

This edition of Focus is dedicated by

Harry and Carol Saal  
Nate, Susan and Jared Saal

in loving memory of

**Jessica Lynn Saal** י"ל

*A beloved daughter, sister, and aunt  
and a deeply-committed member of our Jewish Community,  
whose life was cut short at the age of 34.*

Jessica was steeped in the learning of Torah from the six years she spent at the South Peninsula Hebrew Day School. Her zest for life included a special enjoyment of the holiday of Chanukah. She regularly invited friends into her home to enjoy latkes, light candles and exchange small gifts. But her greatest Chanukah gift was providing the spark for gathering friends together to celebrate the Jewish holidays and traditions. To her diverse group of friends, she infused these relationships with a positive sense of her Jewish identity. She was proud of her heritage and found ample opportunities to celebrate it.

The hidden lesson of the Chanukah story:  
*“All the good of Israel and its survival depends on its unity.”*

May we always support one another  
and derive strength from each other.

# FOCUS

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# FOCUS

No. 7 Fall 2007

*A Chanukah Reader*

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## Preface

Not all holidays are created equal. The most important celebrations of the year are the biblical holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot. Purim, a holiday founded by the prophets of the Great Assembly, is next in significance. From the perspective of both Jewish history and law, the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah comes in last. Relative to the others, it is the least important observance on our calendar.

Yet strangely enough, Chanukah currently enjoys the enviable position as one of the most well-known and widely observed Jewish holidays in America. Upon reflection, one can easily understand why.

First, Chanukah has a great story. The brave resistance of a small group of Jewish “Maccabees” against the mighty army of the Seleucid Empire was a battle of the weak vs. the strong, a struggle for freedom vs. tyranny, and a quest for religious expression vs. political repression. Their miraculous victory is a story that speaks loudly to the Jews of America as it echoes both the themes of this country’s founding and the anti-Semitism and discrimination of the last century.

Second, Chanukah is blessed with a beautiful mitzvah – the lighting of the menorah. At first glance, it is not much of a mitzvah, really. Just eight candles lit in the window of a Jewish home. But across the wide Diaspora, in Europe, Africa and the New World, those little candles reappear year after year, century after century, never succumbing to the cold and darkness of the long winter night. It is an image heavy with meaning. In modern times, the innocuous Chanukah menorah has become a symbol of Jewish survival, Jewish pride and the Jewish State. The act of lighting a menorah today is nothing less than an expression of existential wonder and thanksgiving at being a Jew, and a passionate declaration of faith in the future of our people.

Lastly, Chanukah often falls out right at the end of December. Embracing and celebrating Chanukah provides a way for Jewish Americans to affirm their heritage at a time when jingling bells, blinking bulbs, and the mass marketing of the “holiday season” threaten to drown out all else.

For this edition of Focus, the rabbis of the Jewish Study Network strove to transcend the Chanukah of today and uncover the original meaning of the holiday as it was conceived by the sages of old. As you read the results of their studies, you will be pleasantly surprised to find that the contemporary American Chanukah has much in common with the original vision. And in the end you will learn that even a holiday as “unimportant” as Chanukah is indispensable to the spiritual growth of a Jew in today’s world.

In closing, the editors wish to thank rabbis Gavin Enoch and Avi Lebowitz for collaborating on the historical overview which constitutes the first part of the introduction.

Wishing you and yours a Happy Chanukah,

Rabbi Joey Felsen  
Executive Director, JSN

Rabbi Yisroel Gordon  
Editor

# Introduction

The story behind the events of Chanukah begins with the Greek conquest of the Kingdom of Judea by the military forces of Alexander the Great in 320 B.C.E. Not content to be mere military conquerors, the Greeks maintained a vision of conquest that extended beyond just physical subjugation. They wanted their culture to dominate the world and hence always sought to spread its influence within the territories under their control. Long before the actual events of Chanukah took place, Greek culture, known as Hellenism, started to make itself felt within the Jewish population.

As Paul Johnson notes in *The History of the Jews*, “the impact of Hellenization on educated Jews was in many ways similar to the impact of the Enlightenment on the eighteenth-century ghetto... it was a destabilizing force spiritually and, above all, it was a secularizing, materialistic force.”

In response to Hellenization, internal conflict soon arose within the Jewish people as those who favored the new trend confronted those who did not. Eventually there developed a movement of Jews whose aim it was to force the pace of Hellenization by purging Judaism of those elements that limited the advancement of Greek culture.

In the year 175 B.C.E., these Jewish Hellenizers gained a powerful ally with the ascendancy of Antiochus IV Epiphanes to the throne of the Seleucid (Syrian-Greek) empire. Like those before him, Antiochus was disturbed to find the Jews still holding on to their own religion and worshipping their own God in blatant disregard of the Greek deities.

To further advance the cause of Hellenization, Antiochus issued decrees banning any religious or cultural practices not in line with Hellenism, particularly the observance of Brit Mila, Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. Antiochus was a vicious dictator bent on the destruction of Judaism. Women who circumcised their babies were executed with their dead babies hung around their necks (I Maccabees 1:60-61). A special directive was also

sent to stop the sacrificial service in the Temple. The Temple itself, in 168 B.C.E., was desecrated and turned into a place where hogs were offered to the pagan gods.

One particularly sinister decree of Antiochus was the law requiring every Jewish girl prior to marriage to first have relations with the Seleucid governor. Jewish resistance to this decree is detailed in the following incident. Yehudit, the brave daughter of Yochanan the High Priest, was delivered to the governor prior to her wedding. Instead of following suit, she cunningly prepared dairy products for him to eat and wine to drink. The governor ate the cheese, became thirsty, and drank a lot of wine. When he fell asleep, Yehudit beheaded him.

The efforts to homogenize Judaism with Greek culture met resistance from those Jews opposed to Hellenization. Pious Jews willingly martyred themselves before the face of imposed apostasy. But isolated incidences of resistance eventually developed into outright rebellion.

The initial military revolt was led by one Judah the Maccabee, an epitaph awarded him for his famous battle cry, “Who is like You among the heavenly powers, O God!” (the word “Maccabee” being an acronym formed by the first letters of the above Biblical verse). Judah was joined by his five brothers, all sons of Matisyahu, patriarch of the priestly Hasmonean family. Legend has it that a Seleucid general once described these five Jewish heroes as “stronger than lions, lighter than eagles, and quicker than bears” (Scroll of Antiochus 44).

Despite the extraordinary odds stacked against them, the children of Matisyahu miraculously succeeded in their battles against the Greeks. Without divine intervention, the enemy would have swiftly crushed this small band of religious Jews. Instead, after a short period of intense fighting, the Maccabees freed Jerusalem from Seleucid control and isolated the Hellenized Jews to the northern port city of Acre.

Finally, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kislev in the year 165 B.C.E., the Maccabees returned to the Temple. As they set

about repairing all that had been vandalized, God had a second miracle in store. When the pagan Hellenists invaded, they desecrated the menorah and sabotaged the oil reserves. When the Maccabees finally regained control, they could find only one jug of oil fit for the lighting of the new menorah in the Temple hall. The Jews used the little oil they found and something extraordinary happened. It just kept on burning, day after day. It burned for eight days, even though there was only enough oil for one, giving them the time they needed to produce new, pure oil.

To commemorate both the miracle of the war and the miracle of the oil, the sages instituted the holiday of Chanukah, eight days of thanksgiving, celebration, and light, to be observed each year by all subsequent generations.

\* \* \* \* \*

The first of the miracles, the military victory, fits right into the standard paradigm of Jewish history. A mighty enemy threatens the Jews, God intervenes and the Jews are saved. We recognize this storyline. The miracle of the menorah, however, is not typical at all. No one's life was in danger. There was a shortage of pure oil, but when defiled oil is the only kind available, it may be used. So actually, there was no need for a miracle here at all! Stranger yet, it is the commemoration of this miracle that takes over our Chanukah celebrations today. We light a menorah for eight nights to commemorate the unnecessary miracle of the Temple menorah. Why?

Certainly, God doesn't do things like this just for fun. There is a message here for us, a message so vital it warrants a miracle to get its point across.

Let's return for a moment to the Jewish uprising against the Hellenists. The Syrian-Greeks posed no mortal threat to the Jews. Unlike some of our enemies, it was not genocide that they were after. Their hatred was not directed at the Jew, it was directed at Judaism. They forbade Jewish observance and they shut down the Temple. Many Jews were resigned to the new world order, and a number embraced the alluring Hellenistic culture. But some Jews, the heroic Maccabees, would not



surrender. They fought for their religious freedom; they fought for the keys to the Temple. And with God's help, they achieved the impossible. They won.

One thing is abundantly clear. The Maccabees did not fight to save the Jews. They fought to save Judaism.

After the Holy Temple was refurbished and rededicated, the Maccabees realized that they had only one jug of oil, enough for just one day. They lit it and it burned for eight days. A strange miracle indeed. In fact, this miracle was not wrought by God at all. It was wrought by man.

A mitzvah fulfilled with *mesirut nefesh*, self-sacrifice, is imbued with a supernatural quality. When man rises above material pleasures and fights off the seductions of Hellenism, when man's love of God, Torah, and Mitzvot inspire him to overcome all obstacles, when man lives up to his own majestic divine image, man himself is performing a miracle.

It is perfectly natural to pursue the desires of the body. But man, unlike animal, can break the laws of nature. Man can transcend the physical and activate latent spiritual potential by mustering his strength and exercising his free will. It is no surprise that a mitzvah fulfilled with spiritual muscle has supernatural staying power. A miracle of light is the natural result of the Maccabee's heroic stand against darkness.

In the end, the two miracles of Chanukah are really one and the same. It is the victory of the Jewish ideal over the Hellenist ideal; Spiritual Man beating Olympic Man at his own game. On Chanukah we celebrate our capacity to transcend natural law.

The fire of the Maccabee's menorah is eternal. It transcends time and burns through the ages, through generations of Jews in every corner of the Diaspora. That same miraculous light shines from our Chanukah menorahs today, illuminating our homes with the undefeatable Jewish spirit. It is the secret of our survival. It will never go out.

# The Real Zeal

## Understanding the Maccabean Response

*Rabbi Gavin Enoch*

Speaking of a perceived partnership between the Jews and the Greeks, Winston Churchill once wrote that “no other two races have set such a mark upon the world...No two cities have counted more with mankind than Athens and Jerusalem... Personally, I have always been on the side of both.”

Chanukah, however, tells of a different story; one of conflict, not cooperation. The Jews in ancient times resisted Greek advancement, going to the extremes of military confrontation in defense of their culture against the encroachment of Hellenism. On Chanukah we celebrate the heroism of the Maccabean revolt. Most of all, though, we celebrate its victory.

But what would we think of the Maccabees were they around today? A small band of long-bearded priests taking on the major military and cultural super-power of the day, risking their lives in defense of their ancient religious practices. Were they martyrs, or were they fanatics? Were they perhaps even religious fundamentalists? The idea of fighting for anything in the name of God has earned a bad reputation over the years, and deservedly so.

How many wars have been fought, lives lost, and tears shed over the needless bloodshed of wars motivated by religious antipathy? And especially today, with the rise of radical Islamism, any mention of holy war arouses only one connotation, and it's not a positive one. In celebrating Chanukah, then, are we not merely glorifying the Talibans of the past? Would we not more naturally align ourselves with the enlightenment of the Greeks rather than a small band of rebels that resisted the march of modernity?

Such questions force us to look deeply into of the Judeo-Greek conflict and the extreme reaction it sparked in Jews of the time. In reality, there exists a subtle yet profound disparity between the kind of zealotry practiced by the Maccabees and its modern day adulterations. Understanding this distinction will reveal the powerful lesson that Chanukah has to teach for our times, indeed for all times.

## II

Let us start by examining the concept of zealotry as understood within the context of Jewish tradition. The Biblical roots of zealotry are found in the story of a man named Pinchas. After leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Jewish people encounter many a foe along the path toward the Promised Land. In one particularly harrowing episode, the people of Midian launch a truly unconventional attack, sending their women into the wilderness to seduce the male Jewish population into idol worship. As a result, a plague ensues and thousands of Jews are dying. At the peak of this intrigue, a Jewish prince by the name of Zimri makes a brazen demonstration by cohabiting publicly with a Midianite princess. Their goal is to glorify the worship of the idol of Peor, and to enthrall the masses into joining them.

As many look on with disbelief, one man is willing to make a stand. Pinchas, consumed with rage at the blasphemous spectacle taking place before his eyes, grabs a spear and impales the two of them on it. While many of his contemporaries chide him for over-reacting, God is so pleased with Pinchas that He awards him a “covenant of peace,” conferring upon him and all his descendents the status of a *Kohen* (priest). The pernicious plague too comes to a sudden halt.

When we read this story we tend to focus on the outcome, assuming that Pinchas obviously did the right thing here. After all, God Himself vindicates him. But we must ask ourselves, what justification is there for taking such a course of action? The Talmud states that anyone seeking legal waiver to perform an act of zealotry is denied.<sup>1</sup> So, while Pinchas was granted post hoc kudos for his zealotry, nevertheless Jewish law does not mandate it. Not only that, had Zimri managed to kill Pinchas first he would have been absolved of murder under the Law of the Pursuer.<sup>2</sup> As fair game for all, Pinchas was indeed taking his life into his own hands.

Furthermore, it is a fundamental Talmudic dictum that doing a mitzvah that one is commanded to perform is better than doing the same act when not commanded to do so. That is, discharging an obligatory duty is more praiseworthy than acting voluntarily.<sup>3</sup> While it might sound counter-intuitive at first, nevertheless there is good reason for this: It takes much greater character to overcome one’s natural resistance to authority than to go with the flow of one’s own inspiration.<sup>4</sup> Zealotry, insofar as it is a self-motivated act of self sacrifice, clearly falls low on the hierarchy of religious expression.

The story of Chanukah is no less dramatic than that of Pinchas, and as such no less problematic. The Maccabees were vastly outnumbered, outskilled, and underarmed in facing the Greek war machine. They had absolutely no hope of survival, much less victory. All they could realistically expect from their

rebellion was to meet with swift defeat and ultimate annihilation. Yet the Maccabees, like Pinchas before them, took the law into their own hands regardless of the consequences.

Hindsight is twenty/twenty and it is easy to judge the merit of an act by its results. Yet, we have seen that zealotry is neither justified legally nor praiseworthy religiously. As such, it comes as surprising that zealots like Pinchas and the Maccabees should be held in such high esteem by the Jewish tradition. What, in the end, is so good about being a zealot?

### III

For an answer, we must return to the story of Pinchas and his spear. Having killed Zimri at great personal risk, Pinchas is awarded eternal priesthood and a covenant of peace. But listen as God Himself explains exactly why Pinchas deserves such accolades:

Pinchas...has turned my anger away from the Children of Israel *by being jealous My jealousy.*

Numbers 25:11-12

*“By being jealous My jealousy.”* He expressed the anger that I should have expressed.

Rashi ad loc.

What a fascinating statement! To be zealous is to be jealous. This is no mere alliteration or play-on-words. The word for “jealousy” (*kinah*) is closely tied with the word for zealotry (*kana’ut*). While in English the two words share a similar phonetic ring, in Hebrew the connection goes much deeper. Both words actually stem from the same three-letter Hebrew root (קנא). Hence, they are in essence the same word!

Now, the cynic might very well claim that the zealous are just jealous of the people they attack. Admittedly, there is some truth to this assertion. Far too often those who crusade against others are really just trying to control their own desires to partake in just those activities they rail so much against.

True zeal is nothing of the sort. Granted, it is a form of jealousy, but not for the fulfillment of one's own desires or the pomp of one's own ego. Rather than jealousy *of* the other, it is jealousy *for* the other. It is a jealousy on behalf of God.

Such jealousy stems from a burning desire to defend an ideal, to fix the breaches in God's world. But more than that, it stems from a personal need to defend the honor of God, an internalization of the world as only He sees it. To be angry at that which angers Him, as Rashi puts it. To "be jealous *His* jealousy," not one's own.

