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December 2015 • Chanuka 5776



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in honor of their children and grandchildren

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Introduction

The Gemara, *Shabbos* 23a, states that upon seeing the Chanukah lights of someone else, one recites the blessing of *She'asa Nissim*. Tosafos, *Sukkah* 46a, are bothered by the fact that other mitzvos do not have such a blessing. We don't recite a beracha upon seeing a lulav, sukkah, mezuzah or any other mitzvah. What is at the root of this blessing? Why does Chanukah — a late rabbinic holiday — merit this unique blessing?

In truth, there are two components of the mitzvah of ner Chanukah. One relates to the formal obligation to light the candles. We recite the beracha of *lehadlik ner shel Chanukah* as we light the candles commemorating the parallel experience in the Beis Mikdash. We light in the context of a miraculous salvation of the Jewish People. Reenacting those magical moments of bringing light into a very dark world full of assimilation, we embrace the symbolic fire of Torah that illuminates our homes. In this regard, we seek to create inspiration within the internal world of our family and ourselves.

One of the central messages of Chanukah is that illumination and inspiration must not only be created, but also discovered and pursued. There is a miracle not only in the creation of light, but in its appreciation and enjoyment as well.



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However, there is an additional dimension to the Chanukah experience. Upon entering the Beis Hamikdash, the Chashmonaim could have easily relinquished their goal of kindling the Menorah based upon the principal of *onnes rachmanah patrei* — we are exempt from mitzvos when circumstances beyond our control don't allow us to perform them. The absence of any oil, in addition to the ubiquitous presence of impurity, would have provided enough halachic basis to postpone the rekindling of the Menorah until materials could be properly procured. Yet they chose differently. The Chashmonaim searched the Mikdash for any vestige of pure oil, and upon finding only enough for one day — knowing full well that this lighting would be inadequate — they moved forward

with *hadalakas HaMenorah*. One of the central messages of Chanukah is that illumination and inspiration must not only be created, but also discovered and pursued. The berachos that are recited on the Chanukah lights are not only for the production of the light, but for its discovery and appreciation as well. The beracha that is recited upon seeing the lights of others is symbolic of this discovery and appreciation.

We live in a world with much darkness. From our own internal communal struggles to the larger global threats of extremism and terror, the message of Chanukah is not only found in our mandate to illuminate that darkness ourselves, but in our efforts to discover it in the homes of others as well. As we walk the streets of our communities on Chanukah and we peer into the windows of our fellow Jews, we pause and recognize that there is a miracle not only in the creation of light, but in its appreciation and enjoyment as well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yaakov Glasser'.

Hearing the Sounds of the Divine

The struggle with Greece

Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer describes the Greek rule over the Jews during the Hasmonean period as “darkening the eyes of the Jewish people.”¹ It would seem that *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* is describing the Greek oppression as a general religious oppression as opposed to particular decrees of religious intolerance. It “darkened” the eyes of Jewish people from all the mitzvot of the Torah. Is this description of *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* in disagreement with the description in *Megillat Aniochus* ch. 31, that Greece was interested in nullifying three particular mitzvot: Shabbat, brit milah and Rosh Chodesh? The answer to this question perhaps lies in an important thesis by Rabbi Dovid Cohen, the Nazir of Yerushalayim.

The Nazir's “Weltanschauung”

The Nazir, Rabbi Dovid Cohen, in his celebrated work *Kol Hanevuah*, outlines a basic difference between Jewish philosophy and Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy, the Nazir writes, is based on an analysis of theories that emerge from an examination of the world — via sight.

“Jewish philosophy is different. It is auditory. It does not look at the world to see G-d. Rather it hears the laws of the world and listens to commandments that cannot be seen but whose words are heard” (page 38). According to the Nazir, there is a deep tension between Greek philosophy, which emphasizes an analysis based on empirical study, versus Judaism,



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which emphasizes a message that is heard. The Nazir astutely points out that both Biblical and Rabbinic writings are replete with an inordinate emphasis on hearing and listening in the Jewish religious experiences. The ultimate expression of Jewish faith is

an auditory experience:

שמע ישראל ד' אלו קינו ד' אחד.

*Hear o Israel: Hashem is our G-d
Hashem is one.*

Similarly, the Nazir writes:

Personal reflection and historical background:

When our family made aliya in 2004, leaving behind our meaningful jobs at Y.U., there were many beautiful things that awaited us in Eretz Yisrael. Aside from toiling and teaching Torah next to the Kotel Hamaaravi, there were beautiful surprises that we had not anticipated. There are two particular things that immediately come to mind. First, the opportunity to learn daily from Mori V'rabbi Harav Nebentzal shlit”a. Second, the administration of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh allowed me to sit in a special and unique room when preparing shiur and speaking with students — “The Nazir’s Room.” The Nazir, Harav Dovid Hakohen zt”l, was a prized student of Harav A.Y. Hakohen Kook zt”l. The Nazir’s depth in Torah, Kabbalah and philosophy was legendary. He was a practicing nazir and did not cut his hair or drink wine. His bookcases, tables, chairs and even his bed were relocated to the Haidra building overlooking the Kotel plaza after the Six Day War. I was told that the Nazir, who was in the Old City when it was captured by the Jordanians in 1948, was constantly expressing his longing for the Old City of Jerusalem. His return to the Kotel after the Six Day War is legendary. His furniture was also returned to what became known as the Nazir’s Room even after his death. Spending time in that unique room overlooking the Kotel is a very special experience. Since then I have felt an affinity to the Nazir. Despite the intellectual and spiritual gaps between me and the Nazir, I attempted to cull some ideas from his sefer *Kol Hanevuah*, and this article is a celebration of this unique *oved Hashem* (servant of G-d) and his powerful message about prophecy and *mesorah* (tradition). As I finish writing this article on Isru Chag Sukkot 5776, while Jews have been murdered at the entrance of the Old City on their way to visit the Kotel the memory of the Nazir, his messages, his passion for this city, and its redemption are as important as ever.

Wisdom is described in the Torah as 'the word of G-d' and Rabbinic wisdom is described as a 'saying' which was heard (*ma'amar*). This is because Torah wisdom is an internal experience of listening and is not achieved or understood through the human gaze. For that reason a teaching is emphasized as something that was heard, and not through form or substance.²

Kol Hanevuah pg. 25

The Nazir goes so far as to suggest that the word *hashkafah*, which is colloquially used today as an outlook, is an inappropriate term. Although people often refer to a "Torah *hashkafah*," the word *hashkafah* indicates a vision and our Torah view, argues the Nazir, does not come from man's vision but through listening to the words of our tradition even when it seems to be contradicted by empirical evidence.³

The Negative Influence of Greece According to Rabbinic Tradition

Based on the Nazir's approach, the statement in *Megillat Antiochus* does not contradict the teaching of *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*. Although the Greeks prohibited the Jews from three particular commandments, the approach that Greek philosophy would "darken and obscure all the commandments," as described by *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, can be understood based on the thesis of the Nazir. "The darkening of the eyes of the Jewish people" can be referring to the emphasis of the visual and empirical at the expense of the oral traditions that echo from Sinai. The expression is appropriate considering the meaning of darkness and light in Kabbalah in general, and particularly

in the teachings of the Nazir. The Nazir describes light as "G-d's glory." Darkening the commandments can refer to preventing the Jews of the period from accessing the inner light of the commandments, by emphasizing a philosophy that is antithetical to the "inner light of Torah." [It is beyond the scope of this article but it can be argued that particularly the three commandments that the Greeks chose to prohibit epitomize the above-mentioned tension between Greek and Jewish philosophy.]

Challenges to the Nazir's Approach

Although the Nazir was deeply appreciated by fellow *gedolei Torah*, it was argued that this thesis failed to recognize other components of the G-dly experience involving the visual. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l raised his concerns regarding this topic.⁴

There are some fantastic ideas that are expressed here about the significance of listening with "closed eyes," about the power of listening to an internal calling while ignoring external phenomena. I must say that I do not entirely identify with that position. I agree completely that we must listen carefully and pay attention to every sound, and we have become more sensitive to this, thanks to the author. However, I don't believe that we should advocate proceeding through life with closed eyes. In truth, we don't need to raise the banner of the importance of the phenomenon of listening at the expense of the power of vision. We need to learn how to balance these two tools and combine them and not have them oppose each other. ... I would like to conclude with the thread of my original point and that is the significance of this work even if there

are some points that require a deeper analysis. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the author who opened both old and new frontiers about a very important topic.⁵

Further Analysis of the Nazir's Thesis

Shabtai Daniel, a student of the Nazir, attempted to address some of the concerns raised regarding the Nazir's thesis.⁶ He pointed out that Rav Yosef Albo, in the *Sefer HaIkarim*, presents a similar idea. However, Rav Albo does not negate the significance of vision and sight but believes that there is something loftier about sound and listening. *Sefer HaIkarim* notes that in Mishlei both the significance of vision and hearing are emphasized:

אֵזְרוּ שְׁמֵעַת וְעֵינַי רְאָה ה' עֲשֶׂה גַם שְׁנִיָּהֶם.
משלי כ"ב

A hearing ear and a seeing eye, Hashem made both of them.

Mishlei 20:12

However, Rav Albo points out, there is another passage in Mishlei that implies the value of hearing as greater than the value of vision:

אֵזְרוּ שְׁמֵעַת תּוֹכַחַת חַיִּים בְּקִרְבֵּי הַחֲכָמִים תִּלְוֶינָה.
משלי ט"ז

The ear that hears life-giving reproof will abide in the midst of the wise.

Mishlei 15:31

In this passage, hearing is mentioned and seeing is not. In fact, the Nazir himself (page 63) quotes this point from the *Sefer HaIkarim* and concludes: "Both (vision and hearing) are beautiful, however, ... it is the sound that is the sweetest. 'Let me hear your voice for your voice is sweet' (Song of Songs 2:14)." This point is significant when responding

to Rav Lichtenstein's objection that the Nazir seems to ignore the value of the visual in the religious experience. Shabtai Daniel argues that the Nazir does not mean to reject the religious significance of the visual. He does, however, give greater spiritual significance to the auditory experience. It seems that the Nazir believes that "kol," a sound, is central to the spiritual experience because true wisdom is heard as the word of G-d. Although the visual form is a manifestation of G-d's presence, one cannot discern G-d's moral code and messages without auditory confirmation of G-d's "voice." Hence, the Nazir emphasizes that we can only know G-d's will from what we hear from our teachers or from prophecy. As Rav Lichtenstein argued, the visual experience is also part of prophecy. However, according to the Nazir, the manner in which we interpret the visual must be supported by the auditory.

If G-d's voice is not present when a human being envisions the world, then the visual experience and all of the inferences it represents can contradict Judaism. For the Nazir, this is the struggle between Greek philosophy and Judaism.

For the Nazir, Greek philosophy, due to the fact that it ignores the auditory experience of Jewish prophecy, introduces a philosophy that is opposed to Judaism. If G-d's voice is not present when a human being envisions the world, then the visual experience and all of the inferences it represents can contradict Judaism. It would seem that the Nazir wanted to emphasize this point so that the significance of the sound of Sinai, and prophecy in general, would be appreciated. Hence, the Nazir insists on contrasting the limited perspective of the visual and empirical when compared to the truth of the oral messages of Sinai and prophecy. For the Nazir, this is the struggle between Greek philosophy and Judaism.

The Victory of Chanukah

According to the above approach, it could very well be that it's not a coincidence that Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the Menorah's lights. As mentioned, light is symbolic of G-d's glory, which is often hidden and obscured by the material world. During the period that the miracle of Chanukah occurred, the dominant Greek culture threatened to extinguish this light of Torah. The miraculous return of the flames of the Temple's Menorah is the physical expression of light, which represented the Jewish nation's rejection of those Greek influences that had attempted to "darken the eyes of the Jewish people."

Practical Applications of the Nazir's Thesis⁷

The Nazir's thesis is important for so many areas of Jewish life. Generally, the above discussion would be placed in the theoretical arenas of Jewish

philosophy, *machshevet Yisrael*, and part of the important debate of how much exposure to secular philosophy is healthy and appropriate for a student of Torah. However, there are a few very practical lessons that can be applied when reflecting on the Nazir's thesis.

The Power of Listening

The Nazir's thesis is not only about prophecy, philosophy or a Torah perspective of tradition. It also emphasizes the centrality of listening in the life of an *oved Hashem*, a servant of G-d. In an age in which everyone has a blog and an opinion, we learn from the Nazir that the power of listening is at the core of being connected to G-d. There are a few areas that I have noticed where we, the broader Jewish community both in Israel and the Diaspora, have begun to let go of this central component of *avodas Hashem*.

We, as a people, are blessed that over the last fifty years, *batei medrash* (study halls) are growing at rapid rates all over the world. There are more *chavrusos* learning together than there were fifty years ago, but how many are truly bending their ear to listen? The Talmud (*Chagigah* 3b) describes a student who "makes his ear like a 'grain receiver' to receive the teachings of his teachers so that he will have a heart to understand that which is pure and that which is not."⁸ It seems that this ideal is slowly being lost. Students of the *beit medrash* are placing more emphasis on amassing their own knowledge and less emphasis on "listening" and receiving a proper *mesorah* from their rebbeim. This observation is not only relevant to semicha students but to all those who aspire for growth in Torah. As part

of the information age, individuals can easily fool themselves as being masters of a topic by simply amassing information with search engines such as Google or the Bar Ilan Responsa Project. Growth in Torah requires diligence as well as the dynamic dialectic of study by listening, questioning and assimilating the messages of a teacher who embodies and transmits the traditions of Sinai. As our thesis suggests, if the auditory experience of learning from a rebbe is lost, we may be inadvertently diminishing our connection to the *mesorah*. Without the ability to listen and learn from our teachers, we risk losing one of the central components of *avodas Hashem*.

Listening as Central to Human Relationships

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Reich described to me the experience of watching Rav Nissan Alpert zt”l speaking with his wife on Simchas Torah. Rav Alpert zt”l was learning in the back of the beis medrash while the students were dancing. Right behind him was a bench that was placed as a divider between the men’s and women’s sections. When Rebbetzin Alpert zt”l wanted to tell her husband something, Rav Alpert zt”l turned around to entirely face his wife and gave her his full attention.

