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THE IMPACT OF SO FEW ON SO MANY

There are less Jews in the world than a rounding error of a Chinese population census.

I read a few years ago that an acceptable mistake in such a census is 30 million – double the number of Jews in the world! Furthermore, there are many more children in first grade in China (approximately 20 million) than there are Jews. Israel, one of the smallest countries in the world, can fit a whopping 460 times into China’s landmass!

Despite these figures, the remarkable fact remains that this tiny people, of less than one fifth of one percent of the world’s population, has impacted the course of humanity’s moral and spiritual history significantly more than China and arguably more than any other nation in history. Historian Paul Johnson makes this point in the closing chapter of his monumental work, “A History of the Jews,” when summing up the great Jewish contribution to the world:

“To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both Divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind.

For me, one of the most profound lessons of Jewish history is this – so few can so deeply have an impact on so many. That strength lies not in numbers but rather in the quality of spirit. 20th century American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, made this point well when she famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; it is the only thing that ever has.”

This is perhaps the story of the Jewish people in a nutshell.

An explicit verse in the Torah highlights this very point where it states that we are the smallest of all nations. The verse implies that the basis for being singled out for a unique Divine role is not a result of numerical strength but is rather rooted in the realm of the spirit. It is linked to being an Am Segula – a treasured people, which is a unique spiritual and deeply transformative metaphysical trait facilitating the ability to impact far beyond a number quantum.

ONE FAMILY, ONE PEOPLE

This fundamental idea of so few people having so great an impact is at the heart of Jewish living since time immemorial. Indeed, the whole book of Bereishit is the story of one family. Adam and Eve and their children, Noah and his wife and children and the family of Abraham and Sarah, our forefathers and mothers and their children. Through their passionate belief in one G-d, a personal G-d who created us and the world for a purpose, the book lays the moral foundations and spiritual building blocks for an entire nation.

The Book of Shemot is about how this family gave birth to a people and nation whose redemption from the clutches of Egyptian oppression, its experience of Divine revelation and acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, would eventually transform the moral and spiritual course of all of human history.

So few impacting so profoundly on so many.

THE HASMONEANS

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Chanukah story. One man, Matityahu the Priest, and his five sons: Yehudah, Shimon, Yochanan, Elazar and Yonatan – one small family known as the Hasmoneans, changed the course of Jewish history forever. An event which took place 2,300 years ago continues to echo into eternity.

It was a time of Greek world domination, systematic global acculturation and the assimilation of the inhabitants of the conquered nations and minorities throughout the Empire. Judea, the Jewish country at the time, was heavily influenced by the enticing hedonistic lure of Hellenistic...
culture. The Jewish people were in grave danger of losing their national and spiritual identity and – G-d forbid – vanishing as a distinct culture from the platform of human history, the fate of so many ancient nations. Had this small Hasmonean family not placed its finger into the rupturing dyke, and not cemented the breach of the tumultuous and raging waters of cultural assimilation, the flame of Torah and Jewish destiny may very well have been snuffed out forever.

This one family stood up against the harsh decrees of the Syrian Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes, who threatened to uproot every last vestige of authentic Jewish life. They attracted supporters and grew in number, sparked a revolution, rebuilt a Jewish sovereign state, brought cultural independence to Judea and rededicated the Temple in Yerushalayim. They succeeded in not only stemming the tide, but in reinvigorating the Jewish people’s belief in themselves and G-d, enabling them to survive and push back the military, political and cultural onslaught of the dominant superpower at the time.

Outnumbered by 20-1, Judah made the following remarkable speech before facing one of his many battles: “Victory in battle emanates not from the multitude of numbers but rather in the strength given from Heaven...whatever the will of Heaven be, so shall it transpire.”

With a tiny group of untrained men, the Hasmoneans not only defeated this huge army, but continued for many years to fight even larger forces continually sent to put down the rebellion... and even greater miraculous victories took place. The Book of Maccabees recounts that: “On the 25th day of the 9th month, which is the month of Kislev, and on the very date that the heathens had profaned it (the Temple), on this very day was it dedicated afresh.”

The reason we still observe Chanukah today, over two millennia later, is a testament to the Maccabees’ display of incredible courage and faith, and their belief in the justice of the cause of Jewish destiny. It was this that enabled them to prevail in the face of impossible political and military odds.

The few against the many.

**THE HASMONEAN SPIRIT IN OUR TIME**

We live in a privileged generation which has seen a remarkable revival of the Hasmonean spirit. After the devastation of the Shoah – the horrific murder of one-third of our people and the destruction of almost the entire Yeshiva world – we have witnessed two miraculous rebirths. Of Torah and of Israel.

A handful of surviving leaders rebuilt the world of Torah study over the course of a few short decades into arguably the largest cadre of Torah learners our people has ever had. And out of the desolate backwater of the Ottoman Empire, a small band of Zionist pioneers created the miracle of modern-day Israel. Reviving a nation, reclaiming a land, rebuilding a country, revitalizing a language and reigniting our spirit.

Two powerful examples of the essence of Jewish history and Divinely-directed destiny. Of how so few can have such a deep impact on so many.

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3. Nevertheless, this verse – “the fewest of all peoples” – needs to be reconciled with the multiple promises made to our forefathers of their progeny being compared to the dust of the earth and stars of the sky, too numerous to count. There are many answers but I will just mention one. Rav S.R. Hirsch (Bereshit 13:16) suggests that these promises refer to the eternal nature of the Jewish people. All other nations, while perhaps much larger in number in any particular generation, eventually die out and cease to exist as a nation. Their numbers are therefore finite. The Jewish people, while small in number in every generation, have a Divine promise to exist eternally, outliving all the other nations. Hence their collective numbers over all generations are infinite.
4. First Book of Maccabees.

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Rabbi Doron Perez is the Chief Executive of World Mizrachi

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DAYS OF DUALITY

In its description of the origin of Chanukah, the Talmud mentions both what the holiday commemorates as well as how it was initiated – “for a later year they established and created the days as holidays through hallel and hoda’a.”

The Sfat Emet points out that the Talmud presents hallel and hoda’a (praise and gratitude) not as how the holiday expresses itself, but as the foundations of its creation. Why are hallel and hoda’a so central to Chanukah?

While the institution of hallel reminds us of other Yamim Tovim, the emphasis on hoda’a seems unique to Chanukah. Understandably, when Al HaNissim (added to the bracha of hoda’a) describes the holiday’s goals, it mentions hoda’a first –

כְּפֶרֶשֶׁת הַיּוֹם וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים לְּכָל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְקִרְבִּי מודֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם שֶׁהִזָּרַת בִּי שֶׁהֵם מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהֶבֶל וָרִיק... וַאֲנַחְנוּ כּוֹרְעִים לְדוֹר וָדוֹר נודֶה לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְדוֹרֵיהֶם וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ LNeoN hoda’a (bowing). Bowing is the marker of the hoda’a song succinctly summarizes the prohibition’s nature and intent:

הנהו הלילה Kushner us Ani LeDodi. These lights are holy and we have no permission to use them – only to look at them, so we can thank and praise Your great Name.”

The uniqueness of hoda’a lies in the word’s dual connotation – gratitude and admission. This duality accounts for the word’s recurrence in the Modim prayer:

The Mishna tells of the Hasmonean institution of 13 hodon five (accompanied by hoda’a) to offset the 13 Grecian breaches of the Beit Mikdash’s soveig – the marker of the point in the Mikdash beyond which gentiles could not proceed.

These breaches were a Hellenistic denial of G-d’s (and, by association, the Jewish people’s) unique holiness. For them, Man was as great, if not greater, than G-d. The Greeks celebrated Man. Their astronomy placed Earth and Man at the center of the universe; their veneration of art sanctified Man’s determination of beauty; their mythology viewed the gods as reflections of Man, and their deification of the human body (in its natural form) expressed their view of Man’s perfection.

In response, the Hasmoneans sought to restore Man’s perception of his place in G-d’s world by instituting hishtamshut and hoda’a. They did so by using the two as the foundation of the Chanukah holiday, which commemorated the victory over the Greeks and Hellenism.

For this reason, the Talmud formulates the prohibition of benefiting from the Chanukah lights not as an issur hana’a (prohibition of benefit), but as an issur hishtamshut (prohibition of use). While hana’a includes benefit of any kind, hishtamshut specifically connotes the redirecting of an object for one’s personal use. Man is meant to enjoy G-d’s world, but to realize that the world is about more than just his pleasure.

The HaNeirot Halalu song succinctly summarizes the prohibition’s nature and intent:

This aspect of admission needs to be most pronounced when thanking G-d. Although much of the aid received from mortals is of a non-essential nature (i.e. we could have helped ourselves), G-d’s assistance is basic to our very existence. We re-admit this absolute dependency every morning when we open our eyes –

and are expected to remember it as long as we remain awake –

We are different not only in who we serve, but in how we admit, recognize, and thank.

CHANUKAH – A TIME FOR ADMISSION

The Mishna tells of the Hasmonean institution of 13 hishtamshut (hoda’a is meant to enjoy G-d’s world, but to realize that the world is about more than just his pleasure.

The haNeirot Halalu song succinctly summarizes the prohibition’s nature and intent:

These lights are holy and we have no permission to use them – only to look at them, so we can thank and praise Your great Name.”

1 Shabbat 21b.
2 Sefat Emet, Sefer Bereishit, Vayeshev, 638 D’H K’va’um.
3 Tehillim 30.
4 Understandably, the Talmud (Bava Kama 16a) asserts that the spinal cord of one who avoids bowing at Modim transforms into a snake: the first to suggest that man deny his dependence on G-d.
5 Shabbat 21b.
6 See Rambam et al and Shekalim 17a.
7 Shabbat 21b.

Rabbi Reuven Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and Dean of the Yeshivat HaKotel Overseas Program ravtaragin@mizrachi.org

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Rabbi Reuven Taragin

MIZRACHI EDUCATORS
The Talmud\(^1\) explains that the basic mitzvah of Chanukah is for the head of the household to kindle one light each night. The mehadrin (those who are meticulous in the performance of mitzvot), kindle a light for each member of the household. The mehadrin min hamehadrin, who are even more meticulous, adjust the number of lights daily. Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree as to the nature of that adjustment. Beit Shammai say: On the first day one kindles eight lights and gradually decreases the number of lights from thereon until, on the last day of Chanukah, he kindles one light. And Beit Hillel say: On the first day one kindles one light, and gradually increases the number of lights until, on the last day, he kindles eight lights.

Ulla said: There were two Amoraim in the West, Eretz Yisrael, who disagreed with regard to this dispute, Rabbi Yosei bar Avin and Rabbi Yosei bar Zevida. One said that the reason for Beit Shammai’s opinion was that the number of lights corresponds to the incoming days... the reason for Beit Hillel’s opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the outgoing days. And one said that the reason for Beit Shammai’s opinion is that the number of lights corresponds to the bulls of the festival of Sukkot (13 were sacrificed on the first day and one fewer was sacrificed on each succeeding day) and the equivalent number of sacrifices on each succeeding day) and the number of lights is based on the bulls brought in the courtyard of the Sanctuary. Perhaps combating external influences is an efficient method to apply in the public sphere, where bombastic measures are sometimes necessary to ameliorate evil and darkness (מַעֲלִים בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵין מַעֲלִין בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵין). Beit Hillel’s application of מַעֲלִים בַּקֹּדֶשׁ is based on the showbreads offered in the inner sanctuary. In the inner sphere of our homes, a more positive means of edification is a gradual increase of light as we encourage our children to extend their strengths\(^4\) (עשה טוב). Chanukah lights are linked to the home – and thereby Beit Hillel’s “probiotic” method of education is deemed the more preferable!

A similar debate between their approaches to Chinuch is recorded regarding a gentile who asked Shammai to convert him on condition he be taught the entire Torah while standing on one foot.\(^3\) Shammai pushed him away with a measuring stick, believing that he must first display motivation to relinquish his evil past before learning Torah. The same gentle came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: “That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.” Hillel espouses a more “probiotic” approach to Jewish education – teach a little Torah and gradually increase the student’s light as the darkness automatically begins to fade.

CHANUKAH AND CHINUCH

The Antibiotic vs. Probiotic Approach

Chinuch is an opportune time for us to revisit our methods of Chinuch. Beit Shammai’s “antibiotic” approach is based on the bulls brought in the courtyard of the Sanctuary. Perhaps combatting external influences is an efficient method to apply in the public sphere, where bombastic measures are sometimes necessary to ameliorate evil and darkness (מַעֲלִים בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵין מַעֲלִין בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵין). Beit Hillel’s application of מַעֲלִים בַּקֹּדֶשׁ is based on the showbreads offered in the inner sanctuary. In the inner sphere of our homes, a more positive means of edification is a gradual increase of light as we encourage our children to extend their strengths (עשה טוב). Chanukah lights are linked to the home – and thereby Beit Hillel’s “probiotic” method of education is deemed the more preferable!

1. Shabbat 21b.
2. Ner Mitzvah II.
3. Shabbat 31a

Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and the Director of the Mizrachi Matan Lapidot Educators’ Program shani@mizrachi.org

1. The lighting of the Menorah was not merely a manifestation of the military miracle against the Greeks, but also a means to overcome the negative Hellenistic influences that had infiltrated the Beit HaMikdash and the entire Jewish culture. Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai differ regarding the most effective means of continuing to commemorate and counter the “darkness” and deterrents in our path toward Avodat Hashem.

2. The Maharal\(^2\) explains that on Sukkot we ward off the influences of the 70 nations through bringing the equivalent number of sacrifices and decreasing the number of bulls until we are left with one, symbolic of Am Yisrael’s exclusivity. So too on Chanukah, we continue to commemorate our victory in a war against the darkness of Hellenistic culture through lighting many lights in our homes to combat the evil. As we minimize the darkness, fewer candles are needed day by day. This is Shammai’s “antibiotic” approach to Chinuch (education) – ward off the “virus” of darkness through doses of light! As the darkness subsides, fewer antibiotics are necessary! According to Beit Shammai, we light according to the incoming days, anticipating a better state (less negative influences) day by day.

3. Beit Hillel adopts a more “probiotic” approach to strengthen us – people are naturally good and merely need to boost their immunization against negative influences in a gradual manner, increasing the already-present light day by day, strengthening and elevating themselves above those around them. Each day one becomes stronger, building one’s resistance against the surrounding influences through adding more light!


Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and the Director of the Mizrachi Matan Lapidot Educators’ Program shani@mizrachi.org
Chanukah Candle Lighting in the Modern Age

The modern reality of artificial lighting and of people’s ever-changing habits pose significant questions regarding the best time for lighting Chanukah candles.

When I was a child in Tel Aviv, the stores would close at 7:00 pm. After that, the streets were deserted in many places, though there were areas busy in the later hours as well. In those days, there was hardly a soul in the streets of Yerushalayim either at night time, not even in the city center.

Today, both in Israel and overseas, there are people walking around the streets at all hours. Shopping malls, restaurants and the entertainment culture mean that the streets are full late into the night.

Of course the reason I mention this is because the Talmud – and Halacha – tells us we should light candles “from when the sun sets until three stars: the appearance of three stars. The Gra says we light at sunset (and so seemingly does the Mishna Berura).”

Simply put, candles should be lit at sunset. Yet this is still the middle of the day for many people. So how does modern life affect the time for lighting candles?

In this context, I will present a general overview.

What does “from when the sun sets” mean? There is a disagreement among the poskim. According to the Shulchan Aruch, we light at the appearance of three stars. The Gra says we light at sunset (and so seemingly does the Mishna Berura).

How late can we light? Again, there is disagreement. The Shulchan Aruch says lechatichla (ideally) we light at sunset or at the emergence of three stars, and the candles should be alight for at least half an hour. If you didn’t light then, you can light up to half an hour after the emergence of three stars. Bediavav (after the fact), one can light the entire night until dawn.

There are two explanations why lechatichla one should light at sunset or at the emergence of three stars:

1. One who lights at the emergence of three stars does so because the light from the candles is distinct (Mordechai, Meiri). One who lights at sunset does so as now it is clear to all that the lights are for the mitzvah and not for illumination (Yereim).

2. One who lights at sunset does so as it is closer to the time when the Menorah was lit in the Beit HaMikdash. One who lights at the emergence of three stars does so in order to not light outside the Beit HaMikdash in a similar manner to inside the Beit HaMikdash.

Can One Intentionally Delay Lighting Candles?

If there is a principled reason for lighting at the correct time (for example, showing that the lighting is for the mitzvah or as emulating the Temple), candles must be lit at this time. If there is no such principle or the focus of lighting is for publicizing the miracle (and most people will return home later), it will be possible to light later, when people are returning home.

Many Rishonim wrote that when lighting inside the house (and not at the entrance to the street), it is not necessary to light at a specific time as the only publicity for the miracle is to the members of the household.

The Rama agreed but added that it is still preferable to be stringent regarding the earliest possible times for lighting.

From these opinions, we understand that the determinant is the publication of the miracle, and since the members of the household are always around, candle lighting can be done at a later time (at least when needed). If, like today, people return from work later than the ideal time to light candles, there is a case for saying that the time they return is the ideal time, because the publicizing of the miracle will be greater.

Practically it is best and desirable to light at the onset (sunset or appearance of stars). In this way, all the approaches are fulfilled lechatichla, and we also merit entering the darkness of night with the light of a miracle, and echoing Temple times, when the Menorah was lit from the start of the night.

When one needs to wait for the whole family to light together, it seems possible to rely on the above explanations and delay, especially if there will be more publication of the miracle later.

There are those who put more oil or bigger candles in their Chanukiah so that the lights burn longer than half an hour and the miracle is publicized to more people for a longer time.

And the more holy light we can bring to the darkness, the better!
Chanukah is a holiday celebrating the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, a holiday of tremendous political salvation. So why not call it “Independence Day”? Why the emphasis on the miracle of the oil and lighting the Menorah?

The miracle of victory over the Greeks was the great miracle in Hasmonean times, but the miracle of the cruse of oil is the miracle we remember today, every day of Chanukah.

The miracle of the cruse did not save the people of Israel from distress but it did allow the Menorah to be lit anew. The triumph over the Greeks meant the opportunity of worshipping G-d openly again, so the purification and re-enactment of Temple service were the essence of victory. Therefore the holiday is not called “Independence Day,” in memory of a military victory and national liberty, but “Chanukah,” in memory of the renewal of the Temple service.

In other words, Chanukah is about cultural and spiritual, rather than national, freedom.

Lighting the Menorah signifies the work of the Temple not only because it was one of the acts of Temple service but because it has a symbolic meaning: the diffusion of light from the Temple outwards.

Furthermore, the Menorah was lit with oil, and the Torah emphasizes that the oil was collected and brought to the Temple by the people: “instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps continually.” The light of the Temple cannot spread on its own. Only in partnership with the people of Israel can the great light burst forth and impact the world.

After a spiritual confrontation between the people of Israel and Greek culture – when some of the people abandoned the Temple and turned to Greek culture – the Temple was darkened, and the Temple service ceased. When the people of Israel rose, and returned to the Temple, to the spiritual world, the first work upon return was to light the Menorah. Israel returned to spread the light of the Torah.

