

# קולנו



# שמע

SHEMA KOLEINU: DIVREI TORAH FROM THE REBBEIM, TALMIDIM, AND FACULTY OF MTA:

# CHANUKAH 5784



**THE MARSHA STERN TALMUDICAL ACADEMY /**  
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## Why Did Chazal Wait to Establish Chanukah? Rabbi Michael Taubes ('76) - Rosh Yeshiva

The famous passage in the Gemara in *Shabbos* (21b) which outlines the origins of the holiday of Chanukah relates the story about the great miracle of the oil burning in the *Beis Hamikdash* for eight days when there was enough for only one day, and concludes by reporting that “*leshanah acheres*”—the following year—the Rabbinic authorities of the time established these eight days starting on the 25th of *Kislev* as days of praise and thanksgiving. Given the clear import of this miraculous event, along with the unlikely military triumph of the Jews over their Greek enemies and their allies, we may ask why *Chazal* did not respond more immediately and enact the holiday right away, that very year.

One might answer simply that they did in fact declare this holiday in the immediate aftermath of the miracle, and the intention of the Gemara is actually that they instituted it *to be observed* the following year, but not that they first instituted it *during* the following year. Indeed, the Ritva there (*d”h leschanah*) posits that at the time when the miracle was in fact taking place, that is, during that original year, *Chazal* had no way of knowing with certainty how long the miracle would go on; in other words, they perceived the miracle immediately, after the very first day (and after winning the war), but they did not yet announce a holiday then because the miracle, as we all know,

continued, and they were obviously unsure just how long it would last. The implication of this approach is that once the miracle did in fact end, *Chazal* indeed announced the holiday immediately, to be observed the following year.

Along similar lines, the *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Orach Chaim* 670:5) points out that according to the *Midrash* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:2), the *Mishkan* in the days of Moshe *Rabbeinu* was actually completed on the 25th of *Kislev*, though its inauguration and initial operation were delayed for certain reasons until the following *Nissan*. For this reason, even before the miracle with the oil, the *Chachomim* at the time of the rededication of the *Beis Hamikdash* following the conquest of the enemies who had defiled it, wanted to establish an eight-day holiday modeled after the original dedication of the *Mishkan*, which included seven preparatory days and then the actual initiation day (see *Vayikra* 8:33–9:24). Moreover, he cites from *Sefer Chashmonaim* that during the battle with their enemies at that time, the Jews were unable to properly observe the eight days of *Sukkos* with *Shemini Atzeres*, and following their victory, they wanted to “make it up” with another eight-day holiday. When they subsequently saw that the miracle of the oil lasted for exactly eight days, they took it as a divine sign of support for the enactment



of specifically an eight-day holiday. But again, this was not evident until after the conclusion of the miracle, hence the delay in declaring the holiday—though the delay was not necessarily all the way until the following year.

Some note, though, that the above does not seem to fit well with the simple reading of the text of the Gemara, which implies that the very establishment of the holiday was in fact delayed until a year later, and other answers are thus advanced. In the 19th century, Rav Baruch ben Shmuel Meir Lawski of Krynck, Poland (*Shu"t Minchas Baruch* 109:3) suggested that the holiday was decreed in two stages: the first, even prior to the miracle with the oil, reflected a celebratory commemoration during the very year of the story itself, while the second, accompanied by the institution of the days as days of praise and thanksgiving with their attendant laws, took place the following year. The Netziv, in his commentary to the *She'iltos* of Rav Achai Gaon (*She'ilta* 26 No. 1), points to a Gemara in *Megillah* (14a) which indicates that there is a definitive obligation upon people who themselves experience a significant *yeshuah* from mortal danger to sing praises to Hashem at the time of the salvation, but that this obligation does not automatically extend to continuing to mark the occasion of this salvation each year on its calendar anniversary. Consequently, one may argue that during the year when the actual Chanukah miracle took place, there was no need for *Chazal* to introduce a formal enactment of a holiday to celebrate, as the people who experienced the events surely felt everything on their own, and they were indeed required themselves to express thanks to Hashem, which they presumably did. The following year, however, that requirement was no longer in effect, and it was at that time, a year later, that the establishment of the holiday by *Chazal* became necessary, and the Gemara thus reports the matter accordingly.

Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, the great Sephardic authority, in his commentary to that Gemara (*Ben Yehoyada* to *Shabbos ibid.*, *d"h leshanah*), states that at the time when the miracle actually took place, *Chazal* were unsure whether a holiday was indeed warranted. After all, they could not be sure that the divine impact of the miracle would continue to be felt much later; maybe the impression would wear off. Only upon seeing a full year later that the divine light did in fact continue to radiate from this miracle did *Chazal* see fit to institute a holiday. In a similar vein,

**“After all, they could not be sure that the divine impact of the miracle would continue to be felt much later...”**

The *Bnei Yissaschar* writes in a number of places (see, for example, *Ma'amarei Chodesh Kislev–Teves*, *Ma'amar* 3, *Ner Mitzvah* No. 1) that *Chazal* first needed to see what kind of effect this great miracle would have long-term upon the Jewish people; only once it was clear to them, a year later, that its importance was fully appreciated did they institute the holiday of Chanukah. The message of these latter suggestions is that the occurrence of a miracle, no matter how great, is by itself not enough of a reason to enact a holiday. Indeed, the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (*Perek* 5 *Mishnah* 5) lists ten fantastic miracles which took place in the *Beis Hamikdash* on a regular basis; we do not have a major holiday commemorating any of them. There were likewise other great military victories which our people enjoyed over various enemies in our history, and yet they are not marked by the observance of a holiday like Chanukah. What, then, was special about this miracle and this military triumph? The Jewish people at the time of the Chanukah story, despite the fact that the *Beis Hamikdash* was still standing, were facing a major threat of assimilation and religious apathy, as many people were abandoning Hashem and traditional Judaism in favor of the attractive Greek and Hellenistic culture. By performing the miracle that allowed the small Jewish army which remained steadfast in their commitment to the Torah and the *mitzvos* to vanquish its more powerful opponents, and the miracle which allowed the small jar of oil to burn brightly in the *Beis Hamikdash* for eight days, Hashem sent the entire Jewish people a message, indicating that He is still present and that He expects and awaits their return to Him and His Torah. Would the people hear the message of these miracles and respond appropriately? After assessing the situation for an entire year, *Chazal* determined that indeed they had, and thus decided only then to establish the holiday of Chanukah, and that is what we celebrate and should be inspired by ourselves.



## From the Beis Medrash: Insights from Our Rebbeim & Faculty



**Rabbi Tanchum Cohen**

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### **The Mystery of The Missing Menorah: A Halachic Whodunit**

If someone asked you to imagine, draw, or paint a Chanukah scene, *Neiros Chanukah* would most likely figure prominently in the image you create. Yet when the Gemara provides an ancient sketch of Jews keeping Chanukah, the *neiros* seem to be strangely absent. In the midst of introducing the halachos of Chanukah, 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 Chanukah? Our rabbis have taught, "The 25th of Kislev [begins] the eight days of Chanukah 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. (Shabbos 21b)*

The *braisa* opens with the prohibitions – fasting and eulogies are antithetical to the joy of Chanukah – and closes with the positives: the *Chachamim* instituted Chanukah 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 *Menorah* oil. [1] Why is the rabbinic *mitzvah* of *hadlakas neiros* strikingly absent?

In a public shiur delivered in *Yerushalayim* during the 1970s, Rav Betzael Zolty [2] offered an intriguing historical-halachic solution to this mystery. Rav Zolty's approach is anchored in the discussion of the following double sugya. *Maseches Shabbos* offers



two separate – and somewhat contradictory – discussions of the question of practical benefit from *Neiros Chanukah*: 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. (Shabbos 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 בזווית עליו. ה"נ שלא יהו מצות בזווית עליו

*Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav Assi: It is prohibited to count money opposite Chanukah 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 braisa [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. (Shabbos 22a)*

In this second passage, Rav Assi forbids counting money by the Chanukah 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 Chanukah 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

# **“the Chachamim instituted Chanukah as a yom tov celebrated with Hallel and thanksgiving...Why is the rabbinic mitzvah of hadlakas neiros strikingly absent?”**

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 mitzvah*, disrespect of the *mitzvah* at hand. The first passage refers to use of the light to fulfill another *mitzvah*, such as enjoying reading a sefer or eating a Shabbos meal by Chanukah 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 Chanukah lights parallels the wholesale prohibition against any benefit from the light of the *Menorah* in the *Beis haMikdash*. Rav's accepted opinion reflects the principle of *zecher laMikdash* as described in *Maseches Rosh Hashanah*:

מתני' בראשונה היה הלולב ניטל במקדש שבעה ובמדינה יום אחד. משחרב בית המקדש, התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שיהא 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 Hashanah 30a)

The destruction of *Beis haMikdash* 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 *mitzvah* of *Neiros Chanukah* was instituted as a *zecher la-Mikdash*, as a mnemonic parallel to the *mitzvah* of lighting the *Menorah* in the *Mikdash*. As a result, we make no use whatsoever of the Chanukah light much as we would be absolutely forbidden to make any use of the *Menorah* light in the *Mikdash*. [4] Rav Zolty highlights the remarkable implication: the rabbinic *mitzvah* of *hadlakas neiros* was instituted after the destruction of the second *Beis haMikdash*, well over a century after the miracle of Chanukah took place. While we are familiar with *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miraculous story of Chanukah, as the *telos* of the requirement to kindle *ner Chanukah* [5], Rabbeinu Zerachya seems to understand that this rabbinic *mitzvah* 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 haBayis* when both purposes were relevant. [6]

This concept solves the mystery of the missing *menorah*. The passage we began with is a particularly ancient *braisa*, which records the original institution of Chanukah 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 Chanukah* was added later, following the Roman destruction of the *Mikdash*, and it is therefore recorded only in later texts such as the Mishna (*Bava Kamma* 6:6) and Gemara (*Shabbos* 21a) which were composed after *churban haBayis*. May our engagement with *Ner Chanukah* 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 Chanukah* themes — *pirsumei nisa* 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 *braisa* is a reference to reciting *Al haNissim*, which enhances *Modim*, the gratitude section of *tefillah*. Rambam, however, appears to have interpreted “thanksgiving” as a reference to *Neiros Chanukah* (see footnote 4 below)

[2] *Mishnas Ya’avetz, Orach Chaim* 73:1.

