

# Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts  
from  
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Shlita

Vayeishev - Chanuka





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# Torah Wellsprings

## Vayeishev - Chanuka

### The Path to Happiness

It is the natural desire of human kings to be in the company of the wealthy and prestigious. They don't enjoy being among the poor and downtrodden. *L'havdil*, the opposite is true regarding the King of the world. As it states אשכון אה דכא, "I will dwell among the downtrodden." Hashem desires to live among the poor and humble people. He resides specifically with them.

Nevertheless, Hashem doesn't want to be among those who are sad. As Chazal (*Shabbos* 30) say, "The *Shechinah* resides only with someone who is happy." Why is that? A human king wants to be among happy people because they make him happy, but why is it important for Hashem to reside with happy people?

The Ksav Sofer *zt'l* (*Teshuvah Orach Chaim* 27) answers that if one feels sad, it means that he doesn't believe that everything is for the good. And if he doesn't believe that, he doesn't deserve that Hashem should stay with him.

Yosef was always happy. The proof is from the *pasuk* (39:2), ויהי ה' את יוסף, "Hashem was with Yosef," and we know that the *Shechinah* wouldn't be with Yosef if he weren't happy.

But how could Yosef be happy? Just a short while before, he lived peacefully in Eretz Yisrael, and he learned Torah every day with his father, Yaakov Avinu. Now he became a slave among Egyptians.

Nevertheless, the *pasuk* tells us (39:2) ויהי ה' את יוסף, "Hashem was with Yosef,"

which means he was happy. How did he manage to maintain his happiness at that time?

The Ksav Sofer zt'l replies that the answer is written in the same pasuk (ibid.) ויהי ה' את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח, "Hashem resided with Yosef (which means he was happy. The reason he was happy is because) ויהי איש מצליח Yosef considered himself successful.

Yosef is the only person in Tanach who is referred to as an איש מצליח, a successful person. The Midrash

translates איש מצליח as גבר קפוח, "a dancing person." Yosef was always dancing and filled with joy, and according to the Ksav Sofer, Yosef attained this positive attitude because, under all circumstances, he considered himself living a story of success.

It is all a matter of perspective. Yosef could have been miserable with his lot but instead chose to focus on what he does have and the successes he was lucky to attain. With that attitude, he was always happy.<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Happiness is a frame of mind.

Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l of Yerushalayim was a very happy person. Once, someone told him, "By the way you're walking down the street, it looks like you think the entire street is yours."

Reb Zalman Brizel replied, "It's true! The entire street is mine. Come and I'll show you!"

They went to the grocery and bought bread. Then they went to the bank, and Reb Zalman took out some money. He put out his finger and a taxi stopped for them.

Almost singing, he said to his companion, "Don't you see that the entire street is mine? The grocer, the bank, the taxies; they are all working for me. Hashem had compassion on me, so Hashem

This concept is something that we can apply in our lives. On a practical level, this means to focus on what you have rather than on what you lack. Tell yourself that you are an איש מצליח, successful, in the spiritual and material realm, and you will be happy. But if you will focus on how much you still need and how unsuccessful you are, it will be difficult to stay upbeat.

Once, in prison, Rebbe Zusha saw that his brother, Rebbe Elimelech, was sad, and he asked him about that. Rebbe Elimelech replied, "How can I be

happy? There is a pot in our room that is meant to be used for the washroom. This means that we won't be able to say a word of Torah and *tefillah*!"

Rebbe Zusha told him, "This is a reason to be happy because we will be able to keep the mitzvah prohibition of refraining from davening and learning in the presence of a bad scent."

Rebbe Elimelech realized that his brother is right, and they began dancing for joy around the toilet. The guard came quickly and saw them dancing. He said, "So that's

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appointed others to bake bread, run the bank, and drive a taxi for me, but everything is for me."

Another time, someone asked Reb Zalman Brizel z'l how he manages to always be happy. He replied, "Some go to sleep at night and wake up blind, *rachmana litzlan*. There are those who go to sleep at night and have a heart attack in their sleep, and they don't wake up in the morning. I didn't sleep at all last night because my young child was crying. But I have my eyesight, and I didn't have a heart attack. Shouldn't I be happy? I couldn't sleep because I was up at night rocking the baby, but that is also a reason to be happy! Baruch Hashem I have children!"

what you're so happy about," and promptly removed the bucket.