And it is precisely then that the miracle occurred. Why?

During this time, the people of Israel were in a state of depression, but they were trying to find and connect with points of light. The people were making the effort, but that was not enough. The impurity was so great. It would be a long time before the people could produce pure oil, so to speak, for they first had to undergo a process of extensive internal cleansing.

However, because the people wanted to take the first step and return to the worship of G-d in the Temple, G-d helped them to light the Menorah. The miracle was a “glimpse” of G-d expressing enlightenment, affection, and Divine assistance following a course of human action.

The lit Menorah in the Temple miraculously illuminated and allowed the people to undergo the process of internal cleansing and of re-lighting their internal light. At the end of this process, the people would be able to light the Menorah themselves, and once again earn the right to share the great light with the world.

1 Shemot 27:20.

Rabbanit Sharon Rimon teaches Tanach and is Content Editor for the Tanach website www.hatanakh.com/en
These and Those

When one asks a sheilah (halachic question) to a Rav and receives a psak (ruling), that psak is binding, because we assume that the Rav was correct in his ruling. This assumption is based on the verse, סֵדָר הַלָּאָרְא אֲלֵהָיו נִדְרֶשֶׁת בָּהֵן, “The secret of G-d is revealed to those who fear Him.” This verse is quoted by the Talmud 2 to issue the correct ruling, how can we assume that the assumption is based on the verse, was correct in his ruling. This psak serves as the basis of our reliance upon a Rabbinical (disagreement) in halacha? If each Rav has a measure of Divine assistance to enable him to issue the correct psak, how can disparate rulings ever exist?

The Talmud answers this question with the phrase: בְּאֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ דִּבְרֵי אֱלֹקִים, “These and those are the words of the living G-d” (Eiruvin 13b). For example, regarding the many disputes between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, we assume that both sides of the machloket have validity.

This does not mean that one has the option to follow either opinion. The halachah is usually in accordance with the opinion of Beit Hillel. What it does mean is that when we study Beit Shammai’s opinion, it is equally considered a fulfillment of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, because this opinion has legitimacy as well. As long as both sides of the machloket arrive at their positions by working with the proper halachic principles through which the Torah is expounded, each is considered to have a bona fide point of view, and each opinion constitutes a chefzta shel Torah (an “object” of Torah), even though in practice we follow the majority opinion.3

The concept of אֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ דִּבְרֵי אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים is particularly relevant to Chanukah. The Talmud discusses the origin of the holiday:4

When the Greeks entered the Beit Hamikdash, they rendered all the flasks of oil there impure. When Beit Chashmonai gained the upper hand and vanquished them, they searched and found only one flask of oil with the Kohanim’s seal still intact, containing only enough to kindle the menorah for one day. A miracle occurred with this oil, and they kindled the menorah with it for eight days.

G-d is generally not interested in changing the rules of nature that He established at the time of Creation. The Rambam writes that the eight-day miracle was necessary because this was the amount of time necessary to manufacture and transport additional tahor (pure) oil.

The Acharonim5 ask a most basic question regarding the disqualification of the tamei (impure) oil. The Talmud teaches that there is a machloket Tanna’im regarding whether liquids contract tumah on a Torah level or only on a rabbinic level.

The accepted opinion, based on Yosi ben Yoezer’s testimony, is that liquids are susceptible to tumah only rabbinically, and this rabbinic enactment was never instituted regarding liquids in the Beit HaMikdash. Nevertheless, in the era in which the Chanukah episode did take place, the consensus was that the oil in the Beit HaMikdash could contract tumah, and thus G-d performed the miracle because of their psak. This ruling was later reversed when the majority opinion shifted and their view was outvoted.

It turns out that the whole story of Chanukah is truly fantastic. Remarkably, G-d changed the rules of nature in deference to the principle of אֵלּוּ וָאֵלּוּ דִּבְרֵי אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים.

Accordingly, the entire Chanukah miracle was unnecessary. Tamei oil does not exist in the Beit HaMikdash!

Acharonim explain that the halachah that Beit HaMikdash oil always remains tahor was in fact a subject of debate over several generations. It is true that if the Chanukah episode would have occurred 100 years later in the time of Yosi ben Yoezer, G-d would not have performed the miracle, because according to the accepted ruling at that time, the oil could not contract tumah and there would have been no need for the miracle.

Adapted from “Rav Schachter on the Moadim.”
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Our doorway is our bridge to the outside world. It is the place of transition between our public, society-centered life, and our private family-focused life. Throughout the year, we place one religious marker at this crucial exit and entrance point – our mezuzah.

On Chanukah, we position another object in our doorway, opposite the mezuzah – the chanukiah. Why does the Talmud demand specifically to place it in the doorway, opposite the mezuzah. What is the deeper message behind these two mitzvot?

Living in our open society, we encounter many situations which challenge our religious observance. There are, at times, two opposite pressures to which a Jew might succumb. There are those who find it easier to be a Jew on the “inside.” When they are at home, they are totally kosher. They daven, they make brachot, they are meticulous about each detail of halacha. Yet when they go outside, they feel the need to blend in. Off comes any religious identification. They daven, they make brachot, they are meticulous about each detail of halacha. Yet when they go outside, they feel the need to blend in. Off comes any religious identification. The need to socialize and intermingle with professional acquaintances justifies the falling away of any religious norms. They are a Jew at home but not amongst the nations.

There are also those who find it easier to be a Jew on the “outside.” Peer pressure, being surrounded by others who would not approve of certain inappropriate behaviors, force them to behave religiously. They would not dare eat in a certain public eatery, or take certain liberties or shortcuts, related to their public religious observance.

Yet, in the privacy of their own home, when nobody is watching, the standards are forgotten.

These two behaviors, says Rabbi Benjamin Blech, are what Chazal had in mind when they enacted the mezuzah on the right and the chanukiah on the left. The mezuzah is on our right upon entering our home.

As we transition from our social public domain into our private domain, we take note of the mezuzah, which reminds us that G-d is always watching, and we always have a standard of behavior to live up to, even if no human being is present.

The Rambam writes, וְכָל זְמַן שֶׁיִּכָּנֵס יִפְגַּע בְּיִחוּד שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הקב”ה – “and each time we enter, we are met with the name of G-d.” The mezuzah tells us not to leave our Judaism out on the street, not to live a Judaism based on other’s judgments.

Yet upon exiting our house, the chanukiah is on our right. The Greek motto was the blending in of the nations, the Hellenization of the Jews. Be like us, why be different. The chanukiah symbolizes our victory over the Greeks and their creed. We must and will be Jews in the workplace, amongst our neighbors, just as we are in our own homes.

Yet upon exiting our house, the chanukiah is on our right. The Greek motto was the blending in of the nations, the Hellenization of the Jews. Be like us, why be different. The chanukiah symbolizes our victory over the Greeks and their creed. We must and will be Jews in the workplace, amongst our neighbors, just as we are in our own homes.

So as we leave our homes, and we look to the right, we see our chanukiah, to remind us not to leave our Judaism inside. We overcame the Greeks, and we must stay strong in our public Jewish way of life.

Yosef epitomizes this message. In his epic struggle with Potiphar’s wife, he controls his urges and privately was מְקַדֵּשׁ שֵׁם שָׂמִים. The Talmud1 tells us that his father’s image, symbolizing his religious upbringing, appeared to him. Yosef knew the message of the mezuzah. He practiced his Judaism in private. Yet later on, we also observe that Yosef, though the only Jew in the entire country of Egypt, was not fearful to behave in a unique manner. The Torah2 tells us that Yosef’s master saw that G-d was with him. Rashi comments that Yosef constantly invoked the name of G-d in his everyday conversations. He did not feel constrained by being out in the open, amongst strangers. Yosef understood the message of the chanukiah. He practiced his Judaism in public.

Our job on Chanukah is to remember what the Hasmonean victory over the Greeks symbolizes. Our inner and deep feelings for our religion must motivate us to be חתמו כדברי, to be Jews on the inside, in private, as well as Jews on the outside, amongst other people. Let us use this holiday as a springboard to strengthen our spiritual growth, both in our homes and in our public lives.

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1 Sotah 36.  
2 Bereishit 39:3.
There is probably no other holiday in the Jewish calendar that has had as much material written about it as Chanukah. There are many causes and reasons for this seeming anomaly of a relatively minor rabbinic holiday receiving so much attention. The fact that by the nature of the calendar it falls in the month of December – and especially this year when it actually coincides with the holiday of the majority culture in the Western world – is part of the reason it has achieved such notoriety and attention.

Jews never want to be left out of a celebration and thus we have created our own – gifts and all – allowing us some latitude in participating in the general atmosphere of the month. All of this is perhaps true only on the subconscious level, as it is likely that none of Israel's great scholars would publicly countenance such an approach. Nevertheless, realistically speaking, one cannot help but feel the resonance of the general culture, at least in the Jewish societies of the Western world.

As such, Chanukah has been portrayed in a more universal sense than its original commemoration perhaps warranted. In my youth, the general Jewish representation of the holiday was that it was a battle and a triumph for religious freedom. Mainstream Western Jewish society presented it as a victory for democracy over totalitarian rule and completely universal in its message and content.

This was at a time when being Jewish, certainly publicly Jewish, was fraught with financial and social pitfalls. Even observant Jews did not wear distinctive garb or head covering publicly and therefore displaying the lights of Chanukah in our front windows was to convey a universal idea and not merely a Jewish commemoration.

Again, in my youth, no-one placed their Chanukiah outside, near the door of their home. The Rabbis of Eastern Europe had warned that one should not antagonize the general population by a public display of Jewish commemoration. This held true even in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The growing strength and intensity of Orthodox Jewish life in the United States and the great amount of acceptance and tolerance the Jewish community has achieved over the past half-century have altered this behavior pattern. Most American Jews feel comfortable – except perhaps on the college campuses of the country – in asserting their Jewishness publicly and unabashedly.

Here in Israel, Chanukah has largely returned to its original format and meaning. It represents the struggle against false gods, Hellenistic misinterpretations of Judaism and a desire to purify the people and the Land through our actions and the Divine miracles omnipresent in our personal and national lives.

Chanukah here does not stand for pluralistic Judaism, concern for the environment or any of the other new false gods that so invest Western society today, and in parts of the Jewish world as well. The Hasmoneans fought against foreign oppression of Israel and paganism and for Jewish sovereign independence and Torah observance. And that battle has not yet ended.

The miracle of Chanukah is an earned miracle, so to speak. There is a rabbinic tradition that all of the miracles that appear in the Bible were built into nature – again so to speak – at the inception of the process of Creation. Not so the later miracles.

Those miracles had to be earned by the sacrifice and actions of the Jews themselves in opposing evil, wrongdoing and paganism. This is an important lesson for us in our times. Though we do not yet have the ability to purify the Temple or light its golden candelabra, the kindling of our small Chanukah lights symbolizes our determination and commitment to be a free, independent and holy people, devoted to our tradition and our Torah.

By doing so publicly, even in a society where the general culture stands against much of what we represent, we renew our purpose and mission in life. It is our actions that will bring about the necessary miracles that will be reflected in the Jewish story throughout the ages. We therefore thank G-d not only for the past miracles that Chanukah represents and commemorates but also for the current miracles, seen and unseen, known and unknown, that mark our present existence as well.
often wonder what a rationalist like me can do when encountering everyday miracles.

The old joke tells of a man drowning in the sea, clinging to a floating board and praying to G-d to send him salvation. A fishing boat passes and offers help, but he says, “No thanks, I am confident in the L-rd.” Next, a surfer reaches out to him and again he refuses, “Salvation will come like the blink of an eye.” A helicopter flies over and our hero waves it on. He drowns. He arrives in Heaven and asks G-d why He didn't save him. “I sent you a boat, a surfer and a chopper. What more did you want?”

A similar joke tells of a woman hurrying to a critical meeting in Tel Aviv. She’s desperately searching for a parking space. She prays to G-d to help her. The words have barely left her lips when a truck moves out of a spot. The woman says “Never mind G-d, I managed.”

What the two jokes have in common is that the person does not understand that G-d works through natural agents, that all natural incidents are G-d’s acts in the world. In the first joke, the man does not value the help offered because it was not Divine enough. He didn’t recognize the agents as Divine because they weren’t decorated with fairy dust or accompanied by thunder and lightning. As far as he was concerned, G-d had not yet intervened.

In the second, the woman hurried to use the opportunity that presented itself, but because it was ‘natural’ she attributes no religious value to it. Here, too, G-d did not interfere.

We can manage on our own...

This fits in beautifully with the old description of Zionism:

The secular kibbutznik says, “You say the State of Israel is from G-d? No way! It’s from the Palmach!” Then with a Yiddish accent, the chassid from Mea Shearim says, “You say the State of Israel is from HaKadosh Baruch Hu? No way, it’s from the Palmach.”

There are two types of ingratitude (in Hebrew it’s the same word as heresy). One could fail to understand that G-d is operating in the world because the means seem too ‘secular’ – the intermediaries are not sufficiently refined. Or one could put one’s trust in the ordinary and say it’s nature, so why are you talking to me about G-d?

What is an everyday miracle? Let us suggest that it’s an occurrence that does not involve changes in the order of nature, but is perhaps statistically quite unlikely, happens with perfect timing and even feels like a miracle, if only for a second.

It seems like the purpose of everyday miracles – the exception, the unlikely, and sometimes even the unbelievably crazy – is to teach us about the usual, the expected and the standard.

Once at a Brit, I heard people joking about the sleeping baby blissfully unaware of what was about to happen. Then one of them commented, “And do we know what awaits us?”

It felt like he had just exposed the strings that are attached to all of us. Like puppets, we move around with an illusory sense of control and choice, unaware of the directing instructions and the plot being weaved over our heads.

Similarly, couples undergoing fertility treatments have a sharp awareness of the fragility of the webs that keeps the tiny embryo attached. There is a feeling that the tissue is so delicate it is almost held in place by prayer. That it might tear if we let go even for a minute.

We are all held in place by delicate silk strands. We are all vulnerable, fragile and exposed – and miraculously supported every second of our lives.

Not only are we more fragile and vulnerable than we care to admit. We are also continually blessed and coddled with an abundance of good in every second of our routine existence, above all imagination and beyond our ability to perceive.

The everyday miracle is a kind of momentary unveiling, a statistical glitch attesting to our entire existence.

Just like G-d-forbid, tragedies shake our world, a miracle also has the power to make our world tremble. However, we have mere seconds in which to acknowledge what has happened as literally awe-some or to see it as something natural and obvious.

“Even the person for whom a miracle is performed is unaware of the miracle.”

So the next time you experience an everyday miracle, be aware of it. Acknowledge it!

1 Niddah 31a.

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Cheri Tannenbaum
The Menorah used in the Beit HaMikdash was a seven-branched candelabra. Today we use a nine-branched Chanukiah during the eight-day holiday of Chanukah, commemorating the eight-day miracle of the jug of oil.

The Menorah, carved in deep relief, is the main focus on the Arch of Titus, an arch constructed in 81 CE by Emperor Domitian shortly after the death of his older brother Titus. The carvings depict the spoils taken from the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Menorah has been a symbol of Judaism since ancient times. Today, flanked by two olive branches, it is the national emblem of the modern State of Israel.

In Jewish oral tradition, the Temple Menorah stood 18 handbreadths high, or approximately 1.62 meters (5.3 ft).

In 2009, the ruins of a synagogue dating from before the destruction of the Second Temple were discovered in Magdol, in the Galilee. Archeologists discovered a rectangular stone displaying a depiction of a seven-lamp Menorah markedly different from the depiction on the Arch of Titus. This Menorah has branches that are polygonal, not rounded, and the base is triangular, not graduated. However, this was found a significant distance from Jerusalem. The depiction on the Arch of Titus has often been interpreted as a more reliable eyewitness reconstruction of the original Menorah from the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Temple Institute has created a life-sized Menorah, designed by goldsmith Chaim Odem, intended for use in a future Third Temple. The Menorah is made of one talent (interpreted as 45 kg) of 24-karat pure gold, hammered out of a single block of solid gold, with decorations based on the depiction of the original on the Arch of Titus and the Temple Institute’s interpretation of the relevant religious texts.

The Menorah symbolized the ideal of universal enlightenment, as noted in the Talmud: “Rabbi Yitzchak said: He who desires to become wise should incline to the south [when praying]. The symbol [by which to remember this] is that... the Menorah was on the southern side [of the Temple].” The seven lamps allude to the branches of human knowledge, represented by the six lamps inclined inwards towards – and symbolically
guided by – the light of G-d as represented by the central lamp. The Menorah also symbolizes the Creation in seven days, with the center light representing Shabbat.

**According to** one opinion in the Talmud, only the center lamp of the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash – into which as much oil was put as into the others – was left burning all day. Although all the other lights were extinguished, that light continued burning, despite being lit first. This miracle was taken as a sign that the Shechina, the Divine Presence, rested over Israel. It was called the Ner HaMa’aravi (Western lamp) because of the direction of its wick. This lamp was also referred to as the Ner Elokim (lamp of G-d).

1 Baba Batra 12a.
2 Rashi, Shabbat 22b.
3 Menachot 86b.
4 I Samuel 3:3.
HISTORY ITSELF HAS A HISTORY. OUR PERSPECTIVES SHIFT OVER TIME, AND SOME MOMENTS MAY ONLY SEEM MEANINGFUL IN RETROSPECT. WE DON’T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AN EVENT UNTIL MANY DECADES LATER OR SOMETIMES EVEN CENTURIES. A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE HISTORY OF CHANUKAH.

At one level, the Chanukah story is very simple. From the days of Alexander the Great of Macedon, Israel was under the dominion of the Alexandrian Empire of the Greeks. This meant that in the third century BCE, it was under the control of the Ptolemies based in Egypt and Alexandria. Then, during the second century BCE, Israel came under the domain of the Seleucids who were based in Syria.

The Seleucid leader, Antiochus IV, who modestly called himself Epiphanes, meaning “G-d made manifest”, decided to force the pace of Hellenisation on the Jews of the Land of Israel. Among other things, he forbade the public practice of Judaism, erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple, and offered swine before it as a sacrifice, in a desecration of Jewish values that Jews of the time called the Abomination of Desolation.

An elderly Priest called Mattityahu, and his sons and their supporters, known to history as the Maccabees, rose in revolt. Over the next three years, they scored a momentous victory over the Seleucids, re-conquering Jerusalem and bringing it back under Jewish sovereignty. They cleansed the Temple and rededicated it, lighting the great Menorah, the candelabrum that stood in the Temple, for a celebration lasting eight days.

That is the story of Chanukah as captured in history in the first and
second books of Maccabees. But that is not how the story was ultimately told within the Jewish tradition, as it was ruled that the two books of Maccabees, and others under the same title, should be called Sefarim Chitimoni'im, apocryphal works, and kept out of the Bible. The Chanukah story that is told instead is a very different one, with a powerful message.

