
THE AKKAD EDITION

The Shaare Rahamim Hanukkah Booklet

Berachot &
mizmorim

Our Rabbi's
messages

Commentary on
Al Hanissim

Divrei Hazal on
Hanukah

Midrash Hanukah

Overview of
Hanukah History
by Rabbi Miller

Story of Yehudit

Sephardic Laws
and Customs



Compiled & published by Cong. Shaare Rahamim

Table of Contents

• ברכות על המנורה	
• Our Rabbi's Message	11-41
• Commentary on Al Hanissim	42
• Divrei Hazal on Hanukah	62
• Midrash Hanukah (Adapted from Me'Am Loez)	72
• Overview of Hanukah History (Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt"l) ..	78
• Yehudit's Saga (Adapted from Me'Am Loez)	90
• Yosifon (excerpts Ch. 18 and 20)	99

Historical Overview of Hanukah & General Laws

A. Why we light the menorah	107
B. Seudah- not mandatory, but customary	108
C. Custom to eat dairy	108
D. No eulogies, fasting or Tachnun on Hanukah	108

Who is Obligated to Kindle the Hanukah Menorah?

A. Sephardic Custom-head of household lights for everyone	108
B. Children living away from home.....	109
C. Head of the house away overnight.....	109
D. Guest- visiting and spending the night.....	109
E. Guest-visiting and returning home to sleep	109
F. Women- living alone	109
G. Living alone/house without public exposure.....	109
H. Guest at hotel	109
I. Traveler	109
J. Blind Person	109
K. Moves from one place to another the same night	109

Placement of Hanukah Menorah

A. Where should menorah be placed?	110
B. Height of Menorah.....	110
C. Apartment Buildings	110
D. Windows not facing the street	110

How to Light the Menorah/Berachot

A. Berachot- first night of Hanukah	111
B. If one forgot "she-heh-cheh-yanu".....	111
C. Berachot, remaining nights of Hanukah	111
D. Sequence of Berachot and lighting.....	111
E. Reciting "HaNairot Halalu" and other mizmorim	111
F. Order of lighting- direction	111
G. Insufficient candles- how to proceed	111

H. Oils and wicks	112
I. Electric Menorah	112

Candle Lighting Time/Duration

A. Optimum time to light	112
B. Latest time permitted	112
C. Extinguishing Hanukah candles	112
D. One who returns late at night – everyone asleep	112
E. One who returns late- everyone is still awake	113
F. Lighting before sunset	113
G. Friday- Erev Shabbat	113

Erev Shabbat and Motzaei Shabbat- Menorah Lighting

A. When to light Hanukah candles on Friday	113
B. Accidentally lighting Shabbat candles first (when living alone)	113
C. Praying Mincha and lighting the Menorah	113
D. Placement of Menorah	114
E. If Hanukah candles are extinguished	114
F. Order of lighting and Havdalah on Motzaei Shabbat	114
G. When to light on Motzaei Shabbat	114

Making Use of the Hanukah Lights

A. Prohibition/Role of shamosh candle	114
B. If shamosh is extinguished	114
C. Hanukah candles as illumination	114

Prohibition of Work- Before Lighting

A. Half hour before lighting- prohibitions	115
B. Learning Torah before lighting	115
C. Praying Arbit and lighting	115
D. Eating before lighting	115

Laws of “Al Hanisim”

A. When it is recited	115
B. Forgot “Al Hanisim”- in the Amidah/in Bircat Hamazone	115
C. Remembered- after the place it’s permitted to go back in Amidah	115
D. Replacement Text for “Al Hanisim”	116

Hallel on Hanukah

A. Recitation of Hallel	116
B. Mourner	116
C. Women	116



Foreword

With gratitude to Hashem, Congregation Shaare Rahamim is proud to present our Fifth edition of *Sefer Hanukah*. We are grateful that this *sefer* has been accepted community-wide as a text to learn and review the *halachot* of *Hanukah*, as well as an authoritative source for the background history of *Hanukah*. We have not revised the *halachot* in each of our repeated publications, since our *Shulhan Aruch*, Code of Law, does not change, and remains the same from year to year. In contrast, when commenting on the history and series of events during the Hellenistic era, we could say רחבה מני ים, the Torah is as wide and deep as the ocean. Therefore, in each renewed publication, we chose to share with our readers the fountain of knowledge and teachings of the Rabbis. We were fortunate to receive permission from the families (and copyright holders of the works) of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, זצ"ל and Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, זצ"ל, the *mashgiah* of Yeshivat Ponovezh, to paraphrase their writings and share their thoughts on the holiday of *Hanukah*. We are most certain that this addition to our *Sefer Hanukah* will enhance our readers' understanding of our nation's heritage.

Congregation Shaare Rahamim would like to thank all of our sponsors who made this *sefer* possible. May Hashem bless them with health and success.

Rabbi Shlomo Churba



Rabbi Shlomo Churba

Cong. Shaare Rahamim

For the past 2,000 years, the Jewish Nation has been celebrating the miracle of Hanukah on the 25th of Kislev.

The story of Hanukah describes how the Syrian-Greeks forbade the Jewish people to observe Shabbat, *Rosh Hodesh* and *Brit Milah* (among other decrees). The ultimate objective was not to exterminate the Jews *per se*, but rather to make our Torah extinct and eventually to assimilate our people in their culture and philosophy.

In response, the Jewish leaders mobilized an army of the faithful, led by Yehudah (the Maccabe), son of Mattityahu, the *Kohen Gadol*, and his four brothers. They revolted against the Syrian-Greek army. Hashem answered their prayers and caused a miraculous victory to occur after three years of battle against their enemies.

On the 25th of Kislev, there was once again freedom of religion for the Jewish people.

Our success in defeating the Greeks was *not* accredited to our warfare abilities or tactics and strategy. We totally acknowledge our victory to be a miracle through the hand of G-d. As we say in our prayers, "You [Hashem] delivered the many into the hands of the few...etc."

In addition to our miraculous military victory, there was another undeniable miracle. When the *kohanim* returned to rededicate the Temple and light the Menorah, they found only one flask of oil with the seal of the High-Priest, indicating that it was still pure and suitable to light the Menorah with. There was only sufficient oil in the flask for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days.



The following year, the Rabbis proclaimed that we must commemorate these two miracles with the holiday of Hanukah and by lighting a Menorah in full public view. The light of the Menorah symbolizes the light of the Torah. At that time, the Jews demonstrated their love to Hashem and recommitted themselves to observing the *mitzvot*. Hashem, in His great mercy, intervened on our behalf and defeated our enemies.

Today, Hanukah serves a dual purpose. Inasmuch as we light the Menorah to recall *yesterday's* miracle and events, our Menorah *today* reminds us that we, too, live in a dangerous environment. We are also faced with many challenges that potentially can draw us away from our heritage and our traditional obligations to G-d and His Torah (*has v'shalom*).

With the fire of the Menorah and the fire of Torah, we can restore and strengthen our religious values and our complete love and devotion to G-d.

May we all merit to see the true light of Hashem and the coming of *Moshiah* soon.

Amen!



Rabbi Chaim A. Weinberg

Principal, Yeshivat Ateret Torah

Why do we celebrate *Hanukkah* for eight days? Didn't the miracle last for just seven days, being that the Hasmonean family found one jug of oil, which was enough to last one night? If so, the miracle truly only lasted for seven days — the seven additional days that the oil miraculously burned.

The *Bet Yosef* answers this well known question, explaining that the Hasmonean family took the one pitcher of oil and divided it into equal parts. In that case, even the first night was a miracle, since an eighth of the jug of oil lasted the entire night. Therefore, the miracle was truly for eight days.

However, this answer is a bit difficult to understand. How were the *Kohanim* permitted to divide the one jug of oil into eight parts? If they were required by the Torah to light the *menorah*, should they have not been required to at least light the *menorah* for one night properly and not miss the *misvah* altogether? How could they rely on a miracle that one eighth of a pitcher would burn an entire night?

Therefore, it is possible to explain this in a different manner. The Sages explain that a Jew must believe that Hashem controls the entire world. Everything that people call “nature” is truly only the hand of Hashem. The Greeks preached that nature controls the world, and not Hashem, *has v'shalom*. Therefore, we celebrate eight days of *Hanukkah* to show that even the first night (when there was enough oil to burn the entire night naturally) was also a miracle, as it emanated from the hand of Hashem.

Another possible explanation is the fact that the Hasmonean family found the jug of oil in the first place, was a miracle in itself. The Rabbis are teaching us that one should not think that only a supernatural happening is a miracle, but every good fortune that occurs to us is also a miracle. If the Hasmonean family were fortunate enough to find the pitcher of oil, that, too, is a miracle.



There are many people who take our everyday existence for granted. The fact that we are healthy and have all that we need for our existence is accepted as natural. Many of us do not realize that these everyday gifts that Hashem gives us are miracles that we must thank for. “על ניסך שבכל יום עמנו” – For Your miracles that are with us every day. ועל נפלאותך וטובותך שבכל עת ערב. ובקר צהרים – For your wonders and goodness that is with us every evening, morning and afternoon. Hashem does miracles for us constantly. We must be able to recognize these miracles and acknowledge them. The holiday of *Hanukkah* shows us that even the first day when a flask of oil was found and burned as it always does, is also a miracle that must be recorded and celebrated.



Rabbi Elie Abadie

Congregation Bet Torah

Throughout all of Yaakob Abinu's trials and tribulations, the unique characteristic of **איש תם יושב אהלים** – “A simple man dwelling in tents” remained his, and he transmitted it to his children, in that **אהלים** – “tents” - the Jewish home is the source of wisdom, identification and pride. Yaakob taught his children to remain to themselves: associate with the rest of the world for the purpose of “*tikun olam*” yet all the time maintaining their “tents” **אהלים**, identification and wisdom. This outlook mandates one to refrain from any form of assimilation, adapting the customs of their neighbors, and following the culture of the rest of the world.

The holiday of *Hanukkah* emphasizes the dangers of approaching life in a fashion that is contrary to Yaakob Abinu's approach. On *Hanukkah*, the civilization most noted for its wisdom, **יוון**, the Greek Civilization, actually desired to eradicate the greatest source of wisdom – the Torah.

Hanukkah was not an isolated event in history, but is the link connecting antiquity with modernity. With *Hanukkah*, Judaism faced its first challenge from the so called western thoughts, ideas and culture. The Greeks were proud of their mastery of knowledge. They wrote about a system of logic and philosophy that has lasted until today. But for us, it is only logic and philosophy that is accompanied by Torah values that can succeed. The Hellenists' attempt to force Jews to elevate human wisdom and values above Torah values failed.

We live in a civilization that worships freedom and liberty, institutions which are important, but only to a certain extent—only as far as freedom **of** religion is concerned, and not freedom **from** religion. Therefore, celebrating *Hanukkah* as only a holiday



of religious freedom diminishes the real significance of the holiday and minimizes its importance in Jewish history. Rather, its emphasis is on the absolute importance of subordinating one's wisdom and knowledge to Torah and *Halakha*, and rejecting intellectual and philosophical movements which advocate a secularism or humanism that is devoid of Torah values. For any thought, idea or movement that is not in concurrence with our Torah, is deemed foreign to us, as the children of Yaakov.

Freedom demands responsibility. The most liberating and enlightening experience is a recognition that Divine wisdom is greater than human wisdom. As responsible Jews we must recognize that Torah and Judaism is the embodiment of G-d's wisdom.

The Hasmonean's struggle against the Greek/ Hellenist Empire was not only a political one for "freedom or independence", but it was a battle against the hellenization of the Jews. Therefore, it was only when the Hellenists Jews started to appear, that the struggle began.

The Hasmonean family clearly understood this. Had they not intervened and battled the Greeks, the future of Judaism and the Jewish people would have been in jeopardy. They understood that the battle first had to be won at home. They knew that after the battlefield they had to purify the בית – they had to enter the home of every Jew and rededicate them to the principles of Torah and Judaism. This was the success of the Maccabees: that in each and every household and courtyard of Israel the light of Torah was kindled, so that the Hellenist influence could never darken the future of the Jewish people.

The message of *Hanukkah* is especially relevant during this month of December, where we find ourselves trying hard to keep our Jewishness up with the Gentile festivities and hoopla all around us. It is a shame that as the holidays in Western society and culture became more commercialized, so too the American Jew feels the necessity to commercialize and raise the materialistic value of *Hanukkah* only in order to compete with the dominant



culture. The original message of *Hanukkah* stressed the distance that existed between our tradition and the Gentile tradition, and yet the more we celebrate *Hanukkah* in the American culture the closer we get to emulate their tradition.

If Jews and our Torah are to survive, they can only do so if we keep the success of the Maccabees alive and flourishing. By rededicating ourselves to our Torah, by adding to our Jewish commitment, we can ensure the survival of the Jewish people, or better yet, to ensure *our survival* as part of the Jewish people.

Our Sages have likened Yaakob to a home. Yaakob who is the greatest of the Patriarchs, בחיר האבות, builds a home and a family life with his children, dedicated to the tradition of our people. When we light our *Hanukkah* candles in our homes, let us recall the rededication of the *Bet Hamikdash*, by rededicating and purifying our homes with the wisdom of our Torah, the fulfillment of our *misvot* and the practice of *maasim tobim*. In this way, we'll have the *zechut* to see the dedication of the new *Bet Hamikdash*.

A *Hag Hanukkah Sameah* to the entire community and especially to Rabbi Shlomo Churba and his family who epitomize Yaakob and his family who built a home and a family dedicated to our Torah and *misvot*. *Haslaha Rabbah!* I wish him a lot of success in all his endeavors, and may we see soon the dedication of his new *Bet Tefila* and *Bet Hamidrash*.



Rabbi David Cohen

Cong. Bet Shaul U'Miryam

✱ The Quest for Learning

The well known saying goes: “You can bring the horse to the water but you can’t make him drink.”

“If there’s a will there’s a way.” A child will not want to do something if he does not have a desire. However, nothing can stop a child who has a desire.

A Rabbi once said: You can even bring water out of a stone if you have the will power. As it says: “ההפכי הצור אגם מים” Hashem turned the stone into water for the Jewish people to drink. הצור means the rock. If written backwards, it reads רוצה – will, want, desire. Every child is unique - each individual child needs his own approach to education.

Our Sages teach in *Pirkei Abot*: “והיי שותה בצמא את דבריהם.” Rabbeinu Yonah explains that to someone thirsty, a drink will taste sweet. On the contrary, someone who is not thirsty, will not drink. The job of parents and educators is to ignite the spark, tempt the thirst, motivate, and the rest follows. This is the ultimate key to success with our children and students and their quest for learning.

Hanukkah is the time to reflect on the *hinuch*, Torah education of our most precious gems - our children. As we ignite the spark of the *Hanukkah* flame, let us ask ourselves, are we igniting that special spark in our children to love the Torah and *misvot*? Are we imbuing them with the quest and thirst for our holy Torah? May we merit to raise our children to greet the Messiah, *amen*.



Rabbi Rahamim Churba

The Greeks' Jealousy Towards Benei Yisrael: Who is the "Chosen People"?

For a period of time during the Second Bet Hamikdash, Benei Yisrael came under the rule of the Greek Empire. The Greeks' ancestor, Yefet, had received a special blessing from his father, Noah (see Bereishit 9:27: "Yaft Elokim l'Yefet"). As a result, during this period in history the Greek nation had accomplished great achievements in the areas of wisdom and knowledge, particularly the natural sciences and philosophy. The legacy of their accomplishments remained with other nations, such as the Roman Empire, who based their intellectual activity on Greek scholarship. The basic principles of Greek wisdom of that period has lasted throughout the generations to this very day, as all cultures founded their scholarly work on the Greek's achievements during the Second Temple era.

The Greeks had thus established themselves as the leading influence in the world, developing what was then the "modern culture" of the time. Their academic prominence led them to believe that they were the chosen nation of God¹, and that their advanced culture, which developed out of their superior wisdom, must spread throughout the entire world.

By contrast, Am Yisrael at that time knew the truth, that they were the chosen people and on their account the Almighty created and governs the world. To the contrary, all other nations were created only to serve Benei Yisrael's interests to enable them to serve the Almighty; the culture of the other nations thus had no inherent significance of its own.

The Greeks simply could not tolerate the existence of a nation that saw itself as God's people. They demanded of the Jews, "Engrave upon the bull's horn that you have no part in the God of Israel," meaning, they were to declare that they are not the



chosen nation, that no essential distinction whatsoever exists between Am Yisrael and the other nations.² Towards this end, the Greeks sought to eliminate Shabbat, which signifies Am Yisrael's stature as the chosen people. This function of Shabbat is mentioned by Rashi in his comment to the pasuk, "... for it [Shabbat] is a sign between Me and you for all generations" (Shemot 31:13). Rashi writes, "It is a powerful sign between us that I chose You, as I have bequeathed to you My day of rest for you to rest thereupon." The pasuk continues, "... that you should know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you." As Rashi explains, through the institution of Shabbat the nations know that "I am Hashem, who sanctifies you." The Greeks therefore wished to disrupt Benei Yisrael's observance of Shabbat, signaling to them that they are not Hashem's chosen nation.

The Hashmonaim overpowered the Greeks³ not only politically and militarily, but also ideologically, successfully showing the Greeks that Am Yisrael is, in fact, God's chosen people, and the Greeks are inferior.

This message is an important one for us to learn during the time of Hannukah. We are the chosen nation, even though we live in America, a country with great academic achievements to its credit and a sophisticated, modern culture. This sophistication has prompted some Jews to try imitating those around us in both dress and conduct, as well as with regard to what they deem important - such as sports and movies - to the point where one can hardly distinguish between Jew and gentile. This phenomenon evolves from the force of the Greeks, who sought to abolish the distinction between Am Yisrael and other nations. The Hannukah festival comes upon us through divine providence to remind us of our fundamental distinction from other peoples of the world. We are Hashem's chosen nation, and the other nations were created for our benefit. A person must strengthen himself to resist the influence from the American culture, values, way of life, and dress code.



Although we all observe Torah and missvot, we do not sense the extent of the influence exerted upon us by the general American society. However, we will consider just one small example. Unfortunately in our Galut we spend most of our time in obtaining a livelihood and we extend our interest to strive for wealth. We cannot divert our goals for the sake of materialism but our objective should be for the sake of 'עבודת ה'. Traditionally our forefathers patterned their lives having their priorities in servicing Hashem and they were successful both spiritually and materialistically. However, in our society we don't see those who emulate the secular society to being successful in all of the endeavors. We are Hashem's chosen people, for whom Torah and missvot stand at the very center of existence. During this Hannukah season, which is uniquely suited to help us understand our uniqueness as a nation, let us all strengthen ourselves in this regard, helping to bring the Mashi'ah, speedily and in our days, Amen.

1 See Maharal, *Ner Missvah*, pp. 11,15.

2 See Maharal, *ibid.* p.15

3 See *Or Gedalyahu*, p.60.



✳ **The Greeks' Jealousy Towards Benei Yisrael: Who Governs Nature?**

As we know¹, one who acquires wisdom as to the workings of nature can, have a better control over nature. For example, here in America scientists have become very knowledgeable with regard to the natural world and have thus developed cures for illnesses that work in almost miraculous fashion. Scientific knowledge has produced many nature-defying phenomena, including air travel, men walking on the moon, the construction of skyscrapers, and the destruction of tall buildings in minutes.

The Greeks of the time had likewise acquired superior knowledge of this sort, affording them control over nature. These accomplishments led them to view themselves as the supreme rulers over the natural world.

Am Yisrael, however, knew the truth, that the natural order is maintained solely on their behalf. The Almighty governs nature and alters it for Benei Yisrael. To the contrary, they realized, all other nations exist to help Benei Yisrael serve Hashem.

Rav Hayyim of Volozhin interpreted a pasuk in the Humash as conveying this very message. Mosheh Rabbenu declares, “Yaakov hevel nahalato” – “Jacob is the rope of His allotment” (Devarim 32:9). Rav Hayyim explains this metaphor - comparing Am Yisrael to Hashem’s “rope” – to mean that whatever we do directly impacts the upper worlds. Just as when someone tugs at a rope – no matter how long the rope may be – the effects are felt at the other end, so do the good deeds of everyone among Am Yisrael – as well as, Heaven forbid, his misdeeds – in our physical world affect the spiritual realm. Hashem’s providence responds accordingly, manifesting itself in the way He governs the world. It thus turns out that we have a critical share in the control over the natural order.

The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:3) explains along similar lines the reference to Am Yisrael in Shir Hashirim as, “yonati tamati” (literally, “My faultless dove”). The Midrash



interprets the word “tamati” as “te’omati,” or “My twin,” as if Hashem declares about Am Yisrael, “I am no greater than she nor is she greater than I!” The Ramhal (Rav Moshe Hayyim Lussato) explained that although Hashem undoubtedly governs the world, He wishes to have His treatment of the world depend upon Benei Yisrael’s conduct. The entire world will receive God’s blessing in their merit; through our performance of missvot Hashem’s blessing is bestowed throughout the world, and vice-versa, Heaven forbid. To this concept the aforementioned Midrash refers. “I am no greater than she” – Hashem cannot, as it were, positively impact upon the natural world without the missvot and good deeds of Benei Yisrael. At the same time, “nor is she greater than I” – Benei Yisrael receive only what the Almighty gives them.

