

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary
Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

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Established by Rabbi Hyman and Ann Arbesfeld

November 2013 • Chanukah 5774



A Project of Yeshiva University's
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Featuring Divrei Torah from

Rabbi Kenneth Auman • Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh
Rabbi Yosef Blau • Rabbi Joshua Flug
Rabbi David Pahmer • Rabbi Ezra Schwartz
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**Special Thanksgiving Supplement from
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, Director,
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Kislev 5774

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It is our pleasure to present to you this issue of Yeshiva University's Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go® series. It is our sincere hope that the Torah found in this ספר may serve to enhance your Chanukah and your לימוד (study).

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With this material, we invite you to join our *Beit Midrash*, wherever you may be, להגדיל תורה (to enjoy the splendor of Torah) and to engage in discussing issues that touch on a most contemporary matter, and are rooted in the timeless arguments of our great sages from throughout the generations.

Chag Urim Sameach,

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Table of Contents

Chanukah 2013/5774

From Darkness to Light	
Rabbi Kenneth Auman	Page 4
Chanukah—The <i>Chag</i> of <i>Torah SheB'al Peh</i>	
Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh	Page 7
The Complex History of the Hashmonaim	
Rabbi Yosef Blau	Page 10
Practical Halacha Supplement: Yemei Hallel V'Hoda'ah: The Recitation of Hallel and Al HaNissim on Chanukah	
Rabbi Joshua Flug	Page 13
Let There be Points of Light	
Rabbi David Pahmer	Page 19
My Chanuka while the Beit Hamikdash Stood	
Rabbi Ezra Schwartz	Page 22
Zecharia's Prophecy: The Haftarah for Shabbos Chanukah	
Professor Marcy Stern	Page 27
God's Providence and the United States	
A Thanksgiving Reader on Judaism and the American Idea	
Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik	Page 32

From Darkness to Light

Rabbi Kenneth Auman

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The *Medrash Rabba* at the beginning of *Parshat Miketz*, the *parsha* that is read on Shabbat Chanukah this year (and in most years), speaks about a Chanukah-appropriate theme—light and darkness:

"It was at the end of two years." The verse (Iyov 28:3) states "An end was set for darkness," [The Almighty] set a time limit on how many years the world will operate in darkness because as long as the evil inclination is in the world, darkness and the shadow of death are in the world as is stated (ibid) "the stones of darkness and the shadow of death." Once the evil inclination is uprooted from the world, there is no darkness and shadow of death. Another explanation, "An end was set for darkness," a time was set for Yosef how many years he would remain in the darkness in prison. When that time ended, Pharaoh had a dream.

Bereishit Rabbah, Parshat Miketz no. 89

ויהי מקץ שנתיים ימים, (איוב כח) קץ שם לחשך, זמן נתן לעולם כמה שנים יעשה באפילה, ומאי טעם קץ שם לחושך שכל זמן שיצר הרע בעולם אופל וצלמות בעולם, דכתיב אבן אופל וצלמות, נעקר יצר הרע מן העולם אין אופל וצלמות בעולם, דבר אחר קץ שם לחשך, זמן נתן ליוסף כמה שנים יעשה באפילה בבית האסורים, כיון שהגיע הקץ חלם פרעה חלום.

בראשית רבה פרשת מקץ פר' פט

The Medrash provides two interpretations of darkness. In the first, it represents the *yetzer harah*, the evil inclination. What does the Medrash mean when it states that there is an end to this type of darkness? Must we wait until Messianic times, or can we hope for it to be earlier?

The events that occurred on Chanukah teach us that we do not have to wait until Messianic times to do away with darkness. At the time when the Chanukah story took place, there was a great deal of darkness foisted on Klal Yisrael. It was not only religious coercion that threatened Torah life, but it was the allure of Greek culture that captivated the hearts and minds of many Jews without any coercion as well. There were certain elements of Greek culture that were capable of enhancing and even glorifying Judaism:

The verse (Bereishit 9:27) states, "God shall beautify Yefet and he will dwell in the tents of Shem" ... the beautiful aspects of Yefet (i.e. of Greek culture) will be in the tents of Shem (i.e. the Jewish people).

Megillah 9b

אמר קרא יפת אלהים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם ... יפיתו של יפת יהא באהלי שם.
מגילה ט:

But there were other elements, such as Greek paganism and philosophy that were incompatible with Torah ideology. And those ideas had a certain attraction to many Jews at the time.

Nevertheless, the Torah ultimately triumphed. Perhaps this is why the miracle occurred specifically with the *nerot* (candles) and not with some other aspect of the Beit Hamikdash—to demonstrate that it is the light of Torah that eventually shines through and dispels the darkness.

Throughout the ages, different types of evil inclinations have appeared and challenged us. But they've all gone away, once the light of Torah was able to shine on them and dispel them. The ideas of Aristotle, Plato and other Greek philosophers once posed serious threats to Torah Judaism; today they are not credible threats at all. They may today be significant as subjects of academic study, but they do not provide attractive alternatives for living one's life in the 21st century.

In more modern times, there were many other "isms" that were, for relatively short periods, potent evil inclinations, but today are no longer dangerous—communism and socialism today no longer pose the challenges to our faith that they did in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

"An end was set for darkness." Today's difficulties are different from those of yesteryear, and tomorrow's will be again different. What Chanukah teaches us is that the Torah has the power of light—the ability to dispel whatever challenge is posed by the particular darkness of the time.

Ironically, however, we today are faced with challenges that in certain ways resemble the old threat presented by elements of the ancient Greek culture. What was the basis of the Greek outlook? If one reads Greek mythology, one reads the stories of their gods. The gods were described as powerful beings, but with all the foibles of humans. They lied, cheated, and stole. They were jealous and selfish. The Greeks created gods who resembled them; they were basically worshipping themselves.

On the other hand, the whole idea of the Torah is to put G-d at the center of our universe, and thereby aim for perfection:

Whenever one benefits from this world, one's intent should not be for personal pleasure but for the service of G-d as it states (Mishlei 3:6) "know G-d in all of your ways," and our rabbis taught, all of your actions should be for the sake of heaven, even matters that are optional such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, standing, marital relations, conversations, and all physical matters should be geared towards the service of G-d or something that enables service of Him.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 231:1

בכל מה שיהנה בעולם הזה, לא יכוין להנאתו, אלא לעבודת הבורא יתברך, כדכתיב: בכל דרכיך דעהו (משלי ג, ו) ואמרו חכמים: כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, שאפילו דברים של רשות, כגון האכילה והשתיה וההליכה והישיבה והקימה והתשיש והשיחה וכל צרכי גופך, יהיו כולם לעבודת בוראך, או לדבר הגורם עבודתו
שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים רלא:א

One might argue that a central tenet of American society is also the concept of worship of self, albeit in a different fashion. Our society, too, emphasizes the notion that **we** are the most important thing there is. "You deserve this and this," "Treat yourself to this." And self-fulfillment is the most important thing one should seek. And many of the ills of our society—the rampant sexual freedom, the unbridled materialism, are all symptoms of this notion.

The light that triumphed **הם** בימים was only able to shine because of the great dedication and sacrifices of the Chashmonaim. And today as well, the Torah will only overcome the problems of our society with great dedication to it on our part...

The Medrash has another interpretation of darkness as well, symbolized by Yosef's stay in prison. This represents physical danger and the threat of annihilation. And this danger too has

an end, as is seen in the story of Chanukah and in the countless threats to our survival that we've experienced in our millennia of existence.

In every generation, [nations] stand over us to destroy us and the Holy One Blessed be He saves us from their hand.

Passover Haggadah

שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו
והקדוש ברוך הוא מצילנו מידם.
הגדה של פסח

The world certainly appears very dangerous to us at the current time as well. Chanukah, though, gives us encouragement because it testifies to the power of *me'atim* (outnumbered), *chalashim* (weak) and *tzaddikim* (righteous) against what appeared to be far greater might.

May we merit both types of light—the spiritual light of the Torah and the physical light of redemption.

Chanukah—The *Chag* of *Torah SheB'al Peh*

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

The Gemara (*Yoma* 29b) singles out the miracle of Chanukah as the only commemorated miracle that was not recorded in writing in the Tanach, but rather preserved solely by oral tradition. Many *Acharonim* (e.g., *Sfat Emet*, Chanukah 5644) speculate that it is not coincidence that Chanukah is the only classical Jewish holiday whose roots lie in the *Torah SheB'al Peh* (the Oral Tradition); rather, the essence of Chanukah is a celebration of the unique role and power of the *Torah SheB'al Peh*. *Sfat Emet* points out that not only is Chanukah not included in the Tanach, but it is not even discussed, except tangentially, in the Mishnah. There is no *Masechet Chanukah*, or even one *perek* or one *mishnah* which actually states that we should celebrate or light candles on Chanukah. Why would Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi have omitted this significant holiday from the Mishnah? *Sfat Emet* suggests that even when it became necessary to write down the *Torah SheB'al Peh* and canonize it in the Mishnah, the story and mitzvot of Chanukah had to remain in their pristine state of *Torah SheB'al Peh*, because their essence was *Torah SheB'al Peh*.

The evidence for *Sfat Emet's* thesis is compelling, but it remains for us to explicate in what way the story of Chanukah, as opposed to any other miracle in Jewish history, is substantively connected to the nature of *Torah SheB'al Peh*.¹ In order to do so, we must take a fresh look at both the story of Chanukah and the nature of *Torah SheB'al Peh*.

The obvious enemies in the Chanukah story are the Syrian-Greeks, who attempted to suppress our religion with murderous force. The most dangerous and insidious enemy, though, was not the Greeks but their Hellenistic philosophy and lifestyle, which captured the hearts and minds of much of the Jewish people.² It is well known that the first enemy killed by the Maccabees was a Jewish Hellenist who was attempting to lead his fellow Jews into the world of paganism.³ In order for the Maccabees to declare victory, then, they had to not only militarily defeat the Greeks, but convince their fellow Jews to abandon Hellenism and remain true to their faith. The war was fought not only on the military battlefield, but on the intellectual battlefield as well. Could Judaism withstand the onslaught of Greek philosophy? Could the Jewish people defend its uniqueness in the cosmopolitan Greek polis? Could the mitzvot of the Torah compete with

¹ The *Sfat Emet* himself provided a different explanation regarding the nature of this connection, based on *Shemot Rabba* (47:1, quoted in Tosafot to *Gittin* 60b).

² See I *Maccabees* 1:11-15.

³ I *Maccabees* 2:24.

the advanced Greek culture, art and entertainment? If the heroes of Chanukah did not have answers to these questions, they would have lost the war even before the fighting began.

The Torah, of course, does contain within it the answers to the challenges of Hellenism. Jewish history has proven that our *mesorah* (tradition) can withstand the intellectual challenges of every generation, whether they emanate from Hellenism, Christianity, Islam, the Enlightenment, Marxism or contemporary post-modernism. But where did the Maccabees find the power to combat Hellenistic culture? The Tanach is replete with devastating critiques of ancient paganism, but nowhere explicitly addresses the intellectual challenges of Plato and Aristotle. So wherein lies the eternal power of the Torah? What makes it relevant and compelling to Jews facing challenges that could not have been foreseen by previous generations?

To explain this, we must understand the essential nature of *Torah SheB'al Peh*. Why would Hashem want one portion of the Torah to be transmitted in written form and another portion to remain unwritten?⁴ Rav Moshe Shmuel Glasner, in the introduction to his commentary *Dor Revi'i* on *Masechet Chullin*, explains that Hashem, in His divine wisdom, devised a plan to make the Torah relevant to every generation.⁵ He took the essentials that are constant throughout history and wrote them in the *Torah SheBichtav* (the written Torah), and then gave us a system of interpretation and exposition by which we can derive from the Torah the answers to halachic and hashkafic questions that arise in future generations, and thereby apply the timeless wisdom of the Torah in a manner that is relevant to a particular time and place. *Torah SheB'al Peh* represents the dynamic aspect of our *mesorah*, that aspect which Chazal referred to (*Chagigah* 3b) when they said "*Divrei Torah parin veravin*" – the words of Torah are fruitful and multiply.⁶ In His infinite wisdom, Hashem hid within the Torah the truths relevant to every generation throughout Jewish history, and gave the Jewish people the interpretive tools for uncovering those truths as they are needed.⁷

Our *mesorah* defeated Hellenism because of this power of *Torah SheB'al Peh*, which made the Torah relevant and compelling to a generation suffused with Hellenistic influence. It is this aspect of Torah which allows us today to find the answers to contemporary ethical dilemmas and technological developments, as well as inspiration to help us navigate the challenges of contemporary Western society, in the same Torah that guided our ancestors three thousand years ago. This is the essence of what we celebrate on Chanukah. Unlike Purim, Chanukah does

⁴ For complementary explanations, see also Bavli *Eruvin* 21b, *Bamidbar Rabba* 14, *Moreh Nevuchim* I:71, and the preface to *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* ("Smag").

⁵ Rav Glasner's basic thesis is already found in the Yerushalmi, *Sanhedrin* 4:2. See the *Korban HaEdah* there, s.v. *lo hayta laregel amidah*.

