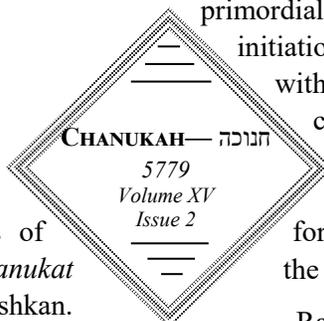


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## Chanukat Hamizbeach: A Fiery Celebration by Ephraim Helfgot (TABC '20)



The Torah reading of the eight days of Chanukah is, fittingly, the story of the *chanukat hamizbeich*, the initiation of the altar in the Mishkan. This process was mirrored by the Maccabim when they liberated Yerushalayim in 164 BCE, taking care to rededicate the entire Beit Hamikdash. Sefer Hamakabim (1:4) even describes the actions undertaken as “*Vayachogu et chanukat hamizbeiach shmonat yamim*,” - “And they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days,” using the same exact phrase used in Bemidbar 7:10 to refer to the process.

Chronologically, the *chanukat hamizbeiach* of the original Mishkan occurs “*Beyom kalot Moshe lehakim et hamishkan*” - “On the day that Moshe finished constructing the Mishkan” (Bemidbar 7:1), which Rashi (ibid. s.v. *Kalot Moshe Lehakim*) identifies as the first day of Nissan. From this day onward, the twelve *nesi'im* brought their identical offerings upon the *mizbeiach*, finally fulfilling the command of “*Veasu li Mikdash, Veshachanti betocham*” - “And you shall make for me a sanctuary, that I might dwell within you.”

The first of Nissan is a highly significant day. One year prior, it was the date of the first commandment addressed to the entirety of Bnei Yisrael, when Hashem showed Moshe the moon as it began its renewal (Mechilta Shemot 12:2) for the month of Nissan. Furthermore, there is a debate in Masechet Rosh Hashanah (10b-11a) between Rabbi Eliezer, who states that the world was created in Tishrei, and Rabbi Yehoshua, who states that the world was created in Nissan. Rabbeinu Tam, quoted in Tosfot (Rosh Hashanah 27a), writes that both opinions are true: G-d decided to create the world in Tishrei, but this creation actually occurred in Nissan. This position is supported by the phrase in the Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah, “*Hayom harat olam*” - “This day is the conception of the world,” as opposed to the *birth* of the world.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 3:9) connects the

primordial significance of the day with its significance in the initiation of the Mikdash. Rabbi Shmuel Bar Ami begins with a simple question: Why is the first day of creation called “*Yom Echad*” - “One day” (Bereishit 1:5), while all of the following days are listed as “the second day”, “the third day”, etc.? Why does the format change from a simple count to a description of the ordering?

Rabbi Shmuel Bar Ami answers that the first day of Creation was not the first day of the fulfillment of the true purpose of Creation; “*Nitaveh Hakadosh Baruch Hu la'asot shutafut batachtonim*” - “The Holy One, Blessed Be He, was desirous of partnership in the lower realms,” but due to human failure dating back to Adam Harishon, the achievement of this goal was delayed. When was the true *Yom Harishon*, the first day? The Midrash cites the formulation of Bemidbar 7:12, at the opening of the *chanukat hamizbeiach*: “*Vayehi hamakriv bayom harishon et korbano Nachshon Ben Aminadav lemateh Yehudah*” - “And the one who offered his sacrifice on the **first day** was Nachshon Ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah.” On the first day of the dedication of the Mishkan, G-d's purpose in creating the world was finally realized.

The Midrash then lists ten firsts of that first of Nissan, ending conspicuously with the phrase “*Rishon leyeridat ha'eish shene'emar, vateitzei eish milifnei Hashem vegomeir*” - “It was the first day of the descending of the fire, as it is said ‘And fire exited from before Hashem, etc.’” This “*VeGomeir*”, “etc.”, presumes that the reader knows the continuation of the *pasuk*. In fact, there are two *pesukim* that start this way: Vayikra 9:24 and 10:2. Both of them occur on the same day, and with drastically different results. The first describes the epitome of the Divine presence within the Mishkan, as a heavenly fire descends and consumes the sacrifices upon the *mizbeiach*; the second is the tragic story of Nadav and Avihu - Aharon's sons who brought a foreign fire before G-d and were incinerated.