Our thesis is not only about prophecy or *d’veikus* (connection) to G-d. What is true in the spiritual sphere

is reflected in the material sphere. If the most important component of man’s relationship to G-d is his ability to “hear” G-d’s messages, the same should apply to his human relationships. A person who truly listens to someone else can sincerely connect with him. One who does not, cannot. In an era in which we are distracted by so many forms of media, are we truly listening to those who are important to us? The Greeks left behind an appreciation for the aesthetic, but no means to create true relationships — neither with G-d nor with other human beings. The above-mentioned thesis reminds us that listening, which is central to all things that are spiritual, is also the key to meaningful human relationships.

Notes

1. ותרדמה נפלה על אברם והנה אימה חשכה גדלה נפלת עליו“ (בראשית ט”ו, ב)
- אימה זו מלכות אדום שנאמר “דחילא ואימתנו” (דניאל ז, א). חשכה זו מלכות יון שהחשיכה את עיניהם של ישראל מכל מצוות שבתורה.
- “A deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold a dread, great darkness fell upon him.” (Bereishit 15:12)
- “Dread” that refers to the kingdom of Edom as Daniel (7;7) describes (Edom) as terrifying and a dread. “Darkness” refers to Greece who darkened the eyes of the Jewish people by obscuring all of the Torah’s commandments.” (*Pirkei D’Rebbe Eliezer* no. 27)
2. The Nazir expounds on this idea with a basic Kabbalistic principle which he continues to contrast with the Greek pursuit of knowledge, “The premise of Greek analysis is form. For the Greek thinkers, a theory is formulated based on how things appear and the material form (*tzurah*) is the base

perspective. However, in Judaism, form (*tzurah*) is not the basis of knowledge because the internal truth (*penimiyut HaTorah*) is hidden.” (page 39)

3. The Torah generally reserves the word “*hashkafah*” to G-d’s perspective not man’s. See for example “*hashkifah mim’on kodshecha*” (Devarim 26:1). There are some exceptions to this rule where the word is used to describe man’s gaze but it can be argued that the Torah is not being laudatory in those instances.

4. When the Nazir’s magnum opus, *Kol Hanevuah* was published, it included fascinating addresses delivered at President Zalman Shazar’s home by Israel’s political and rabbinic leaders celebrating the printing of the book. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l addressed the honorary gathering (in Hebrew) first praising the Nazir’s dynamic presentation of prophecy (which was not discussed in this article) and then concluded by addressing the Nazir’s above-mentioned primary thesis.

5. Addendum to *Kol Hanevuah*, page 44. This quote is a loose translation from its original Hebrew form. Please see the original for any clarification of the author’s intent.

6. At the above-mentioned gathering, see Addendum to *Kol Hanevuah*, page 34.

7. Originally, I thought about writing about how the Nazir’s thesis impacts the way in which an *oved Hashem* relates to the interface of Torah and science, but I quickly realized that an appropriate treatment of the topic requires a separate article. “*Lakol zman ve’et*,” Everything has its time and place (Kohélet 3:2).

8. The relationship between “hearing” and a “heart to understand” fits beautifully with the Nazir’s formulation of the significance of the expression *amarti b’libi*, “I said in my heart” (page 25).



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Chaim Eisenstein at http://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi_Chaim_Eisenstein

Minhagim on Chanukah: Dreidel and Sufganiyot¹

I. Importance of Minhagim

The students of the Maharil (Rabbi Yaakov Moelin, 1365-1427) offer a chilling story about their teacher in his collection of laws pertaining to Yom Kippur.² The Maharil was once chazzan in the town of Regensburg during the Yomim Noraim, and decided to insert a piyyut into Mussaf composed by Rabbeinu Ephraim, who happened to be buried in Regensburg. Although the leaders of the town informed him that this was not their practice, he did not listen to them based upon his logic, saying that it would be an honor to Rabbeinu Ephraim to recite the piyyut. A few days later, on Yom Kippur, the Maharil's daughter died. He understood that this was a punishment for changing the *minhag hamakom* (local tradition).³

This background provides a remarkable insight into why the Maharil emphasized the importance and centrality of minhagim, and how he became the single most influential and accepted codifier of Ashkenazi practices.

Writing during the time of the sprouting of the Reform movement, the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839) was a strong advocate of keeping minhagim. He felt that unorthodox practice began by “simply” changing a few minhagim.



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As such, he called those that change minhagim “violators of the Torah.”⁴ This remark is based upon Tosfos, *Menachos* 20b (s.v. *Nifsal*) — “*minhag avoteinu... Torah*” — the tradition of our forefathers is considered Torah. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explained that this phrase from Tosfos extends beyond the basic obligation to heed to the minhagim of one’s community. It also applies to the requirement to study and understand minhagim and their origins, just as one wrestles to understand each and every word and halacha mandated by the Torah to the best of one’s ability. It is based on this that the Rav dedicated much time from his shiurim teaching minhagim and their sources, with the same depth of methodology and rigor that he would use when teaching halachic concepts to his students.⁵

II. What is the Origin for Spinning Dreidel?

The most popular explanation for spinning dreidel on Chanukah is the result of a decree of the Assyrian-Greeks that Jews were prohibited from studying Torah. This is why we

mention in *Al Hanisim* “*l’hashkicham Toratecha* — [the Greeks tried] to cause them to forget the Torah.” At that time, Torah was taught orally and had to be studied with a teacher. Therefore, Torah would have been lost forever had teachers not continued to study with their pupils. In order to circumvent this decree, Jews studied privately and kept their dreidels nearby; if a soldier came to investigate, they would spin their dreidels to feign playing a game rather than learning Torah.⁶

While this well-known explanation places the game of dreidel back to the period of Chanukah itself, others argue that dreidel is a much later invention of non-Jewish origin. They contend that dreidel is taken from a game played in the 16th century called Teetotum, in which a top, similar to a dreidel, had four sides each with one of four letters. A German or Yiddish teetotum would read: G, H, N, S. G= ganz(all), H halb (half), N nischt (nothing) and S schict (put).⁷ Yet, even if the minhag of playing dreidel on Chanukah evolved from Teetotum, one can still find symbolism and meaning in the dreidel.

Gratitude is extended to Rabbi Joshua Flug for providing many sources in my preparation of this article.

III. Symbolism and messages of the Dreidel

A. Connection to Redemption

R. Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov (Bnei Yissachar 1783-1841)⁸ relates the playing of dreidel to *galut* and *geulah* — exile and redemption. He notes that the letters of the dreidel גשנה correspond to the four stages of *galut* (גופני, שכלי, נפשי, הכל) [body, mind, soul, everything]. The symbolism of spinning the dreidel connotes the idea that although we are surrounded on all four sides with kingdoms and oppressors during our lengthy *galut*, nonetheless the Jewish People are at the center of reality. When the dreidel spins from the center it has control of the four outer sides, just as one day soon we will see the day when all of the nations will recognize G-d and be subservient to Him.

The *Bnei Yissachar* also notes that the gematria of גשנה is 358,⁹ the same as משיח. Furthermore, he notes that one should specifically use a wooden

dreidel because the Navi Yechezkel (37:16), in the haftorah for Parshas Vayigash read during Chanukah, wrote his messages of *geulah* on a piece of wood.¹⁰

B. Connection to the Chanukah Lights

The Sokatchover Rebbe¹¹ (Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein, 1855-1926) suggests that due to the fact that we now light our Chanukah lights inside, *pirsumei nisa* (the requirement to publicize the miracle) depends on the members of the household being present. As such, the custom developed to play dreidel in order to keep the children awake at night so that they would participate in the mitzvah and provide the necessary *pirsumei nisa* for the household to light with a bracha.

The *Divrei Yatziv*¹² writes that we play dreidel to contrast how Jews practiced during the times of oppression under the Assyrian-Greeks, when they had to use dreidels as a ploy to study

Torah. Today we play dreidel and light outside demonstrating that we perform mitzvos in the open — the ideal way to perform mitzvos.

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov¹³ (1912-1976) suggests that the purpose of dreidel is to teach our children that even when they engage in recreation and relaxation it should be focused on the miracles:

The widespread practice among Jewish children of playing dreidel games also reflects the theme of Chanukah. Since the children have money on hand (gifts from their parents), and since the lighting of Chanukah lights causes some bitul Torah, during the winter nights¹⁴ the little ones are told, as it were: "relax tonight and spend your hours happily, so that you might take upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, and the exertion required for the performance of mitzvos after Chanukah. And even now, as you play, do not forget the miracles and wonders performed by Hashem for us."¹⁵

The *Imrei Pinchas*¹⁶ suggests that נגהש



The purpose of dreidel is to teach the children that even when they engage in recreation and relaxation it should be focused on the miracles.

stands for the mitzvos of Chanukah¹⁷ — eight lights and full recitation of Hallel. The Vizhnitzer Rebbe¹⁸ connects Chanukah to Hoshana Rabba, using the letters of the dreidel to symbolize the end of the judgment period as: “ג – שנה” with gimmel referring to *g’mar chatimah tova*.¹⁹

C. The Spinning of the Dreidel

The *Bnei Yissachar*²⁰ offers an insight into the significance of spinning the dreidel by comparing it to spinning a gragger on Purim. He notes that the dreidel is spun from the top, while a gragger is spun from the bottom. This signifies that on Chanukah the miracle was a function of intervention from above — “התעררותא דלעילא,” while on Purim the miracle and redemption came about through human effort and intervention²¹ “התעררותא דלתתא.” During the miracle of Purim, Ester gathered all of the Jews to fast and pray, in order to save the Jewish people from the hands of Haman; however, the outright hand of G-d was hidden in the unfolding of the events (*neis nistar*). On Chanukah, we experienced a supernatural miracle (*neis nigleh*), so we spin the dreidel from on top in recognition of the redemption derived from above.²² Later sources succinctly express this idea of the *Bnei Yissachar*: If we spin below (here on earth) then things will spin above (in heaven) — “אם מסובבים” — “למטה מסתובב למעלה”!

Similarly, Rabbi Armoni,²³ a contemporary Kabbalist in Jerusalem, notes that we spin the dreidel in a clockwise motion, while the gragger on Purim spins counterclockwise. Additionally, the dreidel spins on the ground while the gragger spins in the air. He suggests that on Chanukah, we are trying to bring down the sparks

of kedusha to the earth. Therefore, it spins left to right — from the “*klipot*” on the left to kedusha on the right and the dreidel spins as if it is trying to dig deeper into the ground. On Purim, we are rooting out those “*klipot*,” therefore it spins upward in the opposite direction towards heaven.

Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach²⁴ notes another distinction between the dreidel and gragger. The gragger only spins while we spin it in our hands, while the dreidel continues to spin even after it leaves our hands. Similarly, on Purim, the events which unfolded were causative; future events arose as a result of discrete decisions made previously by people (e.g. Mordechai protects the king, which causes him to be rewarded with riding the royal horse through the streets of the city; Ester invites the king and Haman to a meal, which causes Haman’s demise, etc.). On Chanukah however, the outcomes and ramifications of each single action cannot be viewed as directly bringing about the redemption, but rather had a more long-term effect, similar to the dreidel.

IV. Sufganiyot

Rabbi Maimon ben Yosef, better known as the Rambam’s father, wrote a commentary to the Siddur in Arabic, most of which we do not have. One of the few surviving sections relates to the minhag of *sufganiyot* on Chanukah:

אין להקל בשום מנהג ואפילו מנהג קל ויתחייב כל נכון לו עשית משתה ושמתה ומאכל לפרסם הנס (של חנוכה) שעשה השם יתברך עמנו באותם הימים ופשט המנהג לעשות סופגנין בערבי אלספלנג והם הצפחיות לדבש ובתרגום האיסקריטין והיא מנהג הקדמונים משום שהם קלויים בשמן

זכר לברכתו וכתב רבינו נסים במגילת סתרים כי כל מנהגי האומה באלו המנהגות כמו זה והראש בראש השנה החלב בפורים ובמוצאי פסח והפולים ביום הושענא רבה ואותם המנהגות אין לנו לבזותם ומי שהנהיגם זריו ומשתדל הוא כי הם מעיקרים נעשים ולא יבזו במנהג האומה וכבר אמר הנביא ע”ה ואל תטוש תורת אמך דת אומתך אל תעזוב ובקבלות הגאונים ראשי ישיבות נזכרו מנהגים כמו אלה בהנהגותיהם בסיפוריהם ולא יתבוה דבר ממה שעשו הקדמונים.²⁵

Do not be lenient with any custom; even a light [seemingly unimportant] one, you are obligated in eating and drinking of simcha in order to make known the miracle (of Chanukah) which G-d did with us. There is a common custom to make sufganiyot, which are fried and sweet, and this is an old custom because they are basted in oil, symbolizing the blessing [of the miracle with oil]. Rabbeinu Nissim says in his notes that all customs of the nation such as this one [sufganiyot] and the head [of an animal] on Rosh HaShana, milk products on Purim and Motzei Pesach, beans on Hoshana Rabbah, and all similar customs, we cannot denigrate. Those that keep the customs are scrupulous [with the laws] because they are of the essence and one should not denigrate the customs of the nation. And the Prophet already warned us not to forsake the teachings of our Mothers [referring to customs]. These practices are already apparent in Geonic sources and written in their seforim, and do not denigrate what the earlier generation did.

