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## נר איש וביתו CHANUKAH AND SHALOM BAYIT

Featuring a Special Tribute to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

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



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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## **TO PROTECT AND TO PROJECT: IN APPRECIATION OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

A couple of years ago, I was invited to speak in the keynote session of the national conference of the CCCU—the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities in Washington, DC. On stage were the presidents of each religion's leading faith-based universities. The topic was the place of religion in our country and I was surprised to hear my fellow panelists bemoan the challenges that faith leaders faced in our contemporary times. When it was my turn to speak I thought of Rabbi Sacks and I told those assembled that I had a different perspective. The Jewish people have endured an exile lasting thousands of years, I explained, and while in the

past our goal was simply to persevere, today we have the opportunity to influence and inspire. And this, to me, is the key historic shift at the core of Rabbi Sacks' extraordinary legacy.

For centuries, prominent Jews in the Diaspora were called upon to utilize their positions of influence to protect our people. From Mordechai to the Abarbanel, the fundamental purpose for life in the public sphere was simply to ensure survival. Now, however, we live in an era that is miraculous and wondrous. While the challenges of protecting have not ceased, a whole new vista of opportunities exist. The Jewish people are no longer lost in exile but have once again returned to their homeland. Torah study is







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open and accessible throughout the world. Where once we might have looked at our neighbors and saw only persecutors, today we may look at them and see potential partners. And this presents us not only with great opportunities but also great responsibilities. Rabbi Sacks is a product of this era and a forerunner in realizing the possibilities of our moment in history. Previous generations protected, Rabbi Sacks projected — he shared his Jewish values to the entire world for the benefit of the entire world. We live in an unprecedented moment in time, and Rabbi Sacks showed us what it means to live and embody a life of Jewish values that seeks to redeem the world and move history forward.

This is, in fact, the Jewish mission. It is why G-d gave us His Torah.

As expressed so powerfully in the Chanukah lights. Lit inside the Jewish home, our candles brighten a darkened world. It is the consciousness of this holy mission that elevates our life ambitions and all of our day to day activities and interactions whether it be with family, neighbors or co-workers. From cubicles to corner offices, from batei medrash to Zoom rooms, in boardrooms and classrooms, inside your own home or in dealing with world leaders, the mission and responsibility of each Jew is to embody and forward our values to the next generation and to those around us. This is how we redeem the world.

In our multiple conversations throughout my tenure as President of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Sacks impressed upon me the importance

of seeing ourselves and our mission in these broader terms. He encouraged me to transmit this empowering message to our community and especially to our students, the leaders of the world of tomorrow.

One cannot say enough about Rabbi Sacks' brilliance, erudition and oratory mastery. His profound Torah insights on morality and humanity speak for themselves. For me, however, his lasting impact is the insight he inspired within us about ourselves. "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be," Ophelia famously declares. Lord Sacks showed us what we may become. And for that we remain forever inspired and forever grateful.

May his memory be for a blessing.



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## **FREEDOM AND THE FLAMES OF FAITH: A TRIBUTE TO RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS, ZT"l**

**I**n the year that I was born, a man named Manfred Anson molded and then modeled an exquisite piece of Judaica, replicas of which now sit in exhibitions in the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the National Museum of American History: the Liberty Menorah.<sup>1</sup>

This brass-cast nine-branched candelabra is a blend of two distinct objects, both a century old but of disparate provenance — a traditional Polish menorah and a souvenir model of the Statue of Liberty. Atop each arm of Anson's creation stands a figure of Lady Liberty holding a miniature sconce aloft while resting on a base upon which is engraved milestone moments of Jewish history — from the Exodus to exile and the founding of the State of Israel.

And while the eagle that hovers over the composite menorah is an emblem that is indigenous to both Jewish and American traditions, one wonders whether this aesthetic blend is an indulgence of the artist's idiosyncrasies rather than a synthesis of common creeds — whether this hybrid entity is an alliance of concordant civic spirits or a conglomeration of two inconsistent, even incompatible cultures.

On its face, the fusion of these two objects could not be more incongruous. Lady Liberty was gifted to the former British colonies in celebration of their rebellion against King George and their declaration of a new democratic republic committed to the separation of church and state. On the other hand, the menorah is an

object that celebrates the successful rebellion against the inventors of democracy and the establishment of a dynasty of priests who were to administer a theocratic monarchy. While the respective rebellions resemble a common denominator, there seems to be a deep disconnect in the details.

So this is our question: must we see the Liberty Menorah and feel a sense of manifest discrepancy? Put another way: can a single set of flames celebrate the reinstatement of an ancient monarchy while concurrently lionizing the world's most prominent democracy? And to answer a question of this magnitude, we turn to the quintessential synthesizer — a man whose eloquence, gentility, and wisdom have steered us all, and whose

recent departure has left us all bereft — the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory.

## Freedom as Creed

In a short essay written more than twenty-five years ago, “Democracy and Religious values,”<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Sacks makes the clear case that monarchy has never been at the center of the Jewish political spirit.

It is true that the first five books of the Bible present Moses as a model of authority, which — for all his humility — is as near absolute power as a person can come; other than his brother’s ultimate control over the sacramental rites of national life, Moses manages the military and heads the executive and judicial branches of Jewish governance. And it is true that as a result of Mosaic absolutism the Jews conquer their enemies, both foreign and domestic; are blessed with celestial amenities, both mundane and majestic; and acquire their cultural identity, unyielding and invested in healing the world.

But other than Moses, and a couple of model monarchs, Scripture is saturated with cases of kings failing to shield the nation, and our prophets offer more than their share of repudiation. Gideon — judge and consummate strategist — resists popular calls for him to serve as king, seeing the very request as near seditious, as an attempt to replace God with a human being. And when his prophetic successor, Samuel, faces a nation that again craves a king, his response is unequivocal: **וַיֹּרֶעַ הַדְּבָר׃** “**וַיֵּיטֵב יְיָ שְׁמוֹאֵל**” “The matter was evil in Samuel’s eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

In the words of Rabbi Sacks, Moses and David are exceptions to the rule, where absolute monarchs can be

reliable models of piety and agents of liberty only when informed by God — “without prophecy a society can become corrupt at the top.”<sup>4</sup> What then, until a time when prophecy reigns again, is the truest expression of the Jewish political spirit?



The Liberty Menorah

For Rabbi Sacks, “There is a route to be charted from biblical principles to democratic government.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, he claims, that is precisely the route that pre-modern, non-Jewish scholars took to fashion the West as we know it today: “It was from the Hebrew Bible that the great architects of British and American democracy drew their inspiration.”<sup>6</sup> And since Rabbi Sacks penned those words twenty-five years ago, Eric Nelson, in *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought*, and *Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States*, published by YU’s Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, have filled in the picture to make that thesis self-evident and incontrovertible. In the wake of

Rabbi Sacks’ essay, they substantiate the claim that “Judaism has always seen authoritarianism ... as an assault on the essential dignity of the individual.”<sup>7</sup>

It is true that beyond the models of Moses and a collection of moral monarchs, the biblical text says, ostensibly quite positively, that the king is to sit at the center of an autonomous Jewish state — “You shall surely appoint a king over you”<sup>8</sup> — but that positivity is far from conclusive. Though some of the sages, and several commentators in the Middle Ages,<sup>9</sup> do see this directive as inflexible and as an expression of theo-political perfection, many disagree. As Rabbi Sacks notes, Don Isaac Abravanel reviews the Judaic political tradition and concludes that “monarchy was not so much commanded by the Bible as temporarily conceded.”<sup>10</sup>

And since Rabbi Sacks penned those words twenty-five years ago, Joshua Berman — in his *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* — makes Abravanel’s case even more compelling. For him, the biblical imperative to appoint a king is in fact the opening gambit of a faith seeking to change the world over time, by unleashing a slow-release antidote to executive vice and the widespread venom of tyranny. The directive to install a monarch is less about insisting on kings than resisting despots. And beyond the specifics of Berman’s intricate thesis, Lenn Goodman — historian and philosopher — has pithily written, “... the roots of democracy and of the institutions that ground its legitimacy, its moral strength and beauty ... are anchored in the ideals and institutions of the Torah.”<sup>11</sup>



## Faith as Need

So it seems that there is more in common between the Jewish and American ideals than we might imagine — but, for Rabbi Sacks, it goes even deeper. For though it is true that we have seen a route charted “from biblical principles to democratic government,” for Rabbi Sacks democracy does not sit at the center of the Jewish political spirit either. In his words, “... neither the Hebrew Bible nor the rabbinic tradition idealize any specific political order.”<sup>12</sup> Political structures, for him, are a means not an ends — for without the personal moral responsibility of committed citizens, a vacuum emerges and every single political system, no matter how noble, will wither and fail.

And this theme, that personal moral responsibility is the key to healing the world, has been a professional obsession of Rabbi Sacks from that day to his last, from that essay to his masterful finale, published in September 2020 — *Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*. In it he outlines what has become unmistakable in our age of polarization and militant skepticism — that for all democracy’s greatness, a profound danger remains at its core.

In the introduction he points to a slew of new books devoted to an impending crisis — *The Strange Death of Europe*, *How Democracies Die*, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism*, *The Suicide of the West* — and cites Bill Emmet, veteran journalist, who describes the current state of democratic nations as “demoralized, decadent, deflating, demographically challenged, divided, disintegrating, dysfunctional, declining.”<sup>13</sup> And in one of his installments of *Covenant and Conversation*, Rabbi Sacks makes his

claim as plainly as possible:

*The Greeks were fascinated by structures. Virtually all the terms we use today — democracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny — are Greek in origin. The message of Deuteronomy is, yes, create structures — courts, judges, officers, priests, kings — but what really matters is how each of you behaves ... A free society is made less by structures than by personal responsibility for the moral-spiritual order.*<sup>14</sup>

In the end, nations can thrive under the gentle reign of a benevolent king and people can die under the tyranny of a ruthless majority — and the transition from liberty to autocracy is deviously sly. What lies at the core of biblical and rabbinic thought and at the center of the Jewish political spirit is belief that we the people — not institutional structures — are ultimately responsible for civic virtue.

And while the founders and framers of the United States of America understood democracy to be the only equitable form of administrative government, they too saw the dangers. Rabbi Sacks cites George Washington as having said that, “human rights can only be assured among a virtuous people,”<sup>15</sup> and he hints at the words etched in stone outside the National Archives in Washington DC: “Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Liberty.”<sup>16</sup> James Madison, at the Virginia Ratifying Convention of June 20, 1788, said quite clearly: “To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea.”

Despite their confidence in the administrative systems devised at the hands of the Greeks, the American framers — in the wake of their biblical sensibilities — believed that the

freedoms preserved by democracy do not in and of themselves assure the moral state of the nation. And that sentiment has been cemented in the speeches of successive American presidents who have said: “America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.” American greatness, for these figures, lies not simply in its administrative systems but in the character of the citizenry — and if it grows apathetic or indifferent or worse, democracy can turn into a machine for perpetuating malice.

And while we cited Rabbi Sacks as having written that “without prophecy a society can become corrupt at the top,” his very next sentence says that “without priesthood, it can erode from below.”<sup>17</sup> Without a culture of committed citizens who nurture individual duty and the moral senses, he says, “no freedoms are secure for long.” And perhaps charging us to be a nation of these kind of priests is precisely what Chanukah is all about.

## A Nation of Priests

It is true that Maimonides, the committed monarchist,<sup>18</sup> touts the coronation of the Hasmonean dynasty as part and parcel of the miracle that Chanukah marks.<sup>19</sup> But the administrative elements of the Maccabean achievements are treated as less than incidental in the Talmud, where the focus is squarely on the supernatural staying power of the High Priest’s oil.<sup>20</sup> And the way in which our sages prescribe for us to recognize that miracle is not incidental in the slightest — it is to light flames, not in public squares or even the synagogue, but in our private homes for those on the street to see.



The basic obligation of the festival is to light “*ner ish u-veito*,” as a household, but even better, the sages say, is for each of us to light a candle of our own — “*ner le-khol echad ve-echad*.”<sup>21</sup> And perhaps the sages prefer us to light on our own, in our own homes, not merely as a miniature commemoration of what took place in the Temple, but as an intentional manifestation of the spirit of the festival — exhibiting the truth that our triumph over our enemies only carries meaning if we see that *our freedom places a responsibility on each of us to fill the streets with light*.

Perhaps what the Jewish triumph over the Greeks crystalized — and what is captured in the eight nights of ritual lights — is less a system of government than a national spirit that sees committed citizens at the center of public life. Perhaps Chanukah’s celebration is the refutation of a civilization blinkered by a vernacular fascinated with structures to the point of infatuation — where government systems are deified and responsible citizens are denied reverence and their due in the reckoning of a society’s ultimate virtue.

The legacy of Chanukah is, seen through this lens, not a long-lost dynasty, but a recognition that the freedom to practice our faith in our own homes bestows a responsibility on each of us to light a candle and fight to keep that faith alive. In many ways then, lighting the wicks of a Liberty Menorah manifests the very essence of the Chanukah lesson — showing us

that the gift of liberty cannot be simply frozen in effigy, but we the people must keep the torch alight.

## Passing the Torch

Over the course of the decades of his public service, Rabbi Sacks was an unparalleled ambassador for Jewish values and a leading moral voice, inspiring thousands to live lives of faith and moral responsibility — as the unceasing waves of grief and praise streaming on social media attest. He has charged us all to be a letter in the scroll and has taught us all, by both his words and his example, to celebrate life and never stop fighting for a better future — he has called us all to, in his words, “take the flames of our faith and help set other souls on fire.”<sup>22</sup>

When Rabbi Sacks was the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, his chosen motto was borrowed from the Ethics of the Fathers: “It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.”<sup>23</sup> In many ways, Rabbi Sacks’ legacy is the calling that he has left us to continue his work — to reach out and teach the world the deep truths that live at the heart of the Jewish spirit, which seek, through fostering civic freedom and private faith, to heal the world.

## Endnotes

1. [https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_1391530](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1391530).
2. *Faith in the Future*, Chapter 17.
3. Shmuel I 8:6

4. *Faith in the Future*, 113.
5. *Ibid.* 107.
6. *Ibid.* 106.
7. *Ibid.* 112.
8. Devarim 17:15.
9. Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Aseh #173; *Sefer HaChinukh*, Mitzvah #71.
10. *Faith in the Future*, 111. See Abravanel on Devarim 17:14 and beyond. Avraham Ibn Ezra agrees that monarchies are optional, following the view of R’ Nehorai on *Sanhedrin* 20b.
11. *Is Judaism Democratic?: Reflections from Theory and Practice Throughout the Ages*, 142.
12. *Faith in the Future*, 107.
13. *Morality*, 5.
14. *Covenant and Conversation*, Re’eh 5780 [<https://rabbisacks.org/reeh-5780/>].
15. *Morality*, 12.
16. *Faith in the Future*, 113.
17. *Ibid.*, 113.
18. See note 9.
19. *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Scroll of Esther and Chanukah, 3:1.
20. *Shabbat* 21b.
21. *Ibid.*
22. <https://rabbisacks.org/8-thoughts-8-nights/>.
23. *Pirkei Avot* 2:16.



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## **The First Clash of Civilisations**

One of the key phrases of our time is the clash of civilisations. And Chanukah is about one of the first great clashes of civilisation, between the Greeks and Jews of antiquity, Athens and Jerusalem.

The ancient Greeks produced one of the most remarkable civilisations of all time: philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, historians like Herodotus and Thucydides, dramatists like Sophocles and Aeschylus. They produced art and architecture of a beauty that has never been surpassed. Yet in the second century before the common era they were defeated by the group of Jewish fighters known as the Maccabees, and from then on Greece as a world power went into rapid decline, while the tiny Jewish people survived every exile and persecution and are still alive and well today.

What was the difference? The Greeks, who did not believe in a single, loving God, gave the world the concept of tragedy. We strive, we struggle, at times we achieve greatness, but life has no ultimate purpose. The universe neither knows nor cares that we are here.