⁶ See also the preface to *Ktzot HaChoshen*, who understands the formulation found in *Birkat HaTorah*, "*vechayei olam nata betocheinu*" – and 'planted' amongst us everlasting life, as similarly referring to the dynamic growth of Torah via the process of Rabbinc interpretation.

⁷ See Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, *Adir BaMarom*, v.1 p. 70, for a kabbalistic exposition of the process by which the Torah truths necessary for each generation are revealed to the Sages of that generation.

not celebrate the survival of the Jews, who were not physically threatened by the Syrian-Greeks, but rather the miraculous survival of Judaism.⁸ We celebrate the power of *Torah SheB'al Peh*.

This theme is beautifully captured by the unique mitzvah of Chanukah, i.e., lighting candles. Chazal tell us, in a halachic context (*Bava Kama* 3b), that fire is unique because "*ko'ach acher me'urav bo*"—other forces, such as people, animals and wind, perpetuate and magnify a fire by adding fuel and spreading the flame. Nonetheless, the Gemara concludes (*Bava Kama* 23a) that "*isho mishum chitzav*"—a fire, even if it spread by other forces, is the action of the one who originally ignited it. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that the Torah is compared to fire (*Devarim* 33:2). Hashem lit the fire at Sinai, and even though we have developed and perpetuated that flame by the process of Rabbinic interpretation, *isho mishum chitzav*, the final result is no less of a Divine revelation than the *Torah SheBichtav*. Although Chazal (*Shemot Rabba* 51) teach us that "*Kelalim Limduhu HaKadosh Baruch Hu leMoshe*"—Hashem taught Moshe only the general principles of *Torah SheB'al Peh*, they also tell us (*Berachot* 5a, *Vayikra Rabba* 22) that Mishnah, Gemara and every novel interpretation of subsequent Torah scholarship was revealed to Moshe on Har Sinai. The unique power of *Torah SheB'al Peh*, embedded in the infinite complexity of Divine revelation, is that the Torah innovated in each generation ("*chidushei Torah*") is not a new creation, but rather a discovery of the truth hidden in the original revelation and handed down to us from Sinai.

It is thus not surprising that the one halachic passage in which the Gemara clarifies the relationship between Divine revelation and Rabbinic innovation is found in the context of Chanukah. The Gemara states:

What blessing should one recite? Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Chanukah candle. Where were we commanded? R. Avia said from the verse "Do not stray" [from the words of the judges of your generation].

Shabbat 23a

מאי מברך מברך אשר
קדשנו במצותיו וצונו
להדליק נר של חנוכה והיכן
צונו רב אויא אמר: מלא
תסור.
שבת כג.

How we can say "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Chanukah candle," if Chanukah is a post-Biblical innovation? The Gemara's answer is that the authority of all Rabbinic legislation derives from the original revelation of the Torah. While the same question could have been asked about any of dozens of Rabbinically legislated commandments, perhaps Chazal chose to reveal this insight, i.e., that later Rabbinic tradition is also included in the Sinaitic revelation, specifically with regard to Chanukah, whose essence encapsulates this crucial theme.

The candles of Chanukah thus represent to us the flame of *Torah SheB'al Peh* and the awesome miracle of the eternity of Torah. We justly declare, "*HaNeirot halalu kodesh hem*" – these candles are holy, because they burn with the light of our *mesorah*. These candles are holy because they perpetuate that great fire, lit at Sinai and handed down from generation to generation, which our ancestors bequeathed to us so that we may pass it on to our descendants, until it finally blazes with the light of the ultimate redemption.

⁸ *Levush* (O.C. 670:2) uses this observation to explain why Purim is celebrated with physical feasting and drinking, while Chanukah is celebrated with purely spiritual expressions of joy, i.e., Hallel and thanksgiving.

The Complex History of the Hashmonaim

Rabbi Yosef Blau

Senior Mashgiach Ruchani, Yeshiva University

The Rambam's introduction to the *Laws of Hanukka* gives an impression of the story of the Hashmonaim which leaves out many troubling details.

In the time of the second Temple, when the Greeks ruled over Israel, they issued evil decrees against them, proscribing their religion and forbidding them to study the Law and to fulfill the commandments. They laid hands on their property and on their daughters, and they entered the Temple and made breaches in it, and defiled that which was ritually pure. Israel was in dire straits because of them and suffered great persecution until the G-d of our Fathers took pity on them and saved and delivered them from the hands of the Greeks. The Hashmonaim, descendants of the high priests, won a victory over them in which they slew the Greeks and saved Israel from their hands. They set up a king from among the priests and restored Israel's kingdom for more than two hundred years until the destruction of the Temple. The day that the Israelites were victorious over their enemies and destroyed them was the twenty-fifth day of Kislev. When they re-entered the Temple, they found only one cruse of ritually pure oil, enough to burn only one day. Yet they were able to light with it the candelabrum for eight days, until they had time to press olives and produce new ritually pure oil.

Rambam Hilkhos Hanukka 3:1

בבית שני כשמלכו יון גזרו גזרות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ובמצוות, ופשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות, וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחצום לחץ גדול עד שריחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתיים שנה עד החורבן השני. וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואבדום בחמשה ועשרים בחדש כסלו היה ונכנסו להיכל ולא מצאו שמן טהור במקדש אלא פך אחד ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה שמונה ימים עד שכתשו זיתים והוציאו שמן טהור רמב"ם הל' חנוכה פרק ג הלכה א

The full history of the Hashmonaim and the dynasty that they created is much more complex. Their taking on the dual role of high priest and king was problematic and they did not maintain their loyalty to halakhic Judaism. Internal division and civil war led to their descendants being replaced by Herod, who was not Jewish according to halakha; he became the ruler many years before the destruction of the Second Temple.

Even the miracle of the cruse of pure oil only temporarily restored the Temple service to a high standard. The low level of high priests which marked the era of the Second Temple did not

significantly change. The Temple was restored but its requirements were not properly maintained.

The Rambam is not attempting to distort history. He is giving an intriguing perspective on our celebration of Hanukka. To deepen the question and to fully appreciate the message, details of our observances of Hanukka need to be analyzed. First, in contrast to Pesach, the founding event of the emergence of a Jewish nation, when despite many open miracles, Hallel is recited only on the first day (the half Hallel we recite the rest of Pesach is merely a custom), Hallel is recited on all eight days of Hanukka. Second, in order to spread awareness of the miracle, the Gemara, *Shabbat* 23a, introduces the recital of the blessing *she'asa nissim* made by one who sees the lighting even though he did not light the candles himself. Third, the Gemara, *Shabbat* 21b, offers enhanced levels of observance: through more people lighting and through lighting more candles than the single candle required on each night.

The Talmud states:

What is the situation where [the Mishna emphasizes] reciting a blessing for something good? Such as someone who finds an item. Even though it will be bad for him if the government finds out and confiscates it, right now it is good.

Berachot 60a

ועל הטובה כו' היכי דמי כגון
דאשכח מציאה אף על גב דרעה
היא לדידיה דאי שמע בה מלכא
שקיל לה מיניה השתא מיהא טובה
היא.

ברכות ט.

We are required to make a positive blessing on a good that is not only temporary but has negative consequences. We learn to appreciate and acknowledge the good that Hashem does for us even when it isn't permanent. Hashem enabled the brave and committed Hashmonaim to fight against superior numbers to preserve the sanctity of the Temple, and to protect Jewish women and Torah observance. The miracle of the cruse of oil, even if it only increased the lighting of the Menora with pure oil for eight days, was the stamp of Divine approval on their actions.

Although we pray for our ultimate and permanent redemption, it is also necessary to celebrate partial and temporary victories.⁹ Precisely because the accomplishments of the Hashmonaim were not preserved by their descendants we have to thank and praise Hashem for what was accomplished. An additional eight days of pure oil is a miracle that needs to be promoted and spread. There is a blessing recited upon seeing lit candles because seeing the lit candles is a reminder that the miracle occurred. Each day becomes more precious when the impact of the miracle will diminish as the Hasmonean dynasty comes apart. Symbolically, we add candles distinguishing between days. One day's miracle did not guarantee that there would be any oil the following day. Saying Hallel daily stresses the ongoing aspect of the miracle while hinting that when eight days have passed, the future might not be as bright.

Megilat Taanit, the earliest preserved written work of the Oral Law, enumerates days in the calendar that are minor festivals when fasting and, on some of them, eulogies were forbidden. After the destruction of the Temple this listing was no longer binding. Both the Talmud Bavli

⁹ See R. Zadok in *Divrei Sofrim* 32, who attributes this theme to Purim (suggested by Rabbi Yitzchak Blau).

(*Rosh Hashana* 18b) and the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Megilla* 1:4) state that Hanukka remained. The Bavli explains that Hanukka is different from the other days mentioned because its observance included a specific mitzva.

In the balance of Jewish history, the enormity of loss in the destruction of the Temple, the loss of Jewish sovereignty, and our exile, outweighed celebrating victories, both physical and spiritual, over opponents. Hanukka is the exception because it related to the Temple, was blessed with a miracle, and had ongoing impact for 200 years. During the long and arduous exile, we celebrated the time that we defeated enemies who tried to destroy Judaism and defile all that we consider holy.

In the new State of Israel, if we focus our observance of Hanukka on the meaning of the miracle of the oil, we will recognize that we celebrate partial victories, and that military successes should be followed by a spiritual awakening.

Yemei Hallel V'Hoda'ah: The Recitation of Hallel and Al HaNissim on Chanukah

Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

The Gemara, *Shabbat* 21b, in recounting the story of Chanukah, states that the days of Chanukah were instituted as days of *hallel* (praise) and *hoda'ah* (thanksgiving). Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *Hachi*, explains that *hallel* refers to the recitation of Hallel (in the morning prayers) and *hoda'ah* refers to the recitation of Al HaNissim. According to Rashi, the recitation of Hallel and Al HaNissim is part of the original institution of Chanukah.¹ In this guide, we will discuss some practical aspects of reciting Hallel and Al HaNissim.

Hallel

- A full Hallel is recited all eight days of Chanukah.²
- There is a dispute as to whether women are obligated to recite Hallel on Chanukah.³ Nevertheless, according to Ashkenazi tradition, women may recite Hallel with its blessings even according to the opinion that women are exempt from the recitation of Hallel.⁴

¹ See R. Ezra Schwartz's article in this issue for a further discussion of this topic.

² Whenever there is an obligation to recite Hallel, a full Hallel is recited. The Gemara, *Pesachim* 117a, states that there is an obligation to recite Hallel to commemorate salvation from an enemy. Rashi, ad loc., s.v. *V'Al*, writes that an example of this type of obligation is the obligation to recite Hallel on Chanukah. This doesn't explain why there is an obligation to recite Hallel all eight days of Chanukah. Perhaps this can be explained based on the comments of Maharal, *Chiddushei Aggadot* to *Shabbat* 21b, that while the primary miracle of Chanukah was the defeat of the Greeks, this miracle was not recognized universally as a miracle. The miracle of the oil signaled that the defeat of the Greeks was a miracle of the same magnitude. Perhaps this is the reason why Hallel is recited for eight days. While celebration of the miracle of the war should have only been a one-day celebration, the rabbis of the time were given a message through the miracle of the oil that it is worthy to celebrate the miracle of the war for eight days. In the song *Maoz Tzur*, we recite "*bnei binah ymei shmonah kav'u shir u'rinanim*," sons of knowledge instituted eight days of song and praise. Who were these *bnei binah*? R. Yehuda Assad, *Teshuvot Yehuda Ya'aleh*, *Orach Chaim* no. 200, suggests that the *bnei binah* were those who were able to look back and see that it is worthy to celebrate this miracle for eight days. Once these *bnei binah* saw that the miracle of the oil lasted for eight days, they realized that it is worthy to celebrate the miracle of the war for eight days.

³ Tosafot, *Sukkah* 38a, s.v. *Mi*, note that women are exempt from reciting Hallel on Yom Tov because its recitation is a time-bound positive mitzvah and women are generally exempt from this type of mitzvah. However, Tosafot note that women are obligated to recite Hallel on the first night(s) of Pesach and explain that Hallel on the first night of Pesach commemorates the miracle of the Exodus. Since women were part of the miracle (*afhen hayu b'oto*

- If someone came late to the synagogue and is faced with the choice of reciting Hallel with the congregation or beginning one's morning prayers, it is preferable to recite Hallel with the congregation and then recite the morning prayers as long as there is no concern that by doing so, one will miss the final time to recite *keriat sh'ma* or the Amidah.⁵
- One may not speak during the recitation of Hallel unless it is for an urgent matter.⁶
- During Hallel, one may respond to Kaddish (*Yehei Shmei Rabbah* etc.), Kedusha (*Kadosh Kadosh* etc. and *Baruch Kevod* etc.) or *Barchu*. If one is between paragraphs, one may also respond Amen to blessings of the chazzan.⁷
- Hallel must be recited in the proper order. If one skipped a paragraph (e.g., one thought that only a "half Hallel" is recited) or even a word, one should return to the paragraph or word that was skipped and continue from there.⁸
- Hallel should be recited while standing. If someone has difficulty standing, it is permissible to lean on something.⁹

Al HaNissim

- Al HaNissim is inserted into the blessing of thanksgiving, both in the Amidah (*Modim*) and in Birkat HaMazon (*Nodeh lecha*).¹⁰ It is recited in the Mussaf Amidah (of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh) as well, even though Chanukah does not generate an obligation to recite Mussaf.¹¹

ha-nes), the exemption of time-bound positive mitzvot is waved. R. Shimon Sofer, *Hitorerut Teshuva* 3:271, writes that the same logic should be applied to Chanukah and therefore, women are obligated to recite Hallel on Chanukah. Rambam, *Hilchot Chanukah* 3:14, implies that women are exempt from the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah.

