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## The Purity Premise

by Andy Ebbin (DRS '17)

Chanukah is one of the most popular holidays likely because it tells a fun story and has minimal obligations other than eating fattening foods. As kids, the story makes perfect sense, but as we age, questions arise about the tale. We all learn that the miracle of Chanukah is based on the premise that the Maccabim were only permitted to utilize perfectly pure oil in the menorah lighting. However, a more mature, skeptical and knowledgeable person would say that in their situation, perhaps they impure oil would have fulfilled the obligation! The concept of "הותרה בהיבדוק" dictates that in a situation when the entire congregation is already impure, we allow impure things to be used.

So why was it such a big deal for the Maccabim to search the *Beis HaMikdash* top to bottom to find the single bottle of pure oil?

In the same way that being older allows us to better analyze and question, a complimentary, more in-depth study of the story will show us the answers. It was a time of great political and spiritual turmoil. The Greeks had come to rule us, not only by enforcing their laws, but by influencing our spiritual lives. They intended to place themselves above us, to make us look up to them as a people to emulate. Their goal was to assimilate us into their Hellenistic culture and confiscate what made us special - our religion. Ultimately, a group of Jews, the *Maccabim*, revolted against their oppressors and were miraculously victorious, returning political control of the Holy Land back to the Jews. But this war wasn't just for the sake of replacing a foreign ruler with a native one; it was about spiritually redeeming the Jews and bringing them back to their service of Hashem. The options of the *Maccabim* to accomplish this were greatly limited; the Mikdash was a wreck, they were exhausted from battle, and they needed something to remind the people of their heritage which the Greeks had systematically stole.

They *needed* to light the menorah in the most preferable fashion possible. An exemption like הותרה בהיבדוק wasn't going to cut it, because to light with impure oil is obviously not optimal. The real purpose of them lighting the Menorah carried a great deal of symbolism along with it being a mitzvah on its own. This lighting was different than every other time because this was הדינה dedication, setting the standard of how things ought to be done in the future. Because of this, Rav Yosef Engel explains, it was absolutely necessary to use the finest, purest oil possible. This would teach everyone to relearn what they had forgotten under their previous masters and remind them how to serve Hashem in the proper way. Impure oil simply would not succeed in accomplishing that. The *Maccabim* couldn't have a "do as I say, not as I do" attitude towards the people. To not light the Menorah and then tell them that in the future they wouldn't be allowed to copy them except in extenuating circumstances would not work. What they needed to do was lead by example and show the broken



nation that they could be just as great as they once were, without compromises and without exemptions. In the deliberate and strategic actions of the *Maccabim*, they reintroduced the Jews to the correct path, and in doing so, brought the light of Torah for all to share and continue to share in until this very day.

## Counting Up or Down: That is the Question

by Neti Linzer (Ma'ayanot '17)

There is a *machlokes* between Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai over how to beautify the mitzvah of *neros Chanukah*. According to Beis Shamai, a person should light eight candles on the first night, and continuously decrease the amount each night. Beis Hillel, on the other hand, hold that a person should light one candle on the first night, and continuously increase the amount each night. The Gemara explains that Beis Shamai requires a decrease to symbolize the number of days still left of the holiday (*yamim hanichnasim*) and Beis Hillel wants an increase to symbolize the number of days of Chanukah that already passed (*yamim hayotzim*). What is it that compels Beis Shamai to focus on the remaining days of the chag, but Beis Hillel to focus on the days that already happened?

R' Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht writes in his sefer, *Asufat Maarachot*, that this *machlokes* must be understood in light of a different *machlokes* between Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai in masechet Brachot (52b). The Gemara is discussing the proper blessing to recite on the fire during Havdalah. Beis Shamai opines that text should be: "who created the light of the fire," while Beis Hillel holds that it should be: "who created the lights of the fire." The Vilna Gaon explains that Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel are not debating the physical qualities of fire. Both agree that fire begins as a singular spark and becomes a multifaceted flame. They are arguing, however, over which part of the fire to bless: the entire flame, or just the spark?

The Bereishit Rabbah (12:5) can help us with our question. It recounts how Hashem created a "super-light" on the first day, a light so powerful that with it, Adam could see the end of the earth. Adam benefitted from that potent light, until Motzei Shabbat, when he sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. On that night, Hashem concealed the "super-light" and left Adam in the darkness - vulnerable and afraid. Hashem explained to Adam that while he had lost the ability to benefit from Hashem's "super-light," he could create his own light source through the sweat of his brow (*b'zayt apecha*). Hashem taught him to rub two flints together in order to create his own fire. Since Adam's *cheit*, mankind can no longer bask in the singular spark of Hashem's great light, but must work assiduously to create his own flames.

This argument highlights the philosophical differences between Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai. According to Beis Shamai, halacha ought to correspond to an ideal world in which everything is how Hashem originally intended it. We therefore bless the singular spark of fire, reminding us of the original "super-fire" that was supposed to illuminate the entire world. According to

Beis Hillel, however, halacha should correspond to the world in its current spiritual state, and so we bless the entire flame, even though it is a reminder of man's sin.

Understanding the philosophical differences between these two schools of thought sheds a new light on the machlokes about kindling the Chanukah candles. According to Beis Shammai, we light according to the upcoming days of the holiday, so that on the 8<sup>th</sup> night, at the climax of the festival, there is only one singular candle remaining. This singular candle is reminiscent of the great "super-light" with which Hashem initially created the world. Beis Hillel, on the other hand, holds that we light a candle for each outgoing day. Each night we add a candle, to symbolize the current, *b'diavad* situation that continuously draws us farther from the ideal world of Hashem. We move away from the ideal "super-light" but still look back to it as something to which we yearn to return.

The Gemara offers another possible way to read the disagreement between Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai. According to this reading, Beis Shammai holds that we should deduct a candle each night to parallel the bull-offering of Sukkot which decreased each day. Beis Hillel, however, holds that we add a new candle each night in accordance with the principle of "in holy matters, we ascend but never descend." Rav Goldvicht's reasoning can be applied to this *machlokes* as well.

Rashi explains that 70 bulls were brought on Sukkot to symbolize the 70 nations of the world. The bulls diminished each day, symbolizing the fact that the nations will slowly diminish, leaving only Bnei Yisrael behind. This messianic message resembles Beis Shammai's idealistic opinion: Halacha should reflect a perfect world.

As stated before, Beis Hillel relies on the principle that in holy matters, holiness should be added rather than subtracted. The Gemara in Menachos (99a) derives this principle from a *pasuk* about the incense pans of Korach's congregation. The congregation of Korach, despite their egregious errors, was able to donate the tools of their sin for holy use in the Mishkan. Although these were the pans of sinners, these pans not only retained their status of *Kedusha*, but were also elevated to an even greater status and used as a covering of the *mizbeach*. Ever since Adam sinned, man has grown farther and farther away from Hashem's perfect world. But despite man's fallibility, he can still achieve *Kedusha*, and the trajectory from there is only upwards. As we add Chanukah candles each night, distancing ourselves from the original "super-light" of *Gan Eden*, we are also adding more *Kedusha* and reminding ourselves that it is through *mitzvot* that we can turn the *b'diavad* into the *lichatchila*.

After recording the *machlokes*, the Gemara describes how there were two elders in the city of Sidon, and one lit his according to Beis Hillel and the other according to Beis Shammai. Perhaps, this anecdote reflects the importance of both halachic approaches. We should always yearn to return to the world as Hashem first conceived it, but we must also recognize man's foibles and faults which obscure the primordial "super-light."