Why does the Midrash not explicate which *pasuk* it refers to? Perhaps the reference is to both, as both of these verses display the heightened involvement of G-d within the Mishkan. When His will is obeyed, a miraculous fire descends; when it is flouted, a destructive flame comes down.

This dual capability of fire is a long-running theme in the Torah. The same column of fire which lovingly lights the path of the Jewish people through the desert, smites the Egyptian camp (Shemot 13:21 and 14:24); the same fire which incinerates Korach's two-hundred and fifty followers, sanctifies their *Ketoret* pans (Bemidbar 16:35 and 17:2). Indeed, the same flame which symbolized the rededication of the second Beit Hamikdash was to destroy it within three centuries. Fire is a powerful tool, and Divine fire all the more potent and weighty. With great power comes great responsibility; the heightened level of interaction with G-d, the *shutafut* mentioned in the Midrash, necessitated that those who violate its boundaries be punished severely, literally by the same Divine fire.

What, then, is a fitting ritual object of Chanukah, the holiday of the dedication of the Mishkan, of the inauguration of G-d's presence within the Jewish people? It is the flame of the candles, about which we dutifully recite after lighting: "*Haneirot halalu kodesh heim, ve'ei lanu reshut lehishtameish bahem*" - "These candles are holy, and we have no permission to use them for mundane purposes." As Sukkot fades from memory and Pesach has not yet arrived on the horizon; as the winter begins and the 'Jewish offseason' is in full swing, the light of Chanukah reminds us: the Divine presence, the heavenly fire, is in our midst, and Hashem is desirous of a partnership with us.

## The Meaning of Life

by Yishai Mandel (JEC '19)

In the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei, Hashem appears to Yaakov and introduces Himself as, "*Elokei Avraham avicha v'Elokei Yitzchak*," - "G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchak." Rashi explains that, though Hashem doesn't usually associate His name with living *tzadikim*, He did so here concerning Yitzchak, because, as the Midrash Tanchuma says, "his eyes had dimmed, he was confined to his home, and the *yetzer harah* had left him, so it was as though he was dead."

This could seem strange. We all spend our entire lives struggling to resist the *yetzer harah*, so we would think that if the *yetzer harah* leaves, we would be most alive, finally free to do what's right without anything else on our minds. But here, Rashi seems to say that this makes us as though we are dead! To answer this difficulty, we have to say that the definition of our lives is our struggle to overcome our *yetzer harah*.

Everyone has a desire to do the wrong thing, and their purpose on this world is to overcome that desire.

Much of the drama at the end of this week's *parshah*, Mikeitz, revolves around Binyamin. Yosef, in disguise, demands that Binyamin be brought back to Egypt. Yaakov refuses to send him down, wary of any danger Binyamin would encounter. When Yaakov finally relinquishes, Binyamin is falsely accused of stealing Yosef's cup. The *shevatim* and Yosef then have their final confrontation, one that ends in Yosef revealing his identity. Surprisingly, though, despite the fact that Binyamin is constantly in the heat of action, the Torah never tells us what he does or thinks about it. We are told about Yosef's demands, Yaakov's distress, Reuven's promise, and Yehudah's fierceness, but Binyamin himself is not very active.

The Gemara in Shabbos lists four people who never sinned: Binyamin, Amram, Yishai, and Kilav. Noach, the only man that Tanach calls a *tzaddik*, is not on the list. Avraham Avinu, the father of Bnei Yisrael, is not on the list. Neither are Yitzchak or Yaakov Avinu, Yosef Hatzadik, Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon Hakohen, Dovid Hamelech, Eliyahu Hanavi, or any of the other great *tzadikim* that every child knows about. Instead, they are four people that we don't know much about. Yishai and Amram are only known through their children. Kilav, the son of David, is mentioned once in all of Tanach, and Binyamin, though he was one of the *shevatim*, is not very active and we do not learn much about his personality.

The reason we don't know much about these men is because in order to never do anything bad, you also have to never really do anything at all. These men were good people, but they never really participated in that struggle with the *yetzer harah*. Instead, they isolated themselves from it, so they never really had a chance to "live" and achieve greatness.