Similarly, instead of complaining about the avodas Hashem that we fail to perform, we should focus on the avodas Hashem that we do accomplish. As the Sfas Emes (and others) say, שמה בחלקו, being happy with your portion, applies to ruchniyus, too. We should rejoice with our level and consider it special. Although we strive to reach higher levels, we can rejoice and feel successful with whatever portion of *avodas Hashem* we have attained.

This is what Yosef realized as a slave in Mitzrayim. His avodas Hashem mission changed. It wasn't the same as when he lived with his holy father and brothers in Eretz Yisrael. However, within the confines of the situation, he served Hashem with all his might. He focused on those successes, and he was happy with his lot.

## Everything is for the Good

Another approach to achieve happiness is to recognize that everything is for the good. Yosef used this method, as well, to be happy with his portion. He believed that since it was destined for him to be a slave in Mitzrayim, this is the very best situation for him, and something exceptional will come with it. With this thought in mind, he was happy at all times.

The Midrash says, "Eliezer served his master, Avraham, with loyalty, and in this merit, he changed from being cursed (ארור) to being blessed (ברוך)...."

About Yosef, the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim* 1:1) states, יוסף על ידי ששימש את רבו, באמונה יצא לחירות, "Yosef served Potiphar loyally, and in this merit, he was released from jail."

The Sifsei Tzaddik asked the Sfas Emes, "I

understand the first Midrash, that Eliezer became blessed because he served Avraham Avinu loyally. But I don't understand the second Midrash. Why should Yosef be freed from prison because he served Potiphar loyally?! What is so special about serving Potiphar that Yosef was rewarded for serving him loyally?

The Sfas Emes replied that when the Midrash says, יוסף על ידי ששימש את רבו באמונה, it doesn't mean that Yosef served his master loyally. It means Yosef served his master באמונה with *emunah*, with belief in Hashem. He believed that it was Hashem's will that he be a slave and that it was for his good. And in the merit of this *emunah*, he was freed from jail.

To protect himself from sinning, Yosef left his clothes in Potiphar's wife's hands, and he ran outdoors. How did Yosef have the courage to embarrass himself like that, run out

without clothing to escape sin? It was because of what happened earlier. His brothers humiliated him when they removed his כְּתוּנַת פְּנִים, precious cloak, before they sold him. Even then, without his garment, being sold as a slave, Yosef trusted that it must be for the good. That experience gave him the stamina to endure embarrassment once again to save himself from sin.

As the Sfas Emes (תרל"ד) writes, "It seems that since Yosef was embarrassed by his brothers, ויפשטו את כתנתו, when 'they took of his coat' (37:23). He didn't question Hashem; rather, he believed that it was all for the good. Therefore (39:12) ויגם ויצא החוצה, '[Yosef] ran outdoors.' He had *siyata dishmaya* and was able to embarrass himself to do Hashem's will."

The Sfas Emes concludes, "We should learn from these *parshiyos* to accept Hashem's decrees with love and joy because

everything is in His hands...". Everything we go through, even the hard times, are all ultimately for our good. One day we will look back and understand.

It states (39:20), ויקח אדני יוסף, אותו ויתנהו אל בית הסהר מקום אשר אסירי המלך אסורים, "Yosef's master took Yosef and put him into the prison where the king's captives are confined. ויהי שם בבית הסוהר, 'and he was there, in prison."

The final words seem superfluous because it isn't it evident that if he was placed in jail, he was "there, in prison"? The commentaries explain that ויהי שם בבית הסוהר means that Yosef was there with all his heart and soul. He accepted Hashem's decree with joy. He believed that it was for his benefit.