As such, it should make perfect sense that one cannot be commanded to become a zealot. A feeling of zeal must emanate from a personal desire to act for God. Such a feeling only exists in the person who has completely aligned his own will with that of God. Any command to do so would be self defeating and intrinsically superfluous. Zeal must be an act of the most pure self expression. The slightest trace of personal vendetta would quite literally constitute a gross adulteration.<sup>5</sup>

## IV

This kind of zeal is exactly what Chanukah is all about. The special addition inserted into the daily prayers for Chanukah, the *Al HaNissim* prayer, thanks God for the miracle of Jewish victory. But listen carefully to its wording:

...You fought their fight, took up their claim, avenged their cause...

The Maccabees put their lives on the line for God, defending His mitzvot, protecting His Temple, fighting the enemies of His Torah, and yet it was *their* fight, *their* claim, *their* cause? Indeed! They fought their very own cause, appropriated as it was from none other than God himself!<sup>6</sup>

So central is this theme to Chanukah that it even finds expression in the name of the holiday itself.<sup>7</sup> An ancient tradition has it that Chanukah received its name not from the rededication of the Temple (*Chanukat HaBayit*) but rather from a hidden message contained within the name itself. Indeed the word can be broken up to read as follows: *hanu* (they rested) on *ka* (the Hebrew letters kaf and hey, numerically equivalent to 25). This can be understood as an allusion to the fact that the Jews rested from fighting after the completion of the war on the “25<sup>th</sup>” of Kislev, the first day of Chanukah.<sup>8</sup>

What strikes one as strange is that the sages chose to label Chanukah with an epitaph that captures so little of the overall significance of the holiday. Where is there any reference to the miraculous military campaign, the felling of a bitter enemy, or the great salvation of victory? Just, “they rested.” Could one imagine a greater understatement?

The truth is that there are always two elements to any military victory: the defeat of the enemy and the cessation of hostilities (which itself can come about even without a clear-cut victory, such as when a truce is drawn). When nations seek to commemorate their war victories it is usually the former that they seek to express. VE Day marks the day that Germany surrendered; VJ Day, the day Japan followed suit. “V” is for victory, the vanquishing of the foe. But Chanukah is no mere VG day.

With the name of Chanukah the sages at the time sought to give expression to the meaning of the war with the Greeks. The purpose was not to defeat the Greeks qua Greeks. There was no personal or ethnic antagonism here. The point, rather, was to

remove the obstacles to proper mitzvah observance that the Greeks had created. For one who has internalized the will of God, there is no option but to go to war in such a circumstance. There can be no life without Torah and mitzvot.

The main accomplishment of the victory, therefore, was that it put an end to the struggle for keeping mitzvot and allowed the Jews to get back to business as usual. Victory over enemies had no meaning in and of itself, only that it facilitated the freedom of movement to serve God openly. The war had been merely a necessary evil. Ultimate triumph came with the rest from war, the cessation of hostilities that permitted the Jews to live freely once again.

Chanukah, as such, is a microcosm for the entire Jewish world-historical vision. No one could articulate this dream better than Maimonides:

Why did all the prophets and sages long for the Days of the Messiah? Only in order that they should find *rest* from the kingdoms that would not leave them to engage in Torah and mitzvot in the proper fashion. They only wished to find the tranquility to develop wisdom in order to merit eternal life.

#### Laws of Repentance 9:2

Many so-called zealots would not know what to do with themselves were they suddenly to find all their enemies vanish before their eyes. They do not fight for a cause. Rather, their cause is merely to fight. In contrast, during Chanukah, we rise above the jealously zealous to discover the purity, indeed the hope, which hides behind the surface of real zeal.

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<sup>1</sup> Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 82b

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 82a

<sup>3</sup> Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 3a



<sup>4</sup> Tosafot ad loc.

<sup>5</sup> See R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Taam V'daat*, Numbers 25:11

<sup>6</sup> See R. Matis Weinberg, "Patterns in Time," vol. 8, pg. 293

<sup>7</sup> The following section is adapted from R. Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim*, vol. 2, pp. 3-4

<sup>8</sup> R. Mordechai Yaffe, *Levush Malchut*, Shulchan Aruch O.C. 670:1. A prolific and influential author, R. Yaffe served as chief rabbi of both Prague and Lublin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

# Chanukah Lights, Camera, Action!

*Rabbi Daniel Steinberg*

**T**he Rabbis taught: “The mitzvah of Chanukah is one lamp per household. Those who beautify [mitzvot add] a lamp for every member [of the household]. For those who [wish to] beautify [the mitzvah] even more, Beit Shammai says that they light eight on the first night and go down from there and Beit Hillel says that they light one lamp on the first night and thereafter add [an additional lamp on each subsequent night].”

...The reasoning of Beit Shammai is that [the number of burning menorah lamps] should correspond to the number of days of Chanukah still remaining and the reasoning of Beit Hillel is that [the number of lamps] should correspond to the number of days that have already passed.

Talmud, *Shabbat* 21b

The Talmudic passage above records three levels of observance for the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah menorah. At the lowest rung is a single lamp (i.e., a single candle) per household, per night. The next step up is to light one candle for every member of the household each night. How to perform the

mitzvah in the *best* way possible, is the subject of an ancient argument between the academies of Hillel and Shammai. According to Beit Hillel, you'd start with one lamp on the first night of Chanukah. Each new night you add a lamp, so by the end of the holiday, on the eighth day, your menorah is ablaze in all its fiery glory. However, according to Beit Shammai, you do just the opposite. The first day is the brightest, and you *take away* one lamp each subsequent night, so that by the last day of Chanukah, all that's left is the dim light of one solitary candle. Today, everyone follows the opinion of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai's position has been relegated to a footnote of history, but understanding this debate is critical to understanding the spiritual lesson of Chanukah.

The Talmud supplies us with the rationale behind both Beit Hillel's and Beit Shammai's respective positions. Beit Hillel wants the number of lamps burning in the menorah to correspond to the number of days of the holiday that have already passed (the current day is counted together with the previous days) and Beit Shammai wants the number of burning flames to correspond to the number of days of Chanukah remaining. The reasons given are straightforward, but they seem so...mundane. Is there a deeper meaning behind their positions?

Insight into this deeper meaning comes from R. Eliyahu E. Dessler.<sup>1</sup> He presents a fascinating interpretation of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai's argument, which he founds upon a most basic aspect of human nature.

At the onset of the holiday, everyone's inspiration runs high. The entire family gathers around the menorah; nobody misses it for the world. Reciting the blessings, you have no trouble feeling grateful for the opportunity to participate in yet another Chanukah experience. The blessings are recited intently and the Chanukah songs are sung melodiously.

On the second night, people are still riding the wave of inspiration they experienced the night before. However, a subtle drop in intensity is detectable. The blessings are said a little faster. Perhaps, one family member is absent from the lighting.

By the sixth night, the lighting of the menorah has become something of a rote task. Complaints can be heard about how difficult it is to rearrange one's schedule in order to be present at the lighting. The candles are lit quickly, during a commercial break. And immediately after the lighting, the family disperses in all different directions.

By the eighth night, nobody knows where the matches are. Everything has become old and people are almost relieved the holiday is over. They anticipate doing it all again next year, but for now, they're through.

This state of affairs, while unfortunate, is not unusual. It is a fact of human nature that people have a hard time maintaining feelings of inspiration and, according to Beit Shammai, this reality is reflected in the menorah itself. The first night is all bright lights, and by the last night all that's left is a dim flicker.

But not everyone falters in maintaining their spiritual intensity over lengthy holidays. There are a select few whose inspiration increases exponentially with the advent of each new day of holiday. These are the Tzadikim, the wholly righteous, who *work* on themselves each day until they arrive at an inner joy and genuine appreciation for the God-given holiday they have the opportunity to celebrate.

This "work" takes the form of serious contemplation upon the unique aspects of each holiday. Passover is a time to think about freedom and Choseness; Shavuot asks us to think about the Ten Commandments and Torah; Sukkot is a time to reflect upon the divine protection afforded the Jews as they trekked across the wilderness en route to the Land of Israel. On Purim, we dwell upon God's hidden providence and love for us even

when we are in exile. And Chanukah is a time to appreciate the miracles of the victory and the oil. The level of inspiration that is experienced on the holiday is directly proportionate to the amount of effort one invests in this internal work and focused thought.

This is why Beit Hillel rules that, day after day, we *add* menorah lamps. For the menorah lighting should reflect the growing intensity of the Tzadik's holiday experience, the one to which we all should aspire. For eight consecutive days, these people gradually scale the heights of religious inspiration through thoughtful deliberation of the miraculous Chanukah story. On the first night, the lighting of the first lamp marks the humble beginning of their ascent. Each night another candle is lit, demonstrating that far from waning in intensity, holy Jews are *building* on the inspiration they achieved the day before. After a full eight days of meditation, they arrive at the zenith of their appreciation for the holiday. It is only on the *last* day of Chanukah, says Beit Hillel, that the menorah can burn its brightest.

The argument between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, then, is over whose experience the Sages modeled when they instituted the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah menorah. According to R. Dessler's understanding of Beit Shammai, the order of lighting was meant to reflect the sentiment of the majority of the population. Eight lamps are lit the first night for it is common to experience a burst of excitement on the first night of Chanukah. However, since most people do not apply themselves to the rigorous inner work described above, by the second day they are in decline. Each subsequent day of Chanukah only serves to distance them twenty-four *more* hours away from that initial inspiration. Unable to gain access to their previous gusto for the holiday, to them Chanukah seems to drag on and fade out. The menorah lighting of Beit Shammai mirrors

this reality. The menorah fades from night to night until only one flame remains on the eighth night.

According to Beit Hillel, though, the Sages modeled the order of lighting after a special group of individuals – the few Tzadikim whose excitement, joy and inspiration increase day after day. The menorah starts with one lamp and moves up from there until the eighth night when it is all ablaze.

## II

As satisfying as this interpretation is, a question remains. What is the significance of this debate? What difference does it make whose religious sentiment the order of lighting the Chanukah menorah follows?

It is not inconsequential that Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai are discussing the highest category of mitzvah observance, the menorah lighting of those who wish to perform their mitzvot in the most beautiful way possible. In the view of R. Dessler, this debate actually addresses a basic dilemma confronting anyone aspiring to spiritual greatness.

How should a person who wants to grow spiritually go about doing so? There are two possible paths. One option is to become an actor. You can act as if you have already achieved your goal, mimicking the behavior of the wholly righteous. It may seem fake and hollow, but method acting can actually be quite effective. Humans are influenced by their behavior. Acting good *makes* you good.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, when people envision themselves as righteous, authentic internal greatness becomes less formidable and distant.<sup>3</sup> And there is a third advantage to this exercise. A person who strives to act great is less likely to sin. If for no other reason, this person will abstain from

unbecoming behavior, for it undermines their “act” of external dignity.<sup>4</sup>

There is an inherent danger in this approach. A person can comfortably settle into the role of the Tzadik, lose touch with reality and ignore the enormous spiritual work that lies ahead. The line between acting and real life becomes blurred, and instead of making progress, one ends up resting on the laurels of external righteousness, never moving past the false façade he has created.<sup>5</sup>

It could be argued, therefore, that it is preferable to always act in line with one’s true inner state. This is the other option, a religious exercise in its own right, for it forces the Jew to keep a steady finger on his spiritual pulse and reminds him of the long road of spiritual growth that lies ahead. In this approach, the progress of the religious aspirant is marked by synchronicity; never allowing external behavior to get ahead or lag behind their inner spiritual reality. The Jew is then able to progress ever upwards, without fear of developing a false righteousness.

When an individual desires to fulfill the mitzvah of the menorah in the best possible way, it is a desire to take a spiritual step forward. It is precisely here that the argument of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai begins.

According to Beit Hillel, the aspiration of this religious fledgling to soar to spiritual heights needs to be nurtured and the lighting of the menorah is an opportunity to do just that. The Sages instruct this inspired Jew to continuously *add* candles, reflecting the inner work and thought-world of the Tzadikim. The menorah gently guides these individuals up the ladder of spiritual growth; teaching them to constantly grow and build upon their previous accomplishments.

Beit Shammai disagrees. They maintain that one must always avoid the danger of false externals. This is doubly true at a juncture of personal growth. At such times, it is imperative

that a person starkly face the reality of their true spiritual state. In the view of Beit Shammai, the Sages instituted that the menorah should continuously *decrease* in brightness, reflecting the mediocre level of the majority, so that the aspiring minority may take it to heart. See whose ranks you will join if you do not progress in your spiritual life! If you fail to grab hold of this precious inspiration and apply all of your energy to nurturing it into something real, you will cease to be exceptional. On the contrary, subsumed by the majority, your religious life will fade out with the passing time just like the menorah.

### III

Why did God allow the Syrian-Greeks to invade Jerusalem and convert the Temple into a place of pagan worship? “*Hitrashlu b’avodah*,” because the Jews had become lax in the Temple service.<sup>6</sup> Inspiration was at an all-time low and mitzvot performance had atrophied into mere habit. In response, God took away the privilege of serving Him. But when God saw the Maccabees put their lives on the line and fight for the right to perform the Temple service, God made a miracle, defeated the enemy and brought the Jews back.

How appropriate it is that on the holiday of Chanukah, which was established to celebrate a recommitment to the divine service of the Holy Temple, we have the mitzvah of the menorah which gives us a model of personal spiritual growth to which we can aspire.

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<sup>1</sup> Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol. II pgs. 120-122. A leading theologian and a proponent of the Mussar movement, R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1891-1954) lived and taught in Lithuania, England and Israel.

<sup>2</sup> This basic Jewish concept was popularized by an anonymous work of the 12th century: “Know that man is influenced by his actions. His heart



and thoughts are always affected by his behavior...” (Sefer HaChinuch, Parshat Bo).

<sup>3</sup> This concept provides an explanation for the curious Halacha to abstain from eating bread baked by non-Jews during the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 603). Although the laws of Kashrut do not require this stringency, this is considered an extra act of religiosity appropriate for the Ten Days of Repentance for it expresses a fear of non-kosher food. At first glance, it would seem that this is an almost hypocritical exercise. Of what use is it to behave ultra-religious for a predetermined amount of time? However, in light of the fact that the Ten Days of Repentance serves to lay down a strong foundation of spiritual growth for the upcoming New Year, this custom can be understood. By acting like a Tzadik for ten days, the religious aspirant explores the possibility of being a Tzadik himself, driving home the idea that this long-term goal is achievable.

<sup>4</sup> It was for this reason that R. Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Prince) bestowed the appellation of “Rebbe” on the delinquent son of R. Elazar bar R. Shimon and hired a personal tutor for him. The Talmud relates that when the son requested to leave, his teacher replied, “They dress you in gold and call you ‘Rebbe’ – how can you speak of going home?!” The son swore to never again ask to leave (Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 85a).

<sup>5</sup> During his term as leader of the Jews, Rabban Gamliel stationed guards at the entrance of the study hall. They barred access to students whose external actions did not match their true, inner level (Talmud, *Berachot* 28a).

<sup>6</sup> Beit Chadash, O.C. 690

# How to Dedicate – and Guard – a Holy Temple

*Rabbi Avromi Apt*

“**W**hat is Chanukah?”

Talmud, *Shabbat* 21b

In response to this basic question, the Talmud tells the Chanukah story:

When the Syrian-Greeks [of the Seleucid Empire] invaded the Holy Temple (168 B.C.E.), they desecrated all of the Temple’s oil.<sup>1</sup> The Hasmonean dynasty<sup>2</sup> arose and defeated [the enemy], but when they searched [for pure oil] they could only find one flask that still had the unbroken seal of the High Priest. It contained only one days’ worth of oil, but a miracle occurred and they were able to light from it for eight days. (It took eight days to produce new oil.) The following year, they established [these days] into a holiday for thanking and praising [God].

This is the Chanukah story and this is what we are celebrating.<sup>3</sup> At this point in history, however, the relevance of the story is highly questionable. While it is nice to know that God made miracles for our people over 2,000 years ago, what meaning does it hold for us today? Moreover, is it really appropriate to celebrate the miracles of the Holy Temple at a time when the Temple lies in ruins?

Miracles were not uncommon back then.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Talmud (*Ta'anit* 17b) records a list of holidays that were established to celebrate numerous miracles of the Second Temple Era. However, after the Temple's destruction Jews stopped celebrating these minor holidays. Why is Chanukah different? Why do we still celebrate Chanukah today?