## The Menorah Mystery: A Lomdishe Look at *Ner Ish u'Baiso*

by Dovid Tanner (YUHSB '18)

There are certain mitzvos which one needs to do, and there are other mitzvos which need to be done. If you're scratching your head, let me explain. Most *mitzvos asei*, both *deoraysa* and *dirabanan*, are an individual chiyuv on each person - a personal requirement. There are countless examples, such as reciting kiddush on shabbos, wearing tefillin, and honoring one's parents. However, other mitzvos are not innate obligations on the individual, but rather apply to specific situations. For example, there is no individual obligation to put up a mezuzah on a doorpost. If a person is homeless, he isn't neglecting the mitzvah of mezuzah, as the mitzvah is only that your doorpost should have a mezuzah. It's a mitzvah which is only fulfilled should a specific situation arise that causes it to come into play, but it is not an individual chiyuv on the person.

With this in mind, let us examine the mitzvah *midirabanan* of lighting candles on Chanukah. The Gemara in Shabbos (21b) describes the basic mitzvah as "*ner ish u'baiso*," "a light for a man and his household." Even though it is common practice for each person to light in the "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*" fashion described later in the Gemara, the obligation is only one light per household. But what is the nature of this mitzvah? In an essay in the sefer *Ner Dov Ber*, Rav Yosef Zimbal analyzes the two approaches one could take in defining this commandment.

The first approach is to say that just like kiddush and lulav, there is a personal mitzvah on every individual: when Chanukah comes around, he must light a candle in his house. One person from the house, however, can be *motzi* all the others in fulfilling their obligation, just as we find by kiddush. Perhaps there is a similar mechanism by *neros Chanukah*. We will call this the "*chovas haguf* approach"—that there is a specific, individual chiyuv.

The second approach is that, similar to mezuzah, there is no personal obligation to light candles. Rather, there is an obligation that each house should have candles lit there. This is the "*chovas habayis* approach"—that there is a general requirement for each house to have candles lit.

There are several practical halachic questions that depend on which approach is correct. For example, if we say that there is a personal obligation on all members of the house to light candles, but each is fulfilling his obligation through appointing the one who lights as a *shaliach*, a messenger, to do it for them, then it seems that all those being *yotzei* with the *ba'al habayis* must have specific intent to be *yotzei*, like kiddush. But if the mitzvah is to have candles lit in the house, then one is *mekayeim* the mitzvah simply through the fact that they are lit, and he would apparently need no *kavanah* in order to be *yotzei*. However, the Sefas Emes asks on the former approach: If so, what is the chiddush that the mitzvah is "*ner ish u'baiso*"? Many mitzvos can be done through a *shaliach*! Why would the Gemara formulate the mitzvah in such a way that it appears as if it is specific to this mitzvah that the entire household can be *yotzei* in one lighting?

A second *nafka mina*, raised by the *P'nei Yehoshua*, is whether the halacha of "*mitzva bo yoseir mibeshlucho*," that it is preferable for people to do mitzvos themselves rather than having it done through a messenger, applies here. This halacha is

mentioned in the Gemara Kiddushin (41a) in regards to the preference that one prepare for Shabbos personally rather than through others. Would the same apply by neros Chanukah? It seems to depend on the above distinction. If we take the *chovas habayis* approach, it seems not—it doesn't matter who's lighting, as long as it gets lit. But if the *chovas haguf* approach is correct, there should be a preference for individual fulfillment.

In fact, this very question of whether “*mitzvah bo yoseir mibeshlucho*” applies could be the key to solving this Menorah mystery. The Magen Avraham paskens (Hilchos Chanukah, 677:7) that the idea of “*mitzvah bo yoseir mibeshlucho*” does in fact apply by neros Chanukah, which indicates that he holds that there is a *chovas haguf*. But elsewhere, he says that if a woman mistakenly lit Shabbos candles before Chanukah candles, she should ask someone else to light the Chanukah candles for her. Asks the Pri Megadim, if the chiyuv of neros Chanukah is a *chovas haguf*, how can she appoint a *shaliach* to do it for her? She already accepted Shabbos, and the whole point of having the *shaliach* do it is in order to be as if she did it, which would be assur!

The Pri Megadim answers that having someone light for you is not complete *shlichus*. Rather it's only “*miktzas shlichus*”; the person is only somewhat considered your messenger. But if that is true, we're back to square one! For if having someone else light the candles for you is only “*miktzas shlichus*,” how are you *yotzei* the mitzvah? Has the *shaliach* fulfilled your obligation or not?

Rav Zimbal offers a novel approach. He suggests that what the Pri Megadim meant when he said “*miktzas shlichus*” reveals the true nature of neros Chanukah. The mitzvah is not an individual chiyuv like tefillin or kiddush. There is no obligation upon every person to physically light the candles. But it isn't a completely general mitzvah, to simply have them lit in the house, either. The mitzvah contains joint aspects, both *chovas haguf* and *chovas habayis*. The mitzvah is upon each person to have a candle lit in their house. This could be done through personally lighting it or having someone else light it, as long as the person sees to it that the lighting is taken care of. It's a *chovas haguf* to ensure that there is a light in the house. (See Chidushei Rabenu Dovid, Pesachim 7b, for a similar svara.)

This chiddush resolves our problem with the Magen Avraham. Since the mitzvah is at its essence a *chovas haguf*, the axiom of “*mitzvah bo yoseir mibeshlucho*” applies. But since there isn't a real “*shaliach*” representing the person like in other mitzvos, as simply ensuring that the lighting is done takes care of the person's chiyuv, the woman who lit Shabbos candles too early can ask someone else to light Chanukah candles without any concern for violating Shabbos. This also answers the earlier question of the Sefas Emes; the chiddush of “*ner ish u'baiso*” is that the mitzvah, while an individual obligation on the person, only requires one to ensure that a lighting take place in his/her house, but not to physically light a candle themselves.

Rav Mayer Twersky, in his essay “Chanukah: A Time of Renewal” on *TorahWeb*, teaches that Chanukah is a time dedicated to renewal. Just as the Beis HaMikdash was cleaned of the defilements of the Greeks and re-inaugurated at this time of year, similarly, we should look for new ways to rededicate ourselves to Hashem and his Torah, trying to think of novellae,

chiddushim, of our own, within the Torah. In the zechus of the chiddushim we have discussed in honor of Chanukah, may we be zoche to constantly dedicate and rededicate ourselves to avodas Hashem.

## Where is Chanukah Mentioned in the Torah?

by Levi Antelis (RTMA '17)

Where do we see in the Torah that we are commanded to celebrate Chanukah? Well, Chanukah isn't explicitly mentioned in the Torah because it occurred after the time that the Torah was written, and is therefore merely a Rabbinic institution, but some point out that there are actually allusions to the holiday in the Torah.

Firstly, the word “*Ohr*,” meaning light, is the 25th word in the Torah. It is not a coincidence that we begin lighting Chanukah candles on the 25th of Kislev. The second time we see an allusion to Chanukah in the Torah is when Bnei Yisrael were in the *Midbar*. On their journey, they made many stops to camp, and the 25th stop was the in city of Chashmona; the “coincidence” is uncanny.

In the 23rd perek of sefer Vayikra, the Torah describes all of our holidays. Immediately following, we are told of the *avodah* of lighting the Menorah, yet another allusion to the holiday of Chanukah. The seventh perek of Bemidbar describes the Korbanot which the leaders of each *Shevet* brought when the Mishkan was dedicated. At the beginning of the eighth perek, the Torah says: “And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, speak to Aharon and say to him, when you light the lamps, the seven lights shall give light in front of the candles.” Here we see the crucial connection between the Beis HaMikdash being dedicated and the Menorah being lit, which is of course, what transpires in the Chanukah story.

The Midrash tells us that every *Shevet* brought a Korban, except for *Shevet Levi*. Hashem told Moshe to tell Aharon, a Levi, that he should not worry about his ability to bring Korbanot in the future. Hashem told Aharon this to make him cognizant of the fact that Korbanot were only brought as long as the Beis Hamikdash stood, but the Menorah lighting would go on forever. When we light our *chanukiot* on Chanukah, we in a sense perpetuate the lighting of the Menorah.

