Gemara raises this

question afresh and gives a definitive conclusion:

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב אסי (אמר רב) דאסור להרצות מעות כנגד נר חנוכה. כי אמריתה קמיה דשמואל, אמר לי וכי נר קדושה יש בה? מתקיף לה רב יוסף וכי דם קדושה יש בו? דתניא (ויקרא יז, יג) ושפך וכסה במה ששפך יכסה שלא יכסנו ברגל שלא יהו מצות בזויות עליו. ה"נ שלא יהו מצות בזויות עליו:

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav Assi: It is prohibited to count money opposite Chanuka lights. When I said this to Shmuel, he said to me, "Is there some sort of sanctity to the candles?" Rav Yosef asked, "Does blood have any sanctity? Yet we were taught in a baraisa [The Torah states], "if one spills blood [of a non-domestic animal or of a bird] ... one must cover it." One should use what was used to slaughter the animal in order to cover and not use one's feet so that we don't desecrate the commandments. Here too, [we don't count money opposite the candles] so that we don't desecrate the commandments.

Shabbas 22a

In this second passage, Rav Assi forbids counting money by the Chanuka candlelight. This assertion is maintained by Rav Yosef, who explains it as an application of the universal requirement to respect mitzvos; counting money by mitzva candlelight would constitute a form of disrespect. The two passages seem inconsistent: is practical use of the Chanuka candlelight an open question and an ongoing matter of dispute, or is it certainly and conclusively prohibited?

Rabbeinu Zerachya *Ba'al ha-Ma'or*, a giant of 12th-century Provence and Spain,³ suggests that these two passages refer to two distinct situations that warrant different halachic responses. The second passage refers to **personal** use of the light, such as counting money; this is unanimously forbidden, since personal use constitutes *bizuy mitzva*, disrespect of the mitzva at hand. The first passage refers to use of the light **to fulfill another mitzva**, such as enjoying reading a *sefer* or eating a Shabbas meal by Chanukka candlelight; this sacred use is not disrespectful and therefore some *amoraim* (Rav Huna and Rav Chisda) permitted it.

Yet Rav forbade any use of the light, and that is the accepted halacha. Why? Rabbeinu Zerachya explains that our wholesale prohibition against **any** benefit from the Chanuka lights parallels the wholesale prohibition against **any** benefit from the light of the Menora in the Beis ha-Mikdash. Rav's accepted opinion reflects the principle of *zecher la-Mikdash* as described in *Masseches Rosh Hashana*:

מתני' בראשונה היה הלולב ניטל במקדש שבעה ובמדינה יום אחד. משחרב בית המקדש, התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי לולב ניטל במדינה שבעה זכר למקדש ... גמ' ומנלן דעבדינן זכר למקדש? דאמר קרא (ירמיהו ל, יז) "כי אעלה ארוכה לך וממכותיך ארפאך נאם ה' כי נדחה קראו לך ציון היא דורש אין לה" – מכלל דבעיא דרישה:
Mishna: In the beginning, the lulav was taken in the Mikdash all seven [days of Sukkos] and throughout the land on the first day. When the Mikdash

was destroyed, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai instituted that the lulav is taken throughout the land all seven in remembrance of the Mikdash. Gemara: How do we know that we observe [certain practices] in remembrance of the Mikdash? The verse states, "But I will bring healing to you and cure you of your wounds declares the Lord, though they called you 'Outcast, That Zion whom no one seeks out.'" This implies that Zion requires seeking out. Rosh Hashana 30a

The destruction of Beis ha-Mikdash mandated our Chachamim to institute practices that serve as *zecher la-Mikdash*, practices that parallel those in the Mikdash and which will thereby keep the Mikdash memories in the forefront of our thinking. Specifically, Rabbeinu Zerachya writes that the rabbinic mitzva of *neiros Chanuka* was instituted as a *zecher la-Mikdash*, as a mnemonic parallel to the mitzva of lighting the Menora in the Mikdash. As a result, we make no use whatsoever of the Chanuka light much as we would be absolutely forbidden to make any use of the Menora light in the Mikdash.⁴

*

Rav Zolty highlights the remarkable implication: the rabbinic mitzva of *hadlakas neiros* was instituted after the destruction of the second Beis ha-Mikdash, well over a century after the miracle of Chanuka took place. While we are familiar with *pirsumei nissa*, publicizing the miraculous story of Chanuka, as the *telos* of the requirement to kindle



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ner Chanuka,⁵ Rabbeinu Zerachya seems to understand that this rabbinic mitzva is actually a composite of two purposes — publicizing the miracle and remembering the Mikdash — and the Chachamim instituted the requirement to kindle *neiros* only after *churban ha-Bayis* when both purposes were relevant.⁶

This concept solves the mystery of the missing menorah. The passage we began with is a particularly ancient *baraisa*, which records the original institution of Chanuka shortly after the miracles occurred. At the time, the only positive fulfillments were reciting Hallel and *Al ha-Nissim*, and those indeed appear in this ancient text. The requirement to light *neiros Chanuka* was added later, following the Roman destruction of the Mikdash, and it is therefore recorded only in later texts such as the Mishna⁷ and Gemara,⁸ which were composed after *churban ha-Bayis*.

