

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

HOLIDAY INSIGHTS

Short Divrei Torah on Chanukah

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

IGNITING THE SOUL

Beis Avraham

The blessing recited over the Chanukah candles is not to "light" the candle, but rather to "ignite" the candle. This is because the Chanukah lights ignite the soul, the hearts of the Jewish nation, with a burning passion, drawing them towards repentance.

DIVERSE UNITY

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook

Chanukah represents unity within multiplicity. Once existence descends from the simple light of the Infinite, separation and fragmentation begin to take hold. What was once unified is now split, as the various modes of expression take on their own particular forms. In the disunity of varying forces, each path seems to be separate and apart from the others, focusing on self-expression at the expense of the other.

On Chanukah we light many candles, many flames of expression, but in the end we see that they are all rooted in the simple unity of the light of the Infinite.

FLAME OF INSPIRATION

Reb Shamshon Raphael Hirsch

The basic mitzvah of Chanukah is as the Talmud dictates, *ner ish u'beiso*, the head of the household lights one candle and fulfills the mitzvah for his wife and children. However, says the Talmud, one does the mitzvah in a *mehadrin*, enhanced fashion, if each person of the house lights their own.

Yes, we can live life "*ner ish ubeiso*," we light the fire in our own hearts, inspire ourselves and make sure we are warm. But the proper thing to do, the way to accomplish things in a *mehadrin* fashion, is to make sure each person in the home is a burning flame, to inspire children to burn brightly and illuminate the darkness as well.

CONSTANT GROWTH

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

The lights of Chanukah teach us to constantly aim to grow in our service of Hashem; to never give up no matter how many falls we may endure, and to never rest on our laurels.

The flame is never stagnant; it may shine brighter at times, but the flame is constantly aiming and stretching heavenward.

ABILITY TO BEGIN ANEW

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

Ideally, the Chanukah menorah should always look new. However, it is permissible to light from one that does not look new. But an earthen menorah should not be used, since after its first use it will never look new again. (Orach Chaim 573:3)

An earthen receptacle is disqualified because it cannot be made to look new again. However, a glass or metal receptacle may be used, even if it does not look new, because it can be made to look new again.

The same is true with us: when we believe that we can always change, and turn over a new leaf, the Light of G-d will shine upon us, no matter how old we are. (See Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom # 51; Bnei Yissaschar, Kislev 4:9)

PROPER PRIORITIES

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

It was a Friday afternoon when the Beis Avraham was preparing to light the Chanukah candles. Suddenly, his child raced by and knocked over the menorah, with its oil spilling out on the floor. Shabbos was approaching, and there was not enough time to prepare the menorah again.

With a smile, the Beis Avraham said, "The same Creator who commanded us to light the Chanukah candles, also commanded us not to become angry."

HASHEM IS WITH YOU

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

Ideally, the Chanukah candles should be lit no higher than forty inches above the floor, outside the front door on the left side, opposite the *mezuzah*.

A spark of this light is revealed on Chanukah when we kindle the Chanukah candles. Therefore, the candles should be lit near the floor, on the left side outside the door, to symbolize this ubiquitous light. (The “left” and the “outside” represent the “other side” - the forces that counter holiness. The Divine Light shines within them as well, even at the lowest spiritual levels, near the floor.)

So, when you light your Chanukah candles, be aware of what they represent. Always remember that G-d is right there with you, even in your greatest spiritual descent. No matter what you have done, no matter how far you have fallen into the spiritual nether worlds, you can return to G-d right here and now.

See how your little candles bring light to the darkness. Allow their light to enlighten your world.

SHARE YOUR FLAME

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There is a fascinating debate in the Talmud if you can take one Chanukah light to light another. Of course, typically we use the *Shamash* to light the other candles, but supposing we don't have an extra light, can we take the first candle and use it to light the others? Two great Sages of the third century, Rav and Shmuel disputed about just this; Rav said no, and Shmuel said yes.

Now, we have a rule that whenever there is a disagreement between Rav and Shmuel, the ruling follows Rav; there are only three exceptions, and this is one. Why did Rav say that you may not use the Chanukah light to light the others? The Talmud says it's because you diminish the mitzvah; inevitably you will spill some wax or oil. Therefore, Rav says don't do anything that would diminish the light. But Shmuel disagrees, and the law follows Shmuel. Why so?

The best way to answer this is to look at two Jews, both religious, both committed and living a full Jewish lifestyle. One says, “I mustn't get involved with Jews who are less religious than I am, for if I do, my own standards will fall, my light will be diminished.” That's the view of Rav. The other Jew says, “No, when I use the flame of my faith to light the candle in someone else's life, my Jewishness is not diminished, it grows, because there is now more Jewish light in the world. When it comes to spiritual goods, as opposed to material goods, the more I share, the more I have. If I share my knowledge, or my faith, or my love with others, I don't have less, I have more.” That was the view of Shmuel, and that is how the law was eventually decided.

So, share your Judaism with others; take the flame of your faith and help set other souls on fire.

WAKE UP CALL

Reb Shlomo Eiger of Lublin

There are two ways to awaken someone: Either with a loud sound or by turning on the lights.

On Rosh Hashana, we are awakened by the call of the Shofar. On Chanukah, we are awakened by the bright lights of *emunah* (faith) that shine from the Chanukah menorah.