The Kedushas Levi writes, "Yosef could have done something to get himself out of jail, but he didn't do anything. He trusted in Hashem that everything is for the good." So, ויהי שם בבית הסוהר means Yosef accepted his fate, and he was even happy with it. If this is Hashem's will, it was good for him.<sup>2</sup>

On the words, וישב יעקב, which literally means that Yaakov sat, the Midrash (84:5) writes, "This can be compared to a person who was walking along and was suddenly surrounded by a pack of dogs. He was afraid of them, so he sat down among them. Similarly, Yaakov saw Eisav's family (the אלופי עשו stated in the earlier pesukim), and he was afraid of them,

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2. Similarly, the Sfas Emes writes, "Yosef was extremely wise, and he was also wealthy (because Potiphar gave him everything he owned (see 39:8). If he wanted to, he could find a way to get himself out of prison. But he believed that his imprisonment was Hashem's will so he remained there and he didn't try to leave."

so he sat down between them."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that when Yaakov saw Eisav's family, he was scared. But he decided that he would sit among his troubles, which means that he will accept them, for everything is for the good. And with this attitude, everything became good.

### The Great Test

The Gemara (*Yoma* 35:) describes Yosef's difficult test with *eshes* Potiphar. "Every day, *eshes* Potiphar spoke with Yosef and tried to convince him to sin. The clothes she wore in the morning, she didn't wear at night.

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 87; *Tanchuma*) states that *eshes* Potiphar said, "I will give you less *parnassah* [if you refuse to sin]." Yosef replied, גורן לחם לרעבים, Hashem feeds the hungry. She threatened to imprison him or blind him or send

him to a distant land, but Yosef's resolve wasn't weakened. The Midrash writes that she had him wear an iron blade under his neck so that Yosef would look at her. Even so, Yosef didn't look at her. These were extremely difficult tests, and the tests were every day, but Yosef passed them all.

Perhaps the most challenging part of the test was that *eshes* Potiphar tried to convince Yosef that sinning, in that case, was a mitzvah. She sincerely thought it was a mitzvah because she saw in the stars that she would bear children with Yosef. As Rashi (39:1) writes, "Just as Tamar intended *leshem shamayim*, *eshes* Potiphar also intended *leshem shamayim*. She saw in the stars that she would bear children with Yosef, only she didn't know whether it will be with her or with her daughter."

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* says that Potiphar's wife shared

what she saw in the stars with Yosef. She explained to him that it is a mitzvah, destined from heaven. This made the test much greater. Because the *yetzer hara* can't convince *tzaddikim* to perform *aveiros*, so he tries to convince them that it is a mitzvah. The test becomes very difficult to pass. Nevertheless (39:8) וַיִּמָּאן, Yosef refused to sin.

וַיִּמָּאן is also written by the mitzvah of *yibum* as it states (*Devarim* 25:7), בְּמֵאן יִבְמִי. There it means when one has an obligation of *yibum* he may refuse to do the mitzvah and instead perform *chalitzah*. The Midrash (87:5) says that Yosef told *eshes Potiphar*, "If a person is permitted to refuse to do *yibum* (as it states בְּמֵאן יִבְמִי), which is a mitzvah, certainly one can refrain from an *aveirah*!"

The Sfas Emes explains that Yosef was telling her, "Even if you are correct, and it is a mitzvah, I may refrain, just as one is permitted to refrain from

the mitzvah of *yibum*. When one refuses to do *yibum*, another path is opened up – the path of *chalitzah*. Similarly, Yosef told her, even if he turns down this mitzvah, Hashem will arrange it some other way. (And indeed, Yosef married *eshes* Potiphar's daughter, and he bore Efraim and Menasheh from her, in a permitted way.

The Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* writes that just as *eshes* Potiphar saw in the stars that they would bear children together, Yosef saw that in the stars, as well. Yosef understood that this meant he would eventually sin with *eshes* Potiphar. This brought Yosef to think, "What purpose is there in passing the test if I will anyway end up committing this grave *aveirah* eventually."

But then Yosef told himself, "What the future will be, will be. Right now, I can fight and overcome the *yetzer hara*." This attitude saved Yosef

because he ended up marrying Osnas bas Potiphar, and bearing children in a permitted way.