Another question. Every holiday has a special Torah reading that reflects the central message of the day. Strangely enough, on Chanukah we read the Torah portion that deals with the inauguration of the Tabernacle in the Sinai Desert (Numbers 7:1-8:4). What possible connection does this have with the holiday of Chanukah?

The very name of the holiday is curious. The word "Chanukah" refers to the "*Chanukat HaBayit*," the rededication of the Temple to the service of God after the Maccabees drove out the Greeks.<sup>5</sup> According to the Talmud, however, the central point of the holiday is to commemorate the miracle of the menorah. What does the rededication of the Temple have to do with the menorah? Why do we call the holiday "Chanukah"?

## II

For the answer to these questions, we need to take a leap back in time. After the Exodus from Egypt, the Jews constructed a small sanctuary called the "Mishkan" (the Tabernacle).<sup>6</sup> The Torah describes the dedication ceremony of

the Mishkan in detail. It was a twelve day process that included offerings presented by the princes of each of the twelve tribes.

On the day that Moshe finished erecting the Mishkan, he anointed it and sanctified it along with all its furniture...

The princes of Israel, who were the heads of their paternal lines, then came forward... The offering that they presented to God consisted of six full wagons and twelve oxen...

Numbers 7:1-3

For twelve days, the princes consecrated the Mishkan for divine service with their offerings. Each day a different tribal prince came forward and brought offerings on the Mishkan's altar on behalf of his tribe. Yet one prince is missing. The prince of the Levite tribe did not bring any offerings. Aaron the High Priest was disturbed by this failure, so God told Moshe to console his brother.

Tell him that his role is greater than theirs, for he shall kindle and prepare the lights of the menorah.

Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar 5

God told Aaron that he need not worry about his tribe's absence from the Mishkan's dedication because his tribe has a greater role: the daily lighting of the sanctuary's menorah.

God's response is difficult to understand. Firstly, if Aaron was upset about his tribe's failure to present their own offerings, what consolation was there in knowing that they would light the menorah? How would lighting the menorah make up for missing out on the Mishkan's dedication? Nachmanides<sup>7</sup> asks another question. There were many things with which Aaron could have been consoled. His tribe was responsible for the twice daily burning of incense and the service in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. In fact, the tribe

of Levi has exclusive rights to *all* the Temple services. Why did God choose to console him with the lighting of the menorah?

Nachmanides quotes another Midrash:

The kindling of the menorah lights is greater, for while sacrifices are special, they can only be offered when the Temple stands. The lights of the menorah, however, are eternal.

Midrash Rabba, Bamidbar 15:6

What does this Midrash mean? No different from the sacrifices, the lighting of the Temple's menorah obviously ended with the Temple's destruction. What is eternal about the lights of the menorah? Nachmanides has a fascinating interpretation of this Midrash. God was not referring to the daily menorah lighting; he was referring the lighting of the menorah of Chanukah. While the Temple menorah might have been lost in the destruction, it lives on forever through our annual lighting of the Chanukah menorah. Somehow, the essential message of both menorahs is the same.

In order to understand the connection between the Temple's menorah and the Chanukah story, we first need to understand the nature of our enemy, the Hellenists of the Seleucid Empire.

### III

The Hellenist Greeks made it their mission to defile the Temple. They had no intentions of destroying the structure; they loved the architecture. They just set out to remove any vestige of holiness. They turned the Holy Temple into a center of paganism.

The Greeks had no appreciation for spiritual sanctity and holiness; they recognized beauty solely in the physical realm. The Greek hegemony demanded first rights to Jewish virgins. Defilement of all things was the Hellenist way.

This was the Hellenist attitude towards our Torah, as well. They respected the Torah for its wisdom. They translated it into Greek so it could grace the shelves of the great library of Alexandria. But they rejected the Torah's divinity and outlawed its study as a spiritual pursuit.

The Maccabees took up the battle against the Greeks because they could not tolerate this desecration of all things holy. Their battle was neither a War of Independence nor a battle of Good vs. Evil; it was a battle of Holy vs. Profane.

## IV

The Temple wasn't just a beautiful building with inspiring architecture. The Temple was a sacred place, the holiest site on earth. When the Greeks violated the Temple, it lost its sanctity. Before services could return to the Temple, it would have to be rededicated. How do you bring holiness back to the Temple? With a menorah.

The Temple's menorah used oil to produce light – first cold press, uncontaminated olive oil.<sup>8</sup> All oils burn, but the Temple requires oil that is pure, oil whose clean light contributes to the aura of holiness in the Temple. With the act of lighting the menorah with this kind of oil, the Maccabees rededicated the entire Temple.<sup>9</sup>

When the Maccabees first entered the Temple, they could not find any oil that was pure. They persisted until they found the one flask of oil that still had the seal of the High Priest. After that oil was used up, it would have been permissible to use defiled oil.<sup>10</sup> There was no need for God to perform a miracle to make that little oil burn on for eight days. Why did He do it?<sup>11</sup>

The answer is that although impure oil may be used when pure oil is unavailable, only pure oil can be used to dedicate the Temple.

Holiness matters. The Maccabees won and God expressed His approval of their revolt with the miracle of the menorah.<sup>12</sup> The Chanukah menorah thus became the eternal Jewish symbol of purity and holiness – the antithesis of the materialism and physicality of Greek Hellenism.

Aaron was upset that his tribe failed to contribute to the dedication of the Mishkan. God's answer was that He has a more important job in store for Aaron. Aaron's family is to be in charge of the menorah, which would one day be used to dedicate the Temple. But this is just a part of the greater mission of Aaron's family:

Your brethren, the tribe of Levi... will safeguard that which is holy.

Numbers 18:2,5

Holiness is the central element of any sanctuary, for what is a sanctuary if not a place of holiness? It is thus the mission of the tribe of Levi to maintain and protect the sanctity and purity of the Temple. And it is this eternal mission that the menorah represents.

When it came time to rededicate the Temple after its defilement by the Syrian-Greeks, a menorah was used. The menorah, the symbol of purity, was the perfect agent for removing the influence of Hellenism and bringing holiness back to the Temple – and it would be lit by members of the Levite tribe. This was Aaron's consolation.

## V

The Talmud<sup>13</sup> says that one who desires wisdom should turn in prayer towards the south – a reference to the menorah, which was located on the side of the Temple. The menorah was thus a symbol of Jewish wisdom, the Torah. Just as the menorah illuminated the Temple, the Torah illuminates a path through

life for the Jewish people.<sup>14</sup> And just as the menorah's oil had to be pure, the Torah that we teach must be pure too.

The Beit Yosef<sup>15</sup> asks a question that has fascinated scholars for centuries. The story of Chanukah is that one flask of oil, which held only enough oil for one day, kept on burning for eight days. Being that there was sufficient oil for the first day, only the subsequent seven days were miraculous. Why then do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, if the miracle was only for seven?

The simple answer to this question is that there is an altogether different miracle here that is being celebrated. It was the intention of the Greeks to contaminate all of the Temple's oil. That one flask survived their purge was itself a miracle, and it is this miracle that we celebrate on the first night of Chanukah.

The survival of one pure jug of oil is a Chanukah miracle, but it is not an isolated event that happened a long time ago. It is an ongoing miracle. It has been more than 3,000 years since we received the Torah at Sinai and the Jewish people and Jewish tradition are still going strong. God promised that His Torah would never be forgotten.<sup>16</sup> Throughout our history, there have been innumerable attempts to undermine authentic Jewish education, but we are still here and our traditions are intact.<sup>17</sup> We may be few in number like that one little jug, but as long as we pass on pure and unadulterated Torah to the next generation, we can be confident that the light of Torah will burn on forever.

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<sup>1</sup> The High Priest sealed each flask of oil, certifying it as being ritually pure and kosher for menorah use. The invaders of the Temple broke all the seals.

<sup>2</sup> The Maccabees were a family of Kohanim (priests) who fought the Syrian-Greeks. Later, when the Maccabees became the kings of Israel, their royal line was called the "Hasmonean Dynasty."

<sup>3</sup> It is significant that the Talmud downplays the military victory and focuses instead on the miracle of the oil as the main cause for the



establishment of the holiday. In the course of this essay, the reasons for this should become clear.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ethics of the Fathers 5:5

<sup>5</sup> For a sharper definition of the root “Chinuch,” we can look at the use of the word in other contexts. King Solomon in Proverbs (22:6) instructs us “*Chanoch l’naar al pi darko*.” This means, “Train the child according to his way.” This is advice to personalize education for each child. We also find that Abraham went to war with “*chanichav*” (Genesis 14:14). This refers to the people that he trained. It seems that the concept of “Chanukat HaBayit” has the connotation of “training the house” or “breaking it in.”

<sup>6</sup> The Mishkan was a collapsible, portable Temple that was perfect for traveling across the Sinai Desert. It continued to serve as the divine sanctuary for almost four centuries, until King Solomon built the First Temple in 825 BCE.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (1194-1270) was a highly influential Talmudist, communal leader, rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist and biblical commentator.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 27:20

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Tekunei Zohar* quoted by *Yesod V’Shoresh HaAvodah, Sha’ar HaMifkad* 1; Gra ad loc.

<sup>10</sup> In situations where only defiled materials are available, they may be used for communal offerings. Cf. Talmud, *Pesachim* 77a.

<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult for God to perform miracles. However, God created a natural order and He does not break the laws of nature for no reason. When a miracle occurs, it is understood that a lesson is to be learned.

<sup>12</sup> Maharal of Prague (1525-1609). (Heard from R. Yitzchak Berkowitz of Jerusalem.)

<sup>13</sup> Talmud, *Baba Batra* 25b

<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, we find this verse: “The commandments are a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23).

<sup>15</sup> Voluminous 15th century commentary on the “Tur” authored by R. Yosef Karo.

<sup>16</sup> Deut. 31:21

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Mishnat Rabbi Aaron*, vol. 3, pg 68. R. Aaron Kotler (H1891H-H1962H) was founder and dean of Beit Midrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, the world’s largest Yeshiva.

# Primordial Origins of the Holiday Season

*Rabbi Joey Felsen*

Chanukah is a holiday that is welcomed by Jews of the western world with great relief. It provides us with an opportunity to celebrate and come together at a season when there is music in the air and joy seems to dance across illuminated rooftops. We take pride in the modest, yet ample, selection of cards in the drugstores that sport a Magen David or Chanukiah.

Clearly, the holiday was not crafted by the Sages in order to offset the religious practice of another major world religion. The celebration commemorates the victory of a small band of Jewish priests against the superpower of the Seleucid Greek Empire.

In the Midrash, the domination of Hellenistic culture is referred to as days of darkness.<sup>1</sup> The Torah, which is likened to light,<sup>2</sup> was on the verge of being extinguished by a society that disallowed any recognition of a singular Creator. Often, when we speak of light and darkness, we are referring to spiritual

realities and not physical realities. The holiday is called the Festival of Lights, but the symbolism of Chanukah actually gives testimony to our Jewish perspective on darkness, as well as light.

Let us begin with Chanukah's position on the Jewish calendar. Why is it at this time of year? The Hebrew name actually gives testimony to its place on the calendar. The word "Chanukah" can be divided into two separate Hebrew "words." "*Chanu*," the first two syllables, means "they rested" and "*Ka*" is comprised of two characters of the Hebrew alphabet – *Kaf* and *Hey*. Like all letters in the aleph-bet, these correspond to numerals, the sum of which is twenty-five. It was the twenty-fifth day of the Hebrew month of Kislev that the Jewish community rested from their battle and turned their attention to rekindling the lamps of the menorah in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Why would the sages name the holiday after its start date on the Jewish calendar? All the other Festivals have names that reflect their essence. Passover speaks to the sacrificial lamb that was used in Egypt. Sukkot refers to the shelters that we build. Chanukah is rich with imagery and history. Why forsake the opportunity to give it a more descriptive name? It must be that there is something essential to that particular date that needs to be communicated to posterity.

An obscure Talmudic passage may help resolve our problem.<sup>4</sup> The Talmud relates the following primordial event as the origin of the ancient pagan festivals of Calenda and Saturnalia:

Our Sages taught: When the first Man saw the day continually receding, he said, "Woe unto me, perhaps because I sinned I have caused the world to darken and return to [its original] state of astonishing emptiness. This is the death that was decreed upon me from the heavens!" He took action and sat for eight days of

fasting and prayer. Once he saw the [new] season of Tevet and he realized that the daytime was continually increasing, he said, “This must be the natural order of the world!” He went and made eight days of celebration. The next year he made both sets of days into celebrations. He established them for the sake of heaven but [pagans later] established them for the sake of idol worship.

Talmud, *Avodah Zara* 8a

The story seems relatively simple. Adam noticed that the days were getting shorter and panicked because he felt that he might be responsible for having caused the slow destruction of the world. During the Fall there is an equinox in which day and night have the same duration. Daylight then recedes until we reach the Winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. It is generally assumed that the world began with an equinox, and that the first day of Creation was the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Elul.<sup>5</sup> Adam and Eve were then created six days later, on the first day of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah). It is therefore understandable that Adam perceived a decline in daylight hours as time progressed.

The year is divided into four equal seasons of three months each. If we begin with the Fall equinox on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Elul, the Winter solstice will be three months later on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kislev. According to the story in the Talmud, that was the day that Adam established as the start date for his eight days of festivities.

The solstice is the day in which there is a shift in the balance and days once again begin to expand. According to a worldview that values day and light over darkness and night, it is logical that it would be regarded a popular time for celebration. For a culture that values the physical world, the lengthening of sun hours has tremendous utility. It is a time in which one can accomplish much and discover the world around them. The passage from the Talmud stated that Adam

established the celebrations for the sake of heaven, but pagans established them for the sake of idol worship, worship of the physical. The Christian world also begins its eight days of celebration on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of December. Where do we find eight days of celebration? Between December 25<sup>th</sup> and January 1<sup>st</sup>. Are they indeed celebrating the same pagan festival that is spoken about in the Talmud?

The celebration of a season in which light conquers darkness seems like a logical tradition. There is a common view that sees the winter as negative. People long for the summer and the winter is tolerated at best. It is much like the darkness of night. In western terms, the day is essentially the hours of the sun. Night is tacked on at the beginning and at the end, but most of one's productive hours of activity generally take place when the sun shines.

The Jewish people have a different take on the darkness of night or winter. What daylight cannot illuminate is the spiritual. We regard the day as positive, but not by negating night. In fact, night is considered a time where one can be alone with their spiritual thoughts and reflections.

The celebration of Chanukah also takes place on the 25<sup>th</sup> day, but we celebrate on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev. The holiday does not explicitly acknowledge the original celebration of Adam, but we do echo his joy at the realization that this is the natural order of the world. We accept night as the beginning of the day (not just on the Shabbat) because we realize that the darkness is a necessary precondition for the appreciation of the light. Winter is a time when seeds germinate in the ground and the apparent dormancy is really the opportunity for the gestation of a new and wondrous reality. When the small band of priests pushed back the night and allowed the light of Torah to shine again, it gave a renewed and brighter sense of hope and commitment. We do not divorce ourselves of the reality of

darkness; we embrace it as an opportunity that will lead to an even more fulfilling light.

The celebration of the Jewish people at Chanukah is only appropriate as the darkness sets in. The candles are there to emphasize that light is often enhanced when placed against a backdrop of darkness. The light is not there for a utilitarian purpose. In fact, according to Jewish law, one is not allowed to derive any benefit from the light cast by the candles.<sup>6</sup> The famous ninth candle, or Shamash, is there so that we can use its light without having to make use of the light of the candles that acknowledge the miracle of Chanukah.<sup>7</sup>

Chanukah is indeed a Festival of Lights. It is a celebration of the victory of spiritual light over spiritual darkness. The flames of the menorah radiate the message that despite the physical darkness, there is another kind of light that can illuminate the world around us. It is this deeper perspective that we celebrate on the shortest days of the year.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Midrash Rabba, Bereishit 2; Mechilta, Yitro 9

<sup>2</sup> “Light is [a symbol for] Torah” (Talmud, *Megillah* 16a).

<sup>3</sup> Talmud, *Shabbat* 19.