According to R. Maimon, minhagim in general should not be taken lightly, inclusive of the “old” practice of making donuts fried in oil, commemorating the miracle of oil on Chanukah. While this explanation could be used for any fried food; it happens to be that fried dough was a delicacy during the 12th century and earlier.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach²⁶ (1910-1995) offers a unique insight into why specifically fried *sufganiyot* are used to commemorate the miracle of oil. He notes the parallel structure and phraseology between Al Hamichya and Birkat Hamazon. The sentence in Al Hamichya beginning with “*rachem*” corresponds to the same paragraph in Birkat Hamazon, yet its wording differs. In Al Hamichya we add “*ve'al mizbachecha*” — and on your altars. The Gemara²⁷ mentions that after the war with the Assyrian-Greeks, the Chashmonaim entered the defiled Temple and attempted to purify all of the holy vessels. They were successful in purifying everything except for the stones that made up the Mizbeach. Distressed by the situation, they buried them underground. Therefore, explains Rav Shlomo Zalman, we should specifically eat *sufganiyot* — which are fried dough, and whose eating mandates the recitation of Al

Hamichya — in order to mention the Mizbeach during Chanukah.²⁸

While Rav Shlomo Zalman's comments may indicate that the reference to the Mizbeach is intended to remind us of our inability to use the Mizbeach,²⁹ Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg³⁰ cites Rabbi Chizkiya Nevenzahl as developing the approach of Rav Shlomo Zalman with a positive emphasis. Since the Chashmonaim were unable to purify the Mizbeach, they dedicated a new one on the 25th of Kislev and began to sacrifice again on the newly established altar. As such, an individual should go out of his/her way to eat *sufganiyot* outside of the context of a meal,³¹ in order to recite Al Hamichya and praise G-d for this specific miracle of restoring the Mizbeach.³²

Notes

1. While this article focuses on two specific minhagim as related to Chanukah, there are many other minhagim that require further

analysis, such as: eating dairy products and latkes, women not performing melacha while the candles are lit, youngsters collecting tzedakah, “Chanukah gelt,” and gifts to rebbeim/teachers.

2. Maharil, *Hilchot Tefillat Shacharit of Yom Kippur* #11.

3. Rabbi Hershel Schachter explained the Maharil's reaction as follows: Minhagim represent the mesorah. Since he violated a minhag, G-d took away part of his own mesorah as a *midah keneged midah*.

4. *Teshuvot Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah* #107 and *Orach Chaim* #51.

“ע”ע שו”ת הרמ”א ס’ תר”צ, שו”ת מהר”ם פדוואה ס’ עה, שו”ת גינת ורדים או”ח ב:כה, שו”ת הרשב”א ס’ ט, שו”ת חוות יאיר ס’ רלד.

For additional sources see the introduction to *Minhag Yisrael Torah* (Rabbi Yosef Levy).

5. *Nefesh HaRav* p. 24. For background on the general obligation to follow minhagim and for an explanation to many practical minhagim, see the latest volume in the series of *Imrei Baruch* written by Rabbi Boruch Simon entitled “*Tokef HaMinhag BeHalacha*.”

6. *Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun* (19:4), an 18th century work on minhagim.



An individual should go out of his/her way to eat *sufganiyot* outside of the context of a meal, in order to be able to recite Al Hamichya and praise and thank G-d for this specific miracle of restoring the Mizbeach.

7. See *Sefer HaMoadim* (Levinsky) Vol. 5 p. 226, *Edus Journal* Vol. 1 p. 73, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teetotum>, and <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2005/12/chanukah-customs-and-sources.html>.

8. Kislev 2:25.

9. Other sources also point to the connection between the letters of the dreidel and that of “Goshen” גוֹשֵׁן, where the Jews lived while in Egypt, in order to avoid the negative influences of the Egyptian society. As such, Chanukah is a time to reflect upon our past struggles with the Assyrian-Greek culture and how we can maintain true to the Torah throughout each generation.

It is reported that when R. Aharon Rokeach (the Belzer Rebbe, 1880-1957) moved to Israel, there were no dreidels available with the letters נגהש because in Israel it is traditional to use a פ instead of ש. He sent a shamash to search for a dreidel with a ש and commented that one should not change the letter to פ. Presumably this is due to the gematria connection to משיח. It should be noted, however, that Rabbi Moshe Armoni (באחי לארמוני פרשת וישב) suggests that נגהש is the same gematria as צמח, which is another name of משיח.

10. It is reported that the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839) played with a silver dreidel on Chanukah. Whenever someone would enter to visit him he would spin the silver dreidel on his table once (*Siddur Chasam Sofer* as cited in *Peninei HaMoadim* p. 125).

11. Cited in *Piskei Teshuvos* (570:4) and *Siach Sarfei Kodesh* #468.

12. *Orach Chaim* 2:283, Rabbi Yekusiel Y. Halberstam, 1905-1994.

13. *Book of Our Heritage* Vol. 1 p. 283.

14. See Rambam, *Hil. Talmud Torah* 3:15, regarding the importance of learning Torah at night — אף על פי שמצוה ללמוד ביום ובלילה, אין אדם למד רוב חכמתו אלא בלילה.

15. This idea fits nicely with the historical background. Even if one assumes that the dreidel originated as a secular toy, Jews decided to make something meaningful out of it. The experience of merely playing a game can be transformed into an educational and religious experience. This approach is the opposite of those that turned the dreidel into a game of frivolity and an excuse to gamble.

See *Kedushas Levi* (*Derushim LeChanukah* s.v. *Yaduah*), *Shut Chavot Yair* #126, Rabbi Yaakov Emden in *Mor Uketzia* (end of Siman #670) and *Aruch HaShulchan* (*Orach Chaim* 670:9) for their great displeasure with that practice. See also *Sefer Chanukah* (authored by Rabbi Zvi Cohen) 2:5 and *Nitei Gavriel* 51:3.

16. Rabbi Pinchas Shapira of Karitz (1726-1791), *Chanukah* #68.

17. Rabbi Eliezer Zvi Safrin (as cited in *Pardes Yosef* Chanukah p. 160) cited a slight variation גוה שמן, הלל, גדול.

18. Cited in *Beshvilei HaMinhag* vol. 3 p. 119.

19. There are indeed many connections between Sukkos and Chanukah, beginning with the source for the opinion of Beis Shamai as to why we count down from eight to one, reminiscent of the sacrifices offered during Sukkos (*Shabbos* 21b). See also *Sefas Emes* Chanukah, *Baal HaTurim* Vayikra 24:2, and Rav Karelenstein, *Kuntres Beinyanei Yemei Chanukah* p. 49-53.

20. Kislev 4:5.

21. Based on this, Rabbi Abuchatzera (as cited in *Pardes Yosef* on Chanukah p.54-55) points out that this may also answer why Talmud Bavli does not have *Masechet Chanukah* to commemorate and discuss the holiday of Chanukah, whereas Purim has *Masechet Megillah*. The story of Purim, unlike Chanukah, unfolded through our fasting and prayers and after the salvation, our decision to commemorate the miracle with much joy and festivities. It is only through our efforts and investment that we merit additional Torah development as part of Torah Shebaal Peh.

22. The *Sefer Matamim* (cited in *Peninei HaMoadim* on Chanukah p. 123) notes that the dreidel cannot stand up straight naturally. This signifies that the entire story of Chanukah is of the supernatural victory of the Chashmonaim, “many in the hands of a few.” See also the *Azor Eliyahu* on Chanukah (cited in *Taamei Haminhagim* Chanukah # 859, in the footnote) who therefore explains why on Purim we say הרב את ריבנו, while on Chanukah we say רבת את ריבם, placing the focus on G-d as the one who was victorious and not us.

23. *Bati L'Armoni, Parshat Vayeshev*.

24. *Maayan Hamoed* p. 90 (as cited in *Pardes Yosef* Chanukah p. 162).

25. Available at <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=22994&st=&pgnum=8>.

26. *Halichot Shlomo* vol. 2 p. 318-319.

27. *Avodah Zara* 52b.

28. It is interesting to note that we do not mention Al Hanisim in Al Hamichya, only in Birkat Hamazon. See *Harerei Kedem* 1:178, and *Teshuvot Yabia Omer* 3:36, for explanations as to why this is so.

29. From the citation of Rav Shlomo Zalman in *Shalmei Moed* (Fried) p. 246, it does seem to be of negative significance that we no longer had the Mizbeach. He also adds that this is perhaps the reason why we use jelly in the sufganiyot, since the Gemara, *Sotah* 48b, says when the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, it also brought about the end of the sweet taste in the fruit that we eat.

30. *Ner Mitzvah VeTorah Or* p. 114.

31. There is a discussion in the poskim as to whether the fried dough is considered *pat haba'ah b'kisin* and would require one to wash and say Birkat Hamazon if one was to make a meal from it. As such, they suggest not eating large amounts (the size of three or four eggs, about 200 grams, *Mishna Berura* 168:24, *Iggerot Moshe* O”C 3:32, *VeZot Habracha* Ch. 4 FN#23) of fried dough outside the context of a meal. This is probably also a good idea from a health perspective. Additionally, there is a question as to whether Birkat Hamotzi covers the bracha on donuts served at the end of the meal. See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 168:13 and *Mishna Berura* #76. Rav Shlomo Zalman *ibid.* is quoted as not requiring a bracha on doughnuts eaten for dessert.

32. Mentioning “*ve'al mizbachecha*” may be a fulfillment of “*mei'ein hameora*” as we do for *R'tzei* on Shabbat and *Ya'aleh V'yavo* on Yom Tov. However, see also Rabbi Hershel Schachter in *Eretz HaTzvi* #5 for further development of this concept — especially toward the end where he assumes that the concept of *mei'ein hameora* only applies to holidays from the Torah, not inclusive of Chanukah and Purim. The reasons we insert Al Hanisim in Shmoneh Esrei and Birkat Hamazon is a fulfillment of extending our gratitude for our salvation and not of *mei'ein hameora*.

The Inside Story: Reexamining *Mehadrin min Hamehadrin* in Contemporary Times

Family Time

Imagine the picturesque scene of a family lighting Chanukah candles together. If you are an Ashkenazi, you might visualize the family gathering around their menoros, with the head of the house lighting his menorah first, and the rest of the family following suit. If you are a member of the Edot Hamizrach (Sephardi), where the custom is usually for the master of the household to be the only one lighting, you might think of the whole family watching as the father lights for everyone.

Unfortunately, as idyllic as such a scene is, it is sometimes hard to coordinate everyone being present for Chanukah lighting. Is there halachic importance to the entire family lighting in unison? The answer to this question can be reached after a careful analysis of the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles as it is presented in Chazal, the Rishonim, and the early Poskim.

Two Observations

The Braisa, quoted in the Gemara, *Maseches Shabbos* (21b), states that the minimum requirement for the mitzvah of Chanukah candles is “*ner ish ubeiso* — one candle for a person and his household.” For those who perform mitzvos in an enhanced



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fashion, termed *mehadrin*, the Braisa prescribes a more respectable way of lighting — to kindle a candle per person in the home. The Braisa continues that people who are even more scrupulous in their mitzvah accomplishments, called *mehdarin min hamehadrin*, should light a number of candles paralleling what night of Chanukah it is numerically.

תנו רבנן: מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו
והמהדרין - נר לכל אחד ואחד. והמהדרין מן
המהדרין וכו' בית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון
מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

The Tannaim taught: The mitzvah of Chanukah is a candle for a person and his household. And for those who perform mitzvos in an enhanced fashion (mehadrin), one candle per person. And those who are even more scrupulous in their mitzvah observance (mehadrin min hamehadrin) ... Beis Hillel say, the first day he lights one, from then and on, he increases [based on the day].

There are two critical observations to reflect on in this Braisa.

First, as often noted, the Braisa does not discuss the relationship between

mehadrin, lighting based upon the number of people in the house, and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, kindling based upon the number of the day of Chanukah. Although the prevalent Ashkenazic custom is to combine the level of *mehadrin* — based on the number of residents, with the level of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* — based on the day of Chanukah that it is, and to light a candle per person corresponding to the number of days, the Braisa itself is ambiguous regarding that point. The Braisa simply enumerates two options: *mehadrin* — based on the number of people, or *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. In fact, the Baalei HaTosafos on that Gemara (s.v. *V'Hamehadrin*) maintain that the level of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is independent of the level of *mehadrin*. A person may light as a function of the number of people, which is *mehadrin*, or based upon the number of days of Chanukah, which is *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. They explain that it is important to pick either *mehadrin* or *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, because if one were to combine both of those practices, the result would be

an amorphous mass of candles that would leave an onlooker unable to discern if the number of candles corresponds to the quantity of people, the number of days, or both. The opinion of the Baalei Hatosafos is practiced in many present-day homes of Edot Hamizrach/Sephardic heritage.

The second important observation about the Braisa concerns who actually lights the menorah. The Braisa is noticeably and conspicuously vague in applying the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles to a specific individual in the house. The Braisa simply instructs that the basic mitzvah of Chanukah is “*ner ish ubeiso* — one candle for a person and his household,” but it does not clearly highlight who actually lights the menorah. Although the Braisa does use the term “*ish ubeiso* — an individual and his household,” the focus is on how many candles are lit, not on who in the family lights. Chazal appear to be declaring that the mitzvah of Chanukah is to have a candle lit representing a person and his household. This is further evident from the phraseology the Rambam uses when he quotes the Braisa (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:1), where he portrays the mitzvah of lighting as being fulfilled by the family — the *bayis*, as opposed to a specific person:

מצותה שיהיה כל בית ובית מדליק נר אחד בין שהיו אנשי הבית
מרובין בין שלא היה בו אלא אדם אחד.

Its mitzvah is that each household should light one candle, whether the residents of the house are numerous, or whether it is inhabited by only one individual.

The Braisa continues this ambiguity when it discusses the practice of the *mehadrin*. Instead of a direct imperative, the Braisa focuses on how many candles should be in the house, not on who is actively lighting. Similarly, for the most enthusiastic individuals, *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, the Braisa continues to use a neutral term “*madlik*” — “one lights” which indicates that Chanukah candles should be lit in each house.

In all three practices of lighting discussed by Chazal, they emphasize the number of candles that are kindled in the home rather than which individual lights them. Although the head of the household was the one who was lighting, the lack of directive to him specifically seems to indicate that the Braisa’s main intention is that the family should make sure that it has Chanukah candles kindled in its house, not that a specific family member should necessarily light them.



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Likewise, the Rishonim who discuss or codify the Braisa echo the same inexplicit, general word — *madlik* — one lights, giving no significant instruction as to who must do the lighting. That is not to say that the presumption of the Braisa and all that follow it is that anyone aside from the head of the house would light. Yet from the language of the Braisa through the discussion of the Rishonim it would seem that who does the act of lighting is not important, as long as the house has Chanukah candles lit in it.