[3] *Ma’or ha-Katan* to Rif, *Shabbos* 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 Chanukah* as *zecher le-Mikdash*: the phrasing of the *birkas ha-mitzvah* (Ra’avad, *Hilchos Berachos* 11:15) and the centrality of the act of lighting (*hadlaka osa mitzvah*, per Rashi, *Shabbos* 22b). In pre-Chanukah *shiurim*, Rav Hershel Schachter has added several additional *nafka minah*: the position of *She’iltos* (qtd. by *Rosh, Shabbos* 2:9) that leftover oil may not be used after Chanukah, 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 Chanukah* 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* (*Chanukah* 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 (*Shabbos* 21b) that *kavesa ein zakuk lah*, that this rabbinic *mitzvah* was structured as a required act of lighting a *ner* (while *pirsumei nisa* alone would instead have suggested a requirement that the *ner* be and remain lit, *kavesa zakuk lah*). Additionally, Ramban (*Beha’alosecha* 8:2) interprets several *midrashim* as presenting *ner Chanukah* as a perennial continuation of *hadlakas ha-Menorah* in the *Mikdash* (as opposed to the *korbanos*, which have no such perennial continuation); this appears to be a robust formulation of *Ner Chanukah* as *zecher la-Mikdash*. Moreover, Rambam disagrees with Rabbeinu Zerachya’s approach to practical benefit from Chanukah candlelight (*Hilchos Megilla ve-Chanukah* 4:6), and he may follow the Rif in rejecting the abovementioned position of *She’iltos* regarding post-Chanukah leftover oil (Rif, *Shabbos* 9a and Rambam 4:5; see also *Hagahos Maimoniyos* 4:4\*). This is consistent with his interpretation of *hoda’a* (*Shabbos* 21a) as *ner Chanukah* rather than



as *Al ha-Nissim*, and with his corresponding, explicit dating of *ner Chanukah* to the original institution of Chanukah (Rambam 3:3 and 4:12).

[5] *Shabbos* 23b.

[6] Perhaps *pirsumei nisa* alone was insufficient due to the concern of *bal tosif*. 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.

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## Flickering Lights in Dark Times: Thoughts from Rav Kook on Chanukah

### Suitable Wicks and Oils

The *Mishnah* in the Second *Perek* of *Maseches Shabbos* discusses which wicks and oils are suitable for *Hadlakas Neiros* on Shabbos. Certain materials may not be used for wicks since they make “the flame

sputter” and fail to burn evenly, and certain oils may not be used because “they do not flow freely to the wick.” However, with regard to Chanukah, the Gemara in *Shabbos* (21b) rules that these restrictions do not apply. Even wicks and oil that do not burn smoothly are permitted to be used for Chanukah lights. Why are all oils permitted for use on Chanukah even when lighting before Shabbos? Why this distinction between Shabbos and Chanukah?

*Chazal* require that Shabbos candles be lit from high-quality oils and wicks in order to prevent situations where one might be tempted to relight or adjust sputtering lights, which would lead to a desecration of Shabbos. They were more lenient, however, regarding Chanukah, since Chanukah candles need not be re-lit should the flame go out. Also, since it is prohibited to use their light for reading or other purposes, *Chazal* was far less concerned that one would attempt to relight a poorly-lit Chanukah candle.

### The Lights of Chanukah

Rav Kook explained that the special rules of Chanukah candles reflect the very nature of the Jewish struggle against Greek dominance, in both political and cultural arenas.

The authentic heritage of Israel is displayed through Torah. The Torah’s eternal wisdom is symbolized by the Shabbos candles, candles that require a pure oil that burns brightly and clearly.

However, there have been many times during their long history when the Jewish people have been attracted to the wisdom of other religions as well as drawn to the beliefs of other nations. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent when the Jewish people are ruled by other nations or exiled from their land. During these times of national vulnerability, many are drawn to the ideologies of powerful and successful nations, even if these beliefs are not thoroughly considered and may be based only on speculations and theories.

## “The special rules of Chanukah candles reflect the very nature of the Jewish struggle against Greek dominance...”

For such times, Hashem provided the Jewish people with brilliant *Talmidei Chachomim* who were able to defend the Torah by utilizing these foreign ideas. One example is the Rambam, who attempted where possible to reconcile the philosophy of Aristotle with the Torah.

### Short-Lived Flame

However, it is important to note that these foreign philosophies lack the eternal truth of *Torah*. They are like flickering flames that only illuminate for a short while. After a generation or two, the assumptions upon which these ideas are based are often refuted and eventually disintegrate. Utilizing foreign philosophies to bolster the Torah may be compared to lighting Chanukah candles with oils that fail to produce any source of light.

Nevertheless, when these beliefs are popular and widely accepted, the generation is strongly attached to them. If it were not possible to find some measure of agreement with the Torah, many would be skewed to reject the Torah altogether. In order to protect the nation, Hashem allowed the possibility of aligning these fashionable ideas in conjunction with the Torah's wisdom. They do not always line up perfectly with practical *Mitzvos* and *Halachic* rulings. In the words of the Talmud, "They do not flow freely to the wick", but with a little effort, they can be made to at least correspond partially.

We should be aware that such philosophies are not the eternal truth and we are not responsible for their accuracy. "When their light goes out, they need not be re-lit." Certainly, we should not make practical changes to Torah observance based on these ideas. *Halacha* tells us "it is forbidden to make use of its light." They are useful only to put troubled minds to rest, not as a true foundation with modern-day implications. Thus the special rules of Chanukah candles align accurately with the Jewish struggle against the Greeks, at a time when Hellenism and Greek wisdom dominated the world with its new ideas.

### Jewish Nationalism

There was a second sphere in which Jewish people contested the Greek empire: the military-political one. Here too, the Hasmonean rule did not follow the eternal path of *Bnei Yisrael*, which designated the monarchy to the descendants of Dovid *HaMelech* for all generations. The throne of Dovid is compared to an eternal flame, we say in our Shabbos *tefillos* "You promised him that his candle will never be extinguished". But the hour was not ripe for a King descending from Dovid, and the temporary rule of the Hasmoneans provided stability and independence for many years.

The dynasty of Dovid *HaMelech* combined both Torah scholarship and political leadership. The *Gemara* in *Brachos* (3b) tells us that Dovid studied Torah with great diligence day and night, and at the same time, he was energetic and decisive in establishing a prominent reign. Authentic Jewish nationalism must be based on the light of Torah as it says in Yeshaya (2:3) "From Tzion, Torah will come forth."

In summary, the laws of Chanukah lights reflect the transient quality of the Hasmonean victory, both spiritually and physically. Spiritually, the accommodation of foreign philosophies may be

partially reconciled with the Torah's teachings, as represented by oils that did not and will not burn well. And physically, a political rule not of the dynasty of Dovid *HaMelech*. This corresponds to the wicks that fail to hold a constant flame. These achievements provided light, although a weak and unsteady one, for those lacking true independence. They are only fit for the candles of Chanukah, establishing a holiday that was not inscribed for all generations in the Biblical canon as we are taught in the *Gemara Yomah* (29a). Yet even though they are not perfect, unlike the pure candles of Shabbos, we need this type of light during the precarious times of foreign occupation and exile.

### Kodesh Heim

Despite their shortcomings, the light of these candles is holy, *Kodesh Heim*. We should recognize in them the Yad Hashem, that Hashem prepared a path so that those attracted to the prevalent culture should not be cast astray. And the very fact that foreign ideas may be accommodated within the Torah is an indication that these ideas contain a seed of eternal truth, a small drop of pure oil, sealed with the stamp of the *Kohen Gadol*.



Rabbi Shimon Kerner, '77  
Maggid Shiur, 10th Grade

## Mosif V'holeich

If I asked you how many candles we light on Chanukah, you would probably do a quick calculation and come up with the number 44 (including the *shamash*). *Halacha* is very clear that one is one hundred percent *yotzei* lighting just one candle each night, fulfilling the basic requirement of *ner ish ubeiso*. If one wanted to go beyond that, he could fulfill the *mitzvah* at the *mehadrin* level which would be to light one candle per night, per person. In actuality, the predominant practice is to do this *mitzvah* at a level of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* – which according to the view of Beis Hillel means *mosif v'holeich* – we add 1 candle each night to mark the way we uniquely experience the miracle with each passing night. Why do we do this? What message can we draw from it?

I heard from Rav Moshe Tzvi Weinberg that perhaps one of the essential lessons of Chanukah is the lesson of *mosif v'holeich* – having a growth mindset.



We must constantly be striving to improve and avoid complacency at our current level. As life progresses, this means not only to grow quantitatively in terms of how much Torah we learn, how many *mitzvos* we do, or how often we participate in acts of *chesed*, but also to grow in our appreciation of Hashem's constant miracles and involvement in our lives.

The Pnei Menachem was once asked why G-d created gravity? He responded that we can learn an important lesson from it. We constantly face challenges that try to pull us down, but we must persevere, and exert ourselves to continue to rise and elevate ourselves. This is a fundamental lesson we can learn from the flames of the Chanukah candles. The flame is always looking to reach higher.

The *possuk* in *Mishlei* states: *chayim lemala lemaskil* – for the “*maskil*”, intelligent person, the best path of life is *lemala* (up) . The Gra adds another layer to this, explaining that he who doesn't always strive to grow, will by definition regress.

The *mizbeiach* was ascended via a ramp – *lo saale bmaalos al mizbechi*. Unless we try to ascend we will descend! Maybe the celebration of the *chanukas hamizbeiach* is highlighting not only the renewed altar but the symbolism of the ramp itself – *mosif v'holeich*.

## **“This is a fundamental lesson we can learn from the flames of the Chanukah candles. The flame is always looking to reach higher. ”**

We can never rest on our laurels, content to stay the same and coast through life. A Jew must always strive for more. *Mosif v'holeich* is a commitment to progress continuously. We cannot afford to be in the neutral zone.

We learn in the 1st *perek* of *Pirkei Avos* – *delo mosif yaseif* – he who doesn't add will cease. Most commentators say it refers to one's Torah study. If we don't always add to our time and depth in learning,

we will lose what we already have. Interestingly, it is the same *tanna* – Hillel, who says *mosif v'holeich*. This concept is not only in Torah study, but in all aspects of Judaism that we must strive for growth, or else *yaseif* – it will cease.