*

May our engagement with *ner Chanuka* both renew our awareness of the Divine miracles that fill our lives and rekindle our yearning for the unimaginably greater relationship with Hashem, which a rebuilt Mikdash will enable, and may our contemplation of these paired *ner Chanuka* themes — *pirsumei nissa* and *zecher la-mikdash* — spur our *avodas Hashem* ambitions in the coming months and beyond.

Endnotes

1. This brief article will explore Rashi's understanding that "thanksgiving" mentioned in the *baraisa* is a reference to reciting *Al ha-Nissim*, which enhances *Modim*, the gratitude section of *tefilla*. Rambam, however, appears to have interpreted "thanksgiving" as a reference to *neiros Chanukka* (see footnote 4 below).

2. *Mishnas Ya'avetz, Orach Chaim* 73:1.

3. *Ma'or ha-Katan* to Rif, *Shabbas* 9a.

4. In addition to this prohibition against practical benefit from the candlelight (*asur le-hishtameish le-orah*), Rav Zolty suggests two other halachic expressions of *ner Chanuka* as *zecher le-Mikdash*: the phrasing of the *birkas ha-mitzva* (Ra'avad, *Hilchos Berachos* 11:15) and the centrality of the act of lighting (*hadlaka osa mitzva*, per Rashi, *Shabbas* 22b). In pre-Chanuka shiurim, Rav Hershel Schachter has added several additional *nafkan minah*: the position of *She'iltos* (qtd. by Rosh, *Shabbas* 2:9) that leftover oil may not be used after Chanuka, the position of *Avnei Nezer* that all the lights of *mehadrin min ha-mehadrin* must be contained by a single container, and the position of *Beis Yitzchak* that *ner Chanuka* requires distinct wick and fuel (which disqualifies a Bunsen burner which lacks the former and an electric bulb which lacks the latter). *Beis ha-Levi* (Chanuka 28b) similarly explains that the practice quoted by *Darkei Moshe* 673:6 to avoid reusing wicks is based upon *Mikdash* procedure.

Furthermore, *zecher le-Mikdash* appears to explain the position of Rav Chisda and Rav (*Shabbas* 21b) that *kavesa ein zakuk lah*, that this rabbinic mitzva was structured as a required act of lighting a *ner* (while *pirsumei nissa* alone would instead have suggested a requirement that the *ner* be and remain lit, *kavesa zakuk lah*). Additionally, Ramban (*Be-ha'alo-secha* 8:2) interprets several *midrashim* as presenting *ner Chanuka* as a perennial continuation of *hadlakas ha-Menora* in the *Mikdash* (as opposed to the *korbanos*, which have no such perennial continuation); this appears to be a robust formulation of *ner Chanuka* as *zecher la-Mikdash*.

Moreover, Rambam disagrees with Rabbeinu Zerachya's approach to practical benefit from Chanuka candlelight (*Hilchos Megilla ve-Chanuka* 4:6), and he may follow the Rif in rejecting the abovementioned position of *She'iltos* regarding post-Chanuka leftover oil (Rif, *Shabbas* 9a and Rambam 4:5; see also *Hagahos Maimoniyos* 4:4*). This is consistent with his interpretation of *hoda'a* (*Shabbas* 21a) as *ner Chanuka* rather than as *Al ha-Nissim*, and with his corresponding, explicit dating of *ner Chanuka* to the original institution of Chanuka (Rambam 3:3 and 4:12).

5. *Shabbas* 23b.

6. Perhaps *pirsumei nissa* alone was insufficient due to the concern of *bal tosfif*. See *Megilla* 14a, with Ritva and *Piskei Rid*, as well as Ramban (*supra* 2a) and Netziv in *Ha'amek She'eila* 26:1, and especially Rav Schachter in *Be-Ikvei ha-Tzon* 19:3.

7. *Bava Kamma* 6:6.

8. *Shabbas* 21a ff.

Chanuka and the Light of Rav Kook

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Chanuka, our time of light, is a time to learn the Torah of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook (1865–1935) was a Torah personality who defies a single definition. It is impossible to fully encompass the dynamic life, transformational personality, manifold published contributions, and revolutionary spiritual ethos of Rav Kook. His story has many chapters, from halachic responsa and communal activity to institution-building and diaries filled with poetry searching for Hashem. Rav Kook's Torah personality is best associated with light. And light is a phenomenon that defies a single definition.

Light is the origin of all that exists in our world. It is Hashem's window into our existence. It is a medium of energy and of many dimensions. Chanuka is one of the chapters of the story of light. Chanuka is all about light; its central mitzvah is our creation of light, reflecting the illumination of the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash.

Orot, meaning lights, is one of several of Rav Kook's works that includes light in their title. Light is the theme

to which he refers and the theme he invokes extensively in his writings.

His perspectives on Chanuka, our holiday of light, take many forms: a poem written in Europe that weaves together the halachic details of Chanuka; community sermons; written responsa in his *Orach Mishpat*; and a philosophical commentary to the Talmudic section dealing with all aspects of Chanuka in the second perek of *Massechet Shabbat* called *Ein Aya*.

Thus, Chanuka is an opportune time to appreciate Rav Kook's unique beacon of light. The light of his teachings continues to illuminate our world. Let us consider a few themes of Rav Kook, in light of an aphorism he coined in 1916 (*Megeid Yerachim, Ma'amarei HaRa'aya* pg. 500) to capture the essence of the time of Chanuka:

הברק האלוקי שבנשמת החשמונאים נתפוצץ
לניצוצות. כשיתקבצו לאבוקה אחת ישוב
להגלות.