ALL-ENCOMPASSING LIGHT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

Why do we go to work on Chanukah?

On other Jewish holidays, work is not permitted, because the light of those days is too pure to enter the mundane world. To be part of such a holy day, we must temporarily leave that world behind.

But on Chanukah, there shines a far more intense light, the light of the six days of creation that was hidden for the World to Come. A light through which all mysteries are revealed, all questions answered. A light so powerful, it can enter our everyday world of work and business, and encompass everything we do. And make that shine as well.

On Chanukah, there shines a light that reveals the divine within everything, everywhere.

FRESH START

Reb Noson of Breslov

Through the mitzvah of Chanukah, we merit to draw upon us holy intensity so that we can constantly strengthen ourselves in serving Hashem. The main point is to always begin anew - which is the actual meaning of the name Chanukah.

Chanukah means service with a mindset of training and of starting. As if we are training ourselves and starting in the service of Hashem for the first time - today. Therefore, “we add another candle” each night of Chanukah - a fresh start each day as if lighting for the very first time.

This is the way to continuously grow in our service of Hashem, by approaching each day with extra strengthening, a fresh start, and a reawakening. (Likutei Halachos, Laws of Milk and Meat 4:15)

BLESSINGS FOR ALL

Ruzhiner Rebbe

The Machzor Vitri teaches that the name Chanukah stems from *Chanina* or *Chanan*, to give gratuitous gifts. This is because on Chanukah, Hashem sends divine bounty, comparable to the blessings that descend on Rosh Hashana. However, on Rosh Hoshana only those who are deserving receive these blessings, whereas on Chanukah we receive regardless of our merits or worthiness.

20/20 VISION

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

There is a very high association between Chanukah and the sense of sight. As we sing on each night of Chanukah, “the candles are sacred, we don’t have permission to benefit from their light, but their purpose is simply to be looked at.” Moreover, we have a unique ruling on Chanukah. The Talmud tells us and the Shulchan Aruch records - *ha’roeh mevareich*, one who can’t light for himself or herself and sees the candles of someone else - nevertheless makes the second beracha, *she’asah nissim la’avosainu*. When I see someone put on tefillin, take a lulav, or blow shofar, I don’t make a bracha. Only on Chanukah do I make a bracha on seeing someone else do the mitzvah.

The Kedushas Levi, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, tells us that Chanukah is the holiday of seeing. The different holidays correspond with our different senses. On Purim our hearing is heightened as we listen to the megillah. On Pesach our sense of taste is sharpened when we eat matzah and marror and on Chanukah, he says, we evaluate our sense of sight, how well do we see...

We often feel that “seeing is believing.” If I can perceive and observe it, it is true. If I can’t, it is not real. Following this rule, we have dismissed and disregarded many of the most precious truths and realities in our lives. There are ideas, feelings, thoughts and dreams that are authentic and genuine, despite the fact that they can’t be seen or observed.

Our Rabbis describe the Greek empire and Hellenist influence as *choshech*, darkness. In expounding on the opening verses of the creation story, the Midrash Rabbah says *choshech al p’nei sehom - zu galus yavan*, darkness on the vastness, that is the exile of Greece. Moreover, our Rabbis taught that darkening our eyes was the goal of our Greek oppressors - *shehechshichu einhem shel Yisrael*, they darkened the eyes of Israel.

What is the difference between a room that is filled with darkness or with light? Is there any actual change to the room itself? Whether the light is on or off in the room, the furniture remains the same, the layout of the room, the placement of the door and the height of the ceiling are a constant. What, then, is the difference whether the light in my room is on or off? The answer is just my perception. The only difference is my ability to identify and see the reality, the truth and that which was right before me all along.

Chanukah is about seeing things, people, ideas, and miracles that are really right in front of me, even though I may not be able to visibly see them... One can live with his eyes open, perfect vision, and the light on and still be cloaked in darkness. On the other hand, it can be pitch black all around and yet a person can see absolutely clearly. The Chashmonaim didn’t see their few numbers, weak army, and impossible task. They saw the mighty hand of Hashem, they saw the obligation to fight, and they saw Divine protection that would accompany them.

Chanukah is about lighting the candles and using them to harness our sight, not ophthalmologically speaking, but our deep vision of what is true, precious, and dear... There are truths all around us; it is up to us to decide what to look at and how to see.

STEP BY STEP

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

The Slonimer Rebbe, the author of the Divrei Shmuel taught: We hold like Beis Hillel that we light one light on the first night of Chanukah and add an additional light each successive night. This represents the concept that a person should grow spiritually at a manageable pace, step by step, even if they are only small steps.

Little by little, with consistent progress you will merit to light all eight lights that allude to Hashem’s relationship with us in a way that is above nature.

APPRECIATING THE OPPORTUNITY

Sefas Emes

In response to the classic question - if there was sufficient oil to burn one night, why celebrate the first night of Chanukah - we may answer as follows:

We celebrate that Hashem allowed us to participate in the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah by finding a cruse of oil on the first night. No greater testament to Israel exists than Hashem permitting us to participate in His miracles by finding and contributing the oil which later burned miraculously.