Hopefully this Chanukah will be our last Chanukah without the Beis Hamikdash, and may we all be zoche to spend next year's Chanukah in Yerushalayim.\*

\*information gathered from Chabad.org

## The Importance of the Lasting Oil

by Yosef Solomon (TABC '17)

Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Lublin, the Bnei Yisoschar, writes that the Gematria of “Kisleiv,” the month during which we celebrate Chanukah, equals the Gematria of “Av HaRachamim,” the father of mercy. This seems to imply that Kisleiv and Chanukah are times when Hashem has great mercy on us and has great love for us. What is the basis for this? An additional question to ask, whose answer can perhaps shed light on our first question, is why we mention the military miracle of Chanukah in “Al HaNissim” but not the miracle of the lasting oil.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the Mashgiach in the Mir Yeshiva in Yerushalayim during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, answers our second question with the following *meshal*: a man enters a

house and sees a woman cleaning a child. He doesn't know whether this lady is the mother or just a helper. He figures that if she kisses him after cleaning him, then she is definitely the mother. The baby, however, if he could, would thank the mother only for cleaning him and not for the kiss, as the kiss is merely a sign of his mother's love. Similarly, on Chanukah, we have to thank Hashem for leading us to victory over the Greeks (similar to the mother cleaning her child) and not for the miracle of the oil (the maternal kiss). Hashem already promised that He will never let Klal Yisrael be completely destroyed ("*Lo Tishachach MiPi Zar'o*," Devarim 31:21), so His saving us doesn't signify anything. However, the *Pach HaShemen*, the jar of oil that lasted for 8 days, was, *k'vayachol*, a sign of Hashem's love for us. This is why we thank Hashem only for the war, but we publicize only the miracle of the oil through *Hadlakas HaNeiros*, which symbolizes Hashem's love for us. This is why *Pirsumei Nisa* is so important with the Chanukah candles and why this mitzvah is considered so important that the Rambam considers it to be "*Chavivah Me'od*," "very beloved" (Hilchot Megillah VeChanukah 4:12), because it shows Hashem's love for us and teaches that we, in turn, have to love Hashem.

From the two miracles of Chanukah, we see the tremendous *rachamim* and love that Hashem shows us in this time period of Chanukah. What is it that we do or did to merit this? In the time of the Chashmonaim, the Greeks (Yavan) legislated against the Torah and Mitzvot. They tried to stop Talmud Torah and Shemiras HaMitzvos in general. The Maharal of Prague explains that Yavan hated that we have the Torah and Mitzvos from Hashem. The Greeks had only "knowledge" which had no true purpose or holiness. They had purely secular wisdom and were jealous of the true *Chochmah* of the Torah which gives us a connection to Hashem. The Maharal further explains that Yavan's main goal was to be *metamei* the *Heichal*, to desecrate the Beit HaMikdash, by bringing their foreign culture and ideals into the *Heichal*. I think it is important to note that they did not try to completely stop any Avodah in the Beit HaMikdash, but they simply wanted the Avodah to be done in unison with their empty and immoral culture. This is why it was so important that the *shemen* that the Chashmonaim used in the Menorah was "*Shemen Zayit Zach*," completely pure oil. Even though normally we would apply the concept of "*Tum'ah Hutrah B'Tzibbur*," that laws of impurity can be relaxed when nearly all of Klal Yisrael is impure themselves, and therefore not require the oil to be pure in such instances, the Chashmonaim made sure to use such oil to show that our Avodah and service of Hashem must be completely pure without the influence of foreign cultures and lifestyles. Today, unfortunately, many people often mix secular culture's negative values with our eternal Torah values. Instead of recognizing the superior nature of our eternal Torah, many feel a need to fit every new and passing fad in secular culture into the Torah. We know that although the Hellenist Jews at the time of the Chanukah miracles must have thought the Chashmonaim to be too zealous and extreme, their actions were actually measures of recognition of our eternal Torah and *Bris* with Hashem. Hence, Hashem responded to the Chashmonaim by showing Klal Yisrael exceptional love and *rachamim* in that generation and for all future generations during the month of Kisleiv.

## The Fight for Beliefs: A Chanukah Story

by Abigail Stein (RKYHS'18)

Chanukah is a time to be shared with friends and family, but sometimes within the comfort of our households, it is easy to forget about the true meaning behind the Chanukah story. We teach children the story of the Maccabees, but often overlook the tremendous lessons we can learn from this miracle.

When the Gemara in Shabbat (21b) discusses Chanukah, it teaches that in the time of the Chanukah story, the Greeks took control of Jerusalem and destroyed the interior of the second Beit Hamikdash, but the brave Maccabees stood up for the Jewish people and fought back. With the help of Hashem, they beat the Greeks and regained control of the Beit Hamikdash. Not only were they fighting for the Beit HaMikdash, they were also fighting for the freedom to practice Judaism publicly and proudly.

We are taught in Sefer Yeshayahu (49:6) that the Jewish people should be an *Ohr L'Goyim*, a light unto the nations. We learn from here that we should be an example for other nations by demonstrating ethical and moral behavior. On Chanukah, we can practice this ideal literally. We light our Chanukiahs in our windows to show our neighbors that we are proud of our heritage, and further prove that everything the Maccabees fought for was not in vain. The Rambam in Hilchot Chanukah (4:12) says: "*Mitzvat ner chanuka chaviva hi ad me'od*," meaning, "The commandment of Chanukah candles is very precious." In the dictionary, the word precious is defined two ways: The first is "of great value; not to be wasted or treated carelessly." The second definition is, "used as a term to address a beloved person." The Rambam intentionally chose to use the word precious for a good reason. When he is talking about the Chanukah candles, he uses the word precious with the first definition; but the word, similarly to the Chanukah candles, has another meaning. The Chanukah candles represent the Jewish people as an *Ohr L'Goyim*, therefore when the Rambam uses the word precious he is also emphasizing that Hashem loves and cares for us, especially on Chanukah, when we can literally fulfill the commandment of being an *Ohr Ligoim*.

In America, we take for granted the fact that we are able to be openly Jewish, visit Israel, learn Torah, sanctify Shabbat, and practice the Mitzvot. Although we are blessed with freedom of religion in America, there are still many challenges in practicing Judaism in a secular country. There are many anti-Israel movements that we face on a daily basis, bias news headlines, and articles framing the Jewish nation in a negative light; yet as Jews, we are still expected to be an *Ohr L'Goyim*. By standing up for their beliefs, the Maccabees were capable of being an *Ohr L'Goyim*, and we can do the same by spreading the positive aspects of Judaism. As Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik writes in his article, "God's Providence and the United States: A Thanksgiving Reader on Judaism and the American Idea," we have to be grateful for America, because it too is a gift from Hashem to the Jewish people. Anywhere the Jewish nation lives is a place for it to publicize a positive portrayal of Judaism, and be an *Ohr L'Goyim*. Spreading the "light" of Judaism begins on Chanukah when other nations witness the light of the Chanukiah glowing from our windows.

When looking at the current struggles the Jewish nation faces, Israel is often the first thought that comes to mind. Even

though the Maccabees fought endlessly to ensure that the ability to practice Judaism would live on, the fight did not stop there. The Israeli Defense Force fights tirelessly to ensure that Israel, the Jewish homeland, remains a safe place where the Jewish community can freely practice Judaism. The IDF could be considered the Maccabees of the modern age, but in America as well, we have the capability to be similar to the Maccabees by standing up for our convictions, sanctifying Hashem, and showing the world that we are proud of our nation's successes.

Not everyone has the ability to physically combat those who dissent Judaism, as the Maccabees did and the IDF does, but there are other ways one can confront threats to Judaism. By helping people in need, and speaking up for your values, you can be a Maccabee in your own way. There are many ways in which people take initiative on a daily basis that emulate the Maccabees. From donating items to the IDF, to helping combat false headlines in the news, there are so many heroes who fight every day for the rights of the Jewish people. This Chanukah, take a moment to recognize the heroes who have made it their mission to ensure the Jewish people can live on proudly for generations, and try to think about what you can do to become a Maccabee this Chanukah.

