

## The Underlying Values and Concepts of Chanukah

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During the darkest days of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, when there are the fewest hours of daylight, the Jews bring light into the world both literally and figuratively. While other religions display many lights at this time of the year as well, these are not an integral part of the religious function of the holiday. And if a power outage were to occur, it is only the Jewish candles that would continue to burn brightly at night. In addition to publicizing the miracle and victory of the first rebellion in history on behalf of religious freedom, Chanukah and its customs contain many other concepts and moral ideas. What other Jewish values can be gleaned from the Jewish laws and customs of the holiday of Chanukah?

### **UNIQUE ASPECTS OF CHANUKAH**

Every other Jewish holiday has its own Talmudic tractate to discuss its laws and customs, among the many other topics written therein. There is a separate tractate for Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Passover. (Only Shavuot, a one-day holiday, does not have its own tractate. See the chapter about "Shavuot" for an explanation.) Even Purim, another rabbinically instituted holiday, has the tractate Megillah. Why is there no Chanukah tractate for this holiday? Therefore, even though Chanukah, in general, seems to have a more minor role in Judaism, but, as will be shown, its messages are extensive as well as profound. Chanukah is discussed primarily in the tractate of Shabbat.

In the most famous Talmudic passage about Chanukah,<sup>1</sup> the Gemara asks and discusses what is so special about the holiday that we are not allowed to have eulogies and that Jews are obligated to recite Hallel. It reads: "*Mai Chanukah*-What is [the reason for] Chanukah? The answer given is about the miracle of the oil to light the Menorah in the Temple, as there was only enough oil to light it for one night, but it lasted for eight nights. The passage is familiar but it begs the question: If the question is indeed about the reason for instituting the holiday of Chanukah, as explained by Rashi on that passage,<sup>2</sup> then the answer in the Talmud is quite strange. This passage highlights only the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days, while the miracle in the war that was fought by the Maccabees against the Syrian-Greeks is only mentioned tangentially, as merely creating the circumstances which allowed the miracle of the oil to occur. It seems as if the rabbis of the Talmud were intentionally distancing themselves from the miraculous Jewish victory in that war. But, as we know from the special prayer of Chanukah, *Al Hanisim*, the emphasis there is just the opposite.<sup>3</sup> The great miracle Jews mention in that prayer is only about the war against the Syrian-Greeks, and the oil is mentioned peripherally. This question is best expressed by the Maharal. He asks<sup>4</sup>: Was it really because of the miracle of the oil that the Rabbis established the holiday of Chanukah? We know that a Jewish holiday is only established for a miracle that happened for the Jewish people, and not because of a miracle that allowed someone to do a mitzvah-commandment, such as lighting the Menorah in the Temple. (If, for example, a Jew is prevented from eating or could not eat matzah on one day of Passover and now he or she can fulfill this mitzvah, there is no Jewish law that now creates a separate holiday or reason to recite the special Hallel prayer). Thus, how could the Talmud say that the holiday and the Hallel prayer were established because of the miracle of the oil?

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<sup>1</sup> Shabbat 21b

<sup>2</sup> Rashi commentary on Shabbat 21b

<sup>3</sup> Al Hanisim insert for Chanukah in the Shmoneh Esreh and Grace After Meals

<sup>4</sup> Maharal, Chidushei Aggadot 1:4

## **RESOLVING THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE TALMUD AND CHANUKAH PRAYER**

We could easily solve our difficulty in the Talmudic passage if we were to adopt the Talmudic text version of the *She-iltot* of Rav Achai Gaon who adds<sup>5</sup> just one word to our standard texts of today. (He lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when all manuscripts were copied by hand and sometimes words were omitted or added by accident.) The words there are not “*Mai Chanukah*” – i.e., what is the reason we celebrate the holiday in his version, but rather “*Mai Ner Chanukah* – What is the reason we have the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles”? He then cites an almost identical passage to the one quoted in the Talmud. The *Haamek She-eilah* commentary on the *She-iltot*, explains that if this were the actual Talmudic text, then there is no problem not mentioning the war. Thus, Hallel and the holiday were indeed established because of the war, but only the reason for the mitzvah of lighting is explained in the Talmud.