⁴ *Mishna Berurah*, *Bei'ur Halacha* 422:2, rules that like other time-bound positive mitzvot, a woman who is exempt from reciting Hallel may voluntarily recite Hallel with its blessings.

⁵ Rama, *Orach Chaim* 422:2, writes that on Rosh Chodesh one should try to recite Hallel with the congregation. *Mishna Berurah* 422:16, explains that this is to satisfy the opinions that one does not recite the blessings of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh when reciting Hallel individually. *Mishna Berurah* notes that this reasoning does not apply when there is an obligation to recite a full Hallel and even an individual may recite the blessings according to all opinions. Nevertheless, *Mishna Berurah* 488:3 writes that one should still try to recite Hallel together with the congregation even if it means reciting Hallel before the morning prayers.

⁶ Rama, *Orach Chaim* 422:4, writes that the laws of interrupting a full Hallel follow the same laws as interrupting *keriat sh'ma*, which are found in *Orach Chaim* no. 66. These laws are somewhat complex and beyond the scope of this guide.

⁷ See note 6. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 66:3, and *Mishna Berurah* ad loc.

⁸ *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 422:6. This applies even if a long time elapsed until one realized that a portion of Hallel was skipped. See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 422:5.

⁹ R. Tzidkiyah HaRofei, *Shibolei HaLeket* no. 173, provides two reasons why Hallel should be recited while standing. First, Hallel is modeled after the songs of the Levites in the Beit HaMikdash. Since it is prohibited to sit in the *Azarah* (courtyard of the Temple), the Levites sang while standing and we do the same. Second, Hallel is a form of testimony for the great miracles that God has performed for us, and testimony is always recited while standing. *Mishna Berurah*, *Bei'ur Halacha* 422:7, notes the opinion of Tosafot, *Zevachim* 19b s.v. *V'Leitav*, that it is permissible to lean in the *Azarah* and therefore suggests that according to the first reason, it is permissible to lean while reciting Hallel. According to the second reason, it is prohibited to lean in a manner where one would fall if the item that one is leaning on was suddenly removed. *Mishna Berurah* notes that ideally, one should try to satisfy the second reason, but implies that in a case of need, one may lean.

¹⁰ *Shabbat* 24a and *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 682:1.

- If one forgot to recite Al HaNissim, either in the Amidah or in Birkat HaMazon, there is no obligation to repeat the Amidah or Birkat HaMazon.¹²
- If one forgot Al HaNissim and did not yet recite the name of God in the conclusion of the thanksgiving blessing, one may recite Al HaNissim and then continue through the conclusion of the blessing.¹³
- One who forgot Al HaNissim and has not yet concluded Birkat HaMazon may insert Al HaNissim into the *HaRachaman* section by stating “הרחמן הוא יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותינו בימים” He Who is Merciful, may He provide miracles for us as He did in ancient times during these days. In the days of Matityahu etc. Similarly, if one has not yet concluded the Amidah, one may recite this formulation before “*yihiyu l’ratzon*.”¹⁴
- Al HaNissim is not recited in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* (commonly known as *Al HaMichya*).¹⁵

¹¹ The Gemara, *Shabbat* 24a, presents a dispute as to whether Al HaNissim should be recited in the Mussaf Amidah. According to R. Huna, Chanukah does not generate an obligation to recite Mussaf, and therefore, there is no reason to mention Chanukah in Mussaf. According to R. Nachman, “the day is one that requires four prayers.” R. Nachman’s opinion seems to be that Al HaNissim is not an insertion special for Chanukah. Rather, on Chanukah, when one recites a prayer of thanksgiving, it is appropriate to mention the miracles of Chanukah (see note 15). As such, when one recites Modim in Mussaf, one should include Al HaNissim. R. Nachman’s opinion is codified as normative in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:2.

¹² The Tosefta, *Berachot* 3:12, states that one who omits Al HaNissim from the Amidah is not required to repeat the Amidah. *Tur, Orach Chaim* no. 682, applies this ruling to Birkat HaMazon as well. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:1, codifies both of these rulings.

¹³ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 682:1. In certain situations we allow someone who only recited “*Baruch Atah HaShem*” to conclude with “*lamdeni chukecha*” (there is a verse in Tehillim 119:12, “*Baruch Atah HaShem lamdeni chukecha*,” which is not considered a formal blessing), and then recite the special insertion. *Mishna Berurah, Sha’ar HaTziyun* 188:18, does not permit it in this situation and writes that it is only applicable when the omission would otherwise require one to repeat Birkat HaMazon (or the Amidah).

¹⁴ The suggestion to recite Al HaNissim in the *HaRachaman* section originally appears in *Kol Bo*, no. 25, and is codified by Rama, *Orach Chaim* 682:1. *Mishna Berurah* 682:4, applies it to the Amidah as well. R. Alexander Shor, *Tevu’ot Shor, Shabbat* 21b, objects to *Kol Bo*’s suggestion based on a statement of the Gemara, *Berachot* 60a, that one should not pray for a miracle. *Kol Bo*’s suggestion seems to include a prayer for a miracle. R. Shor notes that perhaps one can justify *Kol Bo*’s position and distinguish between praying for miracles that appear to be supernatural and miracles that appear to be natural. Those that appear to be supernatural are prohibited and those that appear to be natural are permitted. Al HaNissim only mentions the miracle of the war, which was a miracle that appeared to be natural. R. Shlomo Kluger, *Chochmat Shlomo, Orach Chaim* 682:1, justifies *Kol Bo*’s position by positing that the prohibition to pray for a miracle only applies to a miracle that impacts individuals. However, it is permissible to pray for a miracle that affects the entire congregation. R. Ya’akov Orenstein, *Yeshuot Ya’akov, Orach Chaim* 682:2, also distinguishes between praying for a private miracle and praying for a public miracle. He suggests that the reason why it is not appropriate to pray for a miracle is that if the prayer is answered and the miracle occurs, one’s merits are diminished. However, if one prays for a miracle that affects the masses, the *Kiddush HaShem* that is produced by a public miracle outweighs other considerations.

¹⁵ R. Chaim Soloveitchik (cited in *Haggadah Shel Pesach MiBeit Levi* page 233) suggests that the reason why Chanukah and Purim are not mentioned in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* is based on the concept of the compensatory blessing for Birkat HaMazon, which allows one who omits *R’tzei* or *Ya’aleh V’Yavo* from the Birkat HaMazon of Shabbat and Yom Tov to recite a compensatory blessing after *U’vnei Yerushalayim* instead of returning to the beginning of Birkat HaMazon (See *Berachot* 49a-b). This blessing is only available for the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh. R. Chaim explains that the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh* is an abridged form of all of the *berachot* of Birkat HaMazon. Anything that is not a *beracha* is not included in the *Beracha Me’ain Shalosh*. Although the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh don’t normally appear as independent *berachot*,

- Before the congregation begins the Amidah on Chanukah, the gabbai may announce the recitation of Al HaNissim at Mincha and Ma'ariv,¹⁶ but not at Shacharit.¹⁷
- If one began a meal at the end of Chanukah and the meal extended into the night, one should recite Al HaNissim in Birkat HaMazon as long as one has not yet recited Ma'ariv.¹⁸

they have the potential to exist as independent *berachot* in the form of the compensatory blessing. Al HaNissim, which is not an independent blessing, is therefore omitted. R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik (cited in *Harerei Kedem* Vol. I, page 302), presents a slightly different answer than that of his grandfather, R. Chaim. He suggests that the additions of Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh have a different status than the additions of Chanukah and Purim. On Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh, the function of the additions is to mention the day. On Chanukah and Purim, the function of Al HaNissim is to provide a more detailed account of God's providence in the thanksgiving section of the Amidah and Birkat HaMazon. Therefore, the additions of Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh are considered independent portions of Birkat HaMazon. Al HaNissim is not an independent portion of Birkat HaMazon, rather an extension of the thanksgiving section. *Beracha Mei'ain Shalosh*, whose purpose is to provide an abridged version of Birkat HaMazon, abridges all portions of Birkat HaMazon by providing the main idea of each portion, including the additions for Shabbat, Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh. Al HaNissim, which is not an independent portion and is not the main idea of the thanksgiving section, is therefore omitted from the *Beracha Mei'ain Shalosh*.

¹⁶ The Gemara, *Berachot* 9b, praises those who begin their Amidah immediately (and without interruption) after reciting the blessing of *Ga'al Yisrael*. The laws determining which interruptions are permissible during prayer are the most stringent between *Ga'al Yisrael* and the Amidah. Nevertheless, Rashba, in his responsa 1:293, permits announcing *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* in the synagogue on Rosh Chodesh immediately before the beginning of the Ma'ariv Amidah because it is beneficial to the prayer (*tzorech hatefillah*). Rashba's ruling is codified in *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 236:2. *Mishna Berurah* 236:7, notes that Rashba's ruling is not limited to insertions that would require one to repeat the Amidah. It also applies to Al HaNissim.

¹⁷ See note 16. While Rashba's logic could theoretically be applied to Shacharit and one could argue that announcing *Ya'aleh V'Yavo* or Al HaNissim at Shacharit is beneficial to the prayer and permissible, Rabbeinu Asher, *Ta'anit* 1:2, writes that we do not begin the recitation of *geshem* (rain) at Shacharit because it is not permissible to announce it at Shacharit. *Mishna Berurah, Sha'ar HaTziyun* 236:4, deduces from Rabbeinu Asher's comments (which are quoted in *Taz, Orach Chaim* 114:2), that Shacharit is treated more stringently than Ma'ariv regarding making announcements before the Amidah and therefore, one may not make announcements before the Shacharit Amidah.

¹⁸ *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 188:9 and *Mishna Berurah* 188:32.

Let There be Points of Light

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The location of the Chanuka menorah is described in detail in the Gemara and poskim,¹ and we are told that if it is too high it is invalid, since it will not attract attention effectively. For these purposes, too high means more than 20 *amos* high, which is between 30-40 feet, or 10-13 meters. However, it is clear that while the placement of the menorah below that limit is valid, its proper location is far below that limit—specifically, below 10 *tefachim* from the floor, namely within 2-3 feet, or below a meter.

Ravina said in the name of Rava, this is to say that the Chanuka candle should be placed within 10 [tefachim from the floor].

Shabbos 21b

אמר רבינא [משמיה דרבא] זאת
אומרת: נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה בתוך
עשרה.

שבת כא:

No explanation is given in the Talmud for this height. At first, it might seem inconsistent with another major principle of the Chanuka menorah—the need for *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle—which might suggest that a more prominent position, such as higher up, ought to be optimal. What is the rationale for placing the menorah low down?²

The key to the answer is provided by the Rosh, in his commentary on the Gemara:

There is a mitzvah to place it within 10 as Ravina stated in the name of Rava, and this also publicizes the miracle in a greater way when it is lower because it is unusual to place something that is supposed to provide light so low to the ground.

Rosh, Shabbos 2:5

מצוה להניחה למטה מעשרה.
כדאמר רבינא משמיה דרבא וגם
איכא פרסום הנס טפי כשהיא
למטה דדבר העשוי לאור אין
דרך להניחה כל כך למטה
רא"ש, שבת ב:ה

According to the Rosh, the Chanuka candles are not meant for illumination, but to be points of light for us to notice them. Since candles typically function as sources of illumination, the Chanuka candles are apt to be misconstrued as lights, which they aren't supposed to be; rather, they are supposed to be markers, or indicators, or signs. The Chanuka candles are intended to

¹ *Shabbos 21b-22a*; Rambam, *Hilchos Chanuka* 4:7-9; *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 671:5-8.

² The Gemara does quote a dissenting view that does not insist or even prefer the low placement, and some rishonim, including the Rambam, do not mention the low placement as a preference. However, the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 671:6, does quote this preference, and writes that the proper height for the menorah is below 10 *tefachim*.

advertise the miracles of Chanuka. We view the Chanuka candles the way we view *yizkor* candles or *yahrtzeit* candles: as objects that we take note of, that remind us of something.³ This only works when the significance of the candles is evident. But when they are seen as lights, as illumination, then they fail as reminders. This is the insight of the Rosh. The Chanuka candles are to be placed low down precisely because that is *not* where lights go.

Since the Chanuka reminders (candles) are effective only when they are recognized as reminders and not as anything else, Chazal were acutely aware of the need to prescribe the rules of the candles in such a way as to enable the viewer to identify them as Chanuka icons. In addition to the placement close to the ground, as mentioned above, several regulations are aimed at ensuring that the role of the candles, and their message, is noticed and understood.

