



Chanukah

SOURCE BOOK







THE STORY OF CHANUKAH

(AS TOLD BY THE RAMBAM)

(Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135-1204. The Rambam was one of the most distinguished Jewish leaders of the Middle Ages and was a highly skilled physician. His writings on Jewish law and philosophy have been studied in depth by Jews throughout the ages. The Rambam compiled all of Jewish law in his masterpiece work, the Mishneh Torah, which has hundreds of commentaries on it to date. Maimonides was born in Spain and is buried in Tiberias.)

HALACHA #1

In the times of the Second Temple, the Greek Empire ruled the land and they enacted harsh decrees against the Jews. They tried to force the Jews to abandon their religion, and forbade them to study Torah and to observe the mitzvot. The Greeks helped themselves to the possessions of the oppressed Jewish people and had their way with their daughters. They entered into the inner sanctum of the Temple and erected pagan idols and defiled all that was pure. The Jews suffered a great deal under this strain and persecution. Then, Hashem, the G-d of their forefathers took pity on them and saved them from the tyranny of the Greeks. The sons of the Hasmonean priests rose up and fought victoriously, killing many of the enemy soldiers and saving the Jews. A Jewish king from the Hasmonean family began to rule and sovereignty was restored to the Jewish people for more than 200 years.

HALACHA #2

It was on the Hebrew date of the twenty-fifth of Kislev when the Jews vanquished their tormentors. They were finally able to re-enter the Temple and they wanted to kindle the lights of the golden menorah, but they were unable to find spiritually pure oil. All they managed to come up with was one small jug of





untainted oil that contained enough oil to burn for one night. And then a miracle occurred. The oil they used, which should have only lasted for one day, burned for a full eight days, which was the exact amount of time it took to process more pure oil.

HALACHA #3

Because of this miracle, the sages of that generation enacted that these eight days, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, be days of joy and praise. During these eight days we kindle lights at our doorways in the evenings in order to publicize the miracle that G-d performed. These days are called Chanukah. Lighting the candles is a Rabbinic mitzvah just like reading the Megillah on Purim.

רמב"ם הלכות מגילה וחנוכה פרק ג

הלכה א

בבית שני כשמלכו יון גזרו גזרות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ובמצות, ופשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות, וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחצום לחץ גדול עד שריי חם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה עד החורבן השני.

הלכה ב

וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואבדום בחמשה ועשרים בחדש כסלו היה ונכנסו להיכל ולא מצאו שמן טהור במקדש אלא פך אחד ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה שמונה ימים עד שכתשו זיתים והוציאו שמן טהור.

הלכה ג

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על





פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס, וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנוכה והן אסורין בהספד ותענית בימי הפורים, והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים בקריאת המגילה.

THE QUESTION OF THE BAIS YOSEF

(Bais Yosef was authored by Rabbi Yosef Caro. He was born in Spain in the year 1488. As a young boy, he was forced to flee together with his family four years later in 1492, when all Jews were expelled from Spain. Rabbi Caro eventually reached the mystical city of Tzfat in the Holy Land. He codified Jewish law in his famous work, Shulchan Aruch, which is still followed by Jews around the world. He died in 1575, and is buried in Tzfat.)

Bais Yosef asks one of the most famous questions found in all of the Chanukah literature: If there was enough oil in that little jug to burn for one night, then the miracle really only lasted for seven nights. The first night was perfectly natural; there was enough oil to last for that night, it only burned miraculously for the next seven nights. Why then do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? If we are commemorating the miracle, shouldn't we only celebrate for seven days?

There have been over one hundred answers offered to this question throughout the ages. Let's go through some of them.

The Bais Yosef (Rabbi Yosef Caro) himself gives three answers to his question.

BAIS YOSEF #1

They realized that there wasn't enough oil to last the 8 days that it would take to produce more pure oil, so they divided the oil in the jug into 8 parts. They poured one part of the oil into the menorah on each of the eight nights, and that small amount lasted the entire night. Thus, on each day a miracle occurred;





oil that should have lasted for only an eighth of a day lasted for a full day.

POINT TO PONDER: There is a set amount of oil that the Torah requires to be used nightly in the menorah. It is the quantity that would last for even the longest winter night, and that is the set amount for the entire year. Using less oil than this won't fulfill the obligation to kindle the lights of the menorah. Why then on the first night did they use an insufficient amount of oil? Actually, according to their plan, they wouldn't fulfill the mitzvah on any of the eight nights. Generally, it is the Jewish belief that we don't put ourselves into situations where we must rely on miracles. Were they relying on a miracle?

BAIS YOSEF #2

On the first night and on each of the following subsequent nights, whenever they poured oil from the jug into the cups of the menorah, the jug remained completely full. The level of oil in the jug never went down, and thus on each night all the cups of the menorah were completely full with the correct amount of oil. And on each night a miracle occurred.