The Talmud tells us that in the first century, in the last days of the Second Temple, a Rabbi called Yehoshua Ben Gamla established a network of schools throughout Israel. The result of this was that from the age of six, every child in the country received a publicly-funded universal education. This was the first education system of its kind anywhere in the world, and also a clear indication of the now familiarly Jewish commitment to education and to ensuring our children are literate in their heritage. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla’s memory is blessed, because without his intervention the Torah would have been forgotten in Israel. Without him, there would have been no survival of Judaism and ultimately no Jews.

What Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Gamla and the other Sages understood, and what was not understood at the time of Chanukah itself, was that the real battle against the Greeks was not a military one, but a cultural one. At the time, the Greeks were the world’s greatest in many fields. They were unparalleled in their advances in art, in architecture, in literature, in drama, in philosophy. Even today, their achievements have never been surpassed. But Jews nonetheless believed, and surely history has borne this out, that there is within Judaism, within ancient Israel and still within its heritage to today, something special. Something worth fighting for. Judaism, with its emphasis on the sanctification of life, and the belief that every human being was created in G-d’s image, held eternal truths that we could not abandon. This was the unique distinction between the culture of the Greeks and the world of the Torah and Judaism. As a result, Jews have always known that the real battle is not necessarily fought on the physical battlefield with physical weapons, but rather in the hearts and minds of future generations.

So Judaism and the Jewish people became a faith and a nation no longer focusing on its military heroes, but on its spiritual ones. It became a civilization rooted in texts, and in teachers, and in houses of study. We became the people whose heroes were teachers, whose citadels were schools, and whose passion was learning and the life of the mind. The end result was that Judaism did survive and thrive throughout the centuries, whereas Ancient Greece, the Greece of Athens, the Greece of Alexander the Great, declined. In fact, it was only a short time after the events of the Chanukah story that Greece began its decline, and Rome rose to take its place.

That is the message of Chanukah, and to articulate our story, we focus in a rather beautiful and symbolic way on just one tiny detail of the original chain of events: that one cruse of pure, undefiled oil was found by the Maccabees among the wreckage and defilements of the Temple, just enough to light the Menorah until more oil could be sourced.

One of the most interesting aspects of this shifting perspective from the original way of telling the story to the current way is reflected in the name of the festival itself. Chanukah, from the word chanuch, means re-dedication. That is what the Maccabees did to the Temple. They re-dedicated it, as described in the books of Maccabees. Yet over time, Chanukah became connected to the word, a word meaning education. What we re-dedicated was not a physical building – the Temple – but living embodiments of Judaism, namely our children, our students, the people to whom we teach and hand on our heritage and values.

From being the festival of a military victory, Chanukah became the festival of a spiritual and civilizational one.

I believe this history of our history has a message for us all. It teaches us this fundamental truth, as relevant to our lives today as ever before: to defend a country physically you need an army, but to defend a civilization you need education, you need educators, and you need schools. Those are the things that kept the Jewish spirit alive and the Menorah of Jewish values burning throughout the centuries with an everlasting light. Often what seems at the time to be the headline news, the military victory, is, in the hindsight of history, secondary to the cultural victory of handing your values on to the next generation.

If we do that, we will ensure that our children and theirs will light up the world. Chanukah Sameach!
Year in and year out, I am asked a time sensitive question – should a couple getting married on Chanukah light a chanukiah at their wedding?

The most recent time I was asked this question, rather than answering, I took advantage of the educational opportunity and asked if one can even get married on Chanukah.

The answer is yes, but why?

The Talmud famously states “ein me’arvin simcha b’simcha” – we do not mix two different simchot or joyous occasions as they can detract from or be confused with one another, preventing adequate attention to each.1 For this reason, the Beer Hetev and others hold that the custom is not to get married on Purim.2

With so many similarities between these two festivals, why can one get married on Chanukah but not on Purim?

Purim represents the ultimate miracle of physical survival against a physical threat.

Haman hated the Jewish people and therefore wanted to exterminate every last Jew. The gallows that were set did not discriminate against female or male, young or old, believer or non-believer – the very existence of Jews necessitated their eradication. Jews were never welcome into society regardless of what they could potentially add or remove.

Chanukah, on the other hand, was very different in this sense. Jews were not hated for who they were but for what they did. It was not their existence but their practice that threatened Greek culture.

Jews that acted as Jews were different from those that were prepared to assimilate. Indeed they were loved as people and only hated as Jews – if only they could express their humanity through Greek society and abandon their particularity, they would be welcome to not simply survive but thrive.

When read this way, the miracle of Purim is a celebration of the most basic human need – the ability to live and breathe.

The miracle of Chanukah, however, is a celebration of the most basic Jewish need – to live freely and actively as a Jew.

The enemy of Purim hated us so much that they would kill us regardless of what we did – the enemy of Chanukah loved us so much that they wanted us to subscribe to their Hellenistic way of life.

Returning to our question, celebrating the miracle of Purim represents a different type of simcha to getting married – the former represents being alive, the second how we choose to live. Celebrating Chanukah represents the same type of simcha as getting married – we actively choose who we love in order to continue our people.

A Jewish wedding is becoming more rare, not because of hatred, but because of love – universalism is more embracing than particularity and assimilation is more accommodating than distinction.

It is for this reason that one may get married on Chanukah, according to all opinions, as essentially the simchot are two expressions of the same source – choosing to love rather than falling in or out of love, celebrating the perpetuation of our destiny and Jewish continuity.

Therefore, while there are questions around the blessings, one can light Chanukah candles at a wedding for the purpose of publicizing the miracle, because indeed, the miracle of a Jewish wedding is the perpetuation of the miracle of Chanukah – “the strong were delivered into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few.”3

Chanukah is a time learn from our past as we spark, ignite and shine through the next generation, illuminating the path ahead for a brighter future!

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1 Moed Katan 8b.
2 See the Be’er Heitev on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Hilchot Megillah Purim 696:8. See also the Levush, Magen Avraham and Pri Chadash.
3 Al HaNissim prayer.

Rabbi Benji Levy is CEO of Mosaic United
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Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl asks a fascinating question: who actually remembers Antiochus? Does anyone continue in his path and legacy? This can also be asked about Ya’akov and Esav. Ya’akov represents eternity, values and effort, while Esav represents the here and now, violence and evil. Rabbi Nebenzahl writes: “Does anyone remember Ya’akov sitting in the tents? Of course. Every day we are reminded of the ‘G-d of Ya’akov’ three times in our prayers. We live the life and legacy of our father Ya’akov. But does anyone remember Esav, the hunter? For sure — one who studies the Torah of Ya’akov. Outside the Torah, there is no trace of Esav, as well as otherworldly wicked men formerly renowned. If it wasn’t for Ya’akov who exists forever, there would be no trace of them.”

Evil and injustice have no foothold in the end. Seemingly strong and intimidating regimes eventually become a footnote in history.

What’s the hardest thing for us to do? Nothing. On Chanukah, women tend to refrain from doing work for the first half-hour after lighting the candles. According to Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi: “It used to be easier to sit next to the chanukiah. Just sit, look at the flames and relax. Today, it’s a task. No frying sufganiyot, no changing diapers, no serving anything. What is missing most in the world? Serenity. What’s the hardest thing to do? Not to do. You want to message someone and forget who you wanted to text and what you wanted to write. You rush to the kitchen and then ask yourself “what was I looking for?” So sit and watch during this half-hour — for yourself, for those around you. See the ‘there is’ and not the ‘there isn’t.’ Just stop running around and worrying about the light that is elsewhere. The light is here, with you. Look at the flames. That’s all there is to do. Don’t miss out.”

In a small classroom at the Tzion BeRina school in Beitar Illit, Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein told one of the most fantastic stories we have ever heard about Chanukah.

On December 19, 1984, the day he was sentenced to three years in prison in a forced labor camp in southern Siberia, Edelstein spoke to the court. The official charge was “drug possession,” but the real reason was his Zionist and Jewish activity.

“After three months of being in a dungeon,” Edelstein told the students. “I came to the court for sentencing. The hall was full of police and security personnel. Normally, relatives were allowed to come to hear the trial, but they filled all the seats with security personnel so my family had nowhere to sit. Only my wife and mother managed to get in.”

After the verdict, Edelstein was surrounded by police officers. On the way out, he somehow managed to push his head through the security ring. He had one thing to say to his wife, whom he had not seen for three months, knowing it could be a few years before he would see her again. What was so important for him to shout to her? “Tanya, what candle is it today?” She didn’t understand what he was talking about. Then he shouted again, “What candle is it today?” Only after the third time did she realize and shouted back, “Tonight we will light the second candle!” Yes, it was the first morning of Chanukah.

Edelstein did not have a calendar in the dungeon, but he heard the date in court and calculated that it should be Chanukah.

That evening, Edelstein somehow found two matches. He stood in front of the window and lit them. “And so,” he told the young students in Beitar Illit, “I stood there in front of the window for a few seconds until the matches scorched my fingers. It was perhaps the shortest candle lit in history, I don’t even know if I fulfilled the mitzvah, but that night, a little bit of light pushed away a lot of darkness.”

A new poll reveals that 74% of Israelis light candles every night of Chanukah. This is an amazing statistic. Political and media discourse may confuse us. We talk all the time about secular coercion and religious coercion, and especially over the last year’s election campaigns, hurtful things were said about the religious and ultra-Orthodox. Yet it turns out that thousands of years after the Chanukah miracle — deep in our hearts we are all connected. We all want to continue the story together. We’re all a little zealous, dedicated and eager to illuminate the world. The next time you listen to the news and are confident that Israel is completely confused, remember the number 74.

Eight Thoughts for Eight Days of Chanukah

MIZRACHI SLICHIM
“We need to listen to what the candles tell us,” is a famous Chassidic saying. Here are six lessons the Lubavitcher Rebbe learned from the candles and Chanukah which are applicable the entire year:

1. The importance of tradition. Unlike many other holidays, Chanukah is not in the Torah at all. It occurred later, so there are no explicit verses referring to it. Our Sages have determined how to celebrate it. In essence, this teaches us about the importance of tradition, of Sages, of Oral Torah.

2. Prepare for the dark. We light candles precisely when the darkness descends. We are not scared by the darkness. On the contrary, we know there are dark periods, and it is precisely then that we make an extra effort and light up the darkness.

3. Light up the street. The original halacha is not to light inside the house but rather outside. That is, man should not only create light inside but should invest in trying to illuminate the outside, the street.

4. Add light. The method of lighting on Chanukah is called “add and continue” — every day another candle is added. No matter how much you did yesterday, move forward and do a little more today.

5. Permanence in life. The candles are placed in one place and must not be moved. A Jew who enlightens their environment must understand that this task is constant and steady in his soul. It is part of his perpetual order of life, and he must make sure it stays that way.

6. Self Light. The candles stay lit on their own after we light them. When educating and influencing others, make sure your impact is so empowering that others will continue to shine brightly long after you touched them.

When we hear the word gibor — hero, we imagine some powerful Superman. Chanukah is a great opportunity to talk about the heroic spirit. Neither Greek culture nor machoism won out on Chanukah, nor should we focus only on military or physical heroism. After all, the word gibor comes from the same root as the word lehitgaber — to overcome. The Sages said: “Who is a hero? The one who conquers his inclination.” The constant battle for virtue, for gentleness, for language, holiness, in our relationships — this is the heroism that Chanukah must illuminate.

We do not fully understand the mystical, Kabbalistic, spiritual meaning of Chanukah. But let’s try to understand a bit more. Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Danziger wrote a text to read before lighting the Chanukah candles: “Every simple man, when he lights a Chanukah candle, he himself becomes the High Priest, and his house becomes the Temple. He is not just lighting the oil or wax candles, he elevates the light of the six days of Creation and lights in trepidation and awe at the joy of the mitzvah, at the fact that a simple man like himself has the opportunity to ignite great ‘revolutions’ in the Heavenly world.” Note the word ‘revolutions.’ Revolutions not only begin in the square and the street but also at our doors and windows.

This is the first time we are celebrating Chanukah in a country where it is not mainstream culture. In Israel, the Jewish pulse is the pulse of the State. In North America, Chanukah is a minor holiday. Rav Soloveitchik wrote that there is a reason we read about Yosef during Chanukah. The Hasmoneans struggled in the Hellenistic world, Yosef struggled in the Egyptian world, both were fighting a cultural struggle for spiritual independence. Rav Soloveitchik repeatedly uses the word ‘heroic.’ In both cases no one wanted to physically kill us — the Hasmoneans were only asked to assimilate into Greek culture, to give up their identity. Yosef, without losing his own identity, was a senior official in the Egyptian regime. That is why he has become a model for us to live in a foreign land. The challenge of wealth and abundance will accompany us from Egypt to Spain and Germany, and here in America today. When life is comfortable and free and everything is allowed, the Hasmoneans and Yosef force us to ask ourselves, how do our heroism, commitment and dedication manifest themselves in our lives today?

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir are popular Israeli media personalities and World Mizrachi’s shlichim to North America.
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hanukah is often portrayed as the story of an oppressed Jewish minority rising in revolt against an oppressive foreign force. However, in addition to this inspirational narrative, Chanukah is also the unfortunate story of a Jewish civil war. The tensions between Hellenized and traditional Jews had been simmering for decades when Matityahu initiated the rebellion by publicly killing a Hellenized Jew who was offering a sacrifice to the Greek gods. In the ensuing war, the Chashmonaim fought not only the Greeks but also their Hellenized brethren. While we understand that the Chashmonaim were certainly justified in their fight for the honor of G-d and His Torah, our commemoration of Chanukah raises a broader question. Are we celebrating the civil war? Should we be joyfully recounting the defeat of the Hellenistic Jews at the hands of the holy Chashmonaim? What should our attitude be towards this sort of infighting?

In a wide-ranging piece, Rav Kook reflects on the relationship between Torah and the Jewish people.1 On the one hand, the Zohar teaches of the unity of the Jewish people and the Torah, or as Rav Kook paraphrases it, “[they] truly have the same soul.” However, a hallmark of Rav Kook’s philosophy is the embrace of paradoxes. Characteristically, despite the supernal unity of the Torah and the Jewish people, Rav Kook develops another perspective which sees them as interrelated but distinct entities. The Torah is a body of ideas and texts and the Jewish people are a group of human beings.

Within this second perspective, Rav Kook raises the question of hierarchy. We know that both the Torah and the Jewish people are in some ways expressions of G-d and both were created prior to the world. However, is it possible to identify one of these entities as being ‘closer’ to G-d and as ‘preceding’ the other? After analyzing this question from different angles, Rav Kook ultimately concludes that the Jewish people precede the Torah:

From an inner perspective, the soul of the Jewish people is the root of the Torah... the Torah was created for the Jewish people.

The soul of the Jewish people existed prior to the Torah. Though the potency of the collective Jewish soul is at times concealed, it is the closest created entity to G-d, figuratively situated at an even higher point than the Torah itself.2

Rav Kook locates this idea in a Midrashic teaching regarding the construction of the Mishkan. According to the Midrash, even as Moshe grasped the construction intricacies of every other element of the Mishkan, he was unable to comprehend how to forge the Menorah. Ultimately, G-d himself needed to miraculously create the Menorah.

Moshe represents the Torah. The Menorah and its light represent the collective soul of the Jewish people. Moshe’s inability to understand the workings of the Menorah indicates that the root of the Jewish people is even higher than the Torah itself. The light of the Jewish people – the light of the Menorah that we kindle anew every year – is beyond the comprehension of even Moshe Rabbeinu, the archetypal teacher of Torah.

Of course, this does not mean that every action of every Jew is automatically sanctioned by G-d and takes precedence over the mitzvot of the Torah. Just the opposite – in order for the Jewish people’s essence to be actualized and revealed we need to follow the Torah’s dictates. This is particularly true in our current exilic existence when there is no Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash and the light of the Jewish people does not shine brightly in a revealed manner.

But even as we closely adhere to the fixed letters of Moshe’s Torah, this teaching of Rav Kook should significantly impact our attitude towards other Jews during moments of incommensurate debate. Yes, the Chashmonaim were certainly justified and even obligated to launch a civil war on behalf of the Torah. Yes, we too at times must take principled stands on behalf of the Torah which might unfortunately pit us against other Jews. But we should always remember that deeply embedded in our fellow Jew is a spark of the Menorah – a flame that binds us all together and rises higher than even the Torah itself.

1 Shemona Kevatzim 8:157.
2 Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook (Sichot HaRav Tzvi Yehuda: Am Yisrael, p. 40-41) sources this idea in a Midrash (Tanna Devi Eliehu chapter 15). He adds that the primacy of the Jewish people is also implied by the formulation of Birchat HaTorah: “Blessed are you G-d... Who chose us from all of the nations and gave us His Torah,” in which the selection of the Jewish people precedes the Giving of the Torah.

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein is a faculty member of Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim and Yeshiva University.
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Why do we light Chanukah candles? Pirsumei Nisa – to proclaim the miracle of finding the jar of pure oil with the High Priest's seal. We place the candles where others see them. Until what hour may we light the candles? For as long as they fulfill their purpose – "od shetichaleh regel min hashuk" – until there are no longer people in the market place to be inspired by viewing the candles marking the Chanukah miracle.

The Sfat Emet adds a remarkable dimension to the Chanukah story. He interprets the halachic phrase "od shetichaleh regel min hashuk" metaphorically. He points out that the word regel, foot, if read as hergal, means routine, habit. In his unique reading, we learn that one also lights the Chanukah candles to ensure that the central theme of Chanukah, the great miracle which was done for the Jewish nation, does not become routine. It is vital that the remarkable miracle of Chanukah not lose its powerful message of G-d’s miraculous intervention in our lives.

This idea is a central theme in our spiritual life. We believe that everything is from G-d. However, we are created such that things that repeat themselves become devalued. We soon experience them as "just the way things are." We lose our sense of deep appreciation for the everyday miracles, because, well, they happen every day. We take them for granted.

This issue is complex. On the one hand, the fact that things that repeat themselves turn into habits is important and often very helpful. Think of the energy it takes for a child to learn to tie his shoes. It soon turns into a habit and the child’s energy is free to conquer new frontiers. Things that have no special meaning should be turned into habits. The danger, of course, is that things that need thought, intention, dedication and care may also become routine and thereby lose their essential quality of consciousness and intention. These things must remain special, remembered and cherished.

A central challenge to our spiritual life is to develop the artistry of finding the balance between the routine and the new, the standard and the unique. When done well, routine gives stability and security. Too much routine leads to boredom and stagnation. Newness and change add vitality and renewal. Too much change leads to instability.

This issue is central to marriage. Marriage needs stability – living together with the joint understandings which we’ve come to agree on. Two individuals, often so different from each other, build their lives together. The early stage of marriage is focused on the work of building their unique marriage. This is not always easy but is nonetheless needed to create the rules and assumptions of their marriage. However, it is important to remember that marriage also needs newness and renewal in order to maintain its vitality. That vitality doesn’t always come automatically. It demands thought, investment, knowing each other and the needs of the marriage, balancing one’s own life with that of their spouse.

Understanding Chanukah can deepen our awareness of what is needed. Why might the Sfat Emet tie the lighting of the Chanukah candles to the idea of the dangers of routine?