This triggered intense feelings of jealousy on the part of the Greeks, to the point where they demanded, “Engrave upon the bull’s horn that you have no part in the God of Israel.” The Siftei Hayyim notes that Benei Yisrael were to proclaim that they “have no part” in God, meaning, that no partnership exists between them and Hashem with regard to the creation and the natural order.

We express this unique power through the service of “kiddush ha’hodesh.” In ancient times, the Bet Din (rabbinical court) would declare Rosh Hodesh, the onset of the new month, and this declaration would determine the calendar year.

In effect, then, all of nature, even a youngster’s development from year to year, follows the ruling of the court. For example, halachah considers someone a “bar da’at,” an intellectually capable adult, from the age of thirteen. Since the occurrence of one’s birthday depends on the declaration of the Bet Din, their ruling effectively determines when we consider the youngster a “bar da’at.” If they decide, based on their calculations, to make that year a leap year, the boy will not be a “bar da’at” until a month later than he would have been otherwise. This reflects remarkable power and control over nature.²

The Greeks therefore sought to abolish the institution of Rosh Hodesh, which represents Benei Yisrael’s control over nature, a



direct contradiction to Greek thought. The victory of the Hashmonaim publicized the singular power of Benei Yisrael: they govern nature, not the wisdom of the gentiles.

In our times, we see all around us very impressive wisdom and knowledge in the world; nature is being processed for the benefit of mankind, such the manufacture of medications and sophisticated weaponry. Nevertheless, we must realize that success is realized in the world only through our missvot, not secular wisdom. This is a particularly timely message these days when America and Israel are at war: success depends not on the general wisdom, but rather through our missvot and good deeds.

May it be Hashem's will that in the merit of our missvot we will have the power to bring goodness to the world and peace will prevail both here and in Eress Yisrael.

-
1. Based on Siftei Hayyim, pp.60-62.
 2. Based on *Or Gedalyahu*, p.30.



✱ **The Menorah: the Light of the Oral Law**

We have already seen that Greek wisdom had, at that time,¹ attained widespread acclaim to the point where they thought of themselves as the Almighty's chosen people, as evidenced – they claimed – by their intellectual achievements.² During the same period, Benei Yisrael had become very accomplished in Torah scholarship, particularly in the Oral Law, which at that time began blossoming in all its beauty and splendor.

In order to understand the emergence of the Oral Law during this period, we must first consider its process from a broader historical perspective. During the first Bet Hamikdash, Am Yisrael had prophets who would transmit to them Hashem's word, the path they must follow in their service of God and how to perform the missvot. During the Second Temple, after the time of Hagai, Zecharia and Malachi, Benei Yisrael no longer had access to prophecy. Hashem therefore granted superior wisdom to the scholars of that time, enabling them to extrapolate from the written Torah Hashem's will, how to serve God and how to perform the missvot. This ability to extrapolate from the written Torah is what we refer to as the Oral Tradition that has been transmitted since the time of Mosheh Rabbenu from one generation to the next. It includes the thirteen exegetical principles dictating how to derive halachot from pesukim in the Torah. With the end of prophecy in the beginning of the period of the second Bet Hamikdash, Am Yisrael relied on this system of the Oral Law to teach them what Hashem wanted. This is what remains in our time, when everything we do is based on the Gemara, the recorded text of the Oral Law, from where we learn how to observe the missvot.

This process is explicated by Malachi, the last of the prophets, at the very end of his book of prophecies, which marks as well the end of the entire Tanach. The prophet proclaims, "Remember the Torah of My servant, Mosheh, whom I commanded in Horev [Sinai] laws



and statutes for all of Yisrael... Behold, I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet... “ The Semag explains these pesukim as informing the people that until Eliyahu arrives, no more prophets will arise among Benei Yisrael. Our spiritual existence thus rests upon “remembering the Torah of My servant, Mosheh,” through the sages of Yisrael. Though Hashem will no longer provide prophecy to teach us His will, we can learn it by studying and remembering the written Torah, meaning, by extrapolating the Torah based on the wisdom implanted within us through the Oral Law.

Zecharia, in his prophecy concerning the second Mikdash, conveys this same idea: “I replied and said to him, what are those two olive trees, one on the right and one on the left of the menorah?... They are the two ‘sons of oil’... “ The Gemara (Sanhedrin 24) explains the “sons of oil” as symbolizing “the Torah scholars in Eress Yisrael who are soothing to one another like oil.” When the Almighty delivered the prophecy to Zecharia concerning the second Temple, He alludes to the Torah scholars who form the backbone of the Oral Tradition. He similarly shows the prophet a menorah, the symbol of the Oral Law, as we will soon see. For the same reason the second Bet Hamikdash had no aron kodosh, which represents the written Torah; it did, however, have the menorah, representing the Oral Law.

The basis for this association between the menorah and the Oral Law is explained in the work, *Or Gedalyahu*. The Midrash (Bemidbar Rabba 15:8) cites the pasuk from Tehillim (139:12), “Even darkness is not dark for You; the night will shine like day.” In commenting on this pasuk, the Midrash provides an analogy to a king who said to his friend, “Tomorrow I am eating with you; go prepare for me.” His friend prepared for the king an ordinary couch, an ordinary lamp, and an ordinary table. When the king arrived surrounded by servants and with a golden lamp held out before him, the friend saw the great honor showered upon the king and felt ashamed. He immediately put away everything he had prepared, as its quality fell far short of the king’s standards.



The king asked, “Did I not inform you that I am eating here today? Why did you not prepare anything?”

The friend replied, “I saw all the great honor accompanying you on your way and I felt embarrassed. I put away everything I had prepared, deeming it unworthy for the king.”

The king said, “I swear that I am disqualifying everything I brought with me and, out of my affection for you, use only your utensils.”

“Similarly,” concludes the Midrash, “the Almighty is entirely light.” Although Hashem consists entirely of “light,” he nevertheless asks us to kindle our own lights for Him, by lighting the menorah. In this sense, then, the menorah symbolizes the Oral Law. Hashem gave us the Torah, yet He wants us to use our limited wisdom in expounding it and understanding it, such that the sages’ conclusions are accepted as authoritative even in the heavens. The Gemara in Masechet Gittin (6b) tells that Rav Evyatar once came across Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him what Hashem is saying at that moment. Eliyahu responded, “My son Evyatar says this way, and my son Yonatan says that way.” The Almighty defers, as it were, to the rulings of His children, the Torah scholars here on earth.

This is the unique wisdom granted specifically to Benei Yisrael. The text of the berachah recited after the Torah reading blesses Hashem “who has gives us a true Torah, and has implanted within us eternal life.” The Tur (138) explains that the first clause, “who has given us a true Torah,” refers to the written Torah, whereas the second, “and implanted within us eternal life,” speaks of the oral Torah. As the sacred, treasured nation of Hashem, we have received from Him unique, divine wisdom with which to study and interpret the Torah.

The Greeks of that time could not tolerate this notion of our wisdom as divine. They rather looked upon Torah scholarship as a field of study like any other and sought to strip it of its sanctity. They therefore stormed the Bet Hamikdash and contaminated the oil used for lighting the menorah, thus canceling



this ritual. They thereby expressed their rejection of the power of the menorah, the unique quality of the Oral Law.

What empowered the Greeks to defile the menorah was the “Hellenization” of many people from among Benei Yisrael. They adopted the Greeks’ ideology, denying the unique significance of Kelal Yisrael and their scholarship. The Almighty therefore afforded the Greeks the ability to defile the very symbol of this special quality that some Jews themselves rejected. Ultimately, of course, the Hashmonaim came and purified the Temple’s Sanctuary. They firmly and triumphantly upheld the truth, that we are a sacred people and our scholarship involves sacred wisdom given to us especially by the Almighty Himself.

The miracle of the candles, symbolizing the light of the Oral Law, indicated that we defeated the Greeks not only militarily and politically, but spiritually, as well, foiling their plan to eliminate the oral Torah. The Hashmonaim’s victory meant the restoration of the Torah’s glory. The miracle of the oil showed that Hashem still bestows this Torah wisdom upon us, as this wisdom comes to us through the light of the menorah.

A further indication of this symbolism is the Gemara’s dictum, “One who wants to be wise - should go south.” This refers to the menorah, which stood along the southern wall of the Mikdash.

In a similar vein, the Nessiv (Rav Naftali Ssevi Yehudah Berlin of Volozhin) writes that when Mosheh Rabbenu wanted to deeply immerse himself in Torah and comprehend Hashem’s word, he would stand near the candles and gaze at them. Through the power of the candles he could understand the Oral Law from the Torah that he heard from Hashem over the ark. Through the menorah, Hashem bestowed this singular power of the Oral Law to all of Yisrael and particularly to the sages of every generation.

The lights of wisdom that shone at that time return every year during Hannukah, bestowing upon us an added dimension of wisdom to understand the Oral Law. This is what we mean when we thank Hashem for the miracles He performed “for our forefathers in those days and during this time.” The miracles that



occurred during the times of our ancestors resurface in our times. Herein lies the meaning of lighting the menorah: by lighting our candles we establish our connection to the candles of the Bet Hamikdash, drawing the special light of the Torah to us and our generation.

Therefore, during this season, we must concentrate on the greatness of Torah, its qualitative distinction from all other areas of wisdom. Unlike all other fields of study, the Torah, given to us by the Almighty Himself, rises above the natural order. The deeper one reflects on this concept, the more blessing Hashem bestows upon him through the lighting of the Hannukah candles.

Tragically, there are those who study Torah just as they would any other subject matter, without a sense of reverence and sanctity, thinking to themselves, "Well, at least we are, after all, learning." They should know that studying in this way empowers the "sitra ahara," the satan, to undermine the sanctity of the Torah; in effect, then, they destroy the Torah. By contrast, those who learn Torah for its own sake and acknowledge the sheer power of the Torah, they are the ones who bring sanctity upon all of Am Yisrael. May it be Hashem's will that we all involve ourselves in Torah for its own sake, bringing an abundance of sanctity upon the world, and thereby rendering us worthy of the arrival of Mashi'ah in our time.

-
1. Based on *Or Gedalyahu*, p.23.
 2. Maharal, *Ner Missvah*, p.15.



Rabbi Zev Leff

Noted Author and Lecturer

* The Essence of Yavan

The structure of the “*Al Hanissim*” prayer for *Purim* and *Hanukah* is basically parallel - with one notable difference. On *Purim* we introduce a period of history, identifying it with the *sadikim* who are the protagonists of the incident we are celebrating: *בְּיָמֵי מֵרְדֵּכַי וְאֶסְתֵּר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבְּיָרָה* “In the days of Mordechai and Esther in Shushan the capital.”

This is parallel to: *בְּיָמֵי מַתִּיתָיָה בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל וּבָנָיו* “In the days of Matityah, son of Yohanan, the High Priest Hashmonai and his children.”

Then the villain is introduced: *כְּשֶׁעָמַד עֲלֵיהֶם הַמֶּן הַרְשָׁע* “When the evil Haman rose against them.” This is parallel to: *כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יוֹן הַרְשָׁעָה עַל עַמְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל* “When the evil Greek Empire rose against Your nation Yisrael.”

This is followed by a description of the threat that those villains posed to the Jewish people. *בִּקֵּשׁ לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְגׁוֹ וּלְאַבְדׁוֹ* “He sought to destroy, kill and obliterate.” The parallel phrase by *Hanukah* should have been, *בִּקְשׁוּ לְהַשְׁכִּיחַם תּוֹרַתְךָ*, “they sought to make them forget the Torah.” Instead it merely says: *לְשַׁכַּחַם תּוֹרַתְךָ*, “to make them forget Your Torah.” The verb “sought” has been omitted. Some say that this reflects the fact that unlike Haman, the *Yevanim*, the Hellenists, were in fact successful in making a portion of Jewry forget the Torah and leave its ways.

However, if this was the intention it should have said: *הַשְׁכִּיחַם תּוֹרַתְךָ*, “they made them forget the Torah,” in the past



tense, and not לשכחם, “to make them forget.” Additionally, it is difficult to say that with regard to ישראל, “Your nation Yisrael,” that they were successful. Their success was merely with individuals who separated themselves from Your nation Yisrael.

Therefore I think the intention is as follows: Haman’s threat to the Jewish people began when he actively sought to destroy them. However, the threat of *Yavan* began when they actively sought to do something specific against the Jewish people. Before they formulated any of the decrees against the Jewish religion, the *Yevanim* were already a threat. Their mere emergence as an empire created a spiritual danger that many Jews succumbed to and became Hellenists. Hence, it is not what they sought which initiated the threat, but rather their emergence as a dominant world power that created that threat.

To explain what the threat of Greek influence was, we must trace the historical roots of *Yavan* and the nature of their culture. The *Maharal MiPrague* explains that the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Yefet, who were the foundation of all mankind, represented the three aspects of man. Shem represented the inner spiritual aspect of man, the *shem*, “the name” being a reflection of the essence. In fact, the letters ש and מ are the inner letters in the word נשמה, “soul.” Yefet represented the body, the external framework; *yefet*, meaning beauty, representing the external manifestations of aesthetics. Ham represented the inner drives of man, the life force represented by heat, desire, passion.

Based on this, we can explain the blessing Noah gave his two sons, Shem and Yefet. He hoped that the G-d of Shem who creates his inner, spiritual power be blessed and increased; while Yefet be beautiful and enlarged. Yet, his physical, external framework shall be an enhancement to the tents of Shem.



Ham, the heat of the passion of the life forces cursed, limited and mitigated to be a slave to Shem and Yefet. The passions must be subdued to the body and soul and not be given full rein to destroy body and soul by overindulgence.

Yavan descends from and is the quintessence of Yefet, as it states: יפת אלוקים ליפת “may G-d beautify Yefet,” which *Hazal* explain as a reference to the old Greek alphabet which can be used to write a sefer Torah, וישכן באהלי שם, thus it resides in the tents of Shem. However, *Yavan* took their physical quality of external beauty and instead of connecting it to the inner spiritual quality of *Shem*, they totally rejected the inner spirituality and viewed the externals as the only reality of existence. Hence, they embodied *chochmah chisonit*, external wisdom based only on logic and human reason, rejecting the divinely revealed wisdom of Torah completely. They also extolled the physical beauty and physical might (sport) and thus became the essence of Greek culture, which they sought to spread to the entire world.

Perhaps the very word ין represents their approach to the world. The three letters that spell *Yavan*, י, ו, and ן are basically lines with no inside, representing a totally external look at the world. They also represent a quantitative view of the world that is associated with the physical externals as opposed to a qualitative view of the world that is associated with the inner spiritual values. The physical world comes in varied sizes: small, medium and large. The three lines of *Yavan*, the small *yud*, the medium *vav* and the large *nun*, represent this quantitative view of the world - as opposed to spiritual matters that vary in degree, and not size.

Additionally, these three lines are parallel, representing the fact that the physical world has no unity, but rather is made up of individual items that have no point of connection. Only



the spiritual unites all physical things into one unity under Hashem.

Also, ין spelled backwards is ני, “beauty.” They totally distorted the concept of beauty. This emphasis on the externals had an influence over those Jews whose whole relationship to and view of Torah was merely an external view.

Greek culture represents a totally external, physical view of the world and that Jews who looked at the Torah merely from an external viewpoint were vulnerable to the influence of Greek culture.

* The Jewish People's Reaction

The *Bach* in the beginning of the Laws of *Hanukah* comments that the Jewish people were vulnerable to the decrees of Antiochos because there was a deficiency in their *avodah*, sacrifices and prayer services in the Temple. This weakness eventually left them vulnerable to the cessation and desecration of this service by the Greek decrees.

What exactly is the significance of this aspect of Torah life? The Prophet Yeshaya complains that the Torah is observed צו לצו צו לצו קו לקו קו לקו זעיר שם זעיר שם, “a command here, a command there, a line here, a line there, a little here, a little there.” (*Isaiah 28:10*) In fact, G-d does not want from us 613 disjunctive and independent acts. Rather, אחת דבר אלוקים, G-d gave us one unified world for the Jew to develop. He gave us one unified lifestyle of holiness and purity – thereby to become individually and collectively G-d's sanctuary where His presence will be represented to the entire world by a nation of holy *Kohanim*. However, שתים זו שמענו, we as human beings living in a world consisting of many manifold objects cannot relate directly to the unified will of G-d without breaking it down into smaller components.



This can be illustrated with the following example: Imagine a gigantic light bulb, too bright and too large to be able to look at, at one time. That light bulb is encased in a globe into which 613 windows are carved. Through each window one can view another small portion of the vast light bulb and see it and comprehend it. When one looks through all 613 windows one after the other, he gets a composite picture of the light bulb in its entirety. So too, *misvot* are the windows that reveal the one, all encompassing will of Hashem, the totality of the Jew's life and lifestyle from different perspectives. In this respect, one who views the *misvot* as merely separate disjunctive commands of Hashem and obeys them, nonetheless remains an *ebed*, a slave who relates to commands alone.

On the other hand, is the person who is 'שומע בקול ה', who hears into those commands, what their implications are, how they shed light on the all encompassing will of Hashem for his entire life, personality, lifestyle, goals and values. He is like a son who anticipates and concerns himself with the will of his parents and the lifestyle, character, personality which the parent wishes to engender to his child through the directives he gives him.

The *avodah* of prayer and sacrifice, as well as the environment of the *Bet Hamikdash*, puts the various *misvot* into the perspective of a relationship to Hashem and encompasses all of life and all of its components. In this respect, נר מצוה ותורה אור, the *misvot* are a receptacle for the oil which forms the light disseminated by Torah, which generates a Torah personality and lifestyle.

During the period preceding *Hanukah*, Jews were weak in the *avodah*. Torah observance became mere external compliance with commands. The implication of the lifestyle to be created by those commands, the creation of a nation of holy



Kohanim who would become the actual *mikdash* (dwelling) of G-d's presence, was ignored. *Shabbat* was observed, but it did not impose a lifestyle that strove for the spiritual world represented by *Shabbat*, a taste of the world to come. Rather, those *shomre Shabbat* spent their six work days expanding their materialistic goals, which formed their lives' ambition and influenced all their decisions and conduct. They observed the letter of the law, but failed to be imbued with the holiness and purity that the laws implied. In this respect, their observance was dark and external and the preciousness of the chosen nation was diminished.

This very shallow appreciation of true Torah life induced some to be totally influenced by the Greek way of life—for if one views the Torah only externally, it can't match the beauty and grandeur of the externals of Greece. Therefore, they accepted it as an alternative to a drab Jewish existence with which they were disillusioned and unimpressed due to its lack of real content.

Hence, this period is referred to as *galut Yavan*. Even though the Jews were in *Eretz Yisrael* with a *Bet Hamikdash*, still we were in exile. We may have been connected to the externals of the land and the Temple but we were millions of miles away from their inner spiritual essence. As a result of this weakness, the Jews were vulnerable to the decrees that *Yavan* made. G-d enabled the Greeks to carry out their evil decrees in order to wake up *Klal Yisrael* to their faults, so that they strengthen themselves and repent. It is a truism, points out the Chafetz Chaim, that sometimes one does not appreciate what one has until it is taken from him or threatened to be taken from him.



✱ The Greek Decrees

The decrees that the Greeks made against us were specifically the following, as mentioned in the “*Al Hanissim*” of *Hanukah*: לשכחם תורתך “to forget Your Torah,” their main purpose was to make the Jewish people forget Your Torah. This refers specifically to Torah *shebe’al peh*, the Oral Torah, which could be forgotten. The *Yevanim* did not mind if we retained the written Torah as a body of Jewish folklore, as long as our lifestyle reflected the values and morals of Greek culture.

The written Torah without the Oral Torah is like a body without a soul. Hence, the letters of משנה, the Oral Torah, can be transposed to spell נשמה, soul. Without G-d’s explanation of the written Torah, it can be distorted, misrepresented and reduced to a lifeless compendium of history and folklore. It is then no longer Your Torah, i.e. G-d’s Torah, but something very different. It remains a shell without any content.

Another decree against us was: להעבירם מחקי רצונך, “to transfer them from the laws of Your will.” Here too, the Greeks were perfectly willing to let the Jews observe many *misvot* as folk culture, as long as the essence of their lifestyle was in line with the basics of Greek philosophy. The Greeks did not seek to destroy the Jewish people or even our *Bet Hamikdash*. They sought to be מטמאי and מחלל, “to defile and to desecrate.”

