



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5786 Chanukah

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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.**

תשפ"ו Chanukah

What am I?

1. Something very common
2. Something very pretty
3. I am physical and I eat physical things
4. I can eat much more than my weight or size
5. When I eat something, you can't tell that I have eaten it
6. Even though I may be very small, I can become very large in a second
7. Everything else in the world can be cut in two to create two smaller pieces - I can't be cut in two
 - a. not because I'm so strong; my constitution simply doesn't allow for it
8. I can be born in a second and die in a second, but I can live forever if I have enough food
9. My offspring are born with me and die with me
10. Everyone in the world needs me and I can't exist without others, however...
11. It is only by destroying them to their core that I am able to exist
12. By destroying them I destroy myself and must cease to live

Our first inclination regarding each of these collective properties of the phenomenon in question, is to immediately say that no such physical thing could possibly exist, defying, as it does, every rule that we observe in nature. Once, however, you come upon this riddle's answer, you will see that every item is correct. The answer, if you have not yet figured it out, can be found in the first letter of the second, third, fourth and fifth

words of this paragraph. These properties seem more appropriate for a spiritual entity rather than a physical one. This is why a flame is symbolic of a soul, as King Solomon said in Proverbs (Mishle 20:27),

(כז) נֵר יְדוּד נְשִׁמַת אָדָם

27) A man's soul is the flame of Hashem.

Nachmanides (Leviticus 18:29) explains the depth of this idea.

כי נשמת האדם נר ה' אשר נופחה באפינו מפי עליון ונשמת שקי, כמו שנאמר (בראשית ב ז) ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים

A person's soul is the flame of Hashem that was breathed into our nostrils from Hashem's mouth and Hashem's soul. As is says in the verse (Genesis 2:7), "and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life."

As an aside, the Midrash teaches us a powerful concept based on this verse.

ואמרו במדרש אמר הקב"ה לאדם **נרך בידי ונרי בידך**, נרך בידי שנא' (משלי ז) נר ה' נשמת אדם. נרי בידך זו התורה שנא' כי נר מצוה ותורה אור אם אתה משמר את שלי אני משמר שלך

*Hashem said to Adam. **Your flame is in my hands** (as the verse indicates) **and My flame is in your hands** – this refers to the Torah. If you guard and protect my flame, I will guard and protect your flame.*

This statement frames very clearly our role in the world as the guardians of Hashem's flame -the Torah -which is the light onto the world. The verse says (Proverbs 6:23),

(כג) כִּי נֵר מְצֻה וְתוֹרָה אֹר

23) *For a commandment is a flame and **the Torah is light.***

It is only through keeping the Torah and its brilliant ways that the Jewish people are a light unto the nations and the world.

Because the properties of fire are so different than the general characteristics of physical matter, fire offers the perfect metaphor for the soul and other spiritual matters.

There are several ways in which fire serves as a metaphor for spirituality, one of them very relevant to Chanukah.

Have you ever “flicked a Bic” lighter with the gas set on the highest setting? Even if you hold the lighter sideways, the end of the flame shooting out will always turn upward. A flame always goes straight up. Of course, there are scientific reasons for this, but Hashem made it this way for a reason.

The lesson is that just as a flame, a metaphor for our souls, always turns upwards, so, too, our soul is always turning upwards and yearning for a connection to its source. Whether we realize it or not, our souls are always seeking to connect to Hashem, their source. A flame provides us with a way to see that reality.

Fire is also the metaphor for Hashem’s spiritual influence in the world. That is because of the unusual properties described in hints numbers 10, 11, and 12.

As to other forms of matter, once in existence they require no further attention to *keep* them in existence. Once the carpenter has created the chair or table, he can forget about them. He need do nothing to keep them intact. Not so with fire. Fire must be continuously fed. (“Everyone in the world needs me and I can’t exist without others”) With

a continuous fuel supply, a fire can burn forever – hint #8, e.g., your hot water heater pilot light. But once the fire has consumed its fuel, it must cease to exist – hints 11 & 12.

This is counterintuitive. When we look at a burning flame, it looks so solid and secure. It looks like it will go on forever. We know, however, that the second the oil is gone, the candle will go out.

Based on a verse in Psalms, the Sages have inserted the following sentence into the daily prayers.

הַמְחִידֵשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכֹל יוֹם תְּמִיד מְעִשֶׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית.