**"There is No One Greater than Me..." (Gaavah d'Kedushah)**

It states (39:12) ותתפשהו בבגדו, that the wife of Potiphar grabbed Yosef by his clothes. בגדו also means rebellion. The Beis Avraham explains that eshes Potiphar tried to convince Yosef that he was rebellious against Hashem, and therefore, it's natural that he will sin.

Because of the way a person views himself influences his actions. If one thinks he is righteous, he will act that way. If he has a self-image of a sinner and rebel, that is how he will act. As the Rambam (Avos 2:13) writes, ואל תהי רשע בפני ענימך "Don't consider yourself a *rasha*, because if you think you are lowly,

you won't consider your *aveiros* severe."

Rashi (39:6) writes, "When Yosef saw that he was ruling [in Potiphar's home], he began eating and drinking and fixing his hair. HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Your father is mourning, and you are curling your hair?! I will incite the bear [Potiphar's wife] against you.'"

We can say that Potiphar's wife was referring to these matters when she told Yosef that he is rebellious. She wanted Yosef to focus on these faults and weaknesses, because then she could lure him to sin, *chalilah*.

Yosef replied (39:9), אינו גדול בבית מוני, "No one in this house is greater than me." Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* explains that Yosef was saying, "I'm the greatest person in the world. There is no one greater than me." With these encouraging thoughts in mind, he was

able to overcome the *yetzer hara*.<sup>3</sup>

These are the words everyone should tell themselves when the *yetzer hara* tries to convince them to sin. One should say, "I'm extremely distant from sin. I'm among Hashem's *tzaddikim*. With every good deed I do, I make a great *nachas ruach* for Hashem. How can I sin!?"

This is called *gaavah d'kedushah*, righteous pride, that one must use to overcome the *yetzer hara*.

Chazal say (*Sotah* 49:), בעקבתא דמשיחא חוצפה יסגי. The Sfas Emes *zt'l* says that this Gemara can be translated as follows: Before Moshiach

comes, people will have the *chutzpah* to say, "I'm a *tzaddik*! I'm special!" And that's good, and that's necessary because, with that pride, they will conquer the *yetzer hara*.

It states (37:3), וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו...ועשה לו כתונת פסים, "Yaakov loved Yosef more than all his other sons... and he made him a silk coat." This coat, that only Yosef got, caused a lot of jealousy. As the Gemara (*Shabbos* 10) states, "A person should never show favoritism to one son over the others, because the clothing that Yaakov gave Yosef more than to the other brothers sparked their jealousy, and it led to

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3. After the Yidden committed the sin of the *egel*, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for forty days that Hashem should forgive them. Moshe Rabbeinu said that he was praying because (*Devarim* 9:19), כי יגרתו מפני, האף.

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zy'a* said that Moshe was saying, כי יגרתו I am afraid מפני האף, that their noses may turn down due to their shame and disgrace, as a result of their sin. And that is the greatest problem, because if they feel down, this can lead to many more sins.



before Hashem. But be aware that it is true. At times, you do great deeds. This will help you build up your self-esteem. You will consider yourself special and righteous, and this will help you win over the yetzer hara.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 85.) tells that Rebbe (Reb Yehudah HaNasi) came to the city where Reb Elazar (the son of Reb Shimon bar Yochai) once lived. He asked the people of the city whether Reb Elazar had any children living in this city. They told him that Reb Elazar's son, Yossi, lived there, and they told him about the grave sins he commits.

The Gemara says, "Rebbe gave him *semichah* and he appointed Reb Shimon ben Issi ben Lekunyah (the boy's uncle) to teach him Torah." Rebbe gave Yossi the honor of *semichah* to build his self-esteem, and to influence Yossi to do *teshuvah*.

The Gemara relates, "Every day Yossi told his tutor that he wants to return to his city [and to return to his past lifestyle]. His tutor, Reb Shimon ben Issi, would tell him, "You were made a *chacham*, you wear the golden cloak of the scholars, we call you 'rebbe', and you want to leave?"

He would answer, "I swear, I won't ask to leave again." Eventually, he became a great scholar and tzaddik, and he is called in Chazal "Reb Yossi ben Reb Elazar ben Reb Shimon."