The Gemara in *Menachos* (99) relays a discussion between Ben Dama and his uncle R. Yishmael. Ben Dama asked his uncle, one such as I who has studied the entire Torah, may I study Greek wisdom? R. Yishmael responded by quoting the verse – “This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; rather you shall contemplate it day and night. Go out and seek a moment which is neither day nor night and study in that moment Greek wisdom.” The message is clear. No matter how much we study, there is always room to plumb the depths of Torah.

The Kozhnutzer *maggid* was quite ill but managed to live a long life. When asked *bameh haarachta yamim* – what's the secret of your longevity? He responded: “Whenever I finished a unit of learning or a *mitzvah* endeavor, I immediately began something new. I am always in the middle of something.”

The Gemara tells the famous Chanukah story about finding one pure jug of olive oil with the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*. Why was this seal so crucial? He wasn't in charge of the oils? In addition the *meforshim* point out that even if all the oil was *tamei*, we would be allowed to use it for the sake of the *tzibur*. The Gemara is sending us a message that we should live our lives like a *Kohen Gadol*. He would bring the “*minchas chinuch*” – a *korban* brought by a *Kohen* on the day of his inauguration into doing the *avoda* – every single day. What is a once-in-a-lifetime *korban* for a regular *Kohen* is a daily *korban* for the *Kohen Gadol*. This represents once again the idea of *mosif v'holeich*, renewal, growing from one day to the next. Each day is a new opportunity.

When Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt”l was a young *bachur* learning in Grodno, he went for a visit to his uncle, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Novardok, Rav Avraham Yaffan. During his visit, he asked his uncle to show him the best *bachur* in the Yeshiva. Rav Yaffan pointed to one *bachur* and said this is the greatest *amkan* in the yeshiva. After that, he pointed to a different *bachur* and said this is the biggest *masmid* in the yeshiva. He continued to point to different *bochrim* and point out each one as the greatest in different areas. Rav Chaim persisted. These are all great *talmidim*, but the bottom line is, who is the greatest *bachur* in the yeshiva?

The *Rosh Yeshiva* took him to one of the corners of the *Beis Medrash* and showed him a *bachur* and said this is the greatest *bachur* in the whole *yeshiva*. Rav Chaim was perplexed – in mentioning all the previous great *bochrim* his uncle never even mentioned this *bachur*, yet he is the greatest in the whole *yeshiva*?! The *Rosh Yeshiva* answered that this *bachur*'s defining trait is greater than all the others – this *bachur* is a *mevakesh*. That *mevakesh* ended up being the great Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky – The Steipler Gaon.

In *parshas Toldos* we are told “*v’Yaakov ish tam yosheiv ohalim.*” The *Targum Yonasan* translates *ish tam* as one who is one who constantly seeks to learn. We say in *Psukei D’zimra* every day *yismach lev mevakshei Hashem* – those who are true seekers of Hashem, their hearts will be joyous.

The war of the *Chashmonaim* was not only fought on the military battlefield but on the intellectual and spiritual battlefield as well. Many Jews were disenchanted with Judaism and became Hellenists, not appreciating the treasure of their religion. They lacked the *mosif v’holeich* mentality. Jewish history has proven that our *mesora* can withstand the intellectual challenges of every generation, whether they emanate from Hellenism, Christianity, Islam, the Enlightenment, Marxism, or contemporary post-modernism.

Let’s absorb the lesson of *mosif v’holeich*. This Chanukah, let’s all decide that we will take on a growth mindset and look at Torah and *mitzvos* with fresh eyes. Let us inspire ourselves and others to strive to beat the forces of gravity and *b’ezrat Hashem* be zoche to *nissim v’niflaos*, just as *byamim haheim* so too *b’zman hazeh*.



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## Chanukah and *Bikkurim*

Chanukah is the only holiday in the Jewish Calendar that does not have its own *maseches*. If you look down the list in *Seder Moed*, all the *de’oraisa* holidays as well as Purim all have one. As a result, on the few occasions when Chanukah does appear in the Mishnah, it’s worth thinking about.

One such instance is *Bikkurim* 1:6, in which the *Mishnah* mentions that the deadline for bringing *bikkurim* to the *Mikdash* is Chanukah. In actuality, *bikkurim* should be brought immediately, in the Spring, but one may bring them all summer and read the *vidui bikkurim*, the passage of *Arami Oved Aviv*, that we all know from the *Magid* portion of the Pesach Seder. After Sukkos and until Chanukah, one may still bring *bikkurim*, but he is unable to say the *vidui bikkurim*. After that, the *mitzvah* expires.

At face value, this is hard to explain, because the bringing of *bikkurim* is a *din Torah*, which preceded Chanukah by 1000 years. How then, could the deadline for this *mitzvah* be dependent on a much later event?

In truth, we have rabbinic deadlines that are earlier than Torah ones for *syag* – precautionary – purposes, such as the nighttime *Shema* or the last time to eat *chametz* on *Erev Pesach*. Taking this into consideration, perhaps the real deadline for *bikkurim* is somewhat later, and *Chazal* just placed it here because they found that due to its popularity, Chanukah would be a good marker. While this seems like an appropriate answer, there is no indication that this is only a *syag*. Therefore, a preferable answer would be that there is indeed some connection between *bikkurim* and Chanukah that precedes the events of the *Chashmonaim*.

**“The bringing of *bikkurim* is a *din Torah*, which preceded Chanukah by one thousand years. How then, could the deadline for this *mitzvah* be dependent on a much later event?”**

One such possible connection was suggested to me many years ago, based on a Gemara on *Avodah Zarah* 8a, which explains the pagan holidays



"*Kalenda*" and "*Saturnalia*." The Gemara tells a story of a pair of eight day holidays, one before and one after the winter solstice, established by Adam *Harishon*. Those holidays celebrate Adam's initial worry that his sin was causing not only his own eventual death, but the death of the whole world. Additionally, Adam believed that the shortening of the days as the calendar turned toward winter was a sign that the world was slowly dying, leading him to observe an eight day fast. When the solstice passed, and the days began to lengthen again, Adam realized that the world was not dying, so he established an eight day holiday in honor of his relief. The following year, when he discovered that days naturally shorten and lengthen with the seasons, he converted his initial fast period into a second eight day holiday.

How is this story relevant to Chanukah and *bikkurim*? Well, Chanukah does indeed fall right around the winter solstice every year. As the solstice is December 21, Chanukah this year will start slightly before, on December 7, while next year Chanukah will start on December 25, just after the solstice. In spite of this, why would the solstice be relevant to *bikkurim*? Perhaps, when the solstice passes and the days begin to lengthen, it gives us hope that Spring is coming, and together with it the new agricultural season. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for oneself to continue thinking about last year's *bikkurim* when he should really be turning my attention to preparing for next year.

If this were the case, rather than have Chanukah serve as the deadline, as it is only tangentially related to this time of year, the solstice itself should be the deadline.

Even worse, in years like next year, when Chanukah occurs relatively late, one could argue that *bikkurim* brought after December 21 should be invalid even before Chanukah. With this idea now rejected, how can we relate the *bikkurim* directly to the Chanukah story?

Maybe it would better to suggest that Chanukah is not simply a convenient marker for the solstice, but rather that Chanukah and the solstice are related. Therefore, even though the solstice might have been the deadline prior to the events of Chanukah, it became appropriate for *Chazal* to move the deadline afterward. What then, is that connection between Chanukah and the solstice? Perhaps the mistake that Adam *Harishon* made, thinking that the world was

coming to an end, was the same mistake that the *Misyavnim* made in the Chanukah story. They thought Judaism was coming to an end, to be replaced by Greek culture, and did it indeed seem to be the case at the time. This ended up being their biggest mistake, as the *misyavnim* believed that the rise of Greece and Hellenism marked the permanent end of Judaism, while Adam learned that the shortening of days was only a temporary situation. Sometimes it might look like the Torah is out of date, but with the passage of time things always right themselves. As the Gemara says in that story, "*minhago shel olam hu*", that's the way of the world.

With this idea in mind, we can also gain another understanding of why Chanukah is called "*chag ha'urim*," the holiday of lights. This title does not only refer to the lights of the Chanukah candles, but the light of the world. Chanukah reminds us that the natural light of the world, created by Hashem on the first day of creation and focused on the sun on the fourth, waxes and wanes with the seasons of the year. However, the true light, the light of Torah, remains bright always; we just have to see the light and appreciate it.



**Rabbi Shimon Schenker**  
Menahel

## **The Secret of the Candles – How to Maximize Our Children's Potential**

### **The *Chinuch* Dilemma**

Every Jewish parent wants his or her children to grow and reach their potential. However, many parents do not have an exact formula as to how to accomplish this herculean task. If one looks deep enough into any *halacha*, there is a deeper moral teaching lying at the surface. The *halachos* of Chanukah are no exception, and contain a *halacha* that gives us an insight into this fundamental parenting dilemma. As we better understand the nature of a child's obligation to light Chanukah candles, it will give us tremendous insight into our ability to foster and develop real growth in our children.

One of the challenges that parents face in child rearing is how hard to push our children to accomplish versus taking a more laid back approach. This is reflected in the laws of Chanukah itself. There is a large discussion in the halachic literature about the

nature of the *mitzvah* for children to light Chanukah candles. Is there an obligation to teach our children to merely perform the basic *mitzvah*, or are we also obligated to train them to perform *mitzvos* on a higher level and in a more *mehudar* and enhanced manner? R' Yosef Karo in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim*, *Siman* 677:2) writes, "a child that has reached the age of *chinuch* is obligated to light candles." However, the *Magen Avraham* amazingly comments that the *Shulchan Aruch* is referring to a child that has his own house, because it is possible that a child would otherwise be exempt from lighting, as can be found in the writings of the *Shiltei Hagiborim* (*Shabbos* 9b in the pages of the *Rif*). According to both the *Magen Avraham* and *Shiltei Hagiborim*, there isn't an obligation for a child to light Chanukah candles at all. Practically, Rav Moshe Isserles writes in his gloss to the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Ibid. Siman* 675:3) that according to our practice that everyone in the home lights, a child that has reached the age of *chinuch* [1] would also light.

