

Chanukah: Affectionate Light

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks, how can we compare the miracle of the oil to the incredible military victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks? After all it was the latter that freed us and made it possible for us to once again keep the Torah. Why then does the *yom tov* mainly focus on the miracle of the oil?

The Sichot Mussar brings a number of examples in the Torah where we find that Hashem performed miracles that seemed unnecessary. In Parshat Vayeishev we find that Yosef was sold to a band of Arab traders who normally transported foul smelling oils. However, this time they were carrying sweet smelling spices. Rashi points out that Hashem made it this way so that Yosef wouldn't suffer as he traveled to Egypt. The Sichot Mussar asks, Yosef's life had just been turned upside down. He went from being the favored child of his holy father to a slave bound in chains. Did he really care what he was smelling? Specifically during this time of darkness there was a danger that Yosef would fall into depression. Hashem wanted to encourage him, "I'm still with you, don't lose faith." It was a *hearat panim*, as if Hashem's face was shining on Yosef, expressing His love and care even during a time of suffering.

Likewise, when Miriam brought Yocheved to nurse Moshe, Batya paid her. The payment too was a *hearat panim* as if Hashem lovingly said, "I know you don't need the money, it's your own son, but here's a small gift anyway." It's specifically through these small seemingly unnecessary acts of kindness that Hashem shows His deep affection for us.

of the military victory was critical for the continued existence of *Klal Yisrael*. Not so the oil. They could have used impure oil. But Hashem helped the *kohanim* find a cruse of pure oil and He let it burn miraculously for eight days. This, more than the war, showed His caring for us. The essence of Chanukah is a reflection of how much Hashem loves us.

In Tehilim it says, "*Hashem zilcha*," Hashem is our shadow. He reflects the level that we're at. When He saw the incredible *ahavat Hashem* and *mesirat nefesh* of the Chashmonaim he responded by showing his love for us. The love, passion, and self sacrifice of the Chashmonaim inspired Hashem's *hearat panim*.

We too can continue this flow of divine energy and love by serving Hashem with passion and devotion. The first person who modeled this for us was Aharon *hakohen*. The Torah says, "*Vaya'as kein Aharon*." Rashi explains that in all the years that Aharon lit the *menorah* he had the same excitement and enthusiasm that he had on the first day. Chanukah is about rededication and renewal. It's tapping into the fervor and zeal of Aharon and the Chashmonaim and feeling that daily excitement and love in our own *avodat Hashem*. How can we do this? We say in davening, "*Kol haneshama tehalal kah*." The commentators explain, "*Al kol neshima*," for every breath of life we have to thank Hashem. The beauty of Chanukah is making that gratitude a part of our life. Although the *mitzvah* is to publicize the miracle, we light the *menorah* close to home to make it as personal as possible.

corresponds to the good deeds of a person. Hashem loves the *mitzvot* of *Klal Yisrael*, as the Midrash says, Hashem desires the work and sweat of our hands. When He sees our efforts, He gives us His seal of approval by showing His *he'arat panim*. The miracle happened through the *menorah* because it symbolizes our passion and investment in *mitzvot*. The Rambam calls *ner Chanukah*, "*mitzvah chaviva ad moed*" (a very beloved *mitzvah*). It reflects how much Hashem loves our good deeds. The Be'er Mayim Chayim writes that if we could only see the effect of one small *mitzvah*, we would run after good deeds without any regard to our physical needs. *Ner Chanukah* is where earthly fire meets heavenly fire. It's an encapsulation of the light of all our *mitzvot*.

The Ramchal offers a practical suggestion how to do *mitzvot* with more zeal. Think for a moment about all the wonders and kindness Hashem does and continues to do for you. The more you reflect, the greater your desire will be to obey Him. You won't just rush through *mitzvot*, you'll invest your whole being into it as a way of expressing all your profound gratitude. Chanukah is meant to arouse us out of our stupor, to stop looking at life as blasé, as nature, as the way things are supposed to be. Chanukah is *l'hodot u'lehallel*, not just for the miracles of war, but for all the miracles that He does for us every day. When we feel Hashem's face shining on us, when we feel His intense love, then we become filled with appreciation and our *avodat Hashem* is transformed.

In the same way, Rav Chaim says, the miracle The Ohr Gedalyau notes that the *menorah*

Chanukah: Sfas Emes Part 2-Section 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The *halacha* states that one can light Chanukah candles, "*Ad shetichla regel min hashuk*," until the time that people are no longer walking in the marketplace. *Regel* is related to habit, *hergel*, the way one is used to doing things. The light of Chanukah is meant to lift us above routine. Chanukah is related to *chinuch*, renewal. It's a time to reignite our passion in *avodat Hashem*.

Exile forces us out of complacency. When we

saw face to face the moral bankruptcy of the Babylonians, the material excesses of the Persians, and the intellectual depravity of the Greeks, there was an incredible *hischadshut* (renewal). We became stronger for having faced the evil.