## Parshas Miketz and Chanukah: Recognizing G-d's Presence

by Meyme Nakash (Kohelet '18)

Every year, Chanukah falls around the time of parshat Miketz. In examination of this parsha, parallelism can be drawn between the accounts of Yosef's life, and his exemplary behavior, and the messages and implications of the miracle of Chanukah.

This comparison is first evident when Pharaoh famously wakes up from his baffling dreams and calls on Yosef for guidance in dream interpretation. Once Yosef is brought before Pharaoh, he immediately prefaces his minimalistic role in his interpretation by stating, "Not I; G-d will give an answer [that will bring] peace to Pharaoh." (Bereishit, 41:16). Only after this disclaimer does Yosef allow himself to expose the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams, which was a divine message hinting to a near seven years of famine in the land of Egypt, following a seven-year period of a massive food surplus.

Through Yosef's affirmation of G-d's existence, he is able to convince Pharaoh of Hashem's existence and power, as illustrated in Bereishit 41:39 when Pharaoh says to Yosef, "Since G-d has let you know all this, there is no one as understanding and wise as you." Pharaoh is so enchanted by Yosef's perceptiveness that he makes an executive decision to place the responsibility of maintaining Egypt's supply of food in Yosef's hands. Yet, after stocks of grain rot in the Egyptians' possession, Yosef understands the message that G-d is trying to relay to him. Pharaoh's new favorite infers from this that Hashem was relaying a message to him that although he, Yosef, has the advantage of a "*brit*," a covenant through *milah*, the Egyptians do not. After this epiphany, Yosef utilizes his governmental capacity to instruct all of Egypt to be circumcised, Jewish or not. Why would he do this if he was not planning to coerce the nation into converting? After all, Judaism does not encourage religious missionaries.

As stated by Onkelos, a *brit* is a *kayama*, which means both establishment and permanence. Therefore, in order to build a

durable relationship, a formal agreement must be made between two parties. Ultimately, the reason that Yosef enforces *brit milah* upon the Egyptians is to serve as a structure for G-d to be able to distinguish between the divine and the irreverent. Through this covenant, the inherently limited man forms a close partnership between him and Hashem, which by default, extends man's capacity and protects him from unwanted forces. However, it increasingly becomes evident that failure to acknowledge G-d's presence may cause a break in this relationship, as seen in the Book of Maccabees.

While the dispute regarding the miracle of Chanukah continues to fluctuate between either the famous jug of oil lasting eight days and the victory in war against the mighty Greeks, in comparison to Yosef's conduct, it becomes clear that the latter miracle was no miracle at all. After the Hellenistic Jews abandoned the mitzvah of *brit milah*, we see the assimilated crack under the pressure of Greek's aesthetic culture and lifestyle, blinding them from the presence of their Creator. Thus, how could we consider a practically civil war, with Jew vs. assimilated Jew, a miracle? In the Jews' victory, the historical miracle that Chanukah implicitly celebrates is depicted: the ability to love and appreciate another without adapting and surrendering one's values and beliefs. This relational art is ritualized on Chanukah by the lighting of separate candles that gradually build toward a unison of illumination.

The way in which Yosef exemplifies the correct behavior of a Jew by spreading ethical monotheism and publicizing the miracle is a reminder to never lose sight of G-d's presence. In today's society, it is easy to be sucked into the Greek-like materialistic world, and abandon our identities. As a means to escape this inner-conflict, we must take it upon ourselves to balance the demands of our personal lives and desires with our love for Judaism and ideals which we hold so dearly to our hearts. Essentially, by maintaining an equilibrium of sanctifying our agreements with G-d along with our physical inclinations, we too, can reveal and publicize the little miracles that are embedded into our lives, daily.

## The Race for the Greater *Neis*

by Suzzane Rabinovitch (DAT '18)

I think we can all agree that the presents and latkes are pretty fantastic, but do we know what we are actually celebrating on Chanukah? The common answer we are given in elementary school is that the holiday celebrates the miracle of one jug of oil lasting on the Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash for eight days. However, this seems out of place with other holidays that celebrate miracles. Both Pesach and Purim celebrate massive physical miracles in which our entire nation is saved from oppression or death. In contrast, on Chanukah, we celebrate the more subtle miracle of the oil's light lasting eight days. This seems insignificant compared to the other miracles we celebrate, so is this truly what we are celebrating on Chanukah? Aside from the candles' burning, we also celebrate the more substantial miracle of the Jews' winning the war against the Yevanim. This leads us to the famous question: which one of these events is the true miracle that we are celebrating? The Gemara in Masechet Shabbos that discusses Chanukah and *Al HaNissim* in Shemoneh Esrei seems to have different perspectives. The Gemara focuses on the miracle of the burning candles, barely referring to the war, while *Al HaNissim* focuses almost completely on the war instead.

Rabbi Mirsky references an opinion of the Maharal to answer this question. The Maharal says that the main miracle that

we celebrate on Chanukah is indeed the event of the Jews' winning the war against the Yevanim. However, Chazal decided to put more focus on the burning of the Chanukah candles because the event of the war is an extremely physical human event. Since war overwhelmingly consists of human action, they thought people in the future might overlook the divine presence and miracle associated with the war, and instead say that it was simply won due to natural human strength. They decided that emphasizing the miracle of the candles would shed light on the miracle of the war as well, as these two miracles of Chanukah are more connected than we might realize. In the Menorah miracle, a small amount of oil was able to last for eight days. Hashem made it into a "super" oil, greater in quality to replace the lack of quantity. In the same way, the Jews were a very small army compared to the Yevanim. Hashem intervened and made them into "super" soldiers, ensuring that their quality was sufficiently superior so as to rival the Yevanim's quantity.

During the bracha said before lighting the Chanukah candles and many times throughout the holiday itself, we say the phrase "*Ba' Yamim Ha' Heim Ba' Zman Ha' Zeh*", meaning the miracle of Chanukah continues during our time. On Har Sinai, we were given the Torah for this exact reason. Throughout history until modern times, Hashem has instructed us to follow the Torah in order to become better human beings and constantly grow. Hashem gave us the Torah and Judaism so that the quality of our people can compete with the rest of the world's quantity.

Although we are an especially small nation, we as Jews seem to succeed constantly, whether it be through Nobel peace prizes, or technological innovations, and much more, proving "*Bayamim Hahem Bazman Hazeh*" to be truer than ever.

## Ignoring the Odds, Trusting in Hashem, Brings Success

by Yonatan Olshin (NSHAHS '17)

The *Beis Yosef* raises one of the most famous questions concerning Chanukah: Why are there eight days of Chanukah if the miracle was that the oil burned for an additional seven days? There have been countless answers given to address this question but one answer, given in the name of Rav Soloveitchik, stands out from the rest. The Rav answered that the last seven days of Chanukah celebrate the miracle of the oil, and the first day celebrates the persistence of the Chashmonaim. After fighting the battle against the Syrian-Greeks, the Chashmonaim returned to the Temple to find it in total defilement. It seemed pretty clear that they would not find a pure flask of oil. They could have just given up and waited until the next delivery of oil, considering that the odds of finding a pure flask were extremely low. However, the Chashmonaim were eager to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, and they began a search for a pure flask of oil, ignoring the odds of actually finding one. In the end, they succeeded. The Chashmonaim's perseverance to search for the oil, despite the odds, symbolizes the miracle of Jewish survival, and that is why Chazal instituted the first day of Chanukah. By ignoring their low chance of survival, the Jews won the battle against Hellenism by staying strong and committed to Torah and mitzvos.