**"...The word for education, *chinuch*, doesn't just mean beginning, as there are other Hebrew words for that. Instead, it refers specifically to the ability to take something and prepare it in a way that is able to help it fulfill its potential"**

#### **The Chofetz Chaim - Parenting With Simplicity**

It seems clear from both the *Shulchan Aruch* and the Rama that a child who reaches the age of *chinuch* is obligated to light candles, so why does the *Shiltei Giborim*, who echoes the opinion of the Meiri (*Shabbos* 21b s.v. *Mitzvas Chanukah*), *pasken* that unless a child has his own house he is exempt from lighting? Does he not hold that there is a general *mitzvah* to train our children to perform *mitzvos*? The Chofetz Chaim, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, writes in his *Biur Halacha* (*Ibid. s.v. Uledidan*) that the *Shiltei Giborim* holds that while we are of course obligated to train our children in *mitzvos*, this obligation only applies to *mitzvos* that adults themselves are commanded to perform, not extra stringencies that are done to beautify a *mitzvah*. Therefore, children would in theory only be obligated the same way an

adult is, if they have their own home. The *Shiltei Giborim* holds that we are not obligated to train our children to perform *hiddur mitzvah*. The Chofetz Chaim adds in the *Mishnah Berurah* (*Ibid Se'if Katan* 14) that even if one would want his child to light, he should only have him light one candle, because we are not obligated to train children to be so strict to light one extra candle per night. According to this line of reasoning of the *Shiltei Giborim*, and seemingly the Chofetz Chaim in a little more expansive opinion, our children are only obligated to light a minimum of one candle, irrespective of the night of Chanukah. This is the bare minimum requirement in the *Gemara Shabbos* (21b)[2], called "*ner ish ubeiso*."

#### **Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank - Inspiring Our Children for Greatness**

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (*Mikra'ei Kodesh Chanukah Siman* 15) gives a completely new spin to this discussion. Rav Frank differentiates between the levels the *Gemara Shabbos* gives of beautification of the *mitzvah* of lighting. He explains that of course the *Shiltei Giborim* and Meiri do not argue on the *Shulchan Aruch* and Rama, rather the *Shiltei Giborim* and Meiri refer to the basic *mitzvah*, that unless the child has his own home, he does not have to light. This is according to the *Gemara's* base *mitzvah* of *ner ish ubeiso*. However, practically, one would of course need to have his children perform the *mitzvos* to the best of their ability, which would include performing it in a *mehudar* way [3], by lighting an extra candle each night.

According to Rav Frank *zt"l*, our children need to light Chanukah candles in the most pristine way possible. His proof is from the *Gemara Sukkah* (2b) that tells the story of Helene the Queen who sat her young boys in a halachically acceptable *sukkah*. The Ritva there learns from this story that *chinuch* is enabling our children to perform *mitzvos* fully and purely like an adult, without compromise. This concept is inherent in the fabric of the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles itself. The *Pnei Yehoshua* (*Shabbos* 21b s.v. *Mai Chanukah*) famously asks, why did we need the miracle of the oil burning for eight days, why couldn't we just use impure oil based on the principle of *tumah hutra b'tzibur* [4], that impurity is permitted in case of public need in the Beis Hamikdash? The *Pnei Yehoshua* answers that while it is true that they could have brought impure oil, Hashem wanted to show how precious their rededication of the *Beis Hamikdash* was to Him, and that he was with them.[5] Rav Yosef Engel (*Gilyonei Hashas Shabbos* 21a) offers a different explanation

and a fundamental principle in *chinuch* as well. He says that anytime something is done for the first time, it must be done in the most pristine and purest way possible. Therefore, of course the *Chachamim* of the time could have relied on using impure oil, but as they were dedicating the *Beis Hamikdash*, they were charged with setting the tone and level of performance in the *Beis Hamikdash* for all those who came after them, which needed to be only the highest possible level.

### The Foundations of Inspirational *Chinuch*

The *mitzvah* of *chinuch* is the same word and idea as Chanukah; it means to dedicate and start from the beginning to set a pattern of behavior. Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Piaseczno Rebbe, teaches (*Chovas Hatalmidim* p. 8) that the word for education, *chinuch*, doesn't just mean beginning, as there are other Hebrew words for that. Instead, it refers specifically to the ability to take something and prepare it in a way that is able to help it fulfill its potential, to take it from potential to actual. When the *Chashmonaim* were rededicating the *Beis Hamikdash*, they weren't just starting the *avodah* again, they were preparing it to be used for its true purpose and for what it will always be used. So too, the often quoted *passuk* as the *mitzvah* of training our children in *mitzvos* teaches us just that.

חנך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יקלין לא יסור ממנה

(*Mishlei* 22:6)

"Train a child on his way, so that he will not veer from it." The Ritva in *Sukkah* quoted earlier says that from this *passuk*, it is clear that the purpose of *chinuch* is to prepare our children to perform *mitzvos* throughout their lives. Therefore, the *mitzvah* experience of a child needs to mirror an adult's experience exactly.

It is from the *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles that the answer to our question with which we began is now clear. In order to help our children reach their potential, we need to ensure that their educational experiences are as pure and idealistic as possible. In order to enable this type of *chinuch* in our children, we obviously need to choose the institution that will enable our children to grow spiritually, but there is more than that. We need to have and maintain lofty goals and aspirations for our children's spiritual growth. This idea can be seen from a *passuk* in *Tehillim*.

(*Tehillim* 127:4)

"Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so too are our youth." Rav Hirsch explains that when an archer aims his arrow, he sets it on a trajectory higher than his intended goal. In the same way, when educating our children we must aim higher than we might realistically expect them to attain, in order for them to reach the actual target that we are hoping they will achieve. We are only going to have lofty aspirations for our children if we believe in their potential.

Rashi (*Shemos* 2:7) explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* would not nurse from an Egyptian wet nurse because he would eventually speak with the *Shechinah*. The Rama (*Yoreh Deah Siman* 81:7) *paskens* that Jewish children should not nurse from a non-Jew. The Vilna Gaon there, in the name of the Rashba, explains that the source for this *psak* of the Rama is Moshe *Rabbeinu*, as was stated in Rashi that he would eventually speak with the *Shechinah*. Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky asks, how can Moshe be the source for this *halacha*? He was certainly unique in his ability to speak with G-d, so how can this be the standard for all Jewish children? Rav Kaminetsky answers that we learn from this *halacha* that we need to view every Jewish child as having the potential to speak with the *Shechina*.

In order to maximize our children's potential we need to make sure that their educational experience is as pure and pristine as possible, and always believe in their ability to achieve greatness.

### Endnotes

[1] See *Maseches Sukkah* 42a and *Chagiga* 4a. See also *Mishna Berurah Siman* 343:3 who explains that the age of *chinuch* is dependent on the understanding of each individual child and is therefore subjective not objective.

[2] *Shabbos* 21b as well as the *Bach, Pri Chadash (Siman* 670), and *Chacham Tzvi (Siman* 67). See also *Ha'eimek She'eilah (Sheilta* 26:17)

[3] This of course disagrees with the *Mishnah Berurah* that said that even practically we don't need to have our children light candles with *hiddur*.

[4] *Pesachim* 77a, *Toras Kohanim (Vayikra* 24:2), *Rambam (Hilchos Tamidin Umosifin* 3:10)

[5] Rav Yonasan Sacks *shli"ta in Yemei Chanukah (Siman* 7 page 114), adds that according to the *Pnei*

כחצים ביד גבור כן בני הנעור



Yehoshua it makes sense why there is a concept of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* by Chanukah only as opposed to other *mitzvos*, because the Rabbis did not rely on the base requirement on the performance of the original *mitzvah*, they went above and beyond to have the *mitzvah* be done on a more pristine and purer level.



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## Resilience in the Face of Adversity: A Chanukah Reflection

In the face of darkness, Chanukah reminds us to light the fire and keep on burning bright. The story of Chanukah contains many valuable lessons that can help uplift us during these dark times. We look to our past for guidance in navigating our current circumstances.

The Chanukah miracle occurred because a small jug of oil, seemingly insufficient, burned brightly for eight days. There are times when a person might feel insignificant. We must embrace our imperfections and understand that our inner light can shine, even when we feel limited or inadequate. The story of the little jug is a reminder that we don't need to be perfect to experience moments of brilliance.

**“The Chanukah lights are meant to be displayed for all to see. Just as we share the light of the *menorah* with others, we can also share our struggles and triumphs.”**

The Maccabees were outmatched by the Greeks in many ways. And yet, they maintained resilience in the face of adversity. This is a testament to the human spirit's capacity to endure and overcome challenges. The attributes of resilience and hope are essential for every individual facing personal challenges.

Chanukah encourages us to believe that we can emerge from the darkest times and find light and hope within ourselves.

Many people gather and celebrate with loved ones throughout Chanukah. When congregating with others, we feel supported by others. This highlights the importance of social connections. We are reminded to reach out to friends and family, share our joys and struggles, and seek comfort and understanding from our community.

Even the act of kindling the *menorah* each night can be used as a form of self-care. After we light the candles, we often sit and spend some time with the candles, looking at the mesmerizing flickers of the flame. This enables us to take a moment for reflection and mindfulness. Taking time for self-reflection, relaxation, and self-compassion can help nurture our inner light.

The Chanukah lights are meant to be displayed for all to see. Just as we share the light of the *menorah* with others, we can also share our struggles and triumphs. Being open about our experiences can promote understanding, reduce stigma, and offer support to those who may be going through similar challenges.

Chanukah encourages us to remember that our inner light is worth nurturing, even when it seems dim. By embracing imperfections, cultivating resilience, seeking support, practicing self-care, and spreading the light to others, we can contribute to a more compassionate world. Even when we feel surrounded by darkness, we have the power to kindle our inner light and share it with the world. Just as the small jug of oil miraculously burned for eight days, our capacity for resilience and hope can lead us to brighter days, promoting not only our own mental health but also that of our community.

