



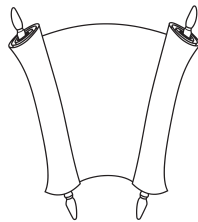
A  
Chanukah  
Reader

Eight Original Essays  
Exploring the Holiday of  
Chanukah

5759

**Our Mission:**

To enrich the Cincinnati Jewish  
community by creating an  
environment of Torah study and  
providing access to our spiritual  
heritage.



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# The Eight-Day Flame

**A Chanukah Reader**

Eight Original Essays by  
the Staff of the Cincinnati  
Community Kollel



**Cincinnati Community Kollel**

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# Chanukah and the Miracle of Recycling

And the earth was astonishingly empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters—G-d said, Let there be light, and there was light. Bereishis (Genesis) 1:2-3

All the rivers flow into the sea yet the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers flow, they are returning to flow. Koheles (Ecclesiastes) 1:7

The Midrash (Bereishes Rabbah 2:4) comments that the darkness mentioned at earth's primordial beginning is a reference to the exile of Yavan (Greece), for they darkened the eyes of the Jewish people with their decrees. We are told that these decrees included a ban against three Mitzvoths: Shabbos, Bris Milah and the dedication of the new moon. Chanukah is the celebration of the Jewish people's military victory over Yavan and their struggle to adhere to the Torah. Just as in the order of creation, where G-d responded to the darkness of Yavan by introducing light, G-d granted his people the miracle of the light of the Menorah, infusing their earthly successes with spiritual significance. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the light mentioned here in the above verse is the twenty-fifth word of the Torah—the calendar date of Chanukah. Moreover, the Rokai'ach explains that the thirty-six candles we light on Chanukah correspond to the first thirty-six hours of creation. At this time the Ohr Haganuz, G-d's special spiritual light, illuminated the world. This light, which was set aside for the righteous for the world-to-come, was revealed at the time of the miracle of the Menorah.

This presents us, however, with somewhat of a paradox. The word

Chanukah means 'dedication' or 'inauguration.' It is a starting point; an event which launches something forward and projects a focus toward the future. Even if we define Chanukah as a 'time of rededication'—the rededication of the Temple—it still seems strange that this celebration would be so closely connected to the very distant past of creation. The thrust of this paradox can be found extending into the future as well. It is certainly appropriate to inaugurate something at its start, to celebrate its continued existence and even to commemorate its beginning. However, to commemorate the inauguration itself seems to be celebrating an event after its proper time. In the context of the Temple, we could commemorate its existence, beginning, or mourn its loss. Yet how do we now celebrate its dedication?

We are familiar with the concept of cycles. We talk about life-cycle events, the events from birth to death. We see a cycle in the days of our week as they flow from its start into Shabbos, the holidays as they occur over the span of the year, and many others. However, truthfully, each of these examples, taken as a single course of events, is not a cycle at all; each one in reality is a linear experience. They each have a starting point and an ending point without any sense of returning or cycling. It is only because these events repeat themselves, week after week, year after year, or generation after generation that they we sense them as cyclical. Certainly, on a superficial level at least, we do not see the weeks or years returning to a starting point or repeating themselves, as surely as we do not envision a particular generation living itself out again in the next generation. Instead, there is a new week, a new year, a new generation following the same pattern. In order to experience the cycle we must exist beyond it, so that we are able to see it repeat itself. When we are limited by the cycle, we will only see a start and an end. Interestingly, when something continues beyond a single cycle of time and begins again, we refer to it in another way, we call it recycling.

The cycle of life, in fact, presents a very frightening picture. Every living thing grows, flourishes and develops, but the level achieved is never maintained. Invariably, as the phases progress, decline sets in, life fades and eventually ends. From this perspective even the initial growth can unfortunately be viewed ultimately as a march toward death. We experience this sense of atrophy and decline in another form during our lives, as well. We are all familiar with the phenomenon of inspired resolutions that are quickly forgotten. New activities which we initially approach with excitement and zeal become routine and our level of per-

formance suffers from laxity and indifference. All things in our physical world seem to be set up for decline, to be replaced with something else, but never maintained.

There is a danger when we think of our own existence in this linear, fatalistic way. There comes the urge to live for the moment, to consume that which can be consumed, to amass that which can be amassed, to enjoy that which can be enjoyed while we can, before time runs out, because after that there is nothing. This outlook is the ideology of Yavan—or Greece. The Hebrew word Yavan is spelled יָוָן. Each of these letters can be written either as a single point or line, without any curvature, turn or loop; they merely start and end. The darkness that Yavan represents is a view of life as a brief day followed by an endless night, without any thought of another tomorrow. Yavan acknowledged the continuity of our existence from day to day. However, they refused to see the arrival of each new day after the darkness of the intervening night, as a metaphor for the relationship between this world and the world-to-come. They did not see their existence continuing after the completion of life in the physical world. It is our spiritual component, of course, that allows us to do this, our Neshama (soul) which exists beyond the limits of this finite physical world. Yavan, however, saw no way to escape this world's linear nature; they saw only an end. It is no wonder that they sought to indulge their physical being with all that this world has to offer and viewed it as an end unto itself.

G-d's response to this dark view is the creation of the Ohr Haganuz, his special light. This light, present at the start of creation and put aside for the world-to-come bridges these two worlds. It allows us to escape the darkness created by the physical limits of our world, just as a flame allows us to escape the darkness of the night and bridge our days. G-d revealed this light within the miracle of the lights of the menorah burning for eight days.

The number of days of Chanukah is quite significant in regards to the concept of cycles. Seven is the number that signifies the idea of a cycle, the primary example of which is the seven days of the week. As we have discussed, the number seven in the context of a week represents only a start and an end. Only by counting eight days do we, in reality, return to the day with which we started. Eight represents a true cycle, giving the sense of continuation. Our existence, by virtue of our eternal soul, is not limited to any cycle; to the contrary, we travel through these cycles. We return to those that seem to repeat themselves, and we pass, just

once, those which we call once-in-a-lifetime events. It is these cycles and events which are, in fact, fixed and limited—we are not. The revelation of G-d's special light during this eight-day period speaks to and of our soul. A man's soul is the lamp of G-d ... (Proverbs 20:27).

These two approaches to life—eternal versus finite—and its cycles were at the heart of the decrees enacted by Yavan against the Jewish people. Each of those three Mitzvoths is rooted in our concept of time. Every eighth day we return to Shabbos—not to the end of another week, but to a time to re-experience the Shabbos of creation. In the lexicon of our Rabbis we often find the day of Shabbos referred to as Shabbos Bereishes, the Shabbos of creation. We spend the day connecting to our creator, and trying to experience it as G-d intended when He rested on that first Shabbos. Each week we are reliving that first Shabbos.

The new-moon which we sanctify each month is not really new at all. It is the same moon as last month, returning once again to a particular point in its cycle. Although the moon fades from sight each month, the point at which we will again see it is fixed. We merely need to await the moon's arrival as it travels through its orbit, reminding us each time that existence is not limited to what we can perceive at any given moment. Amazingly, we recite a prayer each month during the Kiddush Levanah (Blessing on the new-moon) asking for the final redemption, when G-d will return the moon to its former luster, that its light will be like that of the sun and of the special primeval light, as it was at the time of creation. It is quite fitting that the Jewish people are compared to the moon—eternal, always returning even as they seem destined to fade. (The nations of the world are compared to the sun which is actually fixed and only appears to have an orbit.) The decree against the observance of the new-moon was an attack against the true notion of the cycles of the Jewish calendar. This is especially apparent when we consider that all of the remaining holidays of the Jewish year are determined by the cycles of the moon.

Circumcision, by no coincidence, occurs on the eighth day after birth. Certainly among its many meanings is the message that the body and its pursuit of enjoyment are not the end-all; rather, it is merely a tool to be used by the soul to serve G-d. This newly circumcised baby, joining the Jewish people on the day he marks his first return through the cycle of days of the week, is blessed to go on to reach Torah, Chupah and good-deeds; a life viewed as a forward progress, not a race toward demise.

There is an entirely different sense of cycle present here as well. The



father of the newborn was himself circumcised at eight days. Obviously, he was not in a position to participate in that decision. Yet, when he brings his own son to circumcision, he grants his tacit approval to that a prior act, casting it into an entirely new light. Thus, the father, at the circumcision of his son, 'returns' to his own circumcision and redefines it.

Our struggle with Yavan was over the definition of our very existence, the nature of our world and our purpose in it. We argued for eternity, while Yavan pointed to atrophy. With the miracle of the menorah G-d shed his light on these basic truths.

Consider for a moment the timing of this miracle. The Jewish people had already lost their first Temple and were no longer able to reach the level of a prophecy. Furthermore, open miracles, present at the time of the first Temple were not found in the second Temple. From the destruction of the first Temple they had never achieved true independence and were now poised for total domination by the Greeks. A look into the future would have presented a horrific vision of yet another destroyed temple, years of exile and all of its tragedies. In summary, one would have seen people on the decline, poised to fade and vanish. In the midst of all of this came a startling military upset and the revelation of the miracle of the menorah, the light awaiting us at the final redemption.

