



CHANUKAH: LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET – IN DEPTH VERSION

Chanukah was instituted to commemorate the great deliverance of the Jewish People while under the persecution of the Greek empire. The lighting of the Menorah is one of the most popular Jewish observances, and most Jewish homes, regardless of how religious they are or not, light one. It's instructive to look at how the Rabbis describe the Chanukah miracle, to glean the most important aspects of the story, and how it pertains to us in our times.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL

SOURCE 1: TALMUD SHABBAT 21B THE MIRACLE OF CHANUKAH

What is (the miracle of) Chanukah? The Sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Chanukah are eight. (One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them).

When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they **defiled all the oils** that were in the Sanctuary by touching them. And when the **Hasmonean family** (and eventual monarchy) **grew stronger** and **emerged victorious over them**, they **searched and found one jug** of oil that was placed with the **seal** of the **High Priest**, **undisturbed** by the **Greeks**. And there was **sufficient oil there to light** the Menorah for only **one day**. **A miracle occurred** and they **lit the Menorah** from it for **eight days**. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *Hallel* and special thanksgiving in prayer and blessings.

מאי חנוכה? דתתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו
יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד
בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שכתשנכנסו
יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים
שבהיכל. וכשגברה מלכות בית
חשמונאי ונצחום, בדיקו ולא מצאו אלא
פר אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו
של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק
יום אחד. נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו
שמונה ימים. לשנה אחרת קבעום
ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה

There is only one miracle **specifically** mentioned in the source, that of the one jug of oil lasting for eight days. However, a close reading of the Talmud may suggest several more that can teach us important lessons.

Question: How many miracles can you identify alluded to in the source?

(Hint: pay attention to the bold words in the second paragraph)

1. **Few in number** and **weak in military** might, a Priestly family of Jews (Hasmoneans) undertook to fight the Greek Empire and won. (A little light - Torah and Judaism - conquering vast darkness - the Greek absolute faith in Humanism without God.)
2. They were "**dedicated**" to their faith, and "**searched**" for pure oil. (All jugs were defiled and there was no reason to believe there existed any pure jugs.)
3. They actually **found one** jug, and **only one jug**. (If one contained the seal of the High Priest, isn't it logical to believe many more would have been found?)
4. That jug contained within it a remarkable ability to **transcend its natural limitations**.
5. The miracle of the oil "**Shines a Light**" upon the fact that the military victory and all the other less obvious miracles were no less miraculous than the nature-defying lights of the Menorah.

Question: What do these lessons have to say to us personally in our own lives?

On Chanukah we: 1) renew our “**dedication**” to our heritage, 2) reinforce our belief that **every one of us has a pure spiritual core** (our neshama) and that 3) once lit, has an **ever-expanding ability to grow**, 4) **overcome the darkness in one’s life** and 5) appreciate that **this light to transform the world**.

A FEW PRO-ACTIVE SLOGANS TO CONCRETIZE LESSONS :

- Dig Deep and Find Your Light
- Dedicate Yourself to Nurturing It
- Know that this Light can Overcome all the Darkness
- Shine Your Light in the World.

Let’s take a deeper look at this last lesson, “**Shining Your Light**” by examining how the Rabbis structured the mitzvah:

SOURCE 2: MAIMONIDES, LAWS OF CHANUKAH CH. 4:12 - PUBLICIZING THE MIRACLE

The mitzvah of lighting the menorah is such a precious one, so much so that a person must be really careful to **publicize the miracle** and increase praise and thanks to the Almighty for the miracles that He did for us.

Even if a person doesn’t have food to eat, except for what he receives from charity, he should borrow or sell his shirt to buy oil and candles to light.

יב מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה
היא עד מאד וצריך אדם להזהר
בה כדי להודיע הנס ולהוסיף
בשבח האל והודיה לו על הנסים
שעשה לנו. אפילו אין לו מה יאכל
אלא מן הצדקה שואל או מוכר
בסותו ולוקח שמן ונרות ומדליק

We see one thing that separates this mitzvah from almost all others in Judaism; the need to “publicize it.”

Question: Why do you think there is such an emphasis on publicizing the Chanukah miracle through the mitzvah of candle lighting? It doesn’t seem like a very Jewish approach?