BAIS YOSEF #3

On the first night they poured the entire contents of the jug into the menorah. They didn't rely on a miracle, and naturally that oil should have lasted only one night. But in the morning the menorah was just as full as the night before. None of the oil was depleted from the whole night's burning. This miracle occurred for the full eight days of Chanukah.

בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן תרע

ואיבא למידק למה קבעו שמנה ימים דכיון דשמן שבפך היה בו כדי להדליק לילה אחת ונמצא שלא נעשה הנס אלא בשבעה לילות. וי"ל שחילקו שמן שבפך לשמנה חלקים ובכל לילה היו נותנים במנורה חלק אחד והיה דולק עד הבוקר





ונמצא שבכל הלילות נעשה נס. ועוד י"ל שלאחר שנתנו שמן בנרות המנורה כשיעור נשאר הפך מלא כבתחלה וניכר הנס אף בלילה הראשונה. אי נמי שב־ ליל ראשון נתנו כל השמן בנרות ודלקו כל הלילה ובבוקר מצאו הנרות מלאים שמן וכן בכל לילה ולילה:

CHASAM SOFER

(Rabbi Moshe Sofer, 1762-1839. Rabbi Sofer served as the Rabbi of the city of Pressberg in the Austrian empire. He was a strong supporter of traditional Judaism and firmly opposed any change. Many of his thousands of responsa can be found quoted in contemporary halachic works. He established the Pressburg Yeshiva, which became the most influential yeshiva in Central Europe and continued to flourish until the Second World War.)

When the Jews defeated the Greeks and finally re-entered the Temple, they found it completely desecrated. Pagan idols littered the holy inner sanctum. They now found themselves in a quandary: It would take time to rid the sanctuary of all the idols, and they needed to light the menorah that evening! The solution they came up with was to take the golden menorah outside to the courtyard and light it there. The strong gusts of Jerusalem winter winds had no effect on the flames and they burned strong and steady throughout the night. Thus, even on the first night a miracle occurred.

The Chasam Sofer uses his answer to explain a difficulty in one of the special Chanukah prayers. In the prayer entitled “Al Hanissim” which recounts the Chanukah miracle, it says “they lit the flames in your holy courtyard” (והדליקו נירות בחצרות קדשך) (והדליקו נירות בחצרות קדשך). This poses a problem because the menorah was situated in the inner sanctum (היכל), not in the courtyard (חצר). According to the above answer, they actually took the menorah outside and lit it in the courtyard.

ובכזאת ראיתי באמת בדרשות החתם סופר (ד' ס"ז) שכותב לבאר בכזאת





וליישב עי"ב קושית ס' זרע יעקב על שבת שמקשה על הלשון שתיקנו לומר בחד נוכה והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשיך הא הדלקת המנורה היתה בפנים ומ"ט שביק לשון היכל ודביר שהזכיר תחילה וכו'. וכותב הח"ס לתרץ ולומר שזה דמנורה לנכח השלחן מעכב היינו לכללות הבנין אבל המצוה מקיים אפילו עומדת דו-לקת בחוץ, ואז היה ההיכל מלא גילולים ולכן לא הדליקו בפנים אלא בחצרות קדשיך בעזרה עיין שם, הרי כנ"ל. וזהו ח"ס שם ממשיך לפי"ז וכותב, שלכן תקנו להדליק בפתחי החצרות, וכן מיישב עי"ב קושית הב"י הידועה שמקשה דהנס היה רק ז' ימים, והיינו מפני דאפי' על יום א' שהיה להדליק הי' רק אילו היו מדליקים בפנים, ולא כשהדליקו בחוץ דאזי צריך שמן יותר מפני הרוח ששולט ונושב בהאש. וזהו והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשיך על כן וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול עיין שם וש"י.

PRI CHADASH

(Rav Chizkiya De-Saluha, born in Livorno, Italy in the year 1659. His work, Pri Chodosh is one of the paramount commentaries on the Yora Deah section of Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law, and is relied upon by all halachic authorities. At the age of 20, Rav De-Saluha moved to Jerusalem where he passed away at the young age of 39.)

The Pri Chadash, using a typical Jewish approach, answers the question by asking another question: The Rambam (Maimonides) writes that the battle against the Greeks was finally won on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev. It was on that day that they entered the defiled Temple. They only lit the menorah that evening, however, which according to the Jewish calendar (where a day begins with the previous evening) would have been the twenty-sixth of Kislev. So really the miracle occurred on Kislev 26, not Kislev 25. Why then do we begin the holiday of Chanukah on the twenty-fifth of Kislev and not on the twenty-sixth?