The triumph of Chanukah, manifested in its miracles, is the validation of the Jews as an eternal people, the reality of man's spiritual nature and continuing existence and of the ultimate success of G-d's plan for the world. In this context Chanukah, the rededication, is no longer a single point in time; rather, it is something that we re-experience each year. (In fact, according to the Rokai'ach, we have the power to bring back that special light of creation each year, when we light the Chanukah candles.) The message of Chanukah, however, is something we are always experiencing, something we need to tap into to overcome the atrophy of our physical reality. That is the other related message of the miracle.

The Ramban (Bamidbar/Numbers 8:2) based on the Midrash, sees in the instructions to Aaron to light the menorah in the Tabernacle an allusion to the victory of his descendants the Chashmona'im and the miracle of Chanukah. Interestingly, at the conclusion of those instructions, the Torah states that Aaron performed the lighting as G-d had instructed. The Midrash explains that this was a note of praise to Aaron that he made no changes. It is difficult to understand the meaning of this praise. We would expect that Aaron, or anyone receiving instruction from G-d would do as told and make no changes. What do we see

here that is praiseworthy?

The Sfias Emes opens our eyes to the profundity of this statement. When the Torah says that Aaron made no changes it means that he never made any changes, not the first time he lit, not the tenth, not the thousandth, not the ten-thousandth. Every time he lit the Menorah he did it exactly the way he had done it that very first time, with the same excitement, the same zeal, devotion and desire to serve G-d. That is an outstanding accomplishment. To maintain such a level of performance runs counter to the human condition. We expect decline and demise; we see it everywhere in this physical world. But we are not really of this physical world; we have a spark of the eternal. This is the message of the Menorah and Aaron reflected it in his service.

This was really the miracle of the Menorah as well. Was there really a miracle on each of the eight days that the Menorah was lit? It would seem that there was a miracle on only seven of these days, as there was enough oil for one day to begin with. There are many answers to this question, but most of them point to the same ultimate conclusion. The bottom line is that the miracle was that the Menorah was lit with the same oil for all eight days. Just as Aaron defied the physical limits of this world with his consistence, serving the same way each day, the oil escaped its physical limits, remaining each day to provide the light of the Menorah. The message to us, though, is really the reverse. G-d defied the laws of this physical world to give us the miracle of Chanukah, but we have the ability to perform miracles each day, as Aaron did, defying our physical limits in serving G-d.

# Breaking the Bonds of Bris

When we think of the story of Chanukah and the conflict between the Maccabees and their followers against the forces and influence of the Greeks, we think primarily of the spiritual heroism of the Jews. But what of the perpetrators? What were their motives and beliefs about Judaism? Let us explore the minds of our enemies through the prism of Divrei Chazal—the words of our holy sages.

Sfas Emes and other chassidic works quote a statement of our sages that the Greeks decreed against the Jews to desist from the performance of three mitzvos: Chodesh—the determination of the onset of the new Jewish month, Shabbos, and Milah—circumcision. If we delve deeply into aspects of these three commandments, we will find a commonality present at the core of the mission of the Greeks. First, however, let us look at a phrase from the Chanukah liturgy that describes an event which casts a spotlight on the outlook of the Greeks.

In Maoz Tzur we sing "ufortzu chomos migdalei"; that the Greeks "breached the walls of my tower" a reference to an incident recorded in Mishna Midos (2:3). The Mishna describes a lattice fence that surrounded the walls of the inner courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem. It goes on to tell us that the Greeks made thirteen breaches in this fence. The significance of this fence is that according to Mishna Kelim (1:8) no gentile was allowed to pass that boundary. It is evident that the Greeks breached that fence in order to symbolize their opposition to the Torah's separation between Jew and gentile.

It is well known that the stated goal of the Greek persecution of the Jews during the period of Chanukah was not to exterminate them, but rather to Hellenize them, thereby making the Jewish people just another subdivision of Greek civilization. This made the Torah's demands for Jewish distinctiveness anathema to their goal of Hellenization. The distinction between two items is highlighted when it is contrasted against

the backdrop of what they share in common. Areas of belief and practice where Jew and Gentile share common ground and yet the Torah demands of the Jew an added level of relationship and responsibility, highlight their differences.

I wish to suggest that Chodesh, Shabbos, and Milah which the Greeks decreed against, are all areas where the Torah gives the Gentile a role, yet where the Jew has an entirely different capacity. The role of a Jew in these areas is defined not only by a different set of responsibilities, but by a unique covenantal relationship with G-d. In order to understand this we must first know that the Torah speaks to Gentiles as well as to Jews, though in a more limited fashion. The Torah expects the "religion" of the Gentile to be the Noahide laws of conduct. Though there are only seven Noahide laws per se, we will see that there are a number of other items that apply to, if not all, but at least to some gentiles.

Let us look first at Shabbos. In Shmos (23:12) we are told regarding the commandment of Shabbos, "VTinafesh ben amosecho vehager" "The son of your maidservant and the ger shall rest." Who is the "ger" or "stranger" described here? The Mechilta quoted by Rashi tells us that it refers not, as it often does, to the righteous convert, but rather to ger toshav: the righteous gentile whose religion is the Noahide law. The Mechilta goes on to report of a disagreement as to the nature of this "Noahide Shabbos." Either a gentile must refrain on Shabbos from those acts of Melacha—creative work – that a Jew may not perform on Yom Tov (festivals), or from those he may not perform on Chol Hamoed—the intermediate days of the festivals. The Jew however must refrain from a more comprehensive set of activities on Shabbos. He may not perform any one of thirty-nine categories of work; the same categories as were used in the in the construction of the Mishkan—the Tabernacle constructed in the desert. Our Sages derived this from the juxtaposition of the area of the Torah's commandment of Shabbos and the commandment to build the Mishkan. In that section regarding Shabbos (Shmos 31:13-16) G-d describes the Shabbos both as "An eternal sign between Myself and the Children of Israel" and most significantly as a "Bris"—a covenant.

Let us now look at Chodesh. I wish to suggest that this Greek decree against the Jewish calendar was symptomatic of an opposition to a more fundamental issue. This was an opposition to the system of tradition known as the Oral Law. The Jewish calendar is lunar-based, and as such, every month is either 29 or 30 days long. This is due to the fact that the lunar orbit around Earth is slightly longer than 29 and a half days.

According to many authorities, the underlying determinant of whether any particular month will have 29 or 30 days is part of the oral tradition stretching back to Sinai (see Rabbeinu Bechaye, Shmos 12:1 quoting Rabbeinu Chananel). This being so, there would hardly be any more relevant and powerful issue over which the Oral Law dictated control of the nation than the determination of the calendar. What is manifest then in the opposition to Chodesh by the Greeks and their Hellenist Jewish followers, was a head-on confrontation over the validity of the Oral Torah.

Just as we shown in the case of Shabbos, Torah also is an area which the gentiles felt they had a claim, yet the Jewish possession of the Oral Torah represents a unique and covenantal relationship between the Jews and G-d. Just prior to the period of the Chanukah episode, Ptolmey, the Greek ruler of Egypt, had forced the Jewish sages to translate the Written Torah into Greek, in what became known in the gentile world as the Septuagint. Thus, when the Greek persecutions began, the Written Torah already "belonged" to the entire world. There is a Midrash (quoted in the introduction to Sefer Mitzvos HaGadol as having it's source in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer) that Providence arranged that the need to formally write down the Oral tradition in the form of the Talmud occurred only after the establishment of Christianity and Islam. This timing denied the gentile religions the ability to use the Oral Torah as part of their faiths in the same way that they did with the Written Torah (the actual availability of written texts of the Talmud, according to many authorities, postdated the establishment of Islam). This historical circumstance was an affirmation of what Rabbi Yochanan teaches in Talmud Gittin (60b), that the covenant that G-d made with the Jews about Torah was made in reference to the Oral Torah. This prized and uniquely Jewish possession roused the ire of the Greeks and stood in opposition to their universalist goals.

Milah too is not only the province of the Jew. The Talmud Sanhedrin (59b) teaches that when Abraham was commanded to perform circumcision, that requirement passed on not only to his Jewish progeny, but also to those children (and their decedents) that Abraham bore after he received the commandment of milah even though they would be gentiles. Milah has two elements to the procedure. There is the basic removal or milah of the primary foreskin called orlah. The second element is called priyah and involves the pulling back of a remaining membrane. The priyah, rules Shaagas Aryeh (Chapter 49), was not incumbent upon

Abraham himself, nor upon his gentile decedents who otherwise must practice milah. Furthermore, Bais Halevi (Lech Lecha) maintains that the true covenant of milah is only when accompanied by priyah. Thus G-d's promise to Abraham "and I will place my covenant" (Beraishis 17:2) regarding circumcision was really referring to the future covenant that G-d would have with the Jewish people when they would begin to practice the uniquely Jewish form of circumcision—milah with priyah.