The Divine bolt in the heart of the Chashmonaim splintered into sparks. When they will gather into one torch they will return to being revealed.

This one simple phrase includes many aspects of Rav Kook's thinking.

HaBarak HaEloki — The Divine bolt: In Rav Kook's writings the notion of a Divine phenomenon is common. He refers to Divine ideals (האידיאה האלוקית) and Divine wholeness (השלמות האלוקית). These ideas, despite their ethereal language, remind us that we are all living in the

presence of Hashem. Hashem's energy envelops our world and suffuses it with spirituality at every level. Hashem's light is present in our lives. He is constantly pouring light into our world for us to receive, reflect, and refract.

SheBiNishmat HaChashmonaim

— In the soul of the Chashmonaim: The Chashmonaim were ordinary people. They were individual Jews with aspirations and struggles. Yet, they carried within them a spark of Hashem. Each of us has a neshama with a connection to Hashem, if only we can perceive it. The neshama of the Chashmonaim is referred to in the singular. As people who fought for and represented the entirety of the Jewish people they carry one soul, just like the Jewish nation. As Knesset Yisrael, we are all one giant soul, one entity. As individuals, we are part of a greater whole, not separate, distinct parts. Rav Kook emphasized and appreciated the collective dimension of the Jewish people.

Nitpotzetz lanitzotzot — Splintered into sparks: The splintering Rav Kook refers to may reflect the dual role the Chashmonaim played, which proved to be short lived. As Kohanim, they reinstated the service of the Mikdash, returning the holiness and purity of the Beit Hamikdash. They waged an ideological and spiritual battle against those who had abandoned the light of Torah and tradition. They illuminated the world with the light of their spiritual quest, highlighted by the Divine miracle of the oil.

They also served as military men who fought bravely against the Selucid Greeks, who persecuted the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. They struggled for autonomy from foreign rule. They were heroic in their quest, which was championed by Hashem, who delivered them a miraculous victory: many at the hands of few. The small band of Chashmonaim waged a guerilla war to ultimately repel the Greeks and create an independent state. They continued to serve as political leaders in the ensuing period.

However, this experiment did not last. The fusion of religious, spiritual leadership and military, political leadership led to the decline of the service in the Beit Hamikdash and of the Mikdash itself. Ultimately, each of these two important elements — the sanctuary and the battlefield — splintered into separate realms. They each retain a spark of holiness, yet they do not live together in unity. Malchut — physical leadership — and Kehuna — spiritual leadership — are meant to be distinct yet also cojoined partners. The confluence of the two dissolved into the complete separateness of the two. In exile, these forces no longer even appreciate each other's contribution.

KeSheYitkabtzu la'avuka achat — When they gather into one torch: Rav Kook understands history as one unfolding drama, orchestrated by Hashem. We are living in one long arc of redemption — a movement toward total unity. There is no doubt of the reunification, the redemption. Hashem is already unfolding the



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process of reunification at every moment, leading to the gathering of the scattered forces, holy elements in life. Even on a physical level, the past century — the final turn toward full redemption — has seen the gathering of Jews from every corner of the earth.

This ultimate vision is reflected by a specific type of light: a torch, not one single beam of light that would be monolithic. Our view of unity is one that respects and appreciates the different flames within the torch, each with its own color and shade. Each has its own height and hue. Every type of Jew and each individual has a unique quality to contribute to the totality of the Jewish people. Even those who are currently devoid of religious content but contribute to the national rebuilding of the Jewish people are lights in the torch.

Yashuv lehigalot — They will return to being revealed: Hashem will ultimately reveal the unity between what currently may seem to be conflicting or competing values. The spiritual and physical dimensions of life, which are constantly in tension with each other, will find a harmony, a synthesis. The word return used here has the specific connotation of teshuva.

In Rav Kook's panoramic view of teshuva, it's not simply a series of steps to mending a wrongdoing. Teshuva is the process of enlightenment, of revealing the inner light of existence. Teshuva is a movement toward higher levels. This light of unity, peace, and wholeness exists on a personal level, a national level, and a cosmic level.

The word *lehigalot* is related to the word *galut*, meaning exile. In exile — national or personal — we experience the separateness of the sparks. When we are in a place of redemption — in

the Land of Israel — we can reveal the true inner light of the world — the light of Hashem that has accompanied us all along in our journey together.

For Rav Kook, the Chanuka themes of unity, the holiness of heroism and redemption, and the unfolding of history and kedusha are all lights that shine together.

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Of Miketz, Menorahs, and Majesty

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The Controversy over Yosef's Shave

The release of Yosef from prison, a moment of great drama and emotion, has also been the subject of halakhic inquiry. Some rishonim note, in light of the fact that his release took place on Rosh HaShanah,¹ it is surprising that Yosef shaved at that time.²

Rashi comments that the shaving was done because of *kevod ha-malkhut*; nonetheless, working under the assumption that the Avot (and, apparently Yosef included) observed the entire Torah before it was given, it would be expected that he would refrain from shaving on Rosh Hashanah. This question prompted an extensive literature in later generations, analyzing the halakhic considerations from every angle — is shaving a violation *mi-d'orayta* of *Hilkhos Yom Tov*; perhaps

the action is to be considered a *melakhah she'einah tzrichah ligufah*; can it be excused under his unique circumstances; what role does *kevod ha-malkhut* play in the question; perhaps the situation is considered *pikuach nefesh*; perhaps it is relevant that Yosef was presumably shaved by someone else, etc.³

Kevod Ha-Malchut

The *Chatam Sofer*, for one, seemed bothered by the very question itself.⁴ The notion of the Avot keeping the Torah, he argued, was a fine and important idea, but not an actual obligation. *Kevod Ha-Malkhut*, by contrast, is a genuine *din*, one that had to be observed even before the giving of the Torah, by force of law. Thus, *kevod ha-malkhut*, which was commanded, certainly overrides Yom Tov, which was “*eino metzuveh vi-oseh*.”