At the same time, however, Chanukah is not only about

commemorating Jewish survival, perseverance to mitzvos, the military victory, and the miracle of the oil - although they are all important. As the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) says, Chanukah was established as a holiday and a time to give *hallel*, praise, and *hoda'ah*, thanksgiving, to Hashem. The *Nesivos Shalom* points out that the Jews focused not on the odds of their survival, but on their *emunah* and *bitachon* instead. Hashem responded by helping the Jews succeed, and we, in turn, give praise and thanks back to Him. Without His intervention, the odds of survival would probably have proved meaningful, but by focusing on *emunah* and *bitachon*, the Jews survived.

A famous story is told of Reb Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, the author of the *Pnei Yehoshua*. When Reb Yehoshua was 22 years old, there was a big explosion in his town that was caused by a fire in a gunpowder factory. A total of 36 people were killed, including his wife and his daughter. Reb Yehoshua survived the blast, but he was stuck in the rubble. His breath was becoming heavier and heavier, and the rubble above him could have collapsed on him at any moment. There was almost no hope for him. However, he davened to Hashem and promised that he would learn Torah day and night if he merited to get out alive. Miraculously, a clearing opened up in the rubble, and Reb Yehoshua managed to escape alive. After this incident, he kept to his promise, and, eventually, he became one of the foremost *gedolei Torah* of his time. His *sefer*, the *Pnei Yehoshua* is filled with phenomenal *chiddushim*, and is still one of the most widely used *seforim* for *Gemara* study today.

Reb Yehoshua did not focus solely on the odds of his survival, but he diverted his concerns to *emunah* and *bitachon*, and, with the help of Hashem, he survived. Similarly, in the story of Chanukah, the Jews disregarded all logic and davened to Hashem. Hashem rewarded them with a victory in war and in finding the oil. Therefore, on Chanukah, we thank and praise Hashem for aiding us with His miracles.

## Women's Role in Chanukah

By Avigail Schiff and Adina Strong (Bruriah '18)

As the sky darkens, you and your family gather around the window and begin lighting the Menorah. From right to left, you put meaning into each flame you ignite. You think of your ancestors who witnessed the lighting of the actual Menorah in the Beit HaMikdash after they defeated the Greeks. But why, after nearly two thousand years, do we still maintain this custom?

The Talmud in Masechet Shabbos (21b) appears to ask this same question when it writes "*Mai Chanukah*," meaning "What is Chanukah?"

The Gemara answers that Chanukah is a holiday in which we commemorate the wondrous miracles that Hashem performed for our ancestors. He put the mighty Greek army into the hands of the Maccabim, who were much smaller and weaker in comparison. In addition, Hashem allowed us to return to the Beit HaMikdash and purify it, as well find a single jug of pure oil to perform the Avodah of lighting the Menorah, which miraculously stayed lit for eight days.

Many women have the custom of not doing work while the Chanukah candles are burning. What is the basis for this practice? In fact, Chanukah seems like it would be the prime example of a *mitzvah aseh shehazman grama*, a time-bound mitzvah which women are exempt from. The Gemara explains that "*af hein hayu be'oto haneis*", which Tosafot (Megilla 4a, Pesachim 108b) offers two possible meanings. The first,

Tosafot's preferred interpretation, is that the women also benefitted from the great miracles of Chanukah. The second, an interpretation by Rashi the Rashbam, is that women, in fact, caused the neis. There are two strong female characters in the Chanukah story whose actions may offer an explanation for this opinion.

Yehudit was the daughter of Yochanan, the Kohen Gadol of the time. One of the laws decreed on the Jews in those days was that all the young women engaged to be married would have to first sleep with the Greek general, Halifornus, before their wedding. Yehudit took matters into her own hands to rid the Jews of this problem. She went to Halifornus voluntarily and got him drunk. She then cut off his head and publicly displayed it. This courageous act scared the Greek army and ultimately lead to their downfall.

Chana is another remarkable woman who raised her seven sons to be passionate with the concept of "*mekadesh shem shamayim*," meaning to sanctify the name of Hashem. They were all summoned to the King. They were each told to eat pig and all refused adamantly. Usually, eating *treif* at the threat of death is required by halacha, but during the time period of Chanukah, a period of a deliberate attempt to destroy the Jews (*shmad*), the halacha is that every forced sin takes on the status of *yehareg v'al ya'avur*, where one is required to die rather than perform the sin, and this instance of forced pork consumption was no exception. All of the seven sons of Chana, whom she raised with exceptional Jewish values, died *al kiddush Hashem*. This set an example for the Jews at that time of how important it was for them to stay true to their core beliefs. This eventually led to klal Yisrael becoming spiritually strong enough to defeat the Greeks and regain the Beit Hamikdash.

As Chanukah approaches, we need to keep in mind the legacy which these special women left behind, which enables us to celebrate this holiday even today. If not for the immense courage which both Chana and Yehudit displayed, we would not even have the privilege to ask what Chanukah is. When women do not work while the candles are burning, they are in fact honoring the amazing miracle of the oil, as it was largely brought about by the actions of women. As Chazal write, "*af hein hayu be'oto haneis*," the women were greatly involved in the *nissim* of Chanukah.

## The War or the Oil?

by Ty Kay (KYHS '17)

A classic debate ensues every year during Chanukah time. The question focuses around the reason why we celebrate Chanukah; do we celebrate our miraculous victory in war against a better trained, larger, and superior army, or do we celebrate the miracle that a jug of oil burned for eight days, when it should have burned for less? While both rationales offer further insight, a third option can be uncovered.

While both the miracle of the oil and the miracle of the war were spectacular, would either really warrant the establishment of a holiday? In regards to the war, the Jews were overjoyed that they weren't destroyed and defeated the Yevanim, but as moral people, we do not celebrate others' misfortunes. In addition, regarding the miracle of the oil, it was a supernatural occurrence caused by Hashem, but a miracle alone does not seem to be a sufficient reason for establishing a holiday.

Perhaps the true answer as to why we celebrate Chanukah is a product of the two miracles. Both the miracle of the oil and

the miracle of the war were instrumental in the Jews gaining freedom from the Yevanim, which then allowed them to worship as they desired. When the Jews were being ruled over, learning Torah, keeping Shabbat, and practicing other mitzvot were all declared illegal. What we are actually celebrating on Chanukah is the return of our capability to do mitzvot. Without winning the war, the Jews would still be under the Yevanim's rule, and unable to serve Hashem freely. The miracle of the oil symbolized this return, because when the Jews had religious freedom, they would light the Menorah every single day, and once again, the Jews could finally perform this daily ritual.

The holiday commemorates and celebrates the return to normalcy, to religious freedom, and to the constant service of Hashem. Hopefully, over the holiday, we can all make sure to give thanks to Hashem for granting us those privileges: the gift of living our everyday religious lives freely.

## The Dual Nature of *Hadlakas Neros*

by Akiva Finkelstein (CYHSB '19)

When I was younger, I always thought that the lighting of the Menorah on Chanukah was very simple: we experienced the miracle of the oil lasting eight days, and to commemorate that miracle, we light the menorah for eight days. What I was unaware of at the time was that there were other components to the mitzvah of *hadlakas nerot* as well.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, as explained in *Hararei Kedem*, believed that there are two separate fulfillments involved in the mitzvah of *hadlakas nerot*. This assertion is based on the wording of the following Rambam in Hilchos Chanukah (3:3): "Because of this (the miracles of Chanukah), the *chachamim* of that generation instituted that these eight days should be days of happiness and *hallel*, and we should light in these days, candles at night on the entrances of our homes to show and reveal the miracle...and the lighting of the candles is a Rabbinic mitzvah like the reading of the Megillah." The Rav points to the Rambam's seemingly repetitive mention of this being a Rabbinic mitzvah. At the beginning of the halacha, the Rambam said that the Rabbis instituted the lighting of the candles, and he concluded by saying that this was a Rabbinic mitzvah.