As an example, we recite the following declaration after lighting the candles:

These candles we light to commemorate the miracles, the wonders, the salvations and the wars that You performed for our forefathers in those days at this time [on the calendar] through Your holy priests. All eight days of Chanuka, these candles are sanctified and we have no permission to use them, rather just to see them in order to offer praise and thanksgiving to Your great name for Your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvation.

הנרות הללו אנחנו מדליקין על הנסים ועל הנפלאות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה על ידי כהניך הקדושים. וכל שמונת ימי חנכה הנרות הללו קדש הם ואין לנו רשות להשתמש בהן אלא לראותן בלבד כדי להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול על נסיך ועל נפלאותיך ועל ישועתך.

Many mitzvos come with a *bracha*, such as *netilas yadaim* (“*al netilas yadaim*”), *lulav* (“*al netilas lulav*”), *mezuzah* (“*likboa mezuzah*”), and so does the mitzva of lighting Chanuka candles. However, this mitzva is one of very few mitzvos that requires that we make a speech (*Haneiros halalu*) about the mitzva while performing it, describing the purpose of lighting the candles.⁴ Perhaps this is because the candles do not intrinsically signify anything, and to help promote the meaningfulness of those candles Chazal formulated the *Haneiros halalu* declaration.⁵

In a similar vein, the character of the *bracha* over Chanuka candles may be distinct from that of other mitzvos, in that the *bracha* may also be for the purpose of labeling the candles and identifying the message of the candles, which would otherwise be lost.⁶

It was asked: is the mitzvah fulfilled through lighting of the candles or through placement of the candles? Come and listen to what Rava said: If one was holding the candles [at the time of lighting it] one did not fulfill the mitzvah. We see from here that one fulfills the mitzvah by placing it in the correct place. [This is not a valid proof because], in that situation, the onlooker will think that he is holding

איבעיא להו: הדלקה עושה מצוה או הנחה עושה מצוה - תא שמע. דאמר רבא: היה תפוש נר חנוכה ועומד - לא עשה ולא כלום. שמע מינה: הנחה עושה מצוה - התם: הרואה אומר לצורכו הוא דנקיט לה. תא שמע. דאמר רבא:

³ Shabbat candles, by contrast, are intended specifically for illumination.

⁴ *Maseches Sofrim* 20:4

⁵ The Gemara that presents the rules of Chanuka candles does not make any mention of this declaration, however, so the poskim do not invalidate the lighting for omitting it. See for example *Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim* 671:8. However, see *Nefesh Harav*, p.224, that R. Soloveitchik felt that this declaration is an integral part of the mitzvah.

⁶ See R. Yaakov Emden, *Mor Uketziya* 672, and R. Tzvi Pesach Frank, *Mikraei Kodesh* pp. 58-59.

it in order to use it for his needs. Come and listen to what Rava said: If one lights inside (in the wrong location) and then brings it outside, one does not fulfill the mitzvah. This is best explained if one assumes that the mitzvah is fulfilled through the lighting of the candles. For this reason, one must light them in the proper place. However, if one assumes that the mitzvah is fulfilled through the placement, why doesn't one fulfill the mitzvah? In that situation as well, the onlooker will think that the candles were lit for personal needs.

Shabbos 22b

הדליקה בפנים והוציאה - לא עשה כלום. אי אמרת בשלמא הדליקה עושה מצוה - הדליקה במקומו בעינן. משום הכי לא עשה כלום. אלא אי אמרת הנחה עושה מצוה אמאי לא עשה ולא כלום? - התם נמי; הרואה הוא אומר לצורכו הוא דאדלקה.
שבת כב:

The Gemara insists that one not hold the Chanuka candle in his hand, even if it is in the correct location. Although at first, the Gemara understands this rule to imply that the Chanuka candle must be placed in position as an essential part of the mitzva, and consequently holding it in one's hand would be lacking this component, this is rejected. The actual reason for disqualifying Chanuka candles that one holds in his hands is that the onlooker will perceive the candles as illumination and thereby misconstrue their actual role.⁷ Thus, the very fact that the Chanuka candles are not meant for light requires that we avoid giving the impression that they are going to be used for light.

The Gemara rules that in addition to lighting the Chanuka candle(s) one must place another candle nearby, unless there is already a lamp or torch.⁸ Some merge this with a similar rule⁹ that forbids utilizing the flame or the light of the Chanuka candles because of their sanctity (which derives perhaps from their being reminiscent of the *nerot* of the Mikdash, or simply because of their being ritual objects).¹⁰ Thus, the insistence to place another, neutral, candle nearby is in order to prevent people from forbidden utilization of the Chanuka candles. However, others separate these two rules, and they understand the point of the first one is not to shield people from inadvertent or negligent misuse of the candles, but to help onlookers identify these candles as Chanuka candles rather than illumination candles.¹¹ This implies that the additional candle should be placed somewhat removed from the Chanuka candles and specifically higher or in a more central location, where light intended for illumination would typically be placed.¹²

Nowadays, we are accustomed to a porch light or front yard flood light, but years ago this was not common, so a Chanuka candle in the front doorway would be recognized for what it was

⁷ See R. Akiva Eiger, *Teshuvos* II: 125, who emphasizes this point.

⁸ *Shabbos* 21b.

⁹ *Shabbos* 22a.

¹⁰ See *Chidushei Rashba*, *Shabbos* 21b.

¹¹ See Rashba, *ibid.* and Ran on Rif, *Shabbos* 9a, and Meiri, *Shabbos* 21b.

¹² *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 673:1; although the *Mishna Brura* understands the purpose of distancing the extra candle from the others to avoid confusion over the number of Chanuka candles being lit, see R. Yerucham (*Adam V'Chava* 9:1:61:3) who describes, "לצרכו הדליקן" לכ יאמרו על כלן להדליק שום נר אין צריך נר אחר להשתמש לאורו. When one places an extra candle in order to benefit from the light, one should place it by itself, for otherwise [onlookers] will say that all of them were lit for personal needs. If one lights in a place where it is unusual to light any candles, there is no need for the additional candle 'to benefit from the light,'" which is the position advanced in this essay. Incidentally, the *Tur*, *Orach Chaim* no. 673, appears to find no need for the extra candle to be placed remote from the Chanuka candles.

even without auxiliary lighting. If so, those placing their menorah in the front yard (which was the default location in Talmudic times) shouldn't have needed the extra candle.¹³ In fact, that is precisely the interpretation of the Meiri who understands the Gemara's insistence on having a supplemental candle to apply only when lighting inside, but when lighting outside, which is not where people are likely to need the light, and therefore not a likely location to place a lamp, there is no need for the extra candle. However, he concedes that people tend to walk past there, and sometimes to congregate at the doorway, so an additional candle would be appropriate even there.

Nowadays: Electric Light Bulbs

In the 21st century, we do not use candles for illumination at all. Any candle would be only for the purpose of having a beholder look at it, and not to benefit from its light. For example, candles are placed in a restaurant for ambiance, or birthday candles are used so people will look at them.¹⁴ Conversely, any need for illumination will be met by electric bulbs, and not by candle light. Consequently, we might have to re-examine the details of the halacha to see how our observance of Chanuka candles can be consistent with that of earlier times.

Just as candles have been replaced by light bulbs, one might propose that the Chanuka candles be brought up to date by using light bulbs in the menorah. Based on our approach, however, it would seem that **candles**, specifically, are perfectly suited for Chanuka, even more now than throughout history.¹⁵ These Chanuka candles are most striking as artifacts and draw the beholder's attention precisely because they are not light bulbs. By contrast, the "additional candle" described above (that we call the *shamash*), which is specifically for the purpose of shedding light over the area, ought properly to be a light bulb. Since its function is to highlight the Chanuka candles as indicators, and not as illuminators, it should itself be an illuminator and not an indicator. In our world, a candle near the menorah will not succeed in its purpose the way a light bulb would.

On the other hand, there is a problem with having a light bulb near the Chanuka candles that is too bright.

If one lights during the day, one may not benefit from the candles and one may not recite a blessing because [our rabbis] said: one may not recite a blessing on the candle until we benefit from the light.

Maseches Sofrim 20:2

ואם הדליקו ביום, אין ניאותין ממנו,
ואין מברכין עליו, שכך אמרו, אין
מברכין על הנר עד שיאיתו לאורו.
מסכת סופרים כ:ב

Maseches Sofrim states that we don't begin the candle ceremony until we benefit from its light. The obvious difficulty is twofold: we cannot wait until we benefit from the candle to start the ceremony—the ceremony is when we light! Second, we aren't permitted to benefit from the light of the Chanuka candles! Clearly then, the intent of *Maseches Sofrim* is that we don't begin the candle ceremony until we **could** benefit from its light. But this doesn't seem reasonable. If

¹³ See above note 12 regarding R. Yerucham's view.

¹⁴ The notable exception for observant Jews is the Shabbat candles, as above.

¹⁵ Regarding using a light bulb for a *yahrtzeit* candle see R. Y. Greenwald, *Kol Bo al Aveilut*, p.397 #30. Apart from mystical considerations, the *yahrtzeit* candle should be comparable to the Chanuka candles in this regard.

the purpose of the Chanuka candles were to illuminate, then it would be reasonable to insist on their ability to provide benefit—to illuminate. But the Chanuka candles are not for that purpose, so why do we insist on their being able to illuminate? Presumably the answer is that when a candle is in a dark area it is vivid and readily noticed.¹⁶ However, in the words of the Gemara,¹⁷ what good does a candle do during the daylight? If the area is flooded with light, then a candle is unable to stand out and attract attention, and if we want people to notice the candle we would want it to be dark enough. The measure of darkness that we require for Chanuka candles is such that one can potentially benefit from its illumination. Thus, although we may not actually benefit from the light of the Chanuka candles, we must be **able to do so** as a confirmation of their high visibility.¹⁸ A bright room would not be suitable for the Chanuka candles.

Taking both rules together, the ideal environment is one that is illuminated somewhat by a light source other than the Chanuka candles, but isn't too bright such that the candles don't shine. In this environment there would be no preference for a low location over a higher location, as no misunderstanding would exist in any location.¹⁹ In this way, the candles attract the attention of the passerby, and successfully convey the message they are meant to convey, without causing any confusion or misunderstanding.

¹⁶ See Meiri 21b "...ומ"מ קודם שקיעת החמה לא שהרי היא כשרגא בטיהרא ואין בה פרסום נס... , Nevertheless, before sundown, one may not [light] because it is like a candle in a well-lit hall and the miracle is not publicized."

¹⁷ *Chulin* 60b.

¹⁸ This requirement, to be able to benefit from the bright shine of the light when saying a *bracha* over it, seems to be common to all *brachot* over lights: Shabbat candles (*Shabbos* 23b and Meiri there; also see *Pri Yitzchak* 1:6 regarding the caution not to light too early), Havdala candle (*Brachot* 51b), Chanuka candles, and even *kiddush levana* (See R. Yona on Rif, *Brachos* end of perek 4).

¹⁹ See *Mishna Brura* 671:27. This idea may depend on the two opinions cited there.

My Chanuka while the Beit Hamikdash Stood

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We generally link Chanuka with the mitzvah of *hadlakat neiros*, lighting candles. In fact, lighting the candles has become so deeply associated with Chanuka that it is virtually impossible to imagine Chanuka without candles. People go to great lengths to ensure that they do not miss a single night of *hadlakat neiros*, since in common perception, *hadlakat neiros* is the essential act of Chanuka.

However when we look at the Gemara, we note that in fact, the original Chanuka may have been devoid of *hadlakat neiros*:

What is [the reason for] Chanuka? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Chanuka, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient oil for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle happened and they lit [the lamp] for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

Shabbat 21b (adapted from Soncino Translation)

The proper text is these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving—Not that there is a prohibition against creative labor because these days were only appointed to read Hallel and recite Al haNisim in the blessing for thanksgiving.

Rashi, ad loc.

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.

שבת כא:

הכי גרסינן: ועשאום ימים טובים
בהלל והודאה - לא שאסורין
במלאכה, שלא נקבעו אלא לקרות
הלל ולומר על הנסים בהודאה.
רש"י, שם

The Yom Tov of Chanuka was established for *hallel* and *hoda'a* (thanksgiving). Rashi understands that *hallel* and *hoda'a* refer to two different aspects of tefilla, reciting the Hallel and inserting Al haNisim in the *bracha* of Modim. Rashi makes no reference to lighting candles.

According to Rashi's understanding of the Gemara, the kindling of Chanuka lights, which looms so large for us, was not originally part of the Yom Tov.

The *Bach* notes the puzzling absence of lighting of the candles from the Gemara:¹

It is difficult to understand why lighting the candles is not mentioned. It is central [to Chanuka].