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## From the Halls of MTA: Insights from Our Talmidim & Alumni



Naftali Frankel, '24  
Monsey, New York

### The Potency of *Pirsumei Nisa*

The last *Mishnah* in the sixth *perek* of *Bava Kamma* rules that if one's property caught fire from a flame outside a store, and then the fire spread to the building, the store owner is liable for the damages. This is because the store owner was negligent in placing his lamp in a public area. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yehudah mentions that if the flame that started the fire was that of Chanukah candles, the store owner is exempt. As the Bartenura explains, this is because it is a *mitzvah* to place the Chanukah candles outside. Although the *halacha* does not follow Rabbi Yehudah in this case, the notion of placing Chanukah candles outside is seen elsewhere, specifically in a *braisa* cited by the Gemara in *Shabbos* (21b). Found in one of the few instances in which the *dinim* of Chanukah are mentioned in the *Gemara*, the *braisa* remarks that the *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles is to place them on the outside of one's house, close to the door. Rashi comments on this ruling, stating that it is driven by *pirsumei nisa*, the concept of publicizing the miracle. As is seen from the Gemara above, the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles is unique in

that its fulfillment requires the presence, or the likely presence, of observers. While the concept of *pirsumei nisa* is inherent in some of the *mitzvos* that we observe on other holidays, the fact that the lighting of the *menorah* must be public makes this *mitzvah* special. In that vein, it is important to realize what makes *pirsumei nisa* in the context of Chanukah different from the other holidays and their *mitzvos*, as well as the principles that drive this discrepancy.

In "Days of Deliverance," a collection of essays on Purim and Chanukah written by Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, the Rav points out that the ways in which *pirsumei nisa* is expressed are unique to the essence of the holidays on which *pirsumei nisa* is performed. The Rav argued that, while the *pirsumei nisa* of Purim and Pesach only apply to oneself and his fellow Jews, the *pirsumei nisa* of Chanukah applies even to non-Jews. This is proven from the fact that the Gemara teaches that one can only light Chanukah candles while the *Tardoma'ei*—whom Rashi identifies as a gentile nation who would collect sticks late at night—are still out in the street. It is clear from this explanation that the concept of publicizing the Chanukah miracle even exists in regard to non-Jews.

In order to prove this distinction between the *pirsumei nisa* of Purim and Pesach and that of Chanukah, Rav

Soloveitchik delineates the fundamental principles upon which the *mitzvos* we perform on each of these holidays are based. Whenever a Jew is saved from a challenge to his physical survival, he need not broadcast this news to the whole world. This is because physical survival is a natural instinct among all humans, so it is already understood that a Jew will fight for his survival. As a result of this, it is not necessary to publicize the Purim and Pesach miracles to the non-Jews, as these miracles saved us from physical annihilation and servitude. On the other hand, on Chanukah we celebrate the spiritual victory over the *Yevanim* and their evil decrees against the *mitzvos* that we hold so dear. It is because of this that we need to publicize the Chanukah miracle to the non-Jews, as it is a demonstration of the everlasting endurance of Jewish spirituality against the vile influence of the Hellenists and their materialistic values. Once the particular role that *pirsumei nisa* plays on Chanukah is properly understood, a greater appreciation for the *mitzvah* of kindling Chanukah *neiros* becomes apparent. By performing this *mitzvah*, not only do we continue to preserve the memory of the Chanukah miracle and our gratitude to Hashem for the *neis*, but we are also declaring the eternal Jewish commitment to spirituality and closeness to G-d, in addition to our constant and unconditional resistance to assimilation.



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## The Brightest Joy

The holiday of Chanukah brings many great joys to this time of year, including cold weather, vacations, parties, and many people's favorite, donuts. We all have our own personal experiences that make us appreciate and love Chanukah, but most people agree that the lighting of the *menorah* is one of the more impactful aspects of the holiday. The lighting of the *menorah* represents many things, including the seven days of creation, with the *shamesh* representing Shabbos. But most importantly, it represents a symbol of light and hope, which gives us strength and determination.

The wars that happened during Chanukah represent the triumph of the weak against the strong. The Greek army that waged war against the Maccabees was far larger and better equipped than the Jewish army

was, yet the Jewish people beat the odds and somehow won against their opponent. We are all aware that even the greatest display of strength and power does not bring victory by itself, but it takes prayer and the help of Hashem to win in the end. Therefore, Chanukah has a dimension of strength and weakness, which is the power of faith, belief, and self confidence. These traits may not physically be able to take down tanks and gun bullets, but those who possess them have the ability to outwit and outlast a heavily armed opponent. The Maccabees won the war even with their own heavy losses because of their faith, belief, and self confidence.

In Hebrew, the word *menorah* means lamp. The ancient *Menorah* burnt in the *Beis Hamikdash*, and was an everlasting light that was never supposed to go out. After the tearing down of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Greeks did not allow the Jews to keep Shabbos or *kashrus*. The small group of people known as the Maccabees rebelled, and were eventually able to retake the *Beis Hamikdash*. By desecrating the *Beis Hamikdash* and forbidding traditional Jewish practices, the Greeks tried to extinguish the flame of the *Menorah*, and also the flames of Jewish faith. By lighting our *menorahs* year after year, we are participating in the continuous miracle of renewing the light of Judaism. We must realize that we have the blessed opportunity to do so in our times without fear of prosecution, and it is something that we should stand behind and be proud of.

Lighting our *menorahs* today is the moment when we bring light from darkness and hope from fear which was reflected historically by the unlikely victory of the Maccabees against the Greeks.

One proof to the concept of faith and belief in Hashem is the famous question about Chanukah: Why do we celebrate the holiday for 8 days, if after all there was enough oil to light the *Menorah* for one day. Theoretically we should only celebrate it for 7 days, since that was how long the miracle lasted. Well the answer is one I heard regarding the idea of true faith in Hashem. We have to recognize that nothing is a guarantee, and that even lighting for a single night is considered a miracle. It is difficult to recognize and appreciate a small event, especially when it goes on to a bigger event, and often overshadows the initial event. Even though there was enough for one night to begin with, Hashem is the only one that makes it light for any amount of time.

Chanukah symbolizes the attachment of the Jewish



people to Hashem and his Torah values. Jews as individuals may struggle from time to time, but *Klal Yisroel* as a whole never wavers. The miracle of the oil places a sense of strength and resilience in us through our history. Oil also makes some pretty good donuts which recall the burning of the oil as well. The lights of *Chanukah* still shine bright to this day all around the world long after the fire of our enemies has been extinguished by a force greater than them that overcame them. We have to continue to strengthen ourselves and faith in our practices and observances. The holiday commemorates the brightest joy of lighting the *menorah* which symbolizes the renewal of Jewish faith and hope.



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## On *Al Hanisim*: *Birachamecha Harabim*

In *Al Hanisim* we say “*ve’ata berachamecha harabim amadta lahem*” – “But [Hashem], in [His] abounding mercies, stood by them.” This means that despite the Jews’ merits, they still needed Hashem’s abounding mercy, as without the *midas hadin* they would not have been saved. However, we need to explain why their merits were not enough. After all, we also say in *Al Hanisim* that they were *tehorim*, *tzadikim*, and *oskei torah* – pure, righteous, and involved in Torah. Furthermore, it is clear from the *Midrash* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:1) that the *Chashmonaim*, with many other Jews, were *moser nefesh* during the times of the Greek’s decrees. Why then, did they need abundant mercy?

Rav Gershon Edelstein *zt”l* suggests that one could explain that, in truth, *Klal Yisroel* could have been saved with *midas hadin*, yet it would have been without a *neis nigleh*, a revealed miracle that defied nature. Instead, Hashem would have saved *Klal Yisroel* through a *neis nistar*, a hidden miracle that appeared natural. This, Rav Gershon Edelstein writes, would have been comparable to what happened in Russia, which was a revolution in a “natural way.” After many years with decrees that barred engagement in the Torah and *mitzvos*, there was a sudden revolution in which the decrees were abolished. All of this happened with *hashgacha pratis*, but not in a way that appeared miraculous.

As with the Russian Revolution, Hashem could have saved the *Chashmonaim* in a way that appeared natural, but the *Chashmonaim* merited a revealed *neis* that went against nature. As we say in *Al Hanisim*, “*masarta giborim beyad chalashim verabim beyad me’atim*” – [Hashem] delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few.” A *neis* like this required a lot of *rachamim*.

The purpose of a huge *neis* is so that people can strengthen their *emunah* through it. Even though the Gemara (*Taanis* 20b) says that one who uses miracles decreases his merits, this only applies to individuals and not the *tzibbur*. As a result of this, we see that *Klal Yisroel*’s merits are not diminished when Hashem performs *nisim* for them. Rather we find the opposite, that they get *chizzuk* from them. A clear example of this is in the introductory *passukim* to *Az Yashir*, as it’s written, “*Yisrael saw the strong hand... and they believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant.*” (*Shemos* 14:31).

Regardless of this idea, Rav Gershon Edelstein points out that the *pashut* explanation of *birachamecha harabim* is that *Klal Yisroel* needed mercy to not only be worthy of the revealed miracles, but even for the whole *yeshuah*. Without *rachamim*, there would have been no salvation at all. There is no rescue without mercy. This is as *Chazal* say, that the world only stands on *midas harachamim*. Moreover, the *geulah* will come through *rachamim*; this is as we say in davening: “*vesechezenah einenu beshuvcha letzion rachamim.*”



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## The Secret Message of The Chanukah Lights

In the story of Chanukah, the Jews were under Greek control, and thereby forced to obey their laws. The Greeks wanted to spread their terrible values everywhere, so they made strict decrees that would take away the Jews’ freedom to learn and follow the Torah. If anyone were to be caught learning Torah or performing any Jewish acts, there would be deathly consequences. Obviously, this was impossible for the Jews, as it would be unthinkable to live without the

Torah and *mitzvos*; these are the things that make us Jewish. In order to continue living a Torah life, the Jews started learning and doing *mitzvos* in secret. Utilizing any hiding places they could find, the Jews made sure not to let the light of Torah burn away. Finally, a group of Jews called the Maccabees fought back, leading the battle against the Greeks. As the Maccabees lacked weaponry and numbers, the odds of them winning the battle were very slim. However, with Hashem on their side, they beat the much larger Greek army and eventually ousted the Hellenists from the *Beis Hamikdash*. Following the war, the Jews immediately returned to the *Beis Hamikdash* and restored its holiness and purity. The one thing that they could not restore right away was the beautiful golden *Menorah* that was supposed to be lit every day in the *Heichal*. This was because they needed pure olive oil, but the Greeks destroyed and tainted every last bottle that they could find. As the process to produce fresh olive oil would take eight days, it seemed that the restoration of the lighting of the *Menorah* would have to wait over a week. In the end, as we all know, a singular bottle of unperverted olive oil was miraculously found.