<sup>4</sup> The ideas presented in this essay are based on the teachings of R. Moshe Shapiro of Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup> Pesikta D’Rav Kehana 23; quoted by the Ran, *Rosh Hashanah* 3a.

<sup>6</sup> Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 673:1

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

# Meditations on the Mystical Image of the Menorah

*Rabbi Yisroel Gordon*

First used in the Tabernacle over three thousand years ago, the menorah has long been a symbol of Jews and Judaism. It appears on the coins and mosaics of ancient Israel<sup>1</sup> and, in modern times, menorahs are found on all things Jewish – from the stained glass windows and ark curtains of synagogues, to the official emblem of the State of Israel, to the six-branch menorah of Holocaust memorials. In a religion that generally eschews visual images, the menorah is second only to the Star of David as the symbol of our people.

While the menorah itself is widely recognized, its origins and meaning are less well known. What does the menorah symbolize? How did the Jews of old relate to and understand this image? What does the rabbinic literature say? The search for answers to these basic questions take us back to the very

first place the menorah appears – the sanctuary of the Tabernacle.

## II

The services in the Tabernacle (and later in the Temple in Jerusalem) revolved around several pieces of “furniture.” Outside, in the courtyard, there was a large altar for sacrifices. Inside the sanctuary, there was a small altar for burning incense, a table for displaying the weekly “showbread” and a tall golden menorah; and behind a curtain, the Ark of the Covenant sat in the Holy of Holies.<sup>2</sup> The function and meaning of these pieces of furniture can only be understood within the context of the Tabernacle as a whole. What was the Tabernacle? Was it simply a house of worship? The answer may surprise you.

The Tabernacle mirrors the universe – they are both called “tents.” How is this? The verse states, “In the beginning, God created heaven...” (Genesis 1:1). [The Psalmist described it this way:] “He spread out the heavens like a curtain” (Psalms 104:2). [Similarly,] when it came to the Tabernacle [God said], “You shall make curtains of goat skins to be a ceiling over the Tabernacle” (Exodus 26:7). On the second day [of creation God said], “There shall be a firmament... and it shall divide...” (1:6). When it came to the Tabernacle [God said], “A curtain will divide...” (Exodus 26:33).

Midrash Rabba, Bamidbar 12

But it was not only the physical universe that the Tabernacle mirrored. The Tabernacle also reflected spiritual reality.

The Tabernacle and the Temple contained every force and realm. The entire holy structure, all of its houses, storerooms, upper floors, chambers and all of its sacred



furniture, all of it was a [physical] representation of spiritual reality. [It matched] the image, mold and design of the sacred realms and the structure of Divine Chariot...

Nefesh HaChaim 1:4

The Tabernacle was made to correspond to the creation of the universe...

Midrash Tadsheh 2

The Tabernacle is a microcosm of the universe.

Zohar II 224a

The Tabernacle was a whole lot more than a convenient place to serve God. The Tabernacle was a miniature universe. It follows, then, that the furniture within would represent God's gifts to the world. We can now return to our subject, the menorah. Which divine gift does the menorah represent?<sup>3</sup>

### III

Judging by the verses of the prophets, it would seem that the menorah represents the greatest gift of all – the Torah itself. King Solomon, builder of the First Temple, wrote this verse: “A mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23). His father, King David, put it this way: “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path” (Psalms 119:105). The sages of the Talmud also saw the menorah as a symbol of Torah. “One who wishes to be wise should go south – this is indicated by the menorah which is in the south [side of the sanctuary]” (Talmud, *Baba Batra* 25b). “One who sees olive oil in a dream can look forward to the light of Torah” (Talmud, *Barachot* 57a). (Olive oil was the fuel for the menorah’s lamps; cf. Exodus 27:20.) It

seems clear that the Temple menorah represented the divine gift of Torah.

While this is certainly a reasonable proposition, it presents a problem. If one of the pieces of Temple furniture were to represent the Torah, it would have to be the Ark, not the menorah. The Ark held the Two Tablets of the Covenant. God engraved the Ten Commandments upon two sapphire tablets and gave them to Moshe at Mount Sinai. Undoubtedly, the Holy Ark and the Tablets it contains represent the gift of Torah.<sup>4</sup>

If the Ark is Torah, what then is the menorah? Can it be that the Torah is represented by two pieces of Temple furniture?

The Netziv<sup>5</sup> says yes. He resolves our problem by pointing out that there are actually two Torahs. There is, of course, the Written Torah, the Bible text. But then there is another Torah, the *Torah Sh'Ba'al Peh*, the Oral Torah. When God taught the laws and practices of Judaism to Moshe, He did not simply dictate vague verses; He provided Moshe with sharp legal definitions of each of the mitzvot. This is the body of Jewish religious law known as “Halacha.” God also gave Moshe a methodology for mining the Torah text for fresh insight and guidance.<sup>6</sup> Together, these Jewish traditions make up a “second” Torah, an Oral Torah. This Torah was transmitted orally from teacher to student, generation after generation, until it finally appeared in written form as the six orders of the Mishnah (circa 200 C.E.) and Talmud (circa 500 C.E.).

The Holy Ark represents the Written Torah, but the menorah represents the Oral Torah, the Sinaitic teachings which flow from and illuminate the otherwise impenetrable Torah text.<sup>7</sup> This is indicated by the design of the menorah itself. The menorah has six branches that flow out of a central pillar – corresponding to the six orders of Mishnah which flow out of the Torah text.<sup>8</sup>

There is a fundamental difference between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, and the Ark and the menorah express this difference. The Ark is sealed in the Holy of Holies and is untouchable by man. The same can be said of the Torah text; its words are eternal and unchanging. When it comes to the Oral Torah, however, man has an active role to play.

God gives man the sacred tasks of interpreting Torah verses within the framework of tradition and determining how to apply Halachic principles to the changing realities of life. Moreover, in order for a teacher to successfully transmit the Oral Torah to his students, contemporary and innovative language must be used. Using the Oral Torah, we bring Judaism to life. We light the menorah.

The menorah has more to say about the Oral Torah. The Torah tells us that the menorah must be sculpted out of one giant block of gold.

Make a menorah out of pure gold. The menorah shall be formed by hammering it.

Exodus 25:31

This is hard physical labor. And it's the perfect analogy for the student of the Oral Torah. Studying Talmud is akin to hammering metal;<sup>9</sup> it takes enormous mental strength and perseverance to clarify a page of Talmud.<sup>10</sup> At first reading, the Talmud often comes across as enigmatic. It needs to be read and reread, thought through, discussed and debated. Hammered. However, like the sculptor of the menorah, the student of Talmud must always be conscious of the fact that it is pure gold that he is hammering. If the studying is done with objectivity and sincerity, allowing the raw material to speak for itself, the student-artist becomes a miner-sculptor of the objective truth within. Over time, potent words and concepts come into focus, and what first appeared unintelligible now stands before the student as a work of breathtaking depth and beauty.

Why does Judaism function this way? Would it not have been more prudent to codify all of Jewish law unequivocally in the bible itself? Why is human involvement necessary at all? According to R. Gedaliah Schorr,<sup>11</sup> the answer to this basic question is found in an extraordinary parable of the Midrash.

A king had a good friend. The king said to him, “Know that today I dine at your place. Go and prepare [a feast] for me.” The [king’s] friend went and prepared a simple couch, a simple lamp and a simple table. The king arrived surrounded by an entourage of his servants. Golden lamps [were held aloft] on both sides before the king. When the [king’s] friend saw all this honor, he was ashamed and he hid everything he had prepared for the king – it was all [too] simple. [When the king entered the house,] he confronted his friend. “Didn’t I tell you that I was dining by you? Why didn’t you prepare anything?” His friend responded, “When I saw your majestic escort, I was ashamed. I put away everything I prepared for you; all the vessels were simple.” The king said, “I swear to you by your life. I invalidate every vessel that I brought with me. Because of my love for you, I desire only to use your things.”

God is no different. He is all light... but He tells the Jews, “Prepare for Me a menorah with lamps” ...

As soon as they made it, the Divine Presence, the Shechinah,<sup>12</sup> arrived.

Midrash Tanchuma (Yashan) Ba’alotecha 9<sup>13</sup>

R. Schorr explains that just as divine love was the impetus behind the menorah, divine love was also the impetus behind the Oral Torah.<sup>14</sup> God gave the Jews the Halachic process and empowered them to interpret the Torah and decide on matters of religious law because He loves us and desires our humble insights. The existence of an Oral Torah is the ultimate witness

to God's infinite love for, and faith in, His people. Once again, the menorah models the Oral Torah perfectly.

It would seem that we have come to the end of our quest. The menorah is the symbol of the Oral Torah<sup>15</sup> – hardly a surprising conclusion. But things are not so simple.

## IV

Besides the mitzvah to build a menorah and place it in the Temple sanctuary, there is also, not surprisingly, a mitzvah to light it:

Aaron shall set up the lamps [of the menorah] outside of the curtain of the Testimony in the sanctuary [of the Tabernacle]. [It shall burn] before God, from evening until morning...

Leviticus 24:3

The Talmud asks a very basic question:

God needs light? The Jews traveled in the desert for forty years by the light of God! (cf. Exodus 13:21). The answer is that [the menorah] bears witness to humanity that the "Shechinah," the presence of God, dwells among the Jews.

How did it bear witness? Rav says [that the menorah bore witness] through its westernmost lamp. [Even though the westernmost lamp] was filled with the same amount of oil as the other lamps, its flame [never went out and] was regularly used to relight the others [the next day]...

Talmud, *Shabbat* 22b

As the Talmud says, God obviously has no need for interior lighting in His house. So why is there a menorah in the

sanctuary? The Talmud does not answer that the menorah represents the Oral Torah. Instead, the Talmud introduces a new idea. The daily miracle of the menorah's westernmost lamp was proof positive that God was with the nation.

This explains an unusual name for the menorah found in the book of Samuel.

The *lamp of God* had not yet gone out, Samuel was lying in the sanctuary... and God called to Samuel.

I Samuel 3:3-4

The menorah is a “lamp of God” because it is the menorah, more than any other piece of Temple furniture, which affirms God's presence. How does the menorah affirm God's presence? By burning far longer than its oil supply would normally allow. This is what the verse meant when it said, “The lamp of God had not yet gone out... and God called to Samuel.”

For students of Kabbalah, the design of the menorah itself serves as a clear reminder of God's presence on earth. Its seven branches evoke both the seven days of creation and the seven “Sefirot.” Literally translated as “spheres,” the Sefirot are spiritual “pipes” that the infinite God uses to relate to His finite physical universe.<sup>16</sup> The seven Sefirot differentiate and filter down the overwhelming perfect oneness of God into an imperfect and conflicted world. As a result, humans alternatively experience divine “kingship,” “kindness,” “strength” or “beauty” when in fact all experiences have their source in the One Above.

By corresponding to the days of creation and the Sefirot, the seven branches of the Temple's menorah represent the mediums of physical existence, time and divine providence through which God relates to man. As a symbol of this relationship, the menorah declares the central tenet of Judaism: No matter how dark and divorced from God things may appear, all human experiences share the same divine source! A given menorah

lamp may reach out far from the center; it may even be the westernmost lamp. But at its root, every lamp has its source in that one unifying central pillar. Our lives are no different. Although events often appear coincidental or haphazard, we should never forget that whatever happens is part of a unified divine plan. The Shechinah is always with us.

## V

On the one hand, the menorah represents the Oral Torah, but at the same time, the menorah also testifies to God's presence on earth. Why is the same piece of Temple furniture functioning as a symbol for these two very different ideas? Aren't both the Oral Torah and the Shechinah's presence important enough to warrant monuments all their own? Why do they have to share the menorah?

The answer is inescapable. These two ideas simply cannot be separated. As R. Dovid Cohen writes, the Shechinah rests its presence among the Jews *because* we have the Oral Torah.<sup>17</sup> By representing both ideas simultaneously, the menorah communicates this fundamental truth. It is an elegant solution, but it begs for an explanation. How could the Oral Torah be more potent than the Written Torah? What is it about the Oral Torah that brings God into the world?

The answer is that it is God's desire for a relationship with man that brings Him into our world,<sup>18</sup> and nothing creates more intimacy between God and man than the study of the Oral Torah.

Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa of Kfar Chanania says: If ten people sit together and engage in Torah study, the Shechinah rests among them, as the verse states: "God stands in the assembly of God" (Psalms 82:1). How do

we know this even of five [who engage in Torah study]? The verse states: “He has established His bundle upon earth” (Amos 9:6). How do we know this even of three? The verse states: “In the midst of judges He shall judge” (Psalms 82:1). How do we know this even of two? The verse states: “Then those who fear God spoke to one another, and God listened and heard (Malachi 3:16). How do we know this even of one? The verse states: “In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you” (Exodus 20:21).

Ethics of the Fathers 3:7

Note that the Mishnah did not say that one merits the Divine Presence simply by reading the Written Torah. Not at all. Only one who *engages* in the study of Torah, analyzing the text with the Siniatic methodology of biblical exegesis and pondering the abstract, Talmudic definitions of the mitzvot, merits the presence of the Shechinah.

How do we know that when three [judges] sit in judgment the Shechinah is with them? The verse states: “In the midst of judges He shall judge” (Psalms 82:1).

Talmud, *Berachot* 6a

Study the Oral Torah, determine the Halacha, and God is there. Why? Because the study of the Oral Torah is a meeting of the divine mind with the human mind in a joint effort to define the mitzvot of the Torah. The Oral Torah and the Halachic process are, by definition, a partnership between God and man. God *has* to be present.

Any judge who correctly determines the true Halacha... it is as if they have partnered with God in the acts of creation.

Talmud, *Shabbat* 10a



Deciding on matters of Jewish law is the ultimate creative partnership of man and God, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the High Court.

The Jerusalem High Court<sup>19</sup> is the *main center of the Oral Torah*. It is the pillar of jurisprudence; from there law and justice go out to all of Israel. The Torah relies [on the judges], as the verse states, "... according to the Torah that they teach you" (Deuteronomy 17:11)... All who accept our teacher Moshe and his Torah are obligated to rely on the rulings [of this court] in matters of religious law.

Maimonides, Laws of Heretics 1:1

The Jerusalem High Court is a perfect illustration of the Oral Torah in action. Questions of Torah and Jewish practice are debated, deliberated, and voted on. The court's rulings then *become* Torah. Why? Because God participated in the proceedings. This is the way the Oral Torah operates and this is the way God is brought into the world.

When the High Court disbanded, the Shechinah departed.

Pesikta Rabbati 10

By now, we should be able to appreciate this mystical teaching of the sages:

God, the Torah and the Jews are intertwined (lit. knotted) into each other.

Zohar, Parshat Acharei, 73:1<sup>20</sup>

While we cannot claim to fathom the secrets of the Zohar, we can say that God, Torah and the Jew are "intertwined" in the sense that Torah makes a Jew into God's partner. We have described the Oral Torah as the ultimate expression of God's love for His people. It should come as no surprise that it binds God to man.

The menorah models this God/man partnership beautifully. God creates the gold and supplies the design, but it is man who does the actual hammering and sculpting – using God-given intelligence and strength. God grows the olive; we press it into oil. We light the wick; God makes it burn. The menorah thus embodies the intimate, symbiotic God/man relationship engendered by the Oral Torah. And as such, it proclaims God's presence on earth.

The Torah is like oil in a lamp and Israel is its wick, causing the light of God to shine forth on all creation.

Tikunei Zohar 21 (60a)<sup>21</sup>

We leave it to the reader to ponder this last mystical teaching in light of all that we have learned.

## VI

This is all very nice, but there is, however, one caveat. In order for the study of the Oral Torah to bring down the Shechinah, it has to be a purely objective search for the Divine Will. God has no interest in collaborating with a Talmud student who wishes to confine Torah to personal opinion, contemporary convenience or political correctness. One who sets out with a predetermined result in mind is by definition no longer engaged in the Halachic process.<sup>22</sup> This is one of the reasons the Oral Torah presents such a great challenge to man. It simultaneously demands genius, creativity, transcendence and surrender.

More than any other piece of furniture in the Tabernacle, Moshe encountered difficulty with [the construction of] the menorah...

God said to Moshe, “Take a talent<sup>23</sup> of gold, put it into the furnace and [the menorah] *will make itself*... Hit it with a hammer and it will *make itself*...”