Ancient Israel gave the world the idea of hope. We are here because God created us in love, and through love we discover the meaning and purpose of life.

Tragic cultures eventually disintegrate and die. Lacking any sense of ultimate meaning, they lose the moral beliefs and habits on which continuity depends. They sacrifice happiness for pleasure. They sell the future for the present. They lose the passion and energy that brought them greatness in the first place. That's what happened to Ancient Greece.

Judaism and its culture of hope survived, and the Chanukah lights are the symbol of that survival, of

Judaism's refusal to jettison its values for the glamour and prestige of a secular culture, then or now.

A candle of hope may seem a small thing, but on it the very survival of a civilisation may depend.

## **The Battle to Teach Moral Values is Won at School**

It was a fateful clash of civilisations when Ancient Greece and Israel collided. Jews won. Had they not done so, there be no Judaism today and there would almost certainly be no Christianity or Islam.

These events are commemorated on Chanukkah, the eight-day Jewish festival of lights we are celebrating now. They happened 22 centuries ago, when Israel came under the rule of the Alexandrian Empire. After Alexander's death the empire split: the Ptolemies

in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria. Each ruled Israel in turn.

Ancient Greece and Israel were profoundly different. The Greeks excelled at everything visual. The Jews worshipped the invisible God. To Greeks, the Jews were strange and superstitious. To Jews, the Greeks were pagans and idolaters.

The Ptolemies allowed Jews to practise their faith in peace but one Seleucid leader, Antiochus IV, believed in the active Hellenisation of the Jews. It was an act of hubris that cost him dearly.

Not all Jews were opposed to Hellenism. Some saw it as the future. It was cosmopolitan. Judaism, they felt, was parochial. The glittering achievements of the Greeks seemed to breathe a freer air than the pieties of their own people. Two high priests in particular, Jason, then Menelaus, saw Antiochus as an ally with whose help they could force the pace of cultural change.

They introduced a gymnasium into Jerusalem. Young priests began to spend more time on the body than the soul. They encouraged Antiochus to forbid the public practice of Judaism. They even erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple precincts. They began to offer pagan sacrifices on the Temple's altars. It was deeply provocative. The Jews called it the "abomination of desolation".

A priestly family, the aged Matthias and his sons, known as the Maccabees, rose in revolt. They won back Jewish independence, cleansed and rededicated the Temple, and relit its candelabrum, the Menorah. That is why to this day we light candles for eight days. Chanukah means "rededication".

The military victory was short-lived. Within a century Israel was again under foreign rule, this time by the Romans. It was the spiritual victory that survived. Realising that the real battle was not against an empire but a culture, Jews set about constructing the world's first system of universal education. The effect was astonishing. Although they were later to suffer devastating defeats at the hands of the Romans, they had created an identity so strong that it was able to survive 2,000 years of exile and dispersion.

What history taught them was that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need schools. In the short run battles are won by weapons, but in the long run they are won by ideas and the way they are handed on from generation to generation. Oddly but appropriately, Chanukah comes from the same Hebrew root as "education".

In Britain today we risk undervaluing and misconceiving our schools. We think in terms of league tables of academic results. But schools are more than this. They are the way a civilisation hands on its values across time. When a culture forgets its own values, especially when it thinks they are something we each invent for ourselves, it is about to die – not immediately but inevitably. That is why faith schools have become so popular. They have a strong and distinctive ethos. They honour the past. They create community and continuity. They teach children who they are and why.

Chanukah tells us that there are two different battles for freedom. One is fought by soldiers, the other by teachers, and it is the second that eventually determines the course of history. When civilisations clash,

strengthen schools. The world we build tomorrow is born in the lessons we teach today.

## The Light of War and the Light of Peace

There is a law about Chanukah I find moving and profound. Maimonides writes that 'the command of Chanukah lights is very precious. One who lacks the money to buy lights should sell something, or if necessary borrow, so as to be able to fulfil the mitzvah.'

The question then arises, What if, on Friday afternoon, you find yourself with only one candle? What do you light it as — a Shabbat candle or a Chanukah one? It can't be both. Logic suggests that you should light it as a Chanukah candle. After all, there is no law that you have to sell or borrow to light lights for Shabbat. Yet the law is that, if faced with such a choice, you light it as a Shabbat light. Why?

Listen to Maimonides: 'The Shabbat light takes priority because it symbolises shalom bayit, domestic peace. And great is peace because the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world.'

Consider: Chanukah commemorates one of the greatest military victories in Jewish history. Yet Jewish law rules that if we can only light one candle — the Shabbat light takes precedence, because in Judaism the greatest military victory takes second place to peace in the home.

Why did Judaism, alone among the civilizations of the ancient world, survive? Because it valued the home more than the battlefield, marriage



more than military grandeur, and children more than generals. Peace in the home mattered to our ancestors more than the greatest military victory.

So as we celebrate Chanukah, spare a thought for the real victory, which was not military but spiritual. Jews were the people who valued marriage, the home, and peace between husband and wife, above the highest glory on the battlefield. In Judaism, the light of peace takes precedence over the light of war.

## The Festival of Lights that Signifies an Inextinguishable Faith

What I find fascinating about Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights we celebrate at this time of the year, is the way its story was transformed by time.

It began as the simple story of a military victory, the success of Judah the Maccabee and his followers as they fought for religious freedom against the repressive rule of the Syrian-Greek emperor Antiochus IV. Antiochus, who modestly called himself Epiphanes, “God made manifest”, had resolved forcibly to hellenise the Jews.

He had a statue of Zeus erected in the precincts of the temple in Jerusalem, ordered sacrifices to be made to pagan gods, and banned Jewish rites on pain of death. The Maccabees fought back and within three years had reconquered Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple. That is how the story is told in the first and second books of Maccabees.

However, things did not go smoothly thereafter. The new Jewish monarchy known as the Hasmonean kings themselves became hellenised. They also incurred the wrath of the people by breaking one of the principles of Judaism: the separation between religion and political power. They became not just kings but also high priests, something earlier monarchs had never done.

Even militarily, the victory over the Greeks proved to be only a temporary respite. Within a century Pompey invaded Jerusalem and Israel came under Roman rule. Then came the disastrous rebellion against Rome (66-73), as a result of which Israel was defeated and the Temple destroyed. The work of the Maccabees now lay in ruins.

Some rabbis at the time believed that the festival of Chanukah should be abolished. Why celebrate a freedom that had been lost? Others disagreed, and their view prevailed. Freedom may have been lost but not hope.

That was when another story came to the fore, about how the Maccabees, in purifying the Temple, found a single cruse of oil, its seal still intact, from which they relit the Menorah, the great candelabrum in the Temple. Miraculously the light lasted eight days and that became the central narrative of Chanukah. It became a festival of light within the Jewish home symbolising a faith that could not be extinguished. Its message was captured in a phrase from the prophet Zekhariah: “Not by might nor by power but by My spirit, says the Lord Almighty.”

I have often wondered whether that is not the human story, not just the Jewish one. We celebrate military victories. We tell stories about the

heroes of the past. We commemorate those who gave their lives in defence of freedom. That is as it should be. Yet the real victories that determine the fate of nations are not so much military as cultural, moral and spiritual.

In Rome the Arch of Titus was erected by Titus’s brother Domitian to commemorate the victorious Roman siege of Jerusalem in the year 70. It shows Roman soldiers carrying away the spoils of war, most famously the seven-branched Menorah. Rome won that military conflict. Yet its civilisation declined and fell, while Jews and Judaism survived.

They did so not least because of Chanukah itself. That simple act of families coming together to light the lights, tell the story and sing the songs, proved more powerful than armies and longer-lived than empires. What endured was not the historical narrative as told in the books of Maccabees but the simpler, stronger story that spoke of a single cruse of oil that survived the wreckage and desecration, and the light it shed that kept on burning.

Something in the human spirit survives even the worst of tragedies, allowing us to rebuild shattered lives, broken institutions and injured nations. That to me is the Jewish story. Jews survived all the defeats, expulsions, persecutions and pogroms, even the Holocaust itself, because they never gave up the faith that one day they would be free to live as Jews without fear. Whenever I visit a Jewish school today I see on the smiling faces of the children the ever-renewed power of that faith whose symbol is Chanukah and its light of inextinguishable hope.



# EIGHT PERSPECTIVES ON CHANUKA

## Yosef's Chanukah Candles in Mitzrayim

**Rabbi Etan Moshe Berman**

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Yosef lit Chanukah candles in Mitzrayim.

You have likely never heard that before because there is no such statement in Chazal. And yet, there is a truth to it.

The Torah (Bereishis 39:2) tells us:

וַיְהִי ה' אֶת יוֹסֵף אִישׁ מְצָלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרָיִם.

*Hashem was with Yosef, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*

The very next pasuk tells us:

וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי ה' אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹשֶׂה ה' מְצָלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ

*And his master saw that Hashem was with him and all that he did, Hashem*

*allowed to succeed in his hand.*

What does the second pasuk add that we didn't already know from the first? The first pasuk informs us that Hashem was with him, and Yosef was successful. The second pasuk only adds that Yosef's Egyptian master saw this.

What exactly did his master see? Instead of the Torah writing that he saw Yosef's success, it relates that he saw that Hashem was with him.

I have three questions:

1) What does it mean that Hashem is with someone? It is unlikely that this Egyptian had achieved such a high spiritual level that he saw the Shechinah resting on Yosef. He did not see the presence of Hashem; all he saw was that Yosef enjoyed success. Why doesn't the Torah simply say that the Egyptian master saw Yosef's success? — "His master saw that Hashem allowed Yosef to be successful." הצליח בידו

2) How did he "see" it? One can believe or perhaps even know that an individual's success is due to Divine influence, but one does not actually see it.

3) Why would an Egyptian attribute the success of Yosef to Hashem and not one of the Egyptian gods?

Rashi writes:

כי ה' אתו. שם שמים שגור בפיו:

*That Hashem was with him — the name of Hashem was fluent in his mouth.*

With these few words, Rashi answers all three questions. Yosef was so successful in verbally acknowledging and attributing all of his success to Hashem that despite being a seasoned idolator, his Egyptian master became convinced that Hashem was the cause of all of Yosef's success.

All of those acknowledgements and attributions were Yosef's Chanukah candles in Mitzrayim.

How so?

Probably the most unusual element of the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles is the expenditure required to assure its fulfillment.

According to the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 671:1), even a destitute individual must purchase wicks and oil, even if that means selling his clothing for cash. This stands in stark contrast to the comment of the Rama elsewhere (*Orach Chaim* 651) that we need not spend more than a fifth of our available funds to fulfill a mitzvah from the Torah. Since lighting Chanukah candles is a rabbinic institution, why would we be obligated to spend more money to assure its fulfillment than on a mitzvah from the Torah?

The source for this halachah is the Rambam (*Chanukah* 4:12) who writes:

מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד  
וצריך אדם להזהר בה כדי להודיע הנס  
ולהוסיף בשבח הא-ל והודיה לו על הנסים  
שעשה לנו, אפילו אין לו מה יאכל אלא מן  
הצדקה שואל או מוכר כסותו ולוקח שמן  
ונרות ומדליק.

*The mitzvah of Chanukah lights is a very precious one, and one must be cautious regarding it in order to publicize the miracle and to increase the praise of the Lord and gratitude towards Him for the miracles that He did for us. Even one with nothing to eat other than from charity must beg or sell his clothing and procure oil and wicks to light.*

The reason Chanukah candles are so precious and their fulfillment is so critical is due to *pirsumei nisa* — they publicize the miracle. They declare that Hakadosh Baruch Hu performs miracles for the Jewish People. Facilitating that declaration is more important than facilitating the fulfillment of a positive commandment from the Torah. The

acknowledgement, appreciation, and expression of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's involvement in the world in general and with Klal Yisroel in particular, is more fundamental, its declaration more critical, than the fulfillment of positive mitzvos.

We find this idea expressed in the Torah itself when Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, asks for and receives a miracle from Hashem to determine the proper wife for Yitzchok. After the entire story is presented as a narrative, the Torah repeats it as part of the conversation that Eliezer has with Lavan and Besuel. What is Hakadosh Baruch Hu teaching us by repeating the whole story?

Rashi (*Bereishis* 24:42) quotes from the Midrash:

אמר רבי אַחָא יָפָה שִׁיחָתָן שֶׁל עֲבָדֵי אֲבוֹת  
לְפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם מִתּוֹרָתָן שֶׁל בְּנִים, שֶׁהָרִי פָּרְשָׁה  
שֶׁל אֱלִיעֶזֶר כְּפוּלָה בְּתוֹרָה וְהִרְבָּה גּוֹפֵי תוֹרָה  
לֹא נִתְּנוּ אֲלָא בְּרַמְיָהּ

*Rabbi Acha said, more precious are the conversations of the servants of the Avos than the Torah of their descendants. The section of Eliezer is doubled in the Torah, but much of the principles of the Torah were only presented with hints.*

What is so precious about the conversation between Eliezer and Besuel?

The answer is that their conversation resulted in the acknowledgment and appreciation of the miraculous involvement of Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the connection between Rivkah and Yitzchok. The result of that conversation was that even Lavan and Besuel were forced to admit that *me-Hashem yatza hadavar*; it was an act of God (*Bereishis* 24:50). It was a conversation rich with *pirsumei nisa*.

The purpose of lighting Chanukah candles is *pirsumei nisa*, the

acknowledgement, appreciation, and expression that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is constantly performing miracles for Bnei Yisroel.

When Yosef behaved in a manner that made it clear to all that his success was only because of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it was a type of *pirsumei nisa*. It was because of that *pirsumei nisa* that his master “saw” that Hashem, not an Egyptian deity, was “with him.”

That is how Yosef lit Chanukah candles in Mitzrayim, and it is in this way that we should all light Chanukah candles every day.

## The Anatomy of a Miracle: The Chemistry of Combustion and Chanukah

**Mrs. Miriam Chopp**  
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Many *divrei Torah* on Chanukah address the popular question: What are we commemorating on Chanukah? The victory in battle against Hellenistic oppression, or the miracle of the extended burning of the oil in the Menorah? According to the Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b), the essence of Chanukah is the miraculous combustion of the one small remaining sealed cruse of pure oil that burned in the Menorah for an additional seven days, eight days in total. From the next year forward, these days were instituted by the sages as a holiday with recitation of Hallel and special thanksgiving in prayers and blessings:

נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. לשנה  
אחרת קבעום ועשאוּם ימים טובים בהלל



*A miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight days. In a later year, they established these days as a holiday of praise and thanksgiving.*

### Shabbat 21b

The Rambam is uncharacteristically effusive in describing the mitzvah of *ner Chanukah*:

מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד  
וצריך אדם להזהר בה כדי להודיע הנס  
ולהוסיף בשבח הא-ל והודיה לו על הנסים  
שעשה לנו. אפילו אין לו מה יאכל אלא מן  
הצדקה שואל או מוכר כסותו ולוקח שמן  
ונרות ומדליק:

*The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is a very precious mitzvah. A person must be meticulous about it in order to publicize the miracles and increase praise to Hashem and thanks to Him for the miracles that He performed for us. Even if one requires charity for sustenance, one must borrow money or sell one's clothing in order to purchase oil or candles to light.*

### Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:12

The Rambam explains that the procuring of oil or candles for lighting the Menorah obligates a person to sell his clothing to enable the purchase. This is the only mitzvah in the Torah that the Rambam describes in such a manner.

It is interesting to note this extreme emphasis on the miraculous burning by briefly exploring combustion in the Torah.

#### 1. Creation:

ויקרא אלקים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר  
יום שני.

*God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.*

### Bereishit 1:8

Rashi notes that the term שמים is a

contraction of word pairs. — שא מים — carry water, שם מים — water is there, and — אש ומים — fire and water that He mixed together. This would be the first mention of fire in the Torah (though not directly in the text). Heaven is composed of a miraculous mixture of opposing forces.

**2. Kayin and Hevel:** The next narrative of fire comes with the offerings of Kayin and Hevel. When the Torah (Bereishit 4:4) states that Hashem turned to the offering of Hevel, Rashi explains that a heavenly fire descended, which showed acceptance of the offering of Hevel.