While this was seemingly a miracle in and of itself, this bottle that should have lasted just one day, ultimately lasted for a whole eight days, a miracle that only Hashem could perform. It is in this vein that we must learn to tap into the light of Chanukah through the constant source of light that Hashem has provided for us, the Torah and its *mitzvos*. In other words, we must utilize the Torah to our advantage, as it serves as the light that opens our eyes to the important things in life.

At this time, with the ongoing war in Israel, it is extremely important to open our eyes, turn on that light inside us, and learn and daven for *Klal Yisrael* and our home, *Eretz Yisrael*. To paraphrase the words of Rav Avigdor Miller, we must be extremely grateful that we are able to live in a place like America that tolerates Jews and allows us to practice religion openly. This is an amazing thing, but we need to be careful to distance ourselves from the things that distract us, and focus our attention on what's truly important. The light of Chanukah is a reminder that we are here for a reason. Taking these ideas into consideration, we should hopefully all be able to look at our Chanukah candles and think about our purpose and the things that are really important to us.



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## The Ultimate Avodas Hashem of Chanukah

The *Sefer Minhagei Chasam Sofer* writes that on Chanukah you should be very careful to be involved in learning Torah more than other days of the year. This is because the *yetzer hara's* goal is to stop you from *avodas Hashem* and learning during Chanukah as *Chazal* made Chanukah to thank and praise (Hallel) Hashem. But Rav Yeruchem Olshin in his *Sefer Yerach Lemoadim* asks: If Chanukah is thanking Hashem, why should we have to be more careful in our learning? Aren't these two different things? Additionally, if there is a special *yetzer hara* during Chanukah, why does he try to stop us specifically on Chanukah?

Let's take a look at the Gemara in *Shabbos* which tells us the whole story of Chanukah. At the end of the *sugya*, the Gemara tells us that the year after the miracles, the *Chachamim* established a *yom tov* for *hallel* and thanks (*hoda'ah*). Rashi explains that this refers to the *chiyuv* to say *hallel* and *al hanissim* on Chanukah. However, this leads to a *kasha* on the Rambam, who only mentions *Al Hanissim* in *hilchos tefillah* and surprisingly makes no mention of it in *Hilchos Chanukah*! The *achronim* explain that the Rambam, unlike Rashi, holds that the whole *chiyuv* of *Al Hanissim* is not a *chiyuv* of the day, but rather a *din* in *tefillah*. Namely, the *chiyuv* of mentioning *yom tov* in *tefillah*. However, asks Rav Yeruchem Olshin, this does not seem to be a sufficient answer because it seems clear from the Gemara that *hoda'ah* is because of the day, and the Rambam mentions *hallel* as coming from Chanukah, so why not *hoda'ah*? We need to ask why the *braisa* that the Gemara quoted didn't mention lighting the *menorah* which is the *ikkar mitzvah* and representative of the day, and only mentions *hallel* and *hoda'ah*?

The answer to both of these questions is that really according to the Rambam, the *mitzvah* of *hoda'ah* on Chanukah is to be done through lighting the *menorah*. That's why lighting the *menorah* is mentioned in the *braisa*. That's what *hoda'ah* is. Also, the Rambam didn't leave out *hoda'ah*. In *hilchos Chanukah* right after discussing the *halachos*

regarding *hallel*, he mentions the *chiyuv* to light the *menorah*. This is *hoda'ah*. *Al Hanissim* is something totally separate in *tefillah*. Rav Sholomo Zalman says that if while lighting you don't know or think about the reason behind the lighting (which he says is *lehodos* and *Hallel*), you are missing the main point and you are only *yotzei* because you did the action already. Using this we can answer a question dealing with one of my favorite *sugyas*: *mitzvos tzrichos kavanah*. There are *poskim* who hold that even though by *mitzvos derabanan* we *pasken* that *mitzvos* don't need *kavanah*, by *menorah* we make an exception to say we do. What is different about *Chanukah*? Says Rav Yeruchem Olshin, that really this *kavanah* is not because of *mitzvos tzrichos kavanah* that we require you to have *kavanah* to be *yotzei*, rather it is because you have to have *kavanah* to thank Hashem because that is the whole point of lighting the *neiros*.

We can use this to answer why the Rambam calls the *mitzvah* of *Neiros Chanukah* a very precious *mitzvah*, and why specifically *neiros*. Rav Yeruchem Olshin explains beautifully that it is really a *yesod* for all *inyanim* in *Avodas Hashem*. He explains this quoting Rav Aharon Kotler where he explains on the *pasuk* in *Bereishis* that *Chazal darshen* that the world was created because of *bikkurim* that are called *reishis*. Rav Aharon explains that it really means the point of *bikkurim* is that it is a *hoda'ah* to Hashem. This is also said in the Rambam where he says that the *kavanah* of all *mitzvos* is to believe and thank Hashem that he is our creator. This becomes apparent by thinking about the revealed *nissim* from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in which we can then recognize the *nissim nistarim* from Hashem. That was the whole point of creation. The *menorah* is such a special *mitzvah*, as the whole point of it is to thank Hashem and make the *neis* known. This was the whole point of Creation, and through thanking Hashem we are *mechazek* our *emunah* in him. That is really the whole point of *Chanukah*.

Now, we can go back and answer our question on the *Minhagei Chasham Sofer*. As the *Chovos Halevavos* tells us that because of our *chiyuv* to thank Hashem for all that He Has Done for us, we are *chayev* to do all of his *mitzvos* (because we are so grateful we will do whatever Hashem tells us). That is why during these days we need to be especially *mischazek* in all *Avodas Hashem*, as the whole point of the day is to praise Hashem. That is also why the Chasam Sofer said to be very careful in learning during these days because *Talmud Torah* is considered *kineged* all the

*mitzvos* even regarding this. Learning Torah is *avodas Hashem* at the highest level. Now it makes sense since Chazal made these days of *hallel* and *hodaah*, the *ikkar* way of praising Hashem is through learning because when you really recognize what Hashem has done for us, you realize that the only way to really praise and thank Hashem is to do the highest form of *Avodas Hashem*: *Limud Hatorah*. A *Freilichen Chanukah* to all!



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## Chanukah: True Peace

The Rambam *paskens* in the end of *Hilchos Megillah vChanukah* (4:14), "*hayah Ifanav ner beiso vner Chanukah o ner beiso vkiddush hayom ner beiso kodeim mishum shelom beiso*"—"if one has in front of him [the ability to fulfill only the *mitzvah* of either] the light of his home [i.e. Shabbos candles] or the light of Chanukah [i.e. the *menorah*], or the light of his home or the daytime Shabbos *kiddush*, the light of his home takes precedence [in both cases] to maintain peace in the home." The Rambam concludes that "*gadol hashalom shekol haTorah nitnah la'asos shalom ba'olam*"—"so great is peace that the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world."

This conclusion seems out of place. What is the connection between Chanukah and *shalom*, such that the Rambam wrote about the *mitzvah* of *shalom* specifically by Chanukah? After all, the Rambam is not a running commentary on the Gemara—he categorized all the *dinim* by topic. Thus, the two *mitzvos* must be connected on a deeper level. Furthermore, the entire *halacha* that *Ner Shabbos* takes precedence over *Ner Chanukah* should've seemingly been written in *Hilchos Shabbos*, where the Rambam's addition of the idea of the greatness of *shalom* would have made more sense. This is especially true given that together with the *din* of *Ner Chanukah* or *ner beiso*, the Rambam brings the *din* of *kiddush hayom*, which has no connection at all to Chanukah.

One of the many differences between the *neiros hamikdash* and *Neiros Chanukah* is their time and place. On one hand, the *mitzvah* of *neiros hamikdash* is that they should be lit inside the *Beis Hamikdash* and specifically by day, when there is still light outside. On the other hand, *Neiros Chanukah* must be



"*al pesach beiso mibachutz*"—"at the entrance of the house, outside" (*Gemara Shabbos 21b*) and must be lit at night, when the sun has already set. Additionally, the natures of the *neiros* are different. The *neiros hamikdash* were lit in a place where G-dliness shined openly and the curtain of the world, so to speak, was not present at all. Therefore, when the Greeks were *m'tamei* the *Beis Hamikdash*, they were *mvatel* the *avodah* in general, and the *neiros hamikdash* in particular. The novelty of *Neiros Chanukah*, though, is that they even light the outside, the darkness of the night and the *galus*. As is explained by the Ramban (*Bamidbar 8:2*), *Neiros Chanukah* are on a higher level than the *neiros hamikdash* because the *neiros hamikdash* became nullified when the Greeks desecrated the *Beis Hamikdash*, while *Neiros Chanukah* are "*einan bteilin le'olam*"—"never nullified" (*ibid.*), lit even in *galus*, the time of greatest darkness.

This is also, in a way, the advantage of a *ba'al teshuva* over a *tzadik*, as the *Gemara* (*Berachos 34b*) states, "*makom sheba'alei teshuva omdin tzadikim gmurim einam omdin*"—"in the place where *ba'alei teshuva* stand, complete *tzadikim* don't stand." *Tzadikim* have no connection at all to evil, while *ba'alei teshuva*, through their *teshuva*, have the strength to make "*zdonos na'asos lo kizchiyos*"—"his intentional sins into merits" (*Gemara Yoma 86b*). The evil itself is turned into good.

The number of *neiros* by Chanukah is also greater than by the *Beis Hamikdash*—the Chanukah *menorah* has eight *neiros*, while the *Beis Hamikdash* had seven. The number seven points to the order of the universe, since the world itself was created in seven days and each week has seven days. As the *Rashba* (*Teshuvos HaRashba cheilek 1 siman 9*) writes, the number eight, by virtue of the meaning of the number 7, is parallel to something greater than the normal order. Therefore, in the *Beis Hamikdash*, where G-dliness was openly revealed, the number seven was sufficient. However, in a place of complete darkness, one needs light which is greater than the order of nature—the eight *Neiros Chanukah*—in order to realize Hashem's majesty.

Nevertheless, although there is an advantage in the *avodah* of *ba'alei teshuva*, in that it reaches higher than the *avodah* of *tzadikim*, there is an inherent advantage of the *avodah* of *tzadikim*: they have absolutely nothing to do with evil. Their entire *avodah* is in *tov*, and the light of Hashem is more clearly revealed by them. Therefore, the true goal is to connect these two *avodas*, which, as the *Zohar*

(*chelek 3, 153b*) states, will be in *yemos hamoshiach*, when "*moshiach asa le'asava tzadikaya btiyuvta*"—"moshiach will come to bring [even] the *tzadikim* to *teshuva*." The combination of these two *avodas* comes through a light which is greater than either could achieve alone. The advantage of uniting both of these *avodas* is hinted to by the *neiros Chanukah*. They themselves bring light to the darkness of *galus*, but they are also a reminder of the *neis* of the *Beis Hamikdash*, where there was no darkness.