מחלל literally means to hollow out, to remove inner spiritual meaning and to leave but an outer shell. Similarly, טומאה is the vacuum left when holiness and spiritually leave an entity, as when a נשמה leaves the body. Hence, they also targeted those specific *misvot* that represent the inner soul of the physical world. *Shabbat* and *Rosh Hodesh*, the inner holiness of time, and the inner holiness of the body of *brit mila*



In addition, the *Midrashim* and the *Rambam* tell us that they made specific decrees against Jewish women and the holiness of matrimony and family purity, for the woman is the symbol of the inner holiness of the Jewish people. They also made decrees against Jewish money and property, for physical property to the Jew is merely a utensil to be infused with meaning by its function, whereas in Greek eyes, money and property are an intrinsic value in themselves.

The word חשמונאי hints to these decrees. The “ח” stands for חודש – *Rosh Hodesh*; “ש” – שבת; “מ” – מילה and ממון; “נ” – נדה and “א” – אשת איש. The “י” is either the letter that signifies one of the previously mentioned חשמונה; or else the “י” hints to G-d’s name, meaning that they sought to remove G-d from Jewish observance. Hence, להעבירם מחקי רצונך does not mean to prevent them from keeping *misvot*, but rather to transfer the Jews from חקים – literally laws of nature, the spiritual laws that form the limits, boundaries and shape of the physical world. They wanted to change them from laws that reflect G-d’s will, the inner core of all Torah commands, to mere do’s and don’ts, mere folk customs

The desecration of the *Mikdash* and total suppression of a Torah way of life stimulated the *Kohanim* to action and to awaken the Jewish people to join them in reestablishing a true Jewish way of life, a total rejection and negation of Hellenism. Their victory gave them once again the designation of בנימ, children.

Hashem responded in kind and gave us a miracle that reflected our unique preciousness that is reflected through our bond to G-d through Torah and *misvot* and our closeness to Him in prayer. All this is symbolized by the *Menorah* that represents the light of Torah that emanates from the receptacle of the *misvot* when they are pure and untainted. Recognition of



our unique relationship with Hashem generated an increased awareness of G-d's special relationship to us and resulted in eight days of הלל והודאה, song and praise to Hashem, of intensified closeness to Him.

✳ Hanukah - A Complete Victory Over the Greeks

The lesson of the triumph of the *Kohanim* over the Greeks and the symbolism of the miracle of the *Menorah* can be illustrated through the following *Midrash*: When *Yaakov Avinu* beheld all the mighty chiefs of Esav as enumerated at the end of *Perashat Vayishlah*, he felt weak and helpless, and therefore יושב יעקב, “Yaakov sat down.” He froze into inactivity so as not to incite the wrath of his opponents, just as a person surrounded by wild dogs is careful to remain motionless in order not to provoke the dogs to attack.

The *Midrash* then brings a *mashal* of a flax dealer and a blacksmith who were neighbors. One day the flax dealer received a large shipment of flax; the blacksmith, observing this delivery wondered aloud, where would the flax merchant store all that flax? To which a sharp individual responded, one spark from your fire can reduce all the flax to ashes and then it can be easily stored.

So too, Hashem told *Yaakov Avinu*, do not be terrified by the hordes of Esav's warriors. Esav is compared to straw, you are likened to fire, and your son Yosef, to a flame. One spark from you, will consume them all.

Although the lesson is clear enough, the parable itself is ludicrous. Is it clever advice to store a massive inventory of flax by reducing it to ashes?



The blacksmith's query as to where to store all the flax can be understood on two levels. On the surface the question seems to be a simple request for information. However, upon closer examination it is obvious to the sharp listener that this is not the intention of the question. What does the blacksmith care where they store the flax? It is not his worry. The blacksmith's question is not a question at all, but rather a statement of awe by the blacksmith and the impressive inventory of his neighbor. His remark reflects his awe at the scale of his neighbor's business possession compared to his own insignificant hammer, anvil, bellows and fire. To this the clever friend responds by reminding the blacksmith that although the flax dealer appears to run a more massive operation, in reality that which the blacksmith possesses is far more potent and powerful and can transform the entire inventory of flax into ashes within moments.

Many times we are prone to being overwhelmed by the power in numbers of the forces of evil in the world, and we tend to underestimate or disregard the power of the spiritual forces. This in fact is one of the lessons of *Hanukah*. Greece descended from Yefet who is called *bagadol*, "the great" and powerful—externally. It was specifically the *Kobanim*, who are not known for their physical powers, but rather for their inner spiritual strength, that G-d aroused to combat this threat.

In "*Al Hanissim*" of *Hanukah* the word *gadol*, "great" is mentioned no less than four times – *Kohen gadol*, *shem gadol*, *teshuah gedolah*, and *Shimcha bagadol*. "*Shimcha bagadol*," "Your great name" – to impress upon us that it is not Greece who is in reality great and powerful. True greatness is not measured in physical terms, in numbers, physical strength, power or wealth, but rather in spiritual might generated by righteousness and purity—the spark that can consume all of the vast stocks of flax.



We mention in “*Al Hanissim*” that G-d delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the defiled into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who engage in Torah. While it is miraculous for a weak and small group to overpower strong hordes, wherein lies the miracle that the pure righteous Torah scholars overcame the defiled wicked sinners?

Perhaps the intention is to inform us that the physically weak and few can overpower strong armies, not because they are weak and few, but rather because they were pure and righteous and have the power of Torah, for this in fact is the real source of strength and power.

Perhaps this is also the reason why the first day of *Hanukah* is celebrated even though there was enough oil to burn naturally that first day and hence it would seem that the miracle occurred only on the subsequent seven days. The ability for that oil to burn seven extra days emanated from the pure and holy spiritual power introduced into it by the performance of the *misvah* on the first day. It was the *mesirat nefesh* of Matityahu and his sons for the *misvah* that transcended all physical barriers and limitations and enabled the oil to burn beyond its physical capabilities. Hence, the lighting on the first day was the source and cause of the miracle of the remaining seven days.

As we find ourselves surrounded by enemies far more numerous than we, armed with the most sophisticated, devastating weaponry, we must consistently remember the miracle of the *menorah* as elucidated to Zecharia the Prophet, *לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי אמר ה'* “*Success and triumph are not in the multitudes, nor in the physical might and power, but rather in My spirit, says Hashem.*” (*Zecharia 4:6*)



It is this recognition of our spiritual power, of the significance of the inner spiritual essence over the physical externals, that makes what we achieved during the period of the *Hashmonaim* eternal, as it says in “*Al Hanissim*”: ולעמד ישראל ועשית תשועה גדולה ופרקן כהיום הזה “And to Your nation Yisrael made a great salvation and redemption until today.”

It must seem that all that was gained at that time – the rededication of the Temple and freedom from foreign rule – was lost at the destruction of the Second Temple. What then remains to this very day?

What remains is the understanding gained from those miracles that gives us the power to withstand the influence of the Greek culture and the external might, power and wisdom embodied in the secular culture of our times.

It is significant that all that *Yavan* wanted to negate is included in *Hanukah*. Every *Hanukah* includes at least one *Shabbat*; it contains one *Rosh Hodesh*—*Tebet*; it is eight days, hinting to *brit mila*. Women have a special relationship to *Hanukah*, having a custom to refrain from work during the time the candles burn because of the integral part that women played in the miracle of *Hanukah* as exemplified by *Yehudit*, and the custom is to give *Hanukah gelt*, money in honor of *Hanukah*.

In *galut* we light the *menorah* indoors to enlighten and strengthen ourselves. May we soon be able to return to *Eres Yisrael* where we will be able to light the *menorah* as was originally intended, outside our doors to enlighten the entire world with the light of Torah. This is as it states regarding the times of the *Mashiach*: כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה' כמים לים מכסים “When the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the waters covered the earth.” (*Yeshayah 11:9*)



Commentary on Al Hanissim

Translated from the Sefer "Siftei Haim"¹



❁ Overview

Hazal instituted the recitation of "al ha'nissim" in the berachah of *modim* in the Amidah, since this berachah is about thanking Hashem for the miracles He performs every day. They therefore added to this berachah the expression of gratitude for special miracles that Hashem performed for us.

This expression of thanks constitutes the very essence of the day, as is clearly indicated in the Gemara (Shabbat 21b): "The following year, they established them and made them [the days of Hanukkah] festivals with hallel and thanksgiving." Rashi explains, "... to read hallel and to recite 'al ha'nissim' in hoda'ah (the berachah of *modim*)."

What requires explanation is for which miracle among the miracles of Hanukah we express thanks in "al ha'nissim." As it appears from the text of the prayer, the thanks relates only to our having been saved from the Greeks, as we say, "You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak..." The miracle of the oil, however, receives no mention at all in "*al hanissim*." What we say, "... and they lit candles in Your sacred courtyards" connects to that which we recite just prior - "they cleared Your sanctuary, and they purified Your Temple" from all the impurities of the gentiles, they made a menorah and new vessels, they reinstated the Temple service and once again

1. Taken with permission of the copyright holder.



lit the menorah. This is what we mean by saying, “and they lit candles in Your sacred courtyards.” It thus turns out that the miracle of the oil is not mentioned at all in “al ha’nissim,” at least not explicitly. Why? The reason is that the recitation of hallel is for the miracle of the oil, and the thanksgiving expressed in “al ha’nissim” is for the salvation and our having been saved from the Greeks.

✧ **(Ve)al hanissim**

“(And) for the miracles”: This continues from the *modim berachah* - “*Modim anabnu lach*” (“We thank You”) and “*al nisecha shebechol yom imanu*” (“and for Your miracles that occur for us every day”). Beyond these, we also thank You “al ha’nissim” - “for the miracles...”

✧ **Ve'al hapurkan**

“and for the redemption”: “*Purkan*” is an Aramaic word for the Hebrew “*pidyon*,” or “redemption.” The pasuk says in Debarim (7:8), “*He redeemed you from the house of bondage*” and the Aramaic translation of Onkelos translated it as, “*ufarkach* [from the word, “*purkan*”] *mibet avduta*.” In other words, we thank the Almighty for having redeemed us from our troubles.

✧ **Ve'al Hagevurot**

“and for the powers”: That the Almighty showed us His powers.

✧ **Ve'al ha'teshu'ot**

“and for the salvation”: At first glance, “*purkan*” has the same meaning as “*teshu'ot*.” We may explain that “*purkan*” refers to redemption in the general sense, such as what



occurred during the Exodus - the very departure from Egypt and release from bondage is the redemption. Afterwards, however, different crises developed. As they stood at the sea, Hashem split it for them; likewise, when they walked in the wilderness they had nothing to eat, and Hashem provided them with manna and a well. These are “*yeshu’ot*.” This is analogous to a dangerously-ill patient whose condition improved to the point where his life was no longer in danger; this is the “*purkan*.” Still, he requires many “*yeshu’ot*” in order to have his good health restored.

✧ **Ve'al ha'milhamot** (recited by Ashkenazim)

“and for the wars”: The obvious question arises, is it good that wars are fought? Why do we express thanks for war? Due to this question, some (such as the Anaf Yosef) have a different version: “*al ha'milhamot*” - “for the wars,” without the conjunction, “*ve*” (“and”). The phrase thus reads, “and for the salvation for the wars,” or, more precisely, “for the salvation **during** the wars.” Thus, we thank here not for the war itself, which is something negative, but rather for the salvation that resulted from it. We could explain the more common version, “*ve'al ha'milhamot*,” to mean that we thank the Almighty - even though war itself is certainly not a joyful event - for that when war became necessary, He fought it for us until victory, such that His Name was sanctified as a result. (Rav Yaakov Emden explained similarly.)

✧ **She'asita la'avotenu bayamim hahem
bazman ha'zeh**

“that You performed for our forefathers in those days at this time”: According to the simple meaning, “in those



days” refers to that period, and “at this time” means the 25th of *Kislev*. Some explain homiletically that once You brought salvation to our forefathers “in those days,” the door of salvation has remained open from that point forever. Therefore, even nowadays - “in this time” - these days are days of salvation. The Levush’s version of the text reads, “bayamim hahem ubazman ha’zeh” - “in those days **and** at this time,” meaning, we thank for the miracles that occurred “in those days,” and at the same time, we thank for the miracles that the Almighty performs for us every day - “and at this time.”

✽ **Bimei Matityah ben Yohanan Kohen Gadol Hashmonai ubanav**

“During the time of Matityah the son of Yohanan the high priest, the Hasmonean, and his children”: We mention the names of the people during whose time the miracle occurred, just as on Purim we mention, “During the time of Mordechai and Esther in Shushan the capital,” but we do not mention the date, in which year after creation or since the Second Temple that this event took place. The period is referred to by the names of the righteous people who lived then, for it was through them and in their merit that the salvation came about and the great events of the period took place. Hazal comment (Yoma 38b), “The Almighty saw that the righteous are few, so He went ahead and planted them in every generation.” Meaning, in every period the Almighty assigns tzadikim who create and establish their period in accordance with their unique quality, in Torah and in *avodat Hashem*, and the period is therefore called by their names.

“**Matityah ben Yohanan**”: Here his father’s name is mentioned, whereas when we mention “Mordechai” (when reciting



“al ha'nissim” on Purim) we do not mention his father's name. The explanation given is that since Yohanan was a righteous and well known Kohen gadol (high priest), we mention his name in order to make note of “*zechut avot*” - the merit of his (Yochanan's) forefathers.

A person's name reflects his essence (see Yoma 83b). Therefore, the name “Matityah” and “Yohanan” reflect the essence of these men. “Matityah” is a combination of the word “*matal*” (מתת), a gift, or that which is given, and Hashem's Name, “יהוה”. He felt that everything he had came to him as a gift from Hashem. Similarly, “Yohanan” is a combination of Hashem's Name, “יהוה”, and the Hebrew word “*hanan*,” or “חנן”, which means to show grace or favor. He felt that Hashem always graced him with undeserved kindness. A person who lives with a sense that everything he has, including even natural things, comes as a gift or favor from Hashem, deserves having the Almighty perform miracles for him. Since such a person has reached the level where he senses that even nature reflects God's kindness towards him, the Almighty adds miracles for him in order to strengthen his faith. (On this basis we can understand the comments of the Gemara in Berachot 57a - “One who sees in a dream ‘Hanina,’ ‘Hanania’ or ‘Yohanan’ - many miracles will be performed for him.” Meaning, when one feels that everything is a favor from Hashem, he earns miracles, as we explained.) Hashem therefore performed great miracles through Matityah.

“Ben Yohanan Kohen Gadol”: Yohanan was the son of Shimon Ha'ssadik (Simon the Just) who had been a member of the Anshei Keneset Hagedolah (Men of the Great Assembly), and Yohanan assumed the high priesthood in his place. Matityah, however, was not a Kohen gadol; hence, the phrase



“Kohen Gadol” in this sentence refers to Yohanan and not to Matityah.

“Hashmonai”: This is the family name. Some say that “Hashmonai” (“Hasmonean”) denotes prestige, as in the pasuk in Tehillim (68:32) “*Ye’etayu hashmanim,*” referring to the arrival of important noblemen, whom the pasuk calls “*hashmanim.*”

✻ **Keshe’amdah malchut Yavan hare-sha’ah al amcha Yisrael**

“when the evil Greek Empire rose against Your nation, Israel”: The Greek Empire was a kingdom and government of evil, which longed to oppress “Your nation, Israel” with the purpose of -

✻ **Leshakecham Toratach ul’ha’aviram me’hukei ressonach**

“to make them forget Your Torah and transgress the statutes that You willed”: The poskim indicate a clear distinction between Hanukah and Purim. On Purim, the decree was issued against the Jewish body - “to destroy, to kill and to annihilate,” whereas on Hanukah the decree prohibited involvement in Torah and missvot. Thus, the Jewish Hellenists who accepted the Greeks and their wisdom and followed their practices were treated well. The Greeks wanted only to do away with the Jews’ Torah and missvot, not to destroy them.

Human Wisdom as Opposed to Divine Wisdom

“To make them forget Your Torah.”: This was the Greeks’ primary battle. At first glance, this seems hard to



imagine. The Greek were exceptionally wise; “Greek scholarship” is seen as the classic example of wisdom. Why, then, did they wage such a fierce battle against the Torah of Israel? The answer is that specifically because of their wisdom they waged this battle. The Greeks indeed respected wisdom, but only human wisdom. They perceived man as the master of wisdom, and through his own intellectual powers he can develop knowledge and science. They refused to recognize or acknowledge the existence of the wisdom of the Torah - the divine wisdom - and its superiority over human wisdom, that a person must negate his wisdom and even himself before it. It disturbed them that Am Yisrael remained attached to the wisdom of the Torah and submitted their intellect to it. They therefore issued decrees “to make them forget Your Torah” - because it is the Torah of Hashem which far surpasses the human intellect.

For the same reason, it was not enough for them that Benei Yisrael would not study Torah; they wanted “to make them forget.” They did this by forcing and luring the Jews to love and adore in their hearts the wisdom of Greece. In this manner they could make the Jews forget their Torah, since memory and forgetfulness depend mainly on the individuals’ will. That which one wants and yearns for he remembers well; that in which he is not interested he forgets. Indeed, the *Mishna* in Avot (3:10) states, “Whoever forgets one thing from what he learned - Scripture regards him as though guilty to pay with his life... but he is not guilty to pay with his life until he sits and removes them from his heart.” The mishna does not say, “from his mind,” because, as stated, forgetfulness depends on the heart.

The Rav of Ponivizh zt”l explained that the custom developed to give “Hanukah money” to children because the



Greeks prohibited Torah learning. When the Jews defeated them and wanted to return the children to their studies, they gave them some money in order that they will learn. This is how we make learning beloved to children, as the Vilna Gaon wrote in his famous letter. And learning for ulterior motives leads one to learn for learning's own sake (“*mi'toch she'lo lishmah, ba lishmah*”). In commemoration, we give Hanukah money in order to encourage the children to learn.

“... and transgress the statutes that you willed [‘*hukei ressonach*’].” As mentioned, the Greeks perceived human wisdom as superior, and they believed that a person must do only that which he can understand intellectually. Accordingly, they maintained, one should not obey Hashem’s “*hukim*” - the statutes whose reasons we cannot comprehend. Hazal say (Yoma 67b), “You shall observe My statutes’ - those matters which the Satan and nations of the world challenge, including: eating pig, wearing *sha’atnez*... “ Total submission to Hashem and His will directly opposes the essence and existence of the gentiles. For this reason, when Hashem came to offer the Torah to the nations, they asked, “What does it say?” (see Sifrei, beginning of Parashat Vezot Haberachah). Meaning, only if we can intellectually understand what we must do, they said, will we accept it. Kelal Yisrael, by contrast, did not ask what the Torah said. They rather declared, “*Na’aseh venishma*” (“We will do and we will hear”), meaning, we accept upon ourselves the will of Hashem even if we do not understand. This is the greatness of Yisrael, and it was this quality that the Greeks sought to eliminate.

The question, though, arises, the Greeks prohibited missvah observance in general, not only the *hukim*; why, then, does it say that they tried to make Yisrael transgress “*hukei ressonach*”



- Hashem's "*hukim*"? The answer is, that even the Greeks understood that a person must conduct himself in an orderly fashion and with a sense of authority, and act honestly. After all, they had great philosophers who authored books of ethics and proper behavior, such as Aristotle, who wrote a book about ethical conduct. As mentioned, however, this was all within the framework of human understanding; they spoke of ethics and manners only to the extent to which the human intellect warranted and understood it. With Am Yisrael, however, good qualities are what the Torah teaches us they should be, they extend far beyond that which the intellect requires. For example, we learn in the Torah about the quality of hessed (kindness) from Avraham Avinu's performance of hessed as he learned from Hashem's performance of hessed - a kindness that inestimably surpasses the ethic of kindness built upon the dictates of the intellect. The same applies to all good qualities - we learn them from the ways of Hashem as expressed to us in the Torah, and not from the dictates of our minds.

It thus turns out that for us, all laws in the Torah classify as "*hukim*." The intellect does not require performing laws specifically according to the precise definitions and details of the missvot. We rather follow these rules because this is what Hashem commanded. Even the areas that we can understand intellectually, such as the generalities of missvot, which we call "*mishpatim*," are also included under the category of "*hukim*." The pasuk says (Debarim 6:20), "*When your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of) the decrees, statutes [hukim], and laws [mishpatim] that Hashem our G-d commanded you?'*" The answer given by the Torah (pasuk 24) concludes, "*Hashem commanded us to perform all these statutes [hukim].*" To the question raised by the child concerning the "decrees and laws," which the child can and wishes to understand, we reply that everything is included under



“*bukim*”; we observe them because this is Hashem’s will, and not because we understand it (Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch zt”l). This is what we mean when we say that the Greeks tried to halt our observance of “*bukei ressonach*” - “the statutes that You willed.” We perform all the *missvot* not because of our understanding of them, but rather as a “*bok*,” because Hashem commanded them and this is His will. This, the Greeks could not tolerate, as this represents the polar opposite of their outlook, that a person must do only that which he can intellectually comprehend, and they therefore issued decrees against it.