#### 3. Avram and the Fiery Furnace

וימת הרן על פני תרח אביו בארץ מולדתו  
באור כשדים.

*Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur Kasdim.*

### Bereishit 11:28

Why is this place called “Ur Kasdim,” (*ur* connoting fire)? Rashi describes the narrative of Nimrod casting Avram into the fiery furnace and his salvation, followed by his brother Haran’s demise.

As in all the above examples, the miraculous nature of these combustions is alluded to in the text of the Torah and only explicitly described by Rashi.

#### 4. Moshe and the Burning Bush

וירא מלאך ה' אליו בלבת אש מתוך הסנה  
וירא והנה הסנה בער באש והסנה איננו אכל.  
*An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.*

### Shemot 3:2

The wonder that Moshe observed was combustion without consumption. The nature of fire is to provide heat and light but also to consume and

utterly destroy. Any alteration of the natural laws can be considered miraculous.

If we view fire as a combination of energy and matter, we understand that the potential energy of the fuel source is converted into heat and light as the matter undergoes a chemical reaction.

*Teva*, the Hebrew word for nature, comes from the same root as *matbei'a*, coin. Just as a coin is cast with the impression of an image, Hashem casts his impression and we call that nature. He hides His hand in the physical world, but we are the recipients of *nisecha sheb'chol yom* — Your miracles each day.

On a spiritual level, the lack of consumption common to both Ur Kasdim and the Burning Bush do not deviate from G-d’s natural laws. The energy, heat, and light were present, but the combustion is absent since Avram and the spirit of Hashem had no elements of physical matter to consume (contrast this to Haran’s immediate demise.)

Returning to our initial question of commemoration on Chanukah: victory in battle vs. miraculous Menorah, we turn to the Maharal:

י"ל שעיקר מה שקבעו ימי חנוכה בשביל מה  
שנצחו את היוונים. רק שלא היה נראה שהי'  
נצחון ע"י נס הש"י שעשה זה ולא מכחם  
וגבורתם. ולפיכך נעשה הנס ע"י נרות המנורה  
שידעו שהכל היה בנס המלחמה ג"כ.

*It seems that the real reason why they established an eight-day holiday was to celebrate the victory over the Greeks. However, it wasn't abundantly clear that the victory was the result of a miracle from G-d rather than their own might and courage. Therefore, a miracle was performed through the lights of the Menorah so that everyone should know that everything was a miracle, including*

the war.

The Maharal explains that while we are commemorating the victorious battle and the miracle of the oil, the emphasis on the Menorah is to ensure for posterity that there will be a recognition that the military victory and the extended combustion are equally miraculous.

Historically, the time period of the Chanukah story is a small bubble of victory from oppression that then cascades into the Roman conquer and the destruction of the temple. In the prayer *Al Hanisim* we use an interesting form of language:

שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.  
This can be translated as: “Who wrought miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.” An alternative translation can give us a more contemporary application: “Who wrought miracles in those days and presently in this time.”

“There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle.” This quote is commonly attributed to Albert Einstein. Whether verifiable or not, the point is valid. The Rambam’s emphasis on the importance of the Menorah lights is now understandable. The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is a very precious mitzvah. We need to emphasize the energy and the spiritual; the heat and the light of the miracle, even if it means giving up the physical: food and clothing. That was truly the essence and victory of Chanukah.

Chanukah is the last holiday commemorated by the sages. It occurred in a brief moment of success before our ultimate *galut*. It falls during the darkest part of the winter.

We could be despondent over the personal battles we wage on a daily basis. Instead, we have been graciously armed with Hashem’s eternal reminder in the form of the Menorah flames. The Menorah reminds us that we are equipped with incredible potential and energy, which can illuminate and glow in scope beyond our comprehension.

*Developed from a shiur given by Rabbi Meir Goldwicht, Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

## The Eternal Jew

### Rabbi Aharon Ciment

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The Rambam in the opening halacha of the third chapter in *Hilchos Chanukah* states:

בבית שני כשמלכו יון גזרו גזירות על ישראל ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ומצות ופשטו ידם בממונם ובנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם, ולחצום לחץ גדול. עד שריחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו, והושיעם מידם והצילם.

*During the time of the second Bais Hamikdash when the Greek kings were in power, they issued decrees against Israel preventing them from learning Torah and performing mitzvos. The kings laid their hands on their wealth and their daughters then entered the Heichal, defiling all that were pure. The Jewish people were greatly oppressed by them. Ultimately, Hashem took pity upon them and saved them from their tormentors.*

The Rambam’s explanation seems difficult to understand. It appears that the Rambam equates the theft of our money by the Greeks to the far more serious suppression of our religion. This seems to play into the anti-

Semitic falsehoods fostered by our enemies about alleged Jewish greed.

Another question: is the Rambam ignoring the possibility that the true intention of the Greeks was even more sinister even than depriving us of our religious freedom? Did they intend to wipe out the Jewish people? Were they no different than Pharaoh or Haman? Or were the Greeks content with Jewish survival as long as the Jews did not practice their religion?

Rabbi Avrohom Weinfeld, in *Even Yisrael*, suggests that the the Greeks indeed intended to annihilate the Jewish people. However, the Greeks were worried that if they made their true intentions known, the Jewish people would retaliate and ultimately wage war. He writes:

שכוונת מלכות יון היה להתחיל רק במלחמת הדת היה כי יראו להתחיל במלחמה גלויה נגד ישראל להשמיד ולהרוג אותם כמו שהיה באמת רצונם, שאולי ילכו ישראל במלחמה נגדם כי ירגישו בגודל הסכנה ויאמרו הבא להרגך השכם והרגו וילחמו בהם ויצטרכו לעלות מן הארץ הישראלית, לכן עלה בדעתם אופן אחר איך ללחום עם ישראל היינו במלחמת הדת, ובוזה סברו שלא ילכו במלחמה נגדם כי לא ירגישו כולם בסכנה.

*The Greeks brought spiritual persecution because they feared that fighting an overt battle against the Jewish people in order to destroy them — which was their true intention — might cause the Jewish people to fight back because they would realize the great danger and say, “if someone comes to kill you, kill him first ...” Therefore, the Greeks came up with a different strategy to fight the Jewish people — through a religious war. They thought that the Jewish people would not fight back because they wouldn’t realize the magnitude of the danger.*

Now we can understand why the Rambam emphasizes theft as

much as spiritual persecution. The Rambam understood that the Greeks were no different than all of our past and future enemies, whose intentions were and will be to eradicate us. He therefore added in his halacha the physical aggression perpetrated against the Jewish people, which was expressed by taking our money and our daughters. The Greeks wanted us to think they could tolerate Jews in the world and they only objected to us practicing our religion. However, their true motivation and intention was to eradicate not only our Torah, but to annihilate the Jewish people entirely.

This approach begs the question, how did the Rambam know that their true intention was to eradicate us and not necessarily to prevent us from learning Torah? Unlike Purim, there was no edict that was sent out with the signet of the king proclaiming the Jewish people should be killed on such and such date. The answer is that the Greeks and all the Gentile nations knew that when the Jewish people were given the Torah at Har Sinai, there was an eternal bond between Hashem, Klal Yisrael, and the Torah. As the *Zohar* (Acharei Mos 73a) states: Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Torah, and the Jewish people are all interconnected. Once the Jewish people proclaimed at Har Sinai, “*na’aseh v’nishma*” — we will do and we will listen — we forever forged a bond with Hashem. Rabbi Dovid Cohen in his *Yemei Chanukah* writes:

דיסוד נתינת התורה לישראל, הוא החיבור של ישראל ואוריינתא וקובה שהם חז, שהתורה היא חלק אלוך ממעל, וישראל בשורש נשמתם הם חלק אלוך ממעל, ועל ידי נתינת

התורה לישראל, הם נעשים דבוקים בנותן התורה.

*The foundation of the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people is the interconnection of the Jewish people, the Torah, and Holy One Blessed Be He. The Torah is a portion of Hashem and a piece of Hashem is a part of every Jew. Once the Jewish people received the Torah we became a part of the One who gave the Torah.*

The Greeks and all the other nations knew intuitively that they were incapable of taking away our Torah or our mitzvos because they are as eternal as Hashem. Just as they knew that they can’t rid the world of Hashem, they also realized they can’t rid Klal Yisrael of their connection to Torah. Therefore, when they targeted the Jewish people, it must have been with an intent to destroy them physically. This is how the Rambam knew the true motivations of the Greeks and that they were disguising their true intentions of physical annihilation behind spiritual persecution.

## Sukkos and Chanukah: The Unbreakable Bond With Hashem

### Rabbi Aaron Cohen

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There are many sources that point to a connection between Chanukah and Sukkos. After reviewing this correlation, we will discuss its significance.<sup>1</sup>

1) The Midrash<sup>2</sup> relates that the Greeks wished to uproot both the

mitzvah of lighting the Menorah as well as the eight days of Sukkos, and Hashem responded by granting Klal Yisrael victory and the celebration of the eight days of Chanukah.

2) The Gemara (*Shabbos* 21b) records the dispute between Bais Hillel and Bais Shamai as to whether we should light one candle on the first day of Chanukah and then add a candle each successive day, or whether we should start with eight candles and subtract a candle on each subsequent day. One of the reasons ascribed to Bais Shamai, who advocates for diminishing numbers of candles, is that the 70 bulls sacrificed over the course of Sukkos decreased in number each day, from 13 on the first day to seven on the seventh day.

3) Both the *Rokeach* (*Hilchos Chanukah Siman* 225) and the *Baal Ha’turim* (Vayikrah 24:2) suggest that the Torah introduces the obligation of lighting the Menorah immediately after the discussion of Sukkos to draw a parallel between Sukkos and Chanukah. The *Baal Ha’turim* references that Hallel is said on the eight days of Chanukah just as it is said on the eight days of Sukkos (including Shemini Atzeres). The *Rokeach* highlights the corresponding number of days of Sukkos and Chanukah, and notes that the mention of pure olive oil for the Menorah hints to its preferred use on Chanukah, and adds that the respective terms *ner* and *neros* related to the Menorah allude to the halachah that one candle is lit the first night and additional *neros* are added subsequent nights.

4) In the second perek of Sefer Chagai, the *navi* prophesies that Hashem will “shake the heavens and the earth,” and Rashi interprets this as referring to the miracles that will



occur at the time of Chanukah. The passage begins by identifying the exact time of this *nevu'ah* as the twenty-first day of the seventh month — which is the seventh day of Sukkos, Hoshanah Rabbah.

5) The *Tur* (O.C. *Siman* 417) asserts that the three *regalim* correspond to the *Avos*: Pesach is linked with Avraham, Shavuot is associated with Yitzchak, and Sukkos is connected to Yaakov. The source for the correlation to Yaakov is the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 33:17) וַיַּעֲקֹב נָסַע סִכְתָּה וַיָּבֶן לוֹ בַּיִת וּלְמַקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סִכָּה עַל פֶּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סִכּוֹת, depicting how Yaakov built Sukkos and called a place by this name. Some commentaries also discerned an allusion to Chanukah in the words וַיָּבֶן לוֹ בַּיִת, for the word לוֹ has the numerical value of 36, the number of *neros Chanukah* that we must light in our *bayis*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the same *pasuk* hints at both Sukkos and Chanukah.

What is the association between Chanukah and Sukkos?

The Vilna Gaon<sup>4</sup> offers a remarkable insight into an element of Sukkos. He asserts that the *cheit ha'eigel* constituted a grievous violation of Hashem's trust and consequently Klal Yisrael forfeited the *ananei hakavod*, which represented the special covenant between them and Hashem. Following the shattering of the first *Luchos* there was a long period of appeasement and repentance, with the atonement culminating on Yom Kippur, when the second *Luchos* were granted. The Vilna Gaon argues that a careful reading of the *pesukim* at the end of Sefer Shemos reveals that on the day after Yom Kippur, Moshe gathered the people and instructed them to commence preparation for the construction of the Mishkan,

through which the Shechina would continuously rest amidst Klal Yisrael. After gathering materials and commissioning the artisans, the actual construction of the Mishkan began on the fifteenth of Tishrei. On that very day the *ananei hakavod* returned, representing a full restoration of the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael.

The Vilna Gaon's illuminating interpretation provides some context for another idea relating to Sukkos, presented by the Netziv and others.<sup>5</sup> They note that the Midrash depicts the holding and waving of the *daled minim* as a symbol of spiritual triumph of Bnei Yisrael over the *umos ha'olam*, the nations of the world. Each year during the Days of Judgement, they explain, the nations of the world contest the right of the Jewish people to maintain their position as the Chosen People, and every year the Heavenly Court decides in favor of Klal Yisrael. The *daled minim* are a symbol of our victory. This narrative can readily be understood as an extension of the Vilna Gaon's perspective: Sukkos is the time when we commemorate and celebrate our special relationship with Hashem, which has withstood the greatest challenges from both within (the *cheit ha'eigel*) and without (the *umos ha'olam*).

In this light, the association between Chanukah and Sukkos can be readily understood. The Greeks sought to challenge and negate the idea that the Jewish people have a unique status among the nations of the world. To this end, they especially targeted certain mitzvos, such as Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, and *bris milah*, which highlight our distinctiveness and our special relationship with Hashem.

King Ptolemy's edict to translate the Torah into Greek also served this purpose, as he perceived that this would grant his people equal access and the ability to claim that the Jews had lost their sole propriety over the Torah. The antipathy of the Greeks to the Bais Hamikdash was rooted in its representing and manifesting our special relationship with Hashem, and therefore they sought to disrupt and compromise the *avodah* in the Bais Hamikdash.

This brings the opening midrash to life. The Greeks sought to dispel the notion that the Jews held a special status, and therefore targeted, at least in concept, the meaning of the yom tov of Sukkos. The message of the *ananei hakavod* associated with Sukkos, symbolizing the unique and unbreakable bond between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael, was an anathema to the Greek ideology. They could not tolerate the idea that, in encountering *hashra'as ha'Shechinah* in the sukkah, a Jewish family could reenact that day when Klal Yisrael began construction of the Mishkan and experienced the restoration of the *ananei hakavod*. With the victory of Chanukah and a newfound appreciation for our special relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Klal Yisrael instituted the mitzvah of *hadlakas nerot Chanukah*, representing the transformation of every home into a Mikdash where the Shechinah continues to reside.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

1. Some of the sources and ideas in this article can be found in R. Aryeh Leib Shapira, *Chazon La'moed: Chanukah*, Ch. 18; R. Chanoch Henoch Karelstein, *Kuntres Bi'inyanei Yimei Chanukah*, p. 47ff.

2. אוצר מדרשים (אייזנשטיין) חנוכה עמוד 193: וכתוב עליו תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה, תן חלק לשבעה שכל מי שיש לו חלק בשבע נרות שהן מאירות

תמיד בביהמ"ק וגם לשמונה ימי החג אין בריה יכולה להם, עמדו ושמאו כל השמנים שבביהמ"ק ... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא חשבתם לעקור שבעת הנרות ושמונה ימי החג הנני מביא עליכם שמונה ימים ושבעה בני חשמונאי שמאבדים אתכם מן העולם

3. There are a number of sources that expand on the correspondence between Yaakov and Chanukah. See e.g. *Mi'maamakim al HaTorah, Bereishis, Maamar* 28. Thematically, one might find associations between Yaakov as the *yosheiv ohalim* and the centrality of *Torah She'baal Peh* on Chanukah. As well, Chanukah provides a transition to a post-*nevuah* form of *hashgacha*, and this may be discerned in the *hester panim* that Yaakov experienced as the last of the Avos. Also, as will be discussed later, Yaakov's right to the heritage of his father and grandfather was contested by his brother Esav, and the Greeks also questioned the unique status of the Jewish people.

4. Commentary to Shir HaShirim 1:4.

5. *Ha'amek Davar* (Vayikra 16:16,29), *Chochmas Shlomo*, O.C. Siman 581.