Early Codification: The Rambam, The *Tur* and The *Darhei Moshe*

The Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:1) quotes the ruling of the Braisa completely. In contrast to the Baalei HaTosafos, he expresses *mehadrin min hamehadrin* as an extension of *mehadrin*. For *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, candles are lit in accordance with the number of inhabitants and corresponding to the specific night of Chanukah. The Rambam also maintains the Braisa's ambiguity and lack of emphasis on who does the actual lighting.

כמה נרות הוא מדליק בחנוכה, מצותה שיהיה כל בית ובית מדליק נר אחד בין שהיו אנשי הבית מרובין בין שלא היה בו אלא אדם אחד, והמהדר את המצוה מדליק נרות כמנין אנשי הבית נר לכל אחד ואחד בין אנשים בין נשים, והמהדר יתר על זה ועושה מצוה מן המובחר מדליק נר לכל אחד ואחד בלילה הראשון ומוסיף והולך בכל לילה ולילה נר אחד.

How many candles does he kindle on Chanukah? Its mitzvah is that each household should light one candle, whether the residents of the house are numerous, or whether it is inhabited by only one individual. And those that perform the mitzvah in an enhanced

fashion light one candle according to the number of people in the house, one candle per person — man or woman. And one who enhances even more than this and does the mitzvah in the choicest way, lights one for each person on the first night, and from then on adds one candle per night.

In contrast to the Rambam's ruling on *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, combining the numbers of people and days, the *Tur* (O. C. 671) codifies the mitzvah of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* as the Tosafists emphasized, with the lighting centering solely on which day of Chanukah it is, and ignoring the number of people in the house.

The Rama, in his *Darhei Moshe* on the *Tur*, adds a comment from Rav Avraham of Prague. Rav Avraham asserts that nowadays, when the menorah lighting takes place in the house, even the Tosafists would agree that one should fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* based on the number of days and the number of people, as the Rambam ruled. He explains that since the primary audience for the candle lighting is the family itself, which is aware of how many people are in its own house, there is no concern that the Chanukah candles will create an unidentifiable cluster of candles that do not indicate the number of days or people. Additionally, the Tosafists made their comment when the practice was for everyone to light outside the house by its entrance. When that was done, all of the candles had to be placed in a single location adjacent to the doorway. Therefore, the number and nature of the candles was indiscernible. By contrast, our practice is to light candles in the house. Consequently, it is easy for the members of the family to light candles in different locations, which will clearly indicate how many

people are in the house and which day of Chanukah it is:

וכתב מהר"א מפראג דלדין שמדליקין בפנים ויודעין בבית כמה בני אדם בבית וליכא למיחש שמא יאמרו כך בני אדם הם בבית אף לדעת התוספות מנהגינו נכון. ועוד דמאחר שמדליקין בפנים כל אחד יוכל להדליק במקום מיוחד ולא בעי להדליק כולן בטפח הסמוך לפתח וניכר הנרות שמדליק כל אחד ואחד ואיכא היכרא כשמוסיף והולך בשאר הלילות ולכן מנהגינו אתי שפיר לכולי עלמא:

Rav Avraham of Prague wrote that for us, who kindle inside, and it is known in the family how many people are in the house, and there is no concern that they will say that there is a [different] number of people in the house, even according to Tosafos, our custom is correct. And furthermore, since we light inside, it is possible for each person to light in a distinct place, and they do not all need to light in the tefach beside the doorway, so [the number of] candles each one lights is recognizable, and it is noticeable when he increases and adds on the other nights, and therefore our custom is appropriate according to all opinions.

The thrust of the Rama's quote from Rav Avraham of Prague is to give two reasons why now that we light inside, we can light candles correlating to the number of people in the house and the number of the days, and the concern of the Tosafists can be obviated. Although Rav Avraham and the Rama say that each person lights in a different location, their point is clearly not to innovate that each family member must do the mitzvah himself. They are simply explaining that it is presently possible to divide up the Chanukah lighting, with different people lighting for the family in separate locations in the home. Their focus is to redefine *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, to the advantage of putting Chanukah candles in different locations. Even though

Rav Avraham of Prague and the Rama do say that each person lights, they just mean to clarify how to break up the lighting in different locations and fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* in the best way possible.

It would appear that there are, at least, two possible reasons that they discuss delegating the lighting to different individuals rather than charging one person with the entire task. First, it is simply more convenient for the family members to split the lighting, compared to having one person go around the house from location to location to kindle the candles distributed throughout the house. This can be better understood in light of the Braisa and the Rishonim that follow it, which seem to highlight that the long-standing practice in Klal Yisrael was that anyone in the family could light the menorah. Rav Avraham and the Rama do not see themselves as stating a notable point by adding that many family members light, since there was never any halachic emphasis on who, specifically, should light the menorah. Therefore, Rav Avraham and the Rama are not discussing any change in that way of lighting. Their goal is merely to focus on the definition of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* and to explain that if one is dividing the candles into different locations in the house, different people can light.¹

Furthermore, it is possible that Rav Avraham and the Rama maintain that it is necessary for different individuals in the house to light in the different locations so that the entire lighting takes place at the same time. All the candle lightings are part of one large mitzvah of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* that is being fulfilled by all those in the household, which is to have one set of candles burning based upon the number of people and days. Therefore, the candles should ideally all be lit within the same timeframe rather than sequentially, so that they can join together to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, which means lighting candles representative of the day of Chanukah and the number of people in the house, at the same time.²

In summary, Rav Avraham of Prague and the Rama do introduce the concept that each person perform the lighting. Yet it seems logical that their intent is to facilitate lighting in different locations in the easiest way possible. Additionally, there might be halachic benefits to all of them lighting at the same time. That would be the ultimate fulfillment of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* — candles lit paralleling the number of people and the day.



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Shulchan Aruch and Rama

The discussion between the *Tur* and the *Darchei Moshe* is paralleled in the pages of the *Shulchan Aruch* (O. C. 671:2).

Like the Braisa, the *Shulchan Aruch* uses the very neutral term *madlik* – one should light. The Mechaber states:

כמה נרות מדליק? בלילה הראשון מדליק אחד, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך אחד בכל לילה.

How many candles does he kindle? On the first night light one, from then and on, he adds one each night.

The Rama adds to the Mechaber:

ויש אומרים דכל אחד מבני הבית ידליק, וכן המנהג פשוט, ויזהרו ליתן כל אחד ואחד נרותיו במקום מיוחד כדי שיהיה היכר כמה נרות מדליקין.

And some say that each member of the household should light, and that is the prevalent custom, and they should be careful that each person puts his candles in a distinct place, so it can be noticed how many candles they are lighting.

When the Rama adds that each person should light, he immediately elaborates that they should light in different locations, as he explained at length in the *Darchei Moshe* from Rav Avraham of Prague. Although the Rama's words literally mean that our custom is that each person lights himself, the Rama's focus does not seem to be on which people do the lighting. Since the long-standing practice was that anyone in the family could light, the Rama is not discussing any change in that way of lighting. His only intent is to focus on the performance of *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Different locations can be lit concurrently by different individuals.

If this understanding of the Rama's words is correct, then the Rama would concur with the rest of the Rishonim and Poskim, that the lighting is a household event.

The Approach of Several Acharonim

Several of the *Gedolei HaAcharonim* (such as Rabi Akiva Eiger in his glosses to O. C. *ibid.* and in his *Responsum, Tinyana* 13, also assumed by the Brisker Rav in *Chidushei Maran Riz Halevi al Harambam*, *ibid.*) explain the words of the Rama differently.

They understand that when the Rama writes that each person should light, he means to redefine the mitzvah of *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. According to this explanation, each person makes himself independent of the family, lights separately and fulfills his own mitzvah. Following that logic, there should be little need for a family to light together. Each person can perform his own mitzvah at a different time, comparable to a family doing the mitzvah of lulav and esrog on Succos. Two people in a family are allowed to daven at two different minyanim and shake their lulavim at different times. Similarly, two family members can light their menoros at different times.

The Whole Story

In conclusion, the importance of a family lighting at the same time depends on how one understands the words of the Rama, who says that the Ashkenazic custom is for each person to light. At face value, as explained by some of the great Acharonim, the Rama means that the way to fulfill *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is for each family member to halachically separate himself from the rest of his family and fulfill the mitzvah independently. Accordingly, there is little reason for the family to light together because each person is performing his own mitzvah (notwithstanding the additional *pirsumei nisa* that might take

The Symbolism of Mehadrin

ומהאי טעמא נקרא חנוכה שיש בכל שנה התחדשות ... כי הפירוש נר איש וביתו גם כן כפשוטו שיש התחדשות אור ונר דולק בכל איש ישראל בחנוכה. ומהדרין אחר המצות על ידי יגיעה ותשוקה שלהם יכולין לעורר כמה נרות לכל הנלויים אליהם. שפת אמת, חנוכה תר"מ

It is called Chanukah (from the word dedication) because each year there is a renewal ... the explanation of "one candle per household" on a simple level, is that there is a renewal of light that flickers in each Jewish person on Chanukah. Those who are "mehadrin" and pursue mitzvos through their toil and desire, they can inspire [the lighting of] numerous candles of their followers. Sfas Emes, Chanukah 5740

place if the family lights at the same time). In addition, according to the custom of the Edot Hamizrach, who do not usually follow the Rama, and have only one person light, *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is not increased by the rest of the family being present at the lighting.

On the other hand, a different understanding of the Rama emerges when it is understood in the context of the comment of Rav Avraham of Prague, quoted in the *Darchei Moshe*, which seems to be the source for the pithy comment of the Rama on *Shulchan Aruch*. Rav Avraham discusses splitting up the family's lighting only in regard to facilitating *mehadrin min hamehadrin* by them lighting in different locations throughout the house. Therefore, it is possible that it is more ideal for

the whole family to light at the same time, so they all perform their part of their family's *mehadrin min hamehadrin* in unison, with the resulting candles actually representing the number of people in the family, as well as what night of Chanukah it is.

Hashkafic Thoughts

The Mishkan was dedicated in the wilderness amid much joy and celebration — for most of Klal Yisrael. The Midrash, cited by Rashi and the Ramban (*B'haalos'cha* 8:1), records that at the dedication, Aharon Hakohen was crestfallen. All the *nesiim* (tribal leaders) joyously approached the Altar and brought sacrifices, to the exclusion of Aharon and his tribe, Levi. Aharon thought that his slight involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf incriminated him and made him and his *shevet* unworthy of partaking in the ceremony. In order to assuage Aharon's disappointment, Hashem reassured him that *shevet Levi* was going to receive the greater privilege of performing a permanent dedication in the future. The Ramban explains that the Midrash is referring to the honor that the Maccabees had, as Kohanim of *shevet Levi*, to rededicate the Beis Hamikdash and the Mizbeach during the miracle of Chanukah.

At first glance, the Ramban's interpretation seems perplexing. Why was tradition labeling Levi's rededication of Chanukah as greater and more permanent than the dedication of the *nesiim* in the wilderness? Both of them were temporary and short lived; as soon the Mishkan or Beis Hamikdash were destroyed, both dedication ceremonies lost their significance.

Rav Sholom Spitz highlighted that it is evident that the rededication of the Maccabees had a degree of timelessness. Even without the actual Beis Hamikdash, a vestige of the Temple remains in the menorah of Chanukah. The *keilim* (utensils) of the Beis Hamikdash are no longer extant, but the menorah in the Jewish home burns as a miniature extension of the Menorah of the Temple. This is further evident from the words of the Ran (*Shabbos* 9a, b'dapei HaRif), who explains that our Sages prohibited benefit from the Chanukah candles as a semblance of the Menorah of the Beis Hamikdash. Similarly, the Gemara (*Shabbos* 23b) states that one who is scrupulous with kindling



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the Chanukah menorah will merit children who are Torah scholars. Just as the Temple Menorah represented the brightness of the light of Torah in the Jewish nation, one's children can likewise bask in the light and inspiration of a properly kindled Chanukah menorah.

Accordingly, it is hashkafically appropriate that the mitzvah of Chanukah was specifically declared by Chazal as *ner ish ubeiso* — a candle for an entire household. This unique, family requirement speaks to the nature of the Chanukah kindling as a perpetuation of the Menorah of the Beis Hamikdash because the Beis Hamikdash was usually synonymous with unity among the Jews. Chazal (Yerushalmi, *Chagigah* 3:6) termed Yerushalayim “The city that makes all the Jewish People friends,” because it created a unity of purpose among the Jewish people. When the Jewish people ascended to the Beis Hamikdash for *aliyah l'regel*, they left their differences aside and focused on their common objective of Divine service. Similarly, when the

Jewish home is privileged to light a Chanukah menorah, a diminutive extension of the Menorah of the Beis Hamikdash, it ushers in a singularity of purpose and feeling of unity as the different members of the family combine with the shared aim of thanking Hashem for the Chanukah miracle, and together bring a small light of the Beis Hamikdash into their home. Whether only one menorah is kindled or each person lights his own candles, the menorah burns brightly as it represents the Menorah of the Beis Hamikdash, which brings unity and the focus of common goals into each Jewish home. May we be privileged to see the ultimate commonality of purpose rekindled as we ascend to the Beis Hamikdash together for *aliyah l'regel*, and see it rededicated in all its splendor.

Notes

1. Each person who is lighting for the sake of *mehadrin* would then be making a separate bracha on lighting in his location even though all the lighting could have been done by one person, with one bracha. The *Terumas HaDeshen* (101) explains that one can make a bracha on Chanukah candles that are lit only

for the purpose of *mehadrin*, even though they are not necessary for the simple mitzvah, as in this case, where one increases candles because there are more individuals in the home, and makes a bracha on that lighting.

2. The *Magen Avraham* (671:5) quotes briefly from the *Machzor Maaglei Tzedek* (Chanukah p. 19a in the Sevonto, 1878 ed., p. 152 in the Jerusalem, 2000 ed.), who states that one should light at a time that all the family members are gathered together. Theoretically, according to Rav Avraham of Prague, it would be possible that the *Magen Avraham* and the *Maaglei Tzedek* are referring to the way to kindle *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, with the family all doing so at the same time. Yet upon closer inspection of his writings, it seems that the author of the *Maaglei Tzedek*, Rav Binyamin Halevi, a 16th century Ashkenazi posek, still practiced *mehadrin min hamehadrin* according to the Tosafists, with only the head of the household lighting.