Bach, Orach Chaim no. 670

קשיא ממה שלא הוזכר גם הדלקה שהוא העיקר.
ב"ח אורח חיים סימן תרע

Some answer that the Gemara is simply quoting a *beraita* from *Megillat Taanit*. The goal of *Megillat Taanit* is to report on days when it is forbidden to fast, and does not endeavor to relate all the details of each holiday. Hence, there is no mention of candle lighting in *Megillat Taanit*.²

However, it is possible to offer an alternative explanation. Perhaps *hadlakat neirot* was not part of the original Chanuka. The original Chanuka took place at a time when the Beit haMikdash was still standing. There was no need to institute a new mitzvah of lighting Chanuka candles while the original Menorah in the Beit haMikdash was being kindled. Only after the destruction of the Beit haMikdash was the mitzvah to kindle Chanuka candles established to replace the Menorah that was lit in the Beit haMikdash.³ Although Josephus writes that Chanuka was called *Chag haUrim*, the festival of lights, at its inception⁴ this does not contradict our thesis. It is possible that Josephus meant the festival to celebrate the miracle of lights, rather than the festival when we kindle lights. The kindling of Chanuka lights may have been a later enactment, after *Churban haBayit*.⁵

If this perspective is correct, we may understand a number of halachot. Some Rishonim are bothered by the text of the *bracha* we recite when we light the Chanuka candles. We recite the text "*lehadlik ner*," (to light the candle). According to the most accepted position among Rishonim, the formulation of this *bracha* would indicate that this mitzvah cannot be performed through a *shaliach* (agent). If the mitzvah could be performed through a *shaliach*, the text of the *bracha* should be *al hadlakat ner Chanuka*. Yet Chanuka candles may be lit by a *shaliach*. Why then do we recite the text *lehadlik ner shel*⁶ Chanuka and not *al hadlakat ner Chanuka*?⁷ Raavad (*Hilchot Brachot* 11: 15) in one of his explanations notes that we recite *lehadlik* because the

¹ The same point is made by R' Eliahu Mizrahi in his notes appended to the *Smag*, end of *Hilchot Chanuka*.

² See R' Hirsh Melech Dinover, *Chidushei Mahartza* page 166.

³ This approach was developed by R Betzalel Zolty, *Mishnat Yaavetz*, *Orach Chaim* number 73. R Shlomo Fisher in R. Betzalel Naor's *Emunat Itecha* page 62, asks a number of intriguing questions on this approach.

⁴ *Anitquities* XII, 7:7.

⁵ See *Emunat Itecha* page 59.

⁶ There is a discussion as to the precise text recited, specifically if *shel* is included, and whether it is one word or two. See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 676:1 and *Magen Avraham* and *Birkei Yosef* there for halachic reasons to omit *shel*. There is a kabbalistic reason as well to maintain thirteen words in the *bracha*. Those who recite *shel* but attach it to the word Chanuka maintain the text as it appears in the Gemara but still keep the thirteen words *mekubalim* prefer. See Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael* volume 5 page 76 and note 5 there. The text of *ner Chanuka* rather than *neirot* in the plural is also worth investigating – See *Peri Megadim*, *Eishel Avraham* 263:11.

⁷ Yerushalmi in *Sukka* 3:4 does in fact have the text of *al* and there are Rishonim cited in *Beit Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* number 676, who amend the text of our Gemara to read *al* rather than *lehadlik*. This question was already posed by *Or Zarua* volume 1 number 139. See also *Aruch haShulchan*, *Orach Chaim* 676:2, for a summary of the positions.

mitzvah is based on the candles that were lit in the Mikdash. Since in the Mikdash, a *shaliach* could not perform the service, we also recite *lehadlik*. Clearly for Raavad, there is a connection between *hadlakat haner* in the Mikdash and *hadlakat haner* on Chanuka.

This comparison is also evident in the explanation of two other halachot related to *hadlakat haner*. Rashi, *Shabbat* 22b, s.v. *Ee Hadlaka*, writes that the reason why we assume *hadlaka oseh mitzvah*, the lighting of the candles is the fulfillment of the mitzvah (as opposed to the placement of the candles), is that the mitzvah is similar to the mitzvah in the Mikdash. Ran, *Shabbat* 9a in Rif pages s.v. *Hilchot*, writes that the reason why it is forbidden to derive benefit from the Chanuka lights is that the mitzvah mirrors the mitzvah in the Mikdash and in the Mikdash it was prohibited to benefit from the light.⁸

Other Rishonim

There are a number of other Rishonim who split between the *hoda'a* and *hallel* aspect of Chanuka and the *hadlakat haner* aspect. According to these Rishonim it is entirely possible that *hadlakat haner* was a later enactment only instituted after *churban haBayit*. The *Tur* is a case in point. In chapter 670 of *Orach Chaim* he cites the establishment of Chanuka for the purposes of *hallel* and *hoda'a*, but later on in chapter 671 he first mentions:

Since the miracle took place through candles, the rabbis instituted to light candles each night in order to mention (publicize) the miracle.

ויען כי אירע הנס בנרות תקנוה
להדליק נרות בכל לילה כדי
להזכיר הנס.

As such, according to the *Tur*, the essential, original Chanuka was *hallel* and *hoda'a* and did not include *hadlakat neiros*.

Interestingly, there are *girsao* (textual variances) in the Gemara, cited by other Rishonim, that add a slightly different texture to Chanuka. Rabbenu Yerucham 9:1 assumes that in addition to *hallel* and *hoda'a* there is an obligation to study the halachot of Chanuka on Chanuka. This replicates the obligation to expound upon the topics of each Yom Tov on the Yom Tov itself.⁹ (*Megilla* 31a)

Hadlakat Haner as Part of the Original Chanuka

However, there is a school of thought that maintains that lighting the Chanuka candles was part of the original Chanuka. This can be inferred from the *Sheiltot* (number 26 page 177-178 in *Haamek She'aila* version) who has a text in the Gemara that reads “*mai ner Chanuka*” (what is the reason for the Chanuka **candle**) rather than *mai Chanuka*. Accordingly, *hallel* and *hoda'a* are both functions of the candles themselves. Essentially we are praising and thanking G-d for the

⁸ It remains troubling however why those who compare *neiros Chanuka* to *neiros haMikdash* do not require olive oil as was required in the Mikdash. This same question may be asked on *neiros Chanuka* that are kindled in shul and seem to clearly replicate *neiros haMikdash*, *Shulchan Aruch* 671:7 —see *Piskei Teshuvot* 671 note 43.

⁹ See Rav Aharon Kahn, *Yisamach Avicha*, volume 2, page 363, for a discussion of *dorshim hilchot chag b'chag* (the requirement to study the laws of a festival on the festival) as it relates to Chanuka.

miracles by kindling the Chanuka candles. It is through *hadlakat haner* that we fulfill the obligation of *hallel* and *hoda'a*.¹⁰

Rambam

Rav Betzalel Zolty (*Mishnat Yaavetz* no. 73) infers from the Rambam that *hadlakat neiros* was part of the original institution of Chanuka and constitutes *hoda'a* mentioned in the Gemara:¹¹

For this reason, the rabbis of that generation instituted that these eight days, which begin on the night of the 25th of Kislev, are days of joy and hallel and the candles are lit each night of the eight days at the entrance of the doorways in order to display and publicize the miracle.
Rambam, Hilchot Chanuka 3:3

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור
שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל
חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל
ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי
הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת
הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס.
רמב"ם, הלכות חנוכה ג:ג

Based on Rambam's comments, Rav Zolty argues that if one lit candles but failed to have in mind that he or she is performing a mitzvah, they do not get credit for the mitzvah. Ordinarily a rabbinic mitzvah does not require *kavana* (intent). However, *ner Chanuka*, which is a mitzvah of *hoda'a*, requires a mindful acknowledgment of the benefit one received. This can only come about through proper *kavana*.

R. Zolty's argument is innovative. However, it seems that a careful reading of Rambam will show that lighting candles was an additional and later enactment, not part of the original Chanuka. In fact, the language of the Rambam implies that *hadlakat neiros* was a later enactment. Had it been an enactment of the rabbis at the time of the Chanuka story, Rambam would have written the normative expression *vesheyadliku*, "these eight days ... are days of joy and hallel and that one should light candles ..." The expression Rambam uses, *umadlikin*, implies that this is a matter of fact—candles are lit—rather than an enactment set forth by the rabbis at the time of Chanuka.¹²

Moreover, Rambam never states that kindling the candles was a commemoration of what was done in the Beit haMikdash. Were *hadlakat neiros* a reenactment of what was done in the Mikdash, Rambam would mandate *hadlakat neiros* during the day and not only at night.¹³ A further difficulty with the thesis put forward by Rav Zolty is the fact that Rambam doesn't include *hoda'a* anywhere in his description of Chanuka. Rather, he speaks of *simcha*, instead of *hoda'a*. [Perhaps Rambam had a variant text in the Gemara.] Moreover, Rambam includes Al haNisim in *Hilchot Tefilla* (2:13), together with other insertions for various special days. Apparently Al haNisim, what we term *hoda'a*, is not a special Chanuka insertion. It is comparable to Yaaleh v'Yavo and other insertions that mark particular days. Hallel however, is mentioned in Rambam's *Hilchot Chanuka* and seems to comprise the core of the Yom Tov. As

¹⁰ R. Zolty notes that the *Shiltei Giborim* on the Rif takes this approach. It is unclear why he does not reference that this is the position of *Shelitot* as well.

¹¹ *Mishnat Yaavetz*, no. 73. He cites a *Piskei Ria*"z that the term *hoda'a* referred to in the Gemara is accomplished through *hadlakat neiros*.

¹² See Rav Betzalel Naor, *Emunat Itecha* pages 59-63.

¹³ See *Or Sameach* on the Rambam, *Hilchot Chanuka* 3:3, based on Rambam's position, *Hilchot Temidim Umusafim* 3:10, that the Menorah in Beit haMikdash was kindled during the day as well as at night.

such, it seems difficult to assume that lighting candles is a fulfillment of *hoda'a*, a concept that Rambam never refers to in *Hilchos Chanuka*.

It seems that for Rambam, *hadlakat haner* was not part of the original Chanuka celebration. It was a later enactment. However, the purpose of the later enactment for Rambam was not to rekindle Mikdash lights that have extinguished, but to publicize the miracle (*leharot ulegalot haneis*). The original Chanuka was a time of *simcha* and *hallel*. It was a Yom Tov for us to celebrate on our own. Later on the idea of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle to outsiders was enacted.

Popular culture today stresses the *pirsumei nisa* element of Chanuka. The public display of our values to an otherwise value-starved world, is often viewed as a cornerstone of the Chanuka celebration. According to our analysis however, for both Rashi and the Rambam, the public face of Chanuka, in fact the entire institution of *hadlakat haner*, came about much later. The original Chanuka was not about spreading our values to others, but was about cultivating a proper internal sense of *hallel* and *hoda'a*—gratitude for the miracles bestowed upon us and offering appropriate thanks for these miracles.

Zecharia's Prophecy: The Haftarah for Shabbos Chanukah: Zecharia 2:14-4:7

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The immediate memory most people have of the haftarah for Shabbos Chanukah is Zecharia's vision of the seven-branched menorah. For this reason, the haftarah seems to be a perfect choice to be read on Shabbos Chanukah since Chanukah commemorates the lighting of the Menorah by the Chashmonaim at the rededication of the Second Temple.

Yet, the haftarah includes 23 verses, of which only the last seven describe the vision of the menorah. The first two-thirds of the haftarah are rich in images and visions that seem to have little relevance to Chanukah.

What do the verses do to complete, enrich, or expand our understanding of the menorah vision in Zecharia's prophecy? Or are those first verses included merely to ensure that it contains the requisite 21 verses that are generally required for a haftarah?

In order for one to appreciate the message of Zecharia's prophecy, one needs to recall the historical climate he was confronting. Having spent 70 years in exile after the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians, the Jewish nation was given permission by Koresh, King of Persia, to return to Eretz Yisroel and rebuild the Temple. Unfortunately, very few actually took advantage of that opportunity. Under the direction of Zerubabel, a descendant of David Hamelech, and Yehoshua Kohen Gadol, a descendant of the last Kohen Godol in the First Temple, a relative handful of Jews returned and attempted to recapture Israel's former glory. They soon realized that their dream of restoring the Jewish kingdom to its former glory was not to be anytime soon.

Shortly after their return, the Persians, influenced by the hatred and jealousy of the enemies of Judah in Jerusalem, halted the building of the Temple. When Darius II finally allowed them to resume the work 17 years later, any enthusiasm for the project had waned due to economic decline, lack of funds, and fear that the local populace would once again use their influence with the Persians to stop the building. The small, physically unimposing structure they could afford to build would be a mere shadow of the First Temple.

The Navi Zecharia was attempting to counter this malaise—to encourage the nation to continue building the Second Temple despite all the impediments, and not to be discouraged if their efforts were failing to restore the glory that once was the First Temple.

How appropriate it is then for Zecharia to begin (our haftarah) with joyous words:

Rejoice and be happy, daughter of Zion, because behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst— the word of God.

Zecharia 2:14

רני ושמחי בת ציון כי הנני בא ושכנתי בתוכך נאם ה'.

זכריה ב:יד

The present and inauspicious beginning should not detract from the joy that should be felt in the beginning of the rebuilding of the Temple.