Maharal himself gives a very powerful, though enigmatic answer.<sup>6</sup> He points out that the main element of Chanukah is indeed the military victory, as most commentaries believe. However, without the miracle of the oil, it would not have been clear to all Jews that the military victory came because of G-d, and not solely through the human efforts of the Jews. Thus, the miracle of the oil proves that the victory was not a human and natural endeavor, but it was in fact Divinely orchestrated. But why, then, does specifically this miracle, the miracle of the oil, represent the holiday? Since the essence of the Greek takeover was that they defiled the Temple Hall (*Heichal*), the miracle had to involve the re-purification of the Temple. But it is important to understand this idea more deeply (discussed below) how this small light that lasted many days demonstrates that the war was a Divine victory, and not merely a human triumph.

Another answer involves a careful reading of the last two words in both the Talmudic passage and the *Al Hanisim* passage recited on Chanukah. But first, a brief background about the nature of miracles: (See the chapter about “Miracles” for an amplification of this theme.) There are two kinds of miracles in Judaism, one that defies nature and is therefore supernatural, such as the miracles in the Torah, and the second is natural miracles that occur within nature, which only someone with “religious glasses” can truly see and recognize. The miracle of the Purim story, in which G-d’s name is not mentioned at all in the Megillah, is the first example of the natural type of miracle, as are all miracles of today. The word referencing and symbolizing the supernatural miracles in Judaism is *Hallel*. Thus, the Jew only recites the additional Hallel prayer in remembrance of supernatural miracles, such as the case of all of the holidays mentioned in the Torah. Among the many other explanations, this is also a reason that Hallel is not recited on Purim, since the salvation came about through a “natural” miracle. The word referencing the natural and everyday miracles in Judaism is *Modim* or *Hodaah*. Thus, the traditional Jew wakes up every day and says “*Modeh Ani*,” thanking G-d for the natural miracle of life itself each day. The one blessing in the Shmoneh Esreh that represents natural miracles is the *Modim* prayer since it specifically speaks of “the miracles that are with us daily.”<sup>7</sup> Now we can understand why the rabbis chose the blessing of *Modim* in which to add the *Al Hanisim* prayer as the special references to the miracles of Purim and Chanukah. Purim is clearly a natural miracle and thus was placed in that prayer. Since Chanukah has both a natural miracle (the war) and a supernatural miracle (the oil burning for eight days instead of one day), the rabbis composed a text that speaks only to the natural miracle of Chanukah in the blessing describing the natural miracles, and omitted in that blessing any reference to the supernatural miracle. The rabbis also placed the *Al Hanisim* recitation in the Grace After Meals in the *Nodeh Lecha* prayer, derived from the word *Hodaah*, again a reference to natural miracles, (In this prayer, by and large, all the events discussed are natural miracles as well.) In the Talmud, however, when discussing the reason for establishing a holiday, as pointed out by Maharal, the rabbis used the supernatural miracle of the oil, in order to prove that the victory in the war was Divine, and also stressed in that passage the saying of Hallel for that supernatural event. Now we can also understand the subtle change in those last two words in the Talmudic text. In that Talmudic passage, the rabbis say we honor G-d by reciting *Hallel* and then *Hodaah*, the supernatural miracle (stressed first) and only then

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<sup>5</sup> *She-iltot* Rav Achai Gaon 26

<sup>6</sup> Maharal, *Chidushei Aggadot* 1:4

<sup>7</sup> Next to last blessing of every Shmoneh Esreh

*Hodaah*, the natural miracle. But in the *Al Hanisim* prayer, the rabbis end the text with *Lehodot UleHallel*, first the *Hodaah* of the natural miracle recited in and appropriate for that blessing, and only then the *Hallel* for the supernatural variety of miracle.