6. I elaborated on this idea in *Torah To Go*, Chanukah 5773. One might also explore the importance of human endeavor and initiative in *avodas Hashem* as it relates to Sukkos and Chanukah.

## When You(r Lights) Fail

### Rabbi Shmuel Ismach

Rebbi, Stone Beit Midrash Program, YU and Rabbi, Young Israel of Great Neck

In spite of its rabbinic origins, the details of the mitzvah of lighting Chanuka lights generally point to it being a very serious and important mitzvah. For one, it is labeled as "*pirsumei nisa*," the publicizing of a miracle, a designation limited to very few mitzvot and carrying with it the responsibility to fundraise or even sell the shirt off one's back to afford its fulfillment.

Additionally, the mitzvah of lighting the Chanuka candles was constructed in a very unique way; the basic requirement of *ner ish uveiso* requires

only one light be lit per household, but better methods of fulfillment were created as well. We may perform *mehadrin*, lighting a candle for each member of the household, or *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, taking into account which night of the Chanukah miracle we are commemorating. The construction of this mitzvah seems to challenge us to eschew the basic performance and instead adopt the most challenging version of the mitzvah, which is commonly performed in all Jewish homes.

While these details seem to indicate a strict posture toward this mitzvah, there is one halacha that seems to defy its gravity. The basic requirement for lighting the Chanukah candles is that the candles have enough fuel to last for a half hour. What if the candle (or candles) goes out before the half hour has passed? The Gemara, *Shabbos* 21a-21b, discusses this question.

While R' Huna holds that it must be relit, both R' Chisda and R' Zeira hold that "*kavsa ein zakuk la*," that if it is extinguished, it need not be relit. The halacha follows this opinion and while many suggest that we should relight the candles if they go out before the minimum time, it is only an added stringency to do so and not an actual obligation. Rashba (*Responsa* 1:539) adds that even if it did not extinguish on its own, but rather if in an attempt to adjust the flame you mistakenly extinguished it, there is still no obligation to relight the wick.

If this mitzvah really is of such significance and there is a minimum amount of fuel that lighting requires, why would we not be required to actually make use of that fuel? Why would the candles need to be prepared so that they may last for a half hour, but then not be required to relight

them if they falter?

*Bnei Yisaschar* (Kislev/Teves no. 3) explains that the Chanukah lights need not be relit because they represent Torah's wisdom and its study. He posits that it is this very specific halachic feature that highlights the significant difference that exists between Torah study and the study of all other disciplines. He says that when it comes to Torah, even if we study a topic but are unable to come to a halachic determination or even worse, we come to an incorrect one, our reward is as if the law was determined correctly. Contrast this to other areas of study, where a mistake or an "incomplete" receives no credit.

The lights of Chanukah — and light generally — represents the radiance of Torah. The pasuk states:

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹרֶךְ יְדֵיךָ חַיִּים תוֹכְחוֹת מוֹסֵר

*For the commandment is a lamp, the teaching is a light, And the way to life is the rebuke that disciplines.*

### Mishlei 6:23

Even if our intention and hope is to have the lights last and continue through their required minimum length of time, if they fail, credit is fully provided for this mitzvah.

The Chofetz Chayim popularized this idea in a comment (*Chofetz Chayim Al HaTorah*) on Rashi in Parshas Bechukosai (26:3). Rashi interprets the command of *im bechukosai telechu* (if you follow My commandments) to demand "*shetihyu ameilim BaTorah*" — that we work laboriously on Torah. The Chofetz Chayim explains that the emphasis on the "labor" required for Torah reminds us that unlike other occupations where results are the determining factor in assessing success, when it comes to

Torah study, the rules are different. This, he explains, is the meaning of the expression of gratitude for Torah that we recite at a *siyum* upon the completion of a Torah project:

אָנוּ עֲמָלִים וּמִקְבָּלִים שָׂכָר וְהֵם עֲמָלִים וְאֵינָם  
מִקְבָּלִים שָׂכָר

*We toil and receive reward while they toil and do not receive reward.*

While all industries might toil equally, the effort expended in Torah study results in reward even if the project goes unfinished or is finished poorly.

This tolerance or even embrace of failure in the process of Torah study is found in other contemporary sources as well. R' Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (known as the "Steipler Gaon") writes (*Kreina D'igresa* Vol. II pp. 4-5) how an aspiring student of Torah should write down his "*chiddushim*," his innovations and insights. While we might very well imagine that the Steipler's concept of "*chiddushim*" are reserved for those students at the upper echelons of Torah study, he explains:

חידוש נקרא כשנתברר לך פרטי הסוגי' מה  
שבתחילה טעית וחשבת אחרת, או איזו הסבר  
לדבר שלא הבנת מתחלה טעמו.

*A chiddush is where there was a detail of a topic about which you made a mistake and learned incorrectly (and since figured out) or an explanation for something that you originally did not understand.*

The Steipler explains that the process of "*chiddush*" is not about objective intellectual originality, but the process of uncovering what is new to this particular student. "*Chiddush*" does not only refer to those great ideas that no one has ever heard, but also to the ideas that were "new to us," that we only learned due to our first-timer failures and amateurish mistakes.

The menorah sometimes extinguishes even after all our preparation and efforts to light it. That might not be the result we planned, but it is a result we can still feel good about, particularly when there are so many forces that attempt to smother and sabotage our efforts.

R' Aryeh Tzvi Frumer (*Eretz Hatzvi*, Chanukah 5688) applies this lesson to the challenges of *galus* (exile). He writes how the light of the menorah is meant to inspire our stay in exile and metaphorically shine through the darkness and lack of clarity of the *galus*. At the same time, the haze and distractions of the *galus* can make it difficult to fully follow through on a person's religious plans. This halacha of preparing our lights reminds us that like the Chanukah lights must be fully fueled and energetically arranged in its multiple layers of *mehadrin*, we must also ensure that we start with the necessary requirements and enthusiasm to inspire ourselves and our children educationally. But this same halacha reassures us that just as we cannot guarantee that our lights will carry out the mission we planned and extinguish when they are supposed to, so too we may not know to what end our Torah education will shine through the haze. Our requirement is to try our best.

In a yeshiva system focused on grades and objective measures of accomplishment, we might do well in remembering that despite the strict contours of the mitzvah of Chanukah lights, they seem to provide an apt lesson in handling and overcoming failure and reminding us how to judge true success. Let us focus our energies on giving our children and our students the most fuel, encouragement, and the best

opportunities we can. We know that even if we provide the light, invest the energies, thoughtfully educate, and appropriately partner, whatever happens next is out of our hands. The candle may not ultimately shine as bright or as long as we hoped for, but we still must make every effort to notice the efforts that have been made to keep it alit.

## War, What Is It Good For?

**Mrs. Karen Lavner**

*Judaic Studies Faculty, YUHSJ*

"Thanks but no thanks!" It's an expression we might say when receiving a gift that was no gift at all, but instead resulted in hardship, challenge and frustration. While perhaps not the nicest of reactions, frankly, it's perfectly logical. What sane person thanks someone for causing more difficulty?

This same phrase comes to mind when we examine the text of Al Hanisim:

עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַפְּרָקָן וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת וְעַל  
הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמִּלְחָמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ  
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמְנָן הַזֶּה.

*For the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and for the victories, and for the battles which you have performed for our forefathers in those days at this time.*

We thank Hashem for a variety of items, from miracles to salvation to redemption. However, buried in the list is one seemingly peculiar term: *milchamot*, battles. While it is easy to understand why we would thank Hashem for salvation and victory, why would we include battles as a source of gratitude? Wars by any measure are not traditionally a reason for praise and thanksgiving to Hashem! As we





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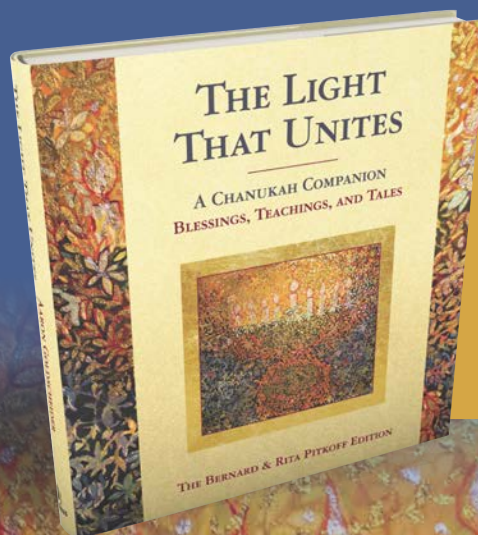
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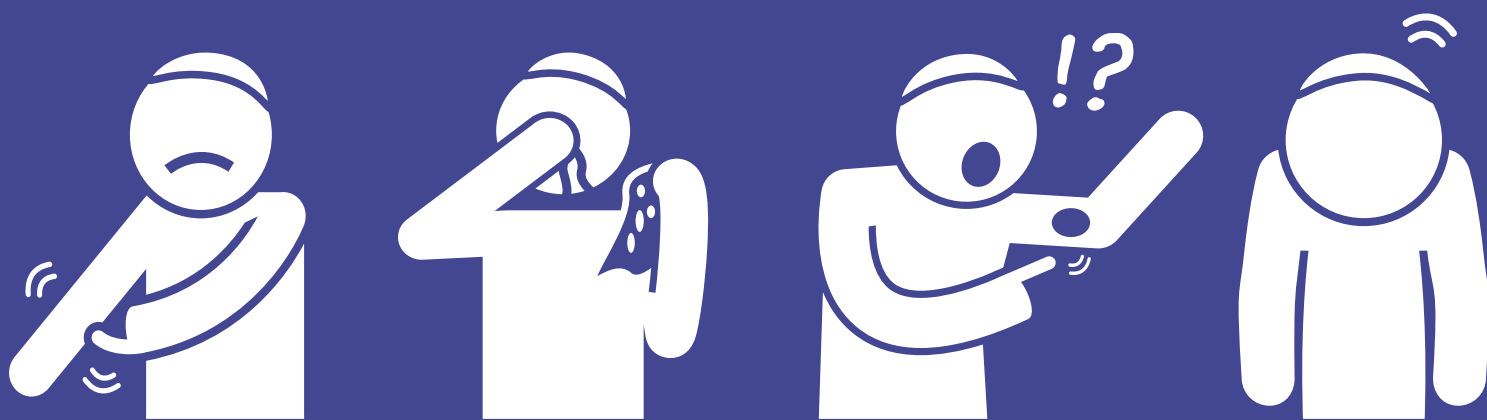
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all know too well, wars yield terrible consequences: shattered economies, depletion of resources, physical and emotional trauma, and worst of all, unbearable loss of life. Why would we include the *milchamot* in our gratitude within Al Hanisim?

On the most basic level, possibly the “*pshat*” (simple) understanding is that we are simply thanking HaKadosh Baruch Hu for fighting the wars on our behalf and for the resulting salvation. As we continue within Al Hanisim, in the case of the military victory of Chanuka, מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים — we thank Hashem for delivering our enemies into our hands, despite Bnei Yisrael being severely outmatched in terms of numbers, weapons, even physical prowess. In other words, from this perspective, the war itself is not a reason for thanksgiving. Quite simply, when we thank Hashem, the gratitude is for the salvation from the war.

In addressing this question, Rav Soloveitchik zt”l (cited in *Harerei Kedem* 1:179) offers a different perspective. He notes that salvations, *teshuot*, would not be possible without the *milchamot*, the battles. In employing halakhic terminology, he depicts the *milchamot* as a *hechsher*, or a prerequisite, to the *teshuot*. In other words, the *teshuot* would never have come about without the wars. The Rav quotes the Beis HaLevi in developing this idea. When Bnei Yisrael sang to Hashem in praise right after the splitting of the Sea, they were clearly thanking Hashem for the miraculous salvation from the persecution of Mitzrayim. Yet, the *shirah* was not only for the miracles, but, in fact, for the slavery itself. The Beis HaLevi comments that there was a requirement of *shirah*, of praise, not

only for the *yeshuah*, the salvation, but for the *tzarah* (struggle)! *Shibud Mitzrayim* (slavery in Egypt) was necessary for the growth and development of Bnei Yisrael as a nation. In considering this nuanced point, we realize that were it not for the challenge and the adversity, we would not have grown, persevered, and even thrived. The battles that we thank Hashem for are not necessarily merely physical, they are figurative, and can lead us to a better place than we were before.

Ramban highlights the significance of the concept of a *nisayon*, a test, in his explanation of *Akedat Yitzchak* (Bereishit 22:1). In commenting on the phrase *V’haElokim nisa et Avraham* — Hashem tested Avraham — Ramban develops the idea that a *nisayon* should be understood from the perspective of the person being tested. When Hashem tests a person, the intention is not for Him to see if the person can withstand the test. HaKadosh Baruch Hu, in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, surely knows the outcome of the challenge. Rather, the goal of the test is for the benefit of the one being tested. Ramban explains the complex idea that the *nisayon* enables us to actualize the potential that exists dormant within us. Since we are in control of our actions, how we respond to a challenge is completely up to us. We alone can choose whether to rise to the occasion. Hashem seeks to reward us not merely for a positive idea in our heart, but for an action, a good deed. Actualizing our potential can yield significant growth.

The *milchamot* we thank Hashem for in Al Hanisim remind us that challenge can be an impetus for growth and gratitude. It is not merely

a cliché to realize that growth is not always achieved at a mountain’s peak or summit but is often realized down in the valley. That is not to say that we look at suffering superficially through naïve, rose-colored lenses, but we acknowledge that there is genuine growth through hardship.

These past number of months have been, needless to say, challenging not only for the Jewish people, but for the global community at large. As we grapple with medical problems, economic fall-out, constant disruptions to schooling and schedules, and tragic losses, we are reminded through the words of Al Hanisim that even the most difficult challenges are opportunities for growth and connection to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

## Our Cherished Menorah: Finding Inspiration in the Symbols of our People

### Rabbi Gideon Shloush

Judaic Studies Faculty at Stern College for Women, Rabbi of Congregation Adereth El in Midtown Manhattan, Past President, NY Board of Rabbis

A few summers ago, on our family’s return trip from Israel, we stopped for a few days in Italy. What a contrast. Just a day earlier we were in Jerusalem standing at the Western Wall, where below Robinson’s Arch we saw the enormous pile of stones left behind by the Romans upon desecrating and razing our Second Temple.

Now we were in Rome, the dreaded destination of so many of those Jewish exiles two millennia ago. As



we meandered through the city, my eyes were fixated on the city's centerpiece, the massive Colosseum. I couldn't help but imagine how many Jews saw their end in this notorious amphitheater. In that moment, I felt the weight of the suffering of my People.

The sense of tragedy and personal loss was compounded when we walked across the way and stepped into the Roman Forum. There before us — in all its brazen glory — stood the Arch of Titus. The imposing structure, which was completed after Titus' death, exists as a tribute to the merciless Roman emperor who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and our holy Temple in approximately 70 CE.

On the arch, we could vividly see the Temple's sacred Menorah, Chatzotzrot and Shulchan; precious spoils taken from our beloved Jerusalem. I overheard a nearby tour guide explain that the individuals depicted on the arch are Roman soldiers — not Jews — proudly taking the booty from Jerusalem's holy Temple.

There is a fundamental difference between the way gentiles and Jews experience these tourist attractions. For most people, the sites in Rome, the towering doorways, grandiose buildings and ancient statues attest to the city's historic might, power and greatness. For Jews however, ours is an entirely different experience. As we traverse Rome's cobblestone streets, we are reminded of the degradation and humiliation of our People.

The Midrash in Parshat Acharei Mot (*Vayikra Rabbah* 23:3) elaborates how Titus prided himself in having “defeated” the King in his own palace. The Gemara in *Gittin* 56b details the great sin Titus committed in the Holy

of Holies at the time of his entering the Temple in Jerusalem. Afterward, the mighty emperor plunged a sword into the Parochet, set fire to the holy edifice, and hauled off his newly acquired prizes, taking them with him to Rome.

Titus arrived at his capital as a hero. He was accorded great honor. Josephus, who had a personal relationship with the emperor, describes in detail the scene of the flamboyant dictator's arrival in Rome.