When Reb Yossi was *niftar*, they wanted to bury him near his father, Reb Elazar, but there was a snake at the cave entrance, preventing them from burying him there. People thought that Reb Yossi wasn't fitting to be near his great father. A *bas kol* emanated and said, "It isn't because Reb Elazar is greater than Reb Yossi. Rather it's because Reb Elazar suffered the pain of

being hidden in a cave for thirteen years" (see *Shabbos* 33).

This Gemara is saying that Reb Yossi reached his father's level (only he lacked the extra merit of having suffered for Torah). Reb Yossi's pivotal change began when he received *semichah*, was called "rebbe" and wore the golden cloak of rabbanim. Because the way one perceives himself is how he will act.

The Or Zarua discusses the order of the alef beis. On the letters צ' ק' ר', he writes that צד"י means empty,<sup>4</sup> representing the people who feel that they are empty people, sinners. As we explained, this negative feeling can in itself lead to sin.

The solution is ק' ר' ר'. These letters are the *roshei teivos* of קריא רבי, call him rebbe, as Rebbe did to Reb Yossi. Build up his self-esteem, and he will reach his full potential.<sup>5</sup>

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4. צד"י means empty. As Onkelus on תהו ובהו writes, צדיא ורקניא, "empty and void."

5. When Reb Yankele Galinsky *zt'l* was a prisoner in Siberia, one of his roommates was a gentile, a former general in the German army. Every night, when the gentile thought everyone was asleep, he put on his general uniform, which he kept under his bed, and he marched around the room, as though he was leading hundreds of soldiers. One night, Reb Yankele asked him why he does this.

The German was embarrassed. He didn't know that anyone saw him. Reb Yankele promised that he won't tell anyone about it, and that he was curious why he did this. The German replied, "I used to be a powerful general in the German army. Hundreds of soldiers had to obey each one of my commands. I don't want to forget my glorious past. So I put on my military uniform with all my medals, and I pretend that I'm once again commander over hundreds of soldiers. That gives me strength to endure the humiliation and

Many people had a hard time holding onto their religion after enduring the horrors of the Holocaust. Our present story is about such a *bachur*. Before the war, he was a chasidische bachur. He had peyos, a long coat, and studied in yeshiva. After the war, he was planning on marrying a non-Jewish woman. People spoke to him, trying to convince him that he shouldn't commit this grave sin, but he didn't listen. Reb Gad'l Eizner *zt'l* succeeded in stopping him with the following simple phrase. He told him: עם פאסט נישט פאר א חסידישע בחור, "It isn't proper for a *chassidische bachur* to do such a thing." That rebuke turned him around because the way to bring people to *teshuvah* is not through harsh rebuke

and the likes, but by revealing to them how great they indeed are.

As it states (*Mishlei* 3:11), מוסר ה' בני אל המאם. The Yesod HaAvodah explains: מוסר ה' Hashem gives *mussar* by saying בני, "You are my son! אל המאם, Don't defile yourself with disgraceful deeds."

A wealthy man and his employee were once riding in a taxi. The wealthy man asked the taxi driver, "How much will this ride cost?"

"Twenty dollars."

"If my worker gets off, how much will the ride cost?"

The taxi driver replied, "It will be the same. Twenty dollars."

The haughty wealthy man turned to his worker

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affliction we suffer here in the Russian prison."

Reb Yankel would tell this story because we should also remember that we are the King's son. We shouldn't forget our glory and pride. Even when we think we are ordinary people, enslaved by the *yetzer hara*, don't forget who we really are.

and sneered, "Did you hear what he said? The taxi driver says that you have no value."

Obviously, this logic is faulty because if the employee rode in the taxi by himself, he too would pay twenty dollars.

Similarly, the *yetzer hara* tells us that we don't have any value, but it isn't true.

Therefore, when the *yetzer hara* incites you to an *aveirah*, believe in who you truly are. As Rebbe Shlomo of Karlin *zt'l* said, "The greatest *yetzer hara* is to forget that you are a *בן מלך*, Hashem's child."

### **Chanukah and the Greatness of Every Yid**

The importance of recognizing our value and worth before Hashem is related to Chanukah.