According to this, we can understand why the Rambam wrote about the greatness of *shalom* specifically by Chanukah—the Rambam is referring to the *shalom* of two opposing ideas. In our matter, the *shalom* and unity of all matters of a house into one purpose is to effect "*vshochanti bsocham*"—"I [Hashem] will dwell among them" (*Shemos 25:8*). Specifically, turning the "*kenegdo*"—"against" of a wife into an "*ezer*"—"help" (*Bereishis 2:18*), bringing *shalom bayis* through *Neiros Shabbos*. A greater opposition, and therefore a greater *shalom*, is darkness (when *Neiros Chanukah* are lit) against light—the order of nature against that which is higher than the order of nature. This is, therefore, the idea of Chanukah: first, *teshuva*, where even the darkness will be illuminated, and thereby connect opposing things with G-dliness, and second, the uniting of the two *avodas*—the order of nature and that which is higher. When one, however, does not have enough strength to do both, it is understood that he needs to direct his power to "*vshochanti bsocham*" in his house, not outside, through *Neiros Shabbos*, since *shalom bayis* is greater.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 3, p. 810-813)



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## A Rarity in the Calendar

This year, the holiday of Chanukah begins on a Thursday night, with Friday being the first day. While this happened just three years ago, the start of Chanukah falling out on Thursday night is actually a very rare occurrence. Why is this the case? Why should it be that some days are not as likely to have a holiday fall out on them?

	Year type 1	Year type 2	Year type 3	Year type 4
Purim	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
Pesach	Thursday	Shabbos	Sunday	Tuesday
Lag BaOmer	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
Shavuot	Friday	Sunday	Monday	Wednesday
Shiva'a Asar B'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av	Thursday	Sunday (pushed off from Shabbos)	Sunday	Tuesday
<i>Chagei Tishrei</i> (Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeres)	Shabbos	Monday	Tuesday	Thursday
Yom Kippur	Monday	Wednesday	Thursday	Shabbos

To start, one must understand that Chanukah is different from the other *chagim* throughout the year. Aside from Chanukah, all of the other holidays can only fall out on four days of the week. From the beginning of Adar, *and* in leap years Adar II, until the 29th of Cheshvan every year, the calendar is the same.

Chanukah, however, is very different. Since Chanukah is in Kislev, it can fall on six different days of the week. This is because Cheshvan can sometimes have twenty-nine days and sometimes have thirty days.

To understand why Cheshvan can have a different number of days depending on the year, one has to understand that the number of days in a Jewish year can vary. As can be seen in the chart above, Rosh Hashanah can only be on the four days that are listed, or there will be ensuing problems with Yom Kippur or Hoshana Rabbah. As a result, whenever we calculate that in the following year the *molad* of Tishrei will fall out on one of the days Rosh Hashanah can not be, we push Rosh Hashanah off by a day by adding a day to the following month Cheshvan. This is called a *shanah shleimah*, a full year. Sometimes, in a year after a *shanah shleimah*, there will be a *shanah chaseirah* to make up for the extra day in the *shanah shleimah*, but this is not guaranteed to happen because of Rosh Hashanah not being able to be on certain days. In a *shanah chaseira*, a day is lost from Kislev, causing it to have twenty-nine days instead of thirty. In a regular year, a *shanah k'sidra*, Cheshvan has twenty-nine days, and Kislev has thirty days.

Since Cheshvan can have a different number of days depending on the year, the holiday of Chanukah can be on more than four days of the week. One may ask, why is it the case that if the number of days in Cheshvan and Kislev can change, that the dates from Adar to the 29th of Cheshvan are not affected in the following year? The reason for this is that a day is added to Cheshvan or subtracted from Kislev in order to make sure that in the next year, Rosh Hashanah and the other holidays will be on one of the four days on which they are allowed to be.

Even with this in mind, there are still two questions left. If Chanukah is so flexible, why is it that there is still one day of the week on which Chanukah can not be? Moreover, what makes this year, when Chanukah is on a Thursday night, so rare?

To answer both of these questions, we need to look at what day of the week Chanukah can be, compared to the day on which Rosh Hashanah fell. In a year when Cheshvan has thirty days, Chanukah will end up on the same day of the week on which Rosh Hashanah fell. If Cheshvan has twenty-nine days, Chanukah will be on the day of the week before the day on which Rosh Hashanah occurred. As a result of this, the first day of Chanukah can never be on a Tuesday, because when Rosh Hashanah is on Tuesday, Cheshvan always has twenty-nine days. This is because a year when Rosh Hashanah falls on Tuesday has to be a *shanah shleimah* or *chaseira*, so in the following year, Rosh Hashanah would fall out on one of the days on which it is not allowed to fall.

Despite this, the second question still stands: What makes this year so rare? Well, for the first day of Chanukah to be on a Friday, Rosh Hashanah has to be on Shabbos, in addition to it being a *shanah chaseira*. This is because a year when Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbos can never be a *shanah k'sidra*, as that would make the following Rosh Hashanah take place on a wrong day of the week. Additionally, a *shanah chaseira* is rare because it requires the *molad* of Tishrei in the following year to be on a day that Rosh Hashanah can be on, and also be only three (five in a leap year) days of the week after the day of the week on which the previous Rosh Hashanah fell. While a *shanah k'sidra* is regular, a *shanah shleimah* is just pushing off Rosh Hashanah of the next year, but for a *shanah chaseira* the calculations have to be perfect.

This would make it a rare occurrence for Chanukah to fall out on certain days of the week. Specifically, these two rare occurrences are a year when Chanukah starts on a Thursday night, and a year when Chanukah is *Motzei Shabbos*. The rarity of these years, however, has more of an impact than we might initially realize, as it creates the only instance in which *Parshas Mikeitz* does not coincide with Chanukah, and we have the opportunity to read the *haftarah* for *Mikeitz*. When you hear the *haftarah* for *Mikeitz* in shul this year, make sure to enjoy it, because the next time it is read in public will be in seventeen years.



## Chanukah's Eternal Tapestry: Chagai, Zecharyah, and the Divine Balance

Ask any *talmid* if Chanukah falling out on the 25th of Kislev is a mere coincidence, and you will receive an enthusiastic “yes.” After all, isn’t the name of Chanukah based on the common acronym, *Chanu-b-chaf-hey*—they rested [from battle] on the 25th [of Kislev]? Hence, had the battle ended (and/or the miracle of the oil had taken place) on a different day, Chanukah would have been celebrated on that day instead. In reality, this is not the case. Not only is it clear from the Book of Maccabees that the decision to rededicate the *Beis Hamikdash* on the 25th of Kislev was intentional, but by looking at the other books of Tanach, we can see that the origin of

the date of Chanukah goes back nearly 300 years prior, to the times of the *neviim*, and shows us the importance of balance between *chayil*, *koach*, and *ruach*—might, power, and spirit. So why is Chanukah on “Chanukah?”

Chanukah's ties to the 25th of Kislev find their origins in Chagai's prophecy, where the construction of the second *Beis Hamikdash* commenced on the 24th or 25th of Kislev. This period marked a crucial juncture for the Jewish people, post-exile and grappling with a sense of hopelessness. Chagai's challenge to the people was clear: Rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash* as testament to devotion to Hashem, with the promise that political sovereignty and economic stability would follow. Zecharyah reinforced this, placing additional emphasis on the need for proper religious repentance to welcome the return of G-d's presence. Zecharyah's prophecy, coincidentally serving as the *haftarah* for Shabbos Chanukah, underscores the critical balance between national and spiritual aspirations. The emphasis on spirit (*ruach*) over might (*chayil*) and power (*koach*) serves as a reminder to Zerubavel, the political leader promised sovereignty at the time, about the importance of maintaining this equilibrium. The intricate dance between these conflicting ideals in the redemption process is crucial in creating a nation devoted to Hashem.

As history unfolds, the *Chashmonaim* rise against Greek rule, aligning the dedication of the second *Beis Hamikdash* with the 25th of Kislev. The choice to rededicate the *mikdash* on this specific date, even though it's clear that they had the ability to do so beforehand, echoes the importance of the date of the Temple's original construction and reflects the prophetic ideals of *Bayis Sheini*. Viewing themselves as fulfilling Chagai's prophecy, the *Chashmonaim* celebrated military victories, the rededication of the Temple, and the return of Jewish sovereignty on this significant date. But Zecharya's prophecy still lay untouched and unfulfilled.

While military victories and Temple dedication stand as central reasons for celebrating Chanukah, *Chazal* later shifts the emphasis to the miracle of the oil. Why this change of focus? The realignment aligns with Zecharyah's vision, as mentioned in Tanach, of the *Menorah* surrounded by olive branches, placing a spotlight on the need for spirituality to triumph over physical strength. As the *Chashmonaim's* political power grew, the focus on this spiritual



aspect became increasingly vital, addressing a decline in religiosity during the *Chashmonai* dynasty.

While the focus on military victories and the rededication of the Temple remains central, *Chazal's* emphasis on the miracle of the oil introduces a nuanced layer to the Chanukah story. Zecharyah's vision of the *Menorah* surrounded by olive branches aligns with this emphasis, stressing the importance of spirituality prevailing over physical strength.

The Chanukah narrative, despite the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, endures as a timeless message. The significance of the date transcends mere chance, carrying a message for every generation. In the context of our present day, the fulfillment of prophecies hinges on finding the delicate balance between might, power, and spirit. Chanukah's enduring relevance lies in its prophetic tapestry, urging us to maintain this delicate equilibrium in our relationship with the *Borei Olam*.

As we reflect on Chanukah's historical tapestry, the prophetic threads of Chagai and Zecharyah continue to weave through the fabric of the holiday. The intentional choice of the 25th of Kislev for the rededication of the *Beis Hamikdash* speaks to a profound understanding of historical continuity and spiritual significance.