Therefore, explains the Rav, it must be there are two separate elements involved here: the first is the mitzvah to light the candles of the Menorah, and the second is to publicize the miracle. These two elements are separate obligations that one must fulfill on Chanukah.

This explanation fits in well with a ruling of the Rambam (ibid 4:8) regarding a time of danger. The Rambam paskens, based on the Gemara in Shabbos (21b), in a time of danger, one can still fulfill the mitzvah of *hadlakas nerot* by placing the candles inside his house, even on his table, instead of outside, where it's most visible to the public. How can one fulfill his obligation of *hadlakas nerot* without any Pirsumei Nisa? Based on the explanation of the Rav, we can say that the Rambam is telling us that even when one is unable to fulfill the obligation of publicizing the miracle, he can still fulfill the first obligation of simply lighting the candles. Why is this so? Well, because, as we said before, the obligation of lighting candles and of publicizing the miracle are, although parts of one mitzvah, two separate halachos. Therefore, one can still fulfill one without the other.

In fact, these two elements of the the mitzvah of *hadlakas neros* are not only separate obligations, but, according to the Rav, correspond to two very different things. The lighting of the candles, the Ramban writes, is actually done in remembrance of the dedication of the Beit HaMikdash, which occurred during the story of Chanukah. This explains why we read about the dedication of the Mishkan that's recorded in parshas Behaaloscha on Chanukah. The obligation of publicizing the miracle, however, corresponds to the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. Thus, we see just how different these two elements of *hadlakas neros* truly are.

I believe that these two separate elements of *hadlakas neros* really reflect the dual nature of the holiday of Chanukah. Chanukah is, on the one hand, about remembering the rededication of the Mikdash after it was ransacked and our return to serving Hashem once more. At the same time, it is also about publicizing the miracle of the oil. Sometimes we tend to focus solely on the miracle of the *neros*, but both are essential to truly celebrating the holiday properly, and we should have both in mind as we light the *chanukiah* this Chanukah.

## How to Hope

by Michael Brenis (Fuchs '17)

There is currently a lot wrong with this world. There is the never-ending conflict in Syria, the ongoing terrorist attacks in Israel, and the repressive dictatorship in North Korea, just to name a few issues. As these problems persist, it is natural to ponder the good that may exist, yet is overshadowed by the sensationalist headlines of the daily news.

Chanukah is the holiday that helps us forget all the bad and enables us to view the world through a more positive perspective. In the story of this holiday, time and time again, the Maccabees fought for their beliefs, rather than simply giving up. From the beginning, Matisyahu defied the orders of Syrians, deciding instead to stand up for what he believed in. He sparked the rebellion, and from there it snowballed. The rest of the story abounds with examples of the Jews' staying positive and fighting for their cause. Matisyahu told his followers to keep fighting, and the Jews went on to war and miraculously won. But what pushed the Jews? What helped them stay positive in the face of such pernicious adversity?

The Jews' actions following the war tell the true story of Chanukah, as well as the Jewish people as a whole. When the Maccabees returned to Jerusalem to liberate it from the control of the Syrians, they found that it was completely desecrated. The altars had been used to sacrifice offerings to idols (Avodah Zarah 52b), and therefore the Rabbis forbade the Jews from using those altars for their own sacrifices. Then, instead of succumbing to the destruction or crying over the impure altars, the Maccabees immediately moved the desecrated ones aside, built a new one, and dedicated it *on the same day*. These people knew that if they stayed truly positive and faithful to Hashem, He would come in at the right moment and provide miracles as needed, which happened in the war and subsequently, with the Menorah. The Jews lit the oil in the hope that it would last for more than one measly day, and Hashem made it last a full eight days. They did not underestimate G-d's powers, and He rewarded them for their faith.

Bnei Yissaschar adds a layer to the Chanukah story that supports this idea. He starts by saying that G-d made the world with an extremely powerful light, but hid it until the time of

Mashiach due to man's sins. As it says in Chagigah 12a, "אור שברא הקב"ה ביום ראשון... וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים עמד וגנוז מהן שנאמר (איוב לז, טו) וימנע מרשעים אורם"

"The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day... and saw that their actions were destructive, He stood up and hid it from them, as it is said, (Job 38:15) 'And from the wicked their light is withheld'."

He then cites the Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Noach that says this light was attainable through learning the *Torah Shebal Peh*. The Syrians tried their best to sever the tie between the Jews and their G-d by forbidding them from learning Torah, but the underdogs used those rays to repel their overbearing authorities. When the Jews finally lit the Menorah, Hashem released a burst of the forthcoming Messianic light into the world. It is said that the same light is set free every Chanukah, even nowadays. This is all due to the group of Jews that stayed positive and kept their faith in the one and only G-d.

My hope for all of us is that we continue to stay positive, even in tough times. This story teaches that if we keep our faith and are courageous in difficult times, we will surely be rewarded in the good times. Hopefully, we can all infuse the world with just a little more Messianic light and positivity this Chanukah, and that sooner rather than later, those short-lived rays will no longer be just glimpses in time, but rather they will transform into a beacon of light that guides us to the Beit HaMikdash and beyond.

## Hidden or Visible: The Miracles of Chanukah

by Davida Krauss (SAR '18)

The holiday of Chanukah is the time when the Jewish people take the opportunity to thank Hashem for the miracles He has done for us. Traditionally, we associate Chanukah with two main *nissim*: the miraculous military victory against the Greeks and the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days. Often, we focus on the miracle of the oil and allow it to overshadow the military victory. However, *Al HaNissim* teaches that the opposite message is truly what is central to our celebration of Chanukah.

"על הנסים, ועל הפרקו, ועל הגבורות, ועל התשובות, ועל המלחמות, שפעשית לאבותינו בנמים ההם בזמן הזה."

"For the miracles, for the salvation, for the mighty deeds, for the victories and for the battles which you did for our forefathers in those days at this time".

The *Al HaNissim* prayer places emphasis on the military victory, while the miracle of the oil is hardly mentioned. If the military victory is the main focus of Chanukah, then what role does the miracle of the oil play?

The Maharal offers a fascinating explanation for how we should understand the relationship between the two miracles of Chanukah. The Maharal explains that Hashem performed the miracle of the oil in order to guide us in properly recognizing the miracle of the war. The lasting oil was a completely supernatural occurrence. The miracle allowed the people to easily realize that they were living in miraculous times. They themselves were then able to come to the realization that Hashem was also responsible for their military victory. The presence of this *Neis Nigleh*, a public miracle, steered the people to become aware of the *Neis Nistar*, the hidden miracle of the war. The Maharal believes that one of our takeaways from Chanukah should be to always see the

*Yad Hashem* in a situation, even when it appears to be natural.

This theme is reflected in another essential question on the holiday of Chanukah: why do we celebrate the holiday for eight days? Rabbi Shmuel Rozovsky, a Talmudic lecturer at the Ponevezh Yeshiva located in Bnei Brak, Israel, offers an answer which connects this question with the previously mentioned idea of Hashem's constant but hidden presence. Rav Rozovsky refines our question by pointing out the famous question of the Beit Yosef that if the miracle of the oil was that it lasted an extra seven days, then perhaps Chanukah should only be seven days long. However, Rav Rozovsky argues that we must celebrate eight days of Chanukah, rather than seven, so that we see the first day's oil portion as equally miraculous as the following seven days. Before we admire G-d's ability to make the oil last seven more days, let us admire G-d's ability to create fire and allow it to exist and burn even for just the first day. From the seven days of *Neis Nigleh*, the public miracle, we understand that even the first day, the "natural" day, was a miracle as well.

This concept was introduced earlier by the Ramban on a commentary on *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. The Ramban says:

"ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם" שמות פרק יג:טז

"Through recalling and acknowledging the great, manifest miracles of the Exodus, a person ultimately acknowledges the hidden miracles of everyday life, which are the foundation of the entire Torah. For a person has no share in the Torah of Moshe our teacher unless he believes that all our affairs and experiences are miracles, that there is no element of nature and the ordinary course of the world in them at all".