Because light symbolizes wisdom. “Who is the wise man? He who understands the consequences of his actions.” A husband or wife realizes that the deepest meaning of their actions and words are their consequences to their spouse. They are wise because they treat their marriage as a work of art that they create and recreate every day through their actions. They are fully committed to the agreements and understandings that serve as the bedrock of their marriage “routine.” They are also deeply concerned that their marriage is filled with vitality and renewal. With this balance, they build their Shalom Bayit (marital harmony). They bring the Divine Presence to their unique marriage.

We light Chanukah candles to proclaim G-d’s miraculous presence in our world. We build fulfilling marriages to bring the Divine Presence into our personal lives.

Rabbi Moshe Berliner is an author, M.S.W. and therapist specializing in family and marriage. His book “To Build and to Bond: Living Well in a Jewish Marriage,” from Mizrahi Press, is now available for purchase from Machon Netivot:
machonnetivot@gmail.com
+972-2-625-8325
A core predictor of which families produce children who grow up to be described as a mensch is the amount and quality of time spent by parents with their children. In a carefully researched national survey of working parents in the United States, the Pew Research Center documented the reality that most children grow up in a household in which both of their parents work. Many parents find it difficult to balance the demands of work and family. Most parents (86% of mothers and 81% of fathers), say they feel rushed at least sometimes, while 40% of full-time working moms say they always feel rushed.

The amount of time parents spend with children is not necessarily correlated with positive child outcomes. Rather, it is the quality of the time. For example, there is evidence that when parents are stressed, irritable, and sleep-deprived, the time they spend with their children can actually be harmful. In contrast, quality time spent reading to a child, enjoying a family dinner together, or engaging in calm one-on-one discussion is clearly associated with positive outcomes in children.

In a fascinating series of studies, researchers have found a direct correlation between the number of times a week parents eat dinner with their children and their children’s risk for drug abuse. Families that eat dinner together once a week have children with a lower risk for drug abuse than those that never do. With each increasing night that parents and children eat together, drug abuse risk decreases to the point where there is virtually no risk for drug abuse in families in which parents and children eat dinner together every night. The importance of “eating dinner” together is not the eating or the dinner; it’s the uninterrupted, focused interaction that seems to bear such valuable fruit. Children have sensitive radar and can tell whether their parents are really there and paying attention to them, or if their minds are preoccupied with concerns about work or other problems. Making time for your child entails truly being present both in mind and body, and providing the undivided attention that children need to develop and internalize proper values.

In addition to eating meals together, routine family rituals such as regularly scheduled family vacations, bedtime rituals, and holiday and birthday celebrations are more important to a child’s healthy development than has been previously appreciated. Research has documented that children appear to benefit in a very powerful manner from partaking in regularly scheduled, structured and predictable activities. For example, studies indicate that families who value these activities and invest time and energy in ensuring that children experience these rituals in a meaningful and predictable manner, raise children who are less anxious, feel more “lovable,” and have more positive self-concepts. Conversely, when these activities are disrupted because of traumatic family events such as divorce or chronic illness, children are at increased risk for a wide range of behavioral, academic and emotional difficulties.

The Kotzker Rebbe has a beautiful interpretation of the verse, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of youth” (Tehillim 127:4). The obvious question is what is the connection between a warrior holding his bow and arrow and childhood? The Kotzker answers that just like with an archer, the closer he pulls the bow, the further and straighter the arrow will go, so too, with children: the closer we hold them, the further and straighter they go.

In a classic longitudinal study, USC Sociology professor, Vernon Bengston, asked a basic question about the internalization of religious values. Looking over the span of four generations, what kind of parenting practice best predicts which great-grandchildren would continue to share the basic religious values and practices of their great-grandparents? Bengston’s findings were what common-sense would dictate: a consistent religious message, a lack of hypocrisy demonstrated by practicing what was preached, and marriage to a partner who was committed to carrying on in the family religious traditions. Most importantly, however, the most powerful predictor of what determined whether a child who left religious practice returned was the level of warmth and closeness between parent and child. As long as at least one parent continued to metaphorically hold their child’s hand, even after they left religious practice, the continued warmth, connection, and love made it more likely that the child would ultimately return to the religious tradition in which they were raised.

Dr. David Pelcovitz holds the Gwendolyn and Joseph Straus Chair in Psychology and Jewish Education at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University.
Rabbeinu Yona writes in Sha’arei Teshuva: When one receives G-d’s chastisement and as a consequence improves his ways, it is proper for him to rejoice in his sufferings, for they brought him great benefit, and he should thank G-d for them as he would for other successes... and one who truly trusts in G-d should hope in the midst of his distress that the darkness will be the cause of his light... As our Sages, of blessed memory, said, “If I did not fall, I could not have arisen; if I had not been in darkness, it would not have been light for me.”1

We do not celebrate our salvation alone, but also the misfortune and suffering that necessitated that salvation.

The suffering and the deliverance are to be seen as one indivisible unit. If someone dug a hole in a public thoroughfare into which someone else fell and broke his legs, he would deserve little thanks for offering to pay the medical expenses. But if a doctor has to break an arm in order to reset it properly, he deserves thanks for both the breaking and the resetting. So too, we must recognize G-d’s providential hand in our suffering as well as our deliverance.

The Sfat Emet explains that the days of Chanukah were designated as days of Hallel vein Hoda’a (praise and thanksgiving): Hallel for the miraculous salvation, and Hoda’a for the suffering and misfortune that preceded it. Thus in the Al Hanissim prayer added to Amidah during Chanukah, we not only thank G-d for His miracles, deliverance, and mighty acts, but also for the battles.

The Talmud2 says that those who composed Megillat Ta’anit (the list of all the days commemorating miraculous deliverances for the Jewish people during the period of the Second Temple) cherished calamities. In other words, only those who could appreciate the Divine involvement in misfortune could truly place the deliverances in their proper perspective.

Our inability to perceive the Divine in our suffering is a result of our limited perspective.

Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz used to give the following allegory. When a small child draws a person, it is obvious from the start that the circle on top is the face, the line going down is the body, and the lines projecting out are the arms and legs. But when a master artist paints a person, he may start with a stroke of bright red, which to the uninitiated viewer appears to ruin the canvas. Only when the painting is completed will it be obvious why the stroke of red was needed for contrast. So, too, G-d is painting a masterful panorama of history.

As the painting develops, there are strokes that we see as unnecessary or detrimental. But when the painting is finished, it will be obvious that every stroke was necessary for the perfection of the picture. Only when the painting is completed will it be obvious why the stroke of red was needed for contrast. So, too, G-d is painting a masterful panorama of history.

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The story of Yosef and his brothers, says the Chafetz Chaim, contains a good lesson for the future. We often imagine that when Mashiach comes, days if not weeks will be needed to explain the many tragedies of our history. But it is not so. With only two words – Ani Yosef, “I am Yosef” – Yosef cleared up all his brothers’ questions. So too, when G-d reveals Himself and the complete picture of the world becomes known, only two words – Ani Hashem, “I am G-d” – will be necessary.

The Sages, who divided the weekly Torah readings, intentionally ended Mikeitz with a cliffhanger – to teach us that although all is ultimately for the good, sometimes one must wait until “next week” to understand how this is so.

1 Midrash Tehillim 22.
2 Shabbat 13b.
3 Berachot 10a.
4 Shemot 33:23.

Rabbi Zev Leff serves as the Rav of Moshav Matityahu
The idea of a miracle is problematic. From a philosophical point of view, the foundation of all science is the Law of Causality. This law states that whatever happens in the world of Nature is a result of a cause which both preceded it, and which brought about the effect in a necessary way.

The laws of Nature have a power unto themselves. Whatever is, is a result of a previous cause. And that cause, in turn, is the result of a cause that preceded it. And so on. This chain of cause and effect doesn’t lend itself to change; it is not subject to alteration. All of science is based on this principle.

It is worth noting that the British philosopher, David Hume, questioned the principle of causality. He demonstrated that the principle of Cause and Effect cannot claim for itself any scientific, empirical proof. Empirical evidence can merely demonstrate that Event A took place before Event B, but cannot establish that Event A caused Event B.

Were we to accept the empirical argument and reject the principle of Cause and Effect, we could suggest a simple understanding of miracles. There are no definite laws of Nature. A miracle is any event that is a result of G-d’s intervention in the course of events.

However, even if we accept the classical approach to Causality and the Laws of Nature, we can still maintain that the philosophical problem is really not severe. To one who believes in G-d as Creator, it is simple enough to say that He, the Author of Nature and its Laws, has the power to change Nature and bring about miracles.

Nevertheless, the real problem is not the possibility of miracles, but rather, the necessity of miracles. Doesn’t the concept of miracle imply that G-d’s intervention in a miraculous manner is a result of some mistake or failure in the mechanics of Nature, i.e. in the original plan of Creation?

Our belief in miracles is based on another belief – freedom of choice. It is this principle which underlies the tenet of schar veO-nesh (reward and punishment). What sense would punishment and reward make if man’s actions are determined, if everything we do is a result of a previous cause which makes our actions necessary?

The belief in Free Will is based not only on our Torah, but on our intuition as well. We experience freedom of choice on a daily basis, constantly. For there to be Free Choice, we must be imperfect. If we were perfect, there could be no Good and Evil. It is only because of our imperfection that responsibilities and challenges are imposed upon us to achieve higher levels of existence.

If we are to be challenged, we must exist in an imperfect universe. Because the universe is imperfect, our role in it is to metaken (correct or perfect) ourselves and it.

Now we can understand the necessity for miracles. Since G-d created us as imperfect beings, there is a need, on occasion, for Him to intervene through the medium of a miracle. Human freedom can sometimes lead us to the abyss of a bottomless pit, to the point of destruction, not only of ourselves but of the world around us too.

G-d is very tolerant with us. He waits patiently, as we say on the Yamim Noraim, כִּי לֹא יַחְפֹּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת אֶלָּא בְּשׁוּבוֹ – G-d does not desire the demise of the wicked, but rather his repentance. Sometimes though, human beings go too far, and G-d will not stand by and allow history to take its course. If He were to do so, His purpose in Creation would be undermined. The underlying purpose of nes – miracle – is to uphold the possibility of the fulfillment of the teleological goal of Creation. We can never know when a situation will arise to precipitate a miracle. But we do know that the purpose of the miracle is to stop Man before he goes too far.

Chazal constantly emphasize that the ultimate purpose of G-d’s Creation was and is Klal Yisrael. The Divine purpose is achieved through the one people who proclaim the existence of the One G-d. Without this people, there could be no universe. Hence, in the case of Chanukah – and other instances throughout history – the miracle of the victory was necessary to save Klal Yisrael and facilitate the fulfillment of the Divine plan.

1 See Brachot 6a. G-d’s Tefillin contain the verse “Who is like you Israel? One nation in the Land.” Also see Rashi’s commentary at the beginning of Bereishit.
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MACCABEES

Those of us fortunate to live in Israel sometimes accept things as a matter of course, even taking them for granted. One of these is perhaps the daily awareness that the State of Israel is a constant and growing miracle – a gift from the Almighty, a serious responsibility He has bestowed upon His Chosen Nation.

The State of Israel is currently situated on only part of the Divinely-given historical Land of Israel. We, who still believe in traditional national Jewish-Zionist aspirations, oppose the dismemberment of our Homeland in exchange for ephemeral promises of tranquility, if not actual peace. We reject the very concept that it is necessary and legitimate to willingly give up one’s territorial birthright for any reason.

It is not just that no nation in history ever voluntarily gave up national territory to an enemy publicly committed to their destruction.

Unfortunately, even we, who sanely oppose such concessions, all too frequently wrap our opposition with rational explanations of strategically necessary territory, water sources, and other equally justifiable reasons. But we must be clear that all those reasons – however reasonable and true – are only secondary reasons.

Yes, without the mountain aquifers in Judea and Samaria, Israel would lose more than 40% of its water sources, incapacitating even a modicum of normal life in the country. Industry would limp at best, agriculture would be crippled. Gardens would go unwatered, bathing and drinking water rationed. But for example, if and when seawater desalination plants become both economical and functional on a mass scale, would this mean Israel no longer needs the geographic center of its Homeland?

Let us be frank. We are here in the Land of Israel – and in Judea and Samaria in particular – because of one primary and permanently valid reason: this is the Land G-d promised to our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

As the Children of Israel of today, we have a heavy responsibility, perhaps more than any previous generation. We did not merit to be the founding generation of the modern State of Israel, the rebirth of the Jewish Commonwealth in its Holy Land after nearly two millennia of wandering in the Diaspora.

But we are enjoined to continue to build and defend our Land and Nation; to be that living, flourishing link between the past and the future.

In 1947, Yitzchak Tabenkin of Kibbutz Ein Harod was asked for his position on the proposed UN Partition Plan. His response: “I must consult with two people before giving you my answer: My grandfather, who is no longer living, and my grandson, who has yet to be born.” Tabenkin, who opposed the territorial concessions involved in the Partition Plan, did not take the here-and-now approach. His national responsibility was a given.

We too cannot be so capricious of nature, so weary of our national responsibility, as to give away what is not ours alone to barter. The Land of Israel is not only our sacred inheritance, but also that of previous generations that yearned to return and those who finally founded the State. It also belongs to future generations, our children and our children’s children, and theirs after them. We cannot be so selfish as to sacrifice a holy heritage for what is transitory expediency at best.

As we celebrate Chanukah and the Maccabees’s strength of commitment, let us all reaffirm our commitment to the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and to our holy Torah, which kept us as a nation throughout the long and difficult centuries of Exile, and pray for the coming Redemption speedily in our days.

Lt. Colonel (Res.) Rabbi Yedidya Atlas is a veteran journalist who has specialized in geo-political and geo-strategic affairs in the Middle East.
Yosef was a prisoner of Zion. He fervently wished to leave the Soviet Union and come to the Land of Israel, a wish which for many others resulted in punishment and a prison term from the Soviet authorities.

There were hundreds of Prisoners of Zion; brave men and women courageous enough to stand up to a ruthless regime. Yosef was unusual in that he not only wished to live in the Land of Israel; he tried in the most dramatic way to carry out that desire.

The day that he attempted to escape to Israel he was arrested by the infamous KGB — the Soviet secret police — and sentenced to death. Due to pressure applied by free countries all over the world, his sentence was eventually commuted to a long and harsh prison term in the horrible Vladimir Prison in Siberia.

The Vladimir Prison is a chilling factory engaged in destroying man's spirit. Inside the prison compound, there is no standard diet or menu. Prisoners' rations are selected from 18 unnourishing varieties which vary in the number of calories from sub-average to starvation level. Likewise, the amount of exercise and fresh air allotted to a prisoner can range from two hours down to none. Contact with the outside is limited to several letters a year, but this too can, and often is, curtailed. Technically a prisoner is allowed two meetings a year with his family, but years can pass without any visits at all.

The KGB has an elaborate and remarkably pragmatic way of controlling an inmate's body and even his thoughts. After the initial shock of life at Vladimir has been experienced, a KGB representative will invite the inmate for a talk. The prisoner will be offered coffee, tea, meat or a visit to a restaurant in civilian clothing. An officer from the secret police might tempt the prisoner with a letter from his family, or by permitting a visit from a friend.

To earn these privileges a prisoner merely has to be willing to inform on a cellmate or confess to a crime he never committed.

Yosef would never inform on a cellmate or confess to a crime he hadn't committed, so he never got any special privileges. Needless to say, he was denied all religious articles, as well as permission to perform mitzvot.

But the KGB, for all their terror, intimidation, and frequent punishments, couldn't break Yosef's iron will to keep G-d's commandments.

Somehow he managed to observe, in the most primitive fashion imaginable, whatever mitzvot he could. He virtually risked his life not to work on Shabbat. He refused to eat non-kosher food and avoided chametz on Pesach.

One frigid winter, a single thought managed to warm Yosef's soul: the holiday of Chanukah was approaching.

Yosef dreamed of how he would be able to observe the mitzvah of lighting the candles, a seemingly impossible act under the circumstances. Certainly, the prison authorities would never permit it and would react harshly to the very proposal of such a notion. Regardless, Yosef put his mind to the mission and developed a clever, viable scheme.

Every day he saved a little bit from his meager rations, even though this meant subsisting on next to nothing. When no one was watching, he secretly slipped a part of a slice of bread or a small piece of potato into his pocket. Later on, he carefully placed these scraps on a small ledge in his cell and prayed that a guard would not notice his collection.

The day before Chanukah, Yosef could barely contain his excitement. So far his little gathering had gone unnoticed and there was only one final, critical detail to be arranged.

Trying to attract as little attention as possible, Yosef purchased a pack of cigarettes in the prison store, although he didn't smoke. He knew that packets of cigarettes were accompanied by matches, and they were the crucial missing ingredient for his plan.

With trembling fingers, Yosef opened up the box of matches and discovered that there were 37 matches inside — exactly the number he needed, with one extra to serve as a shamash, for the lights.

Late on the first night of Chanukah, when everyone was sleeping and no guards were in sight, Yosef inserted the matches into his slivers of dry bread and slices of potato. These scraps were his secret Chanukah menorah!

The matches burned for only a few seconds, but they provided endless light and inspiration for Yosef Mendeleich in the depths of the Vladimir Prison in Siberia.
Mizrachi’s Poland Journey

Mizrachi recently took its second trip to Poland. Debbie and Jeff Herz reflect on last year’s program below, with photos from this year’s trip on the facing page

The first stop on our Mizrachi Journey to Poland – led by Jeremy Kurnedz, Rav David Milston and Rav Doron Perez – was the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, the largest Jewish cemetery in the world, with 320,000 graves.

Those we visited included the Brisker Rav, the Netziv, Rav Yisrael Taub – the Modzitser Rebbe, famous for numerous niggunim, such as Mizmor LeDavid, Ani Ma’amim, and Eshet Chayil – Adam Czerniakow, head of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat (Jewish Committee) who committed suicide rather than select 6,000 Jews per day for deportation to the death camps, and the famous author and playwright, Y.L. Peretz.

We spent two days in Lithuania in Kovno, the capital, and in Vilna. The Jewish population on the eve of World War 2 was 265,000, forming a predominantly orthodox religious hub. Jewish culture and Hebrew language were well developed, yeshivot flourished and high-level secular education was popular. However, there were those who foresaw difficult times ahead, and so between 1924 and 1933, there was immigration to South Africa and Eretz Yisrael, including the relocation of the Slobodka Yeshiva to Hebron.

One of the more uplifting experiences was walking deep into the Rudnicki Forest at night, to a partisan cave, and singing partisan songs around a campfire we built ourselves.

Another memorable experience was our visit to Sugihara House in Kovno, named after the Japanese Consul Sugihara, who – against official orders – issued travel permits enabling 6,000 Jews to escape from Lithuania, mostly to Shanghai.

The next day we walked through another beautiful forest, following train tracks that led to the infamous Treblinka death factory. The Nazis totally destroyed the site and all that remains are 17,000 stones representing the victims’ communities. The only stone representing an individual is for Janusz Korczak, the educator who walked calmly with his beloved orphan children, leading them to their – and his – final destination.

Ten minutes’ drive from the center of Lublin is the Majdanek death camp, astoundingly located in the heart of suburbia, surrounded by houses and opposite the Lublin University. Interestingly, the camp was never destroyed and exists today as an education and tourist site.