### **IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO MIRACLES OF CHANUKAH?**

When it comes to the *Al Hanisim* prayer, the words recited on Purim are far more direct and clear. Haman tried to annihilate the Jewish people, then G-d foiled his plan and killed him. On Chanukah, however, the Greek plan was to “make them forget their Torah” and assimilate the Jews – a spiritual rather than physical destruction. In describing the victory of the Jews on Chanukah, some of the phrases in *Al Hanisim* do not make logical sense. We understand the (natural) miracle in giving over “the strong into the hands of the weak” and the “many into the hands of the few.” But then the text continues, and says that the miracle was also giving “the impure into the hands of the pure” and “the wicked into the hands of the righteous.” Why is this miraculous? Where does it say that the wicked are naturally supposed to defeat the righteous or the impure defeat the pure, and that when the opposite occurs we view it as “out of the ordinary” (like the many into the hands of the few)? What are the rabbis trying to tell us? In addition, as has been well documented above and elsewhere, there are two distinct miracles of Chanukah, the victory of the war and the miracle of the oil that lasted for eight days. Are these indeed two different concepts, or is the same underlying principle present in both of these distinct miracles?

Rabbi Zev Leff has discussed these questions.<sup>8</sup> He points out that at that time in history, Greece, in addition to representing the philosophy that was spreading throughout its conquered territories, was also the economic superpower of the world. Like the capitalism of today in many countries, Greek values were very shallow and external, and everything revolved around “the sale.” At the end of the day, people were judged by how much profit they made and how many sales they rang up, not by the quality of life. Thus, the symbol for Greece was that of quantity, symbolized by the Hebrew name for Greece, *Yavan*, written with three parallel lines, one very small (*Yud*), one medium (*Vav*) and one long (*Final Nun*). These thin lines are the three basic sizes used in every business as part of all sales – small, medium and large, and the line represents the smallest amount of quality, just a thin line. In addition, the word *Yavan* is the Hebrew word for beauty (*Noi*) spelled backwards, because the Greek definition of beauty was the opposite of the Jewish and Torah view of beauty. This was also the philosophy of the Greek approach to war. Just as in business, they believed that superior numbers create the ultimate value, and the greatest quantity of soldiers can defeat anyone and any country.

The Jewish view has always been the opposite. Judaism believes in quality over quantity, whether in prayer or any other aspect of Jewish life,<sup>9</sup> even in war. This was also played out in the physical battle between the Greeks and Jews then, and remains the battle between the Israelis and Arabs today – quantity vs. quality: The Arabs have many more soldiers and weapons, but the Israeli advantage lies in the inherent “quality” or values of its soldiers, which is vastly superior to that of their Arab counterparts. This idea, then, explains the words of the *Al Hanisim* prayer. The Jews defeated the Greeks because of their quality, because they were pure as opposed to the Greeks’ impurity, and righteous vs. evil. This was the source of the strength that helped them overcome the enemy that vastly outnumbered them, and this power remains the Jewish advantage today. This concept of Judaism, that quality is more important than quantity and that superior quality will win out in the end, is also the idea behind the supernatural miracle of the oil. The physical quantity of that oil was only supposed to last for one day, but the spiritual quality of the oil overcame the insufficient quantity and made it last for a full eight days. Thus, the message of both miracles of Chanukah is clear: Jewish survival depends on the quality of the life and values of the Jews, not the quantity of riches or even the quantity of commandments observed. G-d desires the quality, represented by the heart of the Jew.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Festivals of Life,” Targum Press, 2009, Rabbi Zev Leff, pages 114-121

<sup>9</sup> Berachot 5b, Rema on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 295:2, Mishna Berurah on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1, No. 12