The *Harrerei Kodesh* (glosses to Rav Zvi Pesach Frank's *Mikraei Kodesh* by his grandson Rav Yosef Cohen, Chanukah 23:2) quotes two reasons found in the Acharonim for the family being together. The *Hisorrerus Teshuva* suggests that it is only if family members are not lighting, and it is in order to enable them to say or hear the bracha of *She'asa Nisim*, which is said on seeing Chanukah candles. The *Harreri Kodesh* also quotes that the *Chayei Adam* (154:20) seems to see it as always necessary, in order to create additional *pirsumei nisa*.



Just as the Temple Menorah represented the brightness of the light of Torah in the Jewish nation, one's children can likewise bask in the light and inspiration of a properly kindled Chanukah menorah.

Chanuka: Faith vs. Fate

A. The Faithful Maccabees

The defeat of the Syrian-Greeks at the hands of the Maccabees was a function of faith. Based on political, military and social considerations this was not a fair match. The Greeks had thousands more soldiers than the small ragtag Jewish army. But the faith of the Maccabees powered their army and their victory. Common wisdom dictated that the larger and more trained army would win. The victory of Chanuka was, therefore, a victory of faith over reason.

We have a tradition, recorded in *Megillas Antiyochus*, that there were three mitzvos that the ancient Greeks despised and outlawed: bris mila, Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh. The Greeks may have liked the interpersonal ethics of the Torah, but they didn't like the mitzvos that focused on the relationship between man with God, specifically Shabbos, mila and Rosh Chodesh. We understand why they would be opposed to mila, changing the human body by cutting off a piece of skin. They thought the human body was perfect, since they idolized the form of the human body in their culture and in their sculptures. Therefore, they didn't like cutting off a piece of skin. For us Jews though, bris mila is a matter of faith. Why do we cut off this piece of skin instead of any other piece of skin? We have faith in the mitzva of Hashem.

There have been many non-Jews who have had a circumcision throughout the ages. They did so for health reasons. However, when a Jew



Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Compiled by Rabbi Tani Prero

performs a circumcision as a bris mila, he receives an extra spiritual quality. This is something physically intangible that we cannot see. It is an added spiritual factor that comes into our souls and becomes part of our lives. This holiness is beyond nature. Since this is a mitzva that goes against the natural order, the Greeks opposed it. We, though, believe that God is above nature and so is His mitzva and, therefore, so are we.

Shabbos is also against the natural social order. Human beings must work to support themselves, Why make one day into a day of rest? Shabbos is so strict that even some minor forms of work are prohibited. One can't even carry a small object from his house to the outside. A person can't write two letters of the alphabet. These laws are against the natural way for people to live. The Greeks were against Shabbos because they couldn't understand it. Hashem told us that Shabbos is a spiritual day. Our spirituality connects us to it. Even if our physical and biological systems don't need Shabbos, this spiritual day has unique spiritual benefits. Shabbos is *me'ein Olam Haba*, a taste of the future spiritual world. We understand why the Greeks would oppose Shabbos and why the Jews — who are connected to the dimension of spirituality — eagerly observed this

mitzva.

Why, though, did the Greeks oppose the mitzva of *kiddush hachodesh*? What could be wrong with declaring a new month every thirty days or so? This is a calendar system that follows the natural order. The moon goes through a cycle, waning until it disappears, and then it comes back. The beginning of each new month is based on a simple naturally recurring phenomenon. Why did the Greeks oppose the performance of this mitzva, which is based on nature?

B. Rosh Chodesh and its Irrational Implications

The Yerushalmi, in *Ksubos* 1:2, says that the Jewish calendar is controlled by the Jewish beis din. It decides when to start the new month, sometimes in 29 days or sometimes in 30 days. In addition to declaring the beginning of each month, it also institutes a leap year when appropriate. Since there is a discrepancy of 11 days between the solar and lunar years, we add an extra month of 30 days every two to three years to keep the lunar and solar years in sync.

The Yerushalmi teaches us an amazing halacha. At the age of 12, a girl becomes an adult. If her birthday is in the month of Adar, say on the 16th of

the month, her bas mitzva would then be in the month of Adar. But then, if after her 12th birthday, the beis din declares a leap year, she suddenly would become younger again. She would only become an adult on the 16th of Adar Sheini. Physically, she is not considered mature anymore for another month! This is strange. One day she was considered physically mature, and the next she is not. In the mitzva of *kiddush hachodesh* we see that physical reality depends on the Jewish courts. This changes the status of a person, whether a physically immature child or a physically mature adult.

This was a rule that the Greeks thought was irrational. They opposed it, while we, in our faith, accepted it.

Shem Mishmuel, Chanukah 5674, Rosh Chodesh Teves, explains further. The word *chodesh*, month, is related to the word for newness, *chadash*. There is newness within the human being. The Jew on Rosh Chodesh gains a new spiritual injection of life, as if he or she has been recreated anew. It is not just a repetition of the previous 30-day cycle. Every time a new month arrives, a Jew receives fresh spiritual energy. The Jew who is sensitive gets a spiritual arousal on Rosh Chodesh. This is also beyond nature; it is a

We have faith in Hashem, who tells us to have faith in people. Hashem can take us outside of the natural order and make unnatural things happen.

matter of faith.

The *Ohr HaChayim*, Bereishis 2:3, says that this happens on Shabbos too. Shabbos is a holy day that brings holiness with it. A Jew who is sensitive can become energized for more holiness for the rest of the ensuing week. In the same way that the Shabbos day produces kedusha for the week, on Rosh Chodesh, a Jew can access new spiritual energies to grow in holiness and religious experience for the whole month.

In this way, the Jew is like the moon. The moon disappears but subsequently reappears. It comes back with energy, growing and getting larger. The Jew can advance spiritually as he or she goes through each month.

Even time itself has this characteristic. It appears that every second is the same, the clock ticks in the same way every second. However, time is really a dynamic entity that brings with it a different character for each different time. This is a spiritual concept unique to Judaism, and was beyond the understanding of the ancient Greeks.

C. The Greek Jealousy of Am Yisrael

This is the source of ancient Greek jealousy of the Jews. In their system of thought, the natural order is powerful and immutable. It creates a tremendous barrier to human creativity. We are bound by our fate. Fate is an idea often found in Greek literature. Fate, according to the Greeks, binds a person and he cannot break free of it. The Torah, however, teaches us to believe in faith. Thus, faith replaces fate. Man and woman can change their fate. The idea of teshuva is that a person who has done horrible things can still change his

ways and make himself into a better person. I have seen boys who come from places very far from Torah, and after coming to yeshiva they undergo a drastic change. This is the power of teshuva. We have faith in Hashem, who tells us to have faith in people. People can dramatically change themselves. This is the power of Rosh Chodesh, of renewal.

Our existence is not determined by fate. Neither physical nor social orders bind us. They have limited power to control us. Hashem can take us outside of the natural order and make unnatural things happen.

This is the power of bris mila, of Shabbos and of Rosh Chodesh.

Rosh Chodesh is the day of Dovid Hamelech, who was the baal teshuva par excellence. He changed his ways to become a totally different person. Faith that goes beyond nature was at the root of the Maccabees' revolt against the Greeks. The Jews believed with faith and were able to go beyond nature, and they won a war against the odds that physical reality dictated.

D. Faith Even Against Reason

This concept is at the root of the Jewish return to the Land of Israel in modern times. Many nations had written off a Jewish return to Israel as impossible. They were right — dealing with only natural circumstances. No one would have ever entertained such a foolish thought that a small and weak nation would return to its land after nearly 1,900 years. It is way beyond nature, but it is a matter of faith. The impossible dream can happen. This is one aspect of the faith of Chanuka, the creative dream to go beyond what we think is naturally possible.

E. The Month of Teves and Shevet Dan

There are twelve months in the year, and Yaakov Avinu had twelve sons. The commentators have aligned them in different ways. Teves (which is the Rosh Chodesh that occurs on Chanuka) is connected to the *shevet* of Dan. He is the personality of the month of Teves. There is a concept in chassidus called י"ש. It is the acronym of *olam shana nefesh*. This refers to recurring spiritual characteristics that take corresponding form in place, in time and in the human soul. According to this theory, the soul of the month of Teves is *Shevet Dan*. Shimshon, the great Jewish hero and prophet, comes from Dan. His soul had within it the same spiritual energy as contained in the time of Chodesh Teves. What is the nature of this energy?

The midrash, *Bereishis Rabbah*, *Vayeitzei* no. 71, comments on the

meaning of the word *dan*, which literally means judgment. Rachel Imeinu, stepmother of Dan, named him and explained, "*danani Elokim*." The midrash explains this word in two different directions. *Danani v'chivvuni, danani v'zikani*. She said God judged me and found me guilty, and He judged me and found me meritorious. This is why she called her son by the name Dan. This is a strange midrash. What does it mean?

F. Rachel's Desperation

Rachel, the beloved wife of Yaakov, was childless. Meanwhile, Leah had given birth to four sons. Rachel was upset beyond reason. She went to Yaakov and said (Bereishis 30), "You must do what you can to get me children. Pray to Hashem and promise whatever needs to be done in order for me to have a child. If not, I will die." Perhaps she even threatened to commit suicide. Yaakov angrily

retorted, "God is the one who is preventing you from having a child, it is not my fault." In desperation, Rachel gave her maidservant Bilha to Yaakov, and Bilha gave birth to Dan. Eventually Rachel herself gave birth to Yosef.

Yaakov, paragon of virtue, loved Rachel. He wanted her to have a child. How could he be so cruel and say to her, "It's not my fault, take care of it yourself!" *Shem Mishmuel* (in the aforementioned derasha) explains that Yaakov put on a show of cruelty towards his wife because he wanted her to pray. He wanted her to think she was really helpless and hopeless. All along she knew her husband Yaakov was a tzadik and had a strong power of prayer. Yaakov had survived Lavan and Eisav with the help of angels. In her agony, Rachel was relying on Yaakov to convince Hashem to perform a miracle and give her a child. He could probably get the angels to do it, she thought.

The Jews in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp managed to put together the materials to light Chanukah lights on the first night of Chanukah. R. Yisrael Spira, the Bluzhover Rebbe, was chosen to do the lighting. As a crowd gathered around him, he recited the first two blessings. When he reached the third blessing, he stopped, turned his head, and then immediately recited the Shehchianu blessing. After the lighting, a fellow named Mr. Zamietchkowski challenged R. Spira: I understand how you can recite the first two blessings, but how could you possibly bless G-d "that you have kept us alive, have preserved us and brought us to this season" in these dreadful conditions? R. Spira responded that he too wondered whether it was appropriate to recite Shehechianu, and turned to ask one of the rabbis. But when he saw the large crowd of living Jews listening with faith and fervor to the blessings while they stared death in the eye, he knew the answer to the question and recited Shehchianu in a strong and comforting voice.

From Yaffa Eliach's Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust pp. 13-15



When she desperately came to Yaakov and said, “If you don’t get me this child I’m going to die or commit suicide,” Yaakov knew that this was wrong. She had somehow transferred her faith in Hashem to him. She had faith in Yaakov, and that was wrong. Yaakov destroyed this faith when he screamed at her. “I can’t help you!” he exclaimed. “This is your issue.” When he walked away from her then she was completely broken and helpless. She knew there was only one thing for her to do, to pour her heart out to the Almighty. Even Yaakov had seemed to have given up hope for her. Then she prayed like she had never prayed before. This is why she was answered and had the step-child Dan for her to raise.

This same story was repeated centuries later. Chana’s husband suggests that they stop talking about children. “I am your loyal husband. I am better to you than ten children would be,” he said (Shmuel I 1:8). She saw that he had given up hope. This motivated her to pray and she too was answered. When a person finds himself facing a cruel fate and pours his heart out to Hashem, Hashem destroys the decree and creates a miracle for the person to receive a blessing. This is what Yaakov wanted Rachel to discover. There is no such thing as helplessness and hopelessness. Pray sincerely and passionately and you will be answered.

These were the two judgments of Rachel, which the midrash associates with the name Dan. When Yaakov rebuffed her when she had no

children, she felt the first judgment. The later judgment came when she received her wish and Dan was born.

This has happened many times throughout our history. Hashem can always help us.

גַּם כִּי אֶלֶף בְּגִיָּא צְלָמֹת לֹא אִירָא רַע כִּי אֲתָה
 עֲמֻדֵי שְׂבִטָה וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתֶיךָ הַמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי
 תהלים כג:ד

Even when I walk in a place of death, I will not fear evil because You Hashem are with me. Your staff and Your rod will comfort me.

Tehillim 23:4

The Maccabees had reached this point of helplessness and hopelessness. They were subjects of the most powerful army in the world, with the most technologically advanced weaponry. Many Jews had joined the Greeks culturally, abandoning their Judaism. Only a small group maintained their loyalty to Torah. They couldn’t observe mila, Rosh Chodesh or Shabbos. They started with less than a hundred soldiers, mostly kohanim, who were not trained soldiers, and they fought a well-trained and experienced army. But Hashem helped them win, proving that faith is greater than fate. The power of *mesirus nefesh* (dedication and sacrifice) for our holy mission always enables us to succeed.

This is the same spiritual energy that Shimshon had. He single-handedly defeated thousands of enemy Plishtim. This is the energy of Chodesh Teves, to believe in the

impossible dream, to believe Hashem will help us when things seem naturally hopeless. We will never lose our faith in Him!

G. Don’t Always Follow Your Yetzer Tov

Shem Mishmuel mentions an unusual idea that his father, the Avnei Nezer, once said. In Krias Shma, we say “*v’lo sasuru acharei l’vavchem v’acharei eineichem*, Do not follow your hearts and your eyes.” We know people have two eyes, so it makes sense to say *eineichem* in plural form. But each person only has one heart. Why does the verse state it in the plural form? One may say that it means the many hearts of many Jews. But the Avnei Nezer proves that in this case, *acharei l’vavchem* actually means one person having two hearts. Spiritually and emotionally, we all have two hearts: a good heart and a bad heart, a *yetzer tov* and a *yetzer hara*. He insists that the Torah means not to follow both hearts, the *yetzer hara* and the *yetzer tov*. What does this mean?