Upon analyzing this most difficult chapter in our people's history, my teacher, Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter, who provided many of the sources below, noted that historians over the past two millennia have debated whether or not the Menorah on the Arch of Titus is the actual Menorah from the Temple in Jerusalem. Is this the very Menorah that played such a central role in the Chanukah story?

It would seem that if this monument was built shortly after Titus returned to Rome, then there is a good chance that the image on the archway is actually how the Temple Menorah appeared. The problem is that if we take a closer look at the etching inside the archway, we find that the “base” of the Menorah is not how we know it to be.

Rashi in *Parshat Terumah* (25:31) says that the base of the Menorah had three legs. The Rambam, in *Hilchot Beit HaBechirah* 3:2, also says that it had three legs. Ancient drawings in Jericho and Beit She'arim all confirm that the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash stood on three legs. So how do we explain this discrepancy?

A 1950's historian named W. Wirgin suggests that yes, the Temple Menorah had three legs. However, the

Menorah image appearing on the Arch of Titus had its legs covered up by an ornate base. For practical transport purposes, the Menorah was covered with a solid octagon-shaped base.

What makes things so interesting is that the emblem of the State of Israel depicts exactly the same Menorah that appears on the Arch of Titus. When looking closely at the *Semel Yisrael* we can clearly see that it too has a solid base at the foot of the Menorah. How did this come to be?

An important meeting took place on July 15, 1948, two months after the founding of the State of Israel. This was the date of the tenth session of the provisional government of Israel. At this meeting government leaders focused on the design of the emblem of Israel and the flag of Israel.

One hundred and sixty-four participants submitted proposals for how they felt the emblem and flag should appear. Of course, the emblem and flag should represent the values of the State of Israel.

Rav Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog was the first Chief Rabbi at the time. Years later, in 1956 (in *Sefer Zichron L'Shlomo S. Meir*), he reflected on that meeting. He wrote an article about the Menorah and in his writings he concluded that, of course, the emblem of the State of Israel should depict the Menorah. The Menorah is an appropriate symbol of the Jewish People, embodying our role as a light unto the world. It reminds us of the holiness, purity and even the stature of the Beit HaMikdash.

But “it's wrong,” he writes, for the State of Israel “to copy the Menorah appearing on the Arch of Titus, since we know that the Temple Menorah had three legs.” Rav Herzog felt that

the arch Menorah was not the correct choice to place onto the *Semel Yisrael*.

Responding to Rav Herzog was an Israeli historian named Gershom Scholem (in *Magen David: Toldotav Shel Semel*), who argued to the contrary. Scholem noted that there was a similar debate about the flag of Israel. Many did not want the Magen David (Star of David) on the flag of the State of Israel. For many Holocaust survivors in Israel, these discussions were being had just a few years after the war, and that Star of David brought back vivid memories of the yellow stars of the Nazis. That star was a reminder of our *hashpalah* and *yisurin* — the lowering, shaming and disgrace of our People.

But Gershom Scholem felt otherwise. He noted that ultimately, the newly formed Jewish government decided to *davka* put the Magen David onto the Israeli flag because this star now symbolizes that we have risen from the ashes. Scholem said, let's take that very star which we wore into the gas chambers and put it in the face of the world. Let's show the world *koach Yisrael*. Now we fly F-15 fighter planes over Auschwitz with the Star of David emblazoned on their fuselage. We have turned this star from being a *siman mavet* — a symbol of death — into a *siman chaim* — a symbol of life.

Similarly, says Gershon Scholem, let's specifically use the Menorah from the Arch of Titus to appear on the emblem of the State of Israel. Let that be the representation that stands right in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem. Precisely the Menorah that was hauled off by the Romans from Jerusalem; look at it now. See the Menorah in all its glory as it stands proudly, with the Grace of God, to protect the Jews of the world.

Titus, you mocked us with that Menorah, placing it on the arch that carries your name? See where this very Menorah stands today; tall and proud in the heart of a resurrected, vibrant and flourishing Jerusalem.

Two thousand years later, Rome feels like a dark and depressed city. It represents a civilization that is long past its peak. The Roman Forum is falling apart. Contrast Rome with Jerusalem. The City of Gold is glorious! It's a light on a hill. Expansive. Reborn. Stunning! Cranes and construction in every direction. After two thousand years, Israel and the Jewish People have risen again!

How we ought to be inspired by the words of the Prophet Isaiah (60:1):

קוֹמִי אוֹרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֶךְ וְכָבוֹד ה' עָלֶיךָ יִזְרָח.  
*Arise! Shine! For your light has arrived  
and the Glory of Hashem has shined  
upon you.*

## What's Wrong with Studying Jewish History?

**Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank**  
*Maggid Shiur, RIETS*

We all know the basic story of Chanukah, but what is the source of our knowledge? Remarkably, though the history is transcribed in the Books of the Maccabees and other sources, very few details of the story are recorded in Chazal. Indeed, this seems to be one example of a broader phenomenon: when a student of history turns to Chazal or other traditional Jewish sources, there is very little to work with, leaving us to wonder why there is so little recorded history in the post-biblical period. True, Talmudic literature relates

numerous stories from which we can cobble together some sort of narrative, but it expresses little interest in systematic history.<sup>1</sup> Why is that?

One possible answer lies in the Talmudic concept of *mai de-havei havei* — whatever happened already happened, so what difference does it make now? For example, the Gemara *Yoma* 5b states that knowing the order in which the kohanim were dressed during the inauguration is unimportant, were it not for the fact that this information is relevant to interpreting the verses. The *Zohar* (*Beha'alotcha* 149b) powerfully expresses the notion that there is little value in knowing interesting historical tidbits. Why, it wonders, does the Torah tell us that Noah's ark landed on Mount Ararat? "Who cares whether it landed on this mountain or that one?" The *Zohar* answers that passages such as these teach us important values and deep secrets. Indeed, we can only perceive the message of the Torah when we dig below the surface.

The priority of the message over historicity is powerfully expressed by the principle of *ein mukdam u-meuchar ba-Torah* — Scripture is not written in chronological order — precision with respect to historicity is sacrificed in order to better convey the message of the Torah. Instead of approaching history from a dispassionate academic perspective, Jewish thinkers look to the past chiefly to cement their relationship with God and shape their belief in Him and His people. For this, stories suffice; we don't need history.

In my recently released book, *Illuminating Jewish Thought: Faith, Philosophy, and Knowledge of God* (Maggid Books, 2020, pp. 395–402 and 437–443), I elaborate on

why such an approach does not fully answer the question. Indeed, numerous traditional sources extol the value of knowing and understanding our past if we are to understand the present and prepare for the future, including the well-known verse:

זְכוֹר יָמֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דּוֹר וָדוֹר שְׂאֵל אָבִיךָ  
וַיַּגִּדְךָ וַיְהִיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ.

*Remember the days of old, Consider the years of ages past; Ask your father, he will inform you, Your elders, they will tell you.*

**Devarim 32:7**

In the words of R. Mayer Twersky, “To be a Jew, to live as a Jew, means to live with a sense of history... A Jew’s history constitutes who he is, what he is, how he lives, to what he aspires.”<sup>2</sup>

What, then, does *mai de-havei havei* mean? Presumably, it informs us that some details of history are of little value. Along similar lines, Rambam writes that studying chronologies of kings or military chronicles is a waste of time. However, we cannot extrapolate from the fact that there is no usefulness in knowing the order in which the kohanim were dressed during the inauguration that all history is useless. The study of history is especially valuable when it will bring us to an awareness of God’s providential role in world events, or give us a better understanding of who we are and where we should go. Knowledge of our past must guide our current decisions; without it we are in danger of making grave mistakes.<sup>3</sup> Thus we must return to our question, why is there so little Jewish History in Chazal and other traditional sources.

R. Shimon Schwab addresses the question of why Chazal do not record much history in an article originally published in *Mitteilungen* (Dec. Mar. 1984–85) and reprinted in *Selected*

*Writings* (Lakewood, N.J., 1988, pp. 232–235). R. Schwab notes that even though “the story of Chanukah is described in detail in the Book of Maccabees,” in Chazal there are “only a few scant references to this epic drama.” Moreover:

*We have no authentic description by our Tanaim of the period of the Churban, the Jewish war against the Romans, the destruction of the Jewish state, the revolt and the downfall of Bar Kochba, except for a few Haggadic sayings in Talmud and Midrash. For our historical knowledge we have to rely on the renegade, Josephus Flavius, who was a friend of Rome and a traitor to his people.*

*Come to think of it, since the close of the Tanach at the beginning of the Second Beis Hamikdash, we have no Jewish history book composed by our Sophrim, Tanaim and Amoraim. The prophets and the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah have recorded all the events of their days as well as all previous periods. When prophecy ceased, the recording of Jewish history stopped at the same time. Why did our great Torah leaders not deem it necessary to register in detail all the events of their period just as the Neviim had done before them?*

R. Schwab suggests a fascinating answer — to record history would be a violation of *lashon ha-ra*:

*There is a vast difference between history and storytelling. History must be truthful; otherwise it does not deserve its name. A book of history must report the bad with the good, the ugly with the beautiful ... the guilt and the virtue ... It cannot spare the righteous if he fails, and it cannot skip the virtues of the villain.*

Essentially, only with God’s directive can we record the unflattering truths of history.<sup>4</sup> R. Schwab’s theory,

while interesting, raises a number of questions which we address in the above section of my book.

Another similar approach to why historical details of the Chanukah story are not recorded in Chazal can be found in R. Shlomo Brevda’s *le-Hodot u-le-Hallel* (adapted into English by R. Eliron Levinson as *The Miracles of Chanukah*). He suggests that Chazal deliberately concealed much of the Chanukah story in order to protect us from reading potentially harmful material. As a precedent, R. Brevda cites Ramban’s comments to *Bereishit* 12:2. There, Ramban inquires about the many missing details in Avraham Avinu’s life story, from when he is born at the end of *parshat Noach* until Hashem tells him to leave his home (beginning of *parshat Lech Lecha*) when Avraham is 75 years old (*Bereishit* 12:4). Ramban answers that the Torah is not fond of discussing idolatrous ideology. The Torah wished to avoid speaking about the heretical beliefs of those who opposed Avraham and to skip the religious debate between him and the people of Ur Kasdim. Ramban adds that this is also the reason the Torah does not elaborate on the advent of idolatry in the generation of Enosh, instead merely alluding to it.

Thus far, we have presented two approaches — Chazal were uninterested in history, or they felt it was inappropriate to convey history. Let us consider a third possibility based on Maharal’s teachings: Chazal did not reject history; they were seeking to go beyond history. Perhaps the Talmud focuses mainly on wisdom that is inherently valuable (Torah) or that has some sort of immediate utility (e.g. medicine).<sup>5</sup> History does not have that same inherent value. While



important, insofar as it can serve as the basis for valuable lessons, and is even a reflection of God's plans, it lacks the same inherent significance (it is *mikreh*) and it is not immediately practical. Thus, while many Talmudic sources derive instruction from past events, history is absent. What Chazal do teach are the lessons and meaning that emerge from history.

Thus, Maharal writes that the Torah is not a history or biology book and should not be read as such. For example, when Chazal state that we have 248 *eivarim* and 365 *gidin*, they were not seeking to teach anatomy, but rather to teach us how the 613 *mitzvot* (which are comprised of 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments) perfect and sanctify the physical body. When the Torah teaches that rainbows are a covenant between God and man, it was not explaining the physics of the rainbow; it was imparting the spiritual reason behind the physical reason (refraction). Maharal (*Be'er ha-Gola*, 6) notes that many people incorrectly perceive a contradiction between Torah and science because they falsely presume that the Torah's goal is to convey the physical reasons. Likewise, with respect to history, if we wish to study the facts, we can turn to secular sources; Chazal sought to understand the reasons behind the reasons — what's behind the secular causation. The absence of science from Torah does not imply that science is not valuable. Likewise, the omission of history in Talmud does not indicate that it is useless, it simply reflects that it is not Torah.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, from our very inception, God told us that we are (or can be) above history (*tzei me-itzagninut shelkha* — see *Nedarim* 32a and Rashi

to *Bereishit* 15:5). History focuses on secular causation, but the Jewish people merit unique providence. If history reflects nature (*teva*), we exist above nature (*le-ma'aloh min ha-teva*).

Thus, if we wish to truly understand the story of Chanukah, knowing the history may be helpful, but it's insufficient and often misleading. Knowing the facts is not enough; we must learn their lessons. We must seek meaning, not information. We must remember that we are a people that have broken the patterns of history and whose future is not shackled by the past or present. Had the Chashmonaim studied military history or current events they may never have started up with the mighty Greeks. But instead they studied Torah. And the rest, as they say, is history.

## Endnotes

1. It is not just the Talmud that omits this course of study. Dr. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, Seattle 1982) notes that the Rishonim for the most part do not engage in the study of history. He notes that the lack of interest in history in the medieval period cannot be attributed to the lack of Talmudic material, since medieval Jewry "blazed new paths in philosophy, science, linguistics, secular and metrical Hebrew poetry, none of which had precedents in the Talmudic history. Only in historiography, a field in which Islamic civilization excelled and forged an important tradition, did a similar interaction fail to take place" (33). Yerushalmi deals with the handful of possible exceptions, such as *Yosippon*, *Seder Olam*, and *Sefer ha-Kabbala*. While in the early-modern period Jewish historical works began to emerge, Yerushalmi claims that their authors largely were influenced by non-Jewish sources, or, later, were traditionalist responses to those works.

2. <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/976818/rabbi-mayer-e-twarsky/victorythrough-surrender-how-to-live-and->

[die-alkiddush-hashem/](#). Likewise, R. Aaron Lopiansky recently wrote: "We need to teach our children history. And that history needs to include much more than dry names and dates and stories of gedolim. They need to have an accurate understanding of the experiences of the Jewish communities of each generation -- the daily life, the hardships, the challenges, the successes, and the wounds. The pasuk implores us to 'contemplate the years of each generation.'" ("Sometimes Mashiach Is Not the Solution" *Mishpacha*, May 26, 2020)

3. Indeed, in his recent comments on current events R. Mayer Twersky implied that greater historical consciousness would help us better respond to some of the communal challenges we currently face. See [http://torahweb.org/torah/special/2020/rtwe\\_sojourn.html](http://torahweb.org/torah/special/2020/rtwe_sojourn.html).

4. While beyond the scope of this short piece, this would seem to relate to another fascinating position of R. Schwab concerning the controversy regarding the chronology of the kings of Persia.

5. Dr. Yerushalmi wonders why the Rishonim were interested in science and philosophy but not history. Here too, we might respond that these fields, especially when studied the way in which the Rishonim studied them, are inherently valuable. Linguistics too, when used to understand and interpret Torah, is intrinsically important.

6. Interestingly, Maharal's student, R. David Gans (1541–1613), was a rare example of a pre-modern Jewish historian. His history, entitled *Tzemach David*, includes two parts, the first containing the annals of Jewish history, the second those of general history. The introduction to the second section justifies authoring a "profane" subject like general history, showing that it can even be studied on Shabbat.

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## **ISH U'VEISO: NAVIGATING COVID-19 AS A FAMILY**

Editor's Note: To help families navigate the COVID crisis, we posed a series of questions to Rabbi Elchanan Adler and his wife Dr. Miriam Adler.

**Please share with our readers some perspectives about the challenges of the last many months. What were the greatest opportunities for growth? Where did people struggle?**

**Rabbi and Dr. Adler:** These last months have been fraught with enormous challenges for virtually everyone. These challenges have impacted almost every facet of our lives — physical, emotional, psychological, financial and spiritual. They have taxed us as individuals and as a community.

It is important to bear in mind that *nisyonos* — personal tests and challenges — are part of the human condition. As Ramchal writes in the first chapter of *Mesilas Yesharim*:

כי כל ענייני העולם בין לטוב בין לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם.

*All of life's circumstances, both good and bad, pose unique spiritual challenges.*

What is true in the spiritual arena is true in other realms as well.