What is the purpose of *Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim*? From the miracle of *Kriat Yam Suf*, we are reminded of G-d's power, and therefore we must then be cognizant of the role He plays; from our mundane daily activities to more significant moments, G-d is always intimately involved. The purpose of public miracles are for us to recognize G-d's hidden-hand in nature and in history.

Through the texts of the Maharal, Rabbi Shmuel Rozovsky, and the Ramban, the importance of recognizing the *Neis Nistar*, the hidden miracle, is made clear. However, to this day, the main focus of Chanukah for us seems to be on the miracle of the oil burning in the Menorah. Why, after knowing for so long that the central miracle of Chanukah is the military victory, do we still center the holiday around the lighting of the *neros* every night?

The answer to this question may be rooted in the lives that the Jewish people have been living for centuries. Not since the time of the Second Temple have the Jewish people experienced a true *Neis Nigleh*, a public miracle. The emphasis that we place on the lighting of the *neros* is likely a result of our desire to return to a period of time when G-d's hand in our lives was more clearly perceptible. We now live in an age during which our primary way of seeing G-d's involvement in our lives can only be done by noticing the daily, mundane, hidden miracles. Perhaps the true message of Chanukah lies in being able to recognize both the public miracles and the hidden miracles. Throughout our everyday lives, we need to find G-d in the small moments we take for granted each day, like the flame of the candle. But as well, in a time in which we don't feel the

hand of G-d directly at play, we must actively search for it and publicize it to the world.

## The Fight for Beliefs: A Chanukah Story

by Abigail Stein (RKYHS '18)

Chanukah is a time to be shared with friends and family, but sometimes within the comfort of our households, it is easy to forget about the true meaning behind the Chanukah story. We teach children the story of the Maccabees, but often overlook the tremendous lessons we can learn from this miracle.

When the Gemara in Shabbat (21b) discusses Chanukah, it teaches that in the time of the Chanukah story, the Greeks took control of Jerusalem and destroyed the interior of the second Beit Hamikdash, but the brave Maccabees stood up for the Jewish people and fought back. With the help of Hashem, they beat the Greeks and regained control of the Beit Hamikdash. Not only were they fighting for the Beit HaMikdash, they were also fighting for the freedom to practice Judaism publicly and proudly.

We are taught in Sefer Yeshayahu (49:6) that the Jewish people should be an *Ohr L'Goyim*, a light unto the nations. We learn from here that we should be an example for other nations by demonstrating ethical and moral behavior. On Chanukah, we can practice this ideal literally. We light our Chanukiah in our windows to show our neighbors that we are proud of our heritage, and further prove that everything the Maccabees fought for was not in vain. The Rambam in Hilchot Chanukah (4:12) says: "*Mitzvat ner chanuka chaviva hi ad me'od*," meaning, "The commandment of Chanukah candles is very precious." In the dictionary, the word precious is defined two ways: The first is "of great value; not to be wasted or treated carelessly." The second definition is, "used as a term to address a beloved person." The Rambam intentionally chose to use the word precious for a good reason. When he is talking about the Chanukah candles, he uses the word precious with the first definition; but the word, similarly to the Chanukah candles, has another meaning. The Chanukah candles represent the Jewish people as an *Ohr L'Goyim*, therefore when the Rambam uses the word precious he is also emphasizing that Hashem loves and cares for us, especially on Chanukah, when we can literally fulfill the commandment of being an *Ohr Ligoim*.

In America, we take for granted the fact that we are able to be openly Jewish, visit Israel, learn Torah, sanctify Shabbat, and practice the Mitzvot. Although we are blessed with freedom of religion in America, there are still many challenges in practicing Judaism in a secular country. There are many anti-Israel movements that we face on a daily basis, bias news headlines, and articles framing the Jewish nation in a negative light; yet as Jews, we are still expected to be an *Ohr L'Goyim*. By standing up for their beliefs, the Maccabees were capable of being an *Ohr L'Goyim*, and we can do the same by spreading the positive aspects of Judaism. As Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik writes in his article, "God's Providence and the United States: A Thanksgiving Reader on Judaism and the American Idea," we have to be grateful for America, because it too is a gift from Hashem to the Jewish people. Anywhere the Jewish nation lives is a place for it to publicize a positive portrayal of Judaism, and be an *Ohr L'Goyim*. Spreading the "light" of Judaism begins on Chanukah when other nations witness the light of the Chanukiah glowing from our windows.

When looking at the current struggles the Jewish nation faces, Israel is often the first thought that comes to mind. Even though the Maccabees fought endlessly to ensure that the ability to practice Judaism would live on, the fight did not stop there. The Israeli Defense Force fights tirelessly to ensure that Israel, the Jewish homeland, remains a safe place where the Jewish community can freely practice Judaism. The IDF could be considered the Maccabees of the modern age, but in America as well, we have the capability to be similar to the Maccabees by standing up for our convictions, sanctifying Hashem, and showing the world that we are proud of our nation's successes.

Not everyone has the ability to physically combat those who dissent Judaism, as the Maccabees did and the IDF does, but there are other ways one can confront threats to Judaism. By helping people in need, and speaking up for your values, you can be a Maccabee in your own way. There are many ways in which people take initiative on a daily basis that emulate the Maccabees. From donating items to the IDF, to helping combat false headlines in the news, there are so many heroes who fight every day for the rights of the Jewish people. This Chanukah, take a moment to recognize the heroes who have made it their mission to ensure the Jewish people can live on proudly for generations, and try to think about what you can do to become a Maccabee this Chanukah.

## Celebrating All Eight Days of Chanukah

by Hadassah Yanofsky (SHS '18)

The lighting of eight candles to commemorate the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days seems to make a lot of sense. Rabbi Yosef Karo (Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 670), however, asked the following question: If the Jews found enough oil to last for one day, then the first day was not miraculous! Therefore, says Rabbi Karo, we should just celebrate Chanukah for only seven days! Rabbi Yirachmiel Zelcer offers 100 possible answers to explain why Chanukah is eight days. A list of several of these reasons follows.

One answer, proposed by the Maharal of Prague, is that seven is the number of nature, as a week is seven days. The number eight, which is greater than seven, signifies rising above nature into the world of spirituality. This is one of the reasons that *Bris Milah* is on the eighth day: we are purifying the body so that it can be a vessel for spirituality. So, too, Chanukah is eight days, to symbolize that the Jews, invested in spirituality, defeated the Greeks, mired only in the physical.

The Atzei Zayis proposes a different answer. He says that the first night of Chanukah, the day that they had just entered the Beis HaMikdash, came out on the 25th of Kislev, 3622, on a Friday. Therefore, the Jews needed more oil for the first night since they had to light earlier, before sunset, so they wouldn't break Shabbos. The little bit of oil stayed lit the whole night, despite the fact that it was a longer night. Therefore, Chanukah is eight days since even the first night was miraculous in its own right.

The next possible answer is found in the Gemara in Bava Metzia (40a). Both the people and the golden Menorah were impure due to the war. Since earthenware is resistant to impurity, they used an earthenware Menorah. This kind of Menorah is more porous, and therefore, to keep the flame lit for the whole night, they needed more oil. As a result, even the oil

they found was not enough to stay lit for the whole night, yet it did so miraculously.

There are also some other reasons given for why Chanukah, in general, would be eight days. One reason offered is based on the juxtaposition of the portion in parshas Emor that discusses Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret with the lighting the Menorah. Together, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret are eight days. The Bnei Yissaschar says that the proximity of these two topics in Vayikra is a hint that Chanukah is eight days long.