A central theme of the story of Chanukah is the battle with our *yetzer harah*. Pharaoh enslaved the Jewish people and Haman declared that the Jewish people be killed, but Antiochus did not outlaw Jews. He outlawed following Judaism, providing Jews with the option of abandoning their faith. Therefore, Chanukah was not about a struggle for freedom or survival, but a struggle within us to see if we could make the right choice and follow our correct inclination. There were some Jews who, seeing the temptations of Hellenistic life, unfortunately gave in to their *yetzer harah*, but many others did not. This is why we celebrate this Yom Tov.

The worst thing anyone can ever say about themselves is that they do not have a *yetzer harah*, because that is not something natural; people who don't have that *yetzer* are no longer really alive. On Chanukah, we should remember that we have a strong desire to do bad, and that true greatness comes not from isolating our *yetzer* by not making any choices, but from constantly working to overcome its influence and making the correct choices in our daily lives.

## Delving Into Mehadrin Min Hamehadrin

by Sonia Weiner (Ma'ayanot '21)

Chanukah is a holiday of Rabbinic origin, devoid of an attributed canonic text. Not only does it not even have its own *masechta*, but its laws are sandwiched into that of Masechet Shabbat. However, the festival is the most widely-acclaimed Jewish holiday, the performance of its sole *mitzvah* - the kindling of the *chanukiah's* lights - is performed by everyone in the most scrupulous way possible. The famous Gemara in Shabbat states: "To fulfill the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles, it is sufficient for the head of the household to light one candle for each of the eight nights. The "*mehadrin*," or more glorified, way of performing the *mitzvah* is for the head of the household to light several candles that correspond to the number of family members. Lastly, the absolute most glorified way possible, referred to as "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*" is to light either eight for the first night and descend in number for the consecutive nights, or to follow the accepted approach to light one candle and ascend until there are eight candles on the eighth day (Shabbat:21b).

The fact that the mere lighting of one candle is the holiday's sole requirement does not compare to the *de facto* state of the celebration; an overwhelming number of Jews, some of whom do not commemorate other festivals, take upon themselves to fulfill Chanukah in the highest standard with elaborate *chanukiyot*, and with the highest quality of pure olive oil and wicks with the accompaniment of hundreds of customs. For this commandment, everyone, rather than just those who have accepted upon themselves an added level of stringency, take upon themselves "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*." It seems as though no other *mitzvah* is observed by everyone to such an exalted level. Shouldn't perhaps a

more poignant *mitzvah* (even though we should treat all *mitzvot* with the same level of importance) receive the universal quality of diligence that has been attributed to Chanukah?

The answer lies in that the concept of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is essential to the very nature of Chanukah.

The Gemara recalls that upon searching through the defiled temple, only one jug of pure olive oil marked by the seal of the Kohen Gadol was found, which was only fit for lighting the *menorah* for just one day. This statement is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, while it was the task of the Kohanim to produce the oil, it was not the Kohen Gadol's responsibility. Thus, why was there a cruse of oil bearing the Kohen Gadol's seal in the first place? Secondly, elsewhere the Gemara rules that regarding communal *mitzvot*, the laws of purity and impurity are either suspended or overridden altogether (Yoma 6b). Why couldn't impure oil be used? Indeed, shouldn't the *halachic* concept of *ones*, a case in which someone is in a circumstance out of their control which prevents them from fulfilling a *mitzvah* and thus is exempt, make the Jews exempt altogether until pure oil is available seven days later?

The miracle of the oil was only possible because of an observance of *mitzvot* on a "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*" level. The Kohen Gadol was required to bring the *Chavitei Kohen Gadol*, a flour and oil *korban* where the oil could be of lesser quality. However, since the Kohen Gadol was scrupulous in his *mitzvot*, he used only pure olive oil for his sacrifice, the most exalted level possible.

Not only was Chanukah enabled by scrupulous actions, but the entire miracle revolved around completing *mitzvot* at the highest standard possible. Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter comments that the whole miracle did not enable the *mitzvah*, but rather just embellished it, as they were not required to light the *menorah* with pure oil because of their situation and the *halachah* about communal *mitzvot*. Furthermore, originally, the jug of pure oil was divided into eight portions for each day, and a wick of one-eighth of its preferred size was used, which would create a tiny light.