Moshe took a talent [of gold] and put it into the furnace. [Nothing happened.] Moshe said, “Master of the world, the talent is in the fire. As You desire it, so it should be.” At that very moment, the menorah emerged perfectly formed.

Midrash Rabba, Bamidbar 15:4

If we do our part, engaging in the study of the Oral Torah, interpreting the Torah text and defining the mitzvot, all the while surrendering to the divine will, we create with God’s help, or better said, God creates with our help, a living Torah that is so holy and pure it testifies to the presence of God in the world. Just like the menorah itself.

In light of tradition, the Jews have chosen well. The image of the menorah is indeed the perfect symbol for our people.

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<sup>1</sup> A menorah appears on a coin of the Hasmonean king Mattathias Antigonus, circa 40 B.C.E., and menorahs are commonly featured in Jewish mosaics of the Roman period. The synagogue floors of Bet-Shean, Tiberius and Jericho are notable for their beautifully detailed and well-preserved menorah mosaics.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Exodus 25:10-40; 27:1-8; 30:1-6; 40:20-29.

<sup>3</sup> The Midrash cited above (Bamidbar Rabba 12) addresses the menorah directly. “On the fourth day of creation [God said], ‘There shall be lights in the heavenly sky’ (Genesis 1:14) and when it came to the Tabernacle [God said], ‘You shall make a menorah of pure gold’ (Exodus 25:31).” According to this Midrash, it would seem that the menorah represents the sun and the moon. Other Midrashic understandings of the menorah include viewing it as a symbol for the pillars of cloud and fire of Exodus 13:21 (Midrash HaGadol) or even as a symbol of the Jews themselves (Pesiktah Rabbati 29b). See Torah Sh’leimah, Parshat Terumah, notes 188-190.

<sup>4</sup> See Rashi to Exodus 25:11 where he writes that the rim that went around the top of the Ark was a “symbol for the crown of Torah.”

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<sup>5</sup> R. Naftoli Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1817-1893. The Netziv served as the dean of the great yeshiva of Volozhin from 1854 until its closing in 1892.

<sup>6</sup> There are thirteen primary methods of “D’rash,” or biblical exegesis (cf. Sifra, introduction). These tools had two functions. They allowed Judaism to recreate law from the text when a tradition was forgotten and they enabled Judaism to respond to questions on details of the law for which there was no tradition (cf. Maimonides, Commentary to Mishnah, introduction).

<sup>7</sup> The Netziv (*HaEmek Davar*, Exodus 27:20) actually frames things slightly differently. He bundles Sinaitic traditions together with the Written Torah and has the Ark symbolizing both, since both are untouchable by man. According to the Netziv, the menorah serves as a symbol exclusively for the creative Torah thoughts of man, the “*chidush*” and “*pilpul*” which have the power to create new Halacha. For an alternative explanation, see R. Dovid Cohen (New York), “*Ma’aseh Avot Siman L’Banim*,” pgs. 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> Heard from Esther Schlissel z”l of Jerusalem. Although the breakdown of the Oral Torah into six divisions first appears in the structure of the Mishnah, circa 200 C.E., Jewish tradition considers these six divisions to be of biblical origin, as they are indicated by biblical verses (cf. Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a; Midrash Tehillim 19). However, R. Hai Gaon (939-1038 C.E.) is quoted as having seen a manuscript of a *seventh* order of Mishnah! (In all likelihood, this “order” contained the Tannaic material found today in the “*Masechtot Ketanot*.” Cf. R. Reuven Margolias, *Yesod HaMishnah V’Arichah*, pg. 29, note 15.)

<sup>9</sup> The author regrets that he cannot recall where he read the comparison of the hammering of the menorah to the study of Talmud.

<sup>10</sup> “The Oral Torah is not found by one who seeks the pleasures of life, indulgences, honor or greatness in the temporal world. Rather, [the Oral Torah] is found only in someone who kills himself for it, as it says in the verse, ‘This is the Torah – a person who dies in a tent’ (Numbers 19:14). This is the way of the Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink measured amounts of water, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and labor in Torah! For God only entered into a covenant with the Jews for the sake of the Oral Torah... It is hard to learn and it takes great pains [to master] for it is akin to darkness, as the verse states, ‘The nation that walks in darkness saw a great light’ (Isaiah 9:1) – these are the masters of Talmud who saw ‘great light’ when God illuminated their eyes with the Halachot

of the forbidden and the permitted, the ritually pure and the ritually impure...” (Midrash Tanchuma, Parshat Noach 3).

<sup>11</sup> R. Gedaliah Schorr (1910-1979) served as dean of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn, N.Y.

<sup>12</sup> Although God is omnipresent, He does not relate to all things with the same degree of love, consideration or attention. When we speak of the presence of the “Shechinah,” we refer to a more intimate or manifest relationship with God. Cf. Exodus 33:14 where Targum Onkelus translates God’s “face” as “Shechinah.”

<sup>13</sup> This Midrash also appears, with minor variations, in Bamidbar Rabba 15:8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ohr Gedaliahu*, pgs. 44-45.

<sup>15</sup> This gives new meaning to the mitzvah to light a menorah on Chanukah. The Syrian-Greek war against the Jews targeted not the written Torah, but the oral traditions of Judaism. The menorah, the symbol of the Oral Torah, is thus the perfect symbol for our victory. This idea is a major theme in contemporary rabbinic thinking about Chanukah. See, for example, R. Gedaliah Schorr, *Ohr Gedaliahu* pgs. 43-47; R. Chaim Freidlander, *Sifsei Chaim, Moadim* vol. II, pgs. 121, 129-131; R. Dovid Cohen (Jerusalem), *Yemei Chanukah* pgs. 32-44.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, it goes without saying that Sefirot are not long, hollow or round. When attempting to describe spiritual reality, the language of man fails. The word “pipe” is used simply to connote a medium.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Yemei Chanukah*, pgs. 63-67. R. Dovid Cohen of Jerusalem is a lecturer in Talmud at the famed Chevron Yeshiva (Givat Mordechai). This essay owes much to his monumental “*Yemei Chanukah*” (2005).

<sup>18</sup> See Focus no. 5, “A Tisha B’Av Reader,” pgs. 40-45.

<sup>19</sup> Known as the “Sanhedrin,” the High Court was located on the Temple mount and consisted of the seventy-one leading judges of Israel.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Nefesh HaChaim 1:16 (gloss).

<sup>21</sup> Translation taken from R. Aryeh Kaplan, “Handbook of Jewish Thought,” vol. I, pg. 58.

<sup>22</sup> “Manipulating Torah to conform to one’s own limited reasoning – this is the exact opposite of Torah study” (R. Aaron Kotler, *Mishnat Rebbe Aaron*, vol. III, pg. 26).

<sup>23</sup> A talent is approximately 150 lbs.

# Lighting the Menorah

## A Halachic Guide

*Rabbi Avi Lebowitz*

### Menorah Design

1. A menorah can be constructed of any material, but it is advantageous to enhance the mitzvah with a beautiful menorah.<sup>1</sup>
2. The lamps of the menorah should not be configured in an arc or a circle. Nor should one lamp be built closer in and another further out,<sup>2</sup> nor one higher and another lower.<sup>3</sup> The number of flames should be readily apparent and it should be clear that each flame is using only one wick. This is best accomplished by lining up all eight lamps in a straight line.<sup>4</sup>
3. Each lamp of the menorah should be at least a finger-widths distance from the neighboring lamp.<sup>5</sup> If oil lamps are being

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<sup>1</sup> The verse “This is my God and I will glorify Him” (Exodus 15:2) teaches us to enhance mitzvot by beautifying the object with which the mitzvah will be performed (Talmud, *Shabbat* 133b).

<sup>2</sup> Mishnah Berurah (M.B.) 671:15

<sup>3</sup> Chayei Adam 154:10

<sup>4</sup> Rama 671:4; M.B 671:14

<sup>5</sup> M.B. 671:16

used, each lamp should have a separate receptacle for oil; one may not simply fill a bowl with oil and insert eight wicks.

4. Aside from the eight lamps, a menorah also has an additional ninth lamp called a “Shamash.” It should be on a different level than the other lamps – preferably above<sup>6</sup> – and it can be located at either end of the menorah or in the center.<sup>7</sup>
5. One may use glass or metal lamps that have been used before, even though they have been stained by fire.<sup>8</sup>
6. It is not actually necessary to have a “menorah” at all – one may simply line up candles and light them, provided that there is a finger-widths distance between candles.<sup>9</sup>

### Location

7. Originally the menorah was placed outside, but today most people have the custom to light it indoors. However, we still try to make the menorah visible to those walking in the street by placing it near a window.<sup>10</sup>
8. In a situation where it is not possible to place the menorah within view from the street, it should be placed in a doorway opposite the mezuzah. One who walks through the doorway will then be surrounded by mitzvot.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rama 673:1

<sup>7</sup> The Shamash should be situated separately so that it will not appear to be an additional lamp of the menorah (M.B. 673:16).

<sup>8</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:3

<sup>9</sup> M.B. 671:18

<sup>10</sup> M.B. 671:38. If the window is over 30 feet above street level it will not be very noticeable to passersby walking down the street. If it is not possible to make it within 30 feet of the street level, it would then be preferable to place the menorah inside the home by the doorway (Sha'ar HaTziyun 671:42).

<sup>11</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:7

9. Wherever the menorah is placed, it should be at least one foot off the ground so that it is noticeable.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, the menorah should not be placed higher than 40 inches off the floor so that it will not be confused with ordinary indoor lighting.<sup>13</sup> However, if one has a window facing the street, the menorah should be placed in the window even if the windowsill is more than 40 inches off the floor.<sup>14</sup>
10. A menorah that is placed above 30 feet is considered unnoticeable and is therefore invalid.<sup>15</sup> Someone who lives in an apartment building higher than the second floor should not place their menorah by the window but rather inside the home.
11. If a menorah was lit above 30 feet and then, while it was burning, was moved to a lower location, the mitzvah would still not be fulfilled.<sup>16</sup> The menorah must be extinguished, moved to a new location within 30 feet, and then relit.

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<sup>12</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:6; M.B. 671:26

<sup>13</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:6. Indoor lighting fixtures are not usually placed so low (M.B. 671:27).

<sup>14</sup> M.B. 671:27. Since a menorah placed above 40 inches is still valid, it is preferable to forgo the advantage of being low in favor of publicizing the miracle of Chanukah by making it visible to people passing by. Publicizing the miracle through the menorah is a value recognized by the Talmud, whereas the idea of placing a menorah within 40 inches of the ground does not appear in the Talmud at all and is even rejected by many authorities (Sha'ar HaTziyun 671:30).

<sup>15</sup> The Shulchan Aruch 671:6 requires a menorah to be within 20 cubits of the ground. A cubit is approximately one and a half feet.

<sup>16</sup> Since the mitzvah is fulfilled by the act of lighting, the lighting must be done in a valid location (Rama 671:6). If one were to light the menorah below 30 feet and then move it to another acceptable location, the mitzvah is fulfilled since both the place it was lit and its destination point are both acceptable (M.B. 671:30). If one were to light the menorah in a valid location, and then move it to a location that is invalid, that would be tantamount to blowing out the menorah immediately after it had been lit properly. See Halacha 48.



## Fuel

12. The ideal fuel for a menorah is olive oil since it burns cleanly and it reminds us of the Chanukah miracle that occurred with olive oil.<sup>17</sup> If olive oil is not available, one may use any oil that produces a clean, bright flame.<sup>18</sup>
13. Although it is preferable to use oil, many people use wax candles since wax also produces a clean and bright flame.<sup>19</sup>
14. When using candles, they should all be of equal height.<sup>20</sup> It is vital that there be sufficient distance between candles so that they do not melt each other down prematurely.<sup>21</sup>
15. If one cannot afford enough oil to light an additional lamp each night but can afford enough wax candles to do so, it is preferable to use the ideal number of wax candles (cf. Halacha 39), than to use oil and be limited to only one candle per night.<sup>22</sup>
16. In a situation where only inferior oils are available, they may be used even though the flame will flicker and be dim

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<sup>17</sup> Rama 673:1

<sup>18</sup> Rama 673:1. It is unclear if, in the absence of olive oil, it is preferable to use vegetable oil since it is somewhat similar to olive oil, or if it is preferable to use a synthetic fuel that burns cleaner than olive oil.

<sup>19</sup> M.B. (673:4) implies that any oil is preferable to wax candles, since the miracle occurred with oil. Some authorities maintain that candles are problematic since they don't draw the fuel through the wick, rather the wax prevents the flame from burning down the wick too quickly, and that may not satisfy the Halachic need for a "*ner*," a lamp (Sha'arei Teshuva 673:4 quoting Maharal of Prague in his book on Chanukah titled "*Ner Mitzvah*." Although the Sha'arei Teshuva quotes a different rationale for the Maharal, it is an inaccurate quote). The prevalent custom disregards this opinion.

<sup>20</sup> Chayei Adam 154:10

<sup>21</sup> Biur Halacha 671:4

<sup>22</sup> M.B. 671:7. Some suggest that on the first night of Chanukah oil should be used even at the expense of the enhancing the mitzvah on subsequent nights, because it is especially important to beautify a mitzvah at the first opportunity it is performed (Sha'ar HaTziyun 671:8 quoting Binyan Olam).

and dirty.<sup>23</sup> However, there are Halachic concerns about using inferior oils for the Friday evening lighting of the menorah.<sup>24</sup>

17. Although any type of oil or candles may be used, all the lamps of a given menorah should use the same type of fuel. Otherwise, instead of corresponding to the proper night of Chanukah, it appears as if the lamps were lit by different individuals.<sup>25</sup>
18. Ideally one should use wicks made from cotton or flax,

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<sup>23</sup> Oil that one may not derive benefit from may not be used, such as oil that had meat and milk fried in it. Although it is forbidden to benefit from the menorah (cf. Halacha 55) and fulfilling a mitzvah is not considered deriving benefit (Talmud, *Rosh Hashana* 28a), a forbidden item is considered to be lacking in volume and is therefore disqualified for use for a mitzvah (Sha'arei Teshuva 673:1; M.B. 673:2).

<sup>24</sup> Since inferior oils and wicks don't burn well, someone may absent-mindedly adjust the flame to make it burn brighter, thereby violating Shabbat. However, the Shulchan Aruch (673:1) permits the use inferior oils and wicks for the Friday night lighting of the menorah. He explains that since it is forbidden to derive personal benefit from the menorah lamps (cf. Halachot 55-59), there is no concern that someone will adjust the flame. Despite this explanation, Halachic concerns remain. Firstly, it is permissible to use the light of the "Shamash" (cf. footnote #60) so if inferior oil and wicks are used for the Shamash there should be a concern that someone may adjust it on Shabbat (M.B. 673:3). Secondly, if the menorah continues to burn after the necessary time, some permit the use of its light (cf. Halacha 57), at which time there should be a concern that someone will attempt to fix the flame if inferior oils or wicks are used (M.B. 673:6). Based on the first concern, if it is a Friday night and you only have enough olive oil for one lamp, it would seem that the olive oil should be used for the Shamash and the menorah lamps should be lit using the inferior oils and wicks. Based on the second concern, one who has only inferior oils and wicks should try to put precisely the amount of oil necessary to keep the candles burning for a half an hour after the stars come out, and not more.