Alternatively, we may suggest that by immediately kindling the menorah on the first night of Israel’s liberation, we merited the supernatural miracle of the oil for the rest of Chanukah. Thus, we thank Hashem for enabling us to participate so enthusiastically in the menorah’s rededication.

MIRACLE MODE

Divrei Shaul

We are taught (Berachos 54a) that throughout the year, we are not supposed to pray for miracles. However, on Chanukah we can ask for anything, including miracles.

Typically, Hashem runs the world according to the “laws of nature,” but on Chanukah He leads the world in “miracle mode.” Chanukah is a time above nature.

(It is also taught that the number eight is above nature; thus, the eight days of Chanukah are inherently miraculous. The Kedushas Levi compares this to a king who opened his treasury for the day, permitting all to come and take as they please; “Woe to the one who doesn’t take advantage of such an opportunity.” Similarly, Rabbi Elimelech Biderman compares this to someone who won the lottery but failed to claim his prize.)

AVAILABLE TO ALL

Sefas Emes

The multifaceted nature of Chanukah, offering opportunities for Jews at various levels of commitment, is reflected in the differing degrees of observance permitted for the kindling of the Chanukah lights. Categories such as *mehadrin* (who kindle for every member of the household one light per night) and *mehadrin min hamehadrin* (who kindle numerous lights, per family member, based on the particular night of Chanukah) exist to reflect the participation of Jews at various levels of observance.

This theme - allowing for Jews at differing degrees of observance to participate - is also alluded to by the Talmud's distinction between kindling the menorah on the outside, and if necessary even in an attic. While some have also reached the pinnacle of observance and are living an exalted lifestyle ("attic"), others are yet on the outside, not yet committed. They too can benefit and be spiritually uplifted by participating in the Chanukah miracle.

PERPETUAL REDEDICATION

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

It is preferable to use olive oil for the Chanukah lights. The Flood rains ceased during the week of Chanukah, on the twenty-seventh of Kislev (Rashi, Bereishis 7:12, 8:3). Thus, the Light of Chanukah dispersed the clouds that had brought about the deluge.

The reason for this is that the message of Chanukah is perpetual rededication, the knowledge that you can start again - no matter what you've done. On Chanukah you can stop the Flood no matter what you've done. On Chanukah you can begin life anew - no matter what you've done.

So when you are inundated by unwanted thoughts, remember the Chanukah candles. When you feel you are drowning in a spiritual flood, remember the Chanukah candles. When the torrential "rains" are overwhelming and you feel that you deserve a deluge, remember the Chanukah candles...

The olive branch in the beak of Noach's dove symbolizes the olive oil we use for the Chanukah lights (Tikkunei Zohar 13, p. 29a; Zohar Chadash, Bereishis 8:11). The dove was thus indicating to Noach the message of Chanukah: If you want to start life anew and begin again after a deluge, you must always remember to look ahead and not focus on the past. You must be willing to let go of what happened before and perceive a new world in the making. Create the image of that new world in your mind and then actively make it happen.

The Jewish people would have never survived - and you cannot grow as a person - without this Chanukah message. Remember this when you light your Chanukah candles.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The flames of the menorah, a perfect row of lights are magnificent. But then there is the *Shamash*, just a little higher, in a row by itself.

If a person devotes his life to self-enhancement, self-perfection, to growth, that's wonderful, that's admirable - but it's not what will ultimately allow him to reach his greatest heights. When a person becomes a *Shamash*, dedicates his life to helping others give light, to become a conduit for light and love and hope, then he empowers and inspires others, then he is living higher.

To dream alone is awesome, but to help others realize their dreams is greater - because you don't only bring out the best in them, you bring out the best in yourself.

KEEPING THE PEACE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

The Chofetz Chaim was in the home of Reb Nachumke Kaplan during Chanukah. When the time for lighting Chanukah candles arrived, Reb Nachumke decided to wait for his wife to return home before lighting.

The Chofetz Chaim asked his Rebbe why he would wait if the *halacha* clearly states to light at the appropriate time, even if not every member of the family are home.

Reb Nachumke answered that his wife would be upset if he lit the candles before she arrived home, therefore it was a matter of *shalom bayis*, peace at home.

The Talmud states that if a person only has one candle on Friday during Chanukah, he should light it for Shabbos because "*shalom bayis* takes precedence over lighting the menorah." Therefore, Reb Nachumke determined it would be preferable to forgo lighting at the correct time in order to preserve peace at the home.

PURE PROTECTION

Sefas Emes

Why is the menorah kindled by the opening of the home (i.e., the doorway)?

The opening to the home refers to the core of the Jewish heart, the inner spark that is pure and divinely inspired. Man's heart may plot many designs and plans; it may conceive of many complicated schemes, but the essence remains pure. By kindling the menorah at the opening, we enhance and bolster that inner spark and ensure that it remains pure.

Alternatively, just as the *mezuzah* protects the home, so too does the Chanukah menorah protect it. This is particularly fitting as an antidote and reaction to the Greek campaign of defiling the Jewish home. In response, Hashem offers extra protection every Chanukah.

CELEBRATING SPIRITUALITY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

Chanukah is a time of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* (the very highest halachic standards), where we light our menorahs using all the stringencies we can. Many light with oil, and everyone increases the number of candles each night even though only one flame is necessary. In fact, most things that we do on Chanukah are far beyond the strict letter of the law. Why is this?