The Yevanim decreed that Yidden must write on their oxen's horns, *שאינ לכם חלק באלקי ישראל*, that they don't have a portion with the

G-d of the Yidden. The Sfas Emes (תרל"ז ליל ז' ד"ה איתא) says that these words are contradictory because *אלקי ישראל*, means every Yid is united with Hashem. How do they say in the same sentence that they don't have a portion with *אלקי ישראל*? But the answer is, the Yevanim also knew that Hashem is the G-d of the *tzaddikim*. They accepted the fact that Hashem is *אלקי ישראל*. But they felt that this title and prestige weren't intended for the average yid, only for the great *tzaddikim*, which was their error.

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabba* 2:4) state, *וחשך על פני תהום*, "Darkness over the depths..." refers to Yavan "who darkened the eyes of the Jewish nation with their decrees." They darkened their eyes by making them feel that they were unimportant people. When the Chashmanoim won the war, Bnei Yisrael acquired *emunah* that every Yid, no matter who he is, is very

important. With each mitzvah he performs, he sends spirituality and blessings to all worlds. And as we explained, when one attains this belief, he will devote himself to *avodas Hashem*.

### Serve Hashem with Joy

One of the benefits of knowing our importance before Hashem is that this will enable us to perform mitzvos joyously.

The Sar Ha'Ofim, Pharaoh's chief baker, told his dream to Yosef. (40:15-16) אף אני בחלומי והנה שלשה סלי חרי על ראשי ובסל העליון מכל מאכל פרעה מעשה אפה והעוף אכל אתם מן הסל מעל ראשי "Also, I, in my dream, behold there were three woven baskets on my head. The top basket had all the baked goods that Pharaoh eats, and birds were eating from the basket above my head."

Yosef told him the meaning of his dream. בעוד שלשת ימים ישא פרעה את ראשך מעליך ותלה אותך על עין ואכל העוף את בשרך

מעליך, "In just three days Pharaoh will take off your head, hang you... and birds will eat your flesh..."

And that is what occurred (see 40:22).

How did Yosef know that this was the interpretation of the dream? How did Yosef know that the Sar Ha'Ofim's would die?

The Chida (*Pnei David, Vayeishev*) answers with a *mashal*:

An artist painted a picture of a man carrying a basket filled with fruit. People stood in front of the painting, gazing at it in awe. They were saying, "It is so true-to-life, it even fools the birds," because birds were pecking at the painting, trying to eat the fruit.

A wise person disagreed. He said, "If the painting was true-to-life, the birds would be afraid of the man holding the basket. They aren't afraid. This means it

isn't a true-to-life painting. I'd call it a dead painting."<sup>6</sup>

The Chida explains that the *sar ha'ofim* dreamt that he was carrying a basket on his head and yet the birds weren't afraid. They were eating from the bread. Yosef said, "If the birds

aren't afraid of the man holding the basket, it means he's dead." That's how Yosef knew that the *Sar Ha'Ofim* would die.

We'll take this lesson a step further:

In the dream, the *Sar Ha'Ofim*, carrying the

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#### 6. The Chida's *mashal* reminds us of another *mashal*:

Judges at an art competition were ready to proclaim the artist who made a true-to-life painting of fruit and grains as the winner. His painting was so true-to-life, it even tricked the birds, as they repeatedly pecked at the fruits and grains displayed on the canvas.

One artist came to the judges and said, "You can't proclaim him the winner before you look at my painting." He pointed to a curtain on the side of the room, where his artwork lay.

The judges replied, "Open the curtains so we can see your painting."

"I prefer someone else opens the curtain."

One judge tried to open the curtain, but then he realized that there was no curtain there, at all. It was a painting of a curtain.

The judges said, "The other artist fooled birds. Your work fooled humans! You win the competition!"