Before further exploring this question, let’s take a look at how the mitzvah was set up by the Rabbis:

SOURCE 3: TALMUD BAVLI, SHABBAT 21B LIGHTING THE MENORAH IS A FAMILY MITZVAH

The Rabbis taught: The mitzvah of [lighting the] Chanukah [menorah] is **[one] candle for a person and his home...** תנו רבנן מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו

The mitzvah of the Chanukah light is to **place it** on the **outside** at the entrance of one’s home נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ

SOURCE 4: RASHI

This is in **order to publicize the miracle.**

משום פרסומי ניסא

We are all familiar with an eight-branched menorah, and that we light it in an increasing manner, adding a candle each day. But you may have been surprised to learn that the **“basic” mitzvah is really to light only one candle per household**. It should be **“outside the door”** (though our custom in Diaspora is in the window) and it must be in a position to **“publicize the miracle.”**

It's good to know that if you ever get stuck and can only find one candle when you need to light, that is sufficient to fulfill the basic mitzvah!

Question: With that in mind, why would the Rabbis structure the lighting as a “family mitzvah” performed just outside of one’s door if they wanted maximum publicity?

It would seem much more effective if the mitzvah was done “Chabad Style,” in every town square, with the maximum number of people in attendance. Yet, The Rabbis must believe that this is the best way (as a household mitzvah) to publicize it.

Question: Can you come up with some rationale behind why they made this a household mitzvah instead of a big public candle lighting?

Perhaps how to publicize it depends, at least in part with whom you are trying to reach with your message.

Question: Who are we trying to reach with the message of the Menorah?

All of the commentators agree that first and foremost, the publicity is for each individual, their families and their Jewish neighbors. Some, maintain it extends to non-Jews as well.

We need to instill within ourselves, all of the Jewish People, the lessons and the faith gleaned from the Chanukah story, its miracle and what it teaches us about being a Jew.

Consider the following source which takes this concept deeper:

SOURCE 5: SEFAS EMES FIRST REBBE OF THE GERRER CHASSIDIC DYNASTY

Chanukah signals the ultimate salvation and rededication of the entire world. Lighting the Menorah at the doorway demonstrates how the days of Chanukah are symbolically **“the door,” the beginning, of the ultimate redemption.**

The Sefas Emes maintains that lighting the Menorah in our **doorways** literally is part of the process of the ultimate redemption of the world, where light will finally overcome darkness.

Question: Does this suggest anything about how the Jewish People are meant to transform the world?

The Jewish approach is one Jew at a time, one family at a time, each family strengthening one another as role models for other Jews and non-Jews in the world around us. We don't make speeches - rather our values, our actions and what we choose to dedicate our lives for, speak volumes! We are the Chosen People and our job is to be a “light unto the Nations,” but to achieve this transformation starts from within, one person at a time, one house at a time!

SPECIAL ROLE THAT WOMEN HAVE TO PLAY:

Building upon the Sefas Emes, who teaches us that Chanukah is the “doorway” to the Messianic Era, consider this well-known comment from the Talmud:

SOURCE 6: TALMUD TRACTATE SOTA 11B REDEMPTION IN MERIT OF THE JEWISH WOMEN

In the merit of the righteous women that generation was worthy to be redeemed from Egypt בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור נגאלו ישראל ממצרים

The famous kabbalist, the Arizal, extends this concept to the final redemption, which will also come in the merit of the righteous women.

With this as a backdrop, it comes as no surprise that women played such a pivotal role in the Chanukah story and have a special connection to the holiday.

SOURCE 7: LAWS OF CHANUKAH: SHULCHAN ARUCH (670:1)

And women have the custom not to do any work while the candles are lit. (*Since the war was won specially through women...Yehudis sedated a Greek general and killed him*). (Mishna Brurah)

ונוהגות הנשים שלא לעשות מלאכה בעוד שהנרות דולקות

Question: Can you see a connection between the woman’s involvement in empowering the redemption and why the mitzvah was created as a family mitzvah – one candle per household?

Question: In what ways do women hold the key to the spiritual health and vibrance of the Jewish Family?

Perhaps the greatest lesson to learn is that the war against darkness is fought here, in the house, day by day, by through lighting the flame of every Jew and nurturing it to grow in strength, mirroring the steady increase of candles added throughout the holiday.

MAKING IT PRACTICAL AND PERSONAL.

Question: What commitments can you make to strengthen your connection to your Judaism thereby nurturing your inner flame.

Question: What can you do to support and encourage each of your family members on this Journey.

Question: How can you reach out and share the light of Judaism with less affiliated Jew that you know?