What follows in the haftarah is a quite curious vision:

And he showed me Yehoshua, the Kohen Gadol standing in front of the angel of God and the Satan was standing on his right to prosecute him. And God said to the Satan, May God rebuke you, Satan, and may God rebuke you, who chooses Jerusalem, isn't this [man] a brand saved from fire? And Yehoshua was wearing soiled clothing and standing before the angel. And [the angel] said to those standing before him saying, remove the soiled clothing and he said to [Yehoshua], see that I have removed your sin from you and dressed you with clean clothes.

Zecharia 3:1-4

ויראני, את-יהושע הכהן הגדול, עמד, לפני מלאך ה' והשטן עמד על-ימינו, לשטנו. ויאמר ה' אל-השטן, יגער ה' בך השטן, ויגער ה' בך, הבחר בירושלם; הלוא זה אוד, מצל מאש. ויהושע, היה לבש בגדים צואים; ועמד, לפני המלאך. ויען ויאמר, אל-העמדים לפניו לאמר, הסירו הבגדים הצאים, מעליו; ויאמר אליו, ראה העברתי מעליך עונך, והלבש אתך, מחלצות.

זכריה ג:א-ד

Yehoshua Kohen Gadol, the spiritual leader of the nation, is seen in court. The prosecutor, the Satan, stands on the right of Yehoshua, obviously pressing to condemn him for an undisclosed sin, or some other shortcoming.¹⁴ This is alluded to by depicting him as wearing “*begadim tzo'im*,” soiled clothing. God, the judge, stops the Satan in his tracks and doesn't allow the Satan to prosecute Yehoshua because he is an “*ud mutzal me'eish*,” a brand saved from fire.¹⁵ This affirmation allows Yehoshua to escape further prosecution.

Rashi and Radak explain that the Satan represents the “enemies of Judah”¹⁶ who succeeded in stopping the building of the Second Temple in the times of Koresh and were again attempting to stop the building. God tells Zecharia to tell the nation that their enemies will fail in their renewed attempt. They can try to raise Yehoshua's deficiencies before God, but Yehoshua, the saved remnant, will be impervious to their attacks.

Whether the fire referenced is to be taken literally or figuratively,¹⁷ the result is the same: Yehoshua was a survivor. God rejected the Satan's attempt to add fuel to the fire of the past. R' Yosef Kra notes in his commentary on the verse:

There only remains a few of Israel like a brand saved from the fire and you come to prosecute them so I will destroy them?

לא נשתייר מישראל כי אם מעט מאוד שניצל משריפה ואתה בא לקטרג עליהם שאשחיתם.

¹⁴ According to *Sanhedrin* 93a, his sons had married women who kohanim were forbidden to marry and he had not protested.

¹⁵ *Ud* is actually a type of wood that burns slowly.

¹⁶ *Ezra* 4:1.

¹⁷ *Sanhedrin* 93a, understands it literally as Yehoshua having survived being thrown into an actual furnace by Nebuchanetzar. Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, understands it figuratively as Yehoshua having survived the “fires” of exile.

Radak goes one step further:

You were saved from the fire of the exile in order for you to come to Jerusalem and build the Temple and be a kohen there.

וכן זה מוצל מאש הגלות לבא לירושלם ולבנות הבית ולכהן בו.

Yehoshua's survival has a purpose—God won't allow “the enemies of Judah” to succeed in harming him, or the returned Jewish people, because He had a plan for Yehoshua. The *ud mutzal me'eish* is an integral part of the rebuilding of the Second Temple.

I remember vividly learning this haftarah for the first time from an outstanding teacher who had fled Telz via Shanghai before coming to America. I sat riveted as she demonstrated through her personal experience the concept of the Jewish people being an *ud mutzal me'eish*—a people who had been singed by the “fires” of all too many tragedies. She explained ever so powerfully the sense of urgency she felt to rebuild and pass down the legacy of the past to future generations. To survive the pain of *galus* and have the will, desire and strength to rebuild is to be like Yehoshua Kohen Gadol, an *ud mutzal me'eish*. She needed us to know, as Yehoshua did, that imperfections and suffering are no bar to carrying on the *mesorah*.

This part of the vision concludes with God having an angel remove the “soiled clothing” from Yehoshua and dressing him in “*begadim machalatzos*,” clean clothes, an allusion to God having forgiven him for any past sin, and “a priestly hat.” Yehoshua now stands dressed ready for his duties in the Temple. His stature grows before our very eyes.

The haftarah then continues with the navi turning his attention to the political leader of the return to Zion—Zerubabel—a descendant of David Hamelech. Were it not for the dominance of the Persian kings over Eretz Yisroel, he would have been king of an independent Jewish state. Instead, he was merely *pachas Yehuda*—an appointed viceroy.¹⁸

Zerubabel led the *shivas Tzion* (return to Zion) in the heady days of Koresh. It was he who led the first, faltering steps toward rebuilding the temple—but it was also he who had been unable to prevent the Persians from stopping the rebuilding. Now, years later, the nation needed to have its confidence in Zerubabel restored. God instructs Zecharia to tell Yehoshua and his Kohanim: “כי הנני מביא את עבדי צמח,” Behold, I am bringing my servant, the budding one (Zecharia 3:8). Just as a seedling grows slowly, yet steadily, beneath the ground, so too, Zerubabel's stature will gradually, but steadily, emerge and his influence will be felt¹⁹ as he finds favor in the eyes of the Persian king.²⁰

Only after the public image of the two leaders of *shivas Tzion* were bolstered does the navi proceed to the famous vision of the menorah.

In this vision, an angel helps Zecharia decipher one of the most cryptic of his prophecies:²¹

And he said to me, what do you see and I said, I saw and behold there was a candelabra made entirely of gold with a

ויאמר אלי, מה אתה ראה ואמר ראיתי והנה מנורת זהב כלה וגלה על-ראשה,

¹⁸ Chaggai 1:1

¹⁹ Radak on Zechariah 3:8.

²⁰ Rashi on Zechariah 3:8.

²¹ Rashi on Zechariah 1:1.

bowl on its top and there were seven lamps on it—seven pipes flowing to the lamps on its top. And there were two olive trees on top of it, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left.

Zecharia 4:2-3

ושבעה נרתיה עליה--שבעה ושבעה מוצקות, לנרות אשר על-ראשה. ושנים זיתים, עליה: אחד מימין הגלה, ואחד על-שמאלה.
זכריה ד:ב-ג

Zecharia sees a seven-branched menorah that is flanked by two olive branches. A receptacle on top of the Menorah collects olives from those branches, converting them to oil, which then flows directly into the menorah. Zecharia questions the meaning of the vision because, as Radak explains, the entire process was done without human intervention—from the growing and picking of the olives, to the crushing of the olives into oil, to the pouring of the oil into the menorah.

The Angel then explains the meaning of the vision of the menorah by telling Zecharia:

And he answered me saying, "This is the word of God to Zerubabel, saying: Not by armed might and not by strength but rather by my spirit, so says the Lord of Hosts.

Zecharia 14:8

ויען ויאמר אלי לאמר זה דבר ה' אל זרבבל לאמר לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי אמר ה' צבאות.
זכריה יד:ח

Rashi explains:

I will put my spirit into Darius and he will allow you to build and provide all your needs for the building: wheat, wine, oil and trees . . . and you will not need the aid of man.

אני אתן את רוחי על דריוש ויצוה לכם לבנות ולעשות כל צרכי יציאת הבנין משלו ולעזור אתכם בחטין ויין ושמן ועצים ... ולא תצטרכו לעזרת אדם.

The fears, inadequacies, and trepidations of both Zerubabel and the people must be put aside. It is the spirit of God that will be the determinative factor—not the efforts or strength of man. God will see to it that all that is needed to rebuild the Temple will be provided for; nor will any enemy stand in the way. As the haftarah says in its closing words:

Who are you, grand mountain? Before Zerubabel you will become a plain. He will bring out the cornerstone with great excitement for it.

Zecharia 4:7

מי אתה הר הגדול לפני זרובבל למישר והוציא את האבן הראשה תשאות חן חן לה.
זכריה ד:ז

Those that attempt to block Zerubabel and the builders of the Temple will be crushed. Zerubabel is told to continue building on the cornerstone that was set in the days of Koresh. As the rebuilding is continued, sounds of joy and happiness will be heard. Our haftarah then concludes on the same note as it began—the imperative of *simcha*. We began with “רני ושמחי בת,” Rejoice and be happy, daughter of Zion, and the promise that the Divine Presence will eventually return, and we conclude with the joy of rebuilding the Second Temple.

This concept of “לא בחיל ולא בכח,” not by armed might and not by strength, is an important theme of Chanukah as evidenced in God's intervention to ensure the victory of *rabim beyad me'atim*, the many in the hands of the few. This too, then, is a reason Chazal chose to read this haftarah on Shabbos Chanukah.

Surprisingly, the haftarah for Shabbos Chanukah ends at this point in the prophecy. The navi, however, continues elaborating on the meaning of the menorah vision for another seven verses. In the section that is not included in the haftarah, Zecharia asks for an explanation of the two olive branches that stand to the left and right of the menorah. The angel replies:

And he said: These are the two anointed men who are standing by the Master of the land.

Zecharia 4:14

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים שְׁנֵי בְנֵי הַיְצְהָר הָעוֹמְדִים עַל אֲדוֹן כָּל הָאָרֶץ.
זְכַרְיָה ד':י"ד

The two olives represent Zechariah and Yehoshua Kohen Godol, the political leader and the spiritual leader.²² They stand at the helm of the nation having been anointed by God to do His bidding; ready to illuminate His ways to His people.

Why were these last verses excluded from the haftarah? We read Zechariah's vision, but omit part of its explanation.

Perhaps the answer lies in one of the major themes of Chanukah. Both the miracle of the oil lasting eight days and the miraculous victory over the Syrian-Greeks were outcomes that were impossible in rational terms. Rashi explains the message of the menorah being lit spontaneously as: “לא תצטרכו לעזרת אדם,” You will not need the aid of man. The rebuilding of the Second Temple was to be directed by God, and God alone, much like it was God's spirit that drove the victory of the Chashmonaim and caused the oil to burn for eight days. This idea, of God's power to override the natural order, is central to our commemoration of Chanukah. It is for this reason that Chazal chose to close the haftarah with its lesson of “לא בחיל ולא בכח,” “Not by armed might and not by strength but rather by my spirit, so says the Lord of Hosts.”

It is true that there are two olive branches present in Zechariah's vision, representing man's obligation to work towards implementing God's will. If man was to simply sit back and rely on God there would have been but one olive branch above the menorah as a source of oil.²³ The Chashmonaim had to resist the Syrians despite the odds. The one jar of oil had to be lit despite its inability to last eight days. Nevertheless, we end the haftarah where we do to stress, not our own responsibilities, but God's ability to do the impossible.

It is appropriate, then, that the haftarah begins with the joy that we feel in knowing that God will return and rest His presence in our midst, and ends with the joy the Jews felt in the building of the Second Temple. This joy emanates from the fact that we know that God is the ultimate source of our success—be it in building the Second Temple in the days of Yehoshua and Zerubabel, in the rededication of the Temple in the days of the Chashmonaim, and, ultimately, in the building of the Third and final Temple *b'meheirah b'yameinu* (speedily in our days). As Chaggai HaNavi states:

... My spirit stands in your midst, fear not.

Chaggai 2:5

... רוּחִי עוֹמֵד בְּתוֹכְכֶם אֵל תִּירָאוּ.
חֲגִי ב':ה'

²² Radak on Zecharia 4:14.

²³ See *Chazon HaMikrah* V. I, p.369.

God's Providence and the United States

A Thanksgiving Reader on Judaism and the American Idea

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A miracle occurred, and they were able to light from the flask of oil for eight days. The next year, they established and made it a holiday, with thanksgiving and praise. –Shabbat 21b

*Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—that we may then all unite in him our sincere and humble thanks...
–George Washington, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1789*

Introduction

Much has been made in the media of the fact that the American holiday of Thanksgiving occurs this year on what is, for Jews, the first day of Chanukah. While this has provided much fodder for humorous remarks about "Thanksgivikah," in fact, the convergence of calendars ought to inspire us to ponder how the Jewish approach to expressing thanks and gratitude to God may have impacted America millennia later. As millions of Americans prepare to observe Thanksgiving, The Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought presents this essay, and the sources that follow, to help provide a framework for reflecting on the American holiday that is upon us, and on the Jewish ideas that may have inspired it.