Hashem renews in His goodness, each day, constantly, the act of creation.

This means that Hashem is continuously keeping the world together. He is the fuel to the fire, the source of the existence of every molecule on earth. If for even a moment Hashem didn't consciously wish it to exist, the entire world would disintegrate, literally.

We experience this phenomenon daily in our own lives with all our electric appliances. We know that for the pixels on our computer screen to light up, electricity must flow to them from an electrical source, either an outlet or the battery. When the plug is pulled, or the battery dies, no electricity powers the pixels and they go dead. This is true for the millions of electronic devices worldwide.

Similarly, Hashem is the universe's "juice." Without Him powering the atoms, all would go dead.

Before electrical appliances, a burning candle was the metaphor for something in need of constant fuel. A candle's flame looks so solid, as if

it will last forever. And given enough fuel, it will. Yet we know that the moment that the fuel runs out, the flame will die. The flame that we observe now burns from the oil drawn up the wick a second ago. When there is no more oil, the flame must go out.

The total number of candles lit over the eight days of Chanukah is 36 (excluding the shamash). Is there any significance to this number?

The רוקח (Rokeach, R. Elazar of Worms, 1160-1230) explains that Chanukah's 36 candles correspond to the 36 hours that Adam used the *original spiritual light of Creation*. What is *the original spiritual light of Creation*?

The Talmud (Chagiga 12a) asks an obvious question about the creation narrative.

ואור ביום ראשון איברי? והכתיב, ויתן אותם אלקים ברקיע השמים וכתיב ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום רביעי, כדרבי אלעזר דאמר רבי אלעזר, אור שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ביום ראשון אדם צופה בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו. כיון שנסתכל הקדוש ברוך הוא בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים, עמד וגנזו מהן שנאמר, וימנע מרשעים אורם ולמי גנזו לצדיקים לעתיד לבא

*Was the light indeed created on day one? But it says that Hashem put them (the sun, moon and stars) into the heavens on the fourth day (implying that prior to that there was no light)? The answer is what Rabbi Elazar said, "The light that Hashem created on the first day one could see with it **from one end of the world to the other**. When Hashem saw the evil people in the generations of the flood and the Tower of Babel, He hid it from them... and who did He hide it for? The righteous people in the world to come."*

We learn that when Hashem said, *“Let there be light!”* on day one, it was this special spiritual light that He created. Because this spiritual light allowed one to see *“from one end of the world to the other,”* Hashem feared that if it fell into the wrong hands, they would use it to destroy the world. Hence, He hid it away for the righteous people who would only use it for worthy purposes.

When it says that with this special spiritual light one could see, *“from one end of the world to the other,”* it sounds like a person could see from here to China or Australia and know what was going on there. But that is not the case. Rather, it means that with this special light, one could see from this world upwards to the end of the spiritual worlds in heaven. One could see the true spiritual source for everything that exists in the world and how it emanates from Hashem. When seeing the world illuminated with this spiritual light, there could be no question that Hashem is the source of everything that exists, because one could actually trace it back to its source.

Adam was created in the 12th hour of the sixth day of Creation. Our Sages teach us that Hashem hid the spiritual light away after the first Shabbat. That being the case, Adam had use of that special spiritual light for 36 hours. The twelve of the sixth day, and the twenty-four of Shabbat. The Rokeach revealed to us that the Sages instituted lighting thirty-six candles on Chanukah to illuminate for us in the way that the original spiritual light did. The light of the Chanukah candles aims to reveal to us that everything that exists comes from Hashem in heaven. How is that?

The Midrash on the second verse in the Torah describes the four exiles that the Jewish people would experience:

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה ב פסקה ד

(ד) ר"ש בן לקיש פתר קריא בגליות והארץ היתה תהו זה גלות בבל שנאמר (ירמיה ד) ראיתי את הארץ והנה תהו ובהו זה גלות מדי (אסתר ו) ויבהילו להביא את המן וחושך זה גלות יון שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגזירותיהן שהיתה אומרת להם כתבו על קרן השור שאין לכם חלק באלהי ישראל על פני תהום זה גלות ממלכת הרשעה שאין להם חקר כמו התהום

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish explained the verse as referring to the upcoming exiles: תהו refers to Bavel, ובהו refers to Persia and the Meads, וחושך - and darkness – refers to the Greeks who darkened the eyes of the Jewish people with their decrees. They made us write on the horn of an ox, "We have no part of the G-d of Israel." על פני תהום - refers to Edom the final exile that we are in now for so many years.