In Auschwitz, both the museum and camps have thousands of visitors daily. We had to remind ourselves to not be angry at the “tourist feel” but to be grateful that people were at least being educated about this horrendously evil place. It was comforting to us to be openly Jewish, carrying the Israeli flag and davening in a group in public areas.

It was late November and -5°C, although in January and February it falls below -20°C. Tourists are rugged up, but 75 years ago the prisoners were often wearing only one layer of clothes.

Nothing, no amount of reading or film clips, can prepare you for Auschwitz. In fact my mother used to tell us that unless you were incarcerated in these camps you could not imagine, even by visiting, the horrors that transpired there. At the destroyed crematoria, we all emotionally recited Kaddish for our relatives who had no Jewish burial and no grave.

In short, the Mizrachi Journey to Poland was unforgettable and life-changing. To quote Rav Milston, “The most effective way to realize the catastrophe of the Second World War is when we note how the once richly populated communities of Poland are on the one hand empty of Jews, whilst the cemeteries and ditches are filled with our people – zchor. Yet at the same time, we must appreciate that our ability to go back and visit in triumph as a re-born entity is largely due to those who gave us the strength for self-preservation – shamor. It was that shamor that has enabled us to re-build into a strong and vibrant nation.”

Am Yisrael Chai!
A moment of reflection in Majdanek

The group at the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau

Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever’s synagogue in Białystok

The Warsaw Jewish Cemetery

Learning Daf Yomi at Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin

Celebrating life at the grave of Reb Elimelech of Leżajsk
The miraculous finding of a small jug of oil is the story that accompanies us from nursery school on, illuminating Chanukah as the “festival of lights,” when G-d brought light to the Temple Menorah the Greeks had desecrated through that small amount of oil that lasted eight days.

However, there is an earlier story that describes a miracle involving a cruse of oil. It appears in Melachim, part of the cycle of miracle stories involving the prophet Elisha. It is a short narrative, but we can learn a lot about the attitudes the Torah wishes to imbue in us with regard to the significance of miracles in general.

A certain woman, the wife of one of the disciples of the prophets, cried out to Elisha: ‘Your servant, my husband is dead, and you know how your servant revered the L-rd. And now a creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves.’

Elisha said to her, ‘What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?’ She replied, ‘Your maidservant has nothing at all, except for a jug of oil.’

Elisha said to her, ‘Go, he said, ‘and borrow vessels outside, from all your neighbors, empty vessels, as many as you can. Then go in and shut the door behind you and your children, and pour [oil] into all those vessels, removing each one as it is filled.’ She went away and shut the door behind her and her children. They kept bringing [vessels] to her and she kept pouring. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, ‘Bring me another vessel.’ He answered her, ‘There are no more vessels; and the oil stopped. She came and told the man of G-d, and he said, ‘Go sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your children can live on the rest.’

The opening portrait is chilling. The regime has lost sight of human beings. If a poor widow has debts, the creditor can claim her children as slaves, and the State will do nothing to intervene. How the prophet handles the woman’s cries teaches us an important lesson about how we ought to behave here in the present. He does not create something from nothing. Rather, the miracle is that he creates something from something. He asks the woman to check what she has at home. At first, she answers, “Your maidservant has nothing at all,” but after some effort, she finds a jug of oil. That was enough for the prophet. He instructs her to bring vessels, and he starts pouring oil into the vessels. This is the first “miracle of the oil.”

The person who needs a miracle brings the initial vessel. The miracle can then begin. This is the starting point from which the miracle flows, and the magnitude of the miracle is determined not by the prophet but by the woman’s efforts and exertions. She collects the vessels, and the oil fills up those vessels. As long as there are still vessels, the oil will keep flowing, but when there are no more vessels, the oil also stops. The prophet wants to show us that we already have the remedy at home. A single portion of oil in the woman’s home is enough to bring great bounty.

This is also the story of the second miracle of the oil, the Chanukah story. The Chanukah miracle functions similarly to Elisha’s miracle. A small quantity of oil with the High Priest’s seal suffices to light the Menorah for eight days. This is the secret of using the inner reserve of energy that is the source of light and goodness. As the Psalmist says in a hymn to “the servant of the L-rd”: “With You is the fountain of life; by Your light do we see light.”

The secret of both miracles is that when asked, “What have you in the house?” the answer is – I have something. Even when one has a sense of emptiness or failure, it is reasonable to assume that deep down there is always some “small cruse” with the seal of the high priest. From this one positive starting point, beginning with our own efforts, it will then be possible to chart a path that culminates with blessings from Heaven.

2 Tehillim 36.
Chanukah – our celebration of the Temple rededication after the Maccabees’ victory against the Seleucids rulers – tends to lead to discussions regarding the conflict between Western civilization and Torah. This is not surprising, as Antiochus IV enacted a number of decrees with the clear purpose of preventing the observance of key elements of the Torah such as brit mila and Shabbat. This is stressed in the words of Al HaNissim:

“In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Greek government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will.”

While the Maccabees were initially victorious, the cultural battle continued with increased Hellenism infiltrating the dynasty until its final demise. The connection was not lost in Rabbinic tradition. During the civil war that followed the reign of Shlomtzion the Queen, a certain sage who knew “the wisdom of the Greeks” contributed to the downfall of the Temple worship. “At that point, they stated: cursed is the man who teaches his son the wisdom of the Greeks.”

Much has been written about this decree and its application to modern secular studies. One approach is that of the medieval biblical commentator, Rav David Kimche (1160-1235): “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d.” If one first assures their solid foundation in the fear of G-d, other wisdom can then be explored and studied. In the face of an appropriate attitude, exposure to foreign thought will not undermine one’s belief in G-d.

The Sifra also takes having a solid foundation in Torah into consideration but is more concerned about the balance. “You shall do my commandments and observe my rules to follow them I am the L-rd your G-d.” What does it mean to follow them?

That you make them primary (ikar) and not secondary (tafel). That all your business shall be in them. You shall not say, I have finished learning all the wisdom of Israel and now I can go on and learn other wisdom. This was further expanded by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), specifically to discuss the balance between secular and Torah studies. Secular studies can be pursued, but one has to be sure of the primacy of the Torah.

I would like to offer yet another approach by going back to the very beginning, the first verse of the Torah. In his commentary on the word bereishit, usually translated as “in the beginning,” taking the bet to mean “in” and reishit to mean “beginning,” as in the verse of Psalms quoted above. Rashi, however, offers another possibility: the bet means bishvil, usually translated as “for” and says the creation of the world was bishvil haTorah, for the Torah. We generally understand Rashi to mean that the Torah was the purpose of the Creation.

Another meaning of bishvil is “in the path of.” Here, bishvil haTorah means in the path of the Torah. The world was created in the path of the Torah and thus the two are inseparable, hence there is no distinction between the secular and the Divine.

If one truly believes that G-d created the world and all of its physical manifestations, no “secular study” actually exists. If one views humanity as a Divine creation, then study of the humanities is the study of the Divine. What makes something “secular” is actively removing G-d from the discipline, not the discipline itself.

With this approach, there is no conflict between a religious approach and the secular world, because they are inseparable. All areas of study, whether they be science, law or the arts, are potentially holy if one approaches them with that perspective.

If one realizes that the basis of wisdom is the fear of G-d and prioritizes Torah, then what we are doing is Torah. Whether it is religious or secular is up to us.

1 Sotah 49b.
2 Psalms 111.
3 Vayikra 18:4.

Dr. Deena Zimmerman is a pediatrician and Director of yoatzot.org, a website for women’s health and halacha.
E ach year, as we celebrate Chanukah, we read the parshiot that comprise the Yosef narrative. We follow his descent to the prisons of Egypt and his eventual ascent to become second only to Pharaoh.

Throughout his journey, Yosef is confronted with an entirely new and different environment than that of his childhood. He is given an Egyptian name, dressed in Egyptian clothes and he marries an Egyptian woman. In fact, when his brothers arrive in Egypt, they don’t recognize him at all!

It seems that Yosef discarded his previous identity and fully embraced his new Egyptian surroundings. However, Yosef never felt abandoned by or far from G-d. Nechama Leibowitz points out that almost every time we hear Yosef speak in the story, he has the name of G-d on his lips.

Yosef consistently speaks of G-d to those around him, even insisting that his powers of dream interpretation are not his own talent, but a gift from G-d. Yosef firmly believes in G-d and His control over the seemingly random events of his life. This understanding and his own experiences allow him to transmit his faith and the legacy of the Avot to his children, despite their Egyptian surroundings.

This idea is central to the Chanukah story. The war was not only a war of national liberation from an occupying Greek army. The struggle was also an internal one — a battle for the very soul of Judaism. As our tradition flirted and ultimately clashed with Greek culture, many Jews shed their old ways, preferring to don the Greek fashion of the day, choose Greek names for their children, and submit to the Hellenistic zeitgeist.

At first, there was an attempt to synthesize these new ways with Judaism. Indeed, this initial meeting of cultures left indelible marks on our history (certain Greek names became accepted as Jewish, the first translation of the Torah was Greek, and undeniable traces of Greek philosophy crept their way into our philosophical treatises). However, as tensions mounted and the battles of the Chanukah story drew near, the Chashmonaim, with the name of G-d on their lips, charged ahead to sanctify that which had become profaned.

In the aftermath, the miracle of Chanukah was that we never lost sight of G-d’s hand in the world, despite the seismic changes thrust upon our people. We decreed the Greek attempt to rationalize everything, instead finding even the most natural of events to be the work of G-d.

The Beit Yosef posed a simple but critical question about the holiday of Chanukah. If there was enough oil found to last for one day, why do we light candles for eight nights? Why do we say Hallel for eight days? Surely the first day was not a miracle at all but nature!

So many answers have been proposed that books have been written to respond to this question alone. Years ago, I heard an incredible answer from Rabbi Dovid Ebner: perhaps the extra night of lighting and the extra recitation of Hallel is to celebrate and praise G-d for the fact that oil burns at all. The miracle we call nature.

There is a story in Masechet Ta’anit about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, a man who was no stranger to miracles. One Shabbat, he found his daughter very upset. She explained that instead of using oil, she had accidentally lit the Shabbat candles using vinegar, which of course would not ignite. Rav Chanina responded that she should not despair because just as G-d causes the oil to burn, He can cause vinegar to burn as well. The flames from her candles not only burned but lasted until the end of Shabbat.

Interestingly, the Rambam chose to discuss the laws of the recitation of Hallel in the middle of the laws of Chanukah. Perhaps this is to teach us that the ultimate praise of G-d comes from our insistence that He is running the world. When we find ourselves surrounded by a foreign, secular culture, we might change our fashion, our language, our names. However, the true test of our longevity is whether we see G-d’s hand in the world and keep G-d’s name on our lips. This is the legacy of Yosef and the miracle of Chanukah.
World Mizrachi is privileged to present a new initiative in partnership with OU-JLIC

Beit Mizrachi advances Jewish education, leadership and community for a new generation of college students in Israel by providing:

• engaging and dynamic Jewish education
• a welcoming religious community for students
• a warm and supportive home environment for students
• resources for personal and religious growth

Rav Josh and Margot Botwinick are the founding couple of the thriving Jewish community of IDC Herzliya. They have successfully engaged hundreds of students in Jewish life and learning and supported the Aliyah of an entire community of students.

Rav Yehuda and Chagit Peles are the pioneer Beit Mizrachi couple at Givat Shmuel and Bar-Ilan University. They have an open house for young adults at all stages in life, whether a student at Bar-Ilan, a young professional, or a young couple working in Tel Aviv or elsewhere.

“The first Shabbat made us realize how much we had been missing a strong sense of community with a real Torah presence. We never had a minyan or community that was ours and where we felt comfortable. Beit Mizrachi has already brought that to the area, and hundreds of students are excited to be involved.” — Yoni
PREPARE FOR WAR, THE RIGHT WAY

Israel must prepare simultaneously for a broad range of war scenarios. This includes the development of a credible Israeli capacity to strike Iranian nuclear targets; preparation for war on three fronts against an Iranian-led coalition; the ability to degrade enemy offensive capabilities in the two Palestinian arenas, and the ability to withstand intense missile wars.

In each of these scenarios, it will be vitally important to quickly force an end to enemy fire on Israel’s population centers; to deny Hezbollah and its Iranian masters, as well as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the comfort of launching missiles at ease from territories under their control.

No air defense system will be enough. Israel must have ground forces capable of swift and crushing maneuvers to attain decisive outcomes by taking the fight deep into enemy territory and breaking its will to fight.

In other words, Israel must bring back the doctrine known as hachra’ah (decisive outcome).

The recent JISS National Security Plan (see jiss.org.il) argues against sole reliance on the “Intel-Firepower” nexus—intelligence, special operations, and accurate stand-off firepower—which has been the IDF operational doctrine since the end of the First Lebanon War in 1982.

This approach is an important adjunct, not an alternative, to significant ground combat.

The equation, “accurate intel multiplied by precision-guided firepower equals destruction and collapse of the enemy,” has led to suboptimal outcomes because it has not sufficiently considered an essential element—the enemy.

The enemy has learned lessons from every confrontation, becoming skilled in denying the IDF accurate intelligence and/or minimizing the effects of pinpoint Israeli firepower. Enemy techniques aimed at undercutting the utility of the “Intel-Firepower” approach include fortifying facilities, going underground, dispersing and hiding assets, using human shields, and more.

In most clashes, a deleterious dynamic has repeated itself. At first, Israel successfully launches a salvo of firepower based on accurate intelligence gathered over a long period of time. Then follows a decline in the quality of targeting intelligence with an attendant reduction in the number of targets which justify a strike, and a recovery by the enemy and a continuation of its attacks against Israel.

Subsequent Israeli frustration leads to attacks on targets with high collateral damage or on useless targets, alongside an immense effort to acquire new quality targets, which can lead to an occasional success (but this does not alter the general picture). What follows is a prolonged war campaign, leading to public anger and frustration and limited ground forces maneuver, not sufficiently effective to bring the enemy to the point of collapse.

Consequently, a return to combat along more traditional lines is inevitable in many cases. This means maneuvering into enemy territory, locating and destroying enemy forces. Only this will break the spirit of the enemy. To restore deterrence, Israel must not shy away from convincingly demonstrating its capacity to carry-out forceful ground offensives.

Ground maneuver also has a moral dimension. It is the duty of the government and the military to remove any threat to the home front as quickly as possible. A situation in which civilians become the IDF’s shield is unacceptable. This amounts to the abandonment of the civilian population. Consider the long-term suffering of Israelis who live in the Gaza envelope. Or the daylong shutdown of greater Tel Aviv that Islamic Jihad imposed on Israel in November.

It should be recalled that at the beginning of the Palestinian terror campaign of 2000-2001, the government was unwilling to maneuver with ground forces into Palestinian cities, and even within the IDF it was common wisdom that the capture of significant territory was unnecessary. Hundreds of lives were lost until the IDF was sent into the cities of Judea and Samaria. Then, indeed, the IDF was able to achieve solid security results through ground maneuver.

While no large conventional armies today threaten Israel, the situation could change. If a radical Muslim Brotherhood regime should rise in a country like Egypt, or if the Syrian army is rebuilt after that country’s civil war, the IDF must be ready. Bear in mind that building ground forces is a complex process that takes time. Neglecting IDF ground maneuver capabilities is, therefore, a dangerous gamble.

David M. Weinberg is vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. His personal site is davidmweinberg.com
The triumph of Chanukah actually begins with the tragedy of Chanukah. The story that ends in the miraculous Jewish victory over the Greeks starts with an intra-Jewish conflict, as Jewish Hellenizers try to convince their fellow Jews to accommodate the enemy's demands, for the sake of peace.

So many of the major crises in Jewish history, from the Exodus from Egypt through to modern times, involve the tragic specter of a Jewish faction urging their fellow Jews to give in. Of course, each situation is different. Sometimes the Jews who take the other side are well-intentioned. And we should be careful about questioning motives or making overheated accusations. But at the same time, we need to be equally careful not to be lulled into complacency by the fact that those individuals are fellow Jews.

In December 1989, American Jews were startled to read in the New York Times that the architects of the shocking US recognition of Yasir Arafat and the PLO were two Jewish officials in the State Department, Daniel Kurtzer and Dennis Ross.

Kurtzer and Ross insisted Arafat had become “moderate,” but 18 months later, President Bush was forced to sever relations with Arafat after a PLO faction attempted to carry out a massacre of Jews on the Tel Aviv beachfront.

In the years to follow, Kurtzer and Ross, together with Richard Haass and Aaron Miller, and later Martin Indyk and his right-hand man, David Makovsky, played major roles in shaping American policy toward Israel in several US administrations.

The theme of their work has been remarkably consistent: Israel should be pressured to agree to the establishment of an independent “State of Palestine” in almost all of Judea-Samaria and Gaza.

Makovsky has even developed a series of maps designed to prove that since many Jewish residents of the territories live close to the old 1967 lines, a Palestinian state could be created without having to expel all of them en masse.

The most interesting thing about Makovsky’s maps is not his desire to move the Jewish residents of Judea-Samaria around like figures on a chessboard. It’s the fact that every one of his maps shows Qalqilya and Tulkarm as part of the future “Palestine.”

That means Makovsky’s “peace” plan will reduce Israel to nine miles wide at its mid-section, just like in the pre-1967 days, when an Arab tank column could cut the Jewish State in two in a matter of minutes.

Every once in a while, one of these Jewish ex-State Department officials will publicly admit that they made some grievous error in the past. Dennis Ross has acknowledged (on the op-ed page of the Washington Post) that he was wrong to pressure Israel to let Hamas import concrete since Hamas used it to build terror tunnels. Aaron Miller has admitted (also in the Post) that he was wrong to orchestrate the notorious invitation to Yasir Arafat to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

But for some reason, these ex-government officials believe that no matter how many mistakes they have made – no matter how many times they have advocated policies that have undermined Israel – we are supposed to continue trusting their judgment. Ross and Makovsky are now on a book tour, arguing for the “gradual” creation of a Palestinian state in Israel’s back yard.

I don’t see how gradually reducing Israel to nine miles wide is any safer than doing it all at once.

I’m not comparing the Jewish State Department officials to Jews who took the other side in past historical episodes, whether in the days of Egypt or the days of the Maccabees. History will decide if any such analogies are appropriate.

What I’m saying is that any plan that reduces Israel to nine miles wide is a bad plan, even if it is advocated by a Jew, and even if that Jew wears a yarmulke on his head. In ancient times, there were undoubtedly some Jews who were lulled into going along with dangerous proposals simply because they were promoted by a fellow Jew. Let us not repeat that mistake.

Stephen M. Flatow, an attorney in New Jersey, is the father of Alisa Flatow, who was murdered in an Iranian-sponsored Palestinian terrorist attack in 1995. He is the author of “A Father’s Story: My Fight for Justice Against Iranian Terrorism,” now available on Kindle.
In a third grade Chanukah play, someone must be Antiochus. Eight children will be candles and one shamash, and some will be Mattityahu and his sons and a few other Maccabees, but without Antiochus – no play. That is why the Western world is hostile to Israel, and even international athletes do not want to visit: the world has cast us in the role of Antiochus.