America, the *Korban Todah*, and the Origins of Thanksgiving

Any Jewish analysis of Thanksgiving must certainly begin with the *korban todah*, the sacrifice brought as an offering of thanks to God. Ostensibly a *shelamim* like any other, the *todah* is mainly distinguished by the bread that is brought and eaten alongside it: three forms of unleavened matza—10 each—and 10 loaves of chametz. As Vayikra prohibits the offering of chametz on the *mizbeach* itself, the inclusion of chametz in a sacrificial ritual has intrigued many *meforshim*, from Ramban to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. One very interesting approach to the *todah* has been offered by Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, who explained that unleavened bread “represents a station in mid-

process, before the end result is achieved. It represents a deficiency that is waiting for completion.” Chametz, then, represents the conclusion of a process. The one communal *korban* that utilizes leaven is the *shte ha-lekhem* of Shavuot; this, he argues, embodies the completion of the seven-week journey from Pesach to *kabbalat Ha-Torah*. He further suggests that if the sole individual offering in which chametz is included is the *todah*, it is because it serves as a symbol of the salvation that follows distress:

*An offering of thanksgiving is brought by a person who faced some danger or predicament and was delivered from it. Therefore, when he is saved, it is indeed proper that his offering include both chametz loaves and matzot. The matzot symbolize the trouble that he was in, the bitter cry that he uttered, and the process of redemption from that predicament to an open space of relief. The chametz represents the completion of his deliverance and his current state of tranquility; it is an expression of reaching the end of this particular road, the attainment of peace and satisfaction.*²⁴

It is with this in mind that Rabbi Bin-Nun further explores the three sets of matza included in the *todah*. The halakha distinguishes four cases of divine salvation in which one is required to offer this *korban*. All are derived from a prayer of thanksgiving contained in the 107th chapter of Tehillim. The *perek* begins with the exclamation, “Give praise unto God, for He is good, and His mercies endure forever.” The psalm then delineates situations in which individuals find themselves in various forms of distress: those who have “wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle; (107:4)” those who “suffered affliction; (107:18)” the “prisoners suffering in iron chains; (107:10)” and those “went out on the sea in ships. (107:23)” The halakha thus distinguishes those who survived a journey through the dessert or the sea; those who were released from prison; and individuals who survived an illness. In describing each of these crises, Tehillim depicts individuals who find themselves mired in distress, turning to God in prayer, experiencing salvation, and responding with joyous thanksgiving: “Let them give thanks to God for his loving kindness, and for his wonderful works before the sons of men.” Rabbi Bin-Nun suggests, in the spirit of *derush* (homily), that the three types of matza are

...parallel to the three stages that precede the thanksgiving: the stages of distress, crying out, and deliverance... Along with the matzot, this offering also includes the loaves of chametz, which correspond to the fourth stage—the singing of thanks to the Master of the world Who redeems and saves—for having brought this person to his state of tranquility.

With the destruction of the Mikdash, the concept of the *todah* endures in the *birkat hagomel*, which, according to the halakha, is pronounced for the same four cases of salvation seen in Tehillim 107. It is this halakha of *berakhot* that brings us to one of the origins of the American Thanksgiving.

The Pilgrims and the Rambam

Perhaps the most famous figure to arrive in North America on the *Mayflower* was William Bradford, who ultimately became the governor of Plymouth colony. His own account of the Pilgrim journey and of the first years in America, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, emphasizes that he and

²⁴ "On Chametz and Matzah," www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/chametz.htm.

his compatriots were obligated by scripture to thank God for their endurance. In so doing, he cites the 107th Psalm:

*May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which **came over this great ocean**, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and he heard their voice, and looked on their adversity, etc. **Let them therefore praise the Lord, because he is good, and his mercies endure forever.** Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, show how he hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. **When they wandered in the desert wilderness** out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry, and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them. **Let them confess before the Lord loving kindness, and his wonderful works before the sons of men.** (emphasis added)*

Strikingly, the central motif of Bradford's gratitude to God is the very same *perek* in the Tanakh—the 107th Psalm—that serves for Jews as the scriptural source for the halakhic notion of Thanksgiving. In his book *Exodus from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World*, Nick Bunker notes that sections of the 107th Psalm were recited in a prayer uttered by the Pilgrims upon arriving in America. Bunker further points out that the connection between this *perek* and the Thanksgiving story is more profound than that. Incredibly, the Bible that Bradford bore with him across the ocean to the Americas contained a commentary that included the Jewish concept of *birkat hagomel*. Written by the Puritan scholar Henry Ainsworth, the commentary cites as a gloss on Psalm 107 a Jewish law of *berkahot*:

And from this Psalme, and this verse of it, the Hebrues have this Canon; Foure must confess (unto God): The sick, when he is healed; the prisoner when he is released out of bonds; they that goe down to sea, when they are come up (to land); and wayfaring men, when they are come to the inhabited land. And they must make confession before ten men, and two of them wise men, Psal. 107. 32. And the manner of confessing and blessing is thus; He standeth among them and blesseth the Lord, the King eternal, that bounteously rewardeth good things unto sinners, etc. Maimony in Misn. Treat. Of Blessings, chap. 10, sect. 8.

This "Maimony" cited is Maimonides, and the work being referenced is his *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Berakhot*, delineating the four cases of salvation for which one is obligated to express public thanksgiving to the Almighty:

There are four who are required to express thanks: an ill person who has been healed, a prisoner who was released from prison, sea travelers that reached the shore and travelers who reach a settlement. They must express thanks in front of ten, two of whom are scholars . . . How does one express thanks and what blessing should one recite? He stands among them and recites "Blessed are You, Lord our God, Master of the Universe Who provides goodness to those who are undeserving, Who has granted me all of the good." All of the listeners say "[He Who] provided you good should continue to provide for you forever.

Hilkhot Berakhot 10:8

ארבעה צריכין להודות, חולה שנתרפא, וחבוי שיצא מבית האסורים, ויורדי הים כשעלו, והולכי דרכים כשיגיעו לשוב, וצריכין להודות בפני עשרה ושנים מהם חכמים ... וכיצד מודה וכיצד מברך, עומד ביניהן ומברך, ברוך אתה יי' אלהינו מלך העולם הגומל לחייבים טובות שגמלני כל טוב, וכל השומעין אומרים שגמלך טוב הוא יגמלך סלה.
הלכות ברכות י:ח

That Bradford chose the 107th Psalm as the source of Puritan gratitude to God cannot be a coincidence, and it is not too much of a leap to draw an intellectual link between the *today* and the Thanksgiving that we know today. As Rabbi Moshe Sokolow notes in a wonderful essay on this link, this “vestige of Jewish influence on the religious mores of the U.S. is worth our acknowledgment and contemplation—and, of course, our thanksgiving.”²⁵

Washington’s Thanksgiving: An Acknowledgement of *Hashgacha*

The origins of Thanksgiving, then, can perhaps first be found in the Jewish obligation, derived from the Tanakh, to recognize Providence. With the birth of the United States, Americans extended this concept by comparing their own suffering and salvation as a nation with those experienced in the Tanakh by the people of Israel.

In 1774, the Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. A proposal that the delegates begin with prayer met with an objection from John Jay, later the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who pointed to the deep religious divisions among those present. Then Samuel Adams stood up and said that he would hear a prayer from “any gentleman of piety and virtue” who was also “a friend to his country.” A clergyman invited to lead the prayer read the 35th Psalm, in which *David Ha-Melekh* seeks the protection of God:

1 A Psalm of David. Strive, O LORD, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me. 2 Take hold of shield and buckler, and rise up to my help. 3 Draw out also the spear, and the battle-axe, against them that pursue me; say unto my soul: 'I am thy salvation.'

Psalms 35:1-3

א לדוד ריבה ה' את יריבי
לחם את לחמי. ב החזק מגן
וצנה וקומה בעזרתי. ג והרק
חנית וסגר לקראת רדפי אמר
לנפשי ישעתך אני.
תהלים לה:א-ג

That evening, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail:

I never saw a greater effect on an Audience. Who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine interposition and aid. It was enough to melt a heart of stone. It seems as if heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read that day . . . I must beg of you to read that Psalm.

Commenting on this story and others like it, the theologian Michael Novak notes that the sharp denominational divisions among colonial Americans were precisely what made the text of the Hebrew Bible into the central language of the American “metaphysic; the background to the American vision of history and the destiny of humanity.” It was the biblically informed sense of a providential mission, derived from a comparison to the people of Israel, that would enable Americans to overcome their differences and bind their individual selves to a common destiny. Immediately following the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, two of the most famous Founding Fathers suggested that Israelite images of salvation serve as the seal of the nascent nation. Benjamin Franklin advocated that America be forever symbolized by a picture of

²⁵ "Thanksgiving: A Jewish Holiday After All," *Jewish Ideas Daily*, Nov. 23, 2011. I am indebted to Rabbi Sokolow's article for introducing me to Nick Butler's fascinating thesis, and for its providing the full Ainsworth citation of the Rambam.

"Moses lifting up his wand, and dividing the red sea." Jefferson, in contrast, suggested a seal depicting Israel in the desert, guided by a heavenly cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night. After the remarkable military victories against the British, the comparisons between American and ancient Israel only increased. Ariel Abbot, president of Harvard during the revolution, made the case before the legislature of New Hampshire for the adoption of the Constitution by comparing the colonies to the 12 tribes of Israel, and Washington to Moses, concluding that "we cannot but acknowledge that God hath graciously patronized our cause, and taken us under his special care, as he did his ancient covenant people."²⁶

In this context, the celebration of Thanksgiving in America following the ratification of the Constitution emerged as both a recognition of divine salvation and an expression of gratitude for the freedom of religion that was to be found in America. The 1781 Thanksgiving declaration by the Continental Congress specifically sets out events during the war that were deemed providential, if not miraculous. And in 1789, when Washington issued the first Thanksgiving declaration by an American president, he expressed America's gratitude to God for "the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war and the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed," a reflection of the "civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed."

It was only several months before that, writing to Congregation Mickveh Israel in Savannah, that Washington explicitly linked this providence with the Exodus: "May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven." Washington then concludes with the prayer that Americans of other faiths "participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings" of the Jews. In this way, the comparison to ancient Israel served as a uniting force and provided a conceptual framework in which religious freedom could flourish in America.

Our Freedom in America—And Our Obligations to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*

When the Constitutional Convention met in 1787 in Philadelphia, a local prominent Jew by the name Jonas Phillips wrote a letter to the president of the Convention, George Washington, complaining that all public office holders in Pennsylvania were required to affirm that the New Testament was divinely inspired. This, Phillips wrote, "is absolutely against the religious principle of a Jew, and it is against his Conscience to take any such oath." Phillips then asked that the Convention create a country in which "all religious societies are on an equal footing," meaning where all faiths were able to serve in the legislature while remaining true to their beliefs. Phillips then added that, "the Jews have been true and faithful whigs, & during the late Contest with England they have been foremost in aiding and assisting the states with their lives & fortunes, they

²⁶ For more on this, see my article "Blessed Unions," published in the March 2012 issue of *Commentary*.

have supported the cause, have bravely fought and bled for liberty which they can not Enjoy.” He further requested that the Convention create a government devoid of such injustices. Phillips, in other words, audaciously argued to the most famous man in America, Washington, that if the Jews were not able to serve society without violating their conscience, then they were not truly free, because seeking to serve society is itself part and parcel of the Jewish faith, and at the essence of religious freedom, for Jews, is the ability to be part of general society while remaining dedicated to what makes us different. Fortunately for Phillips—and for us—the Constitution produced by the Convention did indeed prohibit any religious test for public office.

Several years later, Phillips' loyalty to what made him different was put to the test. He was asked to testify on a Saturday in a trial in Philadelphia, as courts were then in session six days a week. Phillips refused, explaining that Saturday was his Sabbath and that true equality demanded he be allowed to obey the dictates of his conscience, the general law notwithstanding. Stanford law professor Judge Michael McConnell has called this case, *Stansbury vs. Marks*, the “first recorded case raising free exercise issues following the adoption of the First Amendment.” The court record reports the following: “In this cause (which was tried on Saturday, the 5th of April), the defendant offered Jonas Phillips, a Jew, as a witness; but he refused to be sworn, because it was his Sabbath. The court, therefore, fined him 10 pounds; but the defendant, afterwards, waiving the benefit of his testimony, he was discharged from the fine.”²⁷

Phillips' form of honoring Shabbat—refusing to testify in civil court—is itself noteworthy. The *minhag* to stand for at least the first part of Kiddush is based on the law that witnesses in Jewish courts stand during testimony.²⁸ In Kiddush, we are called to witness what our Shabbat stands for, the creation of the world, the Torah that reiterated it, and the Jews who are commanded to observe and honor it. To put it another way, Phillips, in refusing to give testimony in a court proceeding, was testifying for and honoring the Shabbat.

Phillips is a role model to us as we give thanks to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for the existence of America, and for the freedoms that we experience in the United States. Since 2011, the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University has been constructing and presenting seminars and lectures on the subject of “Jewish Ideas and American Democracy.” Our goal is to bring classic Jewish texts into conversation with the foundational works of American political thought. In that spirit, we present both the above small essay and the sources that follow below. If there is a uniquely Jewish way to mark Thanksgiving, it is to reflect on the impact that Judaism has had on this country, the freedom we enjoy therein, and to ponder our own obligation to communicate Jewish ideas to America and to the world: to serve, like Phillips, as witnesses of the Torah and its values in the United States. We at the Straus Center hope that the study of these sources plays a small role in this endeavor.

²⁷ Michael McConnell, “Free Exercise Revisionism and the Smith Decision,” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 1109-1153.

²⁸ See *Mishnah Berurah* 271:45.

Appendix: A Collection of the Writings Cited in the Essay

[Editor's note: Original spelling and grammar has been preserved.]