✻ **Ve’atah berahamecha harabim**

“**And You, in Your great compassion**”: Not in the merit of our good deeds. The decrees of the Greeks lasted fifty-two years (Rambam, “*Iggeret Teiman*”) until Matityah and his children arose. Until that point, Hashem granted the Greeks the power to rule over and harm Benei Yisrael. This is how Hashem governs the world. So long as no awakening on our part occurs here on earth, not even “like the point of a needle,” the Almighty will not save us from the heavens. Thus, here, too, the decrees continued until Matityah and his sons awakened and arose to give their lives for Hashem’s honor. As mentioned earlier, the name “Matityah” refers to his having understood that everything depends on Hashem’s gift. Therefore, even though they comprised but a small minority of the nation, nevertheless it marked some degree of “awakening” for selfless devotion and faith in Hashem’s kindness, and Hashem therefore saved them with His great compassion.



❖ **Amadeta lahem be'et saratam, ravta et rivam**

“You stood up for them at their time of crisis, You fought their battle”: The Almighty intervened in our conflict with the Greeks and fought our battle for us. Despite the fact that the Hashmonaim fought the Greeks with great devotion, Hazal make no mention of this in “*al hanissim*.” To the contrary, they emphasize that “You, in Your great compassion, stood up for them... You fought their battle...”, in order that the thought never enter our minds that the Hashmonaim were partners of Hashem in the triumph, which would lessen, if only slightly, our obligation to praise Hashem.

❖ **Danta et dinam**

“You executed their judgment”: God’s very entry into the conflict on our behalf marked the first stage; the result was, “You executed their judgment.” Seeing how we were pursued on account of our commitment to Torah and faith, He naturally came to our side and eliminated our enemies. Thus the Almighty carried justice to execution.

❖ **Nakamta et nikmatam**

“You avenged their wrong”: Hashem could have helped and saved Benei Yisrael from their foes without them witnessing the destruction of the enemies. But when Hashem punishes them and eliminates them from the world - this is “*nekamah*,” vengeance.

We say here that the Almighty avenged “*nikmatam*” - literally, “Israel’s vengeance,” but in fact, thereby Hashem’s Name is sanctified, as Hazal comment (Bemidbar Rabbah 22:2), “The Almighty [when commanding the nation to take revenge



against Midian] said, '*nikmat Benei Yisrael*' ['Benei Yisrael's vengeance'], but Moshe [when reporting Hashem's command to Benei Yisrael] said, '*nikmat Hashem*' ['Hashem's vengeance']. The Almighty said to him, 'It is your account that needs to be settled [with the Midianim].' Moshe replied, 'They pursue us only because of the Torah and missvot that You gave us; the vengeance is therefore yours.'" This does not refer to the desire to see Hashem's vengeance for the pleasure and natural satisfaction of revenge. Rather, when Hashem shows His vengeance against the enemies of Yisrael, who are, in effect, His enemies, His Name is sanctified, as everyone sees His kindness and love towards His nation, as well as His immense power and the justness of His judgment against His enemies.

✽ **Masarta giborim beyad halashim**

"You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak": Hashem wanted to show the Greeks that their view, that everything depends on human intellect, is fundamentally flawed. It is not the intellect that reigns supreme, nor is he who wages his battles using natural means which would, according to the human intellect, grant him victory, necessarily the victor. He therefore delivered the mighty and the many into the hands of the weak and the few.

Those who distort the truth claim that the Hashmonaim were, in fact, powerful, and they had the advantage of having lived in the region, which gave them a familiarity of all the places where they could hide and lay in ambush. Therefore, despite their low numbers, they had a clear advantage. Hazal, however, testify to the fact that they were too weak and too few in number to win through natural means.



❖ **Verabim beyad me'atim, utme'im
beyad tehorim, u'resha'im beyad
sadikim, vazedim beyad oskei Toratecha**

“the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the evil-doers into those involved in Your Torah”: Hazal here note five points of distinction. On the surface, the first two have an entirely different meaning than the other three. “The mighty into the hands of the weak” means “even though they were weak,” and “the many into the hands of the few” likewise means, “even though they were few.” Normally, through natural means alone, the many and mighty should win, but the Almighty helped them and they miraculously defeated the many and the mighty. The other points mentioned - “the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous...” - refer to the fact that specifically because they were pure and righteous, it was appropriate for the Almighty to assist them and lead them to victory. This marks not a miraculous wonder, but to the contrary, was precisely what should have happened.

Alternatively, however, one could claim that even in the first two, could be explained to mean that Hashem delivered the mighty and the many into the hands of the weak and the few specifically because they were weak, and not despite their weakness. Because they sensed their weakness and knew that through natural means they have no possibility of winning the battle, they clearly did not place their trust in their own power. They rather went to war with a sense of self-sacrifice for the sanctification of Hashem's Name, not with the assumption that a miracle will occur. True, one must yearn for Hashem's salvation and miracle, but one should not rest assured that a miracle will save him. If one does so, then he does not display



“*mesirut nefesh*” - self-sacrifice. Moreover, the Almighty will not perform a miracle for such a person, as Hazal comment (Torat Kohanim, Vayikra 22:32): “From here we learn that whoever gives himself over with the assumption that a miracle will be performed for him, a miracle is not performed for him; [but if he goes into the situation] without expecting a miracle to be performed for him, a miracle is performed for him.” Hazal (Bereishit Rabbah, end of Parashat Noah) tell that Avraham Avinu prepared to give his life for the sanctification of Hashem’s Name in the fiery furnace and was saved. His brother, Haran, initially had doubts. Only after he saw how Avraham was saved he agreed to be sent into the furnace with the confident faith that he would be saved as his brother had been. This therefore did not constitute genuine “*mesirut nefesh*,” and he was therefore not saved. But Matityah and his children acknowledged their military inferiority and therefore did not trust their strength. On the other hand, they did not trust in a miracle, either. They rather submitted themselves entirely to Hashem and prepared to give their lives for His Name. Hashem therefore helped them. It thus turns out that all five items mentioned refer to reasons why Hashem delivered the Greeks into their hands.

“... and the evil-doers into those involved in Your Torah.” How are we to understand this contrast, between the “evil-doers” and “those involved in Your Torah.” (In the rest of the sentence, the contrast is clear - the mighty and the weak, the many and the few, etc.) The Hebrew word “*zed*” appears in a pasuk in Mishlei (21:24), “*Zed yahir less shemo*” - “The proud ‘*zed*’ - scoffer is his name.” It similarly says in Tehillim (119:51), “*Zedim belissuni ad me’od*” - “*Zedim* scoffed at me very much.” We see that “*zed*” refers specifically to a “*less*” - a



scoffer. Hazal write (Avot 3:3), “Two people who sit and there are no words of Torah spoken among them - this is a meeting of *‘lessim’* [scoffers].” The question arises, why do Hazal consider two people who sit and speak about nonsense “scoffers,” even though they do not jeer or laugh at anything? The answer is (based on Rabbenu Yonah’s commentary there in Avot, as well as in Sha’arei Teshuvah 3:177) that when a person knows or should know the importance of Torah and does not take advantage of his spare time to learn, “this can only be because his heart scorns the missvot and the reward in the world to come.” Such a person is indeed considered to scoff at the Torah.

The Greeks, too, were “*zedim*”; with their evil hearts, they jeered at the Torah and those who studied it. What did they scorn? After all, they, too, were scholars who valued wisdom. And a Jewish scholar was also a scholar. But their primary contempt was directed towards the “*oskei Toratecha*” - those who **involved** themselves in learning, not on the Torah learning itself. For us, the main thing is “*la’asok be’divre Torah*” - to involve ourselves in Torah. We receive stature and reward specifically for our “involvement” in Torah. Meaning, we must exert ourselves in learning regardless of whether or not we reach the correct conclusions or derive some concrete result or benefit from the study. We bear an obligation to exert effort in Torah learning because it is Hashem’s Torah, through which we earn reward. The Hafess Hayyim zt”l asked on the phrase, “we exert ourselves and they exert themselves; we exert ourselves and receive reward, while they exert themselves and do not receive reward,” don’t all people earn reward if they exert themselves in a given project? He answered that in all other pursuits, people receive payment only for the concrete results of their labor. We, however, receive reward for just the toil



itself. This outlook opposed that of the Greeks. They viewed their scholarship as but a means to come up with inventions and various improvements, to derive some practical benefit from their wisdom. Involvement in Torah for its own sake, without any other purpose - this they could not understand. They therefore scoffed and waged an evil battle against those who involved themselves in Torah. Ultimately, it was specifically “*oskei Toratecha*,” those who toiled in Torah learning, who defeated the great wisdom of the Greeks. This marked not only a physical victory, but a spiritual victory, as well, as the Greek scholarship had blinded and seduced many eyes, and Matityah and his children drove them from the holy land.

‡ **Ulecha asita shem gadol vekadosh
be’olamach**

“and for Yourself You made a great and sacred name in Your world”: Although the “*al ha’nissim*” prayer speaks about the Jews’ salvation, we point out first and foremost that the victory resulted in a *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God’s Name), for through this victory people saw the greatness and sanctity of the Torah, and the greatness and sanctity of Am Yisrael, as opposed to the impurity of the human wisdom of Greece. They further learned to recognize Hashem’s way, of assisting those who trust in him, and they saw His greatness in the world - that the world is “*olamach*” - “Your world,” it belongs to Him. For fifty-two years the Greeks held control, leaving room to mistakenly conclude that the world is anarchical, without any governing law or authority. Hashem did not save the Jews throughout all those years because there was no awakening on their part; the *hillul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem’s Name) was thus attributed to us: because we did not awaken, we caused it. After the victory, however, everyone



saw that Hashem governs the world, which is “*olamach*” - “Your world.”

We then mention the second result:

✻ **Ulamecha Yisrael asita teshu'ah
gedolah u'furkan ke'hayom hazeh**

“and for Your nation Israel You performed a great salvation and redemption, as on this day”: This phraseology is based on the pasuk in Sefer Nehemiah (9:10), “*Vata'as lecha shem ke'hayom hazeh*” - “You made for Yourself a name, as on this day.” One possible meaning would follow the meaning of a similar phrase in Sefer Bereishit (25:31), “*Sell to me like this day your birthright.*” Rashi explains, “Like the day is clear.” Similarly, “as on this day” refers to the clear and certain salvation that Hashem provided.

The “Ess Yossef” explains, “The salvation and redemption is even today, for in every year during these days the miracle is revealed, and Hashem bestows upon His nation during these days salvation and redemption.” Meaning, since during this time of year a window of salvation and miracles is opened for us, the unique quality of these days as a time of salvation, remains for all generations.

Another possible explanation is that the primary purpose behind crisis and the subsequent salvation that Hashem brings to His people is for us to repent, acknowledge Hashem's existence and supervision over us, and heed His commands. The salvation itself constitutes not the end but the means, as Hazal comment (Tanhuma, Yitro 3) that when Kelal Yisrael exclaimed, “Is Hashem in our midst, or not?” Amalek immediately attacked. The Midrash compares this situation to a son riding on his father's shoulders, and his father gives him whatever he needed. Then the child sees a person and asks him,



“Have you seen my father?” His father then takes the son off his shoulders, and the dog comes along and bites him. Clearly, removing the child from his shoulders and the dog’s bite were not just a punishment. Rather, it served to let the child know that the punishment came from his father, so that he will then draw closer to him once again. This is also how Hashem works when bringing upon crisis and then salvation - it serves to strengthen our faith in Him. Therefore, every year, when we bring to mind the events of the period of crisis and salvation, by lighting the candles and expressing thanksgiving throughout Hanukah, and we thereby reinforce our recognition of Hashem’s Hand that controls everything, we achieve even today the goal of salvation. This is what it means that the great salvation is even “as on this day.”

✽ **Ve’ahar ken ba’u banecha lidvir
betecha**

“Thereafter, Your children came to the Sanctuary of Your house”: After the victory, they were able to restore the avodah service to the Bet Hamikdash.

✽ **Ufinu et hechalecha**

“and they cleared Your abode”: They removed from the Temple all the idolatrous images that the Greeks had brought in.

✽ **Vetiharu et Mikdashecha**

“and they purified Your Temple”: - from all the impurities that were there. They similarly purified the vessels that the Greeks had defiled, and they built a new menorah (see Masechet Rosh Hashanah 24b).



❖ **Vehidliku nerot be'hassrot kod-shecha**

“and they lit candles in Your sacred courtyards”: According to the straightforward reading, this refers to their having restored the menorah candle-lighting service, and merely alludes to the miracle of the oil. Undoubtedly, we thank Hashem for the miracles He performed for us, but we thank Hashem primarily for enabling us to once again serve Him in the Bet Hamikdash.

❖ **Ve'kav'u shemonat yemei Hanukah elu**

“and they instituted these eight days of Hanukah”: The word “hanukah” means, “*hanu*” - they rested - “*chaf beib*” - on the 25th (of *Kislev*). Thus, the festival is named not for the war and victory - as the name would then have to be “*nis-sebu*,” they won, instead of “*hanu*” - but rather for the “*menuhab*,” the resting. The gentiles rejoice over the victory, whereas we celebrate the result of the victory, which allowed us to once again serve Hashem.

Only *avodat Hashem* is in man's power, as Hazal say (Ketubot 30a), “Everything is in God's hands, except for fear of God.” Therefore, the sole intention and goal of the Hashmonaim as they went out to war was to restore the Temple service and reestablish the religion the way it ought to be practiced. We therefore mention in great detail in “*al ha'nissim*” that “Your children **came** to the Sanctuary of Your house, **and they cleared... and they purified... and they lit,**” to show us that the only thing we can and must do is observe Torah and missvot; the rest the Almighty alone does and will do.



❖ Le'hodot ul'halel le'Shimcha hagadol

“to thank and to praise Your great Name”: The festival of Hanukah was established for two purposes: to express thanks through the recitation of “*al ha'nissim*” for the salvation, and to praise through the recitation of hallel for all the miracles, including the miracle of the oil.

The Hebrew word, “*boda'ab*,” thanksgiving, actually bears a double meaning. Besides referring to “*todah*,” or expressing thanks, it also means “*le'hodot al ha'emet*,” to acknowledge the truth. When we acknowledge the truth, that everything that happens to a person comes from Hashem and is ultimately for his benefit, we will then naturally give thanks to Hashem. For this very reason we first mention “*le'hodot*” - to thank - before “*le'halel*” - to praise. In order for a person to reach the state where he can praise Hashem, he must first do “*boda'ab*” - acknowledge that truly, everything is from God.



❖ Divrei Hazal on Hanukah

Rav Huna said: One who is accustomed to light the *Hanukkah* lights will have Torah scholars for sons.

(*Talmud Shabbat 23a*)



Hashem said to Yaakob: Since you endangered your life for a small jug for My benefit, I will repay your children with the small jug of the Hasmonean family, referring to the miracle of *Hanukkah* that occurred with a small jug of oil. The *Maharshal* writes that the small jug for which Yaakob endangered his life was a jug of oil which he had dedicated to pour over the Altar. It is for this reason, he placed his life in danger to retrieve it.

(*Damesek Eliezer*)



Rabbi Meir said: Hashem said that the lights of the *menorah* which were kindled by the *Kohanim* are more precious to me than the luminaries I established in the heavens. Why? When the Tribal Princes brought gifts to dedicate the *Mishkan*, the tribe of Levi did not bring gifts, and its Prince, Aaron the *Kohen*, was grieved at the lost opportunity. He said: "All the other princes brought gifts, but I was not able to." Hashem told him: "I assure you that all the other tribes together made one dedication, but you will be instrumental in an entire dedication."

(*Midrash Tanhuma Tesaveh*)



In the future, all the festivals will lose their relevance besides for *Hanukkah* and *Purim*.

(*Hazal as quoted in Sefer Haim*)



Why do we recite *Hallel* on *Hannukah*? Because in *Hallel* it states: "Hashem illuminated for us." Why don't we say *Hallel* on *Purim*?



Because it is written [that the essence of the decree was] “to destroy, kill and eradicate.” *Hallel* is only recited when a kingdom is destroyed, and the kingdom of Ahashverosh continued to exist, so we don’t say *Hallel* on *Purim*. However, since Hashem destroyed the Greek Kingdom, they began to praise Hashem, saying: “In the past we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, slaves to the Greeks, and now we are servants of Hashem, “Give praise servants of Hashem.”

(*Petikta Rabati 2*)



One must not say, “I will not observe the *misvot* commanded by the Sages (such as *Hanukkah*), since it was not commanded in the Torah.” Hashem says: “No, my sons. Whatever they decree upon you, observe, as it states: According to the Torah they taught you. Why? For even I observe that which they decree upon Me, as it states: “And you will decree, and it will come to fruition.” (*Job 22*) Know that regarding Yaakov, what does it state at the time he blessed Ephraim and Menashe? “He put Ephraim before Menashe.” He put the younger one before the older one, and his decree came to fruition. When? By the sacrifices of the Princes, the tribe of Ephraim brought their sacrifice first, as it states: “On the seventh day the Prince of Ephraim and on the eighth day the Prince of Menashe.”

(*Petikta 3, Tanhuma Perashat Nasso*)



Moshe set the Tribe of Levi to correspond with the Greek Kingdom, as the Hasmonean family were from the tribe of Levi. Levi is the third tribe and the Greek Kingdom is the third (of the four kingdoms). Levi, when spelled in Hebrew has three letters, as does the Greek Kingdom when spelled in Hebrew (*Yavan*). Levi brought sacrificial bulls, and the Greek Kingdom wrote on the horns of a bull “they have no portion in the G-d of Jacob.” The Greek Kingdom had a large army, whereas the tribe of Levi were few in number. Moshe saw them (the tribe of Levi) and blessed them, as it states “Hashem blessed his army.”

(*Tanhuma Perashat Vayehi*)



In Shir Hashirim (6:10) it states, “Who is this that gazes down, brightening like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, brilliant as the sun, awesome as the bannered hosts of kings? There are four praises of Israel here, corresponding to the four kingdoms that enslaved Israel throughout their exile, and nevertheless, Israel did not deny Hashem. “Brilliant as the sun,” during the Greek Kingdom. The sun is called “mighty,” as it states “It will rejoice like a mighty one to run its course.” During *Tammuz* (the summer months) who can withstand its heat; everyone flees from it, as it states, “and there is no hiding from its heat.” So too, everyone fled from the Greek Kingdom. Mattityahu and his sons stood up with faith in Hashem, the army of Antiochus fled from them, and they killed them out. Therefore Hashem says to them: “Fashion your plowshares into swords and your pruning shears into spears, and even the weak ones will say, ‘I am strong.’ (Joel 4) Likewise, “In this way all your enemies will perish, Hashem,” (Judges 5). All this in order to fulfill, “Brilliant as the sun.”

(*Midrash Rabbah, Perashat Shemot*)



On the twenty-sixth day of *Iyar* the glory of Judah and Jerusalem was taken away. During the days of the Greek Empire they brought wreaths and hung them on the doors of their Temples, on the doors of their stores, and the entrances of their courtyards, and they would sing to the idols. They would write on the head of an ox and on the forehead of a donkey that their owners had no portion in the G-d of Yaakob, just as the Philistines did. But when the Hasmonean family were victorious, they abolished this practice. The day this practice was abolished was considered a festival.

(*Megillat Taanit 2*)



Kindling the *Hanukkah menorah* is a beloved *misvah* and one must be careful to observe it properly, to publicize the miracle and to praise Hashem for the miracles He performed for us.

(*Rambam, Laws of the Megillah and Hanukkah*)



Perashat Emor details the laws of *Shabbat*, the holidays of *Pesah*, *Shabuot*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Succot*. Immediately following this section is, “Take for yourself pure olive oil pressed for lighting.” This is an allusion to *Hanukkah*, when one uses pure choice olive oil. It says, “to kindle the lamp...arrange the lights,” to teach that the first night one light is lit, and after that lights are lit. The section of the lights is juxtaposed to the section of *Succot*, for just as *Succot* has eight days, so too, *Hanukkah* has eight days, and we complete *Hallel* (as on *Succot*). The dedication of the altar is juxtaposed to the section “Speak to Aaron to take the Levites,” for through the tribe of Levi, Yohanan the *Kohen Gadol*, the *Hanukkah* miracle occurred. Another reason the section of *Succot* is juxtaposed to the kindling of the lights is to teach that the *Simhat Bet Hashoeva* of *Succot* took place by the light of huge candelabra of fifty cubits..

(*Rokeach, Laws of Hanukkah*)



The dedication of the altar is juxtaposed to the blessing by the *Kohanim* as an allusion to the Hasmonean family who performed the rededication of the Temple. In order that the evil eye should not find place in their reign, He blessed them first. This section is juxtaposed to that of the *Mishkan* so that in the merit of the *Mishkan* peace should reign. Likewise, in Psalms the words “Hashem will bless His nation with peace” is followed by “The song for the dedication of the Temple.”