<sup>10</sup> Sanhedrin 106b

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PURE OIL**

The above lesson about quality also helps us understand and answer another fundamental question about the Chanukah story. In their attempt to demonstrate the triumph of the Jewish way of life over the Greek lifestyle, the Jews understood that the symbol of the oil – the light of Torah,<sup>11</sup> the pure oil of the Menorah that would not be extinguished – was crucial. They knew that it would take eight days to manufacture and deliver additional pure oil, and they found only one day's worth of pure oil because the Greeks had defiled all the other containers of oil. But why was there a need for ritually pure oil at all? Of course, only this kind of oil would normally be permitted for use in the Temple to light the Menorah each day. But when there is a situation where everyone and everything is impure, as was the case when the Greeks intentionally defiled everything, then Jewish law clearly allows impure oil to be used in lighting the Menorah.<sup>12</sup> What, then, was all the fuss about lighting with pure oil?

It is true that from a Jewish law perspective, impure oil would have been acceptable. But, if the symbol of the victory was that quality in Judaism is superior to quantity, then it had to be the best quality oil, even if Jewish law allowed a less qualitative substitute in this case. Therefore, it was important to the Jews to find and light only with pure oil, even if it would have meant an interruption of lighting (which would have symbolized a break in the continuity of Judaism). Fortunately, G-d made the qualitatively superior pure oil last for a full eight days until new pure oil arrived, thereby also symbolizing the continuity and eternity of Judaism by lighting the Menorah without a break of even one day. (Today this is symbolized by the eternal flame that is lit in almost every synagogue.)

## **CHANUKAH IS THE ONLY MITZVAH WHERE ALL JEWS DO THE MAXIMUM**

Regarding many commandments in Judaism, there is a basic minimum that a Jew must do to fulfill his or her obligation. There are usually additional customs or expenses that those who want to fulfill the mitzvah "better" can add to this minimum. This is true in keeping kosher as well as with almost every positive commandment. The higher level of observance is called "*Mehadrin*" and the highest level of all is called "*Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin.*" In the case of all other commandments, different kinds of Jews perform different levels of mitzvot. But with Chanukah it is different. Everyone agrees that the basic mitzvah-commandment is to simply light one candle each night for the entire family, and that completely fulfills one's obligation. Those who are "*Mehadrin*" light one the first night, two the second night, etc., for the entire family. But the super-observant, "*Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin*" light one the first night, two the second night, three the third night, etc., and each family member receives his or her own Menorah. This highest form of observance has become standard practice in most Jewish homes where Chanukah candles are lit!<sup>13</sup> No one today lights just one candle each night of Chanukah. Why not? Why is this commandment the only one in Judaism where a majority of Jews took it upon themselves to observe the highest form of the commandment? To answer, we need to return to understand the philosophy of this holiday and the true battle between the Jews and the Greeks.

Maharal, in the same passage cited above,<sup>14</sup> adds a point which at first seems rather shallow, but on deeper reflection, we may see it as the essential point of the holiday. He repeats the notion that the Greeks showed their domination over the Jewish people by defiling the Temple Hall. He then uses the idea of gematria (numerical value of Hebrew letters) to prove his point (which is atypical of the Maharal). The Hebrew word *Heichal* (Temple Hall) has a numerical value of 65, while *Yavan* (Greece in Hebrew) has a numerical value of 66. This shows that Greece is "stronger" than the Temple Hall and can make it impure (*Tameh*). Therefore, the Greeks were able to make all of the cruses of the oil impure, except for one that apparently escaped their notice. We know that this cruse was pure (*Tahor*) since it was sealed with the stamp of the Kohen Gadol-High Priest. Thus, the Kohen Gadol is "higher" and "stronger" than the Greeks. In

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<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 6:23

<sup>12</sup> Pesachim 77a

<sup>13</sup> Shabbat 21b, Biur Halacha, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 671

<sup>14</sup> Maharal, Chidushei Aggadot 1:4

other words, the Greeks were successful in making the *Kodesh* (Temple Hall) impure, but the symbol of what is called the *Kodesh Kodoshim* (Holy of Holies), the Kohen Gadol, the Greeks could not overcome and make impure. Thus, they could defile all other oils (*Kodesh*), but not that one cruse (*Kodesh Kodoshim*). What does this signify? What is the special power or concept that the Greeks possess that is stronger than the Temple Hall?