How ironic! The world crowns the Greeks as the beginning of the enlightenment, their having brought us philosophy, mathematics, the scientific method, arts, and culture. All academia today is based on the foundations of the Greeks, and the Roman empire that followed, yet the Sages refer to this great body of knowledge as **"darkness?"**

King Solomon said in Proverbs (3:19):

(יט) יְדוּד בְּחָכְמָה יָסַד אֲרֶץ

19) Hashem has founded the world on wisdom.

At the time in history when the Chanukah miracle took place, there was a very strong philosophical debate going on between the Greeks and the Jews. The Greeks claimed that we live in a WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") world. Spirituality and holiness are a figment of man's imagination. Wisdom is something that we determine through investigation and research, *i.e.*, the scientific method. The Jews on the

other hand said that holiness and spirituality are a reality and that wisdom is something we learned from the Creator, Hashem.

The Greeks had a problem with this idea. “Holiness,” did you say? What is that? Where can you see holiness? How do you measure it? How much does it weigh? If it is not subject to the scientific method, it has no reality. This was the position of the Greeks. The only true reality to them was one that could be experimented with and experienced with one of the five senses.

Nachmanides writes: (Vayikra 16:8)

ולא אוכל לפרש כי היינו צריכים לחסום פי המתחכמים בטבע הנמשכים אחרי היוני אשר הכחיש כל דבר זולתי המורגש לו, והגיס דעתו לחשוב הוא ותלמידיו הרשעים, כי כל ענין שלא השיג אליו הוא בסברתו איננו אמת:

For I (Nachmanides) needed to squelch those who know much about nature and follow the path of Aristotle who denied the existence of anything that he could not experience with his senses and who was so haughty as to think, he and his evil students, that anything that he could not comprehend with his mind was not true.

To this end, the Greeks imposed laws designed to uproot the concept of holiness from the Jewish people, which is why they specifically targeted only four commandments: Shabbat, Torah study, Brit Milah, and Rosh Chodesh.

The Torah expressly declares that Hashem sanctified the Shabbat day and made it holy. Shabbat transforms every Jew, no matter what his weekly vocation is, into a holy person. He lives his entire week for the day when he can elevate himself above the mundane and spend time

with his Creator. But because the Greeks denied the Shabbat's holiness, they maintained that it was a day like any other.

The Torah is holy, and the study of Torah, Hashem's holy words, makes a person holy. A Torah Sage is a holy person.

The Talmud (Megillah 8a) tells us that King Ptolemy II took 72 Sages, and without telling them why, put them into 72 different rooms. He then entered each room and told each Sage to translate the Torah into Greek. Hashem put the same ideas into their minds, and they each made 19 changes to their translation, miraculously translating the Torah exactly the same. The Greeks were not interested in learning our holy Torah. They instead wanted access to it so they could show that it wasn't holy. Because it is impossible to access the Torah's depth and breadth in translation, it made the Torah look like any other book. This is why the Sages said that the day that the Torah was translated into Greek was as bad as the day on which the first Tablets were broken, because, in a sense, the translation also broke the Torah.

Brit Milah is a sign in a Jewish man's body signifying his special covenant with his Creator, instilling holiness into his body, and enabling him to control his earthy desires and live a holy life. The Greeks, who worshipped the body, denied this, too.

Finally, they outlawed Rosh Chodesh. Establishing the first day of the new month, Rosh Chodesh, by the high court fixed the holiday schedule for that month. For example, based on the day that the high court determined to be Rosh Chodesh Nissan, fifteen days later, Pesach, with its inherent holiness, would begin. This takes the concept of a Jew's holiness a step further, for it puts control of the holiness in the hands of the high court, mere human beings.

This is exactly what we say in the blessing on the festivals.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְקַדֵּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְמַנִּים:

Blessed are you Hashem who sanctifies the Jewish nation, who sanctify the times.

First Hashem made his Nation holy, and that empowered them to sanctify time. With this, when they declare the day holy, it is holy.

This is where the Greeks were in the dark. They denied the existence of anything that could not be observed, sensed with one of the five senses, measured, or experimented with.