Hence, the miracle caused for the most preferred oil with the proper wick and amount of oil to be used - the "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*." That is why it has become universally accepted upon Jews to keep Chanukah in particular with the highest standard. What is embedded in our minds on Chanukah is the miracle of the oil and not the

larger, main miracle of the victory of the war; a victory which has two books dedicated to it - both Maccabees I and Maccabees II. There are holidays commemorating the war's miracles like the 23rd of Cheshvan, celebrated in the times of the Mishnah but no longer relevant. The reason offered by many commentators is that the miracle of oil represents the endurance of the Jewish flame despite attempts at defilement. When the Greeks invaded the Beit Hamikdash, they did not burn all the oil which would have surely prevented them from fulfilling the *mitzvah*; rather, they contaminated it, indicating that they sought not to rid the Jews of their practices, but to incorporate them into a more Greek philosophy and ideology. It required extra stringency on the parts of both the Kohen Gadol and the people to ward off spiritual destruction and perform *mitzvot* in a Jewish, not "Greek," manner.

## Divine Intervention

by Baruch Burger (DRS '19)

This week's *parshah*, Parshat Miketz, starts off with the following *pasuk*: "*Vayehi miketz shnasayim yamim, uPharaoh cholem: v'inei omed al hayeor.*" - "And it was, at the end of two years, that Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the river." The Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah compares this *pasuk* to a *pasuk* in Sefer Iyov, as they both contain the word "*keitz*." In Sefer Iyov, the *pasuk* says "*Keitz sham lichoshech,*" which means that "He [Hashem] sets an end to darkness."

Based on this comparison, the Midrash explains that the word "*choshech*" in Iyov can refer to the dark period in the life of Yosef: the period when he was in jail. When the *pasuk* in Iyov says that Hashem sets an end to the darkness, it may be also reminding us about the time that Hashem ended the dark period of imprisonment in Yosef's life. This comparison is showing us that Hashem used Pharaoh's dream as a way to influence the release of Yosef from jail. By enabling Pharaoh to have this dream at this particular time, Hashem was able to orchestrate the release of Yosef precisely at the time that Hashem desired.

The Beis Halevi points out something very powerful from this Midrash. The reason Pharaoh dreamed was that Hashem decreed it; it was not purely by chance. The objective of the Divine was a controlling factor.

Fittingly, this week's *parshah* falls out on Chanukah. On Chanukah, we propitiate God for a myriad of miracles. However, the miracle for which we thank Hashem the most is undoubtedly that of the oil that sustained the fire of the *menorah*. The military victory, however, was likely the far more important miracle for the

well-being of the nation.

One can suggest a reason for this based on the aforementioned idea put forth by the Beis Halevi. Perhaps the reason for this discrepancy is that, although the military victory was more important, the miracle of the *menorah* oil was more evidently the work of a Divine Entity. It is because of this clear act of Divine intervention that we more profusely thank Hashem for this miracle.

The *haftorah* for Shabbos Chanukah also seems to echo this idea. In the *haftorah*, Zechariah describes one of the visions that he experiences. Zechariah describes seeing an elaborately decorated *menorah*, and seems bewildered as to what it represents. An angel enlightens him by saying the following: "*Lo bchayil v'lo bchoach ki im-bruchi.*" - "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit."

The angel is suggesting that the reason for the success of Zerubbabel is not purely because of Zerubbabel's actions and qualities, but also because of his connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Perhaps this idea can be extrapolated beyond the sole experiences of Zerubbabel to all success that humans experience. The hand of Hashem, we see, plays a role in human endeavors.

The Ramban extends this idea even further. Contrary to popular belief, the Ramban likely does not deny the existence of natural order. However, the Ramban does suggest that Hashem sporadically intervenes in the natural order of the universe. He does this, according to the opinion of the Ramban, in order to reward the pious and to punish the wicked.

The notion that the way we act can "entice" God to change the course of universal events is indeed very powerful. It can change one's entire worldview.

The Ramban's conception of Divine intervention, while certainly not universally agreed upon, is nonetheless inspiring. When one does an action, one should contemplate not only the direct results of said action, but also if that action is what G-d might view as "good."

