



YESHIVA
HIGH SCHOOL

MOED

Chanukah Edition 5776

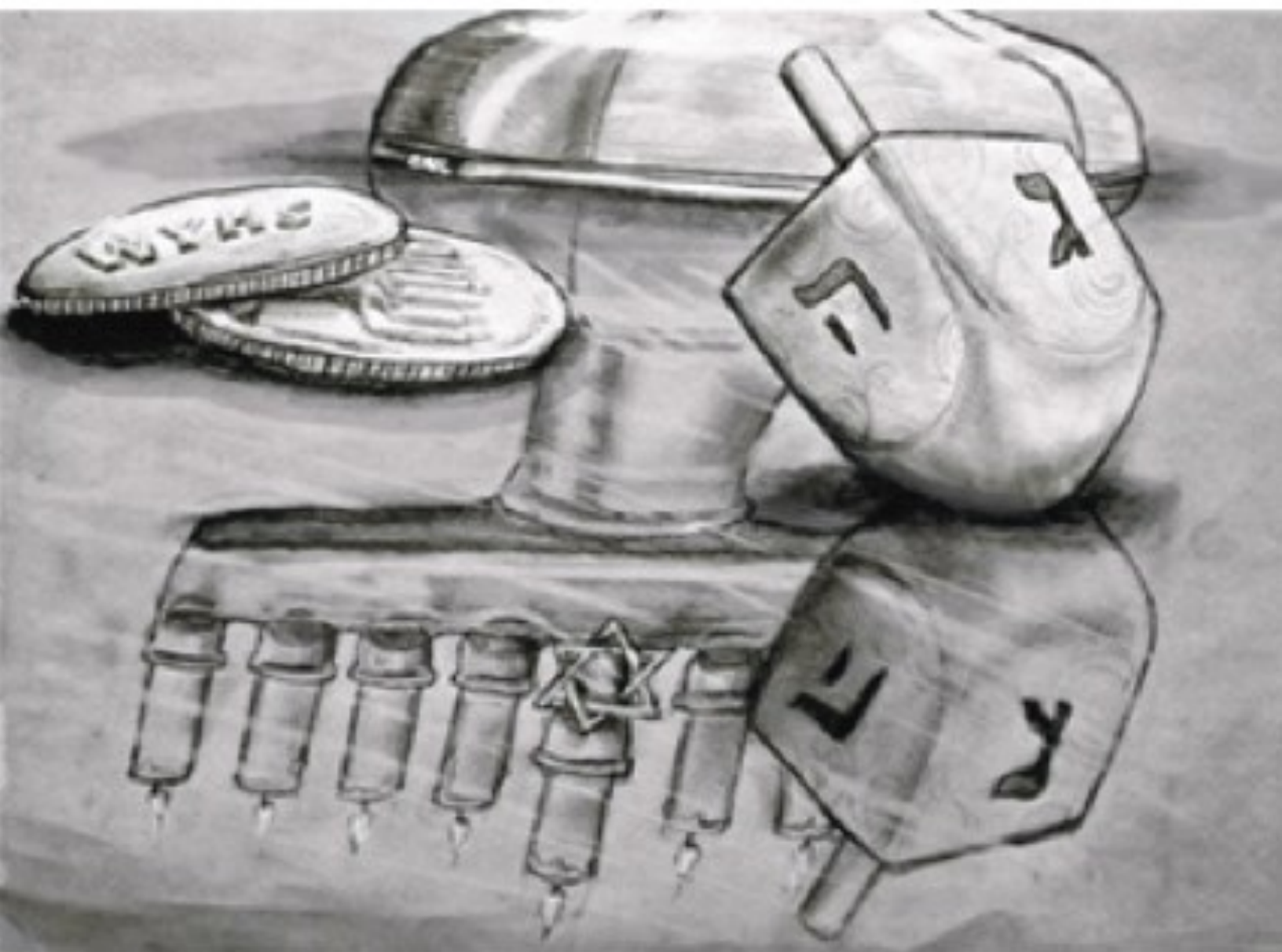


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Humility and Oil

Max Abramovitz

In the story of Chanukah, the Greeks are the antagonistic force that opposes Judaism in every regard. They distort ideas of pleasure, worship many gods, and even go so far as to ransack the Beit Hamikdash. The Talmud says that during their raid they found and destroyed all of the oil there. Due to this, when the Chashmonaim eventually regained control of the Holy Temple, they were only able to find one flask of oil with the Kohen Gadol's seal on it. While this is one of the most famous parts of the Chanukah story, it does raise a few interesting questions. There is a rule that if a person who has done idolatry handles wine, the wine is unable to be used for religious means. It is unknown whether this applies to oil or not, but this does bring up the potential inability to use the oil. In addition, the existence of the Kohen Gadol's seal seems to be illogical, as the Kohen Gadol previously had no involvement in the process of the preparation of the oil. These revelations make the situation seem much less concrete than it did before.