I would like to conclude by connecting these four answers to our question as to why Chanukah is eight days with four methods that Antiochus used to oppress us:

- Antiochus forbade *Bris Milah*, which takes place on the eighth day, so we triumph against the Greeks by making our celebration eight days long.
- Shabbat was forbidden by Antiochus and yet we kept it that year. This is going to correspond to the second answer that we gave which says that we keep eight days because the first day was Shabbat.
- The laws of kashrut and purity were forbidden and that year we kept the laws of purity, by using an earthenware menorah, making even the first night of Chanukah miraculous, which made Chanukah a total of eight days.
- They tried to stop us from learning Torah, but we kept right on learning. From this deeper learning of the Torah and seeing the connections between the different halachot, we learned that Chanukah is supposed to be eight days long.

In each generation we are oppressed, yet we fight back and win. In the words of Mark Twain "[the] Jew ... beat them all... All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains." The Maccabees beat the many Greeks and we still celebrate it, and will continue to celebrate it until B"H mashiach arrives.

## Chanukah: The Love of G-d for the Jewish People

by Harris Garber and Jordan Cohen (HAFTR '17)

In the *Al HaNissim* prayer that we add to Birchat HaMazon and to Shemoneh Esrei, we find an interesting term to describe the Jewish People. It says that "Afterwards, Your Children came to the Holy of Holies..." Of all the possible descriptions, like "Bnei Yisroel" or "Jewish People," why was the term "Children" used?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l points out that the miracles that enabled the Maccabees to overcome the mighty Greek army seem to have been of far more importance than the miracle of the oil. The military victory facilitated the removal of Greek hegemony and the freedom to observe the Torah. The miracle of the oil played no part in this victory, but rather it enabled the Menorah to be lit for an extra seven days.

Rav Shmuelevitz therefore asks that it would have seemed more understandable to establish the festival of Chanukah because of the military victory rather than that of the oil. He explains that there are two reasons why Hashem may perform a miracle. One is when there is an absolute necessity for the miracle to take place. For example, the miracle of the manna in the desert was of the utmost necessity in enabling the people to eat while living in the desert. However, there are other miracles

that are not particularly essential, but rather their main function is to show Hashem's particular love for the recipient of the miracle.

Chanukah is the holiday of Hashem's love for us. The miracle of the oil was His present to us, to show us that not only does He take care of us, but He also loves us and "goes the extra mile" for us.

Therefore, it makes perfect sense why the description of "Children" would be used in *Al HaNissim*. The miracle of Chanukah was not only for that generation. It was for all future generations. As we all celebrate together the miracle of that one little flask of oil, we reflect that we are Hashem's children. We showed our love by risking our lives for His sake, and He showed His love with an "extra" miracle.

It is fitting that Parshat Mikeitz falls out on Chanukah. Yosef went from rejected foreign prisoner in the dungeons of Egypt to Viceroy in a manner of minutes. Hashem demonstrated to Yosef that no matter the situation, He was there for him. The lesson of Yosef and the lesson of Chanukah inspire us to act on our relationship with Hashem, and try to go the "extra mile" in our relationship with and avodah to Hashem.

## The Darkness of the Festival of Lights

by Jonathan Mizrahi (YULA '18)

Most people don't consider the mystery that shrouds Chanukah. There seems to be an overwhelming emphasis placed on the importance of the miracle of the oil, with the mitzvah of *neros Chanukah*, but not as much so on the miracle of the great military victory, besides from the allusion to Matisyahu and the Maccabees in the special supplicatory paragraph of *Al HaNissim* in the *Amidah*. This is perhaps rooted in Chazal's discomfort with the Maccabees as well as a fundamental disapproval of the effects of the war.

There has always been a sort of tension between the Rabbis and both the Maccabees and their military efforts. This aversion is in part the reason that the Rabbis rejected the Book of Maccabees for canonization in *Tanach* and that there is no tractate for Chanukah in the *Gemara*.

This rabbinic antipathy has many possible explanations. Most likely it was because, not only did the Maccabees claim the priesthood after their victory, but they usurped the crown, much to the distress of the rabbis. The rabbis believed that the kingship was reserved for descendants of Dovid haMelech, but the Maccabees were Levites.

Furthermore, the rabbis' jaundiced view on the Maccabees during the time of the redaction of the Mishnah because of the Maccabean usurpation contributed to the rabbinic apathy towards the military miracle. Additionally, the opposing army the Maccabees fought was largely composed of Hellenist Jews that supported the Greek conquest. The Maccabees were not only fighting against gentiles, but against their own kind in a quasi-civil war. The rabbis understandably frowned upon Jews killing other Jews.

Some great Jewish figures even acknowledge the almost ironic darkness around the holiday of lights. According to the *Ge'onim* and the Rambam, ensconcing ancient tradition, the *Hanukiah* should be lit not before or after sunset, but at sunset -- essentially, at twilight. Twilight is a sort of

intermediate period between complete light and total darkness. The institution of such a time is a way of encoding the message that, while there is light – both literally and figuratively – to the miracles, there is also a dark side to Chanukah.

## Judaism: Not Just Numbers

by Effie Klein (Rambam Mesivta '18)

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, R' Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, considers the thirty-six Chanukah candles (minus the eight *shamashim*) we light throughout the course of Chanukah and looks for the deeper meaning behind this number. I will share some of his ideas, as well as other ideas I have heard, while incorporating some of my own.

When the Sanhedrin voted on incurring punishment, they needed a majority of the seventy-one members to agree, meaning thirty-six. Thirty-six is also double of the number eighteen, which is the *gematria* for life. In fact, if you add the eighteen of life to twenty-six (*Gematria* of Hashem's name), you get forty-four, which is the number of candles lit on Chanukah plus the *shamashim*. When one says "*Chai Hashem*," meaning G-d shall live on, it asserts his faith in Hashem. When Dovid declared Shlomo the next king over Israel, he said: "As long as Hashem lives, who has redeemed my soul from all suffering, as I have sworn unto you (Bat-Sheva) in [the name of] Hashem, G-d of Israel saying: 'Shlomo my son shall rule after me, and he will sit on my throne instead of me', I will do today." (I Kings 1:29-30). When using this language, it often refers to a promise, saying as long as G-d lives (forever), so-and-so will happen. Also, we can add the thirty-six of "double life" (one life in this world and one life in *Olam Haba*) to eight to get forty-four. This eight refers to the eight of supernatural. This is a universal concept throughout Judaism. Seven is nature (seven days in a week, seven weeks in the Omer, seven years in the Shemittah cycle) while eight is "above nature" (Bris Milah, Chanukah, Isru Chag).

There is another well-known concept. It is that in each generation, there are thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim*. Called *tzaddikim nistarim* (hidden righteous men), or the *Lamed Vov'niks* in Yiddish (referring to the *Gematria* thirty-six), their purpose in this world is to "greet the Shechinah, and the world would come to an end if one of them were missing (Gemara Sukkah 45b, Sanhedrin 97b).

The *Gemara* in Chagiga (12a) resolves two seemingly contradictory statements in the Torah. As we know, the luminaries were created on the fourth day. If that is so, how can the passuk (Breishis 1:3) say "Hashem said 'let there be light', and there was light"? The light discussed here is what is called the *Or HaGanuz*, or "hidden light". G-d originally created this light, but it was unfit to use because of the evil people in this world. G-d had to set it aside for the *tzaddikim* in *Olam Haba* (see Rashi in Breishis 1:4). The B'nei Yissaschar says that the *Or HaGanuz* was in this world for thirty-six hours. Our thirty-six Chanukah lights are a commemoration of this light.

We are taught many amazing things about the miracle of Chanukah. However, we will never know them all; there are just too many. With this knowledge of the significance of Chanukah, our fulfillment of the mitzvah shall be enhanced. With this, we shall merit living in the times where we will have a Sanhedrin, where we will be beyond nature, where the thirty-six *tzaddikim* will be revealed, and the *Or HaGanuz* restored.



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