## Chanukah: Why Not Seven Days?

by Judith Wechter (Bruriah '19)

After the Jews were miraculously able to defeat the Greek army in the Chanukah story, they returned to the Beis Hamikdash to light the *menorah*. They were only able to find a small jug with enough oil in it to keep the *menorah* lit for one day. Another miracle occurred, however, and the oil lasted for eight days - the amount of time needed to make more oil. Therefore, we celebrate

eight days of Chanukah in commemoration of the eight days for which the oil lasted.

The Beis Yosef asks a famous question: Why was the first day considered a miracle? There was enough oil for the first day, so shouldn't the holiday be only seven days? Why do we include the first day as part of the miracle?

The Beis Yosef himself offers three answers. One answer is that the Chashmonaim knew that there would only be enough oil for one day, so therefore they divided the oil into eight parts. That way the *menorah* would at least be lit every day, even if it wasn't for the whole day. The miracle that occurred was that the small amount of oil in the *menorah* lasted for the whole day on each of the eight days. The second answer of the Beis Yosef is that after the jug was emptied into the *menorah* on the first day, it was discovered that it was still full of oil. This happened on each of the days of Chanukah. His third answer is that when the *menorah* was checked after the first day, none of the oil had been burned up.

There are many other answers that are given. Here are a few:

The Chasam Sofer finds an answer to this question in the words of *al hanissim*. When the Chashmonaim returned to the Beis Hamikdash after their defeat of the Greeks, they found it in a state of impurity. They wanted to light the *menorah*, but it would have been inappropriate to do so in the impure sanctuary. Therefore, they brought the *menorah* outside into the courtyard of the Beis Hamikdash. However, more oil is required to light something outside than for lighting it inside. Why? The *menorah* would require more than just one day's worth of oil because it would have been left unprotected from the wind. That's why in *al hanissim* it says: "*Vhidliku neirot bchatzrot kadshecha. Vkvu shmonat ymei Chanukah.*" The Chashmonaim lit the *menorah* in the *chatzer*, the courtyard, and that is the reason why we celebrate eight days of Chanukah and not seven. Since the *menorah* was lit outside, the first day was also a miracle.

The Atzei Zayis points out based on calendar calculations and other historical evidence that the twenty-fifth of Kislev fell out on a *shabbos* that year. Therefore, the *menorah* had to be lit before nighttime on Friday night, and would require more oil to last through the end of *Shabbos*.

Another answer is given based on the Ramban's comment at the end of Parshas Bo. There the Ramban

talks about the fact that amazing and obvious miracles should lead a person to recognize the hidden miracles that occur in nature every day. The fact that oil burns at all is itself a great hidden miracle of nature. Hashem is the one that makes it happen, albeit through the means of a natural order that we can understand. Therefore, even the first day of the oil burning is counted as a miracle, as the fact that the oil burned at all is a hidden miracle that we must appreciate. This final answer can serve as a reminder that while we celebrate the awe-inspiring miracles such as the small, weak army defeating a far bigger and stronger army, and oil lasting longer than it should have, we should remember that even "natural" things in life are really miracles that should be recognized and celebrated as well.

## Chanukah: A Holiday of Going Above and Beyond

by Hannah Mamet (Kushner '21)

Every Chanukah, we light the *chanukiah* with the help of a special candle. What is the purpose of this *shamash*? Why do we need a helper candle? Is it really necessary?

The answer is no - it is not really necessary. The *chanukiah* used to be kept outside of people's homes during the time of the Mishnah and Gemara (Masechet Shabbat 21b) as a remembrance to the miracle that took place for the Jews during this time of the year. However, as anti-Semitic sentiment grew throughout the centuries, many Jews were forced to move their *chanukiot* inside. Moving the *chanukiah* inside, however, can easily bring one to use it for mundane purposes, which is forbidden. For example, the Gemara also forbids one to use the light of the candles to count money (Masechet Shabbat 22a). We are not allowed to use the candles for trivial things.

The *shamash* is not a *halachic* requirement, but is used to prevent any mundane uses of the candles which would violate their sanctity. But we still must ask the question: if it is only to stop us from using the other candles casually, should it really be considered holy? The answer is yes, it *is* holy! Chazal rule that we should not use the *shamash* for anything demeaning. Anything that is used even indirectly in conjunction with a *mitzvah* must be treated with reverence.