One answer could be based on Rashi's words: "One who causes another to sin is worse than if he had killed him. For one who kills him, kills him in this world, but one who causes him to sin removes him from this world and from the next world." The Greeks did not try to physically kill us, they tried to prevent us from learning Torah and keeping mitzvos; they tried to spiritually destroy us; something far worse than a physical death.

This is why our victory against them led to such a great celebration, and this is why we specifically perform the mitzvah of Chanukah to the best of our ability. Because by showing Hashem how much we value our spiritual lives and treasure our connection with the Torah and its mitzvos, we demonstrate our value for the relationship we have with the One who gave them, which we are eternally grateful for, especially as we celebrate all of the miracles that took place on Chanukah to save our spiritual lives.

CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

Reb Noson of Breslov

There are those who can possibly be mistaken, since they see how far from the light they actually are, therefore they can fall into a depression and despair G-d forbid, which is even more damaging than anything, as it's known.

Therefore, one who has mercy on themselves needs to turn everything around into joy, that precisely because they see and understand their great distance from the light, precisely through that, they should be very happy and joyful, because as far as they seem and feel, nevertheless they can see that the light is right here with us, for even with the way we feel, we still light the holy light of the Chanukah candles right inside our home!

And the same with the light of tefillin, which although it is such a great and exalted light, we put them onto our arms and on our head, is there anything closer to the light than that? And although we feel so far and removed from this light of tefillin, to the contrary, precisely because of this, this is our joy that we get healed with such great, precious, and wonderful medicines that come from such a far place.

And this brings us such great hope that surely Hashem will redeem us from all our troubles and bring us closer to Him in mercy.

INITIATING MIRACLES

Rabbi Shais Taub

What is a miracle? Well, to understand a miracle, first you must understand what's natural.

Natural means the regular way things are, the predictable order. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west, that's natural. Imagine one day the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, that would be called a miracle or supernatural.

Now, everything in the universe has a nature. Us too, as individuals. We have a certain pattern that's predictable, that's the way we behave, that's the way we are comfortable, that's our nature.

The story of Chanukah is a story about a miracle, a story about going above nature. We had enough oil to last for one day and it took eight days to make more. So what would be the normal thing? Take the oil and divvy it up into eighths because naturally speaking, you are limited. You are limited by the certain finite quantity of oil that there is, and if you use it all up on the first day, nature says you don't have any more.

That's not just the physics of it, that's the psychology. A human being is limited by his fear. What does that mean? It means I'm robbing from the moment the perfection that I'm able to give it.

The miracle is when I abandon all fears and all calculations, and I give this moment everything I've got, as if it's the last moment in time that will ever exist. And when I act that way, in that miraculous way, there's a mechanic of reciprocity in the universe.

When I rise above my nature, then the world conducts itself in a supernatural way as well. I've got to do everything that I can do, and G-d does the rest. But the miracle begins with me.

DAYS OF THANKS

Rebbe Nachman

The days of Chanukah are days of thanksgiving and praise. Thanksgiving and praise are the essence of the delight of the World to Come. They cause the light of truth to shine: we can pray in truth and learn Torah in truth from the lips of the true teacher, and marriage unions are formed in truth.

These three rays of truth send light to all the different facets of speech and bring the faculty of speech to perfection. Through this we are able to bring the sanctity and joy of Shabbat into the six days of the week. Then the simple unity of G-d is revealed.

All these *tikkunim* (rectifications) are brought about by the kindling of the Chanukah lights, and the praise and thanksgiving which we offer on Chanukah.

How precious it is if you achieve all this on Chanukah and bring about these awesome *tikkunim*.

MIRACULOUS TIMES

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

The Talmud (Shabbos 21b) teaches, “The following year [after the Jewish nation experienced the miracles of the war and of the menorah], the Chachamim established Chanukah as a day of praise and thanks to Hashem.” Why did they wait a year before establishing Chanukah as an annual holiday?

Initially, they thought that these miracles were an isolated experience. However, the following year, they perceived that it is a special time designated for miracles and salvation; they understood that the miracle of Chanukah would recur each year. Therefore, they established it as an eternal holiday.

LIGHT UNTO OTHERS

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

Lighting your candles outside your doorway represents being a light to the world. Not to “show off,” but to shine from the inside.

Being you is the greatest thing you can do for the world. If you are not yet able to do so, seek guidance from others - be a window to let in their light. If even this task is beyond you, then at least do the very best you can. Never give up, no matter what! Hold on to whatever light you can. (See Likutey Moharan I, 9, 112; Ma’ayanim BaNechalim, Chanukah 6)

YEARNING FOR CLOSENESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

The two major miracles we celebrate on Chanukah is the amazing victory of the Maccabees of the Greeks, as well as the miracle of the oil burning for eight days. Why is it that we commemorate the oil lasting for eight days? Sure, it was a miracle, but how does it play a pivotal role in our lives? What lesson does the miracle of the oil provide for each and every generation for all of time?

We need this remembrance, because the oil represents our deep yearning to perform a mitzvah in the best possible fashion, our yearning for closeness to the Creator of the world. Everything was in ruins, and it would have been completely acceptable for the Maccabees to light the used oil. But the Maccabees weren’t looking to settle. They wanted to offer Hashem only the very best.