The *Chatam Sofer's* comment is itself difficult to understand. *Kevod ha-malchut* is also a law of the Torah, derived from pesukim.⁵ By what logic is this law separated from the other mitzvot of the Torah, which he deems voluntary in the Pre-Sinaitic era, while this one is not?

In considering the obligation of *kevod ha-malkhut*, R. Simcha Zissel Broide, the late Rosh Yeshivah of the Chevron Yeshivah, posits⁶ a number of theories explaining its importance. Among the five points that he makes is what he considers a fundamental principle of the human personality: It is crucial for one's spiritual development that he possess the ability to appreciate great things. One who is jaded and cynical, who views all things with disinterest, is unable to attain any kind of meaningful spiritual maturity. Thus,

it is critical to hone one's awareness of the extraordinary, and the attitude one brings toward royalty is certainly reflective of this vital attribute.

It is interesting to note that there is another (seasonally appropriate) comment of the *Chatam Sofer* that is also somewhat surprising. We generally assume that Chanukah and Purim, clearly post-Biblical in origin, are observed as *chiyuvim mi-de-rabanan*.⁷ Nonetheless, maintains the *Chatam Sofer*,⁸ if one would let the occasions of Chanukah or Purim pass by without any acknowledgement, this would be the wrong thing on a level *mi-d'orayta*.

Appreciating Greatness and Majesty

Perhaps the common element between the two statements of the *Chatam Sofer* — his comment regarding Yosef, and his assertion regarding Chanukah — is the fundamental necessity of cultivating an appreciation for greatness and majesty. One who is unreceptive to the miraculous and the majestic is incapable of approaching the Torah with any potential for success. If one is unmoved by the extraordinary, then the greatest gift of all eternity can fail to move and inspire; not for any internal deficiency in the item, but because of the closed “eye of the beholder”.

This issue is indicated as well by the comments of the Ramban on the pasuk⁹ following the giving of the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot*, when Moshe

tells the Jewish people not to be afraid, because G-d has come “*ba-avur nasot etchem*.” The Ramban understands this in the sense of *nisayon*, to test the Jewish people, to see if they are capable of feeling an appreciation for the awe-inspiring display that accompanied *Matan Torah*.

As R. Yitzchak Hutner explains,¹⁰ this “test” was a crucial part of the process of the bestowing of the Torah upon the Jewish people. If the Jews failed to be moved by such a display, then they cannot fulfill their roles as the guardians of the Torah; they will be unreceptive to the infinite treasures of its content, and thus immune to its influence.

In this sense, R. Hutner notes the Maharal of Prague's interpretation of the Talmud's statement that the *churban Ha-Bayit* took place because the Jews failed to recite *Birkhot Ha-Torah*.¹¹ This passage has long challenged commentators, both because of the apparently disproportional nature of the punishment, and the well-known fact that the Jews of that era were guilty of several other egregious offenses. The Maharal explained¹² that the Talmud is not claiming that the lack of *Birkhot Ha-Torah* is the punishable offense; indeed, the *churban* was provoked by the other offenses committed at that time. Rather, the Talmud's question was this: since we know that the Jews of that time were involved in the study of Torah, how is it also possible that they were guilty of such transgressions? Should not their *talmud Torah* have influenced

them toward a more righteous path?

To this, explains the Talmud, it is commented that the Jews of that time did not recite a berakhah on the Torah. They were not awestruck by the experience; they were not moved by the privilege to express gratitude to He who bestowed this great gift. If that was their attitude, they were not in a position to be influenced by the Torah's content.

The *Chatam Sofer* is reminding us, in his two comments, that no relationship with Torah can be complete without a sense of the majestic and the miraculous. Before the giving of the Torah, the Avot were not technically obligated in mitzvot; but if they were lacking an awe of majesty, they would not have been the Avot. Before the events of Chanukah, there was no obligation to light candles or recite Hallel; but in the generations after, one who can casually fails to do so is shown to be flawed in his relationship with Torah at a fundamental level. The convergence of Miketz and Chanukah provides us with a reminder that allowing the magnificent to become mundane is a danger to the very definition of the Jewish personality.

Endnotes

1. *Rosh HaShanah* 10b.
2. *Bereishit* 41:14.
3. See, for example, R. Asher Weiss, *Minchat Asher al ha-Torah*, *Bereishit* #56.
4. See his *chiddushim* to *Bereishit*. It should



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be noted that there are several editions of the *chiddushim* of the *Chatam Sofer* to the Torah, under the titles *Torat Moshe*, *Torat Moshe HaShalem*, *Chiddushei Chatam Sofer*, *Mei-Otzrot HaChatam Sofer*, etc. In many of those editions, the *Chatam Sofer* does deal with the question more directly. The comment mentioned here can be found in the edition printed in R. Yehudah Horowitz's *Gilyonei Mahari al Sefer Chatam Sofer al ha-Torah*.