In Hallel we say, "*Hallelu avdei Hashem*." As long as the Jews felt subservient to the Greeks, their need to serve couldn't be channeled towards Hashem. The Zohar writes

that we can only be perfect servants of Hashem if we tap into the full powers of our heart and mind and put it somewhere. Then we can transfer it. But if we're asleep and our mind is taken up with nonsensical matters, we can't get to *malchut shamayim*.

The deeper the exile, the more authentic the redemption. The end letters of the verse, "*Nachon libo batuach b'Hashem*," is Chanukah. When we reach a point of surrendering to

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Hashem, when we can say our heart relies only on Him, then we can affirm that the exile was good.

Our rejection of the Greek constraints of the mind, of the false idols, got us higher than we could've possibly reached had we not lived through it.

Western ideology has aspects of *Galut Yavan*. It espouses humanism and the idea that everything can be folded up and made to fit so it feels good and looks good. The more passionately we reject this and develop our *emunah*, the more we'll see this as a stage we had to go through along the way. In our personal lives too, there are times of exiles and redemption. We have to accept the down times as stepping stones to renewal.

Take some time on Chanukah to watch the flickering flames of the *menorah*. Their holy light has the power to transform. The first half hour after lighting, should ideally be treated like *chol hamoed* in regard to doing work.

There should be some inner distancing from one's own need to take over and create and fix. The Chanukah lights can reveal our true inner selves.

The Mishna in Avot says, "Examine these three things and you will not come to sin, where you came from, where you are going, and who you will account to." This is meant to humble us. The inability to see beyond our own blinkers can blind us. The flames of Chanukah give us light. The Gemara says that a candle is good for examination. On Chanukah we are meant to look deeply within ourselves to find our own unique spark of infinite divine light.

Halacha says that the *mezuzah* should be on the right side and the *menorah* on the left side. The right, stronger, side symbolizes recognition of Hashem's unifying force. The left, weaker, side tells us that ner Chanukah has the ability to help us find Hashem where he's least accessible, within the part of us that isn't naturally attuned to Him. The Chanukah lights tell us that Hashem is right here with us the same way He was in the *beit hamikdash* at the time of the miracle. The Jews were at a very low level then, in much the same place we are now. Just as He fought our battles and made us recognize who our enemies really were, He can do the same for us. Chanukah is not letting oneself be defined by darkness. It's finding the light and letting it transform us.

Chanuka: The Unique Role of the Kohen

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman

What is the intrinsic relationship between *kehuna* and *Chanuka*? Rashi in Beha'alotcha notes that the miracle of Chanukah had to happen through the *kohanim*. After Aharon Hakohen had missed out on the first *Chanukat ha'Nesiiim*, Hashem appeased him by assuring him that the second Chanukah would happen through his descendants. In the *Al Hanisim* song we say, "*al yedei kohanecha hakedoshim*." We emphasize that the miracle happened through the *kohanim* and that they are an essential aspect of Chanukah.

Rashi points out that Hashem punished Moshe for initially refusing to go to Paro by taking the *kehuna* away from him and giving it to Aharon. The Gur Aryeh asks how was this *midah keneged midah* (measure for measure)? He explains that the *kohanim* are meant to be the messengers between Hashem and the Jewish people. In the *beit hamikdash*, they would offer our sacrifices to the Almighty and they continue to bring

Hashem's blessing down to us through the *birkat kohanim* (priestly blessing). When Moshe refused to be the messenger of Hashem and the Jewish people to Paro, Hashem took away the *kehuna* from him.

The Mishna in Avot tells us, three crowns were given to the Jewish people, *keter kehuna*, *keter malchut*, and *keter Torah*. Each crown corresponds to a different level of the person: *guf* (body), *nefesh* (soul), and *sechel* (mind). The Maharal explains that *keter kehuna* corresponds to the holiness of the body. *Kehuna* is the only crown of the three that is hereditary. In addition, blemishes of the body disqualify a *kohen*. We do not find this in any other area of Torah law except in special cases related to judges.

The Maharal says that in addition to the body, *kehuna* parallels the brain and the soul. Both *kehuna* and speech signify the meeting point of the physical and spiritual worlds. When Hashem created Adam, the Torah says,

"*Vayehi adam l'nefesh chaya*." Unkelos translates *nefesh chaya* to mean 'a speaking spirit.' Speech is the unique identifying factor that differentiates man from animal and it emanates from the point where body and soul meet. The Chofetz Chaim, the father of the modern *shemirat haloshon* movement, was a *kohen*. The navi Malachi says, "*Ki siftei kohen yishmeru daat*." Only a *kohen* could pronounce a leper who spoke *loshon hara* impure. When he refused to speak, Moshe lost the *kehuna*.

The miracle of Chanukah had to happen through the *kohanim* because it was a battle against the distorted ideology of Yavan. The Greeks claimed that one could not have a relationship with an intangible entity. They insisted that the world was not meant to be elevated. Ultimately, the *kohanim*, whose whole essence is connecting the physical to the spiritual, won over them, and gave us Chanukah.