This is the message we are to internalize when we light the menorah, this is the miracle of the oil. That when we have a yearning to draw close to Hashem, we should try with the best of our abilities, never settling for the easy way out; and we must have faith that Hashem will be there to support us and guide us, empowering our spiritual growth and development.

STOP, THINK, THANK

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

On the dreidel it says, “*Neis Gadol Haya Sham* - There was a great miracle there.” But while the dreidel is spinning, we can’t see what it says; only once it stops, can we see the reminder of the great miracle.

Similarly, when a person is busy to and fro, he can become so busy that he doesn’t get a chance to see all the miracles happening to him. If he stops for a moment, he will see the miracles. We need to stop, think, and thank Hashem!

SOULFUL LIGHTING

Meir Einei Chachamim

Believe with complete faith that when you stand to light the menorah, all the sparks of your soul and of your fathers and grandfathers souls, all the way to Adam HaRishon, are standing there with you. This applies to every Jew who lights the menorah. These souls join, hoping that perhaps they will merit their rectification and reach their origin and source.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Rabbi Yossi Katz

Night is a time of darkness and uncertainty, when Hashem seems hidden or disconnected from us. But we proclaim “Hashem is One!” We firmly believe that even when we perceive distance between us, we are always connected to Him...

The lights that we kindle on our Chanukah menorahs are not simply festive lights. They represent and are equal to the *Ohr HaGanuz*, the “hidden light” that was created at the beginning of time but was so holy that Hashem secreted it away for the tzaddikim in the time of Mashiach. This means that the light emanating from our menorahs is extraordinary - completely out of this world!

One of the miracles of Chanukah is that not only did this light descend to us in the days of the Maccabees, but we continue to receive it through our menorahs every year.

SOURCE OF LIGHT

Rabbi Tzvi Freeman

Think of each person you meet as a candle that you must ignite with the light you hold. How will you know that you have succeeded?

When he sets others alight with his own flame.

That is why we must enlist every soul we light. Not only because we need a whole army of lamplighters to light up the world, but because no person is meant to only receive and not give.

TRANSCENDENTAL HOLINESS

Rebbe Nachman

The appeals we make to G-d to “Forgive us!” on Yom Kippur help us to experience the holiness of Chanukah. The reason is that the theme of Chanukah is the consecration of the Holy Temple (*Chanukat Beit Hamikdash*), and on Chanukah we draw the sanctity of the Holy Temple upon ourselves. But it is only possible to do this when our sins are forgiven, as they are on Yom Kippur.

The great teaching which the Holy Temple embodies and declares to the world is that “The Lord, He is G-d;” in all His aspects He is One. This knowledge can free us from the hold of sin. Nowhere is G-d’s love for Israel more clearly revealed than in the forgiveness of sin.

When we radiate the holy knowledge of G-d’s unity to our children and pupils in this generation and in all the generations of the future, we can come to a vision of the transcendental levels of holiness, the holiness which is beyond this world and encompasses it.

This vision is a foretaste of the joy of the World to Come. It is through the kindling of the holy oil of the Chanukah lights that we come to perceive these levels and then our very life and sustenance are drawn from the Supernal will.

We long and yearn and pine for G-d with a desire that has no limits. But only if you are close to a true teacher who is filled with genuine love can come to attain these levels on Chanukah. How precious it is to find such a teacher.

ACKNOWLEDGING HASHEM

Rebbe Nachman

Through the mitzvah of kindling the lights of Chanukah we acknowledge the glory of G-d. His glory is exalted and magnified in the world. Those who were distant from Him are stirred to return. We can attain true fear of Heaven, harmony in the home and genuine prayer. Strife and malicious slander are banished and universal peace spreads in all the worlds.

PUTTING IN THE EFFORT

Sefas Emes

Our Sages teach us, “Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his portion.” This also refers to our spiritual lot, and the outcome of the mitzvos we perform. We always want to carry out the mitzvos in the best manner possible, but as long as we put in our best effort, we must remember to be satisfied with however much we ultimately accomplish.

Similarly, the rule states that if the candles blow out, it is not necessary to rekindle them. Here too, we see that it is our responsibility to take the appropriate steps, but what happens next is solely up to Hashem.

OPPORTUNE TIME

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

A young man came to me and said, “Rebbe, I don’t feel anything... I know the holy Rebbe of Ruzhin said, ‘A simple person’s prayers on *Zos Chanukah* (the final day of Chanukah) can accomplish the same amount as the prayers of the most righteous person on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur,’ but I don’t feel anything!”

I answered him that there was a person who had to get to the hundredth floor of a building, so he went into an elevator and pushed the button. When the elevator reached the hundredth floor, the doors opened, and they told him that he had arrived, and it was time to step out. He said, “I don’t feel like I’m on the hundredth floor.” To which they responded, “Regardless of whether if you feel it or not, you are now standing on the hundredth floor.”

The same applies to us. Whether we feel it or not, we are currently amidst very special and holy days, days that are above nature... Don’t let the opportunity pass you by!

WELCOME HOME

Sefas Emes

While other, perhaps, more dramatic miracles occurred during the time of *Neis Chanukah*, emphasis is placed on celebrating the miracles of the Chanukah lights (rather than the military triumph).