The Psalm that United the Continental Congress:

A Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams

September 16th, 1774

Having a Leisure Moment, while the Congress is assembling, I gladly embrace it to write you a Line.

When the Congress first met, Mr. Cushing made a Motion, that it should be opened with Prayer. It was opposed by Mr. Jay of N. York and Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina, because we were so divided in religious Sentiments, some Episcopalians, some Quakers, some Aanabaptists, some Presbyterians and some Congregationalists, so that We could not join in the same Act of Worship. Mr. S. Adams arose and said he was no Bigot, and could hear a Prayer from a Gentleman of Piety and Virtue, who was at the same Time a Friend to his Country. He was a Stranger in Phyladelphia, but had heard that Mr. Duche (Dushay they pronounce it) deserved that Character ... Mr. Randolph our President, waited on Mr. Duche, and received for Answer that if his Health would permit, he certainly would. Accordingly next Morning he ... read several Prayers, in the established Form; and then read the Collect for the seventh day of September, which was the Thirty fifth Psalm. You must remember this was the next Morning after we heard the horrible Rumour, of the Cannonade of Boston. I never saw a greater Effect upon an Audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that Morning...

I must beg you to read that Psalm. ... It will amuse your Friends to read this Letter and the 35th Psalm to them ...

I long to see my dear Family. God bless, preserve and prosper it. Adieu.

John Adams

Proposals for the Seal of the United States

A Letter by John Adams to Abigail Adams

Philadelphia, 14 August, 1776.

THIS is the anniversary of a memorable day in the history of America. A day when the principle of American resistance and independence was first asserted and carried into action. The stamp office fell before the rising spirit of our countrymen. It is not impossible that the two grateful brothers may make their grand attack this very day. If they should, it is possible it may be more glorious for this country, than ever: it is certain, it will become more memorable. Your favors of August 1st and 5th came by yesterday's post. I congratulate you all upon your agreeable prospects. Even my pathetic little hero Charles, I hope, will have the distemper finely. It is very odd that the Doctor cannot put infection enough into his veins; nay, it is unaccountable to me, that he has not taken it the natural way, before now. I am under little apprehension, prepared as

he is, if he should. I am concerned about you, much more. So many persons about you sick, the children troublesome, your mind perplexed, yourself weak and relaxed. The situation must be disagreeable. The country air and exercise, however, will refresh you.

I am put upon a committee, to prepare a device for a golden medal, to commemorate the surrender of Boston to the American arms, and upon another, to prepare devices for a great seal, for the confederated States ...

Doctor F. [Benjamin Franklin] proposes a device for a seal. Moses lifting up his wand, and dividing the red sea, and Pharaoh in his chariot overwhelmed with the waters. This motto. "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

Mr. Jefferson proposed, The children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night...

I shall conclude by repeating my request for horses and a servant. Let the horses be good ones. I can't ride a bad horse so many hundred miles. If our affairs had not been in so critical a state at New York, I should have run away before now. But I am determined, now, to stay until some gentleman is sent here in my room, and until my horses come. But the time will be very tedious.

The whole force is arrived at Staten Island.

Proclamation of a Fast Day

Dec. 11, 1776, Continental Congress

Whereas, the war in which the United States are engaged with Great Britain, has not only been prolonged, but is likely to be carried to the greatest extremity; and whereas, it becomes all public bodies, as well as private persons, to reverence the Providence of God, and look up to him as the supreme disposer of all events, and the arbiter of the fate of nations; therefore,

Resolved, That it be recommended to all the United States, as soon as possible, to appoint a day of solemn fasting and humiliation; to implore of Almighty God the forgiveness of the many sins prevailing among all ranks, and to beg the countenance and assistance of his Providence in the prosecution of the present just and necessary war.

The Congress do also, in the most earnest manner, recommend to all the members of the United States, and particularly the officers civil and military under them, the exercise of repentance and reformation; and further, require of them the strict observation of the articles of war, and particularly, that part of the said articles, which forbids profane swearing, and all immorality, of which all such officers are desired to take notice.

It is left to each state to issue out proclamations fixing the days that appear most proper within their several bounds...

Continental Congress, Thanksgiving Proclamation

By the United States, in Congress Assembled

October 26, 1781

PROCLAMATION.

Whereas it hath pleased Almighty God, the Father of Mercies, remarkably to assist and support the United States of America in their important struggle for liberty against the long-continued efforts of a powerful nation, it is the duty of all ranks to observe and thankfully acknowledge the interpositions of his Providence in their behalf; Through the whole of the contest from its first rise to this time the influence of Divine Providence may be clearly perceived in many signal instances, of which we mention but a few:

In revealing the counsels of our enemies, when the discoveries were seasonable and important, and the means seemingly inadequate or fortuitous.

In preserving and even improving the union of the several states on the breach of which our enemies placed their greatest dependence,

In increasing the number and adding to the zeal and attachment of friends of liberty,

In granting remarkable deliverances and blessings with the most signal success, when affairs seemed to have the most discouraging appearance,

In raising up for us a most powerful and generous ally in one of the first of European Powers,

In confounding the counsels of our enemies and suffering them to pursue such measures as have most directly contributed to frustrate their own desires and expectations: above all,

In making their extreme cruelty to the inhabitants of those states when in their power and their savage devastation of property the very means of cementing our Union and adding vigor to every effort in opposition to them; and as we cannot help leading the good people of these states to a retrospect on the events which have taken place since the beginning of the war so we may recommend in a particular manner to their observation the goodness of God in the year now drawing to a conclusion in which the Confederation of the United States has been completed,

In which there have been so many instances of prowess and success in our armies, particularly in the southern states, where, notwithstanding the difficulties with which they had to struggle, they have recovered the whole country which the enemy had overrun, leaving them only a post or two on or near the sea,

In which we have been so powerfully and effectually assisted by our allies, while in all the unjust operations, the most perfect harmony has subsisted in the allied army: In which there has been so plentiful a harvest, and so great abundance of the fruits of the earth of every kin, as not only enable us easily to supply the wants of our army, but gives comfort and happiness to the whole people,

And in which, after the success of our allies by sea, a general of the first rank with his whole army has been captured by the allied forces under the direction of our commander-in-chief.

It is therefore recommended to the several states to set apart the THIRTEENTH day of DECEMBER next, to be religiously observed as a day of THANKSGIVING and PRAYER; that all the people may assemble on that day with grateful hearts to celebrate the praises of our glorious Benefactor, to confess our manifold sins, to offer up our most fervent supplications to the God of all grace that it may please Him to pardon our offense, and incline our hearts for the future, to keep all His laws, to comfort and relieve all our brethren who are in distress or captivity, to prosper our husbandmen, and give strength to all engaged in lawful commerce; to impart wisdom and integrity to our counselors, judgment and fortitude to our officers and soldiers; to protect and prosper our illustrious ally and favor our united exertions for the speedy establishment of a safe, honorable, and lasting peace, to bless our seminaries of learning, and cause the knowledge of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.

To George Washington from Jonas Phillips, 7 September 1787

From Jonas Phillips

Philadelphia 24th Ellul 5547 or Sepr 7th 1787

Sirs

With leave and Submission I address my Self To those in whome there is wisdom understanding and knowledge. they are the honorable personages appointed and Made overseers of a part of the terrestrial globe of the Earth, Namely the 13 united states of america in Convention Assembled, the Lord preserve them amen.

I the subscriber being one of the people called Jews of the City of Philadelphia, a people scattered and despersed among all nations do behold with Concern that among the laws in the Constitution of Pennsylvania their is a Clause Sect 10 to viz.—I do belive in one God the Creator and governour of the universe the Rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked—and I do acknowledge the scriptures of the old and New testament to be given by devine inspiration—To Swear and belive that the new testament was given by devine inspiration is absolutly against the Religious principle of a Jew and is against his conscience to take any such oath. By the above law a Jew is deprived of holding any public office or place of Government which is a Contradectory to the bill of Right Sect. 2 viz.—1

That all men have a natural and inalienable Right To worship almighty God according to the dictates of their own Conscience and understanding, and that no man aught or of Right can be compelled to attend any Religious Worship or Erect or support any place of worship or Maintain any minister contrary to or against his own free will and Consent nor can any man who acknowledges the being of a God be Justly deprived or abridged of any Civil Right as a Citizen on account of his Religious Sentiments or peculiar mode of Religious Worship and that no authority can or aught to be vested in or assumed by any power what Ever that shall in any Case interfere or in any manner Controul the Right of Conscience in the free Exercise of Religious Worship.

It is well Known among all the Citizens of the 13 united states that the Jews have been true and faithfull whigs; and during the late contest with England they have been foremost in aiding and assisting the states with their lifes and fortunes, they have supported the cause, have bravely fought and bleed for Liberty which they can not Enjoy.

Therefore if the honourable Convention shall in their Wisdom think fit and alter the said oath and leave out the words to viz.—and I do acknowledge the scriptures of the new testament to be given by devine inspiration, then the Israelites will think themself happy to live under a government where all Religious societys are on an Eaquel footing. I solecet this favour for my Self my Children and posterity and for the benefit of all the Israelites through the 13 united States of america.

My prayer is unto the Lord—May the people of this states Rise up as a great and young lion, May they prevail against their Enemies, May the degrees of honour of his Exceellency the president of the Convention George Washington, be <Extolled> and Raise up, May Everyone speak of his glorious Exploits—May God prolong his days among us in this land of Liberty—May he lead the armies against his Enemys as he has done hereuntofore, May God Extend peace unto the united States—May they get up to the highest Prosperitys—May God Extend peace to them and their Seed after them so long as the Sun and moon Endureth—and May the almighty God of our father Abraham Isaac and Jacob endue this Noble Assembly with wisdom Judgement and unanimity in their Councils, and may they have the Satisfaction to see that their present toil and labour for the wellfair of the united States may be approved of Through all the world and perticular by the united States of america, is the ardent prayer of Sires Your Most devoted obed. Servant

Jonas Phillips

Samuel Langdon, The Republic of the Israelites as an Example to the American States

And now, my fellow citizens, and much honored fathers of the State, you may be ready to ask *“To what purpose is this long detail of antiquated history on this public occasion?”* I answer—Examples are better than precepts; and history is the best instructor both in polity and morals. I have presented you with the portrait of a nation, highly favoured by heaven with civil and religious institutions, who yet, by not improving their advantages, forfeited their blessings, and brought contempt and destruction on themselves. If I am not mistaken, instead of the twelve tribes of Israel, we may substitute the thirteen states of the American union, and see this application plainly offering itself, viz.—That as God in the course of his kind providence hath given you an excellent constitution of government, founded on the most rational, equitable, and liberal principles, by which all that liberty is secured which a people can reasonably claim, and you are empowered to make righteous laws for promoting public order and good morals...By this you will increase in numbers, wealth, and power, and obtain reputation and dignity among the nations: whereas, the contrary conduct will make you poor, distressed, and contemptible.

The God of heaven hath not indeed visibly displayed the glory of his majesty and power before our eyes, as he came down in the sight of Israel on the burning mount; nor has he written with

his own finger the laws of our civil polity: but the signal interpositions of divine providence, in saving us from the vengeance of a powerful irritated nation, from which we were unavoidably separated by their inadmissible claim of absolute parliamentary power over us; in giving us a Washington to be captain-general of our armies, in carrying us through the various distressing scenes of war and desolation, and making us twice triumphant over numerous armies, surrounded and captivated in the midst of their career; and finally giving us peace, with a large territory, and acknowledged independence; all these laid together fall little short of real miracles, and an heavenly charter of liberty for these United-States. And when we reflect, how wonderfully the order of these states was preserved when government was dissolved, or supported only by feeble props; with how much sobriety, wisdom, and unanimity they formed and received the diversified yet similar constitutions in the different states; with what prudence, fidelity, patience, and success, the Congress have managed the general government, under the great disadvantages of a very imperfect and impotent confederation; we cannot but acknowledge that God hath graciously patronized our cause, and taken us under his special care, as he did his ancient covenant people.

George Washington, Letter to Congregation Mickveh Israel, Savannah, Georgia

Gentlemen: I thank you with great sincerity for your congratulations on my appointment to the office which I have the honor to hold by the unanimous choice of my fellow citizens, and especially the expressions you are pleased to use in testifying the confidence that is reposed in me by your congregation ...

I rejoice that a spirit of liberality and philanthropy is much more prevalent than it formerly was among the enlightened nations of the earth, and that your brethren will benefit thereby in proportion as it shall become still more extensive; happily the people of the United States have in many instances exhibited examples worthy of imitation, the salutary influence of which will doubtless extend much farther if gratefully enjoying those blessings of peace which (under the favor of heaven) have been attained by fortitude in war, they shall conduct themselves with reverence to the Deity and charity toward their fellow-creatures.

May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people ...

George Washington, Thanksgiving Proclamation

[New York, 3 October 1789]

By the President of the United States of America, a Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor—and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks—for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation—for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war—for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed—for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted—for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually—to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed—to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord—To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport

George Washington

August 18, 1790

Gentlemen:

While I received with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced on my visit to Newport from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security.

If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and happy people.

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration and fervent wishes for my felicity.

May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.

May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

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