We have now seen the common theme that runs through the three mitvos that the Greeks attempted to abolish from among the Jews. They wished to remove items that highlighted not only a unique Jewish role, but most importantly, items that were bound up in an exclusive relationship—a bris—between the Jew and his G-d. This motivation can be seen clearly in a quote from the Greek tyrant Antiochus himself. This quote is actually the only known source for the tradition of the decrees against Chodesh, Shabbos and Milah. It is found in a work known as Megilas Antiochus, which according to Rav Saadiah Gaon (10<sup>th</sup> century C.E.) was written by the Chashmonaim themselves. In this quote, Antiochus tells his people that "let us destroy the covenant... of Chodesh, Shabbos and Milah." With this statement, the mind of our enemy is revealed. He wished first and foremost to destroy the special relationship between the Jews and their G-d.

# The True Miracle of Chanukah

“What is Chanukah?” That is the question set forth in the Talmud Shabbos. Rashi, the premiere commentator on the Talmud explains the question to mean, ‘because of which miracle was the holiday of Chanukah established ?’ Before we analyze the Talmud’s answer let us review the historical events that led up to the miracles of Chanukah.

The king of the Seleucid empire Antiochus the third (223-187 B.C.E.) invaded Judah in 199 B.C.E., and in a series of battles outmaneuvered Ptolemy’s army and forced its withdrawal from Judah . By 198 B.C.E. Judah had passed from the Ptolemaic empire to the Seleucid empire. Prior to these events, Greek culture had made a profound impact on the land of Judah. The major counterforce the Jewish nation had to face was the prevailing Greek culture. The pressure of Hellenism ravaged Jewish society. A series of tragic events combined, caused the cultural dispute between the Hellenized Jews, and their Rabbinic foes to snowball into an outright, physical war.

Antiochus the fourth (son of Antiochus the third) declared himself diety , and his likeness to be worshipped publicly. Simultaneously he attempted to gain world dominion by use of force. Antiochus was particularly interested in the complete domination of Judah. He intended to use Judah as a base for his conquest of Egypt, and the destruction of his archenemies, the Ptolemys. Antiochus enlisted the Jewish Hellenists in his cause. The vehicle for the Hellenists attempt at victory would be the office of the high priest.

In 174 B.C.E. Choneo, the high priest of the temple in Jerusalem, and a devout Jew, was replaced by his Hellenized brother, Jason. Jason committed himself to the realization of Antiochus’s goal, the complete Hellenization of the people of Judah. Jason influenced many of the Temple’s priests to disregard the strict observance of Temple rituals. He encouraged the Jewish population to adopt Greek sports, and values

in their entirety, even the pregame sacrifices to Greek gods. However, the extreme Hellenist Jews accused Jason of not being “Greek enough,” which caused his removal from office by Antiochus. He was replaced by Menelaus, who won the position through enormous bribes to . In order to pay these debts, Menelaus and his brother Lysimachus sold off many of the golden vessels of the Temple.

However, at the same time, Menelaus and Lysimachus were aware of the growing opposition towards them. The Rabbis openly preached their opposition towards Hellenism, and Menelaus in particular. Lysimachus got nervous, and ordered his army to subdue their Rabbinic foes. The people of Jerusalem joined in a revolt against Menelaus and Lysimachus . Emissaries were sent to Antiochus, demanding the removal of Menelaus. Once again Menelaus used bribery, flattery, and lies, to convince Antiochus of his loyalty, and importance. Many of Menelaus’s foes were then put to death. An open civil war was now imminent.

In 169 B.C.E. Antiochus realized his dream of conquering Egypt, and disgracing the Ptolemys. His triumph was short-lived. The new superpower of the era, Rome, objected to this conquest, and forced Antiochus to withdraw from Egypt, by threatening him with war. Antiochus’s defeat fooled the Jews, led by Jason, into thinking they could safely rebel against Menelaus’s rule. Antiochus, embittered by his failed Egyptian campaign turned to deal with the unrest in Jerusalem. He perceived the struggle between Menelaus and Jason as a rebellion against him, and invaded Judah, capturing Jerusalem in the process. In the course of the battle Antiochus’s troops massacred thousands of innocent Jews.

In addition to physical domination, Antiochus began his attempt to eradicate Judaism. He entered the temple in Jerusalem , and pillaged the golden vessels . Using force he reinstated Menelaus to the high priesthood. Antiochus was not convinced of Menelaus loyalty to his ambition of eradicating the religious way of life. He sent the trusted, Apollonius with a large army to Jerusalem. Another massacre took place, with innocent Jews again being killed, and the temple was breached in ten areas. Greek temples and altars were set up throughout the land. A decree was made that pigs were to become the usual sacrificial animal, even in the Holy Temple. Circumcision was banned, as was the celebration of Jewish Festivals and the Sabbath, the declaration of the new moon, keeping kosher, ritual purity, and the study of Torah. Consequently, almost all forms of Jewish behavior was forbidden, and punishable by death.

Menelaus began Antiochus’s work immediately. The scholars of Israel



were singled out, and put to death. Pious Jews were tortured and killed, upon their refusal to eat pork, or sacrifice pigs. The future of Judaism was seriously at risk, as it seemed as if the Hellenists, and Antiochus had the upper hand. At this crucial moment, a handful of heroic Jews entered the scene, and saved Judaism from its imminent plight .

This group of Jews was led by Matityahu ben Yochanan, who was of priestly origin. He, and his family lived in the village of Modiin. When the Greek army attempted to permeate Modiin with pagan worship, Matityahu bravely led his sons, and fellow townspeople in a revolt, killing the Hellenized Greek representative and the Syrian-Greek soldiers. This act spurred a general Jewish revolt against Antiochus, Menelaus, and Hellenism. Matityahu, and his 5 sons rallied an army of six thousand, who called themselves the 'Macabees,' or 'Chashmonaim.' Macabee is an acronym for Mi Camocha Baylim Hashem (who is like you amongst the powers, Hashem). Several generals were sent to put down the Macabee's revolt, yet all of them failed. Antiochus, enraged by the embarrassing failures of his generals, swore to destroy the Jews and their homeland. Antiochus appointed Lysias as head of his government. Lysias in turn appointed three of the most able generals: Ptolemei Dorimenes, Nikanor, and Gorgias to eradicate the Chashmonaim. A huge army of almost 50,000 soldiers entered Judah, and camped near the town of Emmaus. Exhibiting great courage, Yehuda, Matityahu's son, led the greatly outnumbered Macabee's, to defeat the Greek army. After the victory, the Chashmonaim joyously took to the task of purifying the Holy Temple. The Jewish army destroyed the pagan idols on the Temple Mount, purified the Temple and its vessels, and finally expelled the hated Hellenists. As part of the Temple re-dedication, they lit the Menorah, which, although enough oil was present to last only one day, miraculously burned for eight days . this left enough time to produce, and obtain fresh, pure oil. (This history is based on Rabbi Wein's book Echoes of Glory)

Now that we are familiar with the history of the holiday, let us reexamine the statement quoted earlier from the Talmud Shabbath. The question asked was: Because of which miracle was the holiday of Chanukah established? Was it the military victory of 6,000 Macabees defeating the massive 50,000 man-army of the Greeks, or was it the one-day vial of oil, that remained burning in the Temple for eight days ? What is the answer given by the Talmud? Upon the return of the Chashmonaim to the Holy Temple, they found only one small jug of ritually pure oil. This jug contained just enough oil to burn for only one

day. A miracle took place, and that small jug of oil burned for eight full days. Due to this miracle, the holiday of Chanukah was established for future generations, to praise, and give thanks to Hashem. The Talmud does not mention one word about the great military victory. Not one word about the unbelievable defeat of the Hellenists, and the rescue of Judaism. Paradoxically, if one were to look at the special prayer we add to the shemona esrei on Chanukah its main emphasis is the miraculous military feat, how the few beat the many, and the weak beat the strong. Here there is no mention whatsoever of the miracle with the oil. Based on this prayer, how can the Talmud say that Chanukah was established due to the miracle of the oil, and not mention the war?

The main reason for Chanukah is that the traditional Jews miraculously defeated the Hellenists. For this we praise and thank Hashem for eight days. However if not for the miracle of the oil, which blatantly broke the laws of nature, we may have overlooked G-d's role in the story of Chanukah. We may have said that Yehuda the Macabee was the greatest general of all time, and his military prowess led to the Macabee's victory. As impossible as it seems we may have attributed the entire miracle of the war to natural means, and taken G-d out of the picture. Only after the Chashmonaim witnessed the Menorah with enough oil for a day burning for eight full days, they came to the realization that also the preceding events were a miracle. Through the oil they were able to recognize the hand of G-d. After this recognition they were ready to establish the holiday of Chanukah, to praise, and thank G-d. Now we are able to understand why the Talmud cites the miracle of the oil as the reason for the establishment of Chanukah. If not for the miraculous oil, the Jews would have overlooked Hashem's role entirely, and there would not have been the institution of a holiday. In the prayers, however we thank Hashem for the military victory over the Greeks and Hellenists, which granted the continuation of traditional Judaism for generations to come.