This is to stress that it is not sufficient to celebrate military triumph which simply commemorates our extrication from evil, but rather to focus on becoming again Hashem’s subjects.

It was through the miraculous kindling of the Chanukah lights that it became apparent that Hashem was prepared to welcome back the Jewish people to His fold.

SHINING OUR CANDLE

Reb Avraham Yitzchak Kook

Every man must know and realize that inside of him burns a candle, and his candle is not the same as his friend’s candle, and that there is no one who does not have a candle. And every man must know and realize that he needs to strive to reveal the candlelight openly, and to kindle it into a great torch and light up the entire world.

NEVER TOO LOW

Reb Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

The Talmud (Succah 5) states that the Shechinah never descends below ten *tefachim*. However, Hashem makes sure that no Jew will be detached from Him. So during the miracle of Chanukah, Hashem, so to speak, comes down below ten *tefachim*. He comes close to man to bring him back up to Him.

FLAMES OF ONENESS

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

G-d is everywhere equally - He can be found both in Heaven and hell. He is there amid the bliss of your deveikut experience, and He brings you and sustains you through the torment of hell. He can be found anywhere if you just open your eyes, if you open your heart to His Presence. He can be found anywhere if you just realize that there is absolutely nowhere that is void of His Presence.

The experience of Heaven and that of hell are actually two sides of a coin. Without the experience of the deepest of suffering, you can never know true bliss. Suffering and bliss must thus alternate, for they revolve around the very same axis. They are both given to us to provide us the experience that both are different aspects of One. This is the secret of the Chanukah dreidel, the symbol that all things are One.

The worlds are represented by the sides of the dreidel, which all revolve around the one axis. At one point in life, you may find yourself in higher worlds, only later to fall to lower ones. Yet always remember that it is only your perception that distances you from G-d; you are no further from G-d than your own perception (see Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom # 40).

Light your Chanukah candles; rise up to G-d in their flames. Behold that those flames are part of the Oneness.

THIS IS YOUR CHANUKAH

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

Chanukah is not just some celebration of miracles performed in the past. Neither is it just a commemoration of righteous people who lived in the distant past.

It is a guiding light for people from all walks of life, from all eras in time, to see through the darkness of their personal lives and to become part of history. It is encouragement for those who face insurmountable odds as a result of personal history. It is a declaration that G-d will perform miracles for us when we courageously stand up for battle. It is inspiration for us to be our own Maccabees in waging our inner battle. It is also the knowledge that G-d is with us, even when we lose the battle.

Kindle your own candle. Ignite your soul. Chanukah is your Story. (see Likutey Halakhot, Shiluakh Hakein 5:8)

COSMIC EFFECT

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

The message of Chanukah is that although it may seem that our actions don't make a difference, they make a massive difference to Hashem and to the world. Just like a small candle can light up a dark room, our Torah and mitzvot light up the world.

HOLY KNOWLEDGE

Rebbe Nachman

Through the mitzvah of kindling the lights of Chanukah, we draw down holy *Da'at*, the knowledge of G-d, upon ourselves. This *Da'at* is the goodly oil (Tehillim 133) of memory, whereby a person at all times bears in mind that everything in this world, both in general and in particular, has meaning only in relation to the World to Come.

DOWN TO LOWEST DEPTHS

Reb Dovid of Tolna

Chazal tell us that the divine presence does not descend lower than ten *tefachim* from the ground. The only exception to this is the menorah on Chanukah, whose place is ideally required to be less than ten *tefachim* off the ground. The Shechinah, on this occasion, does descend lower than ten. This is the mystical concept that lies at the root of the gemara that says: if your wife is short, bend over and whisper to her.

PRAISEWORTHY COURAGE

Rabbi Moshe Bamberger

One of the heroes of the Churban in Europe was Rabbi Yisrael Spira, the Bluzhever Rav (1889-1989), who survived the horrific nightmare of the war and continued to be a spiritual leader and inspiration to his fellow prisoners.

In Bergen-Belsen, he secretly arranged, on the first night of Chanukah, to light a menorah in the presence of hundreds of Jews, who risked their lives to do so. The Rav recited the three blessings and lit the menorah.

A non-believing Jew asked the Rebbe, "Rabbi Spira, I do not understand how you can bring yourself to recite the Shehecheyanu blessing. How can you offer thanks for having been kept alive for this time of death, torture, and hunger? We wish we were dead!"

The Rebbe replied, "I, too, was wondering how I could joyfully recite these words. Then I looked around and I saw this huge assemblage of Jews that had risked their lives to participate in this mitzvah. Have you ever in your life witnessed such courage and faith? Isn't that something to be grateful for?"

LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Rabbi Uri Lati

Chanukah is at the time of the year where we have the longest nights. Sometimes we feel in life that the struggles and the pain that we are going through are very long, and it doesn't seem like there will be a light at the end of the tunnel. This is why we light *Nerot Chanukah*. When everything around you is surrounded by darkness, you have the true light.

RULES OF THE GAME

Reb Nachum of Stefanesti

During Chanukah the winter nights are long and dark. So what can a person do after the lights of the menorah have burned down, the potato latkes have been eaten, and the children have spun the dreidel for the last time and gone to bed? For a few *chassidim* in Stefanesti, the answer was to put on their woolen mufflers and fur hats and head for the beis medrash (study hall).