If *Kodesh* is holy, then what is the special significance *Kodesh Kodoshim*? *Kodesh* means that which is separated, that which is special. When a man says to a woman “*Harai at mekudeshet li*-You are betrothed to me,” he is making a Jewish law statement. This woman, from now onward, is designated as special and separated for him. From this point on, she is forbidden to all other men in the world and will only be permitted to him. In a similar vein, a Jew may change an object’s status from *chulin* (secular, mundane) to *Hekdesh* (Holy, *Kodesh*). Once it is *Kodesh*, it is forbidden for all people to use and is designated for “G-dly” purposes only. If that is true about *Kodesh*, then what can the term *Kodesh Kodoshim* possibly signify? It seems very strange. If *Kodesh* is an absolute term – i.e., separated from *Chol*-secular, the mundane, then how could something be “more” *Kodesh*, more holy, more separated?

The difference is clear: If the *Kodesh* is the place that is not *chol*, then in order to understand *Kodesh*, one must leave the *chol*-mundane and separate from it. *Kodesh Kodoshim* is the place that *Kodesh* is revealed not by separating from *chol*, but by demonstrating that there is no *Chol* at all!! He who can investigate deeply within the *chol*-secular and find *Kodesh* within that very *chol*, has found *Kodesh Kodoshim*. Simple *Kodesh* is he who can escape the *chol* of this world and come to *Kodesh*. But the next higher step is he who can live within this world and still find *Kodesh*. *Kodesh Kodoshim* means that *Kodesh* is not only revealed over there, where there is no *chol*, but even over here, in the midst of the *chol*. When the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) entered the place called *Kodesh Kodoshim* once a year, on the holiest day of Yom Kippur, at the holiest moment of the year, what did he do there? He would speak about the sins and iniquities of the Jews, with one request -- *kapparah*. This word usually is translated as “atonement,” but can also signify “appeasement.” As it says (about Jacob’s meeting with Esau), “For he said, I will appease him (*achapra*) with the present that goes before me...”<sup>15</sup> The Kohen Gadol asks G-d to reveal that beneath all these sins, all this *chol*, right within the mundane or secular there still exists *Kodesh*. The day on which Jews are obligated to ask to pray with the sinners (the prayer before Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur), is the day that reveals that within these very Jews, the most distant Jews, the most *chol* Jews, there is also *Kodesh*.

Now let us return to the previously cited passage and the Jewish people. Maharal says that the Greeks have a power that is stronger than the Temple Hall. This is very difficult to understand. What this implies is that when it comes to *Kodesh*, Jews can only enter it when they are totally pure. But sometimes, the Greeks have a stronger power than the Jews in this area. It was Greece who revealed to the world the most profound philosophy in the history of the world. They explained many “religious” concepts. But at the same time that their priests and prophets entered the great temples in Athens, children were killed in Sparta because they did not run in sync with the other children. In Greece, then, the “holy” city had to be in one place, while the “non-Holy” city was in a different area. The entire battle between the Jews and the Greeks that is sometimes explained as light and darkness, was not, in reality, such darkness. The Greeks gave great light to the world. There are no images referred to more often (even in Jewish sources) than those in Greek literature. But the darkness of the Greeks is that they could not combine the two worlds together, the intellectual world of Athens and the reality of Sparta. That is one area in which the Jews have something that the Greeks do not possess. They call it *Kodesh Kodoshim*.

Therefore, in an effort to show that they understood this idea, the Jews, even Jews who do not ordinarily perform commandments during the rest of the year, took it upon themselves not only to be *Kodesh* and light one candle on each night of Chanukah, but even the higher form of *Kodesh*, the *Kodesh Kodoshim*, which Jews translate into the action of *Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin* by lighting more than one candle each night of the holiday. This shows that even within secular Jews there can be holiness, and this is

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 32:21

the secret to defeating the Greek philosophy in the world: Judaism does not separate between holy and non-holy, as every unholy object has a potential to be holy.

