



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה חנוכה II

December 31, 2024

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

Tonight, December 31st, the 1st day of the month (“Rosh Chodesh”) of Tevet, is the seventh night of Chanukah. Jews the world over have kindled seven candles in their menorahs to celebrate the seventh consecutive day that the one flask of oil, which should have fueled the candles for only one day, miraculously lasted for a full eight. We started Chanukah with one candle and have added another candle every night to focus our attention on how, with every passing day, the miracle increased in its wonder.

The Sages instituted that before performing any mitzvah we recite a *beracha*, a blessing, to thank Hashem for having sanctified us through His mitzvot. Hence, every night, before kindling the first candle, we recite a blessing just as we do when performing any Torah commandment.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה
*Blessed are You Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and has **commanded us to light the Chanukah candles.***

(We also recite a second beracha [*she asah nissim*—“Who has performed miracles”] every night, and a third *beracha* [*shehechyanu*] on the first night. But these are blessings of praise, not of mitzvah.)

The Talmud (Shabbat 23a) asks a question. The miracle of Chanukah happened in the middle of the Second Temple period, 1175 years after the Torah was given. Therefore, the mitzvah to light the menorah is strictly a rabbinically created mitzvah, the Rabbis of the time having determined that this miracle was worthy of a holiday. They accordingly instituted the Chanukah holiday and its mitzvah to light the menorah. So, how do we say in the blessing that **“commanded us to light the Chanukah candles?”** Where *in the Torah* did Hashem command us to light the Chanukah lights?

והיכן צונו? רב אויא אמר, "מלא תסור" רב נחמיה אמר, "שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך."

Rav Avia answered that the Torah instructed us to listen to the Sages, as it says (Deuteronomy 17:11),

(יא) עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יוֹרוּךְ וְעַל הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ לְךָ תַעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל

*11) According to the teaching that they (the Rabbis) will teach you and according to the judgment that they will say to you, **shall you do; you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.***

Rav Nechemia derived it from this verse (Deuteronomy 32:7):

(ז) זָכַר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם בֵּינוּ שָׁנוֹת דָּר וָדָר שָׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיִּגְדֶּךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְךָ

*7) Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation, **Ask your father and he will relate it to you, your elders and they will tell you.***

By listening to the Sages to light the Chanukah candles, we fulfil the Torah's commandment to listen to them, which authorizes us to recite the blessing that "Hashem has commanded us to do this mitzvah." This obtains every time that we listen to the Sages. We as well fulfill the Torah commandment to listen to them.



Our practice is to add one candle per night as we celebrate the Chanukah holiday. Although the connection between the number of candles we light and the nights of the holiday seems intuitive, it is interesting to know that that is not the only way to perform the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles. The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) tells us.

תנו רבנן מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד והמהדרין מן המהדרין בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמנה מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך

The Rabbis taught: the mitzvah of Chanukah is for each household to have one candle lit every night of Chanukah. Those who wish to beautify the mitzvah should light one candle for each member of the household every night. As to those who wish to beautify the mitzvah even more, Bet Shammai says that one should light eight candles the first night and decrease by one each successive night (8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1). Bet Hillel says that one should light one candle the first night and increase by one each night (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8).

The Talmud is teaching us that there are three different levels of lighting Chanukah candles:

(1) One fulfills his basic obligation by lighting just a single candle every night. Lighting one candle for eight consecutive nights, suffices to remind us of the eight-day miracle of the oil.

(2) If one wishes to beautify the mitzvah, מהדרין – *Mehadrin* - he may light a candle for every person in the household. So, if there are five people in the household, one would light five candles every night of the holiday. The additional lights add a dimension of beauty to the mitzvah because it indicates how many people are involved in its performance,

and the greater number of people involved in doing a mitzvah the more glory to Hashem. ברב עם הדרת מלך - *The greater the number of people performing a mitzvah, the greater glory to the King.*

(3) If one wishes to beautify the mitzvah even more, מהדרין מן המהדרין – *Mehadrin min Hamehadrin* - he would do so by indicating through the candles *which night* of the holiday it is, by either adding one candle per night according to Bet Hillel or starting with eight and subtracting one according to Bet Shammai.

You now know that Jews the world over have chosen to perform the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles in the most beautiful way (level three) according to the opinion of Bet Hillel.

Two Talmudic Sages, Rabbi Yossi bar Avin and Rabbi Yossi bar Zvieda differed in the explanation of Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel's argument regarding "counting up" or "counting down."

One Sage explained (it is unknown who had which opinion) that Bet Shammai's opinion focuses on the number of days yet to come. On the first night of Chanukah there are eight more days of Chanukah to celebrate. Bet Hillel takes the opposite approach. We are counting the days that we have already celebrated. On day one, albeit the very beginning of the day, we have begun celebrating day one, and as we celebrate each day, we add another candle until the eighth day.

