



The Messages of the Name of Chanukah

The name of the holiday can be understood in a number of ways. The פשוט, the straightforward explanation, is that it comes from the idea of the inauguration. The Torah describes the offerings brought by the *nesi'im* at the onset of the use of the altar in the Mishkan as קִנְיַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ (Bamidbar Chapter 7). This literal connection is most likely the reason the offerings of the *nesi'im* are the Torah reading for each day of Chanukah.

הַנּוֹכָח, in the sense of the dedication of a new structure, is also used in context of the beginning of the use of the Temple built by Shlomo; multiple sacrifices were brought for the inauguration of the House of G-d by the king and all of Israel (Kings 2, 8:63). A הַנּוֹכָח was also performed upon the dedication of the Second Temple (Ezra 6:17) and completion of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem at the time of return from Babylon (Nehemiah 12:27). This meaning of the name is most connected to the spiritual reason for Chanukah, the rededication of the *Menorah* and Temple after it had been defiled by the Syrian-Greek oppressors. This reason for Chanukah is most closely associated with one of the commandments of Chanukah, the lighting of candles.

The second stream of interpretation of the name separates the last two letters from the rest of the work.

The last two letters – כ and ה – are the date in Kislev on which the holiday falls. The remaining letters spell נָחַד, they rested. Thus the name can also be read “they rested on the 25th” (Machzor Vitry Seder Chanukah 259). This version of the name thus reflects the more worldly reason for the celebration of Chanukah, the miracle of winning the battle against the Syrian-Greeks and the ability to rest at the end of this battle. This reason for Chanukah is most closely associated with the second commandment of Chanukah, the reciting of prayers of thanks such as *Hallel* and additions of portions of thanks in the *Amidah* and *Birkat HaMazon*.

However, there is yet another word reflected in the name of Chanukah, that of הַנּוֹרָה, education. This is fitting too, as Chanukah celebrates the victory of the Jews in regaining the central part of Jewish education, the study of Torah. In the words of the Rambam, *Hilchot Megillah VeChanukah* Chapter 3: “At the time of the Second Temple, when the Greeks ruled, they decreed edicts to remove Jews from their religion and to prevent their involvement with Torah and commandments.” Therefore, the reason for the worldly battle in the first place was to reclaim the spiritual world G-d had given us through the Torah.

Candles are a wonderful metaphor for education. In lighting one candle from another, the fire takes hold of the second candle, but is not diminished in the first. So too in education. When a teacher passes on knowledge to his or her student, the student gains understanding and the teacher’s knowledge is not diminished.

Prayers of thanks should also be an important part of education. This can be more challenging as there is a natural tendency to offer thanks if one is dealt the ‘ideal’ student. It is harder to feel thanks for students who are more challenging. But that too is a message of Chanukah. The victory over the Greeks was not perfect. The battle raged for years after the Temple dedication and the Hasmonean Dynasty lasted only 100 years. Yet every year we say *Hallel* for the victory we were given at that time. So too, we should be thankful for all of our students and help each of them shine their unique light on the world.

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