



## The Power of Loneliness

**W**e've reached the culmination of the month of Kislev, whose entire nature is supernatural. Chanukah is above and beyond nature! Or better still, it is natural that miracles are performed at this time and the *Ribono Shel Olam* answers our prayers. He wants to make miracles for us, with our help.

On the eight days of Chanukah we have the ability to change decrees. Yes, Chanukah has the ability to actually overturn decrees. During normal times, a decree is a decree. Actions don't help. We cannot change the outcome. But on Chanukah, for eight days, we have the opportunity to act and make the effort. G-d "moves over" (as it were) and through our intervention, desires to perform miracles.

There are even great secrets hidden in the words of the *beracha* on the candles. The Sephardim say: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר חֲנֻכָּה, while the Ashkenazim say: נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

What's the difference? One word: שֶׁל.

The mystic, Rabbi Ben-Tzion Mutzafi explains the Sephardi version: the *beracha* contains exactly 13 words. According to the Arizal, through uttering each one, we reveal one of the 13 *middot haRachamim* (G-d's attributes of mercy): ה', ה', ק-ל, רחום, וְחֲנוּן, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם, וְרַב חַסֵּד, וְאֶמֶת. נֵצֵר חֻסֵּד לְאֱלֹפִים נִשָּׂא עוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְּוָה. He also explains the deeper meaning of the other customs surrounding the Chanukah candles, like singing Maoz Tzur.

Although customs and *segulot* are not essential for the actual lighting, they do serve to make the *mitzvah* even more precious, as the Rambam

uncharacteristically writes מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד *mitzvah*.



### Lighting the First Candle

The first candle is נֵר אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ, "one candle per household." Therefore, try to at least light this candle at home. Even if you are a guest somewhere and you don't sleep at home, halachically you must light in your own house as well, before or after, because it brings blessing to your home.

So light and bear in mind: "I am now invoking those days that were, those wondrous lights from the time of the Chanukah miracles."

Because in Judaism, even time is above time.

According to the Maharal, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev and the Chatam Sofer, the first candle is for all the lonely people.

For anyone who feels like a lone candle in the dark. For those wanting to get married. Or to think of others in their loneliness and isolation.

The first candle also corresponds to Avraham, the epitome of kindness. Be kind. Light and pray for someone sitting in the dark, someone who is suffering. Prayer for others is the greatest kindness, and it saves the one who prays from loneliness as well.

I once received a letter from a mother who told me what she prayed for on the first night of Chanukah. In front of that one lonely candle she prayed that her only child would not grow up lonely. That he should have a brother or sister. And indeed, after much heartache and effort, she and her husband were blessed with another son.

On the first night, the lonely people say to the *Ribono Shel Olam*: "Look Hashem, I've been struggling alone in this darkness, yearning and asking: איכה? Where are you? I'm now lighting a candle for You in the dark and believe that my complete salvation is imminent."

Even if the candle has already been extinguished, keep praying. Give loneliness a place in your prayer.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, the merits of our lonely people will bring the light of *Mashiach*. Why? Because one small, lone candle can eradicate great darkness.

The redemption will come, writes Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, when you understand: עֲרַכְתִּי נֵר לְמִשְׁיַחִי, "I have lit a candle for my redeemer," (Tehillim 135:17). עֲרַכְתִּי - I have worth (בעל ערך) because even in my loneliness, I illuminate a dark world.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi is a popular Israeli teacher, speaker and writer.