(*Baal Haturim, Perashat Nasso*)



Why is the section of the *Menorah* juxtaposed to the section of the dedication by the Princes? When Aaron saw the dedication by the Princes, he was upset, since neither he nor his tribe partook in the dedication. Hashem said to Him: I swear that your portion shall be greater than theirs: You will kindle the *Menorah* each morning and evening. (*Rashi* and *Midrash*) I am not clear why this *misvah* was chosen to comfort him, rather than any other *misvah*,



such as the incense each morning and evening. However, this is an allusion to *Hanukkah* during the time of the Second Temple which occurred through the Hasmonean family, who were descendants of Aaron. I found that Rabbeinu Nissim (*Megillat Setarim*) quotes this *Midrash* and adds that when the twelve tribal Princes brought their dedication gifts and Levi did not, Hashem said: Tell Aaron that I will perform another dedication for Israel through your descendants with miracles and salvation. This is *Hanukkah* which is called after them—the *Hanukkah* of the Hasmonean family. And that is why this section is juxtaposed to the section of the dedication of the altar. I also saw (*Yelamdenu* and *Midrash Rabbah*) that Hashem said to Moshe: Tell Aaron not to fear as you will participate in something greater. Sacrifices are only relevant as long as the Temple is in existence, but kindling the lights is forever, and likewise the blessings I gave you to bless My children will never be terminated. And so it is. Now that the Temple no longer exists, the sacrifices have been annulled and so has the kindling of the *menorah* in the Temple. But Hashem alluded to the lamps of the *Hanukkah* of the Hasmonean family which still exist, even during our exile, and likewise do the blessings of the *Kohanim*. And both these sections were juxtaposed to the section of the dedication of the altar for Aaron's honor, who was not included.

(*Ramban, Perashat Be'haalotcha*)



Hanukkah, referring to the dedication of the Temple, is an allusion to the dedication of the world. At the beginning of creation, "Hashem said: Let there be light," and in the same way, the *misvah* of *Hanukkah* is with lights. Just like that early light was hidden and we can not make use of it, we are prohibited from deriving benefit from the light of the *menorah*. This is alluded to in the words "Let there be light." The numerical equivalent of the word *יהי* "Let there be" is 25. When the Hasmonean family was victorious they merited three lights: first, the light of the *Shechinah*, that is, the purity of the Temple that the Greeks had



profaned and they purified. The *Shechinah* is called light, as it states “Hashem is a light for me.” Second, the light of Torah, and the third, the light of the *misvah*, as it states: “The *misvah* is a lamp and the Torah is a light.” The word “Let there be” is written three times: “Let there be light,” “Let there be a firmament,” and “Let there be luminaries.” “Light” alludes to the revelation of the *Shechinah*, and “Firmament” and “Luminaries” allude to “The *misvah* is a lamp and the Torah is a light,” as it states “The intelligent ones will shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those that make others righteous, as stars forever.”

(*Shelah*)



During the days of *Hanukkah* we must not be sad, rather we should rejoice and be happy for all the good that Hashem has bestowed upon us during these days. The *misvah* of *Hanukkah* is of great significance, and we may not treat the *misvah* of *Hanukkah* lightly since it is a commandment of the Sages. During those days Hashem bestowed great things and saved them from death. He did not allow them to stumble into their enemies’ hands. Whoever makes light of this *misvah*, denies the good Hashem has bestowed, and does not rejoice in the glad tidings of Israel. He likewise does not hope for their redemption and comfort, G-d forbid. And it is the same with the *misvah* of *Purim*.

(*Seder Hayom*)



The miracle of *Hanukkah* lights correlates to the hidden light (the early light of creation) which was hidden in the Torah. It is for this reason that we light 36 candles – to correspond to the 36 times “light” is mentioned in the Torah. And that is an allusion to the hidden light which was in existence for 36 hours for Adam, and afterwards it was hidden in the Torah. The way I understand it, the name of the month in which we are given a glimpse of the hidden light which was hidden in the Torah was called כסלו, Kislev, or כס ל"ו. The light (the hidden light) which is mentioned



36 times in the Torah is hidden, but we are allowed a glimpse of it during this month. This month is followed by the month of טבת, *Tebet*, that light is good, טוב.

(*Bnei Yisaschar*)



The 36 *Hanukkah* lights correspond to the 36 Tractates of the Talmud, as light is symbolic of the Torah.

(*Midrash Pinhas*)



I once heard that each *Hanukkah*, during the kindling of the lights, the hidden light is revealed.

(*Imrei Pinhas*)



Since the hidden light is revealed during the kindling of the *Hanukkah* lights, each person should sit next to his lights for a half hour, while they burn.

(*Imrei Pinhas*)



One should be filled with enthusiasm as one kindles the *Hanukkah* lights as he is bestowing G-dliness on all the worlds. Hashem is pleased with his action, and he causes pleasure to his Creator. He bestows bounty on all powers and worlds. "Fortunate is the nation for whom this is so, fortunate is the nation for whom Hashem is their G-d." All the worlds proclaim: Fortunate is the nation who brings pleasure to their Creator.

(*Kedushat Levi 5*)



As it is known, the *misvah* of *Hanukkah* is of Rabbinic origin, and it applies to a low area, to below 10 *tefahim*. Although the *misvah* is performed close to the ground, it illuminates the whole world and brings the G-dly holiness and light to lowly places, as



is clear in all the intentions, holy names, and allusions of the *Hanukkah* lights and its blessings. Through the lights of *Hanukkah* the holiness of Hashem is uplifted and increased in this world. This is the primary goal of Hashem: that through our actions we should uplift all the worlds.

(*Kedushat Levi*)



“To benefit us with the goodness of Your luminescence and to accept our prayers with mercy.” The words *מטוב נהורך*, “With the goodness of Your luminescence” plus one (the count of the word itself) has the same numerical equivalent as *נר חנוכה*, “*Hanukkah* light.” This is an allusion that the *Hanukkah* lights emanate from the “hidden light.” In the merit of the *Hanukkah* lights the Jewish people will have their prayers answered.

(*Hesed L'Abraham*)



The *Malbim* (*Eres Hemdah*) quoting from the *Zohar*, states regarding the Creation of light, that it is not written “And it was so,” as it is by all the other items created. Our Sages state (as quoted in *Rashi, Beraishit* 1:4) that Hashem saw that the world was not worthy for that initial light so He hid it for the *Saddikim* in the World to Come. Since there was a change in the creation and essence of the light, the Torah does not state, “And it was so.” Further, the *Zohar* states that when Aaron kindled the *menorah*, he reinstated that missing “and it was so,” indicating that by lighting the *menorah* Aaron was drawing the light from that initial hidden light. This is as it is written, “And Aaron did so.”

(*Ohr Gedaliahu*)



Just like we find with the Creation of the world that the first commandment was “Let there be light,” in the *Mishkan*, the first commandment was regarding kindling the *menorah*. This is as the *Midrash* states: “And He spoke to him:” What did He say?



When you kindle the lights. For the *Mishkan* was microcosm. Therefore, just as with the creation of the world the first commandment was “Let there be light,” so too, with the *Mishkan*, the first commandment was regarding kindling the *menorah*, which is a reparation of the commandment of “Let there be light.”

(*Ohr Gedaliahu*)



The Kabbalistic literature devotes much discussion to the Seven G-dly Attributes: *Hesed*, Kindness; *Geburah*, Mightiness; *Tiferet*, Glory; *Nesah*, Eternity; *Hod*, Splendor; *Yesod*, Foundation; *Malchut*, Sovereignty. It is written in the name of the *Ari* that the Hasmonean family made reparations for the attribute of *Hod*, splendor, which was contrary to the overriding emphasis of the times, which was “*דוה*, Pain throughout the day.” To understand this on some level, we should note that *Hod*, splendor has reference to the Oral Torah, which Antiochus wished to abolish.

(*Ohr Gedaliahu*)



The Talmud states regarding *Hanukkah*: “One who sees the lights on the first day makes two blessings, and one blessing on the subsequent days.” (*Shabbat 23a*) The two blessings on the first night of *Hanukkah* have reference to the extra blessing of *Sheheheyanu*, which is recited on the first night of *Hanukkah*. It seems that one recites the *Sheheheyanu* blessing on the *Hanukkah* lights only once one sees the lights, otherwise, one may not recite the blessing.

Why does *Hanukkah* differ from other festivals when one recites the *Sheheheyanu* blessing on the festival itself? The *Hidushei Harim* states (as quoted by the *Sefat Emet*) that the festival of *Hanukkah* does not contain inherent holiness. Rather, it draws its holiness from the stirring of the Jewish soul which occurs when seeing the *Hanukkah* lights, since the lights emanate from a heavenly source. Therefore, it is only by seeing the *Hanukkah* lights that the Jewish



soul stirs, and on that holiness, the blessing of *Sheheheyanu* may be recited. Otherwise, the festival of *Hanukkah* contains no inherent holiness, unlike all other festivals.

(*Ohr Gedaliahu*)



What a treasure are these days of *Hanukkah*! How much we can merit to achieve during these days, since the lights of the *menorah* emanate from the initial hidden light! What great spirituality descends during these days, through which we can merit to praise and thank Hashem from the essence of one's heart! When we contemplate this, we realize the importance of preparing ourselves adequately for these days so that we can establish that spirituality within us. To achieve this we must purify ourselves from any obstacle that would prevent us from achieving this. We must stay away from external sources of wisdom because they prevent one from reaching the internal essence of the Torah's wisdom, and obscure the light of the Oral Torah which was hidden within one's heart. By preparing oneself well, he will merit the spirituality that descended during the victory of the Hasmonean family. He will merit great spirituality through the *Hanukkah* lights, as it is written, "In your luminescence, light will be seen," meaning that through the *Hanukkah* lights, he will merit to see great lights.

(*Ohr Gedaliahu*)



We would like to thank Ateres Publishing for giving us permission to use excerpts from their sefer "Otzar Peninim".



The story of Hanukah began in 168 BCE
when the Greek King Antiochus
issued many decrees in his attempt
to eradicate Judaism.



Midrash Hanukah

In the twenty-third year of King Antiochus' reign, the 213th year of the Second Temple, the King became very hostile and had evil designs against the Jewish People, which impelled him to wage war against them. He gathered all his advisors, officers and servants and said, "Are you not aware of this nation living in Jerusalem whose religion is different from every other nation and who do not obey the King's edicts? Additionally, they are arrogant and claim that they are the Chosen People, above all other nations and they eagerly await the downfall of all nations. This is what they say: 'Darkness and mist will cover the land and the nations, but light will shine for the righteous and all the Jewish people will have light in their dwellings.' Therefore, this evil nation does not deserve to live. Now, let us arise and wage war against them and obliterate them from the face of the earth and in this manner we will conquer them. The first tactic will be the issuance of a decree forbidding the observance of three of their commandments: Sabbath observance, *Rosh Hodesh* and *Brit Milah*."

The plan pleased the King's officers. Afterwards, the King sent his general, Nikanor, and a large army to fight the Jews in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was besieged and oppressed by many evils and a great many Jews were killed.

To further oppress and avenge himself against the Jews, this evil man had an altar erected in the *Beit Hamikdash* and sacrificed a pig upon it, scattering its blood throughout the Sanctuary.



When Yochanan, the son of Mattityahu, the *Kohen Gadol*, saw all this, he zealously set out to avenge Hashem's glory and decided to kill the evil general. He concealed a sword under his coat and approached the King's gate, calling out to the gatekeepers: "I am Yochanan, the son of Mattityahu, I have come to speak to your master."

They went to Nikanor and said, "Yochanan the High Priest wishes to speak with you."

Nikanor replied, "Bring him in."

Yochanan came before Nikanor. Nikanor said, "Why have you transgressed the King's command? Why don't you desire the welfare of the kingdom? Don't you know how powerful I am and that I can do all manner of evil in the world against you and your people, not even leaving a remnant of them alive? And who is this G-d that you trust in? In the blink of an eye, I can kill you and your nation and burn you like straw!"

Yochanan responded, "I have come now to say that I will totally obey your orders."

Nikanor said, "How am I to know that you are in fact telling the truth and not trying to deceive me? Here is your test, take a pig and sacrifice it on the altar with the blood and the fat. Once you have done this, I will dress you in the King's garments, place you in my chariot and crown you."

Yochanan replied, "I will do all that you command, however, I am afraid that my Jewish brethren will kill me when they see me sacrifice a pig, which is an abomination in their eyes. Therefore, send out all the people who are here so they won't hear my plan and reveal it to the Jews who will stone me."

When Nikanor heard this, it pleased him and he sent everyone out of the house. He remained alone with Yochanan.

After they left, Yochanan pleaded with Hashem and prayed, "Hashem, You are the only G-d, the Sovereign King, Creator of heaven and earth. Please hear the words of Antiochus and his general that insult You, the Living G-d, King of the Universe. And now, Hashem, please save me from him, lest he boast and praise his god, saying, 'My power and strength have caused me to succeed and my god has given over the enemy to me.' Strengthen me now so that I may avenge Israel's vengeance."



Yochanan completed his prayer, approached Nikanor and stabbed him in the heart with his sword — he fell to the ground slain. Yochanan then went out, sounded the shofar and waged war against the King's army. They killed 772,000 Greeks besides those killed by their brethren's sword.

When Antiochus heard that his viceroy Nikanor was killed, he was greatly anguished and called for his officers, servants and viceroys, saying, "Shall we not avenge the nation who dared to kill and wound my soldiers and loot my camps? Now there is no time to waste. We will attack them and abolish the Sabbath, *Rosh Hodesh* and *Brit Milah*. And who is this G-d who will save them from me?"

Then his second-in-command, Bogris, and a great army and multitudes besieged Jerusalem, placing their idols in the Temple. They announced in the King's name: "Whoever will disobey the King's order and observe the Sabbath, *Rosh Hodesh* and *Brit Milah* will be put to death!"

Many Jews martyred themselves to honor Hashem and refused to nullify the covenant of their fathers.

One Levite woman sanctified G-d's Name by circumcising her son, accompanied by drums and dancing. After she circumcised him, she went up on the walls of Jerusalem, her baby in her arms, and said, "Master of the Universe, no matter what, we will never deny You or Your covenant." She finished speaking and threw herself off the wall, dying together with her baby.

Concerning the Sabbath, they said, "The King commanded us not to observe the Shabbat and the Master of the Universe commanded: 'Six days shall you work and on the seventh day you shall rest.' It is best that we obey the command of the Master of the Universe and observe our Shabbat. If we live, we live, and if they kill us, we will die." They went and hid in a cave with their wives and children. When the King was informed that some people were hiding in a cave in order to observe the Sabbath, he sent his soldiers with the following message: "Why have you disobeyed the King's order? Now, if you will come out and obey the decree, you will save your lives."

All the people in the cave replied, "Whatever Hashem has said we will do and obey for He commanded us at Sinai — 'Six days



shall you work and on the seventh day you shall rest. Is it not better for us to die here than, G-d forbid, desecrate the Shabbat.”

When the soldiers realized that these people would not change their minds and refused to obey the King, they set a fire and killed 1,000 men, women and children in the cave.

Upon hearing of this event, Yochanan, the son of Mattityahu, and his four brothers armed themselves and trusting in their Father in Heaven, fought against their enemies, killing countless people. Only Bogris remained and some wounded refugees. They escaped to Antiochus. Bogris said to Antiochus, “You sent us to abolish the Sabbath, *Rosh Hodesh* and *Brit Milah*. You and your people will fade away before this occurs. All the nations are insufficient to stand up to the five sons of Mattityahu — they are stronger than lions and swifter than eagles. Now, my master, O king, if you will but listen to my advice, do not fight with ‘the few’ lest we become a source of ridicule in the eyes of the other nations and their kings. If it pleases the king, send dispatches to all the provinces of your kingdom asking them to send all their officers and people so we will have an army of thousands upon thousands of soldiers and then we will see who will be victorious.”

Antiochus proceeded with this plan and soldiers arrived from the provinces — too numerous to count. When Bogris saw the enormous number of soldiers, he decided to return to Jerusalem and go to war against the Jews. They went and laid siege to Jerusalem. The walls were breached and they began to destroy the holy Temple and desecrate it. He said to himself, this time they will not prevail for my strength is too great.

The wicked Bogris said to the Jews, “You are fools to try and fight such a great army. If you have faith that your G-d will bring a flood against us, He promised never to bring another flood to the world. And if you think the angel Gavriel will stand against us and burn us like he did to Sancheriv, we anoint our bodies with pig’s blood and no angel will touch us. Therefore, what will you depend on in your war against us?”

The Jews raised their eyes heavenward and said, “Not for our sake, Hashem, not for our sake, but do so for the glory of Your Name — why should they say that You cannot save us? About You it is



said: “Your design is great and numerous are Your deeds.” Simultaneously, G-d said to them, “I swear, My thoughts are greater than yours — Hashem will not abandon His people!”

At the same time the Jews were anxiously scanning the eastern direction, perhaps the Persians were coming to their aid. This angered Mattityahu, the *Kohen Gadol*, and he said, “Is it for nothing that it says ‘cursed is the man who trusts in man instead of Hashem and blessed is the man who trusts Hashem’? So why are you placing your faith in mortals?”

The Chashmonai (Hasmonean) answered him, “Well said! We do not have faith in mortals but only in Hashem. I and my seven sons and you and your three sons number twelve, corresponding to the twelve tribes, a testimony to Israel. We shall go out against them, placing our complete trust in Hashem that He will perform wonders and miracles for us.”

And so it was — first they fasted and then they donned sackcloth and ashes to beg mercy from Hashem to help them and protect the Jews.

After they finished praying, they arose and fought their enemies, striking a mighty blow.

At the same time, Hashem gathered the seventy guardian angels of the nations of the world and pierced their ears with a fiery awl, saying, “Each of you must kill your kinsmen and do not permit anyone to escape. It is your life for theirs!”

And when the guardian angels of the nations heard this, they went and directed the arrows shot by the Greeks against the Jews and reversed them to strike the Greeks. As it is written in *Tehillim*, “Their sword will pierce their own heart and their bows will be broken” (37:15). The Chashmonaim saw these miracles and said, “Hashem fights for us!” The angels looted the wealth of every slain king and transferred the wealth to the Jews. The Jews took great vengeance against their enemies, some died by fire, others by sword, while still others were hanged. Bogris, the wicked, was killed by fire.

When Antiochus heard that Bogris was killed as well as the other generals, he fled to the coastal provinces, leaving everything behind.

After the war ended, the Chashmonaim came to the *Beit Hamikdash* to cleanse and purify it (165 BCE). They made all the necessary repairs to the gates. Then they searched for pure olive oil,



sealed with the *Kohen Gadol's* seal, and found only one flask with sufficient oil for one day. However, Hashem blessed this oil and caused it to burn for eight days. Because of this miracle and our great salvation from the hands of our enemies, the Jews confirmed and accepted upon themselves and their offspring to celebrate each year the eight days of Hanukah, with praise and gratitude to Hashem, so that we and our children shall always remember.



Overview of the History of Hanukah from Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l¹

At that time (when Antiochus became king of Syria) there came forth from Israel wicked men who led astray the people of the land (the Am-Haaretz, the lowest element) saying: Let us make a union with the peoples around us . . . And they sent messengers to the king, and the king gave orders by their hand to go in the ways of the gentiles and their laws (of idolatry). And they set up a place of sport in Jerusalem according to the custom of the gentiles, and they no longer circumcised their sons, and they forsook the Holy Covenant to go in their ways, and they delivered themselves over to do what was evil in the eyes of G-d" (I Hasmoneans 1:14-17)

Thus, in order to gain power by currying favor with the foreign monarch, this party sold their people and the Torah of G-d; and they brought a cruel tyrant to trample upon their own nation. **Wicked as Antiochus was, he had never before considered repressing the religion of the Jews.** His sole interest was power and tribute. It was solely due to the Hellenising Jews that he became involved in the persecution of the Torah.

1. This section of excerpts from the book, "Torah Nation" from Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt"l was reprinted with permission of the copyright holder. When necessary we have changed the transliterated hebrew to reflect the Sephardic pronunciation.



Antiochus now changed the policy of his predecessors entirely. Under the influence of this wicked party which solicited his intervention, he gave them permission to abolish the Jews' rights to keep their laws which Antiochus the Great and Seleucus had granted. These Hellenisers (*Mityavnim*), as this party was named because of their desire to be assimilated with the Syrian Greeks, were deterred by nothing; they had no scruples to stand in their way, and eventually killed Chonio the *Koben Gadol*.