The Maharal - R. Yehudah Loeb b. R. Bezalel of Prague (1520-1609) - adds insight to the two opinions. Bet Shammai are focusing on the *potential* of the oil and the *potential* of the holiday. The oil placed in the menorah on the very first day carried in it the full eight days of the miracle. Although it was not realized until the end of the eighth day, the miracle was inherent in the oil on the first day. Similarly, as we stand on the first day of Chanukah, we have the full eight days of the holiday

before us to grow from. To emphasize this, Bet Shammai says to start with eight and decrease the number by the day.

Bet Hillel, on the other hand, focused on the *actual* days that the oil burned. With each new day, the scale of the miracle increased. Hence, we should also increase our appreciation of the miracle with each new day. To focus us on this, Bet Hillel says to increase the number of candles by the day.

The other Sage explained that Bet Shammai compared the Chanukah candles to the number of bulls that were brought on Sukkot. Starting with the first day of Sukkot, a special sacrifice of 13 bulls was brought. The second day of Sukkot, involved 12 bulls, etc., until on the seventh day seven bulls were brought. The sum of bulls brought over the holiday's seven days is 70 ($13+12+11+10+9+8+7=70$). The number 70 represents the number of the world's nations. Although we are, so to speak, bringing sacrifices for them, the number decreases, symbolizing that the nations of the world should also decline in their influence and dominance over the Jewish people. Similarly, Bet Shammai says that the Chanukah candles, which symbolize the victory over the Greek empire, should decrease, indicating that their influence should also diminish. When the gentile nations do not dominate the Jewish nation, we are free to flourish and reach our potential.

Bet Hillel, on the other hand, founded its opinion on the concept of – מעלים בקודש ואין מורידים – *we ascend in holiness, and we don't go down*. This is the charge for every Jew, to add more holiness to his or her life every day and not to decrease from that holiness. This lets us combat the negative influence of the gentile nations by becoming greater ourselves. When we are strong and secure within ourselves, their influence upon us perforce disappears automatically. Bet Hillel instructs us to add more

light every night to emphasize that we are supposed to increase the holiness in our lives daily.

This, though, leads us to a curious question.

As stated earlier, Chanukah is a purely Rabbinic holiday. Why did they establish this holiday with three different levels of how to fulfill it; the basic level, *mehadrin* and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, something that no other mitzvah (whether in the Torah or not) has?

We light the eight Chanukah candles to commemorate the miracle of the one *pure* flask of oil that lasted for the full eight days required to prepare fresh *pure* oil. The Greeks had deliberately contaminated all the other oil in the Holy Temple, and, according to some commentaries, just finding the one pure flask of oil was a miracle.

Many Sages pose the following penetrating question. There was plenty of impure oil to be had, and the rule in the Holy Temple is that if pure oil is unavailable, impure oil may be used. It is more important that the menorah be lit, even with impure oil. So, what was the need for the entire miracle? They didn't really need pure oil after all.

The Talmud teaches us that when the Holy Temples stood, the Chanukah miracle happened on a daily basis albeit in a small way. How is that?

One constituent of the daily Temple service was the lighting of the menorah. Each night at dusk, the Kohen would enter the sanctuary and kindle the menorah's seven lamps. These lamps would burn until morning at which time the Kohen would clean out the bowls of the remaining oil and change the wicks in preparation for that night's lighting.

The Talmud reports that although each of the seven bowls of the menorah received the same amount of oil, enough to last through even

the longest winter nights, the center lamp remained lit until dusk; the time to kindle the menorah. At that time, the Kohen would take the still burning center wick in his hand, fill its bowl with fresh oil and wick, light the fresh wick from the burning wick, and then from the newly lit center wick, light the other six lamps.

The Talmud asks (Shabbat 22b), “Why did Hashem do this miracle?”

מחוץ לפרוכת העדות יערוך. וכי לאורה הוא צריך? והלא כל ארבעים שנה
שהלכו בני ישראל במדבר לא הלכו אלא לאורו, אלא **עדות היא לבאי עולם**
שהשכינה שורה בישראל

*“Why did Hashem do this miracle? Did He need the light? The entire forty years that the Jewish people travelled through the wilderness they were guided by Hashem’s light (The torch of fire at night and the cloud of glory during the day). **The answer is that the miraculous burning flame is a testimony to all mankind that Hashem’s Shechina (Presence) dwells with the Jewish people.**”*

This could also be the answer as to why Hashem orchestrated the Chanukah miracle. Even though the miracle was unnecessary and they could legally have lit the menorah with impure oil, Hashem wanted them to know that He was still with them.