The Torah teaches us the exact opposite. Not only is Hashem and holiness a true reality, but the world that we see, nature and all of its laws (what the world calls “reality”), is really *not* real. It has no existence independent of Hashem. They are only a “reality” because each second of each day Hashem wishes them to exist. And, as we noted earlier, if, for even a nano-second, Hashem did not wish them to exist, all reality would immediately cease to exist.

The following Midrash illustrates this point.

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה י פיסקה ו

א"ר סימון: אין לך כל עשב ועשב שאין לו מזל ברקיע שמכה אותו ואומר לו גדול

Rabbi Simon said: Every blade of grass has a force in heaven that strikes it to make it grow.

Everything in this world, even a blade of grass, must have a spiritual force behind it. Nothing can exist without Hashem wishing it so.

The Greek world does not brook the possibility of miracles. A wick of a certain thickness, placed in oil, will burn one half ounce of oil per

hour. This is science, confirmed by experimental evidence, and it cannot change.

Yet the Torah teaches us that nature is in Hashem's hands. Yes, for the most part, it functions smoothly and you can count on it to work as usual. But when Hashem wants to change it, He can. All of nature is just Hashem's most constant miracle.

This idea is brought out clearly in the following true story about the holy Sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. The Talmud reports (Taanit 25a):

חד בי שמשו חזייה לברתיה דהוות עציבא אמר לה בתי למאי עציבת אמרה ליה בלי של חומץ נתחלף לי בכלי של שמן והדלקתי ממנו אור לשבת אמר לה בתי מאי איכפת לך מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק תנא היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו עד שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה

One Friday evening Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw that his daughter was upset. He said to her, "My daughter, why are you upset?" She answered, "I mixed up the bottle of oil with the bottle of vinegar, and, by mistake, I filled the cups for the Shabbat candles with vinegar instead of oil." (It seems that there was a little oil left in the cups and she intended to add new oil, but instead added vinegar. They lit, but she expected the candles to go out any minute.)

Rabbi Chanina answered his daughter, "What do you care? The One who decreed that oil should burn should decree that vinegar should burn!" The Sages taught. The vinegar burned throughout the next day until they took the flame for Havdalah from it.

We see that for Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, oil didn't just "naturally" burn. *Each second that it burned, Rabbi Chanina saw the miracle of Hashem making it burn for that second. Rabbi Chanina's awareness of*

Hashem was at such a high level that he saw Hashem's hand in every aspect of life and in every "natural" process. For someone like that, there is no such thing as nature - everything is Hashem, and there is truly no difference between lighting oil or vinegar. Since it is the will of Hashem at that very moment that is causing the oil to burn, He can do the same for vinegar; one is no more difficult than the other. Had Hashem so decided, vinegar could have been the stuff that we use for lighting our candles and oil would have been used for cleaning and making pickles.

Many of the Jews in the time of the Second Temple were attracted to the Greek philosophy and approach to science. It looked so solid. Its truth could be proved by experiments. Man can fly to the moon. You can cure illnesses. How could anybody argue with science? The reasoning is powerful, and it caused most Jews to abandon the Torah perspective on life and follow the Greek enlightenment. The Jewish religion was in severe danger. Only a handful of Jews remained loyal to the Torah and its teachings. Among them were Matityahu and his 12 sons, who were prepared to sacrifice everything to save Judaism.

The miracle of the oil of the menorah was proof positive to the Torah's view of reality. Hashem showed clearly that oil burns because He is making it burn and it can burn as long as He wants it to irrespective of its quantity.

This is how the light of the Chanukah candles radiate the "hidden spiritual light" of Creation. Although it does not allow us to see into the heavenly realms and how this world emanates from Hashem, the Chanukah candles' flame does give us to see that Hashem is the source of all that exists.

This is the takeaway from the Chanukah candles that burned miraculously for eight full days when they should have lasted only one.

When we stand before the Chanukah candles, we are reminded that what appears solid and permanent in this world exists only because Hashem wills it to exist at every moment. The miracle of the oil revealed that nature itself is not independent, but merely the most constant expression of Hashem's ongoing creation. As we gaze at the flames, we are invited to see beyond what the eye can measure and recognize that holiness and spirituality are the deepest realities of existence. May the light of the menorah strengthen our faith and illuminate our awareness that all life, wisdom, and light flow from Hashem alone.