Jason became the *Koben Gadol* appointed by Antiochus. He erected a place of sport, called the gymnasium, near the Sanctuary, where he required the young men to stand naked, in the manner of the Greeks. Although he sent gifts and offerings to the idols during the festivities at Tyre, he was not wicked enough for the Hellenisers, for he did not introduce idol-worship into the Sanctuary. After three years, they removed him from office and supplanted him with one nearer to their heart, Menelaus, who was ready to stop at nothing.

The new incumbent also encouraged the gymnasium at Jerusalem, where his party came and performed naked. In order to resemble the gentiles who participated, they went so far as to endeavor to appear uncircumcised, by means of surgery.

Not long afterward, Antiochus made an expedition against Jerusalem. The Hellenisers caused the gates to be opened to him; they then denounced to him the leaders of the people who had opposed their wicked innovations, and Antiochus slew many. In addition, he despoiled the Sanctuary and left it bare. Two years later the Syrians returned and plundered the city, took ten thousand captives, burned the finest buildings, overthrew the city walls and erected a citadel overlooking the Sanctuary. In this citadel they installed a Greek garrison, and



here were housed the Hellenisers, who carried on from this place the harassment of the people. Upon the altar of G-d they built an idolatrous altar upon which swine were slaughtered.

In the *Tohacha*-prophecy of *Debarim* (Ch. 28), no mention is made of idolatry, unlike the *Tohacha*-prophecy of *Vayikra* (Ch. 26), where idolatry is mentioned conspicuously. This is because the *Tohacha* of *Debarim* speaks of the second Sanctuary, whereas the *Tohacha* of *Vayikra* deals with the era of the first Sanctuary (see *Ramban* at *Vayikra* 26:16). The ancient lure of idolatry, which sometimes tempted even the most observant Jews by virtue of the universal confidence in the power of idols, was now dead among Jews. The Hellenisers who worshiped the Greek gods did not serve them out of belief in their power to do any good or harm. Their sole intent was to flatter the Syrian Greeks by honoring their gods, thereby demonstrating that they were the one nation with the Greeks. It was a simple case of rejecting the entire Torah and all its obligations, exactly as foretold in the second *Tohacha*: “If you shall not hearken to the voice of the L-rd your G-d to guard to do all His commandments and His statutes” (*Debarim* 28:15).

In accordance with the wishes of the Hellenisers, Antiochus issued an edict that in every city and village altars be erected and swine be offered daily; and he gave order that the worship of G-d should no longer exist among the people. Overseers were appointed to slay anyone who circumcised his son or who possessed any of the sacred books. There were indeed many who complied, some of the more ignorant because they yielded to the influence of the Hellenisers, but in most instances out of fear. But very many refused to obey; men and women were strangled, whipped to death, torn to pieces or crucified alive. A great number fled to the mountains



or the wilderness and concealed themselves in caves and thickets to avoid being coerced into forsaking the laws of the Torah. Such was the fate which the Hellenisers brought upon the nation

It is an error to think, as many writers do, that the *Shmad* was put upon the nation solely by Antiochus, and that the Hellenisers merely were weaklings who yielded to his decrees. The truth is exactly the opposite. It was the Hellenisers who prevailed upon Antiochus to make the decrees, and they themselves were the most energetic enforcers of the decrees. After the wars began, there were times when the Syrian-Greeks **wished to withdraw** from their embroilment with the Jews, but the Hellenisers again and again urged them to continue.

Now was demonstrated the **enormous descent** since the days of the First Sanctuary. The wicked ones in the old era were wicked for themselves, but they permitted others to live according to the Torah and to serve G-d as they wished. Even the sinners themselves continued to keep the Sabbath and to circumcise their sons. But the Hellenisers were not satisfied with their own wickedness, which far outdid the deeds of the worst in the old era, but they decreed death upon all who refused to worship idols, who circumcised their sons, observed the Sabbath, or refused to eat forbidden food; and they burned the books of the Torah and slew everyone in whose possession such books were found. They even hunted out and slew those Jews who fled to the wilderness to hide in caves and forests in order to keep the Torah. The Hellenisers not only transgressed the Torah, but they sought to wipe it out and make it entirely forgotten. They were not a party which merely differed with the people ideologically, as some erroneously think. Like the Sadducees, who were the descendants of the Hellenisers (the writers elevated the Sadducees to the status



of a “religious sect” with its own principals), like the first Nazarenes, and like the Reformers of our time, **they were the enemies of their people.** Many Jews were slaughtered by the hand of the Hellenisers themselves, in addition to the many whom they caused to be tortured to death when they denounced them to Antiochus’ officers.

Now Israel learned the true nature of the Greeks. Unlike the nations of the world, especially in modern times, who admire the Greeks and ascribe them every grace and virtue, Israel alone learned to recognize their profound corruption. (So were European Jews, thousands of years later, to discover the monstrous evil which was masked by the civilization and science of the “gemutlich” Germany.) When viewed at close range, the gods of Greece resembled a horrifying pantheon of crime and vice; and these crimes and vices which the Greeks attributed to their deities afforded them the best excuse to do likewise. The few virtues which their writers preached were not followed by the Greek populace. Unlike Israel, whose Torah **was the possession of the entire nation**, and was the way of life for every individual, the Greek culture (whatever it was) was not the possession of the masses. Only the evils of Greek literature (of which there are very many) were practiced by them. Treachery, unbridled lewdness (including widespread homosexuality), endless arrogance and cruelty revealed the Greeks to the Jew in a light which made their name synonymous with Evil. Israel looked on in astonishment as the nations frivolously adopted the Greeks as the model of civilization, whereas to us Athens and Sparta are known as the swamps of degradation. The ancient Greeks also fabricated against Israel numerous slanders, which have persisted and are still repeated by the wicked today. From the days of Antiochus down to and including the Byzantine era they enraged in con-



stant persecution of Israel; and this attitude was inherited by the founders of the Church, who were Greeks. It is indeed not surprising that the ancient Greeks were so bitterly hostile; they arrogantly sought the first place among the nations in every respect; and when confronted by the wisest and most virtuous of nations, their spiteful envy could not be contained.

But it was not the hand of the Greeks, but of wicked Jews, which first brought upon the nation the yoke of Greek oppression. The Greeks did not initiate the persecutions.

“There came forth from the midst of Israel wicked men who corrupted the people, saying: Let us make a union with the peoples around us... And they sent messengers to the king, and the king gave orders by their hand to go in the ways of the gentiles” (I Hasmoneans 1:14-16)

At the beginning of the oppression the Jews had no intentions of fighting back. They were unarmed, unaccustomed to war or violence, and were confronted by the professional military forces of a powerful monarch, which were assisted by the ruthless Hellenising Jewish officials of the tax-gatherers' network. They offered no resistance, because their sole plan was to await G-d's help, and in the meantime to die for His Law when necessary. Therefore when 1,000 men who had fled for refuge in a cave were attacked on the Sabbath by the enemy, they refused to profane the Sabbath uselessly by offering ineffectual battle; and they all perished. The people knew that self-defense was permissible on the Sabbath, but at this stage self-defense was out of the question.



Everywhere in Judah the people were giving their lives for the Torah: they accepted terrible deaths by torture for studying the Torah or merely for possessing the sacred books, for keeping the Sabbath or the festivals, for performing circumcision and for fulfilling other Misvot. Brides were snatched from the wedding-feast and were violated by the officers. The agonized cry of the crushed and bleeding nation went up to G-d. Some of the greatest scenes in history were now enacted, but almost all of the heroes remained anonymous. Hannah, who offered up all of her seven sons to death by torture in order to avoid idol-worship, **was but a symbol of countless men and women** who demonstrated the most fiery devotion to G-d in the midst of fearful suffering. Israel now exhibited its uniqueness among the nations. *“Many waters are not able to extinguish the love, and rivers cannot wash it away”* (Songs 8:7). An entire people stood ready to yield everything in life, and even life itself, for the love of G-d and His Torah. Nothing like it had ever been seen among the nations, or would ever after be seen.

Although a catastrophe of the first magnitude, this fearful action of the Hellenisers **proved to be a great blessing**. Had they refrained from persecuting the Jews, or had they persecuted them less, the nation would not have been stirred to action and no war would have resulted. This party of depraved renegades would have continued to grow, and to strengthen its influence indefinitely; and the entire history of the Second Sanctuary would have been different. The Sanctuary would have remained defiled, and publicly the Torah would have been ignored; and the effect on the following millennia of history would have been incalculable. It was G-d's hand that induced these wicked men to overplay their hand. The nation was now driven by them against the wall; and now,



because there was no alternative other than complete spiritual extinction, a wave of righteous wrath swelled up and began to roll back against the persecutors.

Now came the time for G-d to fulfill the prophecy foretold by Moses a thousand years before: "*Of Levi he said.... Smite through the loins of those that rise up against him, and of his enemies, that they arise no more*" (*Debarim 33:11*) A scion of Levi, Matityahu the Kohen, raised the banner of the Torah aloft when the Greeks and their Helleniser henchmen came to offer swine on an altar in his town of Modin.

"Matityahu saw, and his heart became hot with anger, and there was kindled within him his zeal for the Torah of his G-d. And he ran, in his wrath, upon the man, and he slew him at the altar" (*I Hasmoneans 2:25-26*) He killed the officer and overthrew the altar; and he called to all who loved G-d's Law to forsake their possessions and follow him into the wilderness. The wrathfulness of Levi, of which Jacob had disapproved (*Beresbit 49:6*), had become ennobled by zeal for G-d's Torah, such as their zeal in helping Moses punish the sinners of the Golden Calf (*Shemot 32:26*), and as when Pinchas the Kohen smote Zimri for openly defying the Torah (*Bamidbar 25:11*); and now it was employed when Matityahu and his noble sons raised the banner of the Torah against its enemies.

Now that they saw purpose in resistance, they no longer permitted themselves to be slaughtered on the Sabbath as hitherto. They battled so fiercely that the Hellenisers fled to the gentiles; and the pious men flocked to Matityahu's army, which now went from victory to victory.

They did not arise for national independence, as the gentile-thinking Jewish writers of today would have us believe. The Nationalist Jews who forsook the Torah make a great to-



do about the Hasmoneans, and depict them as patriots for political independence. These Zionists² of today would have been among the Hellenisers, had they then existed; and the Hasmoneans would have been forced to fight against them for the right to practice the Torah. As long as they were able, the Jews sought peace and abhorred war, especially since war entailed disturbance of the Torah-regimen, which requires a peaceful and established community system. There was but one matter which could stir them to rebellion and cause them to take up arms: the interference with their observance of the Torah. Now the men of peace, and even the *Cobanim*, became warriors; and those who detested war became the fiercest of fighters.

At the age of 64, Matityahu on his deathbed fortified his sons with admonitions of piety and trust in G-d; and he appointed his son Shimeon as the advisor, and his son Judah as the commander. Long and perilous was the campaign waged by the Hasmoneans, as this family was known. But their little army continued to win against such huge odds that all men saw therein the open hand of G-d. The Jews recognized that their leaders were being favored by G-d according to the prophecy that the seed of Levi would overcome their enemies (*Debarim 33:11*). When two subordinates, Joseph ben Zachariah and Azariah, attempted battle on another front and lost 2000 men, it was explained by the fact “that they were not of the seed by which G-d had chosen to bring deliverance to His people” (*I Hasmoneans 5:60*).

All that they did was according to the Torah. They sent away from the army all who had built new homes, betrothed

2. Rabbi Miller, of blessed memory, makes a reference here to the irreligious secular Zionists.



wives, planted vineyards, or who were afraid of battle (*ibid.* 3:55), as prescribed by the Torah (*Debarim* 20:5-8). They always prepared themselves and their men for battle with quotations from the sacred Scriptures and by admonitions toward faith in G-d and loyalty toward His Torah; **and their chief weapon was prayer.** “They assembled at Mizpah... for Mizpah was formerly a place of prayer for Israel. They fasted on that day and wore sackcloth and put earth on their heads and tore their garments... And they cried out to G-d with weeping” (*I Hasmoneans* 3:46-50). “Judah said: Fear not... Arise and let us cry out to the L-rd our G-d” (*ibid.* 4:7-9). “When he saw the very great camp of the enemy, he prayed to G-d” (*ibid.* 4:28).

It is a remarkable fact that they ran into battle while weakened by fasting. No nation attempted to do battle with empty stomachs, but the Hasmonean army fought with a strength which came from G-d. They not only were strong, but their handful overcame mighty armies of skilled fighters.

After three years of war, the day came when they re-entered the desolate city of Jerusalem. They tore their garments and put earth on their heads in bitter mourning for the desecrated Sanctuary of G-d. They sounded the *Shofar* and fell upon their faces, and their outcry of repentance went up to Heaven. The stones of the profaned altar of G-d were put away to wait for a time when a prophet should arise to instruct them what to do. (It is significant that despite the flaming inspiration of this generation, no prophet arose. Not even a false prophet is mentioned, although oracles and diviners abounded in the surrounding nations. This demonstrated the truthfulness and piety of the entire people, who were unanimous in the knowledge that prophecy was no more.) On the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* they made the dedication of the new altar (*Hannukat Hamisbeah*), on the same day when it had first been profaned by their enemies.



For three years, only the Hellenisers and the Greeks had entered the desolated Sanctuary. All supplies had been plundered, and the little which remained was defiled and unfit for use. But because the Hasmoneans now discovered a sealed vessel of olive oil which still bore the unimpaired imprint of the former Sanctuary officials, they therefore made haste to kindle the *Menorah* which had so long been extinguished. (The golden *Menorah* had been plundered together with all the Sanctuary treasures; now they set up a temporary makeshift one, in order not to postpone the performance of the *Misvah*.) They made haste to prepare more of the especially -processed (*Menahot 86a*) oil, for the sealed cruse contained only one day's supply. At the end of the first day the oil had not been consumed. To the amazement and delight of the people, the flames persisted until the end of the eight days of the altar-dedication. We can understand how the excitement of these tidings spread like a fire among Jews everywhere, and how this event was the chief subject of their conversation. The pious nation ennobled and purified by their fearful suffering for G-d's Torah, had longed for the favor of G-d more than they desired freedom and peace. Now they saw that G-d had in some measure accepted their repentance for the sins of their wicked brothers, which had brought G-d's disfavor upon them.

They decreed, on the following year, that the eight days of Hannukah be observed every year as a time of thanksgiving and praise to G-d, of which the most prominent feature was the Hannukah lights.

The genuine tradition of Israel, preserved in the Oral Law, explains the true nature of the Hannukah celebration. "What is Hannukah? (*Rashi*: For which miracle was it instituted?) The Sages taught... A miracle took place and they kindled the *Menorah* from it (from the vessel of oil) for eight days" (*Shabbat*



21b). The miracle of the lights was the central cause of celebration; for the battles were by no means finished, **for soon afterward the power went over to the Hellenisers entirely, after the death of Judah the Maccabee, and the worst part of the Shmad commenced,** followed by 25 years of war. It is thus clear that the celebration of Hannukah was not because of any victory, but because of their rejoicing at the demonstration of the *Shechina* in their midst.



Yehudit's Saga

In the days of Aliporni, the great and mighty Greek king, he captured many provinces and their powerful kings. He destroyed their palaces as well. In the tenth year of his reign, he set his sights on conquering the holy city of Jerusalem. He assembled a fighting force of 120,000 swordsmen and 92,000 archers and said to them. "The nation of Israel in Jerusalem practice a different religion from ours and do not follow the king's policies. They are a source of trouble in our midst — deceitful and fraudulent. Now let us go forth to wage war against them and obliterate them from our midst!"

One of the captured kings responded, "O, King, desist from attacking the G-d of Israel Who is most mighty in war and protects His nation Israel from their enemies. Not only that, but all the nations of the world are considered foreigners in Hashem's eyes while Israel is considered as His kinsmen. Recall the earlier kings who attacked Israel, like Pharaoh and Sancheriv, besides others. Remember well what happened to them. You and your followers will perish in such a confrontation. You will not prevail over Israel who are stronger than lions and more fleet than eagles. They are renowned for their strength."

King Aliporni was infuriated by these remarks. He said, "Who dares to say that the nation of Israel is greater and more powerful than I? How can they possibly stand up to my vast army? Did any god save the other provinces from my conquests that you dare to say that Jerusalem will be saved by Hashem?" In his great anger,



Aliporni commanded that the king who said this should be severely punished for speaking falsehoods about the king's military powers. Then he ordered that they bind him in chains and turn him over to the Jews for his terrible wrongdoing so that he may suffer the same fate as the Jews when they will be conquered. The king's men obeyed the order, delivered the prisoner to the gates of Jerusalem and returned to their master.

The king who was bound in iron chains entered the city and met two generals, Uziah ben Micah and Carmi. They were surprised to see him and asked him what happened. He related everything that had occurred. He mentioned that he spoke only good about Hashem and His nation Israel, but King Aliporni insulted Hashem. As a punishment, Aliporni turned him over to the Jews so he would be killed. When the generals heard all this, they trembled and went to the *Mikdosh*, prostrating themselves before Hashem, bitterly crying and wailing. They cried out, "Hashem, You are the only G-d over all the kingdoms of the earth, You created Heaven and Earth. Please be aware of the insults and abuses of Aliporni. Yet, they destroyed the Assyrian kings, their people and lands and burned their gods, who are not gods but only wood and stone. Now, Hashem, please save us from him and pour Your wrath upon those who deny You and trust in the power of man and horses."

When they finished their prayers, they went to comfort the king (who was in chains), saying, "Our Hashem Whom you recognize will protect you and you will witness the downfall of this wicked enemy when Hashem will avenge the vengeance of Israel. Now you may settle wherever you desire." Uziah brought him to his house and made a big banquet in his honor. Afterwards, the entire nation gathered to pray all night and request Hashem's help.

The very next day, Aliporni ordered his army to go to war against the Jews — 120,000 brave foot soldiers and 12,000 horsemen gathered in a great show of force. When the Jews saw this enormous army, they mourned and cried out to Hashem to save them from their enemies. Then they took up their arms to defend the approach to the mountains day and night. Aliporni, who was advancing around the mountain, found the water pipes to the city and ordered their total destruction. The army generals told King Aliporni that the Jews do not depend on swords, bows or arrows, only the high



and lofty mountains protect and fortify them. They advised placing guards at the water sources thereby killing them through thirst, and eventually they will be forced to surrender the city. The king approved this plan and placed hundreds of soldiers at the water sources.

Twenty days after setting up this watch, there was a water shortage in Jerusalem and the people were thirsty. All of them came to Uziahu and said in unison, “Let Hashem judge between you and us — you have harmed us by not responding to the King’s assault and now we will die of thirst. We wholeheartedly want to surrender, because isn’t it better for us to serve Hashem as slaves of the King than die of thirst and further disgrace ourselves by watching our sons and daughters die before our eyes? We call today upon the G-d of our fathers and the Heaven and earth to bear witness that you must surrender the city and let us die quickly by the sword!”

When Uziahu and the Israelite generals heard the cries of the people, they bitterly cried out to Hashem, “We have sinned! Please Hashem, do not be silent in the face of this enemy of Your People who wish to destroy us. We implore you, Hashem, to take pity on Your nation and do not deliver us to the hands of those who do not recognize You. Why should the nations say, ‘Where is your G-d, O people of Israel?’ With Your great might, You can destroy them. Deal with them as You did with Midian, Sisera and others.” When their cries and shouts subsided, Uziahu arose, his eyes streaming tears, and said, “Be brave and courageous, my brethren, we hope to see Hashem’s kindness in five more days. Perhaps then Hashem’s anger will subside and He will save us. If not, we will do as you suggest.”

When the widow Yehudit, daughter of Beiri, heard this, she decided to speak to the *Kohanim* Chevri and Carmi. Yehudit was a beautiful, pious woman; she even had a special room in her house where she prayed to Hashem. She was beloved to all and was a true G-d fearing woman.

She said to the two *Kohanim*, “What does Uziahu mean by saying that he will surrender the city to the enemy if salvation does not come in five days? Are you testing Hashem? This is not the proper way to attain favor and mercy from the Almighty. This type of approach will only incur Hashem’s displeasure. How can you even consider setting deadlines for Hashem? G-d forbid that you should even contemplate not relying on Hashem! — His kindness is infinite,



as is His power. Now, let us repent for He is patient and forgiving. We will beseech Him for forgiveness and atonement through our prayers, tears and fasting. Hashem is abundantly forgiving. Now is a terrible time for the Jews, but we will be rescued and, as great and terrible is our fear, so will our joy be when we are saved. In truth, we have not sinned as gravely as our ancestors who left Hashem and served other gods and consequently were punished by their enemies. We only serve Hashem and honor His great name, therefore, He will save us. Now you are priests of Hashem and our lives are dependent on your being courageous leaders who will encourage us during this time of trial and tribulation. We are being tested if we truly love Hashem. Remind the people of the tests that our Patriarchs withstood as well as Moshe and other great leaders of the past — they all remained faithful to Hashem and were not killed by their enemies for the sake of Hashem’s great Name.”