The Western world has become accustomed to seeing the universe as a stage upon which there are only two sets of actors: strong and weak, oppressors and oppressed. When trying to compress the Israeli-Arab conflict into this mindset, it is clear how the roles will be divided. The Arabs lose wars, so they do not fit the role of oppressor. This is how we became the oppressors, especially in the eyes of the intellectuals. But of course that is not who we really are. The story of our resurrection in this Land is not a story of power and oppression. It is a story of love and hope, of great faith, and of sorrow and pain. It is a story of the gamut of bright colors, not of black and white.

Nevertheless, the problem is that the black and white mindset, the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed, is part of a comprehensive worldview that has taken over the Western world. It addresses not only Israel, and not only policy issues. It was Karl Marx who introduced this thinking. In his “Communist Manifesto,” Marx argued that the history of every society is a history of class wars. All aspects of our lives are a manifestation of visible and hidden power struggles. Religion, culture, family – all are just manifestations of evil and oppressive control.

Marx thought all power struggles revolve around money and property. After Marx’s failure, today’s neo-Marxists abandoned the economic emphasis and began to talk about power and oppression in broader contexts. Culture not only serves the economy but establishes elusive power relationships on completely different levels. The difficulty in detecting these oppressive relationships just proves how good the privileged oppressors are at their job.

This worldview captivates its supporters because it gives them an intoxicating feeling of exposing collusion. Everyone else delineates that the family is based on love, that religion relies on faith, that the community relies on friendship. Only the sophisticated intellectuals understand that the family is an institution of patriarchal oppression, that religion is an opium for the masses, that the community is an arena for domination and exploitation. There are no individuals in the world who choose to do good or bad, but only non-personal power struggles of classes and sectors and genders, only exploitation and glass ceilings and oppression.

Sadly, sometimes power really does creep into our relationships. The Torah taught us this with the curse of Eve: “Your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.”1 We must be accurate though. It is not that the family is a patriarchal system based on power relations, but that power relations try to sneak into the family, which precedes and is more important than them. Power is just one human weakness but it does not control everything. Power and control are not the foundations of the family, but one of the problems the family faces.

Social institutions – family, home, community and people – should not be powerful organizations of lasting oppression, but a fresh life force that bridges the common root with the young flowers. In our complex world, there is also corrupted power, but it is not everything. Our world is not a haunted black and white wasteland but a colorful and flowering garden.

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1 Bereishit 3:16.
The Tur provides us with the source of our Chanukah celebrations:

“Idolaters entered the Holy Temple and desecrated the oil within. And when the Chashmonaim... searched and only found a very small measure of untouched pure oil with which to light the Menorah. This oil still had the original seal of the Kohen Gadol... but there was such a minute quantity of pure oil, it would never suffice for the time required to bring a new supply of pure oil – in fact there was just about enough oil for the first night alone. Yet miraculously, this small pure measure lasted a full eight days. In subsequent years, in celebration of this wonder, our Rabbis fixed eight days of celebration to thank the Almighty for the miracles he bestowed upon us.”

The Beit Yosef asks why eight days and not seven. There was enough oil for one day so the miracle was making it last for another seven, not eight.

The Beit Yosef himself offers a number of explanations; however, a beautiful answer to the question is suggested by Rav Moshe Feinstein, when explaining the song Maoz Tzur:

“Men of understanding fixed eight days of song and praise.”

How are we to interpret the phrase “men of understanding fixed eight days”? Surely, if one day’s worth of oil ‘burns without being consumed’ for over a week, one needn’t have any special intelligence to register that something very special has just occurred. So why “men of understanding”?

Rav Moshe comments that the celebration of the first day of Chanukah is not a celebration of the miracle but of Nature itself. Appreciating G-d when He performs miracles is one thing; acknowledging the same G-d sustaining Nature is another.

Not only must we appreciate that a small amount of oil burned for longer than it was meant to but we must also internalize the fact that oil burns at all. The point is that both miracles and nature derive from the same source. Therefore, “men of understanding fixed eight days” – those with deeper insight fixed a festival of eight days, adding a day to remember the miracle of Nature.

When Chazal decided to establish Chanukah, they wanted to emphasize something fundamental to our understanding of the world. In addition to the Almighty’s daily involvement in the running of the world, He occasionally intervenes using supernatural means.

In the interim between Sukkot and Pesach, our spiritual winter so to speak, it seems all the more appropriate we dedicate a day to celebrate routine and mundane Nature.

This could certainly be another reason why we light our Chanukiot outside in the darkness. As the Netivot Shalom explains, our objective is to find G-d specifically in the darkness.

Men of understanding will celebrate for eight days – they understand the number eight sheds a revealing light upon the seven. Just as eight symbolizes the supernatural that emanates from G-d, so the seven, the week, represents the natural G-d-given phenomena surrounding us every day.

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1. Orach Chaim 670, in direct reference to the Gemara Shabbat 21b.
2. Drash Moshe, Chanukah.
3. A term often used for Am Yisrael, initially used in Shir HaShirim 2:2.

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Rabbi David Milston is Director of Overseas Programs at Midreshet HaRova and the author of “The Three Pillars” series on the weekly parasha, “Ki Va Moed” on the holidays, and “Eternity,” a study of Nevi’im Rishonim.
While we all enjoy potato latkes and sufganiyot (donuts) on Chanukah, it remains striking that the holiday uniquely lacks an established festive meal. The three major holidays – Pesach, Sukkot, and Shavuot – all include joyful feasts based on the requirement of rejoicing on these days. Many commentators believe that Rosh Hashanah, despite being a Day of Judgment, still has a requirement to rejoice with festive meals, even if it remains appropriate to temper the scope of luxurious foods. While one cannot eat on Yom Kippur, many deemed the preparatory meal beforehand as a festive meal in celebration of the holiday and the atonement it promises.

As such, it remains unsurprising that the Sages included a celebratory feast amongst the requirements for Purim. Yet the Talmud makes no explicit mention of a similar declaration regarding Chanukah, the other holiday created by the Sages. (The custom to commemorate the oil miracle by consuming oily foods emerged much later and remains optional.)

According to Rambam and others, Chanukah does contain an element of simcha which is fulfilled through a festive meal. Rabbi Shlomo Luria forcefully endorsed this position, arguing that a joyful thanksgiving celebration properly publicizes the miracle. However, many authorities, including Rabbi Yosef Karo, contend that there is no mitzvah of eating on Chanukah. They note that in the Talmudic passage which delineates the essence of the holiday, the Sages only assert that this is a day of hallel ve-hoda’a, praise and thanks, and never mention the obligation to have a festive meal.

In support of this position, Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe (Levush) noted that on Purim, our enemies tried to physically annihilate us and thereby prevent us from the ability to enjoy the tangible pleasures of existence. To celebrate the physical salvation, the Sages decreed a physical, festive celebration to go with the spiritual actions we perform to give thanks and praise to G-d. On Chanukah, however, the Greeks did not aim to physically destroy us but to compel us to give up our spiritual heritage and become Hellenized. As such, this is a holiday of spiritual salvation for which no festive meals, a mark of physical redemption, are required. Others have alternatively suggested that a joyful celebration was inappropriate for Chanukah since, in contrast to Purim, the Jews suffered heavy casualties during these hostilities.

A middle-ground position adopted by some Ashkenazic scholars, including Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema), asserted that there is a “small mitzvah” of festive meals on these days, because the holiday marks the rededication of the Temple altar. The Rema further adds, “We are accustomed to singing songs of happiness and praise at these meals, and thereby they become seudot mitzvah (authorized celebrations).” In other words, the possibility of seudot mitzvah exists on this holiday, yet they can only take place through human initiative. When these meals include praises of G-d that clearly manifest the religious significance of the day, they become mitzvot. Without these spiritual ingredients, they are just a regular meal.

As Prof. Meir Rafeld has documented, many Chassidic rebbes emphasized this opportunity to sanctify the mundane. The Munkatcher Rebbe, for example, held special dinners on Chanukah to transform these meals into holy feasts, while others emphasized the unique opportunity to initiate a spiritual experience.

This position highlights an important message of the holiday. Following the Maccabbean victory, the Jews needed to recognize that the glorious military victory came from the hand of G-d. To this end, the Maharal of Prague asserted, G-d created (and the Sages emphasized) the miracle of the oil so that the people should recognize that both of these wondrous miracles – the war victory and the oil lasting eight days – came from Him. As such, one of the themes of this holiday is the sanctification of the mundane via the recognition of G-d’s Omnipresence and His ability to affect the world, whether on the battlefield or in the Temple.

Chanukah feasts allow us to manifest our appreciation of this lesson. Every time we eat, we have the ability to transform this normal meal into a seudat mitzvah through songs of praise and thanks. Just as the Jews of old understood their physical accomplishments as Divine intervention, so too can we turn our holiday parties into religious events. Festive meals might not be obligatory, but the ability to create a seudat mitzvah reflects the opportunity of internalizing this central lesson of Chanukah.

Adapted from Rabbi Brody’s “A Guide to the Complex: Contemporary Halakhic Debates” (Maggid, 2014).

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody is an author, teacher and law fellow.
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Jacob Edrei
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I worked for three years in a lab at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, followed by two years at Haifa University and for the last year, I was finishing the development of Bio Hydrogen in a private lab in France.

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Chanukah has always been associated with freedom, as the upstart Hasmonean community threw off the yoke of Greek domination and reclaimed its independence. And it highlights the ever-present miraculous hand of G-d, evidenced by both the against-all-odds victory in the war, as well as the little cruse, the oil that astoundingly lasted eight full days.

But Chanukah is also about the struggle for purity in an often diluted and deluded world. We light eight lights in our chanukiah to commemorate the eight days it took to secure new, untainted oil. But why so long? One opinion is that the oil was produced in a region four days travel from Yerushalayim.

Another opinion is that due to the war and its many casualties, the people were tamei, ritually impure, and were required to wait seven days before they could become takor, ritually pure. Only then could they process new oil, which took an additional day, and thus the eight-day wait.

The rabbis question if this delay was necessary, for there is a halacha, stated by the Ramban1 “tumah hutra betzibur” – that if the entire nation is impure, in effect no-one is impure! Thus the Temple officials could have immediately secured new oil and re-lit the Menorah! So why did they wait?

While this permissibility did indeed exist, the victorious Maccabees did not want to rely upon it. They felt that if they were going to re-dedicate the Beit HaMikdash, if they were going to jumpstart the spiritual engine of the Jewish people, they should do so without relying on any short-cuts in the law. Better to wait, they decided, and thereby adhere to the very highest of standards.

35 years ago, when I visited the refusenik community in pre-Perestroika Russia, among the ritual items I took with me were a number of ketubot (marriage documents). I offered to perform weddings for couples who had married civilly, but not in a religious ceremony, due to a lack of Rabbis.

The issue was raised that none of the women would be able to go to the mikveh (ritual bath) before the ceremony.

One refusenik explained that this was dangerous for Jews in the USSR as they would be photographed as they entered, and targeted as social deviants and enemies of the State. As such, they stayed away. I explained to the couples that, while mikvah was indeed a prerequisite for Jewish marriage, the Poskim I consulted had instructed me that in this extenuating circumstance, it was preferable for the couples to perform the religious ceremony now, and visit a mikveh later, when it was safe.

After some discussion, one of the women stepped forward and said: “We appreciate your offer and accept that we would be allowed to marry religiously, without the mikveh. But we are going to wait until we can wed in a full-fledged, 100% manner, no less than the most observant of Jews would do. That day will come, we believe, and then there will be no footnote or asterisk by our names.”

I was impressed beyond words.

Often, in today’s Jewish world, we search for ways to streamline, tweak and adjust the law – both Jewish and secular – so that it becomes as palatable as possible to our tastes, without crossing the red line of disobedience or illegality. That is not necessarily a bad thing; I was always taught that our task as rabbis is to make Judaism as accessible and attractive as possible to the wider Jewish community.

But it is also imperative that there be those select individuals who reject the path of least resistance and choose instead to always take the high road, people whose conduct is unsullied and unadulterated, free of short-cuts and compromises. These may be politicians with impeccable integrity, Israeli soldiers who enthusiastically choose combat roles at the risk of their lives, or men and women who demonstrate there are no upper limits to our ability to conform to G-d’s will and Man’s law. These rare and outstanding personalities are the Maccabees of history, rays of brilliant light that show us mere mortals the way. Models and monuments for us all to emulate.

Yaakov Kirschen (of Dry Bones fame) once wrote: The question is not how the cruse of oil lasted for eight days; the question is how we Jews have lasted throughout the centuries! The answer, I suggest, are the living flasks of pure oil and pure faith whose flame can never be extinguished.

1 Bamidbar 31.

Rabbi Stewart Weiss is Director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra’anana jocmtv@netvision.net.il

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One of the mitzvot unique to Chanukah is *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the mitzvah. In addition to lighting the Chanukah candles, it is also mandatory to place them at the entrance to one’s home, in full view, so that passersby will see the lights. Our Sages also designated a specific time frame for lighting the Chanukah candles – from sunset until the streets become empty. There is no specific time; rather, it depends on the location. That explains why the halacha uses the special terminology “*until foot traffic ceases in the marketplace*” – in other words, until people are no longer outdoors and on the streets.

If we look at the mitzvot related to Sukkot and Pesach for example, there is no obligation to publicize them. Pesach is a reminder of G-d’s taking us out of Egypt. Sukkot commemorates G-d’s protection during the 40 years in the desert.

Why is Chanukah – and Purim – different?

Through the Exodus and the trek in the wilderness, the Jewish people were totally passive. The miracles were performed exclusively by G-d. As we read in the Pesach Haggadah: “*I, G-d, did this – and not any angel, any seraph or any intermediary.*”

However, on Chanukah, the Jewish people instigated the miracle. When the Greeks issued edicts adversely affecting the spiritual life of the Jews, forbidding them from studying Torah and observing the mitzvot, the Matityahu was the one who took the initiative. He recruited his sons and appealed to the Jewish people: “*Whoever is with G-d, come to me.*” The Hasmoneans declared war on the Greeks and hundreds enlisted to take part in the struggle. A great miracle occurred as the few prevailed over the many and the weak prevailed over the strong. They then entered the Temple, rededicated it and lit candles.

G-d is not seeking admiration. He wants us to remember and commemorate the miracles so we will keep and observe the mitzvot. Consequently, the observance of the mitzvot on Pesach and Sukkot does not have to be done in public. It is not necessary to publicize the mitzvah.

However, on Chanukah and Purim, it is not enough to observe the mitzvah in private. Rather, the validity of the mitzvah derives from it being publicized. The candles burning on the streets of the city, where everyone can see them, boost the self-confidence of the Jewish people and remind us –and those around us –that we have a special mission to be “a light unto the nations.”
Yehuda Solomon Alkalai was born in Sarajevo (Bosnia) in 1798. He spent his childhood in Yerushalayim studying with various rabbis and it was there he came under the influence of the Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism. In 1825, he became the Rabbi of Semlin (in Serbia). At that time, the Serbs, as well as other nationalities within the Balkan States, were greatly influenced by the Greek War of Independence and the prevailing atmosphere of rebellion against foreign Turkish rule.

With this resurgence of national pride and desire for independence, the entire Balkan area became divided among different nations and peoples. There is no doubt that these events influenced Alkalai and brought him to the realization that the time had come for Jewish nationalism to reassert itself among the Jewish people.

In 1834, with the publication of a small booklet entitled Shema Yisrael, Rabbi Alkalai raised the issue of Jewish political independence and the Land of Israel for the first time. In his essay, he proposed a beginning of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel as a precursor to the Messianic Redemption.

Rabbi Alkalai’s views were further reinforced in 1840, with the occurrence of the Damascus Blood Libel, which shook the very foundations of the Jewish world, and elements of the non-Jewish world too.

This scandal convinced Rabbi Alkalai (and many other members of the younger generation such as Moses Hess) that freedom and security for the nation could and would only be achieved in the Land of the Forefathers, and that the redemption would only come about through positive action on the part of the Jewish community. From this moment, Rabbi Alkalai devoted himself to spreading these ideas through writing and speeches within Western European Jewish communities. He approached such leaders as Moses Montefiore and Adolph Cremieux for their political and financial support.

Rabbi Alkalai was convinced that it would be possible to buy part or even most of the Holy Land from the Turkish government, as Avraham had done at the cave of Machpela when he bought land from Ephron the Hittite. He dreamed of establishing a worldwide organization along the lines of the various national organizations, then prevalent among other European nations. The purpose of these organizations would be to buy and reclaim land, as well as providing loans for new settlers. These ideas were subsequently adopted by Herzl and the World Zionist Organization.

Rabbi Alkalai also traveled to different cities attempting to set up a basic structure for the organization he envisioned. One such group was established in London but it did not last long enough to have any substantial impact upon the masses.

Rabbi Alkalai wanted to convince people that his plan for at least part of the Jewish nation to re-establish itself in the Land of the Forefathers was one of realistic proportions and that the realization of an independent state could be achieved. Towards the end of his life, he moved to Israel and died there without seeing any of his dreams fulfilled.
There are conflicting teachings in our tradition regarding the nature of Greek culture. The Midrash teaches that the word “darkness” mentioned at the beginning of Creation and during the Brit Bein HaBetarim refers to Greece. Equating Greece with darkness clearly indicates a negative attitude toward Greece and its culture.

Nevertheless, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel teaches that a Torah can be written in Hebrew or Greek. The Talmud teaches that in the Land of Israel one should speak either Hebrew or Greek. According to the Zohar, the words “without blemish” in the Torah refers to Greece “who are close to the path of emunah (belief).”

So, which is it? Are we to view Greece as something holy or as darkness?

Rav Matis Weinberg answers this question based on the story of Yosef and his brothers.

Is it possible that the sons of Ya’akov were so horrific and unspiritual that they sought to either kill Yosef or completely rid him from their lives?

The brothers thought they were doing a spiritual act that would save the Jewish faith when they sold Yosef. They saw that Ya’akov had crowned Yosef as the leader of the next generation of their faith.

Who was Yosef?

The Torah relates that Yosef was “handsome of form and handsome of appearance.” Rashi relates that “the daughters of Egypt used to climb the wall to gaze at his beauty.” It wasn’t simply that Yosef was physically attractive. He took care of his outward appearance. The Midrash teaches that Yosef would “pat his eyes, turn on his heel, fix his hair” – focusing on how he looked.

The brothers saw Yosef’s focus on the physical and determined that his leadership would lead the nation astray. When they see Yosef approaching them before they conspire to get rid of him, they say, “Behold, the master of the dreams (Ba’al HaChalomot) is coming.”

The Midrash quotes Rabbi Levi explaining Ba’al HaChalomot to mean, “this one will lead them to worship ba’al (idolatry).”

Rashi teaches that Shimon and Levi had the same plot “against Shechem and against Yosef,” meaning their acts of violence against both were to save the nation.

The brothers were right that Yosef’s interest in the physical world had the capacity to destroy their faith if left unharnessed. Yes, Yosef had these physical tendencies and yes, he cared about the physical world. But, when the physical is harnessed and used in the context of holiness, there can be no higher spiritual level. That is what Ya’akov saw in Yosef – the son who could lead the people in a world where one cannot be exclusively spiritual but must balance the physical with the spiritual.