Our world is in a constant state of flux. Similarly, our life circumstances are ever-changing, with many moving parts that we must navigate. It is understandable to yearn for a state of total serenity; Chazal attribute this aspiration to Yaakov Avinu (*bikesh Yaakov leishav b'shalva*, Rashi, Bereishis 37:2). However, such a wish is rarely actualized. As Ramchal notes further in that same chapter, life in *olam hazeh* is replete with frustrations and disappointments, making it virtually impossible for anyone to feel 100 percent content and at peace.

Challenges are an integral part of life, and they serve as an impetus for growth. By definition, growth comes from living in a state of discomfort, and then persevering despite limitations. This is a principle that figures prominently in *sifrei musar* and is also supported by psychological research focusing on the science of resilience. There is even a barometer known as AQ (adversity quotient) that is used to measure a person's ability to deal with adversity in life. People who are successful in adapting to new situations develop a sense of maturity, competence, and self-mastery.

This perspective — that growth through struggle is what life is all about — should inform the way we think about the current pandemic. While COVID-19 blindsided us

in a manner unlike anything we've experienced before, we are all familiar with stress and struggle. We can remind ourselves that it is precisely in those situations where we **struggle** the most that we can also **grow** the most. Even as we should feel pained by the suffering that has been brought on by COVID-19, we can still welcome the opportunities for growth that have been granted to us.

**Rabbi Adler:** There is an existential element to the many challenges created by the pandemic. The mere existence of an invisible force that has exacted such an enormous toll, and which the world has yet to come to grips with, is a humbling reality that should be a wakeup call for humanity at large and for every thinking individual. It should remind us of our own mortality, help us appreciate the fragility of life, and shatter the illusion that we are masters of our own destiny. As believing Jews, such sentiments should prompt us to engage in *cheshbon hanefesh*, in consonance with the spiritual prescription described eloquently by the Rambam at the beginning of *Hilchos Taanis*.

As simple as this sounds in the abstract, it can be extremely difficult to implement in practice. Like many ideals we embrace intellectually, there is often a huge disconnect between our cognitive knowledge and our day to day conduct. This phenomenon can be described in numerous ways — from the language of musar (“*yetzer hara*,” *lev* versus *mo'ach*, etc.), to psychological parlance (“cognitive dissonance”), to other frames of reference. But whatever the terminology, we all intuitively recognize how quickly we can become distracted from following up on our most genuine convictions.

In conversations with talmidim, I have discovered that one of the greatest impediments to self-reflection is a feeling of resignation and despair. Whenever the typical routine of our daily lives is abruptly uprooted, it is easy to wonder whether anything is truly “worth the effort.” Rather than motivating us to think deeper and do better, a loss of structure can have the opposite effect — causing us to shut down and become zombie-like in our new situation. This, in turn, makes us vulnerable to acting out impulsively in ways that are counterproductive and inconsistent with our core values.

A case in point: many people whose connection to *tefila* was defined by consistent minyan attendance began to lose their “*geshmak*” for davening once they were suddenly forced to daven alone at home for weeks on end. Some of these people started to skip davening entirely.

The same pattern can occur in other aspects of our religious life. Once the threads that hold the religious experience together become loose, the entire value system that underlies the experience is threatened. Sadly, there is ample anecdotal evidence illustrating this trend.

I believe the most effective way to avoid such pitfalls, and what I have advised talmidim, is to first reaffirm to ourselves what our most cherished values are, and then consciously reorient them to the new circumstances. Besides preventing us from “slipping,” this may even help us discover a new and creative way to enhance our *avodas Hashem*. In the case of *tefila*, davening without a minyan can sometimes elicit greater *kavana* than davening in shul, where we feel the need to keep pace with the chazan. This type of experience

allows us to pay closer attention to the individual words of the *tefila*. [*Sifrei Chasidus* describe such a phenomenon via an “out of the box” interpretation of Hashem’s instructions to Noach, “*bo el hateivah*.” Taken in context, Noach was commanded to enter the ark, which would provide him safe haven from the raging waters of the mabul. In Chassidic thought, the lesson is that to achieve purity in davening we must allow ourselves to become enveloped by each and every word (*teivah* also means word) of davening, shielding us from the temptations of the outside world.] The new appreciation for the language of *tefila* can hopefully continue even upon returning to shul.

The same approach can be applied to other aspects of our lives. Whenever a familiar context has been removed or altered — whether it involves *talmud Torah*, *chessed* activities, or any other experience — rather than giving up, we should consciously seek out methods to adapt our values to the changing landscape.

But even as we do so, we need to be honest and patient with ourselves. The new circumstances will not always be a “good fit” with what we genuinely crave, and even our most creative efforts can fall short. In such instances, we should trust that the time will come when we will return to the “old normal.” Bearing in mind the axiom of Chazal חשב אדם לעשות מצוה ונאנס ולא עשה — עשה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשה — one who intended to perform a mitzva but was prevented by circumstance from doing it, the pasuk credits him as if he had performed it (*Berachos* 6a) — we should draw solace and inspiration from our very yearning.

People who successfully implement these strategies are likely to



experience feelings of empowerment. It is genuinely rewarding to creatively “hold on” to our cherished values under new and difficult circumstances. Even when our best efforts meet with less than perfect results, the struggle itself serves to reinforce our inner connection to these values, enabling us to feel a renewed appreciation of the convictions we had previously taken for granted.

**Dr. Adler:** One of my favorite approaches for handling life stress is to ask: “What strengths do I bring to the table? What do I already know to be true about myself that can help me handle this challenge with grace?” Tapping into our strengths is energizing and empowering. Too often, we berate ourselves about our difficulties and failings, neglecting to appreciate G-d-given talents that we can use to our advantage. Of course, the drawback of building on our strengths is that we may not bother to stretch ourselves. Simply shrugging off difficult tasks or expectations as “not my forte” thwarts growth. It is also meaningful to engage in honest introspection related to our weaknesses. We shouldn’t be afraid to ask ourselves, “What weaknesses can I strengthen? What gaps exist in my skill set, and how can I fix them?” For optimal coping, it is vital to celebrate at least one strength, while simultaneously working on improving upon at least one weakness.

On a personal note, I can tell you a little about myself. The current pandemic led to many months of being in limbo — not knowing what school, work, yom tov and shul schedules would be at play from week to week. Since I am not super-structured in my personality, and don’t mind “going with the

flow,” this limbo state didn’t bother me that much. To the contrary, it felt somewhat liberating to have a good excuse for not knowing our plans or having to conform to a rigid schedule. Flexibility and spontaneity are a personal strength, and this was an opportunity to relish that ... to thank Hashem for the ability to be relaxed and *b’simcha* even without set activities. On the other hand, if I would have let myself completely surrender to that natural sentiment without setting up approximate meal

“What strengths do I bring to the table? What do I already know to be true about myself that can help me handle this challenge with grace?”

times, family times and school/work times, and without any attempt to have a “Plan A,” “Plan B” or “Plan C,” those around me would lose out on the emotional safety that order and structure brings.

COVID-19 offered me, and those like me, an opportunity to develop “muscles” for creating internal and external structure when no such framework was being artificially foisted on us. People who are naturally more organized had the opposite opportunities available to them. They could lean on their organizational strengths, and be appreciative of having been blessed with them, and at the same time recognize the ripe opportunity for flexing their weaker “go with the flow” and “be present in the moment” muscles.

**On Shabbos, many of the social opportunities (kiddushim, shared meals, playdates) have been severely curtailed. Shabbos has become more family-centered than before. What advice would you give to make Shabbos meaningful and something that families can look forward to each week?**

**Rabbi Adler:** Shabbos should definitely be the highlight of the week! There is a mitzvah *midivrei kabbalah* of *oneg Shabbos*. “*Oneg*,” which means enjoyment, has many halachic manifestations, such as: enjoying delicious foods, taking a Shabbos stroll or a Shabbos nap (*sheina B’Shabbos ta’anug*), and, most important, learning Torah. In the paragraph of *Retzei* recited in *Birkas Hamazon* on Shabbos, we express a wish that we be spared negativity and aggravation that can interfere with our wholesome Shabbos rest — שלא תהא צרה ויגון ואנחה ביום מנוחתנו. This is the image of *Shabbos kodesh* that must remain paramount in our minds, whatever our particular life circumstances.

Undoubtedly, entertaining Shabbos guests can enhance *oneg Shabbos*. Over the years, our family has hosted many guests at our Shabbos table, including families who were new to the community and singles who appreciated an invitation. As beautiful as shared meals can be, however, socializing with friends and neighbors should not define the essence of our Shabbos experience. It is noteworthy that it is in the context of Yom Tov, rather than of Shabbos, that our *mesorah* seems to place emphasis on sharing our celebration with others, especially the disadvantaged. Indeed,

the *melacha* of *hotzaa'h*, which prohibits transferring of objects between halachic domains, applies only to Shabbos but not to Yom Tov. Even the laws of *techumin*, which restrict our movements on Shabbos as well as on Yom Tov, are, according to many authorities, of greater magnitude on Shabbos than on Yom Tov (see the sources cited in the index to the Frankel edition Rambam, *Hilchos Shabbos*, Perek 27). All of this suggests that our primary focus of Shabbos should be on our own family. While we can still make efforts to reach out to others in safe and appropriate ways, the COVID-19 reality has forced us to make our Shabbos experience more family centered.

**Rabbi and Dr. Adler:** One of the best ways to enhance a family's Shabbos experience is to focus on the spiritual atmosphere at the Shabbos seudah. While we might appreciate the fact that Shabbos provides a respite from the stresses of the week, we don't want our Shabbos meal to begin in the manner amusingly depicted by Rabbi Paysach Krohn in his story about the preschooler who, as "Shabbos Abba," begins to reenact Kiddush for his class with an audible sigh, followed by: "Oy did I have a tough week...*Yom Hashishi*..."

Setting the right tone for the Shabbos seudah means, of course, infusing the table conversation with Torah content. However, this isn't as easy as

simply opening a sefer and reading a Dvar Torah. For those of us with kids, it isn't even just about showing interest in their parsha sheets and artwork (though of course we should). Furthermore, even though we may learn regularly, and even with exceptional resources for divrei Torah (like "*Torah To Go*") at our disposal, creating a Shabbos table atmosphere that is both enjoyable and spiritually uplifting requires a serious investment of time and energy. In families whose members span different life stages, intellectual abilities, personal styles and interests, it is important to be conscious of which parsha messages will be most meaningful. That often means selecting sources before Shabbos and making purposeful choices. Similarly, it is important to engage everyone at the table. This can be done by posing thoughtful questions, inviting comments, encouraging lively debate, and making space for others to share spin-off ideas and related *meforshim*.

More important than the exact content we discuss is ensuring that the family is "engaged" in the Torah conversation and has positive associations with the experience. We should aim to see our kids' eyes light up and observe the wheels of their minds turning. Depending on the background and interests of the audience, it may be appropriate for a Shabbos table discussion to make occasional reference to current events or to sports

in order to reinforce a relevant Torah-based message. However, discussions of politics — whether American or Israeli, local, national or international — would be ill advised, as it is usually trivial and almost always divisive (especially in the contemporary political climate), detracting from a wholesome Shabbos spirit. Needless to say, any form of lashon hara or gossip has no place at the Shabbos table (or at any other place or time).

One of the ways we have enhanced our table over the years has been through parsha riddles with answers corresponding to every letter of the aleph beis. These work for adults as well as children, as the difficulty level varies from question to question. We have fun with these almost every Shabbos! There are also books that are designed to spur discussion at the table. Each chapter contains a nuanced halachic dilemma, allowing everyone at the table to tackle the question and explain his/her reasoning as to what the halacha should be. Afterwards, these responses can be compared to the one given in the book. These kinds of conversations generate lively discussion, making halacha come alive in real life scenarios.

Individuals can also tailor the Shabbos table dynamics to their personal interests. I (Rabbi Adler), have an interest in the meaning and origin of Shabbos zemiros. Occasionally our family "learns" a zemer before singing



it — which adds a lot of meaning. I (Dr. Adler) grew up in a very musical family with many siblings and have beautiful memories of all of us singing in harmony, sometimes singing the same zemer to more than one melody. Music adds another dimension to Shabbos and is good for our *neshamos* as well.

Another nice practice is to learn a section of a larger work every week at the table. We are reviewing a few halachos of Shabbos now, usually before bentching. I (Dr. Adler) have a vivid memory from the first Shabbos I spent at my in-laws, where everyone (all of us already adults) read and explained a Mishna at the end of the meal. In recent years, my father a”h would read from sefarim on *emuna* and had many printouts of divrei Torah so that those children or grandchildren who didn’t have something already prepared could find a thought to their liking.

On a lighter note, experimenting with different foods and table décor can be a good outlet for creative energy and talent. In our current COVID situation, we can focus even more on what is really important — the experience of trying new things and sharing it with each other — without worrying about whether the end product is “guest worthy.” With the extra time we had when school and camp were cancelled, our kids enjoyed preparing different foods and getting complimented on them. Family Shabbos food isn’t about how it tastes, as much as it is about the shared meaning and intention behind it. Letting each child choose something to prepare is another way to create positive “hype” and set Shabbos apart from the other days of the week.

**Dr. Adler:** As a psychologist, I’ll add

a development-related comment. Sometimes, parents worry that their table is a bit boring or chaotic. At times they really do need help creating a framework for the *seuda* — incorporating some of the elements above to give the meal more structure. Very often, however, part of the issue is based on unrealistic expectations. Some cheerful disorder is a normal part of life with young children. Kids shouldn’t feel like the table is a prison where they have to sit quietly like a soldier or risk getting glared at. Healthy energy is good! Some parents mistakenly believe that if they were doing everything “right,” their children would be sitting placidly, like perfectly behaved angels. I think that Hashem wants us to look at our children as “*malachim*” even when they spill the soup, giggle during divrei Torah and kick each other under the table. Kids should feel our love and pride in being their parents and enjoying time with them even when they are doing their “thing” and being kids. We shouldn’t be feeling down on ourselves or our children when our family doesn’t sit or listen perfectly. At some ages kids need to have the freedom to go back and forth from their own activities to the table, and to have some parts of the meal be more adolescent or adult oriented and some parts more “youth targeted.” When our kids were younger, we would sometimes harness their energy by spontaneously starting a game of musical chairs with Shabbos songs, between courses. [We are beyond that stage now, but we hope to eventually enjoy that again with grandchildren Be”H.] Taking walks, playing games after the meal, reading stories or special chapter books aloud, having Shabbos parties or adult treats and just enjoying our families in a more

present, slower paced manner are all ways to make Shabbos special during these times, and always.

In social psychology, there is a wealth of literature about the concept of “bias.” We often see people and events through our own perspectives. Once we wear biased glasses, everything is filtered through them. In family life we can use that concept to our advantage. We should consciously begin Shabbos with a positive bias toward our spouse, our children and our family as a whole. No matter our family’s level of parsha proficiency, their table manners or interest in helping, we should train ourselves to view them with an *ayin tova*. Our bias should be that we are blessed with the best family ever! We should work on feeling like kings and queens sitting with our royal family. Having that perspective will positively affect our mood, and in turn will affect how we react to our loved ones and their foibles. Believing we are lucky to have “the best family ever” is a win-win bias. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy it can help to create that reality!

**For those who now work from home, what are some ways to create boundaries between their personal and professional lives? What about someone who has been spending more time davening and learning at home?**

**Dr. Adler:** Working at home, and the fluidity it allows, can often enhance family dynamics. I found it convenient to put in a load of laundry or prepare dinner in the 15-minute increments I sometimes had between clients. I, and many of my friends, were also able to rearrange our schedules so that our lunchbreaks



coincided with our children's during their "home schooling" days. Many friends appreciated the fact that their husbands no longer had tiring commutes to work and were now more available for homework and household chores. Other couples found time to take a midday walk together or to reach out to each other more easily for support during daily stressors. At the same time, the fluid lines between work and home can make it difficult to have undivided family time. If we can squeeze in a chore or quick conversation in between work tasks, we might also be tempted to squeeze in some work-related emails during homework and dinner.