5. Possible sources include *Bereishit* 48:2 (see Rashi) or *Shemot* 6:13 (see *Mechilta*, *Bo*, ch. 13).

6. *Sam Derekh*, *Bereishit*, II, pp. 117.

7. Setting aside, for a moment, the possibility that the *mitzvot* of Purim, as *divrei Kabbalah*, might have *di-orayta* status.

8. *Responsa Chatam Sofer*, *Orach Chayim*, 208.

9. *Shemot* 20:16.

10. *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Shavuot* #8.

11. *Bava Metziah* 85b.

12. *Hakdamah* to *Tiferet Yisrael*.

The Symbolism of the Menorah

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In a long excursus in his *Commentary on Chumash*, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch gives a detailed view of what the Menorah represents. Rav Hirsch¹ quotes the Talmudic conclusion² that there are two elements necessary, at least *lechatchila*, in sculpting the Menorah — it must be fashioned of gold, and it must be formed out of a single piece, *mikshah*.³ What, though, if there is not enough gold on hand? Then, says the Gemara after an extended back and forth, you are allowed to use other metals, and in that case it

is not necessary for the Menorah to be a single piece; the parts may be soldered together. Rav Hirsch reads the verb *תיעשה* almost as a passive command — one way or another, the Menorah must be made. There is the ideal way to make it — of one piece of hammered gold. And then there is the alternative way using any metal, and any number of pieces.

Why is it so important to have a Menorah even if not in its ideal form? The *Midrash Tanchuma* imagines Aharon's reaction as he watches the gifts being brought by the tribal leaders in the lead up to the dedication of the Mishkan, and wonders if he has missed out. "Don't worry," God reassures him. "Your gift is greater than theirs, for you will be able to light the Menorah forever."⁴ Aharon's is a gift that keeps on giving and involves him and his descendants in daily *avodah* in the Mishkan and the Bet ha-Mikdash. Ramban, to be sure, wonders how this can be referred to as "forever"; were not the First and Second Temples destroyed? Where is the continuity? He suggests that the midrash is alluding to the Chanukah miracle, which has a continuing resonance even post-churban.⁵

Rav Hirsch notes that on a basic level the significance of the Menorah is plain. The Menorah provides light, which symbolizes knowledge.⁶ Standing opposite the Shulchan (representing material prosperity) in the Mishkan and near the Aron with the Tablets, the light of the Menorah symbolizes a nation whose life is grounded in the Torah. But, he continues at great length, while light can allude to knowledge and spiritual enlightenment, it more often represents a "source of growth and life, of unfolding and flowering, of

undisturbed progress and happiness, of joy and bliss."⁷ Light not only illuminates life; it awakens life.⁸ Light can imply perception and understanding but also the joy of living, the consciousness of growing life. The source of light, says Rav Hirsch, is *ruach*, the spirit that "grants knowledge, insight, and wisdom, and at the same time motivates moral will and moral action."⁹

This idea is underscored by the words of Zechariah that we read for the Haftarah of Shabbat Chanukah. Zechariah, asked to describe what he sees, observes an elaborate gold candelabrum (albeit not precisely in the form of the Menorah of the Mishkan (Zech. 2:2)). But Zechariah is unsure of the meaning of his vision and asks the angel to explain. The heavenly response is stirring and memorable:

לֹא בְחֵיל, וְלֹא בְכֹחַ--כִּי אִם-בְּרוּחִי, אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת.

Not by might, not by force but by My spirit, says the Lord.

Zechariah 4:6

The political leader Zerubavel will achieve greatness for himself and the nation and overcome the enormous challenges he faces if he concentrates on the spirit. To be sure, Zerubavel is the leader, not the teacher of the people. His role (sadly unrealized at the end) is to recognize God's will and carry it out.

This, according to R. Hirsch, is the dual lesson of the Menorah. We must combine accurate perception and appropriate action. As another great prophet observes:

...רוּחַ ה'--רוּחַ חֲכָמָה וּבִינָה, רוּחַ עֲצָה וְגִבּוֹרָה, רוּחַ דַּעַת, וְיִרְאַת ה'.

And the spirit of God ... the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit

of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of God.

Yeshayahu 11:2

Yeshayahu enumerates three pairs of words (3 X 2 = 6), each representing a branch of the Menorah. Each branch points toward the central branch, the *ruach*, the spirit of God.

Concludes Rav Hirsch, the spirit of God “is not just the source of theoretical knowledge and perception, but the source of both perception *and* action.”¹⁰

That is why Aharon was comforted with the knowledge that his children would always light the Menorah. They would be the ones to spread the knowledge of God and the ability to bring that knowledge to life. The lesson is sometimes perfectly reproduced — the Menorah is carved from a block of pure gold. But even if the ideal cannot be experienced, in times when the Menorah needs to be cobbled together from baser metals, it is crucial that Aharon’s children be there to bring the light — the spirit of God — to the children of Israel and to mankind.

Endnotes

1. *The Hirsch Chumash* (Feldheim, 2002) “Shemos” 25:31 p. 567.