Even though their usual occupation in the study hall was to learn Torah, the atmosphere that night was different. After all, even if they were grown men, it was Chanukah. It was a holiday. And so instead of opening one of their holy books, they opened up a board for Chinese checkers. Within a few minutes the small crowd was enthusiastically immersed in the game.

In fact, they were so immersed in the game that none of them noticed when the door to the beis medrash opened and a distinguished gentleman walked inside. It was only when the man drew near that they realized who he was. And once they realized who had joined them, they jumped up from their chairs, some from fear and some from embarrassment. For the man was their Rebbe, Rabbi Nachum of Stefanesti. He had caught them wasting time - and wasting it, in of all places, the beis medrash.

However, when Rabbi Nachum spoke there were no words of chastisement on his lips. Instead, he pointed to the checkerboard and asked, "Who can tell me the rules of this game?" No one said a word.

"Do not be embarrassed to speak. Just as a person can learn modesty from a cat and good manners from a rooster, surely we can learn one or two things concerning character refinement from a game of Chinese checkers, if we wish to do so."

Even with this encouragement the small crowd remained mute.

"Very well, then," said Rabbi Nachum, "I will tell you the rules of the game. Number one: You must give one in order to take two. Number two: When you move, you must take just one step at a time, and never more. Number three: You must always move upward, and never down. And, finally, number four: Once you reach the top, you can go wherever you like."

The Rebbe then left the room. As for the *chassidim*, they never again looked at a game of Chinese checkers in quite the same way. (L. Astaire)

BECOME A SHAMASH

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

The *shamash* [which is used to kindle the other candles] is customarily placed higher than the other lights.

This is because one who spends his time helping others "shine their light," will be raised even higher.

PUBLICIZING THE LIGHT

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Chanukah is the only Jewish holiday that centers around the mitzvah of *pirsumei nisa* - publicizing the miracle. The lights of the menorah shine into the darkness of the night, reminding us to bring light and holiness to the world.

THE LIGHT OF TORAH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

The light of the menorah represents the light of Torah and mitzvot that should illuminate the Jewish home and the world at large.

DISPELLING DARKNESS

Chiddushei HaRim

The Chanukah candles teach us that a little light can dispel a lot of darkness. Even in the darkest times, there is hope and light to guide us forward.

FEELINGS OF CONTENT

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

In Parshat Vayishlach, we observe something very interesting. When Esav received the offering from Yaakov, he accepted it and reconciled with him. However, on a deeper level, he intended that everything Yaakov had should turn into bitterness for him. Therefore, he said to him, "Let what is yours be yours." The initial letters of the Hebrew words in that verse spell "*Elil*," which means idol. Essentially, he wished for Yaakov to have success that he would misuse and then become obsessed with accumulating vast wealth. This would serve as a constant reminder that the ultimate purpose in life is to amass money, money, and more money.

When a person lives in such a reality where money is everything, Rebbe Nachman writes that money becomes a form of idol worship. He considers it the harshest punishment, even more severe than other desires, as it is extremely challenging to break free from such a reality.

Yaakov's response, "I have everything," conveyed his understanding that all he achieved was through the grace and blessings of HaShem. Whatever he succeeded in was only due to Hashem's kindness and blessings, and what he had was enough for him.

This is also reflected in the miracle of the small jug of oil during the Chanukah story. They rejoiced over finding a small jug of oil despite it being only enough for a single day, and therefore, a miraculous event unfolded and what they had was enough for them as well, as it lasted for eight days, which symbolizes abundance.

May it be the Divine will that we always remember that everything we have comes from Hashem, who sustains and provides for everyone. Let us find joy in what we have.

JUST A BIT OF PURITY

Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein

The menorah goes in the window not just for the outside world to see, but to tell us, the people in the house: Look out at the big world. Now, see that menorah, and the little flame. It's a message to you. Remember that there was a time when people didn't settle. "Remember," Hashem is saying, "how My people didn't sell out. They could have used impure oil, but they refused. They wanted to do it right, and they would settle for nothing less."

Those tiny flickering flames call out, "Don't think it has to be something big, it can be very small, but it has to be pure. Very pure!"

"If you give Me a little bit of purity," Hashem says, "I will perform miracles for you."

DAYS OF REDEMPTION

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

Every year at this time, the miracle is manifested again, and G-d bestows salvation and redemption on His nation during these days.

This is why we say in the Chanukah addition to the Amidah prayer, "And to your Jewish nation you have done... as on this day." We specifically say "as on this day," indicating that even today, G-d grants us salvation and redemption, just as He did during those times.

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FINISHING TOUCH

Skulener Rebbe

At the beginning of the year, on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos, we build a beautiful (spiritual) edifice, which is the source for bounty and blessings for the new year. Yet, everyone understands that the building isn't finished without electricity. Something essential is missing from that structure. Similarly, the new year without light isn't complete. Chanukah adds the light.

WITHIN REACH

Sefas Emes

Chanukah - unlike other Jewish holidays - represents complete happiness. The reason is that it is the only holiday that we can fulfill completely.

Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkos, according to the Torah, all require that we offer sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. Because we are currently unable to offer these sacrifices, our enjoyment of these holidays is incomplete.