The home/work balance is a dance whose steps are complicated even during non-COVID times. Sometimes it can be extremely helpful to make an important work-related phone call in the evening hours. On the other hand, making that "one" phone call can also become a slippery slope that never ends. In general, studies show that people who have clear "down time," free from any work-related expectations, fare better emotionally. Interestingly, one study showed that 60 percent of employees reported an improved work-life balance during the pandemic. Most of them apparently had less family time prior to the pandemic and were now feeling more connected.

One of the boundaries I try to create for myself is to have some hours that I don't do work related tasks, even if I could technically "squeeze it in." There is a certain peace and regrouping that comes from having no work expectations on one's head. [That is part of the beauty of Shabbos, when we are to imagine that all of our work has been completed.] Recently, I

have also started doing work mostly at one specific desk. This is another well-supported technique for making a mental delineation between work and home life, even within our homes. Sitting down at the work desk turns on "work mode" expectations, and moving away from the desk helps us to switch back into "personal life mode." Leaving work phones and laptops off outside of work hours, or at least turning off notifications, is another good strategy.

**When we bifurcate the different areas of our lives — professional and family, shul and work, religious and secular — we can lose sight of the overarching purpose that unifies these different realms.**

**Rabbi Adler:** As someone whose profession is to teach Torah, my experience may differ from those who work in other fields. BH, I feel blessed that my profession is one that is close to my heart and close to the hearts of everyone in my family. I am also fortunate to have a study in my home that is stacked with sefarim and a large dining room table, which serve as excellent places to learn and prepare shiurim. My wife and children have always done their utmost to respect my "talmud Torah" space at home at all hours of day or night, so the "transition" to working from home was not overly challenging per se. What I missed, however, was the chance to interact in real time with my colleagues and talmidim at Yeshiva, as there is a unique atmosphere and

rhythm to the beis medrash and the shiur room that cannot be replicated at home or via zoom. In speaking to talmidim, I became acutely aware of the challenges that they faced learning and attending shiur remotely.

For many people, especially those in non-chinuch professions, I imagine that the transition to working at home is far more complicated. Add to that the many months that shuls were closed, when our homes had to substitute for batei knesses and batei midrash, and the need for setting appropriate boundaries between all these arenas becomes a real imperative.

I believe that while firm boundaries are essential in the practical realm, our mindset should be one of integration. When we bifurcate the different areas of our lives — professional and family, shul and work, religious and secular — we can lose sight of the overarching purpose that unifies these different realms. As Jews, we aspire to infuse *kedusha* in all that we do — in the spirit of *b'chol derachecha da'ehu* (know Him in all of your ways, Mishlei 3:6) and *kol pa'al Hashem l'ma'anehu* (Hashem made everything for a purpose, Mishlei 16:4). Ultimately, the goal of all our endeavors should be to be "*makedeish shem shamayim*" — and this motto should inform and guide every aspect of our lives.

While davening and learning at home deprived us of *tefila be'tzibur* and *talmud Torah be'rabim*, the "silver lining" was an opportunity to infuse a dimension of *kedusha* into our homes and elevate them, to a certain degree, into a *mikdash me'at*. This spirit of *kedusha* can then more readily spill over to all aspects of home life. In a similar vein, when we work from home (while setting appropriate practical boundaries), we are less

likely to become workaholics and lose sight of the value and beauty of family.

The wholesomeness that comes with living an integrated life makes us role models for our children, who observe us integrating our *avodas hatefila* with our *avodas ha'parnasa* — grabbing a siddur to daven mincha in between clients, or setting aside time to “do the daf” or to be *maavir sidra* during a lunch break. Additionally, every profession can be infused with a spiritual dimension that may also serve as an instructive model for our children. Children will naturally take pride in seeing their parents’ work ethic alongside their love for family. Aspects of our specific professions can become valuable chinuch tools to impart important values to our children — whether in terms of how the parents utilize their specific talents to help people and/or society, how they work hard to provide the family with its basic needs, or how they interact with employers, employees, or co-workers.

Finally, knowing that our family’s “eyes” are on us as we work from home can also increase our personal level of *yiras Shamayim*, helping us to more readily internalize the fact that Hashem’s eyes are also always on us. This heightened awareness can impel us to behave on a higher ethical standard.

Of course, as idealistic as all of this sounds, the ability to focus on work or on davening in the midst of our kids’ brawl, a broken appliance, or whatever other household distraction may be demanding our attention, remains a significant challenge. Obviously, having a dedicated work and/or davening space and dedicated work and/or davening times are therefore essential. I would like to address one point relating to “dress

code” when working or davening at home. Regarding davening, the halacha mandates appropriate attire in consonance with the pasuk *hichon likras Elokecha Yisrael* (prepare to meet Hashem, Israel, Amos 4:12). Obviously, that halacha does not differentiate between davening in shul and davening at home.

However, with regard to work, we might be tempted to think that while it is important to present ourselves properly while in the presence of others, such is unnecessary when working from home. I’ve heard comical stories about people doing Zoom meetings with suit jackets on top and pajamas below the eye level of the screen. While it is amusing to visualize, something about this picture doesn’t feel right. Even if we can “get away with” dressing down, it would not seem to be in our best interests to do so. The Gemara in *Shabbos* (113a) tells us that R. Yochanan would refer to his clothing as “*mechabdusi*” — the things that provide me with dignity. Therefore, there is value to adhering to a dress code even when working from home. How we dress, even in the privacy of our homes, is a reflection of our *tzelem Elokim* and reinforces our sense of inner dignity. Even if we are working in our own home and no one sees us for the entire day, the image that we see when we look at ourselves in the mirror subconsciously sets the stage for how we think and behave. Especially at a time when there is less external structure, it becomes more essential to create visual cues for ourselves that convey a message of focus, mental clarity and productivity. Over these past months, I have encouraged talmidim to dress for learning at home just as they would in a packed beis midrash.

## What are some of the lessons from the crisis that will help us long after the pandemic is over?

**Rabbi Adler:** There are many lasting lessons that we should draw from this pandemic. And it is certainly not too early to start contemplating these lessons. However, given that the crisis has yet to pass and the long-term impact it will have on individuals and society are unknown, we will need to engage in continuous soul-searching and ongoing introspection as a fuller picture emerges. Hence, the following impressions are tentative in nature, and are presented not in the spirit of “*kablu daati*” — an absolute directive — but in the spirit of “*yishma chacham ve’yosef lekach*” — a means to provoke further thought and refection.

The Gemara at the end of *Makos* describes how the entire corpus of the *taryag* (613) mitzvos rests on a few core principles. The Gemara identifies several personalities from Tanach, each of whom sought to distill the essence of *taryag* into the shortest possible list of bedrock principles. The last personality mentioned is the Navi Chavakuk (2:4), who subsumed everything under the postulate of *v’tzadik be’emunaso yichyeh* — a tzadik lives with his faith.

My strong intuition is that the lasting lessons from this pandemic all revolve around *emuna* (faith).

First, *emuna* means a recognition that what happens in the world — and especially when it is manifest on a global scale — is an expression of Hashem’s will. Although most occurrences in the world can be traced to identifiable causes, a *maamin* (believer) understands that the ultimate “mover and shaker” is the

*Borei Olam* (Creator of the Universe). From this perspective, the particular role that a province in China had in inflicting this horrific virus into our world is beside the point. There should be no doubt in our minds that a pandemic of such global proportions is part of Hashem's plan for the world.

For palpable *emuna* to penetrate our beings, we must leave aside the theological quandary regarding how to reconcile divine pre-determination with human free will and accountability — an issue tackled by the Rambam and others. Rather, we should reinforce to ourselves that COVID-19 is a manifestation of Hashem's master plan, and that it has an ultimate purpose.

That is not to imply that we should claim to know *kavshei de'rachmana* — Hashem's hidden reasons for why He unleashed this *mageifa* upon the world at this historical juncture. In the absence of a *navi* who is privy to such information, such speculation can be a distraction from engaging in genuine introspection. Even within the realm of introspection, we should avoid glib pronouncements that presume to explain COVID-19 as a “punishment” for specific moral lapses — be they within the frum world or within greater society (i.e. technology, excessive materialism, reduced standards of modesty etc.). Certainly, we must constantly seek out ways to address personal and communal shortcomings. However, strident proclamations and self-righteous finger-pointing — especially when the finger is pointed at others — will often ring hollow and breed cynicism. Moreover, singling out certain failings over others may misdirect people to search in the “wrong” places. To be effective, *tochacha* needs to

be administered with wisdom and compassion. As Chazal teach us (*Yevamos* 65b):

כשם שמצוה לומר דבר הנשמע כך מצוה שלא לומר דבר שאינו נשמע.

*Just as there is a mitzvah to say something (in a manner of rebuke) that will be followed, so too, there is a mitzvah to refrain from saying something that will not be followed.*

The source for the mitzvah of *emuna* (which the Rambam and many of the *monei hamitzvos* count as an independent mitzvah) is the pasuk *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*. In codifying this mitzvah, the *Semak* (R. Yitzchak Mi'Curbeil) comments that it requires us not only to acknowledge Hashem's existence as Creator but also to affirm His role as a redeemer — to believe that just as He redeemed us from Mitzrayim, so will He redeem us as well in the future *geula*. This aspect of the mitzvah of *anochi* should also be reinforced in the wake of this pandemic. In truth, it should be relatively easy for a Jew who possesses some familiarity with pesukim in Tanach and/or *maamarei Chazal* that deal with elements of the messianic process, and who has a basic appreciation of the totality of Jewish history and the state of the world today, to discern that the world is being readied for such an eventuality. If the gedolim of pre-war Europe such as the Chofetz Chaim could “intuit” the imminent coming of Moshiach based on their assessment of their world situation, how much more we who have the benefit of hindsight to see all of the subsequent historical developments for Klal Yisrael from then until our very day. This “*geula* mindset” is further heightened when we consider the incredible rate of technological advances in our world,

where things that are considered “routine” were in the realm of science fiction a few short decades ago.

[While the constraints of space do not allow elaboration, I think that this observation can be embraced by Jews across the hashkafic spectrum.]

The Ramchal writes in *Daas Tevunos* that Hashem orchestrates events in the world as part of His way of leading it to its state of *tikun*. He refers to this process as “*hanhagas hayichud*.” In a less mystical formulation, R. Yitzchak Meltzen (*Siddur HaGera, Ishei Yisrael*), commenting on the pasuk “*boneh Yerushalayim Hashem*” (Hashem is building Yerushalayim, Tehillim 147:2) recited in *pesukei de'zimra*, explains that the use of present tense — *boneh* (He builds) — rather than *yivneh* (He will build) — suggests that all that occurs in the course of history paves the way for the ultimate redemption. From this perspective, we can remind ourselves, whenever we express our longing for Moshiach, that the pandemic and all its fallout is a critical link in the divinely orchestrated chain of events that will ultimately usher in the *geula*.

The concept of *emuna* is closely related to that of *bitachon*. The precise nature of the relationship between these two concepts have been explained by the meforshim in various ways. For our purposes, let us adopt the following formulation: *emuna* is faith, while *bitachon* is trust. Because a pandemic is a scary reality, it is important that we strengthen not only our belief that Hashem is in charge, but also our sense of *bitachon* in Hashem — trusting in Him and in His ability to protect us from harm.

The pandemic “hit home” for us right after Purim. At the time, I shared with talmidim an insight of the Maharal on



the pasuk in Megilas Esther, which describes the agenda of Haman HaRasha who drew lots with the intent *l'humam ul'abdam* (to confound them and to destroy them 9:24). The word *l'abdam* — which means to obliterate them — is understandable. But what is the meaning of *l'humam*? The Maharal explains that while *le'abdam* relates to the *guf* (the physical body), *l'humam* relates to the *nefesh*, and connotes a sense of being distraught and panicky. When the lots that Haman cast in Nisan settled on a date 11 months later in Adar, Haman's agenda assumed a dual purpose: to annihilate the Jewish people in Adar, and to throw them into a state of panic for all of the intervening months. When facing a pandemic of this magnitude, we need to maintain our calm and avoid falling into a state of panic. **This can be done through strengthening our *bitachon*.** This is something that we can begin to work on now and hopefully continue to strengthen ourselves in, even when this crisis lifts.

In sync with the messages of *emuna* and *bitachon*, we should reinforce our appreciation for the gift of life that we are granted by Hashem each and every day. As we acknowledge in the bracha of Modim: “*al chayenu hamesurim beyadecha ve'al nishmoseinu hapekudos lach*” — for our lives that are placed in Your hands and for our souls that are entrusted to You. Related to this, we should remind ourselves of the premium that the Torah places on human life and, by extension, the significance of

the mitzvah of *v'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoseichem* — you shall greatly guard your lives. R. Moshe Rivkash, in his glosses to *Shulchan Aruch* (known as *Be'er HaGolah*), writes (in his last comments to *Choshen Mishpat*) a remarkable insight into this mitzvah. He explains that since Hashem gives us life in order that we can serve Him, that by being lax in the mitzva of *v'nishmartem* we are betraying His trust and showing ingratitude. Even though taking precautions can feel annoying and cumbersome, we must constantly remind ourselves that by adopting strict standards and protocols we are fulfilling an important mitzvah and demonstrating that we, too, treasure the gift of human life.

Over these past months, the Jewish community throughout the world has suffered the loss of countless individuals, amongst them towering Gedolei Torah, outstanding Jewish leaders and inspiring role models. Many of these losses were brought on or exacerbated by COVID, and in all of the instances, the pandemic prevented the niftarim from being granted the *kavod acharon* (final respects) in a manner that they deserved and would have otherwise received. Some of these losses hit close to home for our yeshiva, including: Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z”l, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z”l, and his wife Mindy z”l, Saadya Ehrenpreis z”l. In the larger Orthodox Jewish community, they include: the Novominsker Rebbe z”l and Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg z”l.

These words are being penned at the completion of shiva for Rav Dovid Feinstein zt”l (who I had a personal connection with since childhood), and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l. The loss of these extraordinary individuals, and that of many others not listed here, leaves a palpable void for the Jewish community. As we look back at this dark COVID-filled period, it behooves us to reflect on their respective legacies and do our utmost to emulate their noble qualities.

**Dr. Adler:** In the long run, difficult experiences are character building. Resilience appears to be one of the most important traits we can develop if we want to lead productive and fulfilling lives. If we can grow from our experiences during this period, we will be on a positive trajectory to help us through future challenges as well. My kids have already begun comforting themselves that the “Corona lockdown” will be a “real story” to tell their own children, *iy”H*, as parents themselves. In reality, it is also a story we can retell to ourselves for our own *chizuk*! Soon we will be able to say to ourselves — we got through **that**... and if we got through **that**, we can get through anything!

The pandemic also helped bring into focus what is really important in life — having an opportunity to be alive (literally), spending quality time with family, and living a Torah-infused life even without the benefit of external structure and supports. Our task is to remain in touch with these messages even as life begins to return to normal.



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## HOME IMPROVEMENT: CHANUKAH'S SPECIAL GIFT

Everyone agrees that Chanukah is a holiday that boosts our spirits in the winter season. The month of Kislev, historically, has been viewed as a hopeful time for our nation, even before the miracle of Chanukah took place. The Mishkan was completed in the desert on the 25th of Kislev,<sup>1</sup> and the foundation of the second Beit HaMikdash was started on the 24th of Kislev.<sup>2</sup> When the Chashmonaim rededicated the Mikdash on the 25th, the outpouring of joy focused on the “House of Hashem,” the *chanukat habayit*.

It is customary to recite Tehillim, Chapter 30, “*Mizmor shir chanukat habayit L'David*” at the end of

Shacharit during Chanukah, which speaks about the dedication of the first Beit HaMikdash. Similarly, the phrase is used again when we move into a new home and hold a celebration. We invite friends and family to celebrate the dedication of our home, symbolizing our own smaller-sized *mikdash me'at*, to be permeated with mitzvot. While Chanukah commemorates unique miracles, such as the jug of oil and the war with the Greeks, it is also apparent that the *chanukat habayit* aspect of Chanukah can celebrate our ability to realize our dreams of bringing Hashem's presence into our own homes, improving our inner selves, and rededicating our relationships.