2. BT *Menachot* 28a.

3. Think of Michelangelo paring down a block of marble.

4. *Midrash Tanchuma, Behalotcha*, 8, 5.

5. Ramban, *Bamidbar* 82.

6. *Shemos* 25:39 p. 570.

7. E.g., “There will I cause the horn of David to flourish; there I prepared a lamp for my anointed.” (*Tehillim* 132:17). (The translation, by the way, of “*keren*” as horn which the English translator (and others to be sure) adopted is quite lame and misses the metaphorical allusion to victory and success. See *Tehillim* 89:18).

8. *Ibid*, p. 572.

9. *Ibid*, p. 572.

10. *Ibid*, p.572.

It’s All About the Hallel

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

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In a poll of “The top 8 practices most commonly associated with Chanukah,” Hallel would likely rank behind the chanukiah, latkes, dreidel, sufganiyot, gelt, Maoz Tzur and Al HaNisim, and perhaps even sfenj (Moroccan doughnuts). However, Rambam linked Hallel and Chanukah closely; in his *Mishneh Torah* code of law, Rambam began the laws of Chanukah by describing Hallel first, even before addressing lighting the chanukiah. Why did Rambam prioritize the connection between Chanukah and Hallel?¹

The Original Celebration

First, it is worth noting that the chanukiah may appear after Hallel simply because it was not part of the original Chanukah celebration. As noted by Rabbi Yitzchak Yehudah Trunk (*Chasdei Avot* 17:17) and

Rabbi Betzalel Zolty (*Mishnat Yaavetz* 73:1), among others, the Talmud’s description of the history of Chanukah omits the chanukiah entirely:

שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד. נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה אחרת, קבעום ועשאוים ימים טובים בהלל והודאה:

For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they contaminated all of the oil in the Sanctuary, and when the monarchy of the house of the Chashmonaim mustered their strength and defeated them, [the Chashmonaim] searched and found only one jug of oil marked with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. There was only enough to kindle for one day, but a miracle occurred, and they kindled from it for eight days. The next year, they established them and made them Yamim Tovim, with Hallel and thanks.

Shabbat 21b

Similarly, the Rambam’s code of law seems to mention the chanukiah only as a secondary commemoration of the miracle:

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל, ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס, וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנוכה והן אסורין בהספד ותענית כימי הפורים, והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים כקריאת המגילה.

Because of this, the sages of that generation enacted that these eight



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days, from the night of the 25th of Kislev, should be days of joy and Hallel, and they light lamps in the evening at the entrances of houses on each night of the eight nights, to demonstrate and reveal the miracle. And these days are called “Chanukah,” and one may neither eulogize nor fast on them, like the days of Purim. And lighting lamps on them is a rabbinic mitzvah, like reading the Megillah.

Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Megillah v'Chanukah 3:3

Further, our tefillah of Al haNisim does say that after the military victory, “they lit lamps in the courtyards of Your sanctum,” but commentators have long explained that this is likely not a reference to an institution of the chanukiah. Rather, it may refer to lighting the Menorah of the Beit haMikdash,² or lighting lamps in joy and celebration.³

These three sources, among others, have led some authorities to suggest that our lighting of the chanukiah was instituted only later, to continue the light of the Menorah in the Beit haMikdash and thereby commemorate the victory of the Chashmonaim. But even without this revision of the chanukiah’s history, the point behind it is indisputable: the explicit emphasis of our sages’ description of Chanukah, in the Talmud, Al haNisim and beyond, has been upon Hallel. This emphasis is one reason to include Hallel in the Laws of Chanukah. Looking deeper into the nature of Hallel, though, we may find a stronger connection.

Processing the Miracle

In discussing the Hallel of Pesach, Rabbi Aharon Kotler⁴ explained that there are two types of Hallel: The ritual of a formal festival, and the reaction to a miracle.

In context, Rabbi Kotler used this analysis to explain why the Talmud and Rabbi Yosef Karo give separate reasons for the lack of a full Hallel in the latter part of Pesach. The Talmud⁵ says it’s because the latter days of Pesach do not have a unique korban, and so their festival aspect is reduced. Rabbi Karo⁶ says it’s because the Egyptians drowned on the seventh day of Pesach, diminishing the joy of the miracle. Each explanation addresses a different element of Hallel.

Unlike Pesach, Chanukah does not warrant Hallel as the ritual of a festival; as a post-biblical celebration, it has no korban. Instead, as noted in the Talmud itself,⁷ the Hallel of Chanukah is purely of the second variety — a response to a miracle. But this Hallel does more than just express gratitude; it is how we process and decipher the miracle, causing us to appreciate its wonder and to fully experience the joy. As Rabbi Kotler wrote:

אף מה שהאדם רואה בעיניו, מהצורך לבאר לעצמו מה שהוא רואה ולקבוע בהכרתו.
Even regarding that which a person sees with his own eyes — he needs to interpret for himself that which he sees, and to establish it in his mind.

The Jews of the second century BCE knew no prophet; no message from G-d interpreted the military victory and the miracle of the oil. Perhaps

there were those in that generation who, given time, could have explained away their military success and the longevity of the oil. But we preempted that mistake by creating “Yamim Tovim, with Hallel and thanks.”