There is something very unique about the *chanukiah* and the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles. Typically, if one fails to complete the requirements for a

specific mitzvah, they would not fulfill their *obligation*. For example, during Pesach, if one does not consume the correct amount of *matzah*, it is considered as if they have not fulfilled that *mitzvah*. When it comes to Chanukah, however, if one did not let the candles burn for the right amount of time, they would still be *yotzeh* the *mitzvah*. We see that this principle can be applied to other areas of *halachah* as well. As long as one puts in the effort and does their part, even in a case where they do not complete the *mitzvah*, Hashem will do His part. We can learn this idea from the story of the Maccabees as well.

Upon returning to Yerushalayim and repairing the Beit Hamikdash, the Maccabees found countless jugs of unsuitable oil, and only one jug of pure oil that had not been ruined by the Greeks. According to *halachah*, they would have been able to use the desecrated oil to light the *menorah*. And yet, the Maccabees felt that it would be improper to use impure oil for such a holy *mitzvah*. Instead, they chose to light the *menorah* using the pure, holier oil. Essential to the proper lighting of the *menorah* was the usage of both holy and pure oil. They wanted the rededication of the Beit Hamikdash to be one of purity and holiness. They did their best and Hashem granted them success. From the strong belief in Hashem inspired by the Maccabees, we, their descendants, learn to go above and beyond in our performance of the *mitzvot* - *lifnim mishurat hadin*.

There is a story of a Jew who once observed all of the *mitzvot*, but did so in the most lenient manner possible. He would always find a rabbi with the most lenient opinion and follow that one. He was excited after living for 120 years to go to Gan Eden. After being sent to Gan Eden, the angels accompanying him brought him to a wooden door with a little window and escorted him inside. All he saw in the room was a bed and a desk. He was confused and exclaimed, "I thought I was supposed to go to Gan Eden!" The angels, with a smile on their faces replied, "This is Gan Eden, according to the most lenient opinion."

Celebrating Chanukah offers many opportunities to perform acts that are above the bare minimum. Chanukah is a time of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* - we strictly adhere to the stringencies regarding the prohibition of mundane use of the *chanukiot*. Even though lighting only one candle each night is necessary to fulfill the *mitzvah*, we all gradually increase the number of lights each night, many of us only using oil to do so. Striving to go above and beyond the letter of the law is so important,

that the Gemara says that the Beit Hamikdash was eventually destroyed because Bnei Yisrael were not kind to one another and were only doing the minimum of their obligations.

The concept of going above and beyond is paramount in Judaism. The Torah states, "You shall diligently keep the commandment of Hashem, your G-d, and His testimonies and His statutes, which He has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of Hashem" (Sefer Devarim, 6:13). These *pesukim* however, appear to be confusing. What is the purpose of saying, "the right and the good"? Was this not already included in the *pasuk*? Rashi says that it is precisely from here that we derive the principle of *lifnim mishurat hadin*. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks comments on this, that the righteous and holy who impress us are those who do not follow the *strict* letter of the law, but supersede it.

Chanukah was molded from *kedushah*. The Maccabees refused to use desecrated oil for lighting the *menorah*. We should all strive to be like them in our celebration of Chanukah and the rest of the year. Let us follow in the example of the Maccabees in striving to perform the *mitzvot* above and beyond the letter of the law.

## Chanukah: One Day Too Short?

by Yisrael Wiener (Cooper '19)

One of the defining characteristics of Chanukah is its very length. If one were to take a stroll and ask pedestrians, whether non-Jew or Jew alike, "What are some of the key aspects of Chanukah?", many of them would answer "its length of eight days," which is in addition to the gifts and *menorah*, of course. However, even this very feature of the holiday needs some investigation, as it's not so *pashut* that the holiday is truly eight days, and even if it is, that it was always celebrated as such is not so simple either.

In the third Mishnah of the first *perek* of Rosh Hashanah, the Tanna Kama describes how on certain months, and during the period where Rosh Chodesh was still determined based on the sighting of the new moon, messengers would go out after the sanctification. Since Rosh Chodesh can be on one of two days, on certain months messengers needed to inform the people as to which day was declared Rosh Chodesh. The certain months were chosen because they contained *chagim*, and messengers were required to be sent out so that Jews could



(at least here in the Northeast) at Chanukah-time.