But to fulfill the requirements of Chanukah according to Torah law, all we need to do is kindle the Chanukah lights properly and thank and praise Hashem - mitzvos that are within the reach of every Jew who wishes to perform them.

IT'S IN HASHEM'S HANDS

Rabbi Avraham Twerski

In his book Growing Each Day, Rabbi Abraham Twerski points out that there have been many miracles in Jewish history, yet few of them have received the prominence that the miracle of the Menorah has received. The reason, he suggests, is because whereas other miracles were initiated by Hashem, this miracle was initiated by the Jews, themselves. When the Jews decided to light the Menorah with the oil that they had - and not worry about how they were going to light the Menorah on the morrow - their action elicited a Divine response. The Menorah stayed lit for seven more days, which gave them enough time to prepare a fresh supply of oil.

This lesson of taking the initiative and doing what we can - while leaving the outcome to Hashem - is reflected in one of the laws of Chanukah. If a Chanukah light is extinguished before the prescribed time for burning has elapsed - thirty minutes - a person isn't obligated to rekindle the light (although it is proper to do so, without a blessing). The reason we don't have to rekindle the light is because our responsibility is only to decide to do the mitzvah and then act on this decision. We aren't responsible for the successful outcome of the mitzvah because success and failure are in Hashem's hands alone. (L. Astaire)

POWER OF FAITH

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook

The flames of the menorah remind us of the power of faith; that even when surrounded by oppression, a small flame of belief can bring about the greatest miracles.

SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Chanukah is a celebration of spiritual survival - the triumph of values over might, of spirit over materialism, of holiness over assimilation.

SMALL ACTIONS, BIG IMPACT

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

The story of Chanukah rests on the Chashmona'im finding one jar of oil that was still intact with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. They lit from the oil in this flask, and instead of lasting for one night, it shone for eight nights.

This famous flask with the seal has gone down in history. Every year, we retell its story. The question we need to ask is why the flask was sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol in the first place. Where in the Mishnah or the Gemara does it say that the oil in the Beis Hamikdash must be sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol?

The Shabbos shel Mi suggests that the reason the miracle occurred was because a certain Kohen Gadol performed his personal service in a manner that was above and beyond that which was required.

A Kohen Gadol is required to bring a personal Korban Minchah daily, which included oil as one of its ingredients. Although this only requires regular-grade oil, out of his love for this mitzvah, this particular Kohen Gadol used only extra-pure olive oil, and to differentiate his special oil from the regular oil, he placed it in unique jars to which he affixed his personal seal.

This is the jar that was found by the Chashmona'im and became famous in perpetuity.

This shows the importance of small acts and the effect that they can have. This Kohen Gadol performed an innocent act; the seal was merely a way of identifying his oil and differentiating it from the others, and yet it changed Jewish history and led to Chanukah.

We can never be aware of the full impact of our actions. Simple, trivial acts can have ramifications for generations. We have to be sure to act positively so that, as far as possible, we can ensure that our actions help perfect and bring optimism to the world and make a positive impact for generations to come. (Inside Chanukah, p. 177)

DOING OUR PART

Reb Noson of Breslov

We find that everything is from Hashem - the fire, the candle, the oil, and the wick, the person lighting and the thing being lit - everything is from Hashem. Nevertheless, if the person won't take a small action, to take the light and light up other lights, surely they won't light themselves up on their own, because this is how Hashem created the world, that He created and prepared everything the way they exist through His wisdom, and at the same time He wants that precisely we complete it through our actions and our awakening down below, even though everything is truly only through Him, for all our work in the service of Hashem is in this same aspect of lighting and shining the light of the soul. (Likutei Halachos, Krias Shema 5:19)

EVERY BIT COUNTS

Rabbi Yehoshua Starrett

The Chanukah candles should be lit at sunset or nightfall. They should be long enough, or the olive oil sufficient, to burn for at least one half-hour after nightfall. If they blow out before the minimum time, it is not necessary to rekindle them.

When it seems that your efforts are not justified and the results do not match the input, when you feel that your toil is being wasted and your intentions are going unacknowledged, remember that G-d does not judge by results, but by the effort you put in.

Remember that whether or not you actually succeed is not within your limited powers and that the toil and desire to do your best is the only thing you can call yours.

No effort is ever lost; no sincere intention goes unseen - even if your attempts seem futile (Bnei Yissaschar, Kislev 3:11).

MIRACULOUS COURAGE

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

The miracle of Chanukah was not just the oil burning for eight days; it was the courage to light it in the first place, in a time of darkness.

UNWAVERING LOVE

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

There are many, many people that are walking around who feel absolutely rejected and worthless, and it requires a miracle that they shouldn't spiral away and downwards.

Chanukah is the Yom Tov Hashem Himself showed us that "No matter who in this world has rejected you, no matter what institution - even a parent who has turned you away - I, the One Who created you, I love you; with all your imperfections, and with all your limping. I'll never leave you. It doesn't make a difference to Me if you dress up like this, or you act like that, I stay with you. I'm with you even in your impurity. And I want you to know that inside each and every one of you, there's still that tzaddik that the enemy didn't reach, that the enemy wasn't able to touch."

The reason why Chanukah is so dear to us is because that point of tzaddik inside each and every one of us is the dearest thing that we have.

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