Yosef is the only person in the Torah who we refer to as a tzadik. It’s easy to be righteous when rejecting the physical world and focusing only on the spiritual. True righteousness is one who can be engaged in the physical world that G-d created and in which He placed us, and not only balance, but elevate the physical and use it for the spiritual.

That brings us back to Greece and Chanukah. Greek culture alone is darkness. It is empty and leads to no good. But when it is brought into the context of holiness – in the writing of a Torah and for communication in the Land of Israel, the remarkable beauty of Greece takes the spiritual to a whole new level. As the Gemara explains, there is beauty to Yefet, the forefather of Greece, but that’s only when it “dwells in the tents of Shem,” i.e. when couched in a spiritual context.

This is why ציון – Zion, referring to Israel and Yerushalayim, is a combination of the letter צ, which symbolizes the righteous tzadik, and the letters יון – Greece. The merger of the righteous, spiritual person together with the beautiful culture of Greece leads to Zion – the physical land where every act, including walking, planting, and building, is actually spiritual – thus elevating its inhabitants to the highest possible spiritual levels.

And that’s the message of Chanukah. We use a beautiful chanukiah, and light following the “Mehadrin min HaMehadrin” approach – beautifying the mitzvah with the physical, to celebrate the incredible spiritual heights we can reach when we engage with the magnificent physical world G-d has created for us to use in the context of spirituality and Avodat Hashem.

1 Bereishit Rabbah, Chapters 2 and 44.
2 Megillah 8b.
3 Sotah 49b.
4 Shemot 237a.
5 Bereishit Rabbah 84.
6 Megillah 9b.

Rabbi Dov Lipman is a former MK and the author of seven books about Judaism and Israel
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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2019

I was interrupted from a restless sleep at 5:30 am when my husband came into the room. “Ariela, just so you know, there’s stuff going on in Azza (Gaza). You should get dressed.” After hearing a deafening boom, my husband, Asher, had checked the news to see if there had been a gas explosion nearby. What he heard had actually come from Azza, 15 kilometers away.

The Israeli Army had taken out an Islamic Jihad leader, which meant it was only a matter of time before rockets would start flying in our direction. We live in an old building in Ashkelon – no elevator, no safe rooms in the apartments. We’re separated from our bomb shelter by four floors. With only 30 seconds to get to safety, when there is a siren we follow protocol and leave our apartment, shut the door behind us, descend one flight, and gather on the north side of the building.

We were well prepared for our first siren at 6:05. We followed our plan as we had countless times before. I grab our nine-month-old baby, Carmel, and my husband pulls Aliza, our sleeping four-year-old, out of bed and carries her out. Whoever gets to the door first unlocks and opens it for the other one, then closes it behind them.

The adults keep cool, smiling at the children gathering on the stairs, some repeating loudly that everything is fine as they try to drown out the booms from overhead – some so loud that they shake the entire building. Internally, people are keeping tabs, counting each explosion... one-two-three, four... five...

The sense of urgency and fear starts to lift when someone inevitably cracks a joke about meeting up for coffee during the next siren or having a building-wide pajama contest.

The next siren came exactly 30 minutes later, at 6:35.

The look of sheer terror mixed with surprise on Aliza’s face as she hears each siren sticks with me. She’s well-practiced, and every time without fail, she drops whatever she’s doing and runs to the door. How could it be that a four-year-old who hasn’t yet learned about death understands what it means to run for her life?

The booms were constant. The sirens continued: 7:04, 7:11, 8:31, 9:12, 9:54. “Just letting you know I’m going to the bathroom,” is another way of saying “You are now responsible for keeping both of the kids safe, don’t wait for me in case of a siren.”

My husband and I discussed leaving Ashkelon to go to stay with his parents in Efrat, where there are virtually no sirens, ultimately deciding against it for fear of being caught by a siren while driving with the kids in the car.

The day went on and the rocket-fire continued with us stuck inside our apartment building, glued to the news. No showering, no trips to the park across the street, no makolet (grocers) runs – just waiting for the
next siren as we try to entertain our kids with games and coloring books.

Finally, the rocket-fire eased-up toward the late afternoon. With the uncertainty of what tomorrow would bring, we got the kids ready for bed as usual.

At 7:00 pm, an announcement was released that schools and work would be canceled the next day as well. Clearly, the army was prepared for another long day of rocket-fire, so while it was quiet, we made the quick decision to leave Ashkelon and head for Efrat.

Within half an hour we were on the road. With our windows rolled down so that we would immediately hear a siren, we were prepared to stop the car, jump out, unbuckle our kids, and cover them, our bodies turning into shields for our little ones. Thankfully that didn't happen. Each kilometer that we drove east brought us more relief, and half-way through the drive, we felt our bodies relax for the first time all day.

Leaving Ashkelon during a tense time is always extremely difficult for us. We're bailing – on our building, on our community, and on our city. We're unable to participate in the volunteering committee that brings necessities to the elderly and sick when they are unable to leave their homes. Ultimately though, the decision is an easy one. The lives and mental health of our children come first.

In between “rounds,” as we call them here in Ashkelon, life carries on as usual. It’s incredible how quickly the whole city bounces right back after a ceasefire – from a ghost city one day to a busy and bustling city the next.

On a regular day, every park, restaurant, store and mall in Ashkelon is bursting with people. People who always know where the nearest bomb shelter is located. Not a single heart in Ashkelon doesn’t skip a beat at the sound of a distant motorcycle, an ambulance, or any other sound that resembles that of an air-raid siren.

And every single night, before we go to sleep, my husband kindly checks that our bathrobes are hooked on top of our towels for easy access – just in case.

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2019**

This evening my husband and I went to a barbecue with friends. We hired a 16-year-old babysitter to watch our two girls, leaving well after they had both fallen asleep.

About 30 minutes after arriving at our friends’ house, our phones lit up – red alert in Sderot. A few minutes later, my phone pinged with a message from the babysitter: “Hey, sorry to bother you! Not to worry you, but there was just a red alert in Sderot. I wanted to know where to go when there is a siren, just in case.”

I wrote back to her that it’s a little bit of a problem – we don’t have a safe room in our apartment, so when there’s a siren, we pick the girls up and take them out into the stairwell. I added that if she can’t manage to do that, it’s completely understandable, but she should try to get them both into the hallway in our apartment – away from windows to the outside.

I wrote back to her that it’s a little bit of a problem – we don’t have a safe room in our apartment, so when there’s a siren, we pick the girls up and take them out into the stairwell. I added that if she can’t manage to do that, it’s completely understandable, but she should try to get them both into the hallway in our apartment – away from windows to the outside.

Life carried on as usual in Ashkelon, we thoroughly enjoy our evening, finally leaving half an hour after we had originally planned.

At 12:00, I messaged the babysitter to let her know – “We’re on our way! So sorry for the delay.” It would be about another four-minute drive home.

12:03. We were driving around the traffic circle that puts us on our street. I was mid-sentence and suddenly “Shh!!!” My husband said and rolled down the window. There it was. The slow and steady rise of a siren filled our ears. We had 30 seconds.

As soon as we were on our street I yelled “STOP THE CAR!” and we came to a screeching halt.

My door was already open when the car stopped. With adrenaline pumping through our veins we ran – not to the closest building where our car was stopped – across the street and over one building to get to our kids.

We weren’t thinking about our safety. We were thinking only of our girls.

Across the street, up the stairs to our building, into the building, and up the three flights, we ran. As people made their way down, as far away from the roof as they could possibly get, we were moving up.

We got to our front door to find our babysitter standing in the hallway, holding our baby, with our four-year-old right next to her.

I didn’t know who to hug first. Do I take the baby into my arms? Do I scoop up my four-year-old? Do I squeeze this 16-year-old girl, who put the safety of my children before her own?

Once the kids were back in bed, Liraz, our babysitter, started to tear up. She explained that she’s used to being taken care of during sirens, not being responsible for others. She said that she was proud of herself that she managed to get out with them on time. I was proud of her too.

I’m usually calm during sirens. I’ve experienced them more times than I can count. This time was different. This time I was away from my babies. This time we were separated by a 30-second run.

_Ariela Schwartz made aliya in 2010 from Baltimore, Maryland, and works as a Health and Medical Content Writer arieladschwartz@gmail.com_
If you ask any Mizrachi member which settlement was the first Mizrachi settlement in Israel, the answer you will probably receive would be Kfar Pines or Kfar Avraham. However, a careful check in the Mizrachi archives will reveal a different answer.

Driving on Route 77 eastwards will lead you to Tiberias. As you descend towards the Kinneret you will see a sign pointing to Arbel. Turning to Route 7717 will take you to the Arbel Valley. According to Chazal, this is where the Geula (redemption) will start. The Midrash describes Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta walking in the Arbel Valley and watching the sunrise – a symbolic sign of the redemption:

“Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta were walking in the valley of Arbel and saw the light of daybreak. Rabbi Chiya said to Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta: thus will be the redemption of Israel- at the beginning, slowly, slowly, and as it goes it will develop and grow.”

They faced many problems – with the Arabs, with the Jewish Agency and among themselves, and eventually, by the end of 1931, they abandoned ship. Some remains of the first houses can still be seen today in the moshav –now non-religious – rebuilt in 1936.

If we continue west, we will reach Arbel. Arbel was already a Jewish settlement during the First Temple period. It was destroyed and rebuilt over and over again. Arbel became a symbol for hope, and the basis for the saying of Nitai the Arbelite, Head of the Sanhedrin in the 2nd century BCE (the time of the Chashmonaim): “Do not give up when destruction falls upon you.” From Arbel’s history he knew very well that destruction is not the end, and hope for redemption and rebuilding is just around the corner.

The symbolism of Arbel is also behind Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir’s words describing the Messiah arriving in the month of Nissan in the Arbel Valley. In the 7th century, in “The Book of Zerubavel,” the Arbel Valley is described as the site of the War of Gog UMagog, a climactic battle that will precipitate the Final Redemption.

Driving towards the Arbel Cliffs you will see a sign proclaiming: “The Ancient Synagogue of Arbel.” Visiting the ruins you will notice that the entrance to the structure is from the east, and the main entrance is built of one stone (a monolith) forming a central main entrance and two smaller ones on both sides. This is just as the prophet described: When the Messiah comes, he will enter through the eastern gate [of Jerusalem], and a late Midrash describes the main entrance and two smaller ones made of one stone. The residents of ancient Arbel, who lived with the symbol and idea that the Redemption and the Messiah will come from here, built their synagogue according to the description in the Midrash.

Traveling in this area today we can see hints of the Geula in its blooming orchards, trees and flourishing agriculture, based on the prophecy of the signs of redemption: “But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home.”

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1 Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 1:1.
2 Talmud Yerushalmi, Pe’ah 87:3.
3 Zechariah 14:4.
4 Midrash Zuta, Shir HaShirim 2, Psikat DeRav Kahana 18.
5 Ezekiel 36:8.

Dr. Hagi Amitzur PhD is a lecturer and researcher focusing on the rural Galilee and its correlation with Rabbinic sources, archaeology and daily life in the Mishnaic and Talmudic period.
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Who Really Initiated Daf Yomi?

RABBI DR. CHAIM SIMONS EXPLORES THE HISTORY OF THE 2711-PAGE PROGRAM

Every seven and a half years, there is a siyum (a celebration signifying completion) held in honor of having learned one daf (page) of Gemara every single day for those past seven and a half years. Jews all over the world participate in such events. During the siyum, photographs of Rabbi Meir Shapiro are displayed, and speakers usually acknowledge that it was he who proposed the idea of Daf Yomi.

It is certainly true that he publicized the idea and encouraged Jews worldwide to participate in this learning schedule, but was the original idea really his?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro was born in 5647 (1887) in the city of Schatz in Bucovina (now Romania). During the course of his life he was the Rabbi of a number of cities. He was also a member of the Sejm (the Polish Parliament), and the President of Agudas Yisrael.

The first Knessia Gedola (literally: large convention) of Agudas Yisrael took place in Elul 5683 (1923).

Rabbi Shapiro wanted delegates to commit to study a page of Gemara every day, and he submitted this proposal at one of the sessions at the convention. However, the members of the committee did not want to take responsibility for the plenum not accepting this revolutionary proposal. They suggested a compromise in that Rabbi Meir Shapiro should put the proposal forward as his own private idea. But Rabbi Shapiro was still worried, because he was among the youngest delegates, and other delegates were therefore unlikely to pay attention to him. Therefore, before the Knessia Gedola opened, he went to speak with the Chafetz Chaim, who suggested an unusual method of ensuring that the proposal would be accepted, which Rabbi Shapiro implemented by saying the following: “How great it is! A Jew travels by boat and takes a tractate of Berachot in his arm. He travels for 15 days from Eretz Yisrael to America, and each day towards evening he opens the Gemara and studies the daf. When he arrives in America, he enters a Beit Midrash in New York and finds Jews studying the very same page that he studied that day, which allows him to happily join their study group. He discusses matters with them and they answer his questions, and the Name of Heaven is glorified and sanctified. Another Jew leaves the United States and travels to Brazil. He returns to the Beit Midrash and finds people immersed in the very page that he studied that day. Can there be a greater unity of hearts than this? What’s more, until the present time there are many tractates that people do not study, tractates that are ‘orphans’ and which only exceptional people concern themselves with. Now the daf will rectify this situation.”

Rabbi Shapiro suggested that the Knessia Gedolah should decide that from Rosh Hashanah 5684 (1923), a daf of Gemara should be studied daily in the order of the Shas. When he put this proposal to the plenum it was enthusiastically received and applauded.

World Mizrachi is hosting an English-language Siyum HaShas event in Yerushalayim to celebrate the completion of the 13th cycle of Daf Yomi.

Rabbi Shapiro once said: “If you look at a page of the Talmud you see words of the greatest Jewish minds covering the entire spectrum of Jewish life and history. There were Jews from the land of Babylon, from France (e.g. Rashi) and Germany (the Ba’alei Tosafot); and in the back of the Talmud, there was Rabbeinu Asher – “the Rosh,” from Spain, the Maharsham from Poland and the Maharam from Lithuania. The Talmud is the most universal and unifying document in Jewish history because all the great people from every place in the world are all gathered in a single place.”

The first cycle of Daf Yomi commenced on the first day of Rosh Hashanah 5684 (September 11, 1923), with tens of thousands of Jews in Europe, America and Israel learning the first daf of the first tractate of the Talmud, Berachot.

7.5 Daf Yomi Facts for a 7.5-Year Cycle

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Today Daf Yomi is studied by tens of thousands of Jews worldwide
Despite this historic proposal – and the consequent attribution of the idea to Rav Shapiro – it appears that he was not the originator.

There are unsubstantiated reports of three people who had such an idea, but for various reasons preferred to ask Rabbi Shapiro to present the idea as if it were his own. The three were: the Rebbe of Tchortkover, Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, the Breslover Chossid, Rabbi Ben-Zion Apter, and the Shotzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shulem Moshkowitz.

However, over two years prior to Rabbi Shapiro’s speech at the Knessia Gedolah, a firsthand report of the proposal appeared in Av 5681 (1921), in the journal “Digleinu” (lit. our flag), in an article written by Rabbi Moshe Menachem Spivak of Shinsa, near Warsaw. The idea of Daf Yomi appeared under the heading Hatza’a Nichbada (an honorable suggestion).

He proposed that a Chevras Shas (a Talmud study group) should be established in which all the participants would be charedi traders, craftsmen or day laborers. They would fix a time between Mincha and Ma’ariv to study a daf of Gemara in the order the tractates appear. Every member of the group would be obligated to take upon himself to learn every day at the same time.

Did Rabbi Shapiro know about Rabbi Spivak’s idea? And if so, did he know of it before he proposed the idea to the Knessia Gedola?

There is no doubt that Rabbi Shapiro knew of Rabbi Spivak’s idea before the Knessia Gedola, and that the two rabbis spoke about it, at least after the Knessia Gedola.

In a letter he wrote to Rabbi Spivak, Rabbi Shapiro apologized for not having mentioned the latter’s idea that had appeared two years earlier in “Digleinu”.

Rabbi Spivak’s family and relatives wanted to publicize this but Rabbi Spivak resisted, not wishing to damage the name of Rabbi Shapiro or of Agudas Yisrael.

Yet there is more evidence that even Rabbi Spivak wasn’t the originator either!

About 10 years before Rabbi Spivak made his proposal in “Digleinu,” a similar suggestion was published by Rabbi Yechezkel Fraser. Rabbi Fraser was born in 5589 (1829) in Virbalis, in the Mariampol district of Lithuania, and he later moved to New York. His proposal appeared in his book “Porachas HaGefen – Yom Yisrael” and was written in Yiddish. He suggested that all Shas groups should unite to be one company, and that each group should teach the same daf in the same masechet at the same time in its own shul.

But that’s not the end of the mystery.

There are at least four sources reporting Daf Yomi suggestions earlier than the above. They are the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Ya’akov Lorberbaum of Lissa, Rabbi Akiva Eiger and the Jewish community in Moravia.

The idea appears in the ordinances of the Jewish community in Moravia in 1759, more than 150 years before Rabbi Shapiro’s passionate speech!

So, regardless of who claims credit for the idea of Daf Yomi, all would agree that its current success and popularity can be traced to Rabbi Meir Shapiro. He was the one that publicized it, and it was due to his charismatic personality and continued efforts that it gradually became a fixture in communities and countries all over the globe. He even prepared a Daf Yomi calendar for the entire cycle which is still in use today.

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons has written a number of books and booklets, some of which can be viewed at www.chaimsimons.net

The Daf Yomi facts were compiled by the editors of HaMizrachi.
A LESSON FOR THE AGES

Every schoolchild knows that Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the pach haShemen – the small jug of pure oil, which lasted for eight days. Yet the only reference to lights in Al HaNissim, the main tefillah outlining the history of the chag, is יָדֵנָךְ וַחֲבָרְךָ, “They kindled lights in Your holy courtyards.” What is the significance of this phrase?

Rav Ya’akov Chaim Sofer, grandson of the Kaf HaChaim, identifies six possible answers. One of the best known, cited in the name of the Chatam Sofer (no relation), is that lights were lit in the courtyards to expand public recognition of the miracle. While explaining the enigmatic phrase in Al HaNissim, this does not address the absence of references to the pach haShemen or the Menorah.

Rav Yisrael Ariel, of the Temple Institute, provides a most creative and novel answer to this question. Citing the Rambam, he explains that there are two daily tasks associated with the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash. The first – hatava – consists of removing the remaining oil, wicks and ash of the previous day’s lighting and refilling the oil in the ner (referring to a cup that holds oil, not a candle). A fresh wick is then placed into the ner. This task is mandated to be performed by a Kohen who is in a state of tahara (purity). The second task is hadlaka – lighting the ner. In theory, this task can be performed by a Kohen who is not in a state of tahara, or even by a zar (a Jewish non-Kohen). Usually, Kohanim tehorim would perform both hatava and hadlaka, but at the first Chanukah lighting, that was not the case.