Of course, both sides of the judgment/compassion dichotomy are essential: our mission as Jews is the constant struggle to find a balance. We must make this struggle relatable to today. This Chanukah, think not only of the Hasmoneans, but of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, and of the Pittsburgh Police Department—positive, human examples of *midat hadin*.

At the same time, think of Stephan Ross, a Holocaust survivor and an example of *midat harachamim*. Following an unfathomable five-year journey of survival through ten Nazi death camps, a teenage Stephan was liberated from Dachau in the spring of 1945. As he walked free for the first time in five years, he came upon an American soldier sitting atop a tank. Upon seeing the emaciated boy, the American soldier approached him, gave him a portion of his rations and an American flag handkerchief, and embraced him. This was the first time in five years that anyone, much less a trained soldier, had treated Stephan as human, and it changed the course of his life. After immigrating to Boston and completing his education, Stephan Ross became a licensed psychologist and dedicated his life to the twofold goal of helping inner-city children and teaching others about the Holocaust. Throughout the course of his career, he touched the lives of thousands of people whom no one else believed in. His story is an important reminder of how one act of kindness can inspire countless other acts of kindness, and we should take it to heart in our day-to-day interactions with others.

## The Essence of Chanukah

by Ruthie Kaplowitz (GMSG '21)

The word “Chanukah” means “dedication.” However, this has almost no connection to the two main aspects of the holiday: the miracle of the oil and the miracle of beating the Greeks in war. We know, in Judaism, that names have much significance and meaning, so how can it be that this is the best name for Chanukah? The answer to this question can be found only by truly understanding the essence of the war. The Jews and the Greeks have very different ideologies and outlooks on life, and therefore the war between us was bound to happen.

In Judaism, we believe that being spiritual is an ideal, and only through spirituality can one connect to Hashem. As Jews, we try to elevate the mundane and physical by making them spiritual. We do this in most aspects of our

lives; we make *berachos* before eating, say *kiddush* on wine, keep strict laws of *kashrus*, and go to the *mikvah*; just to name a few. The concept of being spiritual, especially of elevating the physical rather than praising the mundane, is extremely foreign to the Greeks, who at this point valued physicality and reason.

Historically, we know that the Greeks were great scholars, philosophers, and scientists. They were highly intellectual and primarily admitted only to the existence of things that could be tested, measured, and proven in laboratories. As such, they did not approve of Judaism because it relied so heavily upon spirituality, something to which they were not accustomed. They also did not understand ideological faith, and hence, they did not know how to get rid of Judaism. They only banned physical aspects of Judaism—*bris milah*, *kashrus*, and studying Torah. Therefore, they were unable to prevent the Jews from practicing their faith, because Judaism is so spiritual. Although the Greeks were strong and powerful, they ultimately did not even understand how to fight and win the battle against Judaism.

The war of Chanukah is epitomized in one place: the Beis Hamikdash. The Beis Hamikdash is the single place that represents our physical connection to spirituality. It is the place where Hashem’s *Shechinah* rests, but the Kohanim still serve every day, bringing animal sacrifices. It is the epitome of physicality being elevated to the highest spiritual level, and as such, it is extremely important to us. The Beis Hamikdash connects us to Hashem, and elevates physicality to spirituality each day.

The Greeks understood that the Beis Hamikdash is a place that is important to us, and because of this, they destroyed it physically. They brought pigs into the holiest place, broke the building, and made the Beis Hamikdash unusable in a lot more ways. However, they only made it physically unusable. They were not able to remove the spirituality from the place, because the place itself is sanctified, and they did not understand this. They did not understand that they were fighting an ideological war, not merely a physical war. It was for this reason that the Jews were able to win the war. They were able to go back to the holy place and rededicate the Beis Hamikdash.

Now that we understand the essence of the Chanukah war, we must figure out why Chanukah, in particular, is the name for the holiday. The rededication of the Beis Hamikdash was a Jewish declaration of victory, as the rededication represents the essence of the war itself.



him in shul adding to the confession in Shacharis. Each time he pounded his heart and said *Ashamnu*, we have sinned, etc., he would tearfully add "I am nothing." Imagine the visitor's surprise when, shortly thereafter, this same person was called to the Torah and berated the *gabbai* furiously: "How dare you give me *revi'i*, an *aliyah* unbecfitting of my honor?" When the person returned to his seat, the visitor asked him, "Excuse me, but I couldn't help but overhear your tearful confession of your nothingness. Why, then, were you so upset at the *gabbai*?" The person responded, "I may be a nothing, but the fellow called to the Torah before me was a bigger nothing!"