We understand that we are not supposed to follow our bad instincts, such as anger and jealousy. Why not follow the good heart, the *yetzer tov*? *Shem Mishmuel* says that when the Jews were at Har Sinai and Hashem offered them the Torah, Bnei Yisrael said *na’ase v’nishma*, “We will observe the Torah’s mitzvos and we will understand them.” They placed doing before understanding. Of course we are supposed to understand. But before understanding we must make



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the commitment to do God's will. The second step is that He allows us to study Torah and, with His help, to understand it. But we do the mitzvos even without understanding them. If my good heart says let me understand God's dictates, if I feel I must understand before I perform mitzva actions, I am wrong. First one must make a commitment to listen to Hashem's words, and then begin to understand them. If my good side puts reason before faith saying, "I want to understand the Torah," then I should not listen to my good-hearted intentions. Reason does not replace or precede faith.

This was the crux of the philosophical clash between the Greek value system and the Torah. The Greeks adored the human mind. The ancient Greek appreciation for the beauty of life began and ended with reason. Reason is part of human nature. The Greeks would say, "If it's natural this is what we have to do. We must follow the dictates of our reason." The philosopher was the ultimate accomplishment in ancient Greek culture. They couldn't accept certain *bein adam laMakom* mitzvos. Tfilin, Shabbos, kashrus, Rosh Chodesh

and others didn't seem reasonable to them. They saw the Jews following the dictates of Hashem, even though these mitzvos did not have an apparent rationale.

The Jewish thinkers disagreed. Of course human logic is important. But it's the second step. The first step is faith. We must listen to Hashem since He is the source of our being. He has control of us whether we understand it or not. We first accept our responsibility to Him. The second step is *nishma*, we will understand.

H. Today's Faith

This relationship between faith and reason has been at the core of Judaism throughout the centuries. If we didn't have the commitment of *na'ase* before *nishma* how could we have survived all of those pogroms, persecutions, wanderings, and the horrific Holocaust? How could we go on after that? It would not make any sense to continue after all that. It is simply not rational. The Arab foes of Israel say that there is no rational reason for Jews to continue in Eretz Yisrael. We are different, however, because

we proceed with faith. We know that this is right even if we can't explain why. Hashem has said to us, "You have to continue after the Holocaust, you must return to Tzion."

The power of *kabalas ol malchus shamayim* (accepting the yoke of Heaven) has made Judaism and the Jewish people an eternal nation. We are beyond logic, and therefore nobody can explain the secret of Jewish survival; we can't even explain it ourselves. It is a secret that only Hashem knows. He took His people and placed them above the natural laws of nations and of physics, biology, sociology and history. We in turn make the commitment of faith. This is why Judaism continues today with freshness and power in the Holy Land. With God's help we will have a new Temple, one that will be holier even than the Temple of the Chashmonaim because it is rooted in the power of the eternal faith in God.

Questions and Exercises for Family Discussion

Questions:

- 1) What is the common denominator among the mitzvos that the Greeks outlawed?
- 2) What was the core argument between ancient Greek philosophy and Judaism?
- 3) Why were the Greeks opposed to the mitzva of *kiddush hachodesh*?
- 4) What is the difference between faith and fate?
- 5) Why didn't Yaakov help Rachel in her quest for a child?
- 6) What is the Jewish attitude towards understanding the mitzvos?
- 7) When does reason enter Judaism?

Exercises:

- 8) List five good things you do based on reason.
- 9) List five good things you do based on faith and not on reason.
- 10) Do you experience spirituality when you perform faith based mitzvos?
- 11) Do you experience spirituality when you perform reason based mitzvos?
- 12) Does the existence of the State of Israel and the millions of Jews living there strengthen your faith in Hashem and in his Torah? How?

Chanuka: Yosef and Yavan

In scheduling the reading of the *parshiot* for each Shabbos, our Sages scheduled the reading of one or both of the *parshiot* that deal with the story of Yosef to always fall on Chanukah. They saw an inherent connection between these two chapters in the history of our nation, and it is therefore fitting that we explore this connection as well.

The *Shvilei Pinchas*, *Vayeshev* no. 92, teaches that indeed our Greek exile, *golus Yavan*, is a rectification and expiation for the story of Yosef. Indeed, the *Megaleh Amukos*, *Miketz* no. 16, notes that the gematrias (numerologies) of Y-O-Se-F, Me-Le-CH Ya-Va-N, and the particular Greek king involved in the Chanukah story, A-N-T-I-O-CH-uS, all add up to 156, pushing us further into finding some underlying principles in the relationship between these two chapters of our history. So the question we are left with is: How does the Greek interaction with Judaism explain the travails that Yosef suffered and vice versa, and what are we to extract from this juxtaposition?

Yosef played a special role in Jewish history. He was the first member of the full Judaic family to spend time in exile, in an alien culture. His words, actions and deportment in the various circumstances in which he found himself provide the model for our behavior as we live through this long exile. This forms the basis for a long discussion in the *Shvilei Pinchas*.

The *Shvilei Pinchas* starts the history lesson with Yaakov. When Yaakov fled from Esav, he did not go directly



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to Lavan. Instead, he stopped at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years to study particular areas of Torah, to learn how a Jew is to interact with strangers in an alien world. That is how he survived in the home of his uncle Lavan. When Yaakov had his own family, he taught all his sons Torah, but he understood through some Divine inspiration that Yosef would need this additional Torah. From the age of three, when one begins teaching some aspects of Torah to a child, until the age of seventeen, the same fourteen years he himself had studied the Torah of exile, he taught this specialized Torah to this son. At the age of seventeen, Yaakov sent Yosef in search of his brothers, thus precipitating the sale of Yosef to Egypt and this chapter of our history. This reflection of Torah learning is what Yosef saw when the wife of Potifar tried to seduce him, and this gave him the strength and determination to flee from her grasp.

Yosef had believed that if you try to integrate and interact with the culture around you, if you look like them and act like them, you will be accepted and you may influence them. He found out, however, that if you try to be more like them, you are more likely to be influenced by them than the other way around. He realized that he must remain strong in maintaining

his identity as separate from the Egyptians around him if he was to remain pure and true to his inner self. As such, he was to become the model for the rest of the fledgling nation as they would descend to Egypt twenty-two years later. This was the Divine plan. This was symbolized by the throwing of Yosef into a pit empty of water, but filled with snakes and scorpions; like the pit of Egypt empty of life sustaining Torah but full of the evils and immorality of their depraved culture. Just as Yosef survived both the physical pit and the symbolic pit of Egypt, so too would the nation he represented survive. We would learn how to maintain a separate identity amid the various corrupt nations in which we would find ourselves throughout our history.

This was the essence of the battle between the Greeks and the Hasmoneans, continues the *Shvilei Pinchas*. They wanted the Jews to assimilate into their culture, and unfortunately many Jews did. The Greeks brought their idols into the Temple and sacrificed pigs. And they sought out every jar and cruse of oil they could find to defile it, to compromise the purity of the oil, for the major characteristic of oil is that it separates and rises to the top of anything it is mixed with. Oil always remains separate; it always retains its

essence. The crux of the war with the Greeks was much more than political. The Greeks wanted us to lose our essence and become intermingled with them.

But we already had the example of Yosef, who always remained the *Ivri*, the different one. The Hasmoneans understood that they too, and the entire nation, could retain their specific separate Jewish identity even amid this strong alien culture. Yosef remained righteous by guarding his eyes, by being circumspect in what he allowed himself to see. He did not fall prey to the seductive eyes of the many women enamored of his good looks. He focused only on the purity of what he had learned in his father's house.

The Belzer Rebbe, in *Leket Sifsei Kodesh*, makes an interesting observation. Yosef remained circumspect in observing the three pillars of our faith throughout his life in Egypt. He kept *Shabbos*, *bris milah* (circumcision), and *niddah* (family purity). The initials of these three mitzvos spell out *shemen*, oil, the central symbol of our Chanukah observance. And these three mitzvos formed the backbone of the practices banned by the Greeks.

In the darkness of night, points out Reb Chaim Hachohen, all the wild animals of the forest come out. But when daylight breaks, the beasts disperse and go back to their lairs. In our dark exile, the *yetzer horo* of the alien cultures bare their claws and reach forward with their tentacles. We need the light so that our eyes will see the truth and we will retain our values as Jews.

This too is the lesson from Yosef. The Gemarah, *Shabbos* 22a, points out that the menorah may not be higher than twenty *amos*, approximately thirty feet. If the menorah is to be a beacon

that teaches us to keep our eyes focused on our inner essence, then it must be at something resembling a level that the eye can see without contorting oneself. With our eyes focused on the burning oil of the menorah, on holiness, says *Halekach Vehalebuv*, we will guard our eyes from seeing evil, and turn our sight to the holiness within ourselves, and light up that darkness. For what we see, even if it does not seem to register, remains in our permanent memory. Therefore, the candles must be placed where we can see them.

Returning to the story of Yosef, Yosef's brothers saw only an empty pit, without water. But a vacuum does not exist. If there was no water, surely there were snakes and scorpions in the crevices of the walls. The Hasmoneans recognized the dangers lurking in the walls of the pit of Greek culture. They wanted their homes to be filled with the life-sustaining water of Torah rather than with the emptiness of Greek civilization.

There is another completely different perspective through which we can examine the connection between Yosef and Yavan. *Halekach Vehalebuv* explores the concept of thoughts creating a reality of energy even if the thoughts are never translated into action. On this plane, we must consider the original intention of Yosef's brothers. They actually stated that they wanted to kill him. They only refrained from doing so at the urging of Reuven. But one can kill another in many ways. For example, embarrassing someone, especially in public, is akin to killing them, for we have drained the lifeblood from their face. Another way of killing someone is to kill their spirit, their inner essence. While the victim may be

physically alive, his essence and soul are gone.

The core of Greek philosophy was the worship of the outer shell, the beauty of form, with a total disregard for the inner spirit and soul. In this sense, the Greek exile represented the sin of murder that had existed in the minds of Yosef's brothers. While the brothers wanted to physically kill Yosef, the Greeks wanted to spiritually kill us and everyone else. All they were concerned about was outer beauty and the trappings of civilization and culture. They revered the outer shell and wanted to destroy the inner light.

Each vessel in the Temple and each of the garments worn by the priests contained symbolic meaning. The Menorah in the Temple was the counterforce to and provided expiation for murder, as each sacrifice was expiation for a particular sin. How were the wicks and the lighting apparatus made for the Menorah? The Rambam, *Hilchos Klei Hamkidash* 8:6, answers that the threads were taken from the trousers and belt of the priest's worn-out garments, and also from the tunic.

How was the tunic an appropriate garment from which to extract threads with which to light the Menorah? *Halekach Vehalebuv* cites the Shlah Hakodosh in discussing the pattern woven into the fabric of the tunic. He explains that the pattern was circles with squares inside. He explains the symbolism within this pattern. The circles, he says, represent the physical world. The earth, the sun, fruit — everything — is somehow a circle or derived from a circle. The square represents that which is supernatural, the spiritual. In the desert, for example, we were encamped in a square around the Tabernacle, modeled after the

angels surrounding the Throne of Glory. We recognize that everything in nature is imbued with holiness from above, just as our physical bodies contain the divine souls. We believe in the oil, the essence of the olive. The Greeks wished to discard the oil and sing odes to the beautiful, empty peel of the olive. They wished to defile the essence.

This was the philosophical battle the Hasmoneans were waging against the Greeks. To paraphrase a common axiom, we believe that this world is a round peg in a square hole, a material, tangible entity that is really part of a spiritual cosmos. We must use the light of Chanukah to see the spiritual essence in life and in this world.

Observe the dreidel. The traditional shape of the dreidel is square. Yet when it spins so quickly, it appears to be round. But we know the circle is an illusion, for when the dreidel stops spinning, we again see that it is really a square. The Greeks wanted us to believe only in the circle. [Again, numerology provides an interesting aside. Ya-Va-N = 66, as does Ga-L-Ga-L, a round wheel.] The circle of this world is the mirage; the reality is the square. As for ourselves, how often do we find ourselves running around in circles, not even knowing what our destination is? Now is the time to use the light of the menorah to find our way out.

The world is a world of nature, of seven, and Chanukah, the holiday symbolizing the spiritual which is above and beyond nature, is celebrated for eight days, the number

symbolizing the spiritual and the reconnection with Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Just as the Hasmoneans ignited the world of the physical into the spiritual with the lighting of the oil that burned for eight days, says Rav Moshe Breslover in *Lemachar Aatir*, so too can we ignite the temporal world around us to experience eternity. Now is the time to see the square and transform our circles into squares. Now is the time, says Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz, to infuse our lives with added spirituality, just as we add more light to the menorah each night of Chanukah. Now is the time to daven with greater intention and focus, to search out and get rid of the hidden snakes and scorpions that have crept into the walls of our homes from the surrounding culture.

The Prophet Zechariah 9:13, speaks of awakening the sons of TZiYON (Zion) over the sons of YaVON (Greece). In Hebrew, the only difference between the two is the letter “tzadik” at the beginning of Tzion. Yosef taught us the difference between the Greeks and the lovers of Zion, the Jews. Yosef is known as Yosef the Tzadik, for he remained true to his inner essence in all circumstances. We can also remain true if we keep our focus on righteousness and enthusiasm in doing the mitzvos, for we must remember that it is the inner essence of our observance that is important, not the rote, outer shell. We must use the pure light of the menorah not just to illuminate our windows and declare our beliefs outwardly, but also to search inwardly

In the middle of discussing the laws of Chanukah, the Gemara, *Shabbos* 22a, states that when Yosef was thrown into the pit, it contained snakes and scorpions. The statement comes immediately after the Gemara’s ruling that if one places the menorah higher than twenty *amos*, it is invalid. What is the connection? R. Moshe Feinstein, *Darash Moshe, drush* no. 9, explains that the goal of Chanukah is to look at the supernatural miracles and realize that G-d’s providence in the natural world is just as miraculous. A menorah higher than twenty *amos* symbolizes an approach that miracles are out of our reach and don’t relate to us. We have to light the menorah in a place where we can see it because when we look for signs of miracles, we should see them all around us. The brothers of Yosef threw Yosef into a pit full of snakes and scorpions and the fact that he was able to survive in there was nothing short of miraculous. The brothers were blinded by their hatred of Yosef and weren’t able to see the miracle. If they would have been looking for miracles, they would have realized how wrong they were and that G-d had great plans for Yosef.

and ignite our inner light that Hashem has kindled within us and that the Hasmoneans have modeled for us with their dedication to the essence of the teachings of our forefathers.