Uziah and the *Kohanim* responded that everything Yehudit said was absolutely correct. She said, “I will pray to Hashem for you, and you, in turn, pray to Hashem for me and for the success of my plan that will avenge us against the Greeks. Tonight, my maid and I will leave the city, please do not ask me where I am going. All I request is that you pray to Hashem to save us.” Uziah answered her, “Go in peace. May Hashem grant your request and be with you to take vengeance against our enemy.”

Yehudit went home, donned sackcloth and placed ashes on her head. She poured out her heart to Hashem in prayer, tears and fasting. She prayed, “Hashem, G-d of my forefather Shimon, in whose hand You placed a sword to avenge his sister Dina’s virtue from those who defiled her. In addition, their wives and daughters were taken captive and their booty was looted. Please remember me, Hashem, in Your great kindness, for all Your ways are just. Look upon the camp of this evil enemy who insults You, as You looked upon the Egyptians when they pursued Your nation Israel. They depended on their horses, chariots and armed soldiers but You drowned them like stones in the depths. Let a similar fate befall our present enemy, for they too rely on their swords, bows and arrows and cavalry. They are ignorant that You, Hashem our G-d, are the Master of war and can overpower every enemy who does not call in Your Name and who wish to take over Your holy temple and defile it. Please, Hashem, do it for Your



sake, if not ours — turn their swords to their hearts and break their bows. Regarding our terrible enemy King Aliporni cause him to fall into the trap of loving me and then give me the strength to destroy him. May all this be for the sake of Your great Name that he be delivered into the hands of a woman. Hashem, You despise all wicked empires and hear the cries of the poor to save them. I therefore beseech You to heed my prayer. Help me implement a plan and speak the correct words so that all the nations will know that You are the one living G-d, King of the Universe, and there is no other.”

When Yehudit finished her heartfelt prayers, she called her maid to help her prepare. She bathed and anointed herself and plaited her hair and dressed in all her finery – in beautiful clothes and jewelry. Hashem blessed her with great beauty so she would be admired by all who saw her. Yehudit gave her maid a skin bottle of milk, wine and a flask of oil, flour, bread and cheese and then she left. When she came to the city gates, Uziahu and the *Kohanim* were waiting for her to wish her well and give her G-d’s blessing on the successful execution of her mission.

Yehudit and her maid were met by some of the king’s guards when they descended the mountain at daybreak. They seized her and asked her where she came from and where she was going.

She answered, “I am Yehudit, a daughter of the Hebrews, and I have fled here to hide because I know that the Jews will be delivered into your hands. I decided to save myself and come to King Aliporni to reveal the Jewish nation’s secret plans and show his army the route they should take to capture the city in such a way that there will be no casualties from your camp.”

When the Guards heard all she had to say, they were very impressed by her words, as well as her beauty. They told her she was very wise to come to them and save herself. They also assured her that their king would be good to her and would be favorably impressed with what she had to say. Yehudit was brought to the king who was completely overwhelmed by her beauty and he greatly desired her. All his officers and servants said, “Who can reject and despise the Hebrew nation who possess such beautiful women, and who will not fight for their sake?”

Yehudit bowed to the king who told her to arise and not worry, as he has no wish to kill her or any of her people if they would only serve him. Then he asked her why she chose to flee to them.



Yehudit answered, “We sinned before Hashem, our G-d, and therefore we are being punished. It is for this reason that the Jews fear you. Now there is a great famine and thirst in our city and they are considering slaughtering their sheep to drink the blood and to exchange the sacrifices with wheat, wine and oil, which is forbidden. If they commit this travesty, they will be punished and you will prevail. Knowing all that, I decided to run away and G-d has sent me to inform you. However, I, Yehudit, your servant, will serve Hashem, my G-d, even now while I am here — I pray three times a day to Him and He will tell me when they will have to make restitution for their misdeeds, at which time I will come and report this information to you. You will be able to pass through Jerusalem and the people of Israel will be like a shepherdless flock. Not even the dogs will bark at you as you pass — all this has been revealed to me in a G-dly vision. Because Hashem is angry, He has sent me to tell you all this.”

This pleased the king and his servants. The people were amazed at her great wisdom and said to one another, “There is no other woman in all the land who is so beautiful, wise and charming.” The king said to her, “G-d has benefited you by sending you here to relay this information and turn over your people to us. If everything comes to pass as you say, then your G-d will become mine. Not only that, but you will be first in the kingdom and famous throughout the land.”

The king ordered that she be brought to his treasure house and fed from his table. Yehudit told him that she could not eat this food, but only from the food that she had brought with her. The king was concerned about what would happen when there was no more food left. Yehudit told him not to worry; there will not be a shortage before Hashem will fulfill His plan. She again requested to be permitted to go out from the camp at night and at daybreak to pray to her G-d for three days.

The order was issued to permit Yehudit to do as she pleased and to go and come to pray to Hashem, her G-d. Every night, she left the camp, immersed herself in the pond and then poured her heart out in prayer before Hashem, beseeching Him to help her succeed in Israel’s salvation. Afterwards, she returned to her tent to eat the evening meal.

On the third day, the king made a big party for all his officers and servants. He asked the chamberlain of the concubines to go



and try to persuade Yehudit to come to him. The chamberlain went to her and said, "Do not be embarrassed to come to my master, perhaps he will favor you and you will dine together."

Yehudit replied, "Who am I to refuse the king? Whatever he wishes is for the best."

She dressed in her finery and went to the king. Her beauty overwhelmed the king. He told her to be happy because she has found favor in his eyes. Yehudit answered, "I will eat and drink with you because I am so very happy today, happier than I have ever been. They sat and ate and drank and the king drank more wine than he ever had in his life.

Afterwards, all the king's servants returned to their homes and the chamberlain closed the doors and left. The king remained alone with Yehudit and he fell asleep like a dead person. Yehudit told her maid to wait outside and guard the door. Yehudit stood in front of the bed and tearfully prayed, only her lips were moving but her voice could not be heard. She prayed, "Strengthen me, Hashem, that I may avenge your servant Israel. Reinforce the bolts of Jerusalem's gates, Your holy city, and please support and strengthen me now." Upon completing her prayer, she unsheathed Aliporni's sword and in two blows she beheaded him. Then she took his other weapons and struck his body all over. Yehudit placed his head in her maid's bag and they left, as was their regular routine, to go and pray. No one stopped them because they had the king's permission. At last, they arrived at the gates of Jerusalem and Yehudit joyously called from afar to the gatekeepers, "Open the gates for Hashem is with us and has brought us a great salvation."

The gatekeepers informed the *Kohanim* and everyone gathered to greet her in joy, song, praise and gratitude to Hashem. They lit candles in every courtyard in Jerusalem, dressed in their finery and bedecked themselves in jewels to escort Yehudit into the city because their joy was so great, especially since they didn't expect her to return. The vast assembly grew quiet as Yehudit arose to address them in a strong voice; "All of Jerusalem should praise Hashem, our G-d, for He has enforced our gates and blessed us. Praise Hashem's power and kindness for He did not abandon us and through His servant (Yehudit) He has saved us!" She then removed the evil Aliporni's head from her bag and showed it to them. "And now,



my brethren, I promise you that Hashem sent an angel to protect me when I left here, who remained with me the entire time I was away and made sure I returned safely to Jerusalem. I never had to compromise myself. Hashem has returned me to you and I am overjoyed for His salvation — let us give thanks to Hashem because He is good and His kindness endures forever.”

All the Jews bowed to acknowledge and give thanks to Hashem. They said to Yehudit, “Thank G-d that through you our enemy who blasphemed Hashem has been punished. All the nations who surround us, in Hashem’s Name will be struck down. They pushed us hard that we might fall, but Hashem helped us and answered our cries and did not hide Himself from us.”

Uziah said, “You are the most blessed woman and may it continue so. Let us give thanks and blessing to Hashem, Creator of Heaven and Earth, Who blessed your mission with success, for our enemy is dead. Your heroic act will not be forgotten and your name will be great for you did not concern yourself with your personal welfare in our time of peril and distress.” All the nation responded, “Amen, amen.”

Then the king who had escaped from Aliporni and was staying in Uziah’s house was called. Yehudit said to him, “Hashem, Whose power you acknowledge and Who you said would avenge us from our enemies, has indeed done so tonight. As proof, here is Aliporni’s head who arrogantly blasphemed Hashem and threatened to kill you when he vanquished the Jews.”

When the king saw Aliporni’s head, he prostrated himself on the ground and said, “So may all your enemies be destroyed. Blessed is Hashem and blessed are you for whoever will hear about what you did will praise Hashem, the G-d of Israel.”

Yehudit said to the nation, “Listen to me, my brethren, let us hang this head on top of our wall and at sunrise each of you should take your weapons and go forth to do battle. The gatekeepers will inform the army officers of your approach and when they in turn will enter Aliporni’s tent and see his slain body, they will be overwhelmed with fear and flee. You must chase after them because Hashem will turn them over to you.”

And so it happened, just as Yehudit said. The officers came to Aliporni’s tent and the chamberlain of the concubines entered and



discovered the king's body, whereupon he screamed and cried and rent his garments and then informed the officers what happened and they did likewise. A great fear descended over the entire camp.

The soldiers fled and the Jews pursued them into the vineyards and foothills and killed them. The remainder of Jews went into the enemy camp to take all the booty that was left behind — there was an infinite amount, including sheep, cattle, horses and chariots. There was so much booty that even after one month, they could not tally it. All of Aliporni's wealth was given to Yehudit by a grateful nation.

The fugitive king who was still living in Uziah's house converted to Judaism — he had a *Brit Milah* and became a firm believer in Hashem as a result of the miracles that he witnessed. Not only he but his entire family became true believers in Hashem, till this very day.

The entire nation rejoiced with Yehudit and the women went out with their drums and danced, saying, "Let us give thanks to Hashem because He is good and His kindness endures forever. Yehudit, you are the mother of Israel, the praise of Jerusalem and the source of happiness and honor to our nation. For your courageous acts, Hashem was with you and you will be blessed forever." The entire nation answered, "Amen, amen."

Young and old rejoiced and accompanied Yehudit with cymbals and lyres as she sang this song to Hashem, "Sing to Hashem and dance, sing a new song, praise Him and call out in His Name — Hashem is Master of war through His Name, Hashem. Hashem is great, awe-inspiring and powerful, He has no equal. All mankind will serve You and give thanks. They will praise all Your deeds. Whatever You say will be. The very foundations of the world tremble before Your might. Your right hand, Hashem, is adorned with strength and destroys the enemy. Who is like You among the heavenly powers, Hashem? Who is like You, superior in holiness, too awesome for praise, Who does wonders?"

Following this great salvation, and after the Jews purified themselves, they all brought sacrifices to Hashem. Yehudit donated all her booty to the Temple. The celebrations lasted for three months.

All of Yehudit's life the country was at peace; no enemy harmed them. Even following her death, this peace prevailed for many years. Indeed, the Jewish people enjoyed "light in their dwellings."



Yosifon (Excerpts Ch. 18 and 20)

In 169 B.C.E. Antiochus fulfilled his dream of ruling over Egypt. However, his victory did not last very long, as there was great unrest in Judah among the Jewish Hellenists.

After his victory, Antiochus became very arrogant and fashioned a large idol of himself, made from gold. He sent one of these statues to every place where he reigned. The people were commanded to bow down to this idol and they obeyed.

A group of traitorous Jews came to Antiochus in Egypt and incited him against the Jewish people. They bowed down to his idol and told him the following: "Hashem caused a great wonder to appear in the skies of Jerusalem for 40 days – there were images of fiery horses and riders who held weapons in their hands. These images engaged in battle for 40 days, destroying each other. The wise men of Israel interpreted this great wondrous image as a sign that the enemies of the Jewish people would be destroyed. Furthermore, they said that Antiochus would die in this battle."

The traitors told Antiochus how happy the people were when they heard about Antiochus' downfall. Antiochus became enraged when he heard this. He took action immediately and attacked Jerusalem. Thousands of innocent Jews were massacred. Many of the survivors were exiled. Those who could, fled to the forests and had to eat the vegetation in order to survive.

This massacre and punishment of the Jews did not completely satisfy Antiochus. When he left the land of Judah, cruel officers



and generals remained behind to oppress the Jews. The wicked Poliphus was put in charge. Antiochus ordered him as follows: "Anyone who obeys my commands and will bow down to my idol, eat pig and not observe Judaism, will live. Those who refuse will be put to death without mercy. The Jews are forbidden to observe their Sabbath, Festivals or circumcise their sons. In this way, I will force them to do my will."

Antiochus then left for Macedonia. Poliphus remained behind to implement the king's decrees. Many innocent, observant Jews were murdered as a result. Only Mattityahu and those who followed him escaped to Modiin. When he saw the calamity that befell his people, he cried out to Hashem, "Woe unto me that I should have been born to see the destruction of my people!"

He sent his son Yehuda throughout the cities of Judah proclaiming, "Whoever is for G-d, let him come to me!" A group of the faithful rallied and followed Yehuda when he returned to Mattityahu. Mattityahu welcomed them and said, "There is no need for a lot of discussion, we must pray to Hashem to help save us. Now, strengthen yourselves and prepare to do battle. Let us die like men and not like sheep being led to the slaughter!"

The people were encouraged by his words and said to one another, "How can we allow King Antiochus to rule over us? Enough of this! Let us sharpen our swords and we will save ourselves. We shall remove our yoke of servitude to this nation of Greeks. We will see the wonders Hashem will perform to save us."

When Poliphus and the officers were told that Mattityahu and his sons were plotting a revolt, they gathered a great force against them. En route, they came across a cave with 1,000 men, women and children who were observing the Sabbath. They called out to them, "Come out and desecrate the Sabbath so you may live!" The Jews answered, "We will not come out and desecrate the Shabbat. The Heaven and the earth bear witness that we received the Torah and commandments at Sinai, which we observe. If you want to kill us for this, then do so, but we will not obey your king."

Poliphus gave the order and trees were cut down and placed at the mouth of the cave and set afire and all the Jews in the cave died.

From there, Poliphus and his army continued on to Modiin. They found Mattityahu, his sons and a small band of followers there, for



the rest of the faithful had gone to bring their wives and children. "Listen, Mattityahu," Poliphus said, "you are a respected man among your people. If you will obey King Antiochus' orders, you will live."

Mattityahu replied, "I will obey my King and you obey your king."

The soldiers were all wondering in what manner Mattityahu would be put to death. One of the wicked, traitorous Jews asked, "How long will you accept this type of disobedience from Mattityahu and not take revenge?" He then took his sword and decapitated a pig and placed it on the altar as an offering to Antiochus' idols, sacrificing it in the same manner as the offerings brought in the holy *Beit Hamikdash*. Mattityahu observed this obscenity and was furious. To avenge Hashem's honor, he unsheathed his sword and killed the traitor – decapitating him, and his body fell upon the altar with the pig and was burned. Mattityahu stabbed the officer who spoke to him and many others ran away or were killed. Mattityahu sounded the shofar to call Yehuda to help.

Mattityahu, his five sons and an army of the faithful, pursued the enemy and were victorious. Hashem brought a great salvation to the Jews through them. All the babies in Judah and Israel were circumcised after this victory.

Mattityahu was about to die and he called his five sons to come to him to encourage and strengthen them with his words. "I know you will be challenged in great battles with the enemy. You must fight for our nation and land. Avenge Hashem's honor and that of the *Beit Hamikdash* and do not fear death. Even if you die, you will receive reward as your forefathers did who zealously served Hashem. Hashem granted them grace and honor. Remember Pinchas, our forefather who zealously served Hashem when he killed Zimri and the Midianite woman. He was rewarded with everlasting priesthood, for himself and his descendants because his act atoned for the Jewish people. Hashem bequeathed the Covenant of Peace to our first ancestor, Aharon. And so have all our ancestors been rewarded who acted likewise and who found favor in Hashem's eyes. Now, my sons, be strong and courageous and do not be intimidated by these impure gentiles because they have faith in their own strength which is limited, but you trust in Hashem, our G-d, who is omnipotent – His power is limitless. They will rely on their vast army of soldiers, but you should have faith in Hashem, Who is all-powerful to save you, while



believing in the strength of horses to save people is but a sham. Gather together as one man with one heart and zealously honor Hashem as your righteous ancestors did. In turn, Hashem will empower you and cause your enemies to fear you.”

He then called Shimon, his eldest son, and said, “My son, I know that Hashem has granted you wisdom and knowledge. Now, for the good of the nation, you must guide them and be as a father to your brothers, who will obey you because Hashem has favored you with wisdom and good counsel. Please send in my son, Yehuda, now.”

Yehuda came and Mattityahu said to him, “My son, Yehuda, you are called Maccabe because of your strength. Heed my advice and whatever you do will succeed. I am aware that you are a man of war and Hashem has granted you courage and strength, you are as fearless as the lion. Honor Hashem with this strength, for Hashem is the Source of everything. Go forth, do not tarry, you must seek out the enemy in every direction, in every corner of the country to take vengeance against the idol worshipers, do not be idle. You will serve your nation as their general, the one anointed to do battle.”

Yehuda answered his father and said, “My master, my father, I will do everything that you commanded.”

Then Mattityahu ordered them to bring a flask of oil. He poured some oil over Yehuda’s head and consecrated him as “the Anointed for Battle.” There was a great trumpeting of the shofar and all the nation cried out, “Long live the Anointed one, the commander!”

Mattityahu completed his last words to his sons and then passed away.

Yehuda, his brothers, family and all their followers buried Mattityahu with great honor. Afterwards, Yehuda put on a coat of mail and armed himself with weapons. He then attacked the enemy who was camped around the mountain and had come to capture them. Yehuda and his men killed more than 8,000 strong. He ruled Israel with his sword and sought out all traitors who were then imprisoned. The wicked feared him for his voice was like that of a lion who was hunting prey. All of Israel rejoiced over his courageous deeds. His name spread far and wide across the land and many great and powerful kings and their nations feared him. The stories detailing his wondrous acts of bravery and successful



battles spread throughout the land. [When he passed away, all of Israel praised and honored him saying, “The spirit of Hashem rested upon him and he sat in the refuge of the Most High, he will dwell in the shadow of the Almighty, under the Tree of life.”]

General Apollonius heard about Yehuda’s exploits and he wondered about it and said, “Who is this person who dares rebel against our master, our King Antiochus?” He gathered a great army to fight against Yehuda and his army.

Yehuda and his soldiers met them and a great battle ensued – Yehuda personally led them, killing the enemy on all sides. He killed Apollonius, whereupon the remaining soldiers fled. Yehuda and his army pursued them, killing many and taking plunder. Yehuda retrieved Apollonius’ sword and used it for the rest of his life.

General Seron heard about Yehuda’s exploits and said, “I will make a name for myself by fighting against the mighty Yehuda. He gathered a very large army to attack at Beit Choron. Yehuda was informed and decided to take the offensive so as not to appear afraid.

Yehuda and his army marched all night and at daybreak, they saw before them a massive fighting force. Yehuda’s soldiers asked him how could they expect to fight against such a huge army when ours is so much smaller? Yehuda answered, “Call out to Hashem and He will save us, for the Kingdom and salvation is Hashem’s.”

Yehuda and his men launched a surprise attack, causing great confusion in the enemy camp. Seron and his army fled and Yehuda and his army pursued them, killing many. Many nations feared the Jews because of these great conquests.

Antiochus was enraged by all these defeats. He gathered a tremendous army and divided them. He took half of his forces to invade Persia for they had sinned against him. After hearing about the Jewish people’s transgressions against the king, he appointed Lysias to lead the other half of the army. Lysias was an important man, the king’s relative, and a descendant of the Macedonians. Antiochus charged him as follows, “You know all about Yehuda, son of Mattityahu, and what he did to my two greatest generals and their armies. Now go and destroy them! I am also charging you with my son Eupator while I go to Persia for they have sinned against me.”



King Antiochus left on his mission against Persia, leaving Lysias to fight against Judah and serve as guardian to his son. Lysias appointed Ptolemy, Nikanor and Gorgias, the most capable and strongest generals, to go with him to Judah. As they approached the border, he told them to proceed while he returned to Macedonia. The three generals were accompanied by an enormous army of 40,000 soldiers, 7,000 cavalry and were joined by the forces of Aram and Philistea with Nikanor as their leader. They arrived in Judah to destroy her.

Yehuda and the Elders heard about the approaching army. They mourned and declared a fast day, donning sackcloth and ashes as they prayed to Hashem. Afterwards, Yehuda gathered the nation and appointed officers and they left to meet the Macedonian army. First the order was given to the camp – “Whoever has planted a vineyard, built a new house and recently married, or he who is fearful and faint-hearted, should return home.” Many among the nation did in fact leave for they feared the huge advancing army. Seven thousand strong young men remained with Yehuda and they advanced to meet Nikanor and the army.