The Greeks were out to uproot the Torah and assimilate the Jewish people into their culture and lifestyle. They enacted decrees to detach the Jews from everything holy: the Torah, Brit Milah, the Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and the holidays. The Maccabees were prepared to sacrifice everything, including their very lives, to save Hashem’s Torah and the Jewish people. In return, Hashem showed them the miracle of the candles to demonstrate that His Shechina was with them and that it would continue to be with them. This gave the Maccabees the

reassurance that their efforts had paid off and that the Jewish people would continue to be an eternal nation.

With this we can offer an answer to our original question as to why the mitzvah of menorah has three levels of fulfillment.

Since Hashem made the miracle “beyond the call of duty” so to speak, when not legally necessary (again, because impure oil could have been used), the Sages gave us an opportunity to respond in kind and show Hashem that we love Him. Instead of having just one basic way to perform the mitzvah, we can “go beyond the call of duty” (*Mehadrin*) and enhance the mitzvah by lighting a candle for every person in the household. The extra Chanukah candle for each person gives us the opportunity to show Hashem that we are prepared to go “beyond the call of duty” for Him as well. If we want to go all out, we can even increase our expression of love to Hashem by lighting a candle for every night of Chanukah (*Mehadrin min hamehadrin*). This expresses that we understand that with every passing moment and day the miracle increased manyfold in its greatness. With that Hashem showed us so much love and we wish to respond in kind.

Other Sages take a different approach as to why Hashem made the miracle even though, in a pinch, they could have used impure oil.

They answer that although, in general, lighting with impure oil is permissible, in this case they could not. Since the Greeks had completely defiled the Holy Temple, the Jews had to restore it to its previous level of holiness and purity. This task had to be done with only the very purest and holy materials; for how something commences determines its future. The slightest imperfection at the onset will grow into a major fault down the line. Therefore, in restoring the menorah to its holy service, they could use only pure oil, to begin in the most perfect way possible.

There is yet another answer to this question. The Talmud says (Shabbat 21b).

מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון
ודלא להתענות בהון שכשנכנסו 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 אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו
שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה

The Sages taught, the 25th day of Kislev begins the eight days of Chanukah during which one is not allowed to eulogize or fast. For when the Greeks entered the Temple sanctuary, they deliberately defiled all the oil there. When the Chashmonai kingdom overcame them and were victorious, they searched and found but one flask of pure oil still sealed with the seal of the High Priest, but there was only enough in it to light the menorah for one day. A miracle happened, and the lamps remained lit from it for eight days (the time needed to produce new oil). The next year, they established those days as a holiday with praise and thanksgiving [to Hashem].

My Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth זצ"ל (1918-2001), explained this passage of the Talmud in a metaphoric way.

Our Sages teach us that a flame is symbolic of a Jewish soul. This is based on the verse (Proverbs 20:27),

(כז) נֵר יְדִוּד נְשָׁמַת אָדָם

27) Hashem's lamp is a man's soul

In this context, the defiled oil in the Holy Temple represents the tainted souls of the Jewish people. The Greeks had successfully contaminated the souls of almost all the Jewish people. As they accepted the Greek ideas, their minds became corrupted by the Greek atheistic philosophy. This rendered them incapable of serving Hashem properly,

with pure hearts and pure minds. There was but one small bottle of oil that was still pure with the *seal of the High Priest* verifying its purity. That one bottle of pure oil symbolizes a small handful of people, Mattityahu and his 12 sons, whose souls were still pure and unaffected by the Greek philosophy. The *seal of the High Priest* represents the approval of the great and holy Sages of old. Their minds and souls were pure of any Greek influence and contained only true Torah ideas and values. However, they were actually not sure themselves that they had remained pure and free of any Greek influences.

This was the significance of the miracle of the oil. By making it burn miraculously for a full eight days until pure oil could be produced, Hashem indicated to them that they were indeed pure and would merit to bring the pure and holy light of Torah to the future generations. They needed to know this because the Torah was created such that, if it is not pure, it will self-destruct. The Torah is eternal only when it is complete, with all of its essential components intact. When attempts are made to modify it by adding to it or leaving out essential pieces, the Torah cannot endure. We have seen this throughout Jewish History. Any offshoot of Judaism has dissolved over time and is no more.

This is why Hashem made the miracle even when it was seemingly unnecessary; to *show* the *Maccabees* that they were indeed pure and, hence, suitable to transmit the Torah to future generations. Without this information, they could not be sure they could pass the torch of the Torah forward.

The rest is history. Here we are in the year 5785, a full 2,163 years after the Chanukah story, and we are still learning the Torah from our teachers, who learned it from theirs, all the way back to the story of Chanukah and, from there, back to Sinai. The chain remained unbroken, and our very existence proves that our Torah is authentic and pure.

Tomorrow evening, when we light the eight candles of our menorah, we should appreciate that the miracle of the lights in the Holy Temple did not stop after just eight days. It continues today in each of us and in all those who learn Hashem's pure and holy Torah.