On a deeper level, what can we learn from the holiday of Chanukah? If we were to pay close attention to daily events, we would realize that everything is a miracle. The miracle of the oil led the Jews to this realization. This idea can be illustrated from a story in the Talmud, Tractate Ta'anis, 25a. One Friday afternoon Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa returned home, and found his daughter in tears. He asked his daughter what was troubling her. She explained that she had mistakenly placed vinegar instead of oil in her vessel, and she would be unable to light

the wick for Shabbath . To this Rabbi Chanina replied, “The G-d who told oil to burn can tell vinegar to burn too.” She placed a wick in the vinegar, and it burned the entire Sabbath. Why was Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa able to perform this miracle? He was on such a high spiritual level, that he realized that everything that happens in this world is a miracle. Even scientists can not give a rational explanation for everything that occurs. They can explain how things happen, but not ‘why.’ Scientists can tell us what makes oil burn, but not why oil burns. Rabbi Chanina realized that G-d runs the world. G-d is the one who created the laws of nature, and therefore He can break the laws of nature when necessary. To Rabbi Chanina oil burns because G-d wills it to, and G-d can just as easily will vinegar to burn.

There is a famous question asked about Chanukah, by the Bais Yosef. The Menorah remained burning for eight days, but the Chashmonaim found enough oil for one day. Presumably, we should only commemorate the seven days that the Menorah stayed lit miraculously. Why do we celebrate a full eight days? One answer, which parallels the idea above is that the first day that the oil was lit was also a miracle. The fact that oil burns at all is a miracle in itself.

As we gaze at the Chanukah lights this year, and reflect on the miracles in the days of the Chashmonaim, let us also think about the incredible miracle of life. We should strive to reach the level of Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa, and recognize that everything that happens to us is a result of divine intervention. Our Father in heaven loves us, and takes care of our every need. May we merit the recognition of G-d’s intervention in every aspect of our personal life, and in all of our endeavors. Have a happy and meaningful Chanukah.

# (Not) Just Another Breach in the Wall

The famous song we sing on Chanukah, Maos Tzur, records the events of the victory of the Chashmonaim against the Greeks. Among the destructive acts of the Greeks, the song depicts the following: *ufarzu chomos migdolai*, ( they breached the walls of my towers, ) which is described in greater detail in the Mishna in Middos (2:3):

Within it (the wall of the Temple Mount) was the soreg, ten hand breaths high. There were thirteen breaches in it; these had been originally made by the kings of Greece, and when they (the Chashmonaim) repaired them they enacted that thirteen prostrations should be made facing them...<sup>1</sup>

The commentary of the Bartenura on this Mishna explains that the soreg was a lattice fence constructed of thin slats of wood. In the context of the Mishnayos in Middos, the discussion of the location and size of the soreg seems altogether appropriate. However, it seems puzzling that the Mishna should detail the number of breaches that were made in this fence. Not only does the historical minutia seem irrelevant, what was the purpose of instituting prostrations at the places where it was breached? Moreover, why was it necessary that thirteen prostrations be instituted; seemingly one would have sufficed? In fact, Why didn't the Greeks just destroy it entirely in the first place?

One of the opinions as to the function of the soreg is that of the Tosfos YomTov, who suggests that the function of the soreg was to create a boundary beyond which the gentiles were forbidden to pass as they came onto the temple mount to visit and offer voluntary sacrifices.

Rabbi Gedalyah Schorr, in his work *Ohr Gedalyahu* (Moadim: Chanukah p.66) builds upon the approach of the Tosfos YomTov to comprehend the significance of the breached walls. He offers a profound

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1 Soncino English edition of the Talmud, Soncino Press.

approach which views the physical battles in Jewish history as representative of parallel battles between cultures in spiritual matters. He quotes the Sfas Emes who says that the ideology of the Greeks did not forbid religious expression, yet it shunned the notion that one nation could have a unique role in worship. Therefore, the Greeks attacked the soreg, the very symbol of distinction between Jew and gentile.

Yet the question still remains: why did they make specifically 13 breaches—why did they not just destroy the soreg, and along with it any notion of spiritual separateness? To address this question, Rabbi Schorr takes the spiritual parallel a step further. He points out the significance of the number thirteen as it relates specifically to defining our spiritual role: the thirteen Attributes of Mercy of G-d. These are thirteen adjectives used to describe G-d's characteristics. They depict, in human terms, how G-d relates to the Jewish nation and how the Jewish nation should relate to the world and G-d. The Torah teaches that we are obligated to imitate G-d in His actions, as stated in the verse which implores us: *vehalechta b'drochov* to go in His ways. The Talmud Shabbos (133b) says in reference to the statement uttered at the splitting of the sea: *zeh keili veanveihu*; This is my G-d and I will glorify Him: Abba Shaul says: *Ve anveihu*—you shall make yourself similar to G-d; just as He is merciful, so too shall you be merciful. Similarly, Rashi's commentary on this verse also regards the connotation of *anveihu* as being a contraction of the two words *ani ve hu*; (me and Him)—make yourself like G-d by cleaving to His ways. This paradigm, continues Rabbi Schorr, gives every Jew the ability to become G-d-ly. This was in essence what the Greeks were battling: the Jewish claim to a special link to the Creator. They consequently denied that there can exist a special holiness in the Jewish nation that allows them to actually reflect the attributes of G-d.

This now brings us to the next stage of the Mishna: the corrective institution of the Chashmonaim. In what way did the innovation of bowing at the site of the thirteen former breaches add to the victory? Did not the very re-building of the wall indicate our physical victory, as well as attesting to the fact that our spiritual connection to G-d was intact?

Rabbi Schorr quotes the Chiddushei HaRim who explains that the trait characterizing the Greeks was brazenness; a trait which mirrored the trait of the snake in the Biblical account of the Garden of Eden. As our sages teach, the snake was the Satan, or 'yetzer hora' (evil inclination), which is present in all of us. In enticing Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the snake reasoned that G-d wanted to limit Adam and

Eve's potential, and if they were to eat of the fruit, they would become like G-d. From this it can be learnt that the snake represents a lack of subjugation to Hashem.

Along the same lines, the Talmud Bava Kamma (16b) states: One who does not prostrate during the thanksgiving blessing of the *shmoneh esrei* (silent prayer) will have their spine turn into a snake in the grave. The commentary of the Maharsha on this passage elucidates this cryptic statement. Bowing, he says, represents subservience, and in prayer that obviously means subservience to G-d. Thus, in effect, one who does not indicate in his prayers that G-d alone rules over him, is going in the path of the snake, or the *yetzer hora*, and is declaring that he is his own ruler.

In another passage of the Talmud, Kiddushin (30a), the Maharsha makes another fascinating connection between the symbols of the snake and spine. When the snake is punished in the garden of Eden, G-d states *Al Gechoncha Telech*—You (the snake) shall crawl on your belly. The word for belly in the Torah, *gechon*, is spelled without the letter *vav*, in order to indicate that the snake lacked 'spine<sup>2</sup>.' That is to say, he brought the curse upon himself of being destined to slither on the earth. Interestingly, a snake resembles little more than an abnormally elongated spine. Perhaps this serves as a punishment befitting the crime, giving us the ability to 'learn' from the snakes brazenness.

Hence, says the Chiddushei HaRim, the institution of the Chashmonaim was in direct contrast to the evil intent of the Greeks. The Greeks had an ideology of spiritual brazenness, denying the existence of a chosen people and the authority of G-d as the Ultimate Ruler. This doctrine was representative of the Biblical snake. The Chashmonaim therefore fought this evil, not only physically, but spiritually. The way to fight the *yetzer hora*, or the snake, is to increase ones realization of his reliance upon the Almighty. They therefore instituted bowing at the soreg surrounding the Temple; this being the very action which bespeaks our reliance upon G-d and our emulation of Him. In essence, the Chashmonaic enactment was not at all obscure or unnecessary. It was designed to safeguard the areas of our ideology that define our very

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2 The Hebrew letter '*vav*' **kabbalistically** represents the spine of the body. Just as the spine connects the head to the body, so too the *vav* is the letter representing a connection between the physical (body) and the spiritual (the head). Thus, by denying a spiritual subservience to G-d, the **Maharsha** states that the snake is seen to lack the qualities of the letter *vav*—as indicated by the *vav* being absent in the word *gechon* in the Biblical curse.

essence as the Jewish nation. They realized that to ensure the integrity of our 'spiritual temple,' we need to combat any external forces that tell us to deny our ability to come close to G-d in a unique way.

We commonly refer to Chanukah, as does the song Maoz Tzur, as the time 'lehodos u'lehallel,' to express thanks and praise. Hopefully these insights mentioned in the Ohr Gedalyahu will add even deeper meaning to that phrase. Giving thanks necessarily admits dependance and submission which seemingly incongruously is linked to the ability to come closer to our Creator. This in turn facilitates our ability to emulate His Attributes of Mercy. May we merit to use this holiday of Chanukah as an opportunity to increase our awareness of our dependance on Hashem, and in so doing, aspire to achieve higher levels in self-perfection.

