



Chanukah

Doing What We Can

Global events often make us feel like we and our efforts are insignificant. Tens of millions of people have been sick and most of the world has been affected by Corona. What difference does our cautiousness make within the bigger picture?

With 150 million people voting in a presidential election, how important is our one vote? In most of the states of the US, the outcome of the election was a foregone conclusion before the voting even began.

Reuven Saving Yosef

The Torah speaks of this in its description of Reuven's actions on behalf of his brother Yosef. Though Reuven did not completely save Yosef and was devastated when he returned to the pit to find that Yosef had been sold into slavery,¹ the Torah describes Reuven's saving of Yosef from death as a *הצלה* (salvation).² Though he did not succeed fully, it is important to appreciate what he did accomplish.

The Chanukah Connection

The Midrash³ associates Reuven's salvation with our lighting of Chanukah candles at the entrance to our homes. One fulfills the *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles through merely lighting them.⁴ We are not required to ensure that the candles remain lit and we cannot guarantee how widely they will be seen. We are required to do our part by lighting the candles. The rest is not in our hands.

The nature of the *mitzvah* accurately reflects the historical event it eternalizes. The *Chashmonaim* fought a seemingly hopeless battle. It was the few against the many, the weak against the mighty. That said, they knew their responsibility

was to do what they could to protect their values and fight for Jewish independence.

Helping One Starfish

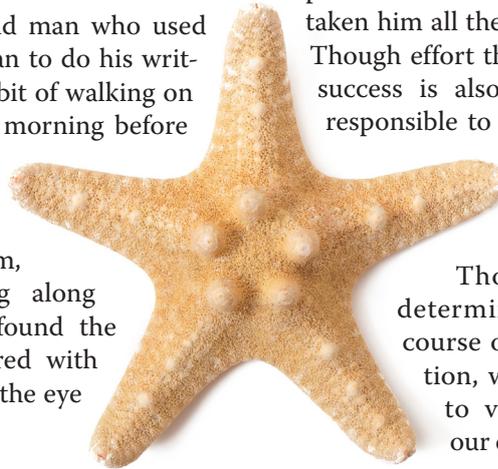
There was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, after a big storm, he was walking along the shore and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and the man could see he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied, "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. You won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned to the man and said, "It made a difference to that one!"⁵



Making Sure We Do All We Can

The Midrash⁶ says that had Reuven known the Torah would record his actions, he would have immediately placed Yosef on his shoulders and taken him all the way back to Ya'akov. Though effort that yields only partial success is also significant, we are responsible to apply ourselves fully, to invest all that we are truly able to.

Though we may not determine the pandemic's course or who wins an election, we should make sure to value and maximize our efforts. In the merit of our doing so, may *Hashem* assist us in the same way that

He assisted the *Chashmonaim* – *בְּיָמֵינוּ יִשְׁעוּנוּ*

1 Bereishit 37:29.

2 Ibid 37:21-22.

3 See Zechor L'Avraham who brings this Midrash. See also Rav Shlomo Kluger's *Kehilat Yaakov*, which offers over 20 explanations for this Midrash.

4 See Shabbat 22b which concludes that the *mitzvah* is fulfilled through lighting and nothing further is required.

5 Adapted from 'The Star Thrower,' by Loren Eiseley.

6 Bereishit Rabbah 34:8.



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Rabbanit Shani Taragin

The End of the Beginning... and The Beginning of the End

The Jewish calendar is divided into two periods of six months – one beginning with Nissan as the “first of the months” (Shemot 12:1) and the other beginning with Tishrei as “Rosh Hashanah” – the beginning of the year. Each period is subsequently divided into two *tekufot* (seasons)¹. Chanukah is celebrated in the very middle of the Tishrei–Tevet *tekufa*, the time of the winter solstice. In many ways, it is therefore the end of the beginning of the year and the beginning of the end of the six-month period.

As the end of the beginning of the year, we find numerous parallels between Chanukah and Sukkot:

From Shavuot till Sukkot, *Bikkurim* are brought with the famous proclamation of “*Arami Oved Avi*.” From Sukkot till Chanukah they are brought without the proclamation (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:6). The Sfat Emet (Chanukah 5644) infers from this that the *simcha* of Sukkot continues through Chanukah!