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Days of Joy: Exploring the Simcha of Chanukah

When the Rambam introduces the concept of Chanukah he uses one word that doesn't seem to fit with the laws of Chanukah. The Rambam writes:

התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל. רמב"ם, הלכות חנוכה ג:ג

The rabbis of that generation instituted that these eight days which begin on the night of the 25th of Kislev are days of joy (simcha) and praise (hallel).

Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 3:3

The Rambam's use of the word "simcha" differs from the Gemara's description of Chanukah as days of "hallel v'hoda'ah," praise and thanksgiving (*Shabbos* 21b). Perhaps the Rambam saw an allusion to the element of simcha in the fact that the Gemara prohibits eulogies and fasting on Chanukah. However, when we explore the laws that normally accompany days of simcha, we will notice that these laws don't apply on Chanukah. Why then does the Rambam use the word simcha and what elements of simcha are manifest on Chanukah?

What Laws Are Normally Associated with Days of Simcha?

The Gemara, *Pesachim* 109a, states that the primary method of fulfilling



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simchas yom tov — the mitzvah to be joyous on yom tov — is by eating the meat of the korbanos. The Gemara also mentions that nowadays, when we don't have korbanos, the mitzvah can be fulfilled in a more subjective manner by partaking in things that make us joyous, recognizing that men, women and children have different interests. For men, that means drinking wine and according to the Rambam, eating meat (see Rambam, *Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:18, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 529:1 and *Magen Avraham* 529:3). A similar requirement is recorded by the Rambam (*Hilchos Megillah* 2:15) regarding Purim, which is called "y'mei mishteh v'simcha," days of feasting and joy (*Esther* 9:22). Yet we don't find the Rambam or anyone else requiring one to eat meat or drink wine on Chanukah. This indicates that there is no element of simcha on Chanukah.

The Mishna, *Moed Katan* 19a, as explained by the Gemara, *Moed Katan* 14b and 19b-20a, teaches us that the simcha on yom tov is enough to override the laws of mourning. This is manifest in two different ways. First, if the mourning period started, the yom tov cancels the rest of that mourning period. Second, if the mourning did

not yet begin, the mourning is delayed until after yom tov. How does Purim's status as days of simcha affect the laws of mourning? According to the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 696:4, all of the laws of mourning apply on Purim. Yet the Rama writes that there is no public mourning on Purim. When it comes to Chanukah, there is no discussion in the *Shulchan Aruch* or the Rama about whether the laws of mourning apply because it is obvious that they apply. This is another indication that simcha is not apparent on Chanukah.

Recitation of Hallel as a Manifestation of Simcha

One common element that Chanukah shares with yom tov is the obligation to recite a complete Hallel. Perhaps the indicator that there is an element of simcha on Chanukah is the obligation to recite Hallel. The Ramban, in his *Hasagos to Sefer Hamitzvos, shoresh* no. 1, notes that the Gemara implies that the obligation to recite a complete Hallel on yom tov is of biblical origin. The Ramban then wonders: if there is a biblical obligation, what is the source? He suggests that

perhaps it is part of the obligation of simchas yom tov. He notes the Gemara, *Erchin* 11a, that derives the obligation of *shiras Halevi'im* (the song of the Levites) from the fact that the offering of korbanos require an element of simcha, and this simcha is accomplished through song. Ramban says that we see from the Gemara that *shira* provides simcha and therefore, if there is an obligation to recite Hallel on yom tov, it is logical that its source is the mitzvah of *simchas yom tov*. As such, one can argue that just as Hallel is recited to fulfill the mitzvah of *simchas yom tov*, the fact that we recite Hallel on Chanukah may be a manifestation of simcha on Chanukah.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to infer from the obligation to recite Hallel on Chanukah that it is a function of simcha. The Gemara, *Erchin* 10b, states that the recitation of Hallel on yom tov and the recitation of Hallel on Chanukah are fundamentally different. We might recite the same words, but on Yom Tov, we recite Hallel to celebrate the holiday. On Chanukah we recite Hallel to commemorate the miracle. When the Ramban suggests that recitation of Hallel is a function of simcha, he was only discussing the type of Hallel that serves to celebrate yom tov. The Ramban was not discussing the Hallel of Chanukah which commemorates the miracle.

What is the Simcha of Chanukah?

It is now evident that the laws and practices of Chanukah don't reflect the ordinary laws associated with holidays that involve simcha. There is no obligation to partake in meat or wine. Chanukah does not interrupt or suspend mourning practices. Even the recitation of Hallel is not a function of

simcha. If so, what did the Rambam intend when he branded Chanukah as days of simcha? What is the simcha of Chanukah?

Perhaps the simcha is based on the following verse:

וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדָשֵׁיכֶם וּבְתַקְעוֹתֵם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל עֲלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זְבָחֵי שְׁלָמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אָנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. במדבר י"י

On your day of joy and on your holidays and on your first of the month, you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings and they shall be a remembrance before Your Lord, I am G-d, Your Lord.

Bamidbar 10:10

The verse teaches us about the requirement to sound the trumpets, but it does not give any indication as to what *yom simchaschem* — your day of joy — refers to. The Netziv, *Ha'amek Davar* ad loc., suggests that it refers to the dedication of the Mishkan or the Beis Hamikdash. We find that when the Mishkan was dedicated, the nes'i'im all brought korbanos and it was a big celebration. We also find that Shlomo HaMelech organized a great celebration for the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash. In fact, the Gemara, *Moed Katan* 9a, notes that the celebration of the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash was so significant that despite the fact that one of the days of dedication coincided with Yom Kippur, the Jewish people ate on Yom Kippur that year. The Netziv notes two other important components of the dedication celebration. The verse, in describing the dedication of the First Beis Hamikdash, states:

וַיְהִי כִּאֲחֵד לְמַחְצְרִים וּלְמִשְׁרָרִים לְהַשְׁמִיעַ קוֹל אֶחָד לְהַלֵּל וּלְהַדוֹת לַיהוָה וּבְהָרִים קוֹל בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת וּבַמְצֻלְתַּיִם וּבְכָלֵי הַשִּׁיר וּבְהַלֵּל לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב כִּי

לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ וְהַבֵּית מְלֵא עֲנֵן בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה. דברי הימים ב' ה'יג

There was symphony among the trumpet blowers and singers to provide a unified voice to praise and thank G-d, and when the sound of the trumpets and the percussions and other instruments were heard and the praise to G-d for He is good and His kindness is forever [was recited], the cloud filled the house — the house of G-d.

Divrei Hayamim II 5:13

We find in this verse that at the time of the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash, they blew the trumpets and they recited Hallel. Similarly, when the Second Beis Hamikdash was dedicated, we find these two components:

וַיִּעֲנוּ בְהַלֵּל וּבְהוֹדוֹת לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעָם הֲרִיעוּ תְרוּעָה גְדוֹלָה בְּהַלֵּל לַיהוָה עַל הוֹסֵד בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה. עזרא ג'יא

They responded with praise and thanksgiving to G-d for He is good and His kindness is forever on the Jewish people. The whole nation sounded a great blast and praised G-d for the establishment of the house of G-d.

Ezra 3:11

Chanukah also celebrates the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash. We commemorate the miracle of the war and we also commemorate the miracle of the oil of the Menorah. However, neither of those miracles are worthy of transforming Chanukah into days of simcha. What gives Chanukah the status of “days of simcha” is the fact that we are celebrating the *Chanukas Habayis*, the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash.

With this background, we can understand a comment of the Rama:

ריבוי הסעודות שמרבים בהם הם סעודות הרשות שלא קבעום למשתה ושמחה. הגה:

וי"א שיש קצת מצוה ברבוי הסעודות משום דבאותן הימים היה חנוכה המזבח. שלחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרעב:

The enhancing of the meals that is done [on Chanukah] is not necessary because [the days of Chanukah] were not instituted as [days of] feasting and joy. Rama: There are those that say that there is somewhat of a mitzvah to enhance the meals because in those days, there was a dedication of the Altar.
Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 670:2

We can understand the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch* that there is no requirement or mitzvah to have any special meals on Chanukah. As we noted earlier, we don't observe that type of simcha on Chanukah. Yet the Rama tells us that because Chanukah also celebrates the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash, we should mark the occasion by enhancing our meals.

Why should the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash be a cause for simcha? Perhaps the answer is based on a comment of the Rambam:

מצות עשה לעשות בית לה' מוכן להיות מקריבים בו הקרבנות וחוגגין אליו שלש פעמים בשנה שנאמר ועשו לי מקדש. רמב"ם, הל' בית הבחירה א:א

There is a positive commandment to build a house for G-d that is suitable for offering sacrifices and for celebrating [on the festivals] three times a year as it states "you shall build for Me a temple."
Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechirah 1:1

The purpose of building the Beis Hamikdash is not only for the ability to bring korbanos. It is also to enable

us to perform the mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel*. The mitzvah of *aliyah l'regel* is always performed in the context of simcha, on yom tov. It is a true simcha experience. If the purpose of building the Beis Hamikdash is to enable us to perform a mitzvah that brings about simcha, then we can understand why the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash is also considered a time of simcha.

The *Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 670:5*, in addressing the question of why Chanukah is eight days, quotes from the Book of Maccabees that the eight-day holiday was originally modeled after Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. What is the connection between Chanukah and Sukkos? Based on what we presented, we could suggest that the celebration of the rededication of the Beis HaMikdash was in part a celebration of the ability to perform *aliyah l'regel*. As such, it was appropriate to model Chanukah after Sukkos/Shemini Atzeres, the longest of the *regalim*.

The Simcha in Today's Times

If Chanukah is a celebration of the rededication of the Beis Hamikdash, now that we don't have a Beis Hamikdash, how do we celebrate? What is our source of simcha? The Netziv, in the very same presentation about the mitzvah to celebrate the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash, teaches us how we can have that same experience nowadays:

בעת שאנחנו בגלות והשגחת ה' עלינו ע"י ד' אמות של הלכה הוא דבר אחד עם חנוכה המזבח בזמן שישראל בארץ ישראל ובית

המקדש קיים שהשגחת ה' עלינו ושכינתו היה תלוי בעבודת בית המקדש ... כך בזמן הזה סיום התורה והתחלתה הוא שמחת לבנו. דרך כלל אין שמחת ישראל כמו בזמן שאנחנו עושים סיבה להשכין את אלקי ישראל בקרבנו. הרחב דבר, במדבר י"ב:

At a time when we are in exile and G-d's providence over us is through the four cubits of Jewish law, [Torah learning] is one and the same with the dedication of the Altar when the Jews were in the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple stood. Because G-d's providence over us and His Divine presence were contingent on the service in the Holy Temple ... So too, nowadays, completion of the Torah and beginning it is the joy of our heart. As a general rule, there is no greater joy for a Jew than providing an atmosphere for G-d to dwell among us.

Harchev Davar, Bamidbar 10:2

The Gemara, *Berachos 8a*, teaches that after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Divine presence rests in the four *amos* (cubits) of Jewish law. We connect with the Shechinah through Torah learning. As the Netziv teaches us, if we want to experience the same simcha that was experienced in the Chanukah story when the Beis Hamikdash was rededicated, we should renew and reinforce our commitment to Torah learning. Our focus this Chanukah should be on "rebuilding" the beis medrash. The places where we learn Torah should be reinvigorated and filled with joyous sounds of Torah learning. May our rededication of the Beis Hamikdash serve as a *zechus* to ultimately merit participating in the dedication of the Third Beis Hamikdash.



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Bayamim Hahem Bazman Haze Illuminating the Light of Chanukah

As we light our menorahs each night of Chanukah, we recite the following bracha:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who performed miracles for our forefathers, in those days, at/in this time.

The wording of this bracha raises a question — how are the miracles of Chanukah relevant to our times? We don't live under Greek rule, we are not engaged in military revolts led by the Chashmona'im, and we currently have no Beis Hamikdash (may we see it rebuilt speedily in our days). Which Chanukah miracles are we still yearning for today?

The Defining Miracle of Chanukah

Every day of Chanukah, we insert the paragraph of Al Hanissim in bentsching and Shemoneh Esrei. The paragraph nicely summarizes the story of Chanukah — the Chashmona'i military victory over the Greek forces, the subsequent purification of the Beis Hamikdash, and lighting of the Menorah. The victory of *rabbim b'yad me'atim* (the many Greeks were defeated by the few Chashmona'im) is a focus of the paragraph, as it was a miraculous deliverance that was clearly orchestrated by G-d.

However, the Gemara in *Shabbos 21b*, highlights an entirely different event as

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the central miracle of our Chanukah commemoration celebration:

מאי חנוכה דתנו רבנן... 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 שבת כא:

What is [the reason of] Chanukah?... For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, 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 for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days.

Shabbos 21b

According to this Gemara, the miracle of the long-lasting oil is the defining miracle of Chanukah, the essence of the holiday. If so, when we seek to understand the relevance of the Chanukah miracle in our current times, we must delve into the messages of the long-lasting oil of the Beis Hamikdash. Through appreciating the miracle of the long-lasting oil, we can then search for connections to modern-day Jewish life.

Greek Exile is Darkness

In Rabbinic literature, the Chanukah imagery of light and darkness extends far beyond the miracle of the Menorah lights. According to Rav Shimon ben Lakish in *Breishis Rabbah 2:4*, the defining characteristic of the period of Greek influence and persecution is *choshech*, darkness. Rav Shimon ben Lakish discusses the following passuk:

וְהָאָרֶץ, הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבִהוּ, וְחֹשֶׁךְ, עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם; וְרוּחַ אֱלֹקִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.
בראשית א:ב

Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

Breishis 1:2

He explains that the phrase alludes to the four *galuyos*, exiles, of Jewish history.