### **Suggested further reading**

For those who wish to analyze more deeply the thirteen attributes of G-d, and how we can practically aspire to emulate Him, the book *Tomer Devorah* by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero is an excellent start, and is now available in English (entitled *The Palm Tree Of Devorah*).

# Chanukah and the Snow in the Winter

(or Daddy, Why Does It Snow in the Winter?)

## **Introduction: Chanukah and Snow**

Chanukah is a holiday that means many different things to many different people. There are many among the Jewish people that stress the military victory over the Greeks and use Chanukah as a source of inspiration in combating today's enemies of the Jews. Others may attempt to derive strength from Chanukah in resisting today's secular cultural lures just as the Jews at that time resisted assimilation into the Greek Hellenist society. Indeed, Chanukah does offer many different lessons for all to learn. But did you ever consider that Chanukah and its message could actually have much to teach us about the Snow in the Winter? Come, let us explore the meaning of Chanukah with spiritual growth as our goal and we shall learn of the strong connection that Chanukah and Snow have.

## **The Complete Torah**

Moshe received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. He spent 40 days and nights as a student of G-d, learning the wisdom of the Torah in its entirety. There was nothing that was not taught to Moshe and when Moshe gave the Torah to the Jewish people he gave them a perfect set of laws. The Torah given at Sinai included all components necessary to live a full life in the service of G-d and was not lacking anything. What then are we to make of the entire section of Jewish law which is Rabbinic? Why would the Rabbis add new laws to a perfect Code given by G-d Himself?

The only possible solution<sup>1</sup> to this difficult question is to realize that every Rabbinic law that we encounter within the framework of Torah does not exist as an ideal. Rather, the existence of Rabbinic laws reflects a failing of the Jewish People within particular areas which forced the



Rabbis to respond and correct these failings. As the first mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches:

Assu Syag LeTorah—Make a fence around the Torah when you deem it necessary. Add<sup>2</sup> precepts and rituals to the Torah to enhance the performance of each of the 613 commandments.

But ideally, the original Torah given directly by G-d was designed to be “self-sufficient” in terms of spiritual growth.

This concept applies equally to the subject of Biblically ordained holidays and their Rabbinic additions. Let us first describe the framework of a Biblical Holiday Calendar and afterwards we may begin to appreciate the innovation of the Rabbinic Holidays.

### **The Biblical Holiday Season**

If one studies the Biblical holidays one discovers that there are 5 Biblically mandated Festivals. The holiday season begins with Passover in the Spring, continues with Shavuot 50 days later, and ends with Rosh HaShannah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot at Summer’s end. All of these holidays take place during the Spring and Summer. There are no holidays prescribed for the Fall and Winter months. Without the Rabbinic additions of Chanukah and Purim, 6 months out of the year, which would include the entire Winter, would be bereft of holidays. What could possibly be the reason for this phenomenon? Why are all the Biblical holidays crowded into the Spring and Summer? Wouldn’t it have made more sense to space the holidays more evenly throughout the calendar year?

Maharal<sup>3</sup> (Rav Yehudah Loewe of Prague) great Torah Scholar and Kabbalist, makes some extraordinary comments about the Jewish Calendar. A free translation follows:

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1 I heard this explanation from HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Baltimore.

2 One should be aware that there is actually a prohibition involving adding a commandment to the Torah (see Devorim-Deut. 4:2). Rambam (Maimonides) in his Introduction to Mishneh Torah (Code to Jewish Law) resolves the dilemma in reference to the Rabbis’ additions by stating that the prohibition of adding to the Torah only applies when one states that the addition is actually part and parcel of the Original Torah itself. Since the Rabbis presented their new laws as Rabbinic and not Biblical they were not in violation of this prohibition.

3 See his Sefer Ner Mitzvah, pgs. 23-24.

It is appropriate that the Chanukah miracle took place on the 25th of Kislev because it is then that the force of Spiritual Light begins to strengthen. On the 25th of Elul, Light<sup>4</sup> was created (since Man was created on the 6th day of Creation, 1st of Tishrei-Rosh HaShannah, and Light was created on the 1st day). Now this Light has 4 states of being (Seasons). The first state is when the Light is at its strongest and the Darkness is at its weakest. As the year moves away from that state the Light begins to weaken and the Darkness begins to strengthen-this is in Tamuz. The Darkness eventually equals the Light's strength-this is in Tishrei. From then on the Darkness strengthens even more to overtake the power of the Light as the Light weakens. This is the 2nd state of being. The 3rd state is when the Darkness is at its strongest and the Light is at its weakest-this is in Tevet. Then the Light begins to strengthen until it reaches the strength of the Darkness once again-this is in Nissan. The Light then continues to strengthen until it reaches its maximum in Tamuz. This process continues every year.

So it is on the 25th of Kislev that the Light begins to strengthen since the Light was created on the 25th of Elul (and the 4 states of being, Seasons, last 4 months each). So since the Light begins to strengthen on the 25th of Kislev, the miracle of the Light<sup>5</sup> of the Menorah's oil took place then. The miracle involved the Menorah's Light, and the re-dedication of the Temple, the Light of the world.

The Calendar, according to Maharal, can be divided into 2 sections. Half of the year, from Passover until Sukkos (Spring-Summer), has Light as its primary power, while Darkness rules the Fall-Winter months. The implications are clear. The season for the Spiritual Light is the Spring-Summer and it is only then that one can actualize the greatest amount of spiritual energy<sup>6</sup>. Fall-Winter is a time for Spiritual Darkness and is not ideal for tremendous spiritual growth. In fact, elsewhere<sup>7</sup> Maharal actually describes the Winter as being "outside of the realm of time."

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4 While the Maharal's statements would apply to the number of daylight hours, his primary concern is the Spiritual aspects of Light and Darkness.

5 The Maharal in Ner Mitzvah, p.1 cites a Midrash that describes the Greeks as being Choshech-Darkness because "they darkened the eyes of Israel with their decrees." Chanukah's Light defeated the Greek Darkness.

6 The physical world reflects the spiritual realm and this is why it is hottest in the Summer. Energy, both physical and spiritual, is at its strongest point. (The evil forces of the world seem to be innately aware of this and unleash some of the greatest spiritual challenges in the Summer.) Winter is cold, dark, and gloomy and reflects the lack of spiritual opportunity.

7 Gur Aryeh-BaMidbar pg. 122

This is because Winter does not offer growth, neither agriculturally nor spiritually. Maharal continues to state that in a certain sense the Winter cannot be acknowledged as being part of any “real existence” due to its lack of developmental value.

We now understand the uneven arrangement of the Biblical calendar. The Holidays mentioned in the Torah all take place during the Spring-Summer months because it is then that the potential for a real, profound, spiritual growth exists due to the power of the Light. The Torah’s ideal approach would not allow for profound growth during the Winter because it is the Season of the Darkness. An attempt at profound growth during that time would most likely be unsuccessful. G-d wanted us to actualize growth during the Summer and then to maintain and hold on to that growth during the Winter. This is the reason why all the Festivals—times for spiritual growth—are in the Summer.

But how were we to hold on to that growth? Did G-d leave us completely without assistance? The answer leads us to a most fascinating subject-Snow.

### **Snow in the Winter: A Needed White Inspiration**

There are few experiences in life that compare with waking up in the morning after a snowfall and looking outside. The sight is stunning, the landscape glorious and beautiful, and the feeling one has is nothing less than the sublime<sup>8</sup>. Only after modernity, with its high-powered engines, tampers with Winter’s wonder does the snow become filthy and unpleasant. Where does this feeling come from? What is this creation that only appears in the Winter? Just why<sup>9</sup> does it snow in the Winter?

A Midrash<sup>10</sup> will be quite instructive:

From where was the dry land of the earth made? From the snow that is under the Kisei Hakavod(G-d’s Throne of Glory). G-d took it and threw it upon the water, the water then froze, and the dust of the earth was formed. As the verse states (in Job 37) “To Snow G-d said: Become land!”

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8 This may be the meaning of the verse in Psalms 147:16 “He makes snow (fall) like a fleece of wool.”

9 Of course, the answer is that it is only during the Winter that the temperature is low enough to transform the precipitation from rain to snow but we know that G-d must have made the world this way for a reason.

10 See Pirkei D’R’Eliezer Chp.3.

The Midrash implies that Snow at its very essence is closely related to G-d's Throne of Glory and; thereby, G-d Himself. There are a variety of other sources which support this concept, as well.

The Zohar<sup>11</sup> tells us a remarkable insight. It states that G-d<sup>12</sup> actually wears Tefillin! And in the same manner in which our Tefillin must be perfectly black, in color, so too G-d's Tefillin must be perfectly white, in color! A possible explanation is based on some basic facts we know about the colors black and white. Black absorbs all other colors that are within light rays while, white reflects all of the other colors. We must wear Tefillin that are completely black because we must absorb all of G-d's wisdom and direction. G-d "wears" Tefillin that are white because He reflects all wisdom and guidance.