The Pri Chadash answers that in the story of Chanukah there was more than one miracle. Yes, there was the miracle of the lights. The victory on the battlefield, however was also an incredible, miraculous occurrence. A handful of poorly armed





and barely trained Jewish fighters against the powerful and war hardened Greek army. The Jews were vastly outnumbered. The Greeks even had state-of-the-art tanks: elephants that were plated in armor! And the Jews won. The first night of Chanukah, explains the Pri Chadash, commemorates this miracle: the miracle of the few against the many, the weak overpowering the strong. That is why we begin the celebration on the twenty-fifth of Kislev when the war ended. The next seven nights commemorate the fact that the oil lasted 7 more days than it should have.

POINT TO PONDER: According to the Pri Chadash, the first day of Chanukah commemorates one miracle, the battle won against all odds, and the other seven days commemorate a different miracle, that of the lights. It is quite understandable why we remember the miracle of lights by again kindling the menorah in our windows and doorposts, but why should we commemorate the miracle of war victory by lighting the menorah for an extra day? What is the connection between the menorah and the war?

TWO KINDS OF MIRACLES

Judaism believes that there are different kinds of miracles. One kind completely defies the rules of nature, like the splitting of the Red Sea. There was no way that scientists could explain that one. Then there are the miracles that don't directly contradict the rules of nature. Skeptics attempt to deny any element of the supernatural in these events.

Think back to the Six Day War in 1967. The world had given up on Israel. President Lyndon Johnson had already asked his speech writers to draft a speech eulogizing the State of Israel, which was on the brink of destruction. But then the unthinkable happened. The small and outnumbered Israeli army pushed back its enemies on all sides, and penetrated deep into the lands of its attackers. Surely a miracle, but not everyone saw it that way. Many explained the victory by extolling the might of the supreme Israeli army.





Think back to World War II: June 6, 1944, the Normandy invasion. Field Marshall Erwin Rommel was certain that the Allied forces would invade at Normandy, but Hitler disagreed, and fortified Pas de Calais further north on the French coast, leaving Normandy somewhat vulnerable. As a matter of fact, Rommel, the commanding officer of German forces at Normandy, happened to be away celebrating his wife's birthday on the very day the Allies arrived. Was all that a coincidence? Some may answer yes. But as Jews, we see this as the hand of G-d.

Let's go back to the Chanukah story. The miracle of the oil was indisputable; a clear demonstration of G-d's hand governing events in our world. But the military victory could potentially be explained and rationalized as good tactics and luck when, in reality, it was our Father in Heaven who delivered our enemies into our hands. So the Sages instituted the same commemoration for both miracles to show that just as the oil burning far beyond its natural capabilities was the hand of G-d, so too the miracles in the battlefield were from the hand of G-d. In commemoration of both miracles, we kindle the lights of the menorah.

In our own lives, there are many events that, from a surface perspective, seem to have just worked out. But if we think deeper, we'll notice that there were actually several factors that needed to come together to facilitate that outcome. Let's take a moment to think back. What were some of those events?

פרי חדש אורח חיים סימן תרע

סעיף א

ובכ"ה בבסלו (מתחילין) שמונה ימי חנוכה. בפרק קמא דמגילה ויא, א לא מא-
סתים בימי כשדים שהעמדתי להם דניאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה, ולא געלתיים
בימי יוונים שהעמדתי להם שמעון הצדיק וחשמונאי ובניו ומתתיה כהן גדול
וכו'. ובפרק במה מדליקין [שבת כא, ב] מאי חנוכה, דתנו רבנן, בכ"ה בבסליו
יומי דחנוכה תמנייא אינון דלא למיספד בהון ודלא להתענאה בהון, שכשנב-
נסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי
ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן





גדול, ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים, לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל ובהודאה. פירוש, ונקראת «חנוכה» על שם שחנו בכ"ה, רוצה לומר כל היום כולו, לאפוקי מיום כ"ד שלא חנו אלא בערב, ואזי הדליקו, וכן קבעו לדורות. ומדברי הרמב"ם [חנוכה ג, ב] מוכח בהדיא שנצחו ביום כ"ה. ואם כן קשה, איך אנו מדליקים בליל כ"ה הוה לן להדליק בליל כ"ו. וי"ל, עם מאי דמקשים [ב"י עמוד תרטו ד"ה ואיכא] ששבעה לילות הוה לן להדליק, שכך היה הנס. ובהכי ניחא, דלילה הראשונה הוא משום הנצחון, והז' לילות האחרות הוא משום הנס:

THE TAZ

(Rabbi Dovid Halevi Segal, 1586-1667. Taz is an acronym for his classic commentary on Shulchan Aruch known as Turei Zahav. The Taz was one of the greatest Polish Rabbinic authorities of his time. He studied Torah with great devotion despite his difficult economic situation. The Taz survived the Cossack massacres, but was forced to temporarily flee from Poland.)