<sup>25</sup> M.B. 673:2; Be'er Heiteiv 673:1. According to some authorities, combining different types of oils is permitted and it is the combination of oil and candles that is forbidden. In a situation where different oils must be used, the primary lamp should be of olive oil and the other oils should be used for the additional lamps (Sha'ar HaTziyun 673:1).

which burn well. If they are not available, one may use wicks made from any material.<sup>26</sup>

19. One may reuse the wicks from previous nights since they tend to be easier to light than new wicks.<sup>27</sup>

### Lighting Time

20. The ideal time for lighting the menorah is approximately 25 minutes after sunset.<sup>28</sup> However, on Fridays the menorah obviously must be lit before sunset to avoid desecrating the Shabbat (cf. Halacha 50-51).
21. If one must leave home early, the menorah can be lit as early as 35 minutes before sunset, but be sure the menorah has sufficient fuel (oil or wax) to burn until about an hour and ten minutes after sunset.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1, M.B. 673:2

<sup>27</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:4

<sup>28</sup> Shulchan Aruch (672:1) writes that one should light the menorah “at the end of the *shekiah*,” no earlier and no later. The meaning of the term “end of *shekiah*” in this context is the subject of a major debate. Some maintain that it refers to the time when three stars of average brightness become visible in the night sky, i.e., approximately 40 minutes after sunset. However, the Ran and Rashba maintain that “*shekiah*” here refers to a time that is approximately 15 minutes earlier than that. According to Rabbeinu Tam, the times are shifted over a half hour later. He requires the visibility of fainter stars that are not visible until 72 minutes after the sunset. On the other end of the spectrum is the Rambam. As the Biur Halacha presents the opinion of the Rambam, he puts the proper time for menorah lighting at sunset. This explains why the Rambam stipulates that one may not light earlier than the prescribed time; a flame is not easily visible when it is lit before sunset. In light of the wide discrepancy of opinions, it would seem that the ideal time to light is approximately 25 minutes after sunset.

<sup>29</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:1. The assumption is that the earliest time to light is “*plag haMincha*,” which is approximately an hour and a quarter before the stars come out. If we assume that the stars come out 40 minutes after sunset, the earliest time to light would be 35 minutes before sunset. Nonetheless, since the candles must burn for half an hour *at night* (Shulchan Aruch 672:1),

22. It is customary to first *daven Ma'ariv* (pray the daily evening prayers) and then light the menorah. However, if one is not going to pray the *Ma'ariv* service until the stars come out, it would be better to light the menorah prior to *Ma'ariv*.<sup>30</sup>
23. If one was unable to light the menorah at the ideal time, every effort should be made to light the menorah within the first hour and a half after sundown. However, even if this time is missed, the menorah should still be lit at the first opportunity – as long there are people in the house who are awake and can be present at the lighting.<sup>31</sup> Although the mitzvah of the menorah serves to publicize the miracle of

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one must put in enough oil for the candles to burn until a half hour after the stars come out. This comes to a total of one hour and 45 minutes.

If the menorah was lit prior to sunset and the lamps blew out before nightfall, the menorah should be relit. However, if one was unable to do so, we consider the mitzvah to have been fulfilled since the lighting took place after *plag haMincha*.

<sup>30</sup> The Mishnah Berurah (672:1) reports that the Gaon of Vilna and R. Yaakov Emden both had the custom to *daven Ma'ariv* after the stars came out and they therefore lit their menorahs before praying. Nevertheless, if the menorah has not yet been lit and the time to *daven Ma'ariv* has arrived, one should *daven Ma'ariv* first. This is following the principal that when faced with the opportunity to perform two mitzvot, the more common one is performed first – which in this case would be *Ma'ariv*. See Biur Halacha (ad loc.) for a more elaborate explanation.

<sup>31</sup> Since the leniency of lighting late at night relies on the publicizing of the miracle being accomplished through the residents of the house, it is necessary to fill the lamp with the usual half-hour worth of oil (M.B. 672:5). If someone returns home late at night after the entire family has gone sleep and it is not possible to wake them, it is doubtful if the blessings may be recited when lighting alone (cf. Sha'ar HaTziyun 672:17). In a situation where someone knows in advance that they will not arrive home until late at night after everyone has gone to sleep, they should appoint an adult family member to light for them at the proper time in which case they can rely on those passing by to publicize the miracle. One who lives alone should be especially careful to light in the proper time, since the only possibility of publicizing the miracle is for those who can see the menorah from outside.

the Chanukah story and at such a late hour no one is in the street to witness the lighting, the miracle is publicized through the residents of the household seeing the menorah burning. Since it is our custom to light indoors, for us the primary publicizing of the miracle is for the people who live in the house.<sup>32</sup>

24. Being that the primary publicizing of the miracle is for the members of the household, some rule that it is more important to light at a time when members of the household are present than to light at the “proper time.”<sup>33</sup> However, since we place the menorah in a window to publicize the miracle out of the house as well, it remains a top priority to try and light within the time frame described above, i.e., at the time when people can typically be found on the street.<sup>34</sup>
25. With the first light of the rising sun, it is no longer permissible to recite the blessings on the lighting of the menorah.<sup>35</sup>
26. Failure to light the menorah on one of the nights of Chanukah has no effect on the lighting for the remainder of the holiday. Each night is its own independent mitzvah.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In the days of the Talmud when people lit the menorah outdoors, the publicizing of the miracle was solely for the passersby walking down the street and not for the residents of the house. For them, the latest time to light was half an hour after the stars came out, for after that the streets were deserted (Shulchan Aruch 672:2). In the days of the Talmud, if one did not get a chance to light until 15 minutes before this time expired, it would be sufficient to put 15 minutes worth of oil in the menorah since there is nothing gained by the candles burning past this time (M.B. 672:5). However, nowadays the main publicizing of the miracle is for the members of the household, so the lamps should burn for at least a half an hour even if they are lit late in the evening. See previous note.

<sup>33</sup> Rama 672:2; M.B. 672:10.

<sup>34</sup> Rama 672:2; Biur Halacha quoting the Tur

<sup>35</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:2

<sup>36</sup> Rama 672:2

## Who Lights?

27. Every Jew has a mitzvah to light a menorah on all eight nights of Chanukah. A poor Jew who cannot afford to purchase candles is required to obtain the money by collecting charity. If that does not suffice, they are actually obligated to sell their personal belongings in order to get the money they need to fulfill this important mitzvah.<sup>37</sup>
28. There is a great dispute whether every member of the household should maintain his or her own menorah, or if there should be only one menorah per household that is lit by the head of the family. Sefardim (Jews originating from the Iberian Peninsula and the Middle East) light only one menorah in the home, whereas Ashkenazim (Jews originating from Eastern Europe) have a separate menorah for each member of the household.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:1. This is an exception to the rule; ordinarily a Jew need not spend more than one fifth of their wealth on a given mitzvah. The source for this exception is found in the laws of Passover. A poor person who does not have the money to purchase wine for the four cups of the Passover Seder is required to sell their personal belongings in order to obtain the necessary funds (Talmud, *Pesachim* 99b). The mitzvah of the four cups for the Seder is different than most other mitzvot because it serves to *publicize* the miracle of the Exodus. It is thus derived from the Talmud that any mitzvah whose purpose is to publicize a miracle, such as lighting Chanukah candles, has a similar requirement.

<sup>38</sup> Shulchan Aruch 671:2. This question is a matter of a dispute between the Rambam (Laws of Chanukah 4:3) and Tosafot (*Shabbat* 21b). Although Sefardim usually follow the rulings of the Rambam and Ashkenazim usually follow those of Tosafot, here it is reversed: Sefardim follow Tosafot's ruling and Ashkenazim follow the Rambam's (B'er Heitev 671:3). The debate here is on the nature of the "enhancement" of adding an extra lamp each night (cf. Halacha 39). Tosafot (and the Shulchan Aruch) believe the idea is to communicate through the menorah which night of Chanukah it is. Limiting ourselves to one menorah per home best achieves this goal by avoiding the confusion created by many flames. The Rambam (and Rama) understand that the enhancement is simply increasing the sum total of candles lit. The more menorahs, the better.

29. Ashkenazic custom is that every man, woman, and child<sup>39</sup> in the house lights their own menorah, with the exception of a married woman whose obligation is fulfilled by her husband's lighting.<sup>40</sup>
30. Although the menorah is a "time-bound" mitzvah, which would ordinarily exempt women,<sup>41</sup> women are obligated in this mitzvah because women were key players and also beneficiaries of the miraculous Jewish victory over the Syrian-Greeks.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, one may have his wife light the menorah for him and fulfill his own obligation through her lighting.<sup>43</sup> However, a child (prior to Bar or Bat Mitzvah) cannot light a menorah for an adult.
31. Even before an Ashkenazi child is Bar or Bat Mitzvah, if

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<sup>39</sup> However, according to the Chatam Sofer (Shabbat 21b) single girls do not light a menorah. He explains that in Talmudic times when the lighting was done outdoors, all the residents of the housing complexes would congregate together when it came time for menorah lighting. It was considered improper for single women to congregate with the men, so to preserve this high standard of modesty the Rabbis did not obligate single girls to light their own menorahs. The Mishnah Berurah (675:9), quoting the Olat Shmuel, writes that women fulfill their obligation through the lighting of men. They seem to be saying that even the obligation of an unmarried woman is fulfilled through the lighting of the men, but the rationale behind this statement is very difficult to understand. Nowhere else do we find that a woman's personal obligation can be fulfilled by having a man do it for her, just as a man's obligation cannot be fulfilled by having another man do it for him.

<sup>40</sup> M.B. 671:9.

<sup>41</sup> Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 29a

<sup>42</sup> Talmud, Shabbat 23b. Jewish women were violated by the Syrian-Greeks (Rashi) and a woman, the great heroine Yehudit (Judith), played a central role in defeating the enemy (Tosafot).

<sup>43</sup> This is clear from the Shulchan Aruch 677:1. Therefore, one who will be coming home from work very late should have his wife light for him at the proper time. However, if one does not expect his wife to light for him and intended on lighting his own menorah when he arrives at home, he did not fulfill his obligation with the earlier lighting of his wife and must therefore light again. However, some suggest that when lighting again he should not recite a blessing (M.B. 677:2).

they are old enough to understand the mitzvah they should be given a menorah to light.<sup>44</sup> For such a young child, one candle per night suffices.<sup>45</sup>

32. For the menorah lighting of guests and travelers, see below Halachot 60-66.
33. Jews who are meticulous about the Shabbat and Chanukah lighting are blessed with children who will be Torah scholars.<sup>46</sup>

### The Blessings

34. On the first night of Chanukah, three blessings are recited immediately prior to the lighting of the menorah.<sup>47</sup>
35. The first blessing is the standard formula for a blessing

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<sup>44</sup> Rama 675:3. Some authorities disagree. They rule that we are not required to train a pre-Bar or Bat Mitzvah child in this mitzvah unless the child dwells in a private residence which would obligate an adult to light (cf. M.B. 677:13).

<sup>45</sup> M.B. 674:14. The additional lamps added each night of Chanukah are an enhancement of the basic, primary mitzvah of one lamp per night (cf. Halacha 39). Parents are only obligated to train their children in the primary mitzvot; they are not required to train them in the enhancement of mitzvot. Although the Mishnah Berurah assumes this approach, the Talmud (*Sukkah* 42a) implies that parents are obligated to train their children to perform mitzvot in the ideal manner. The Talmud rules that a child only need be trained in the mitzvah of Lulav and Etrog when the child is old enough to shake them properly. This is true despite the fact that the mitzvah can be fulfilled minimally by simply picking up the Lulav and Etrog.

<sup>46</sup> Talmud, Shabbat 23b

<sup>47</sup> Rama 676:2. Someone who forgot to recite the blessings before they lit the menorah may not recite the first blessing on the mitzvah of lighting, but they should recite the thanksgiving blessing and the *Shehechiyanu* as long as the candles are still burning. However, if the lamps have already burned for the necessary amount of time (cf. Halacha 46), it is questionable whether any blessings may be recited since the mitzvah has ended. On subsequent nights of Chanukah when multiple lamps are lit, if one realizes that they forgot to recite the blessings before they completed lighting all the lamps, both blessings may be recited (Teshuvot R. Akiva Eiger 13).



recited on a mitzvah: “Blessed are You God, our Lord, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to light the lamp of Chanukah.”<sup>48</sup> The second blessing is an expression of appreciation to God for “performing miracles for our forefathers in those days and at this time.”<sup>49</sup> The third blessing is the “*Shehechyanu*.” “Blessed are You... Who has kept us alive, sustained us and brought to this time.” This is an expression of appreciation to God for giving us the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of the Chanukah menorah.<sup>50</sup>

36. On all nights following the first, we recite only the first two blessings, but not the *Shehechyanu*.<sup>51</sup>
37. Traditionally, two songs are recited after the menorah is lit:

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<sup>48</sup> The Talmud (*Shabbat* 22a) asks the obvious question. How can we say that God “commanded us to light the lamp of Chanukah” if this mitzvah is rabbinic in origin? The Talmud answers that the Torah itself (Deuteronomy 17:11) instructs us not to stray from the instructions of the sages. Being that the sages enact rabbinic law by divine right, the fulfillment of rabbinic mitzvot is considered to be a fulfillment of God’s will (Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, *Shoresh* 1; cf. Ramban *ad loc.* for an alternative understanding).

<sup>49</sup> This same blessing is also recited on the reading of *Megillat Esther* on Purim for it too commemorates a miracle.

<sup>50</sup> On other holidays the *Shehechyanu* is recited for two reasons. Firstly, we are grateful for the opportunity to perform the unique mitzvot of the day, and secondly, we are privileged to experience the sanctity of the day itself. However, on Chanukah the *Shehechyanu* blessing is limited to the mitzvah of the menorah. Work is permitted on Chanukah; the day is not sanctified. Therefore, if one forgot to recite the *Shehechyanu* blessing on the menorah lighting on first night of Chanukah, it should be recited on the lighting on the next night (M.B. 676:2). In contrast, if one forgot to recite the *Shehechyanu* blessing at Kiddush on the holidays of Passover, Shavuot or Sukkot the blessing can be recited at any time – it does not need to be associated with any mitzvah. On these holidays, the *day itself* requires a *Shehechyanu*. If one realized on the eighth day of Chanukah that they have not yet recited the *Shehechyanu* blessing, it is highly questionable whether the blessing may be recited (cf. Sha’ar HaTziyun 676:3; Biur Halacha 692:1; Igrot Moshe O.C. 5:43).

<sup>51</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:2

“*Haneirot Halalu*” and “*Ma'oz Tzur*.” One should be careful not to begin singing *Haneirot Halalu* until at least one of the menorah lamps is lit,<sup>52</sup> since it is forbidden to create any kind of interruption between the blessings and the lighting of the first lamp.

38. Someone who will not be lighting their own menorah (i.e., a homeless Jew, cf. footnote #85) recites the thanksgiving blessing – and the *Shehechyanu* on the first night – upon seeing a lit menorah.<sup>53</sup>

### Lighting the Menorah

39. The basic mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles is simply to light one candle per night on each of the eight nights of Chanukah.<sup>54</sup> However, it is customary to enhance the mitzvah by adding an additional candle each night, i.e., on the first night one lamp is lit, on the second night two, on the third three, and so on. This way, the number of flames corresponds to the day of the holiday.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> M.B. 676:8

<sup>53</sup> 676:3. According to some authorities, this blessing is recited by anyone who does not intend to personally light a menorah – and that includes a man whose wife is lighting for him and a guest who has purchased a portion of his host’s menorah (cf. Halacha 61). However, the Shulchan Aruch rules that this blessing is only recited by someone who is not fulfilling the mitzvah at all (M.B. 676:6).

<sup>54</sup> In the terminology of the Talmud (*Shabbat* 21b), the mitzvah of the menorah is “*ner ish u’beito*,” one lamp per household.

<sup>55</sup> Talmud, *Shabbat* 21b; Shulchan Aruch 671:1. (For an alternative explanation, see footnote #38.) Being that the enhancement of the mitzvah is accomplished by demonstrating exactly which night of Chanukah it is, if one cannot accomplish this due to a shortage of lamps, only one lamp should be lit. Lighting three or four lamps on the fifth night of Chanukah gives the false impression that it is the third or fourth night of the holiday, whereas lighting only one would not give a false impression since one lamp is the minimum required by the Halacha (M.B. 671:5 quoting the Chayei Adam). Beit HaLevi in his novellae on Chanukah concurs with this approach. The Talmud offers

40. If multiple menorahs are being lit on the same table, it is necessary to space them out so that the lamps of each menorah are clearly discernible.<sup>56</sup> However, on the first few nights of Chanukah it is actually possible for two people to share the same menorah – they can each light on opposite ends of the menorah without causing any ambiguity.<sup>57</sup>
41. The menorah must be lit in its final destination point. One may not light the menorah in one place and then transfer it to a different location.<sup>58</sup> The menorah should therefore not be held while it is being lit.<sup>59</sup>
42. An extra candle called the “Shamash”<sup>60</sup> is lit first and is

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two advantages to increasing the number of candles each night rather than decreasing, first that it corresponds to the days of Chanukah and second that it is better to ascend and increase in holiness. The above ruling whose central concern is to not misrepresenting the night of Chanukah by lighting the wrong number of lamps assumes that the Talmud’s first reason is the primary one. According to the second explanation that we wish to ascend in holiness, more lit lamps would be preferable even if it is the wrong number.