We arrived at the conclusion that this was a miracle on our own, via Hallel. That Chanukah celebration acknowledging G-d was a true fulfillment of the mission of Hallel, the Jewish nation spontaneously recognizing what Hashem had done for us. And so Rambam placed its laws properly, at the front and center of the Chanukah celebration that Hallel itself catalyzed — and this act of Hallel should remain the essence of our Chanukah celebration today.

May we soon witness the completion of our redemption, and may we comprehend the Divine Hand in the miracle and so sing Hallel as a nation once again.

Endnotes

1. It is also worth noting that Rambam places the laws of Hallel not in *Hilchot Tefillah*, but in *Hilchot Chanukah*, strengthening the connection to Chanukah.
2. See *Reshimot Shiurim* of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik to *Succah* 51a.
3. See Avudraham *Chanukah*, and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson cited at <https://chabadlibrary.org/books/admur/tm/5726-1/310/index.htm>.
4. *Mishnat Rebbe Aharon*, Pesach pg. 3.
5. *Arachin* 10a-b.
6. *Beit Yosef Orach Chaim* 490, based on *Megillah* 10b.
7. *Arachin* 10b.



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The Luminous and Numinous Light of Chanukah

Rabbi Yehuda Willig

Maggid Shiur, RIETS

It's fascinating to note that we find several connections between the light of the menorah and the creation of the world. Let's cite a few examples.

On Chanukah we light a total of 36 candles if following *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. The Rokeach explains the significance of the 36 total candles as corresponding to the 36 hours that Adam benefited from the special light of creation. Chazal teach that this primordial light was subsequently hidden for the tzadikim in the future.

In addition, the 25th word in the Torah is אור. The context of this word is in the description of Hashem's creation of light. The *Sefer Hatoda'ah* expounds on this and suggests that this is a hint to the light of the Chanukah menorah, which commences on the 25th day of Kislev. Furthermore, the light of the menorah illuminates a darkness hinted at in the pasuk of *v'choshech al p'nei tehom*, darkness over the surface of the deep (the second pasuk in the Torah discussing creation), which the Midrash says is a reference to the dark period of the Greek oppression that took place in the leadup to the Chanukah story.

Moreover, the Shlah Hakadosh points out that the *gematria* of "יהי" in the creation of light (יהי אור) on the first



day of the universe is 25, underscoring yet another connection between Chanukah and creation. He adds that just as the light of creation was restricted from our use, so too the light of the menorah of Chanukah was restricted from personal use.

How do we explain all these connections? Is there some deeper connection that binds Chanukah to creation?

The *Sefas Emes* suggests that the light of the menorah is in fact a continuation of the light of creation! When Hashem hid the original light of creation, it can be found, in part, inside the light of Chanukah. For this reason, says the *Sefas Emes*, one should rejoice extra on the days of Chanukah, days that we can access this primordial light.

Considering this, we can explain why so many traces of the light of Chanukah are contained in the world's creation, specifically in the creation of the first light.

Perhaps we can add an idea to this and offer the following explanation. We are taught that the very first day of creation, the day that Hashem also created light, was the 25th day of Elul, six days before Rosh Hashanah. We also find in the writings of Chazal that creation is referred to as birth; Hashem, so to speak, gave birth to the world.

Based on the comparison of creation to birth, homiletically we can suppose that there was also a period of pregnancy leading up to the world's birth. In this understanding, conception of the world would be nine months prior to the 25th of Elul. This would be precisely the 25th of Kislev. In other words, the very beginning of creation, the moment of conception of this world, is the first day of Chanukah!

This would be another explanation of why the day of Chanukah is so spiritually charged, as Hashem, *k'viyachol*, began the first steps of creation and the illumination of this



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heavenly light on this day. Based on this, we can say that Chanukah is not rooted in creation as the *Sefas Emes* suggests, but rather creation is rooted in Chanukah! This would explain all the connections we mentioned above.

The significance of this last idea is quite great. Chanukah is a time when we can tap into this enormous power and spirit. It is a time to consider our future, a time to sow the seeds for bringing ourselves and the entire world to a more sublime space.

Chanukah: The Holiday of Mindfulness

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We cannot help but be enamored by the beautifully lit menorahs as they illuminate our windowsills throughout the holiday of Chanukah. The dancing flames atop the candles are mesmerizing and can immediately catch the eye of any passerby. Yet, what is so interesting about the lights of the menorah is that we are not allowed to have any benefit from them. Famously, we recite the passage of “*Haneirot Hallalu*” following the lighting of that first candle, and in this passage we add the words: “*ve’ain lanu reshut l’hishtamesh bahem ela lirotam bilvad*” — And we do not have the permission to use them [the lights], just to look at them.”

If we are not meant to use the candles for illumination, then what purpose do they serve? You might answer that they are there to look at, after all that is exactly what we say in the passage

of “*Haneirot Hallalu*” quoted above. But in all honesty, how many people actually sit and observe their menorah after it is lit, how many people would turn on a lamp in their home and just stare at it? Not only is this not done, but it is actually a danger to our eyesight to look directly at a light source for too long. We must therefore endeavor to understand why we light candles if not to benefit from their radiance.