This also explains why symbolically the Jews had to use ritually pure oil, even though ritually impure oil was technically acceptable in Jewish law. Since the Greeks tried to impurify Judaism by forcing non-Jewish ideas into the Jewish religion, even a small amount of these ideas impurified the totality of what Judaism is. Just as if one takes away two oboes and add one more violin added to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, it may sound great, but it is no longer Beethoven's Fifth, so, too, any foreign Greek ideas would make Judaism something else, but not Judaism. Thus, the Jewish people wanted to symbolize that Judaism cannot be adulterated even a little bit, by adopting the most stringent manner of fulfilling the commandment of lighting the menorah. Like the Torah compared above to light, even one letter missing from any Torah it renders it unfit for us. So, too, any small imperfection and change in Judaism will render it no longer Judaism.

Maimonides highlights the specialness of this particular mitzvah by calling only this, and no other commandment in the entire Torah, "The Jewish people's most favorite commandment of all."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, he rules that if a destitute person is so poor that he does not even have enough money for a shirt, it is more important to sell the one shirt he has and use the money to purchase a candle in order to fulfill this commandment of Chanukah. A Jew may even forgo Kiddush wine on Shabbat in order to keep this more beloved commandment, which represents the importance of keeping Judaism in its purest form.

#### **THE JEWISH VIEW OF EDUCATION THROUGH THE MITZVAH OF CHANUKAH**

The word Chanukah can be translated as "dedication" referring to the re-dedication of the Holy Temple after the defeat of the Greeks by the Jews. But this word also is similar to the word *Chinuch*, which signifies education. What can the holiday of Chanukah teach Jews about the Jewish concept of education?

There is an argument in the Talmud about whether the mitzvah of lighting of the candles is fulfilled by simply lighting the candles, or whether the menorah must also be placed down somewhere, to rest for the 30 minutes the candles must burn.<sup>17</sup> The technical difference would concern the person who held the menorah while the candles were burning. If the lighting fulfills the commandment, then it would be permissible for the person to simply hold the menorah for the half hour minimum that the candles had to burn. But if resting the menorah after the lighting is also needed in order to fulfill the commandment, then merely lighting would not fulfill the commandment of Chanukah.

This argument can be understood on a deeper level, regarding the commandment of Jewish education. Is the commandment of education for the Jew to light the soul of the child (or adult) so that this person gets "turned on" to Judaism, Jewish ideas and Jewish practice? Or is the actual commandment of Jewish education to insure that the menorah (child) is rested on something stable – i.e., is able to stand on his or her own two feet after being "lit" and excited about his or her Judaism? What is the Jewish law regarding this commandment? Even though there remains a controversy about this point of Jewish law, everyone agrees that the menorah must be lit with the intention and the possibility of putting the menorah down on a stable surface.<sup>18</sup> This informs us that Jewish education, (Chanukah-*Chinuch*) can be no different. If the goal is only to make the student excited, to light a metaphorical fire and do nothing more, that is not sufficient. The teacher must instill within the student the desire to be "put on a stand" – i.e., to stand on his or her own two feet, and insure that the fire of learning is not quickly extinguished. The goal is to make students "stand" and want to continue to learn, even without the teacher.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Maimonides, Hilchot Chanukah 4:11-2

<sup>17</sup> Shabbat 22b

<sup>18</sup> Mishna Berurah on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 675, no. 2