On the second night of Chanukah, if one initially had only a single lamp but then later found more oil and wicks, they should light an additional lamp without reciting a new blessing since the additional lamp is not part of the primary mitzvah (M.B. 672:6 quoting Beit Yosef). It would seem logical that after the first lamp goes out there is no longer any point to lighting a second lamp. Since the mitzvah has already been fulfilled, it is highly debatable whether there would be any purpose in lighting two lamps at this point.

<sup>56</sup> Rama 671:2. The Biur Halacha suggests that if the menorot are displayed properly, even Tosafot and the Shulchan Aruch would agree that multiple members of the family may each light their own menorah since it will be obvious to all which night of Chanukah it is.

<sup>57</sup> M.B. 671:12 quoting the Chayei Adam.

<sup>58</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:1. The Mishnah Berurah (675:5) explains that moving the menorah from one place to another gives the impression that the light of the menorah is being used for personal needs, a forbidden thing to do (cf. Halachot 55-59).

<sup>59</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:1. The Taz (quoted in M.B. 675:7) disagrees and permits holding the menorah during the lighting as long as it is set down right after the lighting is completed.

<sup>60</sup> The institution of the Shamash is a result of the Halacha that prohibits personal use of the menorah lamps (cf. Halachot 55-59). As the Shamash is

then used to light the lamps of the menorah. It should remain burning for as long as the other lamps of the menorah burn. One should not use a lit menorah lamp to light the other lamps of the menorah, since the first lamp is the primary mitzvah and the additional lamps are only an enhancement of the mitzvah. It would be disrespectful to use that special first flame to light lamps of secondary importance.<sup>61</sup>

43. On the first night, light the lamp on the right edge of the menorah. Each night add an additional lamp to the left. Always light the newest lamp, on the left, first and proceed left to right.<sup>62</sup>
44. If someone is in a rush they can light the first lamp and have

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an additional flame and not one of the sanctified menorah lamps, its light may be used. Lighting a Shamash for our own use serves to indicate that the other lamps are sanctified for the mitzvah and may not be used (Shulchan Aruch 671:5; M.B. 671:24; Biur Halacha ad loc.). See, however, footnote #82. Although we maintain the custom of lighting a Shamash, from a purely Halachic perspective it would seem that the electric lighting we have in our homes does away with the need for a Shamash.

<sup>61</sup> Rama 674:1. According to the reason stated above, it should only be problematic to light the additional “enhancement” lamps from the initial, primary lamp, but it would be permitted to light one enhancement lamp from another enhancement lamp.

It could be argued that when the mitzvah is enhanced by lighting more than one lamp, we should not differentiate between lamps and consider the first to be primary and the additional lamps to be an enhancement. Rather, the mitzvah in its entirety is being performed in an enhanced manner and all the lamps are thus sharing equally in both the core mitzvah and its enhancement. However, the Rama clearly rejects this perspective, for his ruling distinguishes between the first lamp and the additional lamps.

The Shulchan Aruch (ad loc.) cites a debate on whether it is permitted to use an intermediary candle to transfer the flame from one menorah lamp to another. Since the only issue is that using a mitzvah lamp to light a non-mitzvah lamp is degrading to the mitzvah, it may not be considered degrading if an intermediary candle is lit solely for the purpose of lighting a mitzvah lamp.

<sup>62</sup> Shulchan Aruch 676:5

someone else complete the lighting of the remaining lamps.<sup>63</sup>

45. The menorah must be lit for the purpose of the mitzvah. A candelabrum that was initially lit for interior lighting cannot be transformed into a Chanukah menorah by simply placing it on a windowsill. It would be necessary to first extinguish it and then relight it for the purpose of the mitzvah.<sup>64</sup>

### How long should it burn?

46. Before lighting the menorah, be sure that there is sufficient fuel (oil or wax) in the lamp to burn for half an hour.<sup>65</sup> If at the time of the lighting there was insufficient fuel, one cannot simply add oil. The mitzvah is to *light a menorah*; a menorah lacking in fuel does not qualify and must be relit. One should extinguish the menorah, add oil (or insert a bigger candle) and then relight the menorah and once again recite the appropriate blessings.<sup>66</sup>
47. If at the time the menorah was lit the conditions were such that it could have burned for half of an hour, then even if the flames are blown out prematurely by an unexpected gust of wind, one is not required to relight them.<sup>67</sup> If one wishes to

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<sup>63</sup> M.B. 671:49. This Halacha indicates that the enhancement of the mitzvah created by the lighting of the additional lamps is not the physical act of lighting these lamps, but rather the fact that they are lit. The person who recited the blessings is therefore not required to personally light the extra lamps.

<sup>64</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:1

<sup>65</sup> M.B. 672:6; Shulchan Aruch 675:2. When using oil there is no advantage to adding extra oil to keep the flame burning for an extended period of time, but when using wax candles it is advantageous to use tall candles since the impressive look adds to the beautification of the mitzvah (M.B. 672:6).

<sup>66</sup> Shulchan Aruch 675:2

<sup>67</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:2. However, if the menorah was lit in a place where the wind would likely extinguish it, that is tantamount to not having enough oil in the lamp and the mitzvah is not fulfilled – even if, by some freak of

- relight the menorah, no blessing is recited.<sup>68</sup>
48. If one accidentally extinguishes one of the lamps, it is preferable – but not required – to relight it.<sup>69</sup> However, if one intentionally extinguished a lamp prematurely, it must be relit.<sup>70</sup>
  49. If one of the flames goes out prematurely and one wishes to relight it, it is forbidden to use one of the burning lamps to relight it. Since the Halacha does not require the relighting of a lamp that went out, using a burning menorah lamp to relight it would be lighting a non-mitzvah lamp from a mitzvah lamp – an unauthorized use of the menorah.<sup>71</sup>
  50. On Friday afternoons when the menorah is lit before sunset, extra fuel must be added so that it will burn until half of an hour after the weekday lighting time; that is, it should burn (at least) until 55 minutes after sunset (cf. Halacha 20).
  51. When the menorah is lit on Fridays before sunset, it is too early to fulfill the mitzvah at the time of the lighting. (The mitzvah will be fulfilled automatically after nightfall, if the

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nature, the wind does not actually blow it out! Similarly, if one lit the lamp but did not hold the flame to the wick long enough for it to properly catch and sustain itself, the lamp must be relit (M.B. 673:25). Even under these circumstances, one should not make a new blessing on the relighting since it is difficult to determine unequivocally that, at the time of the original lighting, the menorah was doomed to be extinguished (Sha'ar HaTziyun 673:30).

<sup>68</sup> Rama 673:2. If one was lighting four candles on the fourth night of Chanukah and before he finishes lighting the fourth, the first was blown out by a sudden gust of wind, it must be lit again since the enhancement of the mitzvah is only accomplished if all the lamps are burning simultaneously (Biur Halacha 673:2).

<sup>69</sup> Rama 673:2; M.B. 673:27. This is especially true on Friday afternoon where the Taz maintains that one is obligated to relight it (see footnote #72).

<sup>70</sup> This is implied by the Shulchan Aruch (673:2), who writes that if the lamp was put out accidentally it is not necessary to relight it. By stressing the fact that it was extinguished accidentally implies that if one had intentionally extinguished the lamp, he is required to relight it.

<sup>71</sup> M.B. 674:2

menorah is still burning.) Some therefore maintain that one must relight the candles if they blow out, as long as it is still before sunset.<sup>72</sup>

52. A menorah may be moved to a different location after it has burned for the necessary amount of time.<sup>73</sup>
53. One is allowed to extinguish the flames after they have burned for the proper amount of time.<sup>74</sup>
54. It is customary for women<sup>75</sup> to refrain from doing housework while the menorah is burning.<sup>76</sup>

### Personal Use

55. It is forbidden to derive any benefit or use from the flames of the menorah.<sup>77</sup> This Halacha is mentioned in the

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<sup>72</sup> Shulchan Aruch (673:2) rules that even on Friday afternoon one is not obligated to relight the lamps that blow out prematurely before Shabbat begins. However, the Taz disagrees and maintains that there is an obligation to relight them (M.B. 673:26). If the individual who lit the menorah has already begun to observe Shabbat, he should have someone else relight the candles for him as long as the sun has not yet set (M.B. 673:27).

<sup>73</sup> Sh'ar HaTziyun 674:4 from Likutei Mahariv.

<sup>74</sup> Shulchan Aruch 672:2. See footnote #84.

<sup>75</sup> This is a custom that was adapted by women for women, because of their central role in the Chanukah story (cf. Halacha 30). However, in some communities men have also adapted this custom (Shulchan Aruch 670:1; M.B. 670:3). [The discrepancy of customs may depend on a dispute between Rashi and Rashbam (Pesachim 108b) whether the women's role in the story is considered primary or just contributory.] The word "Chanukah" is seen by some to be a conjunction of word "*chanu*" and the number "*chaf hey*," meaning the Jews rested on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Kislev. This may be a source for the idea of abstaining from work (Bach 670).

<sup>76</sup> Shulchan Aruch 670:1

<sup>77</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1. This prohibition also applies to the extra lamps that are added to enhance the mitzvah. This is apparent from the fact that the Halacha is not concerned that using inferior oils will cause a person to adjust the extra lamps on Friday night for the purpose of reading by their light (M.B. 673:7). See footnote #24.

“*Haneirot Halalu*” song: “These flames are holy. We have no right to use them; [we can] only look at them.” It is thus prohibited to read by their light or warm hands by their heat. One may not even use the light of the menorah for the purpose of fulfilling another mitzvah.<sup>78</sup>

56. If the menorah is burning in an otherwise unilluminated room, it is permitted to walk into the room even though the menorah allows you to see where you are going.<sup>79</sup> However, one may not search for something in the room by the light of the menorah.
57. According to some authorities, one should not read by the light of the menorah even after the necessary half hour has passed.<sup>80</sup>
58. If one does accidentally use the light of the menorah, we can consider the benefit to have been derived from the

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The rationale for this prohibition is so that it should be clear that the purpose of the menorah lamps is to publicize the miracle rather than to provide light in the home. Furthermore, since our menorah commemorates the original menorah of the Holy Temple, the Rabbis prohibited its use just as the Temple’s menorah was sanctified and prohibited from being used (M.B. 673:8).

<sup>78</sup> Shulchan Aruch (673:1) rules that one may not learn Torah by the light of the menorah. It is permissible, however, to briefly look something up (cf. M.B. 673:12). See *Biur Halacha* for a more lenient approach.

<sup>79</sup> The Mishnah Berurah (673:11) permits sitting near the menorah in an otherwise not illuminated room. This does not constitute a “benefit.” The *Sha’ar HaTziyun* (673:11) adds in the name of *Pri Chadash* that it is permitted to walk into the room and use the light of menorah to avoid tripping on something. Such a minimal benefit is not forbidden.

<sup>80</sup> Although the Shulchan Aruch rules that both the remaining oil and the light may be used, the Mishnah Berurah (672:8) cites authorities who are stringent about using the light. Their reasoning is that onlookers, unaware that the Halacha changes after half an hour has passed, will assume that the prohibition of reading by the menorah is being transgressed. A verbalized declaration prior to the lighting would not alleviate this problem since an onlooker may not have been present at the time of the lighting (*Sha’ar HaTziyun* 672:12). See *Halacha* 53.



Shamash<sup>81</sup> and not from the sanctified lamps.<sup>82</sup> Every menorah needs its own Shamash.<sup>83</sup>

59. Leftover menorah oil may be used for personal needs.<sup>84</sup>

### Guests and Travelers

60. The mitzvah is to light a menorah *in your place of residence*.<sup>85</sup> This mitzvah cannot be fulfilled by lighting a menorah at a friend's or relative's house.<sup>86</sup> This is true even

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<sup>81</sup> <sup>T</sup>See footnote #60.

<sup>82</sup> Shulchan Aruch 673:1; Rama ad loc. It is unclear if the presence of a Shamash permits the use of the other menorah lamps since we can consider all the benefit to be coming from the Shamash. Biur Halacha (s.v. *yihyeh la'or*) cites a debate between the Bach and Rama on this point. Regardless, one should abstain from using the light of the Shamash since it appears to onlookers as if you are benefiting from the menorah itself (M.B. 673:15).

<sup>83</sup> M.B. 673:18.

<sup>84</sup> After the first half hour, any remaining oil in the lamp is not reserved for the mitzvah – the assumed intent was to designate only a half-hours worth of oil for the mitzvah. Nevertheless, it is preferable to express this thought verbally, since according to some authorities, absent a declaration to the contrary, one who lights a menorah designates all the oil in the lamp for the mitzvah (M.B. 677:18; 672:7). Therefore, if one never make such a declaration, it is best to dispose of any oil remaining in the lamps after the eighth night by burning it without taking benefit from the flame (Shulchan Aruch 677:4).

<sup>85</sup> The Talmud (*Shabbat* 21a) categorizes the mitzvah as “*Ner Ish U'beito*” - one candle per house. The fulfillment of this mitzvah is only possible for someone living in their home, to the exclusion of one who is either homeless or camping. A similar requirement is found by the mitzvah of mezuzah; one who does not own a home has no way of fulfilling the mitzvah.

<sup>86</sup> M.B. 677:12. The Biur Halacha writes that a family that moves into Bubby's house for the duration of Chanukah should light there, even though they have a home of their own in the same city. Although it is generally preferable to light in one's own home, since their house is empty, there is no purpose in lighting there. Although the Biur Halacha is speaking about a situation where the family would be moving into Bubby's house for the entire eight days of Chanukah, it would seem that even if they only move in for a day or two the same ruling would apply since there isn't anyone present at

if you are having dinner there. The obvious consequence of lighting improperly is that the mitzvah will not be fulfilled and the blessings would have been a violation of taking God's name in vain.

61. Travelers who are far from home are still obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the menorah. They can do it in one of three ways:
1. The hotel or house where they are staying is, temporarily, their place of residence. Travelers can therefore light their own menorah there.<sup>87</sup>
  2. Travelers can have an adult family member light for them back at home.<sup>88</sup>
  3. Travelers who are staying in a Jewish home have the option of purchasing a share in the oil and wicks of

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home for the lighting. However, if the family is simply visiting Bubby for dinner, they would be required to delay lighting until they return to their own home.

<sup>87</sup> In this situation, one should have specific intent not to fulfill his obligation through the lighting of his wife at home. Some authorities question whether it is possible for a man to avoid fulfilling his obligation with the lighting of his wife. Being that the nature of the mitzvah is to have a menorah lit in your own home, the mitzvah may not require members of the household to have specific intent to fulfill their mitzvah with this lighting. Rather, the very fact that a household member is lighting a menorah in the home would create an automatic fulfillment of the mitzvah for all members of the family. According to this, a husband's intent not to fulfill his obligation with his wife's lighting, or even a wife's intent to exclude her husband, may be futile and ineffective. To avoid this problem, it would be best for the traveling husband to light before his wife does (M.B. 677:16). (Of course, this will not be possible if he is in an earlier time zone.)

<sup>88</sup> The Shulchan Aruch (677:1) requires the guest to partner with the lighting of his host (option 3) only when the guest's wife will not be lighting for him at home. This clearly implies that if his wife is lighting for him back at home, his obligation is fulfilled through her lighting (M.B. 677:2). If one is not sure if his wife will be lighting for him, he should make sure to use one of the other two options (M.B. 677:2). As mentioned above (footnote #85), it is preferable for a traveler to light his personal menorah before the menorah lighting is done back in their home.

their host's menorah for a small amount of money. They will then fulfill their obligation when their host lights what is now a jointly owned menorah.<sup>89</sup>

62. The first of these three options is the preferred choice.<sup>90</sup> If at all possible, travelers who are staying in a hotel and guests who are staying in a private room should light their own personal menorah.<sup>91</sup>
63. Travelers who will be lighting their own menorah should light it in the room where they sleep and not in the dining room or restaurant where they eat.<sup>92</sup>
64. Travelers who spend Chanukah outside of a Jewish community may not see a menorah at all. They should

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<sup>89</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:1. (See previous footnote.) Some authorities maintain that the host should add a little more oil than the half-hours worth that he needs for himself (M.B. 677:3). Payment is not actually required; what is required is that the guest makes a formal acquisition on some of the lighting materials (M.B. 677:3). When choosing this option it is important for the guest to listen to the blessings made by the host and respond "Amen." (M.B. 677:4; Igrot Moshe O.C. 1:190).