These Jews fail to find truth in Hashem, which leads to failure in finding peace with his fellow. If one truly loves Hashem, then he will find that he loves his fellow Jew. Demeaning other sects of Judaism causes an enormous *chilul Hashem* and allows for a buildup of animosity among Jews.

The Chatam Sofer says that on Asarah B'Teves, the Heavenly court decides whether or not the Jews have the *zechus* to be taken out of *golus*. When we remember the theme of unity and the miracle of Chanukah, we will be able to find truth and peace with Hashem and each other.

## The Berachot of Chanukah

by Judah Wahbah (Ramaz '19)

During the holiday of Chanukah, we kindle the lights of the *menorah* with much joy and recite the *berachah* of *Lehadlik Ner Shel Chanukah*: "Blessed are you Hashem who has commanded us to light the Chanukah candles."

The strange thing about this *berachah* is that we actually don't have any commandment in the Torah or Tanach to perform the *mitzvah* of *hadlakat neirot*. Usually, such a *berachah* is recited only for Torah commandments, but the Torah preceded the miracle of Chanukah by many hundreds of years. How can we say that Hashem commanded us to do this act, if he really didn't?

Actually, this *berachah* for the lighting of the *menorah* is not alone in this regard. There are a few other *berachot* for Rabbinic *mitzvot* which are very similar. These *berachot* include: *al mikrah megillah*, which we recite on the reading of the Megillah; *likroh et hahallel*, which we recite on Rosh Chodesh before reciting Hallel; and *al netillat yadayim*, which we say as we wash before bread. Nowhere in the Torah are we told to read the Megillah, recite Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, or wash our hands before meals. Similarly, the blessing over lighting

the candles for Shabbat and Yom Tov, the blessing over *eiruv*, and the blessing said before we enjoy something in this world all include the phrase, "*asher kidishanu bimitzvosav vitzivanu*," - "that you have sanctified us with your *mitzvot* and commanded us," despite only being Rabbinic commandments.

One explanation for this is as follows: even though the Torah doesn't say explicitly that we are to recite these *berachot*, the Torah commands us indirectly to recite them. It says in Devarim (17:11): "*Lo tassur min hadavar asher yagidu lecha yamin usmoel*," - "Do not deviate either to the right or to the left from the instructions of your Rabbis." This *pasuk* is here to teach us that *divrei chachamim*, the commandments of the Rabbis, should be taken as commandments from the Torah.

It was Chazal, our Rabbis, who innovated these *mitzvot*, and they are elevated to become just like the *mitzvot* of the Torah. So the *mitzvah* that is referenced to in '*asher kidishanu bemitzvatav vetzivanuh*', is the commandment to listen to the instructions and guidance of our spiritual leaders.

This teaches us a very powerful message. Hashem, in setting up His 613 commandments, created a space for our Rabbis to add their own *mitzvot* in certain situations. Hashem understands the continuity of our tradition, and feels that it is vital to have spiritual leaders who can amend and reinterpret ideas based on their time periods. He wanted to provide that opportunity for people to inspire, guide, and bring light into the lives of others.

Similarly, we too should always strive to see how we can enhance the lives of others, as that is what Chanukah is all about. The Greeks took away our freedom and brought darkness into our lives. In contrast, we must provide guidance and inspiration to others, and always bring light into their lives.

## Lighting Up Another's Flame

by Yaakov Willner (YULA '20)

Rav Gedaliah Schorr quotes the Gemara in Yoma 29a that asks: why is Esther compared to dawn? The Gemara answers that just like dawn is the end of the night, so too Esther is the end of the miracles. The Gemara then asks: But what about the miracle of Chanukah? Isn't Chanukah an example of a later miracle? The Gemara answers that the miracle of Esther was the last miracle to be written in Tanach. Chanukah, on the other hand, is a miracle that is not included in Tanach, and is therefore





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Questions? Comments? Please contact [kolhanearimpub@gmail.com](mailto:kolhanearimpub@gmail.com).

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