We sense from the Zohar the meaning and symbolism of the color white. Snow, in being the purest<sup>13</sup> form of white that exists, also represents the idea that G-d, who is sending the Snow from the heavens, is the "Reflector of all Wisdom." White Snow is the object which descends from G-d's "wearing White Tefillin" to remind us that G-d created and maintains the world and we must serve him wholeheartedly.

Maharal<sup>14</sup> describes Snow as being an illuminating force that is tantamount to Spiritual Light. This is why G-d made the earth from Snow (as mentioned in the Midrash earlier) because people on earth need to be reminded as to G-d's involvement in man's affairs. By creating the earth from Snow, G-d has placed a spiritual force that is present at all times in the earth, enabling us to actualize spirituality. And by making the Snow fall at times, G-d sends us a reminder to actualize this spirituality<sup>15</sup>.

Based on what we have now learned, we can understand well why G-d makes it snow in the Winter. It is in the Winter when we experience our lowest point of spiritual inspiration. We do not experience Holidays

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11 I heard the Zohar and its explanation from HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl, Rav of the Old City in Jerusalem.

12 A similar statement appears in the Talmud Brachos 6a. This statement (like many Midrashim) cannot be taken literally as G-d has no physical form. It is not within the scope of this essay to discuss the meaning of this Midrash at length.

13 Some suggest that the meaning of the verse in Yeshayahu 1:18 is based upon this fact. "If your sins are like scarlet they will become as white as snow; if they become red as crimson they will become (white) as wool." If you repent completely your sins can be removed leaving you cleansed to the purest form of white-snow. If not, you can still become white but only like that of wool.

14 Be'er HaGolah, pg.85

in the Winter and it is difficult to grow closer to G-d. G-d, therefore, sends us Snow, and if we contemplate Snow's profound meaning, helps us feel connected to Him once again. Snow descends and covers the ground as if to shout, "Remember that it is G-d that is constantly covering the ground and is providing everything that is in your life. Serve and draw closer to him!"

### **Chanukah: Winter's Initiation**

Having established the Torah's ideal Calendar system and how Winter was to be lived without the inspiration of Biblical holidays (through a spiritual understanding of snow), we can now appreciate Chanukah's role and its significance.

As mentioned earlier, all Rabbinical additions to the Torah resulted from a weakening in some area of Jewish life that required the involvement and response of the Rabbis. The institution of Chanukah as a holiday was no different in this respect. Chanukah could only have been established if the Rabbis determined that there was a need and a lacking within the Jewish People and that Chanukah could rectify that lacking.

So, as the Talmud<sup>16</sup> asks, (in a different context) "Why Chanukah"? The question looms larger when one considers that during the historical period in which Chanukah occurred there were other significant victories against the Greeks that the Jews experienced. In *Megillas Taanis*, a work that lists and describes by month the victories of the Jews at that time, hardly a month goes by without there being some mention of a battle fought with the Greeks in which the Jews prevailed. For example, on the seventh of Elul, the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt after the Greeks had made holes in them. On the 24th of Av a decree which forbade the

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15 Other sources that discuss Snow and its spiritual symbolism include Rav Eliyahu Dessler in *Michtav MeEliyahu* Volume 1, pg. 300. He cites a Midrash that describes Snow as being the rest that the wicked enjoy on Shabbos when Gehenom (Purgatory) punishments are not carried out. He interprets this to mean that the wicked delight in holiness, on the Shabbos, which is represented by snow.

Snow-SheLeG in Hebrew has the gematria (numerical value) of 333. Maharal, in *Sefer Tiferes Yisroel*, Chapter 11 maintains that the number 3 always signifies complete perfection. Snow then is complete perfection three times over.

Rav Tzadok HaKohein (of Lublin) in *Divrei Sofrim*, pg. 42 also understands Snow as being a symbol of ultimate goodness but discusses the interesting notion that sometimes a symbol of goodness can symbolize a diametrically opposing idea. Snow, at times, is used to symbolize coldness and lack of inspiration. See there for further study.

16 See Shabbos 21b

use of Jewish Law to decide disputes was lifted by the Macabees. Many examples such as these are mentioned there. So, why were the events of Chanukah chosen to become a holiday when one could justify establishing a major holiday for almost all events<sup>17</sup> listed in Megillas Taanis? In fact, from a historical perspective, Chanukah was a fleeting moment of Jewish victory because the Greeks still had remained in control of most of Israel. Actually, most of the Macabees were killed shortly after the events of Chanukah. So, why Chanukah?

It seems that the Rabbis' inspiration to establish Chanukah may have come from the timing of the events. Sfas Emes<sup>18</sup> (Rebbe of Ger) mentions that the spiritual inspiration of Succos lasts until Chanukah<sup>19</sup>. "The renewal of the Light of the year continues until Chanukah," he says. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that Chanukah's month, Kislev, is described by the Kabbalah<sup>20</sup> as being "the month of sleep." A month which has a powerful force of spiritual sleep will inevitably fail to maintain the inspiration of Succos.

Kislev is also the month in which Winter<sup>21</sup> actually begins. Winter, as we learned above, is not an auspicious time for inspiration and spiritual growth. G-d's sending of snow in the Winter was to be an aid for us to maintain our growth as we live through the "sleepy" season. But snow alone proved not to be sufficient for us. We couldn't survive the Winter without a spiritually inspiring holiday. So when the miracle of the oil of the Menorah took place the Rabbis saw in it a message from G-d<sup>22</sup> that the Winter needed to "wake up" and obtain spiritual Light. The Menorah symbolizes spiritual Light and a miracle involving the Menorah would convey a message concerning spiritual growth. G-d decided to arouse us with the miracle of Chanukah so that we would be able to survive the

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17 One could suggest that Chanukah was the climax of the Greek defeat since control of the Temple was of high spiritual significance but if one peruses the list in Megillas Taanis one will find that there are many victories that would warrant a celebration such as Chanukah's.

18 Chanukah, p.218

19 Sefer Taamei Minhagim, p.363, states that although we usually associate Yom Kippur as the final day for repentance in the new year, Chassidic sources indicate that one actually has until Chanukah to repent.

20 See Rav Tzadok HaKohein of Lublin, Pri Tzadik, Volume 1, p.72 who cites the Sefer Yetzirah.

21 See Rashi, Parshas Noach 9:22. Rashi says that Kislev is actually the coldest part of Winter.

Winter with our spiritual levels in tact. We proved incapable of living only according to the Biblical holiday season and needed Chanukah as an addition.

And we can derive this from Chanukah's very name.

The name "Chanukah" comes from the root word chinuch<sup>23</sup> which means rededication or initiation. There are many explanations as to the significance of that name. Many explain that this refers to the rededication of the Temple after the Greek domination. Sfas Emes<sup>24</sup> understands that the rededication and initiation refers to strength of survival for the long Exile since Chanukah was to be the last blatant miracle until the Redemption. Shlah<sup>25</sup> maintains that Chanukah rededicated the world to its purpose allowing a focus once again upon spirituality.

I would suggest that Chanukah is an initiation and dedication of the Winter season. Its task is to energize the Winter with a powerful spirituality. It enhances the role that snow plays in connecting us to G-d during the cold, sleepy uninspiring season. Sfas Emes<sup>26</sup> states that we light 36 candles on Chanukah because Chanukah's Spiritual Light lasts for 36 days throughout the month of Teves. This gives the Winter a "jumpstart" which will hopefully help us experience the Winter without any spiritual casualties. Hence, the name Chanukah.

### **Conclusion: It's In Our Hands**

We have studied and learned many insights concerning the Winter and the holiday of Chanukah. Torah study offers much to the stimulation of the brain but the challenge always is to allow the brain's stimulation to affect the heart and ultimately to affect our actions. Let us actualize profound growth on Chanukah so that the Lights of the Menorah succeed to truly light up our entire lives.

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22 See Rav Tzadok, *ibid.* p.77. Rav Tzadok cites an Arizal that describes the 6 Summer months as months of a Man directed inspiration and the 6 Winter months as months of a G-d led inspiration.

23 See Rashi Parshas Lech Lecha 15:14.

24 Sfas Emes Chanukah p. 223

25 Shlah to Parshas VaYeshev. This would fit well with a Midrash P'sikta Rabbasi 2:27 which lists 7 "Chanukahs" beginning with the Chanukah of Creation, and continuing with the Chanukah of the Tabernacle, 1st Temple, 2nd Temple, Jerusalem's wall, Miracle of the oil, and the World to Come. Whenever the world needed a surge of renewal a "Chanukah" occurs.

26 Sfas Emes, *ibid.* p.228

# The Beis Yosef's Question

The Jewish people have always valued questions. Many Jewish parents remember with pride and joy the first good question their child asked. Questions can especially be appreciated on this holiday of Chanukah which classically has been referred to as the Holiday of the Oral Law, which consists largely of the question and answer format found in the Talmud. One of the most famous questions in Jewish thought that relates to Chanukah is the question of the Bais Yosef<sup>1</sup>.