The centrality of the home is highlighted in an interesting question listed in the Gemara. Certainly, we know the lighting of the Menorah is one of the significant mitzvot of Chanukah. However, the Gemara asks: What does one do if he is too poor and has only enough money to buy either Chanukah candles or Shabbat candles? The Gemara in *Shabbat* 23b, states that Shabbat candles take priority. Why would that be? Shabbat candles are lit primarily to enhance peace and harmony in the Jewish home. Rashi comments that sitting in the dark will cause discomfort and add stress in the home. *Shalom bayit* is therefore so significant that Shabbat candles

take precedence over the mitzvah of Chanukah candles.

In recent months, due to the pandemic, we have spent many days, weeks, and months in our homes in the all too familiar states of “quarantine” or “lockdown.” We have had plenty of time to think, recalibrate and direct our attention to the core values and crucial interpersonal relationships found in a “Jewish home.”

In Torah learning, when you have a repeated word or term, it is called a “*milah mancha*.” It shows us that the word is important and that we are meant to learn from its repetition and emphasis. The word “home” seems to be the recurring theme these days before the holiday of Chanukah, relegating us to our own “*bayit*.” Whether it is the many times we are recommended by health authorities to “house in place” or the aforementioned theme in Kislev of the “*chanukat habayit*” — is Hashem telling us something in this time of Chanukah?

Perhaps the answer is in what Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l calls the Jewish Algorithm. Rabbi Sacks posits that the main theme in the Jewish home is the Torah and that the lessons that we learn from the Torah make all the difference in our homes and lives. This “internal moral code” includes, but is not limited to, honesty, respect, tolerance, and responsibility.<sup>3</sup> These values are taught through modeling in our homes to our children. It is incumbent upon us to enrich our homes, elevate them and add spirituality to our relationships.

It is interesting to note that these intrinsic home values are the exact opposite of those of the Hellenistic Greeks from the time of Chanukah. The Greeks focused on externals. According to Rabbi Sacks, Hellenism

was about fitness and art, and the greatest ideal was beauty. Our Jewish homes, on the other hand, center around obligation, commitment, and hope.<sup>4</sup> When you make Torah the focal point and the ultimate guide of your home, Rabbi Sacks states, it strengthens all key relationships. The happiness and success in these relationships is dependent on Torah values.<sup>5</sup>

We are fortunate in many ways. While sitting at home these months, many people have looked around at the walls and the rooms and thought that perhaps they need to do some painting, or to purchase new furniture. However, there is more to be gained from our confinement than simple decorative home improvement. One of the benefits of working from home is that many Torah educators took to the internet and WhatsApp to start sending out short daily Torah messages. Shiurim are being given online and people could literally learn all day and night, without leaving their homes. Rabbis and teachers are succeeding in making learning at home a habit, a daily routine. Technology has assisted us by providing Zoom conferences and webinars, new apps and programs that are delivered with ease into our homes.

Of course, technology can have its flip side, its insidious and distracting impact. Rabbi David Fohrman in his book *A Parsha Companion* speaks about how man creates technological items, like the plow, to make our lives easier. However, he notes we must be aware that these items also can compete for our attention with the things that matter most — like deepening our relationships with our spouse, children, and Hashem. We may be home more often, but

are we “really” there? And if we have succeeded in bringing in shiurim and Torah to our home, have we gone the next step and improved our most important relationships with our loved ones?

## Improving Relationships

Undoubtedly, the central focus of the home is the husband and wife relationship. It used to be that the newspaper or TV were the greatest distractions that prevented couples from having meaningful moments throughout the week. With the advent of mobile technology, families are inundated throughout the day and night with distractions. We have been so busy until now looking outside of our homes that it is only now, due to the pandemic, that we have the time to focus inward on the things and relationships that bring us enduring happiness.

So how best can we improve and achieve noticeable change in our lives? This is especially challenging when we are a generation accustomed to instant gratification, a society imbued with Amazon Prime and “next day shipping.” Further, when change doesn’t happen quickly, we get frustrated and give up, even though the initial motivation was high. A new approach is now necessary to rededicate our own homes and enhance our personal relationships. Dr. David Pelcovitz, in his drasha on Leil Hoshana Rabba, mentioned that if we are looking for enduring change, he recommended the practices espoused by the behavioral scientist Dr. B.J. Fogg in his book *Tiny Habits*.

In this book, Dr. Fogg explains that if a person sets goals that are too broad, it is hard to accomplish them. He claims



that we need to break down these goals into “tiny” new positive actions or habits, and then anchor them to an existing prompt or positive behavior. The existing prompt or behavior then leads a person to perform the new habit, which will be easily remembered and constantly reinforced. Eventually, this will become a positive habitual behavior. Ease is key.

How does this translate into a better marriage? Simply stating “I want to have a stronger relationship with my spouse” may be too broad. Instead, we can insert a small new behavior into everyday life by anchoring it to a pre-existing event. Whenever the front door opens (the anchor), a spouse can happily say something like, “Welcome home!” (the new action), which pleasantly acknowledges the other person’s presence with warmth and a smile. Or, on a Shabbos afternoon when the table is finally cleared (the anchor), that can prompt a husband to say to his wife, “What a great day for a walk together” (new action). If a behavior is easily attainable, it can readily become a habit.

Tiny habits will continue and will achieve the desired long-term goals with one more component. Every time a new habit is mastered, it needs a tiny celebration, a positive reinforcement. It is the celebration that taps into the reward system in the brain. Simple celebrations may include saying the word “Yes!” or “Yay!,” a fist pump, or a big smile. We can even give ourselves the “thumbs up,” and note aloud that we achieved the new tiny habit. This releases the dopamine in the brain, making us experience positive feelings. Naturally, the brain likes the feeling, which helps make the behavior more automatic. The emotions cement the tiny habits, not the repetition and frequency,

notes Dr. Fogg. The celebratory step is the crucial ingredient to achieve a recipe for success.<sup>6</sup>

If a person has the aspiration to become more loving and appreciative, there are many “tiny habits” that can change a relationship. Saying “thank you” after a spouse makes dinner. Texting a message of appreciation after a midday coffee break. Answering “I am here for you” after listening to a husband or wife’s stressful day. These meaningful habits, tied to current everyday anchors, will create positivity in the home. Moreover, change leads to more change. We start small, build confidence, and then naturally open ourselves to positive improvement in many ways.

This is confirmed by Barbara Markway, Ph.D, who states in *Psychology Today* that these small acts of kindness can make a big difference in a relationship. Caring gestures often decline in a long-term marriage due to basic neglect. People assume that once they are married these small steps or actions do not matter. It is actually the little things that can mean everything in a relationship. By complimenting a partner, starting a new hobby together, or scheduling a weekly check-in, small actions can lead to big changes. These acts will keep your bond strong.<sup>7</sup> Remember, anchor them in a preexisting prompt, then follow it with a tiny celebration, to ensure success.

There is a final point that is relevant to our times. Rav Soloveitchik explains in his *Kol Dodi Dofek* (translated into English as *Fate and Destiny*) that we cannot truly understand why any evil befalls this world. He says Judaism teaches us that we need to recognize suffering and not ignore it. Instead, human beings should confront our environment and current

circumstances with introspection and acts of growth. Mitzvot and personal or spiritual self-improvement will undoubtedly lead us forward as we confront those challenges.

Nowadays, we dare not downplay the pandemic. The reasons, causes, or even the world reaction is beyond our comprehension. And, as many of us are now relegated to our own homes, our “bayit,” it is in that inner sanctum where we may find solace. Perhaps our current task may be to use our resourcefulness and imagination and seize our learning opportunities, while creating meaningful relationships.

This stressful time can indeed be the ideal moment for rededication and refocus as an ongoing investment to our family, and to ourselves. We can bring Hashem closer into our personal lives and make small changes, through our tiny habits, making our relationships happier and stronger. While we light the Chanukah candles this year, let us decide to actively seek those changes, sanctify our homes, and improve our lives through our own *chanukat habayit*.

## Endnotes

1. *Yalkut Shimoni* on the Book of Kings.
2. Chagai 2:18.
3. “The Jewish Algorithm,” A Commencement Speech from Rabbi Sacks <https://youtu.be/J41871B4bfk>.
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7. “Fifty Eight Caring Behaviors For Couples” by Barbara Markway, Ph.D *Psychology Today*, available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/living-the-questions/201402/58-caring-behaviors-couples>.



# CHANUKAH & THE JEWISH HOME: A STUDY GUIDE

## Talmudic Sources

When reading the following Talmudic sources, consider these questions:

1. What role does the home play in the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles?
2. Do we light Chanukah candles for the people inside the home or those outside the home?

ת"ר מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד והמהדרין מן המהדרין ... בית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

*Our rabbis taught: the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is one candle for his entire household. The scrupulous (mehadrin) light one candle for each member of the household and those who are very scrupulous (mehadrin min hamehadrin) ... Beis Hillel say that the first day, one candle and each day, one candle is increased.*

**Shabbos 21b**

ת"ר נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ אם היה דר בעלייה מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרה"ר ובשעת הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו ודיו.

*Our rabbis taught: the Chanukah candle should be placed at the doorway of one's home on the outside. If one lives on the second floor (or higher), one places it in the window closest to the public domain. During times of persecution, it is sufficient to place it on one's table.*

**Shabbos 21b**

אמר רב ששת אכסנאי חייב בנר חנוכה א"ר זירא מריש כי הוינא בי רב משתתפנא בפריטי בהדי אושפיזא בתר דנסיבי איתתא אמינא השתא ודאי לא צריכנא דקא מדליקי עלי בגו ביתאי:

*R. Sheshes said: A guest is required to light Chanukah candles. R. Zeira said: in the beginning, when I was studying at yeshiva, I would purchase a small portion of my host's oil and join with him. Once I got married [when I was away at yeshiva], I said, now it is no longer necessary to [purchase a portion of my host's oil] because [my wife] is lighting for me in my home.*

**Shabbos 23a**

## Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think there is such an emphasis on the home? Why didn't the rabbis institute that the mitzvah should be like matzah, in which each person is obligated to perform the mitzvah individually?
2. Does the *mehadrin* option focus on the household or on the individual? Explain.
3. Nowadays, when there are many places where there is no persecution and it is safe to light at the doorway, should we light outside?

## Halachic Sources

אם מותר להדליק נ"ח על הבאהן לא מצאתי הדבר מבואר אבל הלא מי ששילם בעד כל הלילה הוא כשכר לו בית דירה לאכול ולישן שם וחייב בנ"ח ומ"ש רש"י ביושב בספינה י"ל שהיו אז ספינות פתוחות בלא קירוי והרוח מנשב ולא הי' בגדר בית כלל. ואף דהבאהן אינו עומד במקום א' ורכוב כמהלך לא נמצא בשום מקום שהיה צריך בית קבוע למה שמצותו בשביל פרסומי ניסא כנלענ"ד מסבירא.

*If it is permissible to light Chanukah lights on the train, I didn't find any explicit discussion about this, but if one paid for the entire night, it is as if he rented a home to eat and sleep there and is obligated to light Chanukah lights. Although Rashi mentions someone on a boat as being exempt, one can argue that in those days, the boats had no roofs and were exposed to wind and this is not considered a home at all. Even though the train is not stationary, and ordinarily, riding is considered like walking, there is no evidence that one needs a permanent home for Chanukah lights since the purpose of the mitzvah is to publicize the miracle. This is my opinion based on logical analysis.*

**R. Shalom Schwadron, Teshuvos Maharsham 4:146**

והנה עתה אין אנו מדליקין בחוץ ואף שאין סכנה אצלינו מ"מ כמעט הוא מהנמנעות מפני שבכל המדינות שלנו ימי חנוכה הם ימי סגריר גשם ושלג ורוחות חזקים וא"א להניחם בחוץ אם לא להסגירם בזכויות וכולי האי לא אסרחוהו רבנן ועוד דבזה לא יהיה היכר למצוה כל כך וגם לא בכל המקומות יניחו לעשות כך ולכן כולנו מדליקין בבית ולכן כיון שההיכר הוא רק לבני הבית ואין היכר לבני רה"ר כלל אין לחוש כל כך אם אין מדליקין בטפח הסמוך לפתח.

*Nowadays, we don't light outside. Even when there is no danger, nevertheless, it is never done because in our area [Eastern Europe], Chanukah comes during a season of rain, snow and strong wind and it is impossible to light outside unless one places the candles in a glass case. The rabbis never required us to go through that kind of trouble to light outside. Furthermore, by putting [the menorah] in a case, it's less clear that [the lighting is being done] for the mitzvah; also, not all places would allow lighting this way. Therefore, everyone lights inside. As such, since the demonstration [that we are specifically lighting for the purpose of Chanukah] is really for those inside the home and there isn't any such demonstration to those in the public domain, it is not necessary to light in the doorway.*

**R. Yechiel Michel Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan OC 671:24**

## Aggadic Sources

נר איש וביתו נראה לבאר דמה דתקינן ב"ד של חשמונאי נ"ח בכל בית ולא תקנו להדליק בבתי כנסיות כדרך שתקנו במגילה היינו להורות עד היכן כוחה של תורה שאפילו ח"ו כמעט נשתכחה תורה מישאל ויקומו אנשים מעט כדרך שהיה בימי חשמונאים יכולין בעזרו יתברך להקים עולה של תורה והיינו נר איש וביתו כי כל משפחה בישראל יכול להרים נר של תורה ואמנם המהדרין אומרים א"צ משפחה לזאת כ"א אחד הי' ויירש אח הארץ ע"כ מדליקין נר לכל א'.

*One candle for his entire household — One can explain that the reason why rabbis of the Chashmonaim instituted that the candles be lit in each home and not in the synagogue, like they did regarding Megillah (on Purim), is because they wanted to teach us the power of Torah. Even if G-d forbid, the Torah were to be forgotten by most Jewish people and remained in the hands of a select few, the way it was in the times of the Chashmonaim, those few can, with the help of G-d, raise the yoke of Torah. That is why the mitzvah of Chanukah is one candle for the entire household — because each family has the ability to raise the candle of Torah. Nevertheless, scrupulous individuals say that this can even be done by individuals, without an entire family, and therefore, one candle is lit for each person.*

**R. Chizkiyah Feivel Plaut, Likutei Chaver ben Chaim, Vol 11, Shabbos 21b**

באגרת השמד להרמב"ם ... מה שקרה לישראל במלכות יון הרשעה מגזרות קשות ורעות ומכללם היה שלא יסגור אדם את פתח ביתו כדי שלא יתייחד להתעסק בשום מצוה וכו' ... הרי מבואר כי גזרת היוונים היתה נגד המייחד את הבית היהודי ... ולפיכך נקבע במצות נר חנוכה נר איש וביתו והיינו דחובת ההדלקה היא על הבית כדי להרגיש את ענינו של נס חנוכה בקיום הבית בישראל כאשר חזרה עטרת הבית היהודי למקומה.

*In Maimonides' Iggeres HaShmad (A Letter Regarding Persecution), he writes regarding what happened to the Jewish people when the evil Greek Kingdom decreed harsh laws, including a law that no one was permitted to close the door to his home, which prevented people from secretly engaging in mitzvos ... We see that the decrees of the Greeks were against those who consecrate the Jewish home ... Therefore, the mitzvah of Chanukah candles was instituted one candle for the entire household. Meaning that the obligation to light is incumbent on the household in order that we experience the miracle of Chanukah with the preservation of the Jewish home — when the Jewish home was restored to its proper place.*

**R. Mordechai Ilan, Mikdash Mordechai pg. 315**

## Concluding Questions:

1. Has the pandemic changed the way you think about the importance of the home? If so, how?
2. During various stages of the pandemic, there were mitzvos that we ordinarily perform in shul (i.e. the public domain) but had instead do in the privacy of our homes. How did that change of venue affect the way you performed those mitzvos?





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