The Talmud (*Sukkah* 46a) notes that there are two elements of this mitzvah, lighting *and* observing the candles. If one is lighting, then on the first night, three blessings are recited, and on the subsequent nights, two. However, if one is simply watching, then on the first night, two blessings are recited and then one blessing on the nights to follow. The observer does not recite the blessing of “*l’hadlik ner shel Chanukah*” but still says “*she’asa nisim l’avoteinu*,” because he is involved in the acknowledgement and publicization of the miracle. Although we infrequently arrive at the halachic reality in which someone would only observe and not light (or have someone light on their behalf), this is a potential practice that one can theoretically utilize.

Tosafot (*ibid*) question this odd practice, contrasting lighting Chanukah candles to other mitzvot. The Baalei Tosafot wonder: why is it that regarding other commandments such as lulav and sukkah that we are not obligated or even inclined to gaze upon them, whereas with Chanukah that seems to be one of the central facets of the commandment? They note that it is because of our appreciation for the unusual miracle of Chanukah that we are compelled to thank Hashem, even when we are

not fulfilling the commandment of lighting on our own.

Moreover, there is indeed a lesser known but compelling custom that developed over the years, which encourages those who light to sit by the menorah for a period of time. Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (ADeReT), father-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, was a proponent of such a custom and he writes about his great love for the commandment of lighting the Chanukah candles, and how he would be sure to have them lit for as long as possible. He describes his practice as follows:¹

התענגתי לשבת בחדר שבו הנרות, לראותם ולהסתכל בהם בכל רגע, ולא הלכתי מאותו החדר רק כשהייתי אנוס על פי עבודת הציבור. *I would take pleasure in sitting in the room with the candles, to look and gaze upon them for every moment, and I would not leave the room unless there was a great need for me to be involved with communal work.*

Indeed, others shared in such a custom as well, and it is appropriate for one, at the very least, to spend a few moments gazing at the candles and internalizing what they represent – the great miracles and support that our Creator has and continues to provide for His beloved people.

Somewhat reminiscent of us turning toward the flames of the menorah is the Biblical scene in which Moshe Rabbeinu turns toward the flame of the burning bush.

וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָכֵי ה' אֵלָיו בְּלֶבֶת אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֵּרָא וְהָיָה הַסִּנֵּה בְעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינֶנּוּ אֶכְלֵ. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הַמְּרָאָה הַגְּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה. וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּבִּי.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed,

and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."

Exodus 3:2-4

Rabbi Avraham Schorr² suggests that there is a deep connection between this verse and the month of Kislev in which we celebrate the holiday of Chanukah. Notice in the bolded words above that the first letter of each of these words, when combined and rearranged, spells out "כסלו" — "Kislev." The reason being, says Rabbi Schorr, that it is specifically during this time of year that we must "... awaken within ourselves the yearning to see this 'great light,' to see the burning bush, the fire of holiness and Godliness that burns within us."

With this, we can understand that the transcendent custom of gazing into the flames of the menorah is much deeper than the recognition of the great miracles that Hashem did for us so many years ago. Rather, when we look into the flames, we are to reflect on the fire that exists within each and every one of us; that we possess the greatness, strength, and courage to become the best versions of ourselves. As the flames dance in front of our eyes, we are meant to yearn for the sanctity and potential that we have to grow to unprecedented heights in our relationship with our Creator.

How does looking at a fire enable us to do this? What is it about the contemplative state of staring at the flames of the menorah that might help us achieve a heightened level of inner confidence? Life naturally moves at a rapid pace. In fact, our rabbis were sensitive to this reality when they taught us, אָנוּ רָצִים וְהֵם רָצִים. אָנוּ רָצִים וְהֵם רָצִים — "We run and they run. We run to the World to come, and they run to a life of futility."³ While we typically use this statement as a proof-text to living a life of Torah and mitzvot, perhaps even more interesting is that everyone is running somewhere. This is the natural way of the world, that life is often very busy.

Perhaps Chanukah offers us the opportunity to stop running, for just a few days. The eight days of Chanukah are meant for self-reflection, meditation, and rejuvenation. This time of year, when the nights are their darkest and it is easiest to lose track of who we are and what we are here to accomplish, Chanukah offers us the chance to take a break from doing in order to ponder who we are and who we can be. In short, Chanukah is a holiday of mindfulness.

In the late 1970's a professor by the name of Jon Kabat-Zinn started a movement that would fundamentally change the way the world viewed treatment of physical and mental illness. Instead of seeking external remedies, mindfulness seeks to find a solution from within. Kabat-Zinn

explains, "Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally... in the service of self-understanding and wisdom." It may sound simple, or even too good to be true, but mindfulness, when practiced correctly, has been found to be an effective tool in the treatment of chronic diseases and disorders.⁴ There is an incredible capacity for self-healing that we can achieve by simply *being* in the moment.

This is the hidden meaning behind the Chanukah candles. We may not have permission to use them, because that is all we ever do; we are always doing and in pursuit of something. On Chanukah, we may only look at them, reflect on their meaning and on our greater purpose. If we can take these eight days and utilize them to stop running and start introspecting, then although we may not use the Chanukah candles for illumination, *we* will instead be a source of illumination to the world.

Endnotes

1. *Chanukah*, compiled and written by Rabbi Tzvi Cohen, page 110, footnote 8.
2. *Halekach V'Halibuv*, 5763, Parshat Vayeitzei, Page 42.
3. Part of the prayer we recite upon completion of a tractate of Talmud based on the *Berachot* 28b.
4. <https://www.mindful.org/jon-kabat-zinn-defining-Mindfulness/>



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