In our contemporary context, Chanukah beckons us to consider the delicate balance required in our relationship with the divine. The timeless message of finding equilibrium between *ruach*, *chayil*, and *koach*, resonates as strongly today as it did in the days of Chagai and Zecharyah. As we kindle the lights of the *menorah*, we are reminded of the enduring legacy of Chanukah – a legacy that challenges us to navigate the complexities of our world with faith, resilience, and a commitment to the divine balance.



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## ***Ma'alín Bakodesh V'eín Moridin***

The *Gemara* in *Shabbos* states the levels of which one can be *mekayem* the *mitzvah* of *Neiros Chanukah*. The basic level is one candle per household every night. Therefore, on the fifth night,

one would light the same number of candles in his house as on the seventh night, namely just one. The second level is where everyone in the house lights one candle per night. So if a family has eight people, they light eight candles on night one and eight candles on night six. The third level is lighting the number of candles that corresponds to the night. According to *Beis Shammai*, one would light eight on the first night, seven on the second night, and so forth and so on, but according to *Beis Hillel*, one lights one candle on the first night, two on the second night, etc., counting up instead of down.

Why is this so? According to *Beis Shammai* it corresponds to the cows of Sukkos which also went in descending order (13-7). According to *Beis Hillel* it's because of the famous *halachic* principle called *ma'alín bakodesh v'eín moridin*. Three glaring questions become apparent: First, what is the *kedusha* regarding *Neiros Chanukah* in which we can apply the rule of *ma'alín bakodesh*? Second, what do the cows of Sukkos have to do with Chanukah? Third, what does *Beis Shammai* do about *ma'alín bakodesh* if it is really a *halachic* principle?

Our first step would be to define and explore the concept of *ma'alín bakodesh*. Is it just a nice idea, or is it *halachically* binding? The first Mishnah in the fourth *perek* of *Megillah* states that if one wishes to sell an object that is *kadosh*, holy, he can only sell it for something more *kadosh* because of the rule of *ma'alín bakodesh*. The *Gemara* in *Menachos* 99A also says this rule of *ma'alín bakodesh*. We see very clearly that the rule of *ma'alín bakodesh* is a *halachic* principle. But the question remains, does it really apply to Chanukah? To rephrase the question, are *Neiros Chanukah* an object which has inherent *kedusha*, and therefore *ma'alín bakodesh* would apply, or not?

There's a Ramban in *Shabbos* (22a) which explains the *kedusha* that the candles have. The Ramban says that objects that are used for a *mitzvah*, like a *lulav* or *tzitzis*, that aren't usually *kadosh*, gain *kedusha* when they are being used for the *mitzvah*. This would also apply to the *neiros*. The wicks and oil aren't necessarily *kadosh* by themselves, but when they are burning, they have a *kedusha* status. This could be why we say *Haneros Halalu* while we light, because we are infusing the wicks with *kedusha*. According to *Beis Shammai* you can maybe say that there is no *ma'alín bakodesh* because the *kedusha* is the status of having them lit, which applies even if you do the most basic *ner ish ubeiso*. In other words,

the *machlokes* between *Beis Shammai* and *Beis Hillel* boils down to whether or not the quantity of candles increases the *hiddur mitzvah* or not.

Going to our second question, what do the cows of Sukkos have to do with Chanukah? In reality, nothing, but *Beis Shammai* wanted to give us a mechanism with which we can understand what *mosif veholech* is. Just like on Sukkos we brought one fewer cow every day, so too on Chanukah we are lighting one fewer candle per day. If one wanted to say *drush* in this *sugya*, one can say that on Sukkos, the cows represent the 70 nations of the world, and we *shecht* 70 cows. On *Shmini Atzeres*, we bring one cow representing *Bnei Yisrael*. Chanukah is the perfect time to apply this. Chanukah is the last *Yom Tov* chronologically in history, and therefore when we celebrate the fact that we are still around and survived all our enemies, we realize that we are the only one left. What would *Beis Shammai* do with *ma'alin bakodesh*? *Beis Shammai* says that this is also *ma'alin bakodesh* but in a different way. We go from including all of the other 70 nations, to just being *Klal Yisrael*. We go from everyone being represented to just us. That's what *neiros* are, they resemble how *Klal Yisrael* is still here.

This whole *machlokes* is in the level of *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Is *hidur mitzvah* an extra *mitzvah*, or is it the *schar* from the *mitzvah* that's being expanded? Rav Soloveichik *zt"l* said that by *lulav* and other *mitzvos*, it's a separate *mitzvah* of *hidur*. Rav Reichman said that by Chanukah, since it's part of the Gemara, *hidur mitzvah* adds to the *mitzvah*.

How does *mehadrin min hamehadrin* work? Is it *mosif veholech* plus *ner lechol echad vechad* and *ner ish ubeiso*, or is it just *mosif veholech* plus *ner ish ubeiso*?

Tosfos says that it is just *ner ish ubeiso* and *mosif veholech* because, for *ner lechol echad*, you are not able to tell the difference between all the candles. The Rambam (*Chanukah* 4:1) says that it is *mosif veholech* plus *ner lechol echad vechad* and *ner ish ubeiso*. You can be *medayeik* from him that maybe the *baal habayis* should light the amount of candles per person in his family per night, and not that everyone lights his own. Three *shitos* come out *l'ma'aseh*: one *menorah* per house (most *Sfardim*), everyone lights *mosif veholech* (most *Ashkenazim*), and the father lights for everyone in the house, so if there are 10 people in the family, on night 7, he will light 70 candles.



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## A Behind the Scenes Look into the Primary Miracle of Chanukah

The story of the Maccabees' impressive win against the powerful *Yevanim* is a familiar one, as it is constantly mentioned in the *Al Hanisim* prayer over the course of Chanukah. However, despite this historic triumph, our actions over the course of Chanukah seem to predominantly highlight the extraordinary miracle of the oil, which is emphasized through the lighting of the *menorah*. This prompts the question: What is the reason that our Chanukah celebration does not place a greater focus on the miraculous victory over the Greeks?

At first glance, it seems that the core celebration of Chanukah should be rooted in our liberation from the *Yevanim*. This incredible demonstration of Hashem's profound love for His beloved children, as He guided a group of untrained and minimally armed individuals in battle for the sake of Torah, was truly remarkable. Therefore, it is puzzling that we stop to say only a single prayer to commemorate our miraculous victory. The answer to this lies in an idea that the Maharal points out, that if we were to focus our attention on the *Chashmonaim* who fought and won the war for the Jews, we would be diminishing the role of Hashem, the main character in the narrative. After all, it was Hashem who single-handedly caused the Jews to win and continue on as a great nation.

This understanding leads us to appreciate why the primary celebration of Chanukah focuses on the miracle of the oil. Specifically, it is necessary to remember that expressing gratitude to Hashem must involve our acknowledgment of the extraordinary miracles that only He can perform, as they defy the natural laws by which the world seems to run. This is something that surpasses the ability of humans, and as a result, forces us to look to Hashem and appreciate that it was His, and only His, doing all along. *Chazal*, in recognizing the importance of emphasizing Hashem's role, established the miracle of the oil as the central focus of Chanukah, even though the victory over the *Yevanim* might have been perceived as a more significant event.

By establishing Hashem as the ultimate force behind

every occurrence, we can prepare ourselves to properly celebrate the pivotal victory of the Maccabees. This can be done by recognizing the fact that in commemorating our successes, we must demonstrate humility through the acknowledgment that all success comes from above. This serves as a reminder that we must constantly acknowledge Hashem's oneness, and the fact that he is always orchestrating every facet of our lives. Therefore, we must learn to never attribute an excessive amount of credit to ourselves or others. It is this idea that *Al Hanisim* is telling us, that although people should be praised for accomplishing an incredible feat, we must keep that praise to an appropriate degree, as the true praise should be allotted to the One who is running everything behind the scenes. Armed with this perspective, we can authentically celebrate Chanukah, and express the highest form of love for Hashem.



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### A Yid's Toolbox

As Chanukah approaches it becomes more and more apparent how similar the famous story of the *Maccabim* is to our present day lives. We all know about the current events in *Eretz Yisroel*. People are being *moser nefesh* daily for *Klal Yisroel*, and it is truly amazing to see the way we have united together as one nation for one cause.

Interestingly, 2,200 years ago, we also find the concept of *mesiras nefesh* among *Klal Yisroel*, albeit in different, but similar, circumstances. The *Yevanim* attempted to strip us of our identity, but we prevailed. The *Maccabim*, against all odds, triumphed, and our commitment to *avodas Hashem* was renewed. Facing the *Yevanim*, the *Maccabim* knew what they were fighting for—Hashem's Torah—and because of this motivation gained the drive necessary for victory.

Just like back then, despite all the challenges that face us today, we hope to succeed in our mission and to continue the glory of *Klal Yisroel*.

The *Sfas Emes* gives us an insight into what it means to be *moser nefesh* for the Torah. He highlights the *Maccabim's* dedication and love towards Hashem's Torah. The Rambam elucidates upon the *Sfas Emes*

by saying that we must also be *moser nefesh* for Hashem's *mitzvos*, one step beyond what the *Sfas Emes* requires. He highlights that we must put extra emphasis on the miracle of Chanukah, and that we must publicize the *mitzvos* of Chanukah, such as the *neiros*. Especially today, we must go out of our way to do *mitzvos* and increase our *limud HaTorah*.

We must fight to display the powers of Hashem's Torah and *mitzvos* to everyone around us, and show how powerful tools like these could be. We can do our part, and be a *zechus* for *Klal Yisroel* by participating in *limud HaTorah* and doing *mitzvos*.

We can also see something very important from the *neis* of Chanukah itself. After the war, we see the *Maccabim* make their way back to the desecrated *Beis Hamikdash*, and we are told the famous story of the *pach shemen*. For eight days the oil lasted, and every drop mattered. This *neis* shows the power of something small when used for *kedusha*. We must remember this when it comes to *avodas Hashem*, every little bit makes a world of difference.

As mentioned before, current events are unprecedented and require us to go above and beyond. We must keep this in mind when it comes to our *avodas Hashem*, and that every ounce of it matters. *Klal Yisroel* must do our best to come to the aid of everyone in *Eretz Yisroel*. Every day we must do our part to use our *tefillos*, learning, and *avodas Hashem* to help out the people in *Eretz Yisroel*. Hopefully, by making this a constant routine, we will come closer to *yeshuos b'karov b'yameinu*.

חנוכה  
שמח!





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