<sup>90</sup> M.B. 677:3. The language of the Mishnah Berurah implies that lighting one lamp of his own is preferable to acquiring a share in the menorah of his host – even if his host will be lighting the additional lamps which correspond to the night of Chanukah and the guest would only be lighting a single lamp.

<sup>91</sup> M.B. 677:7. In the days when menorah lighting was done outside by the door of the house, the Shulchan Aruch (677:1) rules that a guest who has a private entrance into the house must light his own menorah by that door to prevent people from suspecting him of not doing the mitzvah at all. One could argue that today when we light indoors this is no longer an issue (Biur Halacha 677:1 s.v. *pesach*). However, some authorities posit the exact opposite. Today when every member of the household lights their own menorah, the guest should also light a menorah so that the members of the household don't suspect him of not fulfilling the mitzvah. Some apply this stringent approach universally, but at least when the guest has a private room he should light his own menorah in his room (Biur Halacha 677:1 explaining the Magen Avraham).

<sup>92</sup> Although the Rama (677:1) implies that it is preferable to light in the place where one eats, that is only when it is in the person's place of residence. A restaurant is not a private area and cannot be considered a place of residence.

therefore make every effort to light their own menorah, for even if there are family members lighting for them back at home, there is great value in *seeing* a menorah.<sup>93</sup>

65. A “guest” who resides permanently<sup>94</sup> in someone else’s home and eats at their table is considered a member of the household and is not required to light their own menorah. This is true even if this “guest” is not related to their host.<sup>95</sup>
66. Roommates who share the rent cannot join together and light only one menorah. Each of them is required to light their own menorah.<sup>96</sup>

### Lighting in Synagogues

67. It is customary to light a menorah in the synagogue and make the appropriate blessings on the lighting.<sup>97</sup> Although

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<sup>93</sup> Shulchan Aruch 677:3; Rama ad loc.

<sup>94</sup> Mishnah Berurah 677:1. Only permanent residence can raise a guest to the status of a household member and exempt themselves from lighting or from purchasing lighting materials from the host.

<sup>95</sup> This also applies regardless of whether the guest is paying rent.

<sup>96</sup> Biur Halacha (677:1 s.v. *imo*) cites a dispute about this issue.

<sup>97</sup> The lighting of a menorah in shul is not mentioned in the Talmud, but it is an old, universally accepted “minhag,” or custom, that is mentioned in the primary commentaries on the Talmud and recorded in Shulchan Aruch (671:7).

In general, there is a dispute if blessings should be recited on minhagim. Ashkenazic custom is to recite a blessing on a minhag, provided that it is a well-established minhag, such as the reciting of Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. However, Sefardic custom follows the position of the Shulchan Aruch (422:2) that generally one does not recite a blessing on a minhag. The Chacham Tzvi (responsum 88, quoted by the Sha’arei Teshuva 671:10) wonders why the Shulchan Aruch rules that a blessing is recited on the lighting of a menorah in shul. This seems to contradict his usual position that blessings are not recited on minhagim. The Beit Yosef (671 quoting the Kolbo) cites two justifications for this practice. Firstly, guests and the homeless often slept in shul (this refers to sleeping overnight; sleeping during the Rabbi’s sermon is a privilege reserved for members only!). The shul thus becomes their place of residence and they are obligated to light a menorah

no one's personal obligation to light a menorah at home is fulfilled by the lighting of the synagogue's menorah,<sup>98</sup> it has become a universal custom to light in the synagogue for the sake of publicizing the miracle.

68. The lighting in the synagogue should take place in between the *Mincha* (afternoon) and *Ma'ariv* (evening) prayer services.<sup>99</sup> The exception is Friday afternoon when the synagogue lighting takes place prior to the *Mincha* service.<sup>100</sup>

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there with the blessings. This rationale would not be relevant in most shuls today. The second explanation is that the blessings recited in shul do not function as the ordinary blessings on a mitzvah, but rather as a new way to publicize the miracle. Based on this rationale, even if the person who is lighting in shul has already lit at home, he should still repeat all the blessings, including *Shehechyanu*, on this lighting. This concurs with the ruling of the Sha'arei Teshuva (671:11).

<sup>98</sup> Rama (671:7) requires the person who lights in shul to light again when they return home and repeat all the appropriate blessings (that is, if they didn't light their menorah at home before going to shul). However, on the first night of Chanukah, the *Shehechyanu* blessing should not be repeated at home unless other adult members of the family who will not be lighting their own menorahs are present (M.B. 671:45; Sha'arei Teshuva 671:11). Some dispute this ruling because the blessings recited in shul do not contribute at all to the fulfillment of the personal obligation to light. All blessing must therefore be repeated, including *Shehechyanu* (Igrot Moshe 1:190).

<sup>99</sup> Rama 671:7. Even though it may be slightly before the ideal lighting time, it is still preferable to light when people are present and will remain in the synagogue for at least some of the time that the lamps are burning. Furthermore, we cannot delay the shul lighting until after *Ma'ariv* for at that point everyone needs to rush home to light their own personal menorahs (M.B. 671:46).

<sup>100</sup> Rama 671:7. However, in his work "Darkei Moshe," the Rama writes that our custom is to light after the *Mincha* service even on Friday afternoon. If people are coming late and the sun will set prior to the arrival of a minyan (ten men), the menorah should be lit immediately even without a minyan present, since the publicizing of the miracle will be accomplished when the minyan arrives and they see the lamps burning (M.B. 671:47). It is important to note that some disagree and maintain that candles cannot be lit in shul unless there is a minyan present at the time of the lighting (Biur Halacha

69. The synagogue's menorah is placed by the southern wall<sup>101</sup> and the lamps are set from east to west.<sup>102</sup> The easternmost lamp of the menorah – the one closest to the Ark – is lit on the first night, and each subsequent night an additional lamp is added to the west.<sup>103</sup> The newest, westernmost, lamp is lit first and the lighting continues moving towards the east.
70. Besides the exceptions of lighting in a synagogue where daily prayer services are held or in a house of study where scholars study Torah,<sup>104</sup> there is no source in the primary Halachic literature for lighting a menorah in any location other than a place of residence (cf. Halacha 60).

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quoting R. Yaakov Emden). The point of dispute is whether publicizing the miracle is only accomplished in the presence of a minyan, or whether the very act of lighting in shul qualifies as publicizing the miracle (Biur Halacha 671:7).

<sup>101</sup> Rama 671:7. This corresponds to the menorah of the Holy Temple which was located on the south side of the sanctuary (M.B. 671:39).

<sup>102</sup> Rama 671:7. Some set the candles from north to south because there are opinions that in the Temple the lamps of the menorah were set from north to south, not east to west (M.B. 671:42)

<sup>103</sup> M.B. 671:43. The person lighting stands facing north with his back to the south and sets the first candle on his right, adding one to the left every night of Chanukah (M.B. quoting Chatam Sofer).

<sup>104</sup> Rama 671:7; M.B. 671:39

ליהרג ולא לעבור, וכנראה שמצב החשמונאים לא חייבם להתייצב מול היוונים ולסכן את נפשם. כאן לא באנו לדון אם היה ראוי להם להלחם ביוונים, אלא להסיק שכוונתם היתה במלא המסירות ושלא ציפו לנס. כן גם מרומז בחידושי ה"בית חדש" (הרב יואל סירקש, 1560-1640):

**בחנוכה עיקר הגזירה היתה על שהתראשו בעבודה  
[כלומר, עבודת בית המקדש] ועל כן היתה הגזירה לבטל  
מהם העבודה [ע"י כיבוש בהמ"ק]... וכשחזרו בתשובה  
למסור נפשם על העבודה הושיעם ה' על ידי כהנים  
עובדי העבודה בבית ה', על כן נעשה הנס גם כן בנרות  
תחת אשר הערו נפשם למות על קיום העבודה...**

למרות שמסירותם היא שלמה בלי לסמוך על הנס, בשעת המצוק הצדיקים עדיין משתדלים לעשות כל מה שבידם לעשות וכפי יכולתם, שאם יזכם ה' ויעשה להם נס יחול הנס במימדים צנועים, וכהשלמה בלבד למעשה הצדיקים. כי לעולם לא יעשה ה' נס גלוי לעין כל אדם פשוט. הכנותיהם והשתדלותם אינם מסתמכים על הנס, רק מאפשרים לנס שיחול אם כך ירצה ה'. וכך מבואר בפירושו הרמב"ן על התורה (פרשת נח):

**ואם תאמר, יעשנה [נח את התיבה קטנה] ויסמוך על  
הנס... [יש לתרץ] שעשו אותה גדולה כי כן הדרך בכל  
הניסים שבתורה או בנביאים - לעשותם מה שביד האדם  
לעשות, והשאר יהיה בידי שמים.**

### התעוררות בימי החג

ראוי אם כן שמתוך השמחה בחג, בין הליכות והשחוק, הסביבונים והשירים - נחשוב על מהות הנס. מצד אחד הנס תלוי על אריג הנתונים של ה"מה", ה"איך", וה"מתי", ודורש מאתנו להתאמץ ולעשות כל מה שבידינו לעשות, ובלא הסתמכות על הנס. אמנם מאידך נודע שיש בורא עולם העונה על שאלות ה"למה", ובליבנו אנו מאמינים ומצפים לישועתו מכל צוקה וצרה.

### מסירות נפש בתקוה לנס

כידוע האויב היווני איים על העם היהודי בהשמדת האמונה באלוקיו. האמונה היא רוח העם ויחודו, על ידי זכוי האמונה נפגע עצם הויית עם ישראל. היוונים גזרו שלא לשמור את השבת, לא לקיים מצות המילה ולחצו עליהם לכפור באלוקי ישראל.

המאבק הרוחני נאבק בד בבד עם המאבק המדיני. בשיא המאבק, השטלתו היוונים על בית המקדש ופרצו פרצות בחומת העזרה (חצר המקדש) וטמאו את שמני המנורה. מרכז הדת והרוחניות נפל בידי הכופרים ובכך כבה אור התקוה של עם ישראל. נעשינו זרים בבתנו, הסיכון היה באובדן הזהות הלאומית ואיתה מסורת העם בסכנת הכחדה.

באותה שעה עמדו שלשה עשר כהנים ממשפחת חשמונאי להלחם עם היוונים. זו לא היתה התיצבות רק כנגד השלטון היווני אלא טיהור מן הזיהום האידיאולוגי שהצליחו היוונים לנשוף לאויר האמונה היהודי. במעמדם, הם ביקשו לעצור את ההדרדרות החשוכה ולהתפס באמונה שנוצצה בקרבם, ולהפוך את המצב המדכא לנצחון אידיאולוגי וקידוש השם.

במצב ההוא לא היה משנה אם יעשה להם נס וינצחו את רבבות היוונים. העיקר שיקדשו את שם ה' בכך שלא להניח עצמם להשתק על ידי הכפירה והחילול הנורא.

**ולא תחללו את שם קדשי, ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל.  
אני ה' מקדישכם.**

ספר ויקרא, פרק כב

**מסור עצמך וקדש שמי... וכשהוא מוסר עצמו ימסור  
עצמו על מנת למות, שכל המוסר עצמו על מנת הנס אין  
עושיך לו נס.**

רש"י שם

רש"י מתאר מצב שבו מאיימים על יהודי לעבור על מצות התורה ברבים או ליהרג. בהלכה (שלחן ערוך יו"ד סי' קנ"ז) מפורש מתי חייבים



אולי ההבדל בין המאמין ושאינו, היא היכולת של הראשון להאחז לאורך זמן ברושם מידי. לעומתו, הרציונלי סובר שאי אפשר להמשיך עם הפרספקטיבה הראשונית לאורך זמן. אלא יש לחקור ולהבין את העבר וההווה על סמך נתונים ועובדות. התגובה הראשונית של הפריצה בבכי והתחושה ש"קרה פה משהו" מוקדמת מדי וחסרת מידע מספיק. ככל שעובר הזמן מתוסף מידע שמיועד להחליף את האמונה. הרציונלי אומר שמי שמאמין, מתעלם מן הנתונים והעובדות וממהר לקרוא בשם ה'.

יתכן! המאמין סובר שעולם העובדות והנתונים רוכב על אריג האמונה. אין ויכוח על ה"מה" וה"איך" וה"מתי" של אירועים שהתרחשו, השאלה המתבקשת היא, "מדוע ארעו הדברים?" האם השתלבו כך במקרה מעצמם? ודאי שלא! הרציונלי הוא זה שמאבד חלק מהתמונה בכך שמתרכז רק על חלק מהנתונים כשמתעלם משאלת ה"למה".

**השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלוקיך... ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלוקיך...**

**ואמרת בלבבך, "כחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה".  
וזכרת את ה' אלוקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל.**

ספר דברים, פרק ח'

התורה מזהירה מפני הסכנה של שיכחת ה' והמהחשבה ש"כחי ועוצם ידי" הם גורמי ה"חיל". בפירוש הרמב"ן על התורה מבואר ש"עצם כל דבר [הוא] כחו ותקפו... בתוקף שלימותו." הסכנה היא שנאמין שיש כח עצמאי לידיים שאיתו אנו מנצחים. התורה מחייבת "לזכור" את ה' - שהיא הנותן את הכח לעשות חיל.

כאן למעשה משתלבות עמדותיהם של שני המתווכחים. אמת כי "אי אפשר להמשיך עם הפרספקטיבה הראשונית של רגשות לאורך זמן", ומאידך אותה פרספקטיבה של רציונליות חוטאת לאמת בכך שעונה רק לשאלות ה"מה" והאיך" וה"מתי" ומתעלמת מן ה"למה". דרך התורה היא לדעת ולהאמין, ולזכור שבורא העולם נותן לנו את הכח לעשות חיל.

# המאמין בנס ושאינו

## הרב זאב ג'קובס

**נס גדול היה פה.** עודנו בגן הילדים למדנו את שיר החנוכה, וגם אם הורים וסבים אנו, עדיין מהדהד הפזמון הזה בבתינו. אולם אנו צריכים לשאול את עצמינו, האם באמת אנו חוגגים "נס"? ואולי זה לא משנה כל כך, אם יש סיבה למסיבה, נחגוג ונסתפק בכך. בכל זאת כדאי לנסות לדון בחגיגה ובסיבותיה.

### הנתונים והאמונה

מתוך ראיון שהתקיים לאחרונה, במלאת ארבעים שנה לשחרור הכותל, מצותת ההיסטוריון מיכאל אורן: "אפילו לבני הקיבוצניקים החילוניים - אשר אף פעם בחייהם לא בקרו בבית-כנסת - התחושות היו מאד מרגשות. הרמטכ"ל יצחק רבין ביחד עם שר הבטחון משה דיין שניהם אף יהודים חילוניים, ירדו אל הכותל, קראו תהילים ובכו. זה היה מרגש ביותר לכולם."

רגשות החרדה של אותם ימי טרום מלחמה זכורים היטב. שונאינו הערבים גילו את פניהם וקראו להשמדת עמינו בארצו. לא היתה כל ברירה בידינו, הוצרכנו לפעול כנגד האיום הנורא. וכשהצלחנו, היה ברור לכולם כי משהו מיוחד אירע "פה", זה לא היה נצחון מובן מאיליו. התחושה הכללית היתה שקיימת השגחה אלוקית. ואולם, ככל שנקפו הימים כן דעכו התחושות החזקות והתגובות הלכו ונשתנו. האם אותה האמונה שהציפה את לב היהודי בעת הניצחון, היא האמונה האמיתית?

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**Rabbi Joey**

AND

**Sarah Felsen**

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bringing fantastic Jewish learning to  
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**Anna & Leo Hmelnitsky**