We all are familiar with the story of Chanukah but a brief review is in order to appreciate the question of the Bais Yosef. The Hasmoneans, a small band of Cohanim and their followers rebelled against the mighty Greeks. With the help of Hashem they defeated the Greeks and regained control of the Temple in Jerusalem. Wishing to light the Menorah the Hasmoneans found only enough pure oil to kindle the Menorah for one day. A miracle occurred and the oil lasted for eight days. The Bais Yosef asks the following question: if there was enough oil to burn for one day, then the miracle was only for the seven additional days that the oil burned. Why, then, do we celebrate the miracle of the oil for eight days?

There are literally dozens of answers to this question; I would like to explore a few of the more well known ones and perhaps glean an important lesson about the holiday. The Bais Yosef himself offers three answers to this question. His first answer is, each night the Hasmoneans poured one-eighth of the oil which they found into the Menorah and this sufficed for the entire evening. The Bach explains, although one is not allowed to rely on a miracle that so little oil could burn the entire night, when the Hasmoneans poured the oil into the lamps, they miraculously filled even though only one-eighth of the jug was dispensed. Alternatively, the Bais Yosef suggests that after emptying the oil from the jug,

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11488-1575 One of the great authors and codifiers of Jewish history. His well known Shulchan Aruch is the basis for all modern halachic decisions.



the jug remained full, or that each morning despite burning throughout the entire night the lamps of the Menorah remained full.

The P'ri Chadash introduces a new idea in the holiday of Chanukah to answer this question. Until this point we have assumed the celebration of Chanukah revolved primarily around the miracle of the oil which burned longer than it should have. The P'ri Chadash suggests that only the final seven days celebrate exclusively the miraculously burning oil. The first day of Chanukah however, was instituted to celebrate the military victory over the Greeks. Our lighting of the Menorah is only because the miracle of the oil began on the twenty-fifth of Kislev as the oil was found then, after defeating the Greeks.

Rav Gedalya Schorr explains that the P'ri Chadash is touching the essence of Chanukah. The miracle of the oil symbolized that the victory over the Greeks was not just a military one but a spiritual one as well. Rav Schorr places the battle between the Greeks and the Hasmoneans not exclusively revolving around dominion of the land of Israel, but as a struggle for the soul of mankind. The Jewish people beginning with Sinai had drawn their spiritual strength from direct divine revelation using a medium such as prophecy. However during this period of history the Jewish people were undergoing a radical transformation. Prophecy had ceased with the last members of the Anshei K'nesses Hagedolah, the men of the great assembly who among other things formalized much of our prayer. From where were the Jewish people going to receive their spiritual guidance?

The answer, our sages tell us, is through the medium of intensive Torah study; specifically the Torah She Ba'al Peh (oral law). Through analyzing the Torah they were able to gain a deeper insight into how the world operates and by which principles one should lead his life.

A new movement arose to challenge the Torah and its principles, the Greeks and their philosophy, science, etc. It marked the first time that the nations of the world offered an intellectual alternative to the Chochmas Hatorah, the knowledge/wisdom of the Torah. Although much of Greek philosophy and science may be beneficial and an advancement to society, it by itself does not lead to a more moral, more divine human race. It is only through the rigorous study of Torah, specifically the Oral Law, combined with fulfilling the ideals of the Torah that the purpose of creation can be realized.

With the victory over the Greeks and recapturing the Temple it was not clear whether this miracle had enough religious significance to pro-

claim a national holiday. It was only the miracle of the oil that revealed the true nature of what had happened. The forces of Torah and its study would stand the test of time and shine brightly throughout the generations. Hence we light a candle even on the first night to commemorate the military victory and its spiritual significance as well.

The question of the Bais Yosef has spawned much scholarship throughout the generations. I present you these answers with the hope that beginning with this Chanukah we will investigate our Judaism and discover it's innate beauty.

# How Enduring was the Chanukah Victory?

Students of Jewish History might view our celebration of Chanukah as rather curious. After all, the limited victory of the Macabees seems to pale against the backdrop of oppression, foreign rule, and civil discord which predominate the latter years of Second Temple period. The battles that ensued in the years immediately following the Chanukah victory took the lives of many Jews including Judah Macabee and all but one of his brothers. The eventual liberation from Greek-Assyrian control lasted only several generations until Pompey and Roman dominance turned Jewish monarchs into little more than pawns. How is it, then, that Chanukah became a holiday of such national significance and enduring prominence?

In classical Jewish form, we will introduce our answer with a question. The Talmud (Shabbos 23a) introduces us to the blessing on the Chanukah candles, *asher kideshanu b'mitvosav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel chanukah*—Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the candle of Chanukah.

The Talmud questions the use of the term *v'tzivanu* —and commanded us—for Where did He [G-d] command us in such a mitzvah? After all, Chanukah follows hundreds of years after the close of the Torah and cannot be a biblical commandment?! The Talmud responds that G-d did in fact command us in this mitzvah, albeit in an indirect manner. When G-d charged us, thou shalt not deviate from that which they [the sages of the High Court] will tell you [not] to the right nor to the left, He in fact commanded us to observe the edicts introduced by those sages. Without delving into a lengthy study of the criteria for such Rabbinic ordinances, let us at least recognize the application to our discussion. When the High Court of Israel enacted the Menorah light-

ing, they in fact created a mitzvah befitting the term v'tzivanu reflecting G-d's demand of us, and not merely that of the Court.

This in turn raises another difficulty. There are other Rabbinic mitzvot which bear with them a blessing containing this very same v'tzivanu formula. Why does the Talmud introduce this important concept in the context of Chanukah and not regarding another mitzvah? One would have expected that this discussion could have taken place with regard to a more common mitzvah like the weekly lighting the Shabbos candles where v'tzivanu is used as well. Nonetheless, the Talmud opts to reveal this lesson of 'Divinely-mandated, Rabbinic-commandments' in the context of Chanukah. We will hopefully soon understand just how appropriate this association really is.

In describing the nothingness of our World's existence prior to Creation, the Torah uses the four terms of *tohu*, *vohu*, *choshech*, and *tehom*. The Midrash (B R 2:4) understands each of these terms to relate to a period of our Exile. *Choshech*—darkness—the Midrash reveals, refers to Yavan (Greece) who darkened the eyes of Israel. They [the Greeks], continues the Midrash, demanded of that the Jews write on the horn of an ox, 'We have no involvement with the G-d of Israel.' This unusual decree indicates that the Greeks did not implore a total rejection of G-d's existence. They were apparently willing to live with the possibility of a G-d of the Jews. They could even accept Jewish belief in that G-d. What provoked their enlightened, scientific *weltanschauung* was the Jewish attitude of a relationship with G-d. As such, the Greeks wanted a proclamation reflecting our admission to the impossibility of that relationship. Not only did they insist upon a statement in that regard, they demanded that it be written on the horn of an ox. Commentators point out that the ox, meant to be reminiscent of the Golden Calf, was a cynical taunt. One could imagine the Greeks mocking, Who are you to brazenly claim not only belief in but even an effective relationship with your G-d? Did you yourselves not reject Him for a Golden Calf? One could also suggest that the Greeks were deriding our horn-related ritual of the Shofar. In a sense, Shofar is the ultimate statement of interaction with our Master, for G-d has told us that it is our sounding of the Shofar that causes Him to shift (*so-to-speak*) from a posture of strict judgement to a mode of mercy.

Greek decrees were also made against *brit milah*—the bold Jewish statement of a pact between Man and G-d, and *Rosh Chodesh*—the Court-determined New Moon with its resulting audacious claim that we

can effect the dating of G-d's Holy Days. (The Torah reveals that G-d determines the nature of the various days in response to the declarations of the High Court.) It was these mitzvot and the Jewish attitude that it is through our study and fulfillment of His Torah that G-d's world endures, that the Greeks were determined to squelch.

We can now begin to understand the victory of Chanukah. The Hashmonaim were not merely fighting against the intrusion of oppressive foreign government. They were fighting the intrusion of a foreign ideology. It is fundamental to our belief system that we have a partnership of sorts with G-d. The Hashmonaim, Kohanim (priests) who, in a certain sense, function as the bridge in this relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, successfully rebuffed the notion that we and G-d are separable from each other. It is not a coincidence that G-d publicized His alliance with them and His involvement in their victory with His miracle of the Menorah. Due to the savage vandalism of the civilized Greeks, the Hashmonaim were forced to forego kindling the golden Menorah of the Temple and in its stead utilized a makeshift iron Menorah. A literal reading of the Torah (Exodus 25) would yield an understanding that this Menorah, lacking the formula of fashioned from a solitary piece of pure gold was unfit for use. It is only through the rabbinic exposition of described in the Talmud (Menachot 28b) that we know such a Menorah to be 'kosher.' By facilitating the miracle of this Rabbinic-interpretation-dependent-Menorah, G-d reaffirmed the partnership we share even in the unfolding of the very Torah itself.

We can also now understand that it is highly appropriate for the Talmud to reveal the lesson of v'tzivanu in the context of Chanukah. Commentators explain that implicit in the very victory of Chanukah is our continued recognition of the partnership we have with G-d. As a War of Independence, Chanukah had limited endurance. But the message of the Hashmonaim lives on and the inspiring lesson of our inter-relationship impacts on our deeds nonetheless. Even if a full grasp of the implications of this partnership is beyond our scope, our mitzvot can be performed with an awareness that they are meaningful in the most profound of ways. It is this victory, the success of the Hashmonaim in securing our recognition of this truth which is cause for continued celebration.