The Taz prefaces his answer by quoting an episode from the Book of Kings II Chapter 4: The prophet Elisha is approached by a destitute widow who has nothing at all and creditors knocking at her door. Elisha then asks her if there is anything at all in her home. To which she responds that she has nothing at all except for a jug of oil. The prophet tells her to borrow vessels from all of her neighbors, as many bowls, cups and pots as she can possibly get her hands on. He tells her to then go into her home and close the door behind her. She is to pour oil from the little jug into all of the other vessels until they are all full. And that is exactly what happens. She pours and pours until there are no more vessels left in the entire neighborhood to be borrowed.

The question is, if oil was being produced miraculously, then why was it important that she already have some oil in her house? Why couldn't G-d just make a miracle and have barrels of oil appear in her kitchen?





The Zohar (the primary book of Kaballah) teaches that G-d's blessing rests only on something which already exists. It takes something, even a very small amount, and expands and multiplies it. G-d's blessing doesn't usually take effect when there is nothing there to begin with. Therefore, Elisha asks the woman what she already has at home for the blessing to rest on and the blessing increases the small amount of oil.

The Taz uses this principle of the Zohar to answer the question of the Bais Yosef. On the first night, they poured the entire contents of the jug into the menorah and it was enough to burn for just one night. But that oil also burned for the second and all the other subsequent nights, because G-d's blessing took effect on the oil. If all of the oil was consumed on the first night (as should have occurred naturally) then there would be nothing upon which the blessing can rest to make the miracle for the second night. It must be that some oil remained from the first night's kindling, and thus a miracle occurred even on the first night.

POINT TO PONDER: Every day we turn to G-d and ask that He shower us with His blessing. We ask for our physical needs as well as His blessing in achieving spiritual fulfillment. If we want the blessing then there must be something, even a trifle amount, already in our basket. This applies both to the physical and to the spiritual. We must ask ourselves, what is in our basket?

ט"ז אורח חיים סימן תרע

ול"ג לתרץ דלמפרע אנו רואין שגם בלילה הראשונה היה נס דמצינו בספר הזוהר על פסוק מה יש ליכי בבית שאין הוא ית' עושה נס ליתן ברכה אלא במה שיש כבר בעולם ואפי' הוא דבר מועט אז הוא ית' נותן ברכה להרבות המעט משא"כ בדבר ריקן אין שייך בו ברכ' לעשות בריה חדשה ע"כ ניחא כאן דאלו נדלק כל מה שהי' בלילה הראשון לא היה מקום לנס לחול על שום דבר אלא ודאי דגם בליל' הראשון נשתייר ממה שהי' ראוי לה וממנה נשתייר ועל אותו השיור באה הברכ' שנעש' שם נס להרבות אותו וא"כ ראינו שגם בלילה

הראשונה נעשה נס:





SEFER HA'ESHKOL

(Rabbi Avraham ben Yitzchak of Narbonne, 1110-1179. Rabbi Avraham lived in Southern France and was the head of the Jewish court in Narbonne. He wrote a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud, which unfortunately has been lost. His halachic work, the Sefer Ha'Eshkol is all that remained and it is quoted by many early sources.)

The Sefer Ha'Eshkol explains that there was another miracle in the Chanukah story, one which usually goes unnoticed. The very fact that they were able to find a flask of oil which remained sealed with the special seal of the High Priest was in itself a miracle! The Temple had been ransacked and the Greeks intentionally tried to contaminate anything they could get their hands on. Among all the litter and debris, one small, untainted flask endured, and that was surely a miracle of G-d. That is why we celebrate Chanukah for eight days. Seven, because the oil lasted seven days beyond its natural limit, and an eighth day, because they managed to find the pure oil in the first place.

POINT TO PONDER: When we contemplate all the gifts that G-d has given us in our own lives, we often focus on some of the finer details. The special talents that our spouse possesses or the areas in which our children are gifted. It is important to sometimes take a step back and think about the very fact that we have those children or that we found our spouse at all! As Jews, we believe that matches are made in Heaven; that husband and wife are predestined for each other. That means that out of all the millions of people out there, there is one man or woman that is right for me, and against all odds, I found him or her! When the Torah speaks about marriage, at the very beginning of Genesis, it uses the Hebrew word “**מָצָא**” (מָצָא עֵצֶר כְּנָגְדוֹ) which means to find. If we've found our spouses, for that alone we must be grateful. If G-d granted us the blessing of children, for that alone we must be grateful. What is it that we are most thankful for?





SUMMATION

The lesson of Chanukah is that G-d rules the world. Oil can burn beyond its limit and a weak army can vanquish a mighty one if that is the will of the Master of the World. Chanukah teaches us that we must not take anything for granted. All that we have is a gift from above and this gift must be appreciated. Just as the flames of the menorah burned strong past their natural ability, so too the Jewish people will, supernaturally, endure and continue to flourish eternally.





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