Beit Shammai’s position of lighting Chanukah candles in descending sequence from 8-1 is based on the descending order of sacrifices offered on Sukkot (Shabbat 21b).

Juxtaposed to the laws of the holiday of Sukkot in Parashat Emor, the Torah teaches us to contribute pure olive oil to light the *menorah* in the Mikdash – a hint to Chanukah. Rav Eliezer of Worms says the holidays are connected by the number of days and by the full Hallel (Rokeach, Hilchot Chanukah 225).

The Gemara invalidates Chanukah candles and a *sukkah* higher than 20 *amot*.²

There is a principle of “*Hiddur – Mehadrin min HaMehadrin*” that applies particularly to the Four Species on Sukkot and lighting candles on Chanukah (Shulchan Aruch OC 671:2).

Torches of fire accompanied the spectacular dancing at the *Simchat Beit*

HaShoeva (Masechet Sukkah 5:3). On Chanukah, we commemorate the miracle of finding oil by lighting candles for eight nights. The Gemara juxtaposes the laws of wicks and oils used for the *Simchat Beit HaShoeva* to the laws of wicks and oils used to light the Chanukah candles (Shabbat 21a).

Upon inaugurating the Mikdash, Yehuda HaMaccabi commanded the Jews to celebrate eight days with their agricultural species, “like the days of Sukkot,” for they could not properly celebrate Sukkot that year (Book of Maccabees II, 10:6-7). Just as King Shlomo inaugurated the Mikdash on Sukkot (Melachim I, 8:65-6), it was purified and inaugurated on Chanukah (hence the name – “to dedicate”).

Chaggai (2:18) delivered his prophecy concerning the reestablishment of the Mikdash and the success of the olive harvest on the 24th of Kislev as a continuation of his previous prophecy on the 21st of Tishrei (Sukkot).³

The Sfat Emet explains that the “light of Sukkot” mandated by the Torah is reflected through the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah!⁴

With its many parallels to the Tishrei holiday of Sukkot, Chanukah not only concludes the beginning of the season, but is also the beginning of the end of the first six months of the year, as it heralds “*Tekufat Tevet*.” Not in an apocalyptic sense of course; on the contrary, Chanukah reinvigorates and inspires us to anticipate redemption in literally the darkest times of the year.

The Gemara (Avodah Zara 8a) records how Adam HaRishon saw the daylight hours receding and thought *Hashem* wanted to restore the world to complete darkness as punishment for his sin. He therefore fasted for eight days until he saw the daylight hours begin to increase, and then he “celebrated for

eight days. The next year he instituted those days as holidays.” *Chazal* employ the exact same terminology in teaching us of the miracle of Chanukah: “A miracle occurred and they lit the Menorah from it for eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *Hallel* and special thanksgiving in prayer and blessings” (Shabbat 21b). Chanukah is the beginning of a new *tekufa* as daylight time increases. Remarkably, we are enjoined to participate in this increase of light in tandem with *Hashem*’s natural solar forces.

With numerous vaccines for Coronavirus poised for worldwide distribution over the next few months, the media is full of news of “the beginning of the end of Covid-19.” Chanukah reminds us that we have reached a critical juncture – we must look back at the past few months and reflect upon lessons we have learned since Nissan, and especially from Tishrei-Sukkot, till now. Now is also the time to ponder what the upcoming months of Tevet-Shevat-Adar may bring.

Sukkot and Chanukah teach us that the light of one season has effects on the subsequent ones as well. The light of Chanukah shines not just from natural sources. We also banish the darkness through our own “candle lighting” initiatives as we prepare for better and brighter beginnings!

1 See Eruvin 56a-b, Sanhedrin 13a and Avodah Zara 8a.

2 Shabbat 22a (see Tosfot “*ner*”).

3 See Rav Yoel Bin-Nun, “Yom Yesod Heichal Hashem,” Megadim 12, 49-97.

4 Chanukah 5641.

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