<sup>19</sup> Mishna, Avot 1:1

## **CHANUKAH AND SUKKOT—THE CONNECTION**

There appear to be so many coincidences linking the Torah holiday of Sukkot to the rabbinic holiday of Chanukah, which it is not coincidental. First, the Torah commandment to light the Menorah (each day) in the Temple is found right after the commandments regarding Sukkot,<sup>20</sup> and some commentaries<sup>21</sup> show the link between the two holidays as intentional. Both holidays are eight days long and Hallel is recited every day of each holiday. Just as the Kohen-Priest performed the service in the Temple on Sukkot, it was the Kohanim, the Maccabees, led by Mattithias and Judah, who rescued the Temple on the holiday of Chanukah. The service performed in lighting the torches during the intermediate days of Sukkot in the Temple is recreated, in mini-form, on Chanukah. In fact, the Talmud states that Rabbi Shimon used to juggle exactly eight torches on Sukkot, the same number of candles lit on Chanukah.<sup>22</sup> Finally, when discussing how many candles to light each night, the opinion of Beit Shammai is that we begin with eight candles the first night, then decrease to seven the second night, continuing this way until we reach one candle for the last night. What is his reasoning (even though we do not rule this way according to today's Jewish law)? This concept is similar to the holiday of Sukkot when the number of sacrifices diminished by one each day. So too, should the menorah be lit with the same logic on Chanukah.<sup>23</sup>

But aside from these coincidences or tangential connections, what is the deeper connection between the holiday of Sukkot and the holiday of Chanukah? Maharal states<sup>24</sup> that the concept of *emunah*-belief is written in the Torah three times, representing three types of basic beliefs of the Jew. And those three beliefs are represented by the three Festivals, the “tripod” of Judaism. (Each holiday is called a “*Regel*-leg” and represents one of those three foundations.) The belief represented by Sukkot is that of G-d's protection and interaction with the Jewish people. (See the chapter about “Sukkot” for an expansion of this theme.) It was this same belief that guided the Maccabees in their rebellion against the Greeks. Fighting an army so much larger and better trained would have been impossible and useless unless those fighting truly felt G-d's protection and assistance. This, then, is the deeper, conceptual connection between the holidays of Sukkot and Chanukah.

## **PUBLICIZING THE MIRACLE: WHY AND WHERE?**

Central to the mitzvah-commandment of lighting the Chanukah candles is “publicizing the miracle.” This is so crucial that if a poor person has money for only one candle, and not enough for Shabbat and Chanukah candles, Chanukah takes precedence because of the need to publicize the miracle of Chanukah.<sup>25</sup> But Chanukah is not the only holiday where publicizing the miracle is part of the celebration. On Purim, as well, the rabbis urge Jews to read the Megillah in as large a synagogue gathering as possible in order to maximize the publicizing of the miracle of Purim.<sup>26</sup> Yet, if one cannot read the Megillah in a large crowd, a Jew can still fulfill the mitzvah by reading or hearing it read in a smaller gathering. In fact, a Jew fulfills the mitzvah of reading the Megillah on Purim even if it was read alone, in private.<sup>27</sup> However, if a Jew comes home very late on Chanukah while everyone else in the home is sleeping and no one is around outside when he or she wants to light the Menorah, then the Jew lights without a blessing.<sup>28</sup> Why is the blessing omitted? In this case, there is no publicizing of the miracle in the lighting. Why, then, is publicizing the miracle so important on Chanukah, where it can even hold back the proper fulfillment of the commandment, but not on Purim, when publicizing is not an absolute obligation in order to fulfill the

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<sup>20</sup> Leviticus 23:42-43, 34:1-2

<sup>21</sup> Rokach, Hilchot Chanukah

<sup>22</sup> Sukkah 53a

<sup>23</sup> Shabbat 21b

<sup>24</sup> Gevurot Hashem chapter 47, page 181

<sup>25</sup> Shabbat 23b

<sup>26</sup> Megillah 18a

<sup>27</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 590:18

<sup>28</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 591:7

commandment to read the Megillah? Why is publicizing the miracle an integral part of the commandment on Chanukah but not on Purim?