The Shem MiShmuel, a series of books written by Rabbi Shmuel Bornshtein, answers these questions. The Shem MiShmuel quotes a midrash that says that there were three gifts created in the world, wisdom, strength, and wealth, and anyone who benefits from any of them takes all the delight in the world. The Shem MiShmuel explains how each of these gifts are representative of the Jewish people's exiles. Babylon represented strength with their armies that destroyed Jerusalem. Persia represented wealth, shown very prominently in the Purim story. Greece, however, represented wisdom. When Greece took over Israel, they did so cunningly and not by a show of force.

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Rededication

Shanee Markovitz

The passing of flames. The celebration of survival. All that we lived through; all that we go through. Chanukah.

What is it about the holiday Chanukah that draws the attention of Jews across the world, all of different levels of observance and backgrounds? What is it about these eight days that seems to captivate the entire Jewish world year after year? Is it the oily foods? The exchange of gifts? The time spent with family? Chanukah's influence spreads far deeper and further into the Jewish community than any other holiday. The word Chanukah itself means dedication. In biblical times, the Jews had rededicated their Holy Temple to Hashem when the holiday of Chanukah was established. They fought for their religion, they held onto their culture, and, against all odds, they reaffirmed their connection with Hashem.

This, essentially, is all that makes up the holiday of Chanukah. At its roots it is a holiday of dedication and rededication. Its very core is made up of the reestablishments of both lost and yet-to-be-made connections. Year after year, the Jewish people come together and spread the light of Judaism. No matter what they believe, they partake in this joyous celebration. Gifts are bought for children. Candles are sold out in local stores, and the world holds its breath at the sight of our wonderful lights decorating the windows of every house with a mezuzah.

Chanukah is a time when every type of Jew rededicates himself to Judaism on some level. It is a time when we celebrate the connection that we maintained over the past year. It is an opportunity for us to reaffirm our connections with our Creator and to reassess our values and our goals within our religiosity and spirituality. So this Chanukah, think about what you are dedicating yourself to. Think about the dedications you have yet to commit to.

The Imperfect Holiday

Dovid Zak

The next holiday on the Jewish calendar is Chanukah. One of the reasons we celebrate Chanukah is the rededication of the Beit Hamikdash; however, this raises a very obvious question: why would Jews be celebrating the rededication of the Temple if we never celebrated the original dedication of the temple? We do not have a holiday marking the building of the first Beit Hamikdash, but we have an eight day holiday for its rededication? It just doesn't make sense.

A possible answer is that we, as Jews and as human beings, were born imperfect. Our goal in life is to strive to get as close as perfection as we can-- that is why we are here. That is also the reason behind the first mitzvah in a Jewish male's life: brit milah corrects an imperfection that we are born with in a life dedicated to correcting imperfections. As Jews, our mission is to fix and rededicate ourselves in our quest towards perfection. This may be why we celebrate the rededication of the Temple rather than the original dedication of the Temple. We must remember that the rededication and the striving to perfect our imperfect selves is extremely important.

Chanukah and Purim

Ty Kay

There are two major books in Judaism used to reference Jewish law: the Mishnah Torah, written by the Rambam, and the Shulchan Aruch, written by Rav Yosef Kairo. The Shulchan Aruch discusses the *yamim tovim* in order of the Jewish calendar, starting with Pesach and finishing with Sukkot. However, in the Mishnah Torah, Purim precedes Chanukah, when it should actually follow it chronologically. In order to understand the contrast we need to gain a deeper knowledge about the two different books. The Shulchan Aruch was written to provide a systematic list of all the halachot. The Mishnah Torah, on the other hand, was written in an attempt to include all of the concepts of Torah She'baal Peh and replace the need for studying the Talmud. The order of the holidays in the Shulchan Aruch still makes sense, but why was the order changed in the Mishnah Torah?

