A LIGHT FOR OTHERS

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The lighting of the menorah encodes a distinctively Jewish conception of resilience: light that shines for others is light that no darkness can extinguish. The halakhic structure of the mitzvah, its historical origins, and its symbolic resonances all point toward this central idea.

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 21b) describes three ascending levels of observance: the basic mitzvah of *ner ish u'beito*, a single light for the household; the *mehadrin*, lighting one for each member; and the *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, in which the lights increase each day. This tripartite structure is unique in halakhic literature. It suggests that Chanukah is not designed around minimal compliance but around expanding illumination. The mitzvah is fulfilled most fully when the light grows—when it becomes a model for how spiritual influence ought to function: outward, increasing, and shared.

This is reinforced by the halakhic requirement of placement. The menorah must be set at the entrance or in a window "*lefarsem et ha-nes*," to publicize the miracle. Unlike Shabbat candles, which create private tranquility, the Chanukah lights are inherently public. Their very purpose is relational: to illuminate not only the home but the street, the community, the passerby. In this sense, the mitzvah itself demands that our light be directed outward. We do not kindle for ourselves alone; we kindle so that others may see.

Historically, this outward orientation responds to the Hellenistic program. The decrees against circumcision, Shabbat, and Temple service were intended to extinguish the distinctive covenantal light of Israel. The Maccabean revolt was not merely self-defensive. It was a struggle to preserve the Jewish capacity to serve as a source of moral and spiritual illumination in the broader world. The rededication of the Temple and the rekindling of the menorah were expressions of the belief that Jewish light is not for the Jews alone; its purpose is to radiate covenantal meaning outward.

Rabbinic sources describe the menorah as representing wisdom and the divine presence—light that flows from God into the world. Its illumination was not utilitarian but emblematic: Israel's purpose is to model godly living in a world often dimmed by confusion or injustice. Chanukah democratizes this responsibility. With the destruction of the Temple, every Jewish home becomes a *mikdash me'at*, a miniature sanctuary whose light participates in the larger task of sanctification.

In our time, this legacy assigns contemporary Jews a new kind of Maccabean charge. Modern Maccabees understand that their task is not only to resist hatred or to insist that anti-Zionism is a modern form of antisemitism—though these tasks remain essential. The deeper, perennial charge is to model the character and values of the covenant, to embody the ethical and spiritual brightness that brings honor to God and generates light for the world. Courage is necessary, but so is kiddush Hashem: moral excellence, compassion, integrity, intellectual honesty, and a commitment to uplift others. When the Jewish people live these values visibly, they fulfill the ancient mandate of *pirsumei nisa*—public illumination—not only of a historical miracle but of a living covenant.

Chanukah thus teaches that the durability of Jewish light does not stem from power but from purpose. Light that shines for others persists. It cannot be smothered by cultural pressure, ideological darkness, or historical upheaval. When Jews illuminate the world through their character, their values, and their faith, they continue the legacy of the Maccabees—and ensure that the miracle of light endures.