One answer that has been given is that on Purim the publicizing is for the non-Jews, as it was Haman who threatened Jewish existence. Publicizing the miracle for the future Hamans is important but not an integral part of the commandment. On Chanukah, the real battle in this holiday was between the Jews, those Jews who wanted to change traditional Judaism by adding much of Greek culture (the Hellenists) and those Jews who wanted to preserve the Torah ways and the Judaism from Sinai. When the traditional Jews were victorious and publicizing the miracle of the events was required, it became a necessary component of the mitzvah so that those Jews throughout the ages who wished to alter traditional Judaism by incorporating foreign ideas and values should understand that this is not authentic Judaism. Sending a message to those Jews is indeed part of the mitzvah of Chanukah and candle lighting.

### **WHY NOT FULFILL THE CHANUKAH COMMANDMENT IN THE CENTER OF TOWN?**

Since we have established that the main purpose of the lighting of the candles is to publicize the miracle to as many Jews as possible, then logically if a person travels to the center of Manhattan and lights candles before twenty thousand people, that should be the ultimate fulfillment of the mitzvah-commandment of Chanukah. And yet, Jewish law states that even if a Jew lights in this manner (and Jews do light in synagogue to publicize the miracle), every Jew still, in addition, must go back to his or her home and light there in order to fulfill the commandment.<sup>29</sup> Why is the home necessary to do this mitzvah, when the essential element is to maximize the publicity?

If we look carefully at the story of Chanukah, it shows how the Greeks tried to make the Jews forget about Judaism and force them not to practice their religion (in the words of *Al Hanisim* mentioned above). The Midrash explains exactly what the Greeks enacted in order to force the Jews to forget Judaism. They passed laws forbidding the practice of Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh (which many commentaries explain are actually the laws of family purity).<sup>30</sup> What do all these practices have in common? They are all an intrinsic part of practices of the Jewish home and the Jewish family. The Greeks were very wise, and understood that if they can break up the Jewish family, there will be no foundation of Judaism left, and the fundamental basis of the religion would eventually collapse. Therefore, when the Maccabees and traditional Jews were victorious, they instituted a commandment and practice on Chanukah that would signal the triumph and the importance of the Jewish family and the Jewish home. Thus, as important as it is to light the Chanukah candles in a window (or outdoors as is customary in Israel), it is more important that the miracle be publicized within the family. And it is for that reason that candle lighting in the public square alone does not fully emphasize the essential message of Chanukah – the preservation and strength of the Jewish family. Only by lighting Chanukah candles in the home could that idea be properly represented and symbolized and the commandment fulfilled.

This message was brought home most recently when a group of Jews outside Lisbon, Portugal opened up a new synagogue where more than 70 Crypto-Jews gather each day in prayer and 120 people gathered on one Shabbat morning. All of these people are the result of four families who went underground in 1492, as their descendants married each other while they kept practicing Judaism secretly. What kept them Jewish without a synagogue, without a formal Jewish school and without an organized Jewish community? Only the Jewish home. In fact, at the entrance to the synagogue's sanctuary is the following inscription in Hebrew: "Here in this place, the chain of our tradition has not been severed... As a result of government decrees, the Jewish residents of this village, like other Jews throughout Spain and Portugal, were forced to publicly deny their Jewish religion. But they maintained their Judaism in their homes. Here the candle of Jewish light was never extinguished. For a period of 500 years, from 1492 (when the one synagogue in

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<sup>29</sup> Mishna Berurah on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 572 no. 11

<sup>30</sup> Otzar Midrashim, Chanukah 8-9

Belmonte was destroyed) until 2002 (when it was reopened), in the homes of this village the Jewish commandments were secretly performed, the tradition was transmitted from parent to child, in hushed tones, the Sabbath was sanctified in hiding while Sunday was celebrated before the eyes of the neighbors. They made blessings over the Challah and the wine and mumbled words of Hebrew prayers in the darkness. Here the Jewish soul was never lost. Here the Jewish soul remains forever.... From the midst of the past will rise the future. From the bleak darkness of the Middle Ages shall emerge the light of this Synagogue."

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