ר"ש בן לקיש פתר קריא בגליות... "וְחֹשֶׁךְ" זה גלות יון שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגזירותיהן שהיתה אומרת להם כתבו על קרן השור שאין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל.
בראשית רבה ב:ד

Rav Simeon ben Lakish applied the passage to the [foreign] powers... Choshech symbolizes Greece, which darkened the eyes of Israel with its decrees, ordering Israel, "Write on the

horn of an ox that you have no portion in the God of Israel.”

Breishis Rabbah 2:4

The *Nesivos Shalom* questions why the medrash specifically highlights the decree of the *keren ha'shor*, the horn of an ox, as the source of the darkness brought about by the Greeks.¹ The Greeks imposed many strict decrees during their persecution of the Jews, banning mitzvos such as bris milah, Torah learning, and sacrifices in the Beis Hamikdash.² Why does the decree of the *keren ha'shor* represent the quintessence of *choshech* that defines the Greek galus? To answer this question, we must understand the concept of darkness versus light, as it exists within Torah.

The Motif of Light and Darkness

Throughout Tanach, *or*, light, is conceptually used in association with spirituality and/or Torah.³ In Mishlei 6:23, Torah is compared to light and mitzvos are compared to candles:

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹרֶךְ.

For mitzvos are candles and Torah is a light.

In Mishlei 20:27, man's *neshama* is called the candle of G-d:

נֵר ה' נְשַׁמַּת אָדָם.

The candle of G-d is the soul of man.

The prophet Micha (7:8) conjures up the image of light shining within darkness to describe Hashem's presence in his life:

כִּי אֲשִׁב בְּחֹשֶׁךְ ה' אֹרֶךְ לִי.

When I sit in darkness, G-d is my light.

The imagery of candles and light recurs in many other instances, overtly and exegetically referring to spirituality.⁴

Choshech, conversely, symbolizes the absence of spirituality. Darkness is often invoked as a punishment or threat of distance from Hashem, as is evidenced in Yechezkel 32:8:

וְנָתַתִּי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל אֶרְצָךְ נְאֻם ה' אֱלֹהִים.

I will place darkness on your land, the word of G-d, the Lord.

In Amos 5:20, it similarly states:⁵

הֲלֹא חֹשֶׁךְ יוֹם ה' וְלֹא אֹרֶךְ וְאֶפְסֵל וְלֹא נֶגְהָ לּוֹ.

Behold, darkness, not light, is the day of G-d and blackness not brightness in it.

Choshech exists as a direct contrast to *or*; light and darkness represent opposing forces within the realm of spirituality.

Or and Choshech within the Chanukah Story

With the above understanding of *or* and *choshech* in mind, we can now see how light against darkness is a central theme of the original story of Chanukah, both literally and conceptually. The Greeks recognized that the survival of the Jewish community is not predicated upon our physical existence, but rather upon our spiritual existence. With this knowledge, they sought to separate Jews from religious practices such as bris milah and sacrifices. However, the Greeks understood that taking away these individual mitzvos was not enough to truly overtake the Jews spiritually.

The image of *ner mitzvah v'Torah or*⁶ — mitzvos are candles and Torah is a light/torch — reveals the foundation of Jewish spiritual life. Imagine a room that contains a fiery torch and many individual candles that were lit from that torch. When a few candles are extinguished, the room is still full of light. If one would want to submerge

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky (August 8, 1911 – August 8, 2000) is widely known for his teachings which he published as a series of books entitled *Nesivos Shalom*. He studied in the Slonimer yeshiva Toras Chessed in Baranovitsh, and in 1940 was appointed rosh yeshiva of Achei Temimim, the Lubavitcher yeshiva in Tel Aviv. In 1941 he opened the Slonimer yeshiva in Jerusalem with just five students. The Slonim Hasidic dynasty was virtually wiped out in the Holocaust; the yeshiva in Jerusalem served as the focus for its revival. Rabbi Berezovsky served as the Slonimer Rebbe from 1981 until his death.

Adapted from Wikipedia

the entire room in darkness, one must eliminate the source of the light and extinguish the torch.

This image can help us understand the meaning of Rav Shimon ben Lakish's difficult statement in *Breishis Rabbah*, regarding the decree of the *keren ha'shor*. The Greeks instituted many harsh decrees, with the intention of eliminating Bnei Yisrael's spiritual existence. However, the decrees against individual mitzvos impacted Jewish spirituality in the same way that the extinguishing of individual candles impacts the overall brightness of a room that contains a fiery torch. Only once the Greeks attacked the very essence of the Jewish *or* by inculcating the ideology of “אין חלק באלוקי ישראל” — You have no portion with the G-d of Israel,” was the source of the Jewish religious light, the torch of our

relationship with Hashem, in danger of being extinguished.⁷ It is for this reason that the medrash focuses on the *keren ha'shor* as the decree which “darkened the eyes of Israel,” for it was this decree, specifically, that brought about the spiritual darkness of the Greek exile.

Thankfully, the story of Chanukah does not end with the Greek decrees and takeover. While many Jews were swallowed up by the spiritual void created by Antiochus and the Greeks, a small group of Jews, the Makabim, refused to believe that their connection with G-d was severed, and thereby resisted the darkness that was spreading throughout the Jewish people. The Makabim's call of “*mi laHashem eilai* — whoever is for G-d should follow me,” reflects their insistence and commitment to their relationship with Hashem. Despite the Greeks' efforts to sever the connection between the Jewish people and G-d, the Makabim remained steadfast in their fight for spiritual existence. The Makabim protected the torch of Torah and G-dliness from being fully extinguished by the Greek onslaught, and in doing so, saved the light of the Jewish people from being extinguished.

The Gemara's answer to the question “What is Chanukah?” fits perfectly with this understanding. The rampages and desecrations of the Greeks threatened to extinguish all light from Bnei Yisrael. The lighting of the Menorah using the single remaining pure jug of oil represents the triumph of the light of Torah in the face of nearly-subsuming darkness. The miracle of the small jug of oil that lasted for eight days alludes to the equivalent spiritual miracle, the survival of Bnei Yisrael's connection to Hashem and the perseverance of the light of Torah. Chanukah reminds us that despite tremendous darkness, as

long as there is one small “jug of oil” remaining, as long as the torch has not been extinguished, flames can be relit and light will prevail.

Bayamim Hahem Bizman Haze

Today, our world is threatened by the darkness of a society in which morality is subjective and religious observance is dwindling. Our children and students are enmeshed in a culture in which deviation and exploration is “in,” and tradition is “out.” The statistics of intermarriage, as well as the rate of attrition of Jews who have become less observant or feel less connected to their Judaism, are a frightening reflection of the darkness that has seeped into the larger Jewish community.⁸

It is true that there is darkness in our world, and we must not underestimate the effects and far-reaching effects of the messages of society that encourage us to believe *שאין לנו חלק באלוקי ישראל*, that we have no relationship with G-d. Yet as we celebrate Chanukah once again, and light our menorahs each night, we must remember the message of the long-lasting oil. Darkness exists, but the light of Torah cannot be extinguished.

Just as the Makabim called for a return to G-d and Torah values, we must loudly proclaim our allegiance and commitment to our relationship with Hashem. In the face of darkness, we must champion the beauty of a relationship with G-d. We must nurture the flickering flames that exist within every Jew. If we want our neighbors, children, and students to appreciate the light of mitzvos, perhaps we must first start by rekindling our commitment to Torah and connection with Hashem. Then, just as a small jug of pure oil was

able to miraculously extend the light of Menorah, we will be able to extend the light of Torah and mitzvos throughout our homes and communities.

The true miracle of the Chanukah story was the triumph of light over darkness, of closeness over distance, of spirituality over apathy. As we light our menorahs this year, let us daven for the same triumphs, renewed connection and reinvigorated commitment in our times — *bayamim hahem bizman haze*.

Notes

1. See *Nesivos Shalom, Ma'marei Chanukah, Ner Chanukah, Hemshech Or Hamenorah*, chapter 1, paragraph 2.
2. See Rambam, *Hilchos Chanukah* 3:1.
3. The similarities between Torah and light exist even beyond the conceptual; in numerologically, *Ba'al Ha'Turim* (Bereishis 1:4) points out that the gematria of *את האור* is 613, the same numerical value as the word *בתורה* and equivalent to the number of mitzvos contained within the Torah.
4. For additional examples of the motif of light, see *Tehillim* 4:7, *Tehillim* 36:10, *Tehillim* 97:11, *Iyov* 26:10, *Iyov* 28:11, and *Eichah* 3:2.
5. For additional examples of the motif of darkness, see *Yoel* 2:2, *Tehillim* 35:6, *Iyov* 3:4, and *Iyov* 29:3.
6. *Mishlei* 6:23.
7. See the *Nesivos Shalom, Ma'marei Chanukah, Ner Chanukah, Hemshech Or Hamenorah* chapter 3, paragraph 1, for an in-depth explanation of the Greek tactics and logic.
8. The Pew Research Center's 2013 survey of U.S. Jews, colloquially referred to as the “Pew Report,” is one example of statistic-based evidence of the increasing distance from halachic Judaism and the Jewish faith that is reported by many American Jews. According to the report, only 48% of Jews raised as Orthodox still consider themselves to be Orthodox, and 58% of U.S. Jews have a non-Jewish spouse.

Happy Chanukah!



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Hildesheimer Shul <i>Jerusalem, Israel</i>	Lido Beach Synagogue <i>Lido Beach, NY</i>	Queens Jewish Center <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>	The Jewish Learning Initiative On Campus <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Young Israel of Flatbush <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	Young Israel of Riverdale <i>Bronx, NY</i>
Hillel at Brandeis <i>Waltham, MA</i>	Lincoln Square Synagogue <i>New York, NY</i>	Rambam Mesivta <i>Lawrence, NY</i>	The Kipa <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	Young Israel of Forest Hills <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>	Young Israel of Scarsdale <i>Scarsdale, NY</i>
Hoshen Modiin <i>Modiin, Israel</i>	Lower Merion Synagogue <i>Bala Cynwyd, PA</i>	Rambam Shul <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	The Roslyn Synagogue <i>Roslyn Heights, NY</i>	Young Israel of Fort Lee <i>Fort Lee, NJ</i>	Young Israel of Sharon <i>Sharon, MA</i>
The Jewish Educational Center <i>Elizabeth, NJ</i>	Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School <i>Teaneck, NJ</i>	Riverdale Jewish Center <i>Riverdale, NY</i>	The Village Shul <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Young Israel of Hewlett <i>Hewlett, NY</i>	Young Israel of Skokie <i>Skokie, IL</i>
JLI - The Johns Hopkins University <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	Magen David Sephardic <i>Wykagyl, NY</i>	SAR High School <i>Riverdale, NY</i>	Thornhill Community Shul <i>Thornhill, ON</i>	Young Israel of Hillcrest <i>Flushing, NY</i>	Young Israel of Southfield <i>Southfield, MI</i>
JLIC at Queens College Hillel <i>Queens, NY</i>	Margolin Hebrew Academy <i>Memphis, TN</i>	SCY High <i>San Diego, CA</i>	Tiferet Israel <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Young Israel of Holliswood <i>Jamaica, NY</i>	Young Israel of St. Louis <i>St Louis, MO</i>
Joint Distribution Committee <i>Jerusalem, Israel</i>	Marlee Shul <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Sephardic Bikur Holim <i>Seattle, WA</i>	Torat Emet <i>Columbus, OH</i>	Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale <i>Fort Lauderdale, FL</i>	Young Israel of Staten Island <i>Staten Island, NY</i>
Kehilat Zichron Yosef <i>Jerusalem, Israel</i>	Meitar Merkazi <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	Sephardic Institute Synagogue <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	Touro Synagogue <i>Newport, RI</i>	Young Israel of Houston <i>Houston, TX</i>	Young Israel of Toco Hills <i>Atlanta, GA</i>
Kehillas Bais Yehudah Tzvi <i>Cedarhurst, NY</i>	Menorat Hamaor <i>Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	Sephardic Kehila Centre Synagogue <i>Thornhill, ON</i>	Ulpanat Orot <i>Downsview, ON</i>	Young Israel of Jamaica Estates <i>Jamaica, NY</i>	Young Israel of West Hartford <i>West Hartford, CT</i>
Kehillat Ahavat Zion <i>Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	Merkaz Modiin <i>Modiin, Israel</i>	Shaare Zedek Cong. <i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	United Orthodox Synagogues <i>Houston, TX</i>	Young Israel of Long Beach <i>Long Beach, NY</i>	Young Israel of West Hempstead <i>West Hempstead, NY</i>
Kehilat Chovevei Zion <i>Skokie, IL</i>	Mishkan Shilo <i>Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	Shaarei Shomayim Cong. <i>Toronto, ON</i>	University of Massachusetts JLIC Hillel <i>Amherst, MA</i>	Young Israel of Memphis <i>Memphis, TN</i>	Young Israel of West Rogers Park <i>Chicago, IL</i>
Kehillat New Hempstead <i>Spring Valley, NY</i>	Mizrachi Bayit <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Shaarei Tefilla <i>Las Vegas, NV</i>	University of Pennsylvania Hillel <i>Philadelphia, PA</i>	Young Israel Of Montreal <i>Montréal, QC</i>	Young Israel Ohab Zedek of North Riverdale <i>Yonkers, NY</i>
Kehillat Ohel Ephraim <i>Ariel, Israel</i>	MJE <i>New York, NY</i>	Shaarei Tefillah Cong. <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Viewmount <i>Toronto, ON</i>		
Kehillat Shaareei Torah Of Toronto <i>Toronto, ON</i>	Moledet <i>Be'er Sheva, Israel</i>	Shaarei Torah Orthodox Cong. of Syracuse <i>Dewitt, NY</i>	West Coast Torah Center <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>		
Kehillat Shaarei Yonah Menachem <i>Modiin, Israel</i>	Moriah Shul <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>	Shaarey Yerushalayim <i>Valley Village, CA</i>	Westville Synagogue <i>New Haven, CT</i>		
Kemp Mill Synagogue <i>Silver Spring, MD</i>	Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	Shaarey Zedek <i>Valley Village, CA</i>			
	Ner Tamid Cong. <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	Shalhevet High School <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>			
	New Toco Shul <i>Atlanta, GA</i>	Shivtei Yisrael <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>			

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Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
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