Nikanor had also brought many merchants with him to sell them young boys and girls from Judah because he expected to take many captives. He approached with great arrogance, while Yehuda was humble and trembling. However, Yehuda trusted in Hashem to save them and he fervently prayed to Hashem to help them – “O G-d of Avraham, You are exalted and awesome and rule forever, since the beginning of time. You have the power to start or quell wars, to elevate or lower people. O, please, in Your great mercy, turn to us and humble our arrogant enemy before Your nation who trust in You and Your great kindness, for only You can cause their capitulation.”

After Yehuda completed his prayer, the *Kohanim* blew the trumpets and Yehuda waged war against Nikanor. Yehuda and his army successfully routed the enemy, killing thousands. They also looted the gold that the merchants had brought to purchase the young Jewish boys and girls. The gold was distributed among the poor. Then they stopped all activity because the war was on a Friday.

From there, Yehuda went after two Macedonian warriors who were commissioners in Syria. They managed to escape. Yehuda, however, pursued Poliphus. Elazer HaKohen and the fallen faithful



Jewish warriors were avenged when Yehuda set fire to the house where Poliphus was hiding.

On his return, Yehuda gathered a lot of wealth from the fallen and distributed it among the poor Jews of Jerusalem.

Nikanor escaped by changing into beggar's clothes so no one recognized him. He returned to Lysias and related all that had occurred.

At that time, Antiochus returned from Persia in disgrace – the Persians routed him. He was informed about everything that happened to his generals and armies that attacked Judah. He became enraged, cursing and insulting G-d. He said that he would go to Jerusalem and fill many graves with fallen Jews.

He gathered a tremendous army, chariots and horsemen. Hashem took pity on His nation and afflicted Antiochus with terrible boils and intestinal disease. Despite all this, Antiochus was determined to proceed with his plan to destroy Jerusalem.

Antiochus said, "Quickly, let us go to Jerusalem, I will do as I planned. No one can stop me – can anything stop the sea? So, too, am I unstoppable, I have all the power to do as I desire!" He advanced with his huge army, including many elephants. On the way, his chariot passed opposite an elephant which agitated the horses so that they tripped. The chariot overturned and Antiochus fell, breaking all his bones because he was very overweight. Hashem afflicted him even more, with all manner of terrible afflictions. His servants were forced to abandon him because of his terrible stench that Hashem afflicted him with. It was a fitting punishment for one such as he who had blasphemed and insulted Hashem.

Upon seeing the weariness of his soldiers and their inability to cope with the terrible odor emitting from him, Antiochus realized that Hashem had afflicted him. He humbled himself and submissively said, "Hashem is the Righteous One, He diminishes the haughty and caused me to submit today, wicked that I am. For I have done terrible things to His people and consequently I have been severely punished." He then took an oath, "If Hashem will cure me, then I will go to Jerusalem and bring great wealth – gold and silver and precious clothing will fill her streets. All my treasures and antiques I will give and I will even circumcise myself. Then I will go to all the kingdoms in the land and proclaim that there is no one other than Hashem, the G-d of Israel, in all the world."



However, Hashem did not listen to Antiochus' prayer because he was insincere and Hashem knew what was truly in his wicked heart. Indeed, from then on, Antiochus went from country to country to try and find a cure for his terrible illness. He never succeeded and died a horrible death in shame and ignominy in a foreign land. His son Eupator ruled after him.

Yehuda, the son of Mattityahu *Kohen Gadol* and all his followers came to Jerusalem. They destroyed the heathen altars and cleansed and purified the Temple. They built a new altar and prepared a sacrifice, however, a holy fire was nowhere to be found. They cried out to Hashem and a fire came forth from the stones on the altar and they were able to burn their offering. This fire remained until the third exile.

On the 25th of Kislev, they dedicated the altar and also placed the Showbread on the table. They lit the Menorah and sang Hallel to Hashem for eight days.



Historical Overview and General Laws

In the time of the second *Beit Hamikdash* when the wicked Greek kings passed decrees in their attempt to eradicate Judaism, Torah study was forbidden as well as observance of Shabbat, *Rosh Hodesh*, *Brit Milah*, *Kashrut* and *mikveh*. The enemy breached the Temple walls in thirteen places and forbade the Jews to repair them. The Greeks also defiled the *Beit Hamikdash* with their altars, sacrifices and idols.

Hashem, in His great mercy, saved the Jewish people through the heroic exploits of Mattityahu and his five sons, specifically Yehuda HaMaccabe. Ultimately, the Jews were victorious because of Hashem's salvation.

A. After the final victory, the Jews drove out the enemy and purified the Temple. They wanted to light the Menorah but only found sufficient pure oil, sealed with the *Kohen Gadol's* stamp, that would burn for one day. However, a miracle occurred and the oil burned for eight days.

To commemorate the miracle of the oil (as well as the miraculous military victory), the Rabbis ordained the eight days of Hanukah, beginning on the 25th day of Kislev. Hanukah is celebrated as a time of joy and *Hallel*. Candles are lit for eight nights, in public view, to publicize the miracle of Hanukah. It is a *mitzvah* to light the menorah, similar to other *mitzvot*, such as reading the *Megillah* on Purim.

The holiday is called Hanukah חנוכה because we rested (חנו) from our enemies on the 25th (כ"ה) day of Kislev.



B. There is no *mitzvah* of *seudah* (festive meal) on Hanukah as there is on Purim. The reason we have a *seudah* on Purim is because the Jews were threatened with *physical* annihilation, whereas Antiochus' intention was to destroy the Jews *spiritually*. Following the nation's salvation on Purim, the *mitzvah* of *seudah* was included as a means of demonstrating our joy and gratitude for Hashem's salvation. A banquet represents the *physical* component. Hanukah, which celebrates a *spiritual* victory, is commemorated through *Hallel* and gratitude to Hashem minus the *mitzvah* of *seudah*.

Although there is no obligation to make a *Seudah*, we have a custom to celebrate with a nice meal and recall the re-dedication of the Temple and all the miracles that occurred. If the meal is accompanied with words of Torah, as well as singing and praising Hashem for everything He did, then this meal is considered a *seudat mitzvah*.

- C.** It is customary to eat dairy foods on Hanukah because of the miracle that occurred with Yehudit and King Aliporni. She gave him spicy dairy foods and as a result he drank a lot of wine. He became drunk and fell into a deep sleep, whereupon she killed him.
- D.** No eulogies, fasting or reciting *Tahanun* is permitted on Hanukah.

✿ Who is Obligated to Kindle the Hanukah Menorah?

One must be very careful with the beloved *mitzvah* of Hanukah candles. Whoever is prudent in his observance of this *mitzvah* will merit having children who are scholars. Everyone is obligated to give thanks to Hashem for the miracle of Hanukah specifically, and for all miracles in general as we recite in the "Nishmat" prayer:

"It is mandatory for all creatures to give thanks to You..."

- A.** Everyone is obligated in the *mitzvah* of Hanukah candles. However, it is the Sephardic custom that the head of the household is "motzee" (help another fulfill his obligation) the other family members. He is "motzee" anyone who regularly lives in his home, even if they are not a blood relative, i.e., a mother-in-law, son-in law, etc.



- B.** If a child is supported by his father, even if that child does not live at home (*i.e.*, the child is living in a dormitory) and even if the dormitory is in another city, the father is still “*motzee*” him. This even applies if he lives in a different time zone.
- Even if the son wants to be “*machmir*” (stringent) and light his own menorah, he may do so only without a *berachah*. Since he is considered a family member and is supported by his father he is already “*yotzei*” with his father’s *berachah*. Reciting his own *berachah* would be in vain.
- C.** If the head of the house is away from home overnight (*i.e.*, a business trip), he is “*yotzei*” with the candle lighting that is done at his home. However, if he wants to be “*machmir*”, in a place where there are no *menorot* visible to him, he lights without a *berachah*.
- D.** A visitor may participate in the *mitzvah* of Hanukah candles by giving the head of the household a coin, so he may “own” a portion of the oil or candles.
- E.** A visitor should only join in the *mitzvah* of lighting if he will be spending the night there. However, if he will be returning home to sleep, he should not share in the ownership of the Hanukah candles but rather light in his own home.
- F.** A woman living alone is obligated to light, with a *berachah* for they (women) too participated in the miracle.
- G.** Any person who lives alone and does not have a window facing the public domain is still obligated to light with a *berachah*.
- H.** If a person is away from home (*i.e.*, at a hotel) with his family, he should light in his room with a *berachah*.
- I.** A person who is in transit the entire night, is not obligated to light. However, if he sees someone else’s candles, (within half an hour from *that* lighting), he should make the *berachah* “*sheh-ahsah nisim,*” if no one else is lighting for him at home. And on the first night, he must also make a “*sheh-heh-cheh-yanu.*”
- J.** A blind person’s wife should light for him and recite the *berachah*. If he is unmarried, he lights without a *berachah*.
- K.** Someone who lights Hanukah candles at home, but later that night moves to another place is “*yotzei*” with the original lighting (*i.e.*, a bride and groom).



✿ Placement of Hanukah Menorah

- A.** The essential regulation governing the placement of the Hanukah menorah is that the menorah should be placed outside the door, visible to the public domain. Optimally would be placing the menorah on the left side of the entranceway to the house. Such an arrangement would have the entrance surrounded by *mitzvot* because the *mezuzah* would be on the right side and the menorah would be on the left. However, if it is not feasible to leave the menorah outside, then the next preferable arrangement is to light inside. In our times (as in the time of the Gemarah), it is also not feasible to light outside. (i.e. the menorah may be stolen.) Therefore, we light inside.
- The Syrian tradition is to light indoors, to the left of the doorway. Placement at the doorway surrounds the home in *mitzvot* – *mezuzah* on the right and menorah on the left. (This was the custom of the Chacham Rahamim Cohen-Churba *zt"l*.) Others have the custom to place the menorah in a window facing the public domain.
- B.** The menorah must be placed a minimum of 10½ inches high to 30 inches maximum. Nevertheless, even 30 feet high is acceptable, but no higher. However, when placing the menorah next to a window, it may be placed above 30 inches from the floor.
- C.** Someone who lives in a high building and his window is higher than 30 feet should place his menorah at the entranceway of his apartment. However, if there are other buildings near his building, he may place the menorah in the window where it can be seen by the neighboring occupants.
- D.** One who lives in a place without windows facing the public domain should light near the doorway. When lighting at the doorway, it should be completely apparent that it is specifically to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Hanukah candles. Therefore, one should not light in the exact place where the Shabbat candles are kindled. This only applies if he does not have a special Hanukah menorah. Obviously, if he has a *Hanukiah*, it is evident that these are Hanukah lights.



How to Light the Menorah/Berachot

All family members of the household should be assembled together at the time of lighting the menorah, to publicize the miracle we are commemorating.

- A.** The first night of Hanukah, three *berachot* are recited.
 - 1. להדליק נר חנוכה – *l'hadlik ner Hanukah*
 - 2. שעשה נסים – *sheh-ahsah nisim*
 - 3. שהחיינו – *sheh-heh-cheh-yanu*
- B.** If one forgot to recite the *sheh-heh-cheh-yanu* on the first night, he may do so on the second night (or another night) when he lights the menorah.
- C.** The remaining seven nights of Hanukah, only “*l'hadlik ner*” and “*sheh-ahsah nisim*” is recited.
- D.** The *berachot* are recited *before* the candles are lit (*o-ver l'asiyason*). If he forgot and lit first, he may still recite the *berachot* as long as he didn't complete lighting all the candles. However, if he completed lighting all the candles, he may no longer recite “*l'hadlik ner*” but he may recite “*sheh-ahsah nisim*” within a half hour of lighting and also “*sheh-heh-cheh-yanu*.”
- E.** After he lights the first candle he says, “*HaNeirot Halalu...*” which is comprised of 36 word groups (תבות) paralleling the 36 candles we light over the course of Hanukah. “*Mizmor Shir*” is recited and “*Ma-ohz Tzur*” is sung.
- F.** Hanukah candles are lit the first night beginning on the extreme right side of the menorah. Candles are added on each succeeding night, denoting which day of Hanukah it is, i.e., two candles on the second night, etc. The candles are lit from *left to right* – the additional candle designating the day is thereby lit first (after the *berachot*). In this manner the miracle of the Hanukah lights is demonstrated.
- G.** A person who does not have a sufficient number of candles for the given day should light only one. If, for example, it is the third night and he only has two candles, he should light just one (otherwise people seeing the menorah will think it's the second night). If this person will obtain sufficient candles



for any of the following nights of Hanukah, he may light them like everyone else, regardless of the fact that he was unable to do so previously.

- H.** All oils and wicks are acceptable to use for Hanukah. However, olive oil is preferable, as are cotton wicks.
- I.** An electric menorah is not advisable and may not be used to fulfill the *mitzvah*. If one recites the *berachot* on “candles” from an electric menorah, it is considered a *berachah l’vah-talah*, a blessing said in vain according to most *Poskim*.

Candle Lighting Time/Duration

- A.** It is preferable that candle lighting take place 20 minutes after sunset (approximately 4:50 p.m.). The candles must burn a minimum of a half hour following *tz’ait ha’kochavim* – when the stars come out (approximately 5:45 p.m.)
- B.** If he is unable to light at that time, then he may light all night (until approximately 6:18 a.m.). Refer to note E.
- C.** One should not light the Hanukah candles early – before sunset. If he has no alternative but to light then, he may light after *Plag HaMinhah*, but without a *berachah*, provided that he has sufficient oil to burn for a half hour following *tz’ait ha’kochavim*. If he accidentally lit *before Plag HaMinhah*, he must extinguish the candles afterwards and relight with a *berachah* at the proper time.
- D.** It is permissible to extinguish the candles a half-hour after the stars appear. If they extinguished on their own *before* the prescribed time, it is not obligatory to relight them. However, it is proper that he be stringent in his observance of the *mitzvah* and relight the candles. This particularly applies on Friday, *erev Shabbat* when we light before sunset (see Section VI). The aforementioned refers to a situation where conditions existed for the candles to remain burning for the prescribed time. However, if the candles were in a windy place and were snuffed out, then he certainly must relight them.



- E. If he returned home very late and everyone is already asleep, he must try to awaken two family members. Then he may light and recite the *berachot*. However, in the event that he is unable to awaken anyone, he lights without a *berachah*. It is preferable if when he knows in advance that he will return late that he appoint someone else to light at the proper time.
- F. One who returns home later than the prescribed time to initially light and everyone is awake presents us with a situation and a difference of opinion among the *Poskim*: Is it preferable for his wife to light on time or for him to light later? *HaGoan* Rav Ovadiah Yosef says that it is preferable for the *mitzvah* to be done on time and therefore his wife should light for him.
- G. Friday, *erev Shabbat*, is an exception to the rule. Then, he lights before sunset and recites the *berachah* (see next Section: A).

✿ Erev Shabbat & Motzaei Shabbat – Menorah Lighting

- A. On Friday, *erev Shabbat*, the Hanukah candles are lit *before* the Shabbat candles. One may *not* kindle the menorah before *Plag HaMinhah*. He must make sure that there is sufficient oil, or use large enough candles, that the Hanukah lights will burn a half hour *after tz'ait*, (approximately 5:45 p.m.).
- B. A woman who is living alone and accidentally lights Shabbat candles *before* the Hanukah candles must ask someone else to light Hanukah candles for her. However, if at the time the Shabbat candles were lit, the woman did not intend to accept the Shabbat upon herself, then she may light Hanukah candles and do other work until it is Shabbat.
- C. Optimally, one should have prayed *Minhah* *before* he lights the Hanukah candles. The reason for this is because the Hanukah menorah represents the Menorah of the *Beit Hamikdash* and it was kindled *after* the afternoon offering of the *Korban Tomid* (the daily continual elevation-offering) was brought. In our time, the *Minhah* service is our substitute for this daily offering. If there is no early *Minhah* available, it is best to wait until there is a *minyan* that he can join. In such a case, he should light the Hanukah candles *before* he prays *Minhah*.



- D. Caution should be taken not to place the Hanukah menorah in a place where there is the likelihood that the candles may be extinguished. On Shabbat, he is not permitted to relight them as he may do during the week.
- E. If, for some reason, the Hanukah lights were extinguished shortly after he accepted the Shabbat, then he may ask someone who has not yet accepted the Shabbat to relight them. In the event that no one is available, the Hanukah candles remain extinguished and he has still fulfilled the *mitzvah*. The *lighting* of the Hanukah lights is the manner in which this *mitzvah* is fulfilled and he already did that.
- F. In the synagogue on Saturday night, the Hanukah candles are kindled *before Havdalah* is recited. In one's home, it is just the opposite – *Havdalah* first, then Hanukah candles.
- G. One should not delay in lighting the Hanukah candles when Shabbat is over. If it is his custom to follow the opinion of *Rabbeinu Tam* and wait until 72 minutes after sunset, then he retains his custom and does not end Shabbat earlier.

✿ Making Use of the Hanukah Lights

- A. It is forbidden to use the Hanukah lights for anything, not even for religious purposes, i.e., learning Torah. We therefore add an extra candle called the *Shamosh* (placed higher or lower than the other candles) whose light we are permitted to use.
- B. If, while he is lighting the Hanukah candle, the *shamosh* candle is extinguished, he may not relight it from the Hanukah candle he already lit. In an emergency (i.e., he doesn't have matches), he may relight the *shamosh* from the candle he already lit to light the others. The candle, which is lit first, connotes which day of Hanukah it is and is considered the *ner mitzvah*. If the *shamosh* extinguishes, he relights it with any candle other than the *ner mitzvah*.
- C. The prohibition of using the Hanukah lights only applies to their use in performing a task – i.e., reading. However, if he simply walks through the room where they are placed and the candles light his way, it is permitted as a source of illumination.



✿ Prohibition of Work Before Lighting

- A.** It is forbidden to start a task, or eat a regular meal, or sleep one half hour before the time of lighting the Hanukah candles. If the work was started prior to that time, he may continue, stopping in time to light. One may appoint someone to remind him to light on time. Under such circumstances, he may begin to do work or eat half an hour before candle lighting provided he stops when it is time to light.
- B.** One must even stop learning Torah when the time to light Hanukah candles arrives. However, he does not have to stop learning a half-hour before.
- C.** He may delay lighting Hanukah candles in order to join a *minyán* to pray *Arbit* first. If he will not be attending a *minyán* and will be praying alone, he should also first say *Arbit* and then light.
- D.** One may not start eating a regular meal (more than a 2-oz. portion of bread) a half-hour before candle lighting. Included in this prohibition is any cooked food made from the five grains which constitutes his meal. (A snack is permitted.) However, fruit, fish and meat are permitted.

✿ Laws of Al HaNisim

- A.** All eight days of Hanukah, the *Al HaNisim* prayer is recited in *Bircat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals) and the *Amidah*.
- B.** If he forgot to say *Al HaNisim* and remembered before reaching Hashem's Name at the conclusion of the next blessing, he should go back to *Al HaNisim* and continue from there. However, if he already mentioned Hashem's Name, he must complete the blessing and does not go back. In the *Amidah*, he must complete the blessing "*hatov shimcha*"... if he already said Hashem's Name. Concerning *Bircat HaMazon*, if he already said Hashem's Name, he completes the blessing "*al ha'aretz v'al ha'mazone*." In both situations, he does not go back to *Al HaNisim*, nor may he complete the blessing he



began with the words “*lomdeini chukecha*.” (When a person makes a mistake while reciting a *berachah* in order that the *berachah* should not be said in vain, he completes it with the words “*lomdeini chukecha*”; in this case, he may not.)

- C. If in the *Amidah* he remembered at the end that he forgot to say *Al HaNisim*, he may say it in the form of a request at the end of the “*Elokai netzor*” prayer, (before יהיו לרצון) using the language of the *ha'rachaman* prayer quoted below.
- D. In *Bircat HaMazone*, if he forgot *Al HaNisim* and remembered after he said Hashem's Name in the following blessing, he continues until the series of *ha'rachaman* prayers recited in honor of festivals. At that place he says the following:

הרחמן יעשה לנו נסים ונפלאות כשם שעשית לאבותנו בימים ההם
בזמן הזה. בימי מתתיהו וכו' ...

Hallel on Hanukah

- A. The entire *Hallel* is said during the eight days of Hanukah.
- B. A mourner says *Hallel* on Hanukah even during *shiva*. However, he may not act as the prayer leader for the *Hallel* service.
- C. Women are exempt from reciting *Hallel*. They, therefore, do not say the blessing over *Hallel* when they pray.

Acknowledgments

Congregation Shaare Rahamim would like to thank Rabbi David Silverberg, Mrs. Ethel Gottlieb and Mrs. Sallel for their translating and editing expertise.

We are grateful to Bottom Line Design and R' Moshe Baraka for their beautiful design and layout.

A special thanks to Mrs. C. Yaakov and Mrs. L. Churba for making this Hanukah booklet possible.

For additional copies of this booklet please contact Congregation Shaare Rahamim at 718-677-0203