# What is Chanukah?

“What is Chanukah?” “Lighting candles,” “eating latkes,” “playing dreidel,” would probably be among the answers you and I might give. This question is posed by the Talmud (Shabbos 21b) and the following answer is offered:

From the twenty fifth of Kislev we observe eight days of Chanukah, during which eulogizing and fasting are prohibited. When the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all of the oil [they found] and when the Hasmonean kingship overcame the enemy, they searched and found just one container of oil that still bore the seal of the high priest. The oil was only enough to burn for one day; a miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight days. The following year they established and instituted yomim tovim of hallel and hodaah.

Rashi in his commentary elaborates on the meaning of the final sentence above:

[The Sages] didn't forbid work (as is the case with other yomim tovim) but rather established the reading of Hallel and reciting of Al Hanism in [the blessing of] thanksgiving.

It seems clear from the Talmud and Rashi's explanation that what makes the days of Chanukah special, (enough to be called a yom toy) is our obligation to thank Hashem to a greater extent than we normally do. Why should giving extra thanks be cause for such celebration? To effectively answer this we must go back in time, to the beginning of time, to the story of the first man, Adom HaRishon in the Garden of Eden.

The Rabbis tell us that there were two unique trees in the Garden of Eden, the Aytz HaChaim (tree of life) and the Aytz HaDaas (tree of knowledge), which, we are further told, represented two different ways of relating to Hashem. The Aytz HaChaim signified the more direct connection to G-d, one in which His involvement in worldly affairs would be clear to all. This relationship we could establish and sustain through Torah learning and the performance of mitzvot. Because this relationship would be direct, it could function outside of the limitations

of nature, and the natural process of death and decay need not occur.

In contrast, the Aytz HaDaas represented an indirect connection to the Creator, one in which the forces of nature function as a barrier between ourselves and G-d. When Adom HaRishon ate from the Aytz HaDaas, he became vulnerable to nature, and assured his mortality. The world, as the result of Adom's sin, became placed under the influence of mazal, astrological forces, and the distance between man and G-d created the possibility for man to put his trust in forces created by G-d rather than G-d himself. This possibility eventually became borne out in actuality, and so began idolatry.

Things continued on a downward spiral until one man stood up and began to deny the validity of faith in intermediaries. This was Avraham Avinu. His legacy was continued by his son Yitzchak and grandson Yaakov, their collective efforts being brought to fruition with the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai. Temporarily we returned to the level of Adom HaRishon as represented by the Aytz HaChaim, but our stay on that plateau was short-lived. With the sin of the Golden Calf, we again lost immortality, hope however was not lost and continues today. This hope lies in the belief in a final redemption, the coming of the Messiah the descendant of King David.

If a descendant of King David is going to bring about the final redemption then the seeds of redemption must lie in David himself. The midrash tells us that King David was destined to die at birth—Adom HaRishon foresaw this and gave up seventy years of his life, enabling David to become the figure in Jewish history that he did. The supernatural (eternal) quality to his life extending beyond his years, to the extent that we say even today “Dovid Melech Yisroel chai V'kayum “ (David King of Israel is alive and enduring!).

The Talmud tells us (Succah 26b) that King David never experienced the sensation of deep sleep. Our sages tell us that this is because the unconscious state of sleep is 1/60th of death, and David was meant to exist on the level of Adam before his fall, before he was effected by death in whole or part. Had David not sinned, (the specifics of which being beyond the scope of our discussion), he himself would have brought creation to perfection, returning man to a state of immortality.

What gave David his potential to transcend the limitations of physical life? This questions David himself answers in the Book of Psalms (118:17) “Low Amos key ehcheiyeh V'Ahsapear Maasay Kah” ( I shall not die! But shall live and relate the deeds of G-d) David tells us that

his elevation was achieved through “relating the deeds of G-d, “ which the commentators understand as his songs of praise and thanksgiving. The Talmud (Berachot 7b) asks “What’s (the significance of the name) Ruth?,” and answers “she merited to have David as her progeny who sang to Hashem the songs (shiruth in hebrew, similar to Ruth) and praises.” Of the myriad of qualities David possessed, his incessant expression of praise to Hashem encapsulates him best. David’s descendent, King Chezkiahu, also had the opportunity to bring the world to completion, but we are told that he lost his chance when he didn’t sing shira (praise) with the downfall of the Assyrian King Sanherib, and thus didn’t complete the mission David began.

We return to our initial question, “Why should giving extra thanks (on Chanukah) be cause for such celebration?,” with a possible answer. The acknowledgment of our need to praise and thank Hashem for what happened during the period of Chanukah heightens our awareness of the need to praise Hashem for everything that happens to us today. The more that heightened awareness leads us to further praise Hashem, the closer we (as did King David) move towards our own immortality, as shall be manifest in full with the coming of the final redemption. With this in the back of our minds, what greater joy can there be than reciting the expressions of praise that typify Chanukah (Al Hanisim and Hallel). Man’s completion, and ultimately the purpose of man’s creation lie latent in the thanks and praises of Chanukah and indeed in every act that we do to connect with Hashem.



Dedicated in memory of my father

# Harav Chaim Yehoshua Goldman, zt"l

The beautiful song that we sing after lighting Chanukah candles, Haneros Hallalu, discusses two aspects of the Chanukah holiday. First, it praises G-d for all of the miracles and wonders that He performed in the victory over the Greeks. Second, it makes mention of the role of the Chanukah Menorah which publicizes the miracle to others, known in the Talmud as Pirsumei Nisah.

The mitzvah of lighting the Menorah also has two aspects. One is the actual lighting which helps one recall personally the miracle of the oil. This is why the halachah states that even if a wind blew out the candles, the mitzvah is still valid. The second aspect is the publicizing of the miracle which inspires others to praise G-d. Not only is there an obligation to inspire oneself, there is also a requirement to inspire others.

These are important ideals that have enabled us to survive our long exile. The Ramban in his commentary of the Torah writes that our fundamental task in the service of G-d in this world, is to try to see G-d's hand in 'natural' miracles He performs. Sometimes, G-d will perform a blatant miracle but that serves only as a necessary, temporary inspiration. G-d expects us to see His hand within the course of nature. That is our challenge.

The Talmud Yoma (29a) expresses this idea: Rav Assi said, the Book of Esther is compared to daybreak. Just as the light of day signifies the end of the night, so too, Esther (the Purim story) was the end of all miracles. Why is the historical period of miracles compared to the night? My Rebbe in Ner Israel, Rav Kalman Weinreb, explained as follows. As the Ramban explained, G-d does not want to perform blatant miracles. Their function is similar to the stars that light up the night. Just as the stars are a glimmer of light in the vast darkness of the sky, a miracle is a show of clarity of G-d's existence in a 'dark' world in which G-d's pres-

ence is hidden. The night prepares us for the day, which exists without stars or miracles to inspire us. The day is the time for our real service of G-d without the benefit of miracles.

Our extended exile has been one long period of spiritual darkness. Indeed, it is a tremendous miracle that we have even survived. Before our exile began, G-d sent us the miracles of Chanukah so that we would become powerfully inspired and spiritually charged to therefore have the strength and fortitude to survive the exile. This is also why Chanukah appears in the winter, a 'black' time, a time when the colors of spring are not present. As it is said, 'a little light dispels much darkness.'

Our lighting of the Menorah on Chanukah represents the method by which we are able to survive in exile. The mitzvah involves lights which must be lit at night. These lights symbolize the light of Torah which has powered our survival throughout the darkness in the exile. We must light the fires of Torah within ourselves and then we are given the task to publicize the miracle to others.

It is only because of our commitment to Torah study that we were able to defeat the Greeks. The Midrash compares the Greek Empire to Choshech—darkness, and it was the Or—light of Torah that defeated them.. The Chiddushei HaRim, the first Rebbe of Ger, explains that G-d is pleased more with the study of the Oral Law than even the study of the Written Law, which is done publicly with the Torah readings. This is because the 'scroll' of the Oral Law is our hearts and the quill used to write upon our hearts is our mind. This is the process of learning Torah. The Written Law achieves its highest levels of sanctity when it is written and read because that is its framework of holiness. Ideally, the Oral law must not be written down because if it becomes written, it leaves its special holy place—our hearts—and in doing so loses an aspect of its sanctity.

G-d intended for the miracle of the lights of Chanukah to be a flash of lightning to begin the long exile. We were then given the task to expand and increase that lightning's effect upon us and the world, through our commitment to Torah. This is the message of the Chanukah Menorah. We light a small row of candles to begin the spark and then we show to ourselves and the rest of the world the powerful, impacting implications of Chanukah's miracle. That impact, the strengthening of the belief of G-d and the light of Torah study has always been the force that has held the Jewish people together. May we merit to strengthen the light of the Torah in anticipation of the Final Redemption.



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## A Chanukah Reader

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