Rabbi Brander once explained that the reason that Purim comes before Chanukah in the Mishnah Torah is because the actual story of Purim occurred several hundred years before the story of Chanukah. Furthermore, if we dive deeper into the story of Chanukah, we can see that Purim in fact was one of the main reasons for the establishment of the holiday of Chanukah. After Purim, Esther decided to make Purim an official holiday. Her decision was greatly debated but ultimately accepted. Esther therefore lays out the foundation for establishing a new holiday and because of her, Chanukah later became a festival. Since she set the precedent of establishing national holidays to celebrate miraculous events, the heroes of the Chanukah story decided to do the same. Without Purim, there would be no Chanukah. Maimonides recognizes this and therefore puts Purim first, to show that historically Purim came first, and that Chanukah's legitimacy comes from Purim.

Battles of Philosophy

Leor Levenson

There is an important idea in Judaism that we only celebrate really important events with an established holiday. If so, what was so special about Chanukah? After all, even though we won a big war, that might not have been such a huge miracle. Also, even though the candles lasting for eight days was a miracle, was it really enough to have us establish a holiday for every year?

Rabbi Label Lam offers an insightful answer to this question. He says that there is an even bigger meaning behind both of these miracles, something that we need to value even today.

The Greeks believed in the physical, practical beauty of the world to the exclusion of all spirituality. They worshipped beauty, strength, and brilliance just as they worshipped their gods. They then set out to spread these ideas around the world.

After the Greeks conquered Israel, they imposed their Hellenistic culture of physicality on the Jews. To Greeks and Hellenistic Jews, a candle was just a candle. It was specifically designed to provide light for everyday activities; however, to Jews it was a component of our holy services in the Temple. To us, it was more than just a candle, it was a way to connect to Hashem.

This was the real war with the Greeks, and the reason why the miracle of the candles was so important: the Jews fought an ideological battle about whether or not a candle was just a candle, and they won! Every time we light the Chanukah candles, we are proving the Greeks wrong. We are proving that there is a spiritual side to everything, even something as ordinary as a candle. In our own lives, we do this every year to remind ourselves of this important idea.

Abramovitz continued:

It's explained that oil represents wisdom for the Jewish people. Therefore, when the Greeks "defiled" the oil, it actually is talking about their deceptions to alter Judaism's philosophies in their partially successful attempts to convert Jews to their cause.

However, there was one last secret and incorruptible piece of wisdom hidden in the Torah and in the Jewish people. This piece of wisdom, never discovered or utilized by the Greeks, was the quality of humility. Humility plays a very important role in Judaism. Moshe was the ultimate example of humility. In many arguments between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, the law follows Beit Hillel based purely on their humility. Our questions can be answered by looking at another extreme example of humility: Aharon, the very first Kohen Gadol. Aharon was always willing to throw away his own honor and make peace between the Jews, never once taking credit for it. His immeasurable humility was his seal. Despite the Greeks "desecrating the oil" which we have shown to mean the conversion of the Jews, it was the humility within ourselves that allowed Judaism to survive. We were able to still find the one testament of faith unbroken among all the other broken and twisted faiths--the humility of the Kohen Gadol. Let's try to make this humility prominent once again.

Holiday Fun Facts

Did You Know...

- ... that the Book of the Maccabees, the book which tells the story of Chanukah, was almost included in Tanach?
- ... that the dreidel was originally used to trick the Greeks into thinking that the Jews were just playing a game, not learning Torah?
- ... that we must light the chanukiya wherever the most people will see it, even if that means in the back window?
- ... that you need 44 candles total to light the chanukiya over the course of the holiday?

Candles, Chanukah, Dreidel, Latke, Maccabees, Menorah,
Olive Oil

O J O M O L C V D U I E Q R M
L V L P N E D H E H O K I V X
D P I L B Z L C A T C T Q C N
A M V Z T O I I L N X A K A Y
A L E D I E R D S N U L E B K
A C O L H T E R L V K K W M D
K E I E Q P V V G N Z W A S J
S W L J M A C C A B E E S H U
P F T D Q F B F M O Z L M S U
M Z O L N C U E I T S K E K M
I C S K E A N W V D Y C D R K
U U L C D O C U Q D G Y X O P
I Z X F R Y X U P Q I E Q E C
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Chag Sameach!