As we read in Al Hanissim, the battle to return the Beit HaMikdash to Jewish control was waged by valiant warriors, among them Yehuda HaMaccabi and his brothers Shimyon and Yonatan, themselves Kohanim. Even in their state of tuma (impurity), as the Rambam indicates, they could enter and secure the Beit HaMikdash and once purified, the individual Kohanim who had scrupulously remained in a state of tahara began to reinstate the Avodot HaKodesh (Temple Services).

In order to reestablish the service of the Menorah, the Kohanim found seven tabor metal bars which they inserted into an eighth, creating a makeshift Menorah. Oil was next, yet they could only locate a single jug with sufficient oil for only one day. Miraculously, this would last for the eight days needed to secure a new supply of tahor oil. The Kohanim added wicks and then the process of hatava was complete.

Then, Rav Ariel explains, comes the extraordinary lighting. The Jewish army, which included many Kohanim, had been fighting the raging battles and were decidedly not in a state of tahara. Yet, utilizing the seldom-used leniency associated with the actual hadlaka, the Kohanim inside the heichal (sanctuary) removed the oil-filled, wick-in-place neirot from the tops of the newly formed Menorah, and carried them outside to the courtyards. There the warriors, tamei Kohanim and non-Kohanim, holding torches and, being careful not to transfer any tuma, lit the wicks – the small jug of pure oil, readied them outside to the courtyards. The Kohanim then carried the lit neirot back into the heichal and placed them on top of the Menorah.

Rav Ariel’s interpretation demonstrates that the crowning, public act of returning the Beit HaMikdash to its holy glory was not accomplished just by a few elite Kohanim. As an exemplary expression of communal Hakarat HaTov – appreciation – it was shared with those who had placed their lives on the line for G-d, people and country. Those who had faced the horrors of war, and with G-d’s help, achieved victory. With the sparkle of triumph in their eyes, they were able to share in the act of rekindling the light of the Beit HaMikdash – an act that would remain for thousands of years, a supreme symbol of the strength of G-d, Torah and His love for Klal Yisrael.

Until this very day.

1 Chukai Retzoncha, 3:2.
2 The Mikdash Siddur, Chapter 29.
3 Hilchot Biat HaMikdash, 9:5,7,8.
4 Hilchot Beit HaBechira, 7:23.

Rabbi Dr. Jerold Isenberg is Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Theological College and Executive Director of Mizrahi – Religious Zionists of Chicago.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 2020
5 TEVET 5780

17:30 Doors Open

18:00

OPTION 1
The Revolution of Women’s Torah Learning
A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH
Rabbanit Chana Henkin
Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel
Rabbanit Shani Taragin

OPTION 2
Journalism and Judaism
AN INTERVIEW WITH
Sivan Rahav-Meir
and Yedidya Meir

OPTION 3
Working and Learning – Can They Go Together?
Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

OPTION 4
Masechet Berachot: An Overview
Rabbi Sholom Gold

18:50 Break

19:00 21st Century Torah
KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman • President, Yeshiva University
followed by TED-style talks by Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, Rabbanit Shani Taragin and Sivan Rahav-Meir

19:50 Break

20:00 Siyum HaShas with the participation of leading rabbis including Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Rabbi Yaakov Ariel, Rabbi David Stav and Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

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Al HaNissim

The language and structure of the text in the Al HaNissim prayers recited on Chanukah and Purim are strikingly similar. It is clear they are both written with one voice: The texts have an identical opening, Al haNissim veAl haPorkan “Because of the miracles and the redemption.” They both continue with a similar phrase, “In the days of” and then list the central characters in each prayer’s respective holiday; Mordechai and Esther for Purim and Matityahu and the Chashmonaim for Chanukah.

Subsequently, each prayer describes the potential threat, beginning with the phrase “When they (the villains) stood up.” After describing the threats, the salvations are described, each beginning with the identical phrase, VeAta BeRachamecha HaRabim, “And you in Your great mercy.”

However, there are also clear differences. The prayer on Chanukah has an extra paragraph demarcated with the same phrase Shem Gadol, “great name,” in the beginning and LeShimcha HaGadol, “Your great name,” at the end, describing how the Jews retook and entered the Beit HaMikdash, cleaned and purified it and established Chanukah.

Why does the Chanukah text contain this additional section? Additionally, when explaining the salvation, the Chanukah text is significantly more descriptive, offering more detail in the military victory than the Purim text does. Why?

Purim is a story of Jewish survival while Chanukah is one about a nation thriving. The Purim miracle enabled the Jewish people to avoid annihilation and destruction. At the end of the Purim story, they return to their original and neutral status. Purim takes place outside of Israel, where the goal is survival – exactly what the miracle ensured. Chanukah, by contrast, takes place in Israel, the place where the Jewish future is destined to be built. It is therefore not surprising that the Chanukah story ends with a significantly greater climax; namely the rededication of the Beit HaMikdash and the powerful opportunity that brings.

Al HaNissim on Chanukah is designed to capture the potential the Jewish people have specifically when there is a Beit HaMikdash. In light of this understanding, we can now also appreciate the additional element found in the Chanukah prayer. It is designed to illustrate the significance and great importance of rededicating the Beit HaMikdash and the opportunity to praise and share G-d’s great name with the world – LeShimcha HaGadol.

Based upon this, one may further explain why the miracle of Chanukah is celebrated by placing candles by a window projecting outwards, perhaps recalling Jewish responsibility to be an Or LaGoyim, a light upon the nations and share G-d’s great name with the world.
Chanukah commemorates an incredible miracle – when a small flask of oil sufficient to light the Menorah for one night lasted for eight nights.

Yet there is no holiday to commemorate the stopping of the Jordan River when the Jews crossed into Eretz Canaan, no festival for when the fire came down from Heaven for Eliyahu, no celebration of when the sun stopped for Yehoshua during his battle in Givon, and the list goes on. Why does the miracle of the oil, supernatural as it was, warrant an eight-day holiday?

Furthermore, there were miracles all the time in the First Beit Hamikdash, as described in the Talmud: There was never a fly in the slaughtering area, the smoke from the altar went straight up to the sky despite any winds that blew, and even when the courtyard was packed with worshippers, there was plenty of room to bow down at the right moment.1

So why are we celebrating this miracle of all miracles?

The Talmud2 teaches that there were five ways in which the Second Temple was inferior to the First: The Aron Kodesh was missing, there was no heavenly fire, no Shechina, no Ruach HaKodesh, and no Urim VeTumim.

How could we tell that the Shechina, G-d’s Holy Presence, was missing? The Talmud3 tells us that the western lamp of the Menorah, which had the same measurement of oil as all the rest but lasted longer than them all, testified to the presence of the Shechina. For the 40 years that Shimon HaTzadik served as Kohen Gadol during the Second Temple, this daily mini-miracle of the Menorah, returned.4 However, after his death, it would occur only sporadically.

The Chashmonaim fought valiantly to rededicate the Second Temple, but it was a diminished Temple, missing its signature miracles that showed G-d’s favor. Imagine the joy and celebration amongst the Jewish people when G-d not only returned a daily miracle that happened in the First Temple but multiplied it by eight!

At a time when even the daily service in the Temple seemed diminished and lackluster, when the fighters might have wondered if their efforts were even fruitful, G-d sent them a message of encouragement in the form of a miracle resonating with the symbolism of His attention and caring.

However, without the return of the other miracles, wasn’t this still a shell of the glorious First Beit HaMikdash?

By establishing Chanukah, Chazal taught us to celebrate even when we are not back to the perfect place for which we hope and dream. So, too, today we joyously celebrate the miracle of the State of Israel and our return to Yerushalayim, even as we continue to pray daily for G-d to grant us the full Redemption.

Rabbanit Sally Mayer is Rosh Midrasha at Midreshet Lindenbaum’s Overseas Program

1 Yoma 21a.
2 Yoma 21b.
3 Shabbat.
4 Yoma 39a.
We are fast approaching Chanukah, celebrating the triumph of Torah over secularism. This is of special significance to me, having had a wide exposure to secularism that, thank G-d, has not compromised my Torah dedication.

I was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which had no cheder, no yeshiva, no formal Jewish education. I had no frum friends or playmates, except for the octogenarians in my father’s shul. My oldest brother left for the yeshiva in New York when I was six, followed just a year later by the next brother. My two younger brothers did not come around until I was eight. I attended public school, and what limited friendships I had were with non-Jewish kids.

When my father was asked how he was able to raise five frum sons in Milwaukee, he answered, “I never left Hornosteiple,” referring to the Ukranian town in which his father and grandfather were Chassidic rebbes. True, our home was an oasis of Torah and Chassidut, but it was in a spiritually-barren community. When we left the confines of our home, we were in a secular culture. Even my father’s heroic Chassidut was not enough to resist the pressure of the community.

But there is another crucial factor in our survival. My mother was the eldest daughter of the Kedushas Tzion h’yd, the Rebbe of Bobov. When she was a child of six, she watched my great-grandfather, Rebbe Shlomo Halberstam, the first Rebbe of Bobov, light the Chanukah menorah. The Rebbe lit the menorah, then sat silently, with his eyes closed, meditating. At times, tears rolled down his face.

“Zeide,” my mother asked. “What are you thinking about?” Zeide answered, “I’m davening to G-d that you should have good children.” He continued his silent tefillot for half an hour.

After the Holocaust, my grandmother, the Bobover Rebbetzin, came to America. When the conversation turned to our attending college, my Bubby said to my mother, “You have no reason to worry. You have a bracha from Zeide.”

Even in many frum homes, the father lights the menorah, sings Maoz Tzur, and after just five minutes, goes about his usual activities. The Talmud says that lighting the Chanukah menorah is a segula (a Kabbalistic protective or benevolent charm or ritual) to have children that are Torah scholars. But this does not occur automatically. It requires intense tefillah.

We will soon be observing Chanukah. The challenge from the secular community today is every bit as serious as in the days of Matityahu. Lighting the menorah should be accompanied by intense prayer for our children and grandchildren to be loyal to the Torah.

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1 Shabbat 3b.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski is a psychiatrist and rabbi, and founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania
A t times, the Torah’s use of numbers seems puzzling to our modern sensitivities, and perhaps nowhere more than when the Torah states that 70 descendants of Jacob went down to Egypt and lists the names of each (Gen. 46:8–27). The number of names listed and the final tally cross-validate each other giving the impression that this is a full and realistic census. However, a closer look at the name list and the summary figures it offers for each of the matriarchs reveals puzzling data. Only two of the named individuals are women. It is inconceivable that the ratio of Jacob’s male to female descendants was 34:1. Had the census listed male members only, one might have concluded that the Torah was counting men alone. But by listing two women, it implies that women are also considered in this count. Moreover, the Torah emphasizes that Jacob went down to Egypt with all his daughters-in-law (Gen. 46:5, 15) and all his daughters and granddaughters (Gen. 46:7). For all these reasons Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, the Netziv, concludes that, in fact, many more than 70 persons descended to Egypt (HaEmek Davar, Gen. 46:7).

Throughout the writings of the ancient Near East, numbers seemingly used in a statistical sense are used, in fact, in creative ways to impart ideas, and that is the case here. Numbers in Genesis 46 are designed to reflect status, and this is seen most clearly through another problem in this census: the ‘discrepancy’ concerning the descendants of Leah; they are said to tally 33 (Gen. 46:15), while the Torah lists only 32 names. When we look at the actual names listed in Genesis 46 – as opposed to the summary tally figures for each of the four matriarchs – a clear pattern emerges: the number of descendants of Rachel (14; Gen. 46:20–21) is double the number of descendants of her handmaid, Bilhah (seven; 46:23–24). Similarly, the number of Leah’s descendants (32; 46:9–14) is likewise double of that of her handmaid, Zilpah’s (16; 46:16–17). However, this is only achieved by applying different ‘rules’ to the question of who is counted as a descendant of each of the wives. Rachel’s descendants, for example, include grandsons – Menashe and Ephraim – whereas no other grandsons are included in this census, even though the Torah states that grandchildren were among those who descended to Egypt with Jacob (Gen. 46:7).

However, when we examine not the actual number of names listed for Jacob’s descendants, but rather the summary tally totals, a different axis of significance emerges. The numbers form multiples of seven. There is a grand total of 70 descendants (Gen. 46:27). The descendants of Bilhah are seven (46:25). Those of Rachel total 14 (46:22). Those of Leah (30; 46:15) and of Zilpah (16; 46:18) total 49. The message that emerges is that the “whole” of Israel represented a “significant” contingent – it “counts” 70 individuals. Moreover, it is significant because its subdivisions are multiples of seven as well. Factually, there were far more than 70 members of Jacob’s family who descended to Egypt, as claimed by the Netziv. But the point of the list in the first place was never to offer a roll call. We call the list a census, but that label represents little more than our construction of what we think it is telling us. It is, in fact, an encoded way of demonstrating G-d’s blessing to Jacob and his family as they descend to Egypt. This is one of the many ways seemingly ‘embarrassing’ discrepancies in the Torah are understood in a new light when we read the Torah not according to our own conventions, but in accordance with the writing conventions of ancient times...


COMING SOON!

WHEN SEVENTY ISN’T SEVENTY: NUMBERS IN THE TORAH

Rabbi Dr. Joshua Berman, Bar-Ilan University

WHEN SEVENTY ISN’T SEVENTY: NUMBERS IN THE TORAH

Rabbi Dr. Joshua Berman, Bar-Ilan University
EDUCATION AND DEDICATION

The etymology of the word Chanukah is more complicated than one might think.

First of all, the popular understanding that the name of the holiday comes from a portmanteau of the phrase חנוכה – “They (the Maccabees) rested on the 25th (of the month of Kislev)” is a cute mnemonic, but has nothing to do with the origin of the holiday. The name comes from the chanukah of the Temple.

Why can’t I just translate chanukah into English? Even just agreeing on a translation isn’t simple. The complication arises from the multiple meanings of the root כֶּנֶךְ. While כֶּנֶךְ in modern Hebrew can mean “to educate,” as in chinuch, כֶּנֶךְ, כֶּנֶכְּ, I always thought that כֶּנֶךְ for chanukah meant “dedication.” However, Prof. Stefan Reif shows how the basic meaning of the root כֶּנֶךְ is “to begin, to initiate.” Dedicate, on the other hand, means “to consecrate to sacred uses” – קדש in Hebrew.

One of Reif’s proofs is Deuteronomy 20:5, where it says: וַיָּרֶק אֶת חֲנִיכָיו מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה גַּבוֹת תַּחְתָּלָה וּלְאָלָה תֹּקֵם.

While the JPS translates it as “Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it?” Reif would translate it as “initiated it” or “started to live in it.” Reif quotes an earlier article as saying it does not mean “removing from the realm of the profane… to that of the sacred, but the putting to common use.” He also points out that no dedication of a private house is found in the Bible or “subsequent Jewish custom” and that “house dedication” is a modern Jewish custom.

He writes that in the places where the verb כֶּנֶךְ is used in regards to the Mishkan or Beit HaMikdash (Numbers 7:10, Chronicles II 7:5-9), a good translation would be “initiation” or “starting upon their course of beneficial service.” If “dedication” was intended, the verb should have been קדש ְו כֶּנֶךְ.

According to Reif, the reading of כֶּנֶךְ as “to train, instruct” comes from a mistranslation of Proverbs 22:6 – חנך על פִּדָּרָב.

While the JPS has “Train a lad in the way he ought to go,” Reif prefers “Start a boy on the right road.” (Another common misunderstanding of this verse is that כֶּנֶךְ means “according to his way.” But based on the context of the verse, which mentions his old age in the second half, the plain meaning of the phrase here means “at the beginning of his path.”)

A number of Rishonim support Reif’s approach. Rashi on Genesis 14:14 writes that “the word כֶּנֶךְ signifies introducing a person or a thing, for the first time, to some particular occupation in which it is intended he should remain.” Radak in Sefer HaShorashim follows the same approach.

Reif concludes by writing: the later development of the noun כֶּנֶךְ chinuch in the sense of “education” also demonstrates that the rendering “dedication” is inimical to the essential meaning of the stem.

This all seems very convincing. However, Reif does not discuss an important aspect of the etymology of כֶּנֶךְ. Ernest Klein writes in his dictionary entry for כֶּנֶךְ:

Denominated from chekh, כך (palate) and originally meaning ‘to rub the palate of a child with chewed dates.’ Compare Arabic hanak (palate), hence hannaka (he rubbed the palate of a child), hanaka (he taught, instructed).

So according to Klein, the development is palate → rubbing the palate → instruction. It is unclear how we get from there to “dedicate” (as Klein has it) or “initiate.” As Reif wrote, the case for development from “initiation” to “education” is stronger than that from “dedication” to “education.” But considering the linguistic evidence, perhaps the order needs to be reversed – the word first meant education, and only later meant initiation (of the child).

One additional point of interest is that the word chanich כֶּנֶךְ – which today means “pupil, apprentice, member of a youth group” – might not be related to the root כֶּנֶךְ at all. It appears only once in the Bible, in Genesis 14:14.

The JPS translation is “he mustered his retainers” and Prof. Menachem Kaddari claims that it comes from an Egyptian word ha-na ku-u-ka meaning “armed retainers.” But certainly today, *chanich* has become fully understood as associated with education.

To conclude, I think that the best translation for Chanukah would be “inauguration.” It maintains the sense of initiation, and also denotes consecration, as appropriate to the Temple.

David Curwin is a writer living in Efrat, and the author of the Balashon blog balashon.com • balashon1@gmail.com
Daf 66: משלות זוגותא — Mishnah and Gemara

The Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud) is a record of academic discussions of conducted by the Amoraim about the Mishnah. The Talmud Bavli includes most subjects addressed in the Mishnah, as well as much related Midrash Halacha and Midrash Aggadah. Additional Aggadic material, featuring stories about the lives of the sages, was incorporated to teach future generations about their exemplary character traits. The six sedarim (orders) of the Mishnah are: Zeraim (Seeds); Mo’ed (Appointed Time); Nashim (Women); Nezikin (Damages); Kodashim (Sacred Matters); Taharot (Matters of Ritual Purity). The names of the sedarim are remembered by the mnemonic device, ZMen NaKat. The Talmud Bavli contains only one masechet in Seder Taharot, which is Masechet Niddah — and which is the final masechet of the Babylonian Talmud.

[TO READ THE REST OF THIS WEEK’S DAF YOMI SELECTIONS, VISIT WWW.LEXUSISRAEL.COM]

ILLUSTRATION OF THE WEEK — Put on your thinking cap!

Scan the QR code to submit your answers for a chance to win a prize!

LOOK CLOSELY AT THE ILLUSTRATION AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
1. What event is depicted here?
2. When did the event in the illustration take place?
3. Where did the event in the illustration take place?
4. Who is the man fighting next to the legs of the elephant?
5. What town did these fighters come from?

Explanation

Bet Hillel is of the view that the number of candles lit on Hanukkah increases each night as the holiday progresses. One on the first night, two on the second night, etc. Why? Because in sacred matters we always go up, we do not go down.

TALMUD ISRAELI
CHIDON OLAMI
15 December 2019
17 Kislev 5780

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