The *nimshal* is, there are artists who can fool birds, and there are artists who can even fool humans, but Hashem's artwork, *keviyachol*, fools almost everyone. The world seems to be running by nature, and people don't realize that it is just a painting. Therefore, it states *אין ציור כאלקינו*, and Chazal explain, *אין צייר כאלקינו*, there is no artist like Hashem.

loaves of bread on his head, was obviously alive. Yet, we see that one can be alive, and it is as if he is dead. Sadly, the same can be said about someone who keeps the mitzvos without joy. For example, he lights the Chanukah *lecht*, he says *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim*, but it is without vigor and happiness. He is alive, but his mitzvos are dead. This isn't the ideal way to serve Hashem. We must keep the mitzvos energetically and enthusiastically. When we light the Chanukah *lecht*, say *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim*, and perform all the other mitzvos of Chanukah, let it be evident that we are alive.

### The Beloved Mitzvah

Chazal (*Succah* 5.) say the *Shechinah* never descends lower than ten *tefachim*. The holy *sefarim* teach that Chanukah is an exception because on Chanukah, Hashem comes down to the Yidden who are on

very low levels, lower than ten *tefachim*, and He raises them to Him.

As the Meor Einayim writes, "The *Shechinah* never goes down below ten *tefachim* (see *Succah* 5). However, Hashem seeks that no Jew will be detached from Him. By the miracle of Chanukah, Hashem *kiveyachol* comes down below ten *tefachim*. He comes close to man, to bring him back up to Him."

As the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* said: On Shabbos, Hashem brings us up to Him. On *yom tov*, Hashem comes down to us. On Chanukah, Hashem visits his children in prison.

The Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* writes, "When a king is sitting on his throne in his palace, his people are not permitted to visit. Surely, those who are being punished by the king because of their iniquities won't be able to visit the king... However, when the king travels around his

kingdom, it's his custom to visit the prisoners in jail... At this time, the prisoners shout, 'King! Save us!' This is what happens on Chanukah. Hashem comes to us to save us from our imprisonment."

One night, before lighting the Chanukah *lecht*, the Tolna Rebbe *zt'l* asked one of his chassidim who had a short wife, "When you speak with your wife, does she climb up on a chair to speak with you, or do you bend down to speak with her?" After asking this question, the Rebbe lit the Chanukah *lecht*.

Rebbe Mordechai Dov of Hornesteipel *zt'l*

explained that the Tolna Rebbe had profound intentions when he asked this question. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "If you have a short wife, bend over to seek her counsel..." The Tolna Rebbe was hinting that on Chanukah, Hashem *keviyachol* bends over to whichever level we are on, to elevate us.

The Sfas Emes writes, "Chanukah is mostly for the *chalashim* and the *beinonim*." This means Chanukah is mostly for those who are on low levels, because on this holiday they have the opportunity to rise and be close to Hashem.<sup>7</sup>

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7. People use cotton for the wicks on Chanukah. In Yiddish, cotton is *vatte*. *Vatta* also means distant (בָּטוּל). We use *vatte* wicks to hint that even those who are distant from Hashem can come close to Him on Chanukah.

*Shulchan Aruch* (673:1) states, "If a Chanukah candle...gets mixed with other candles, even a ratio of 1/1000, it doesn't become *batel*..." This is because Chanukah represents the essence of a Yid and his specialty: Even mixed with another thousand, he doesn't lose his unique, individual status and value.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Chanukah* 4:12) writes, מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה היא עד מאוד וצריך אדם להזהר בה, "The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah *lecht* is an extremely cherished/beloved mitzvah and a person must be cautious with it..." Why is specifically Chanukah *lecht* called מצוה חביבה, beloved and cherished? It is because by this mitzvah Hashem comes down to us, and thereby, He demonstrates His love to us.

We will explain with a mashal:

A wealthy person married a poor girl and he brought her to his mansion. She wanted to be sure that her husband loves her. She felt that perhaps he doesn't, because of her origin. Her friends told her, "Of course he loves you. Otherwise, he wouldn't have brought you to his wonderful mansion..."

The bride replied, "That doesn't prove anything. He

brought me to his mansion because that's his home."

One day, she said to her husband, "I prefer living in my old place, where I lived as a child, growing up as a poor girl." And her husband agreed to move there. It was cramped and not luxurious, but her husband wanted to be there if that is where she wanted to be. That proved to her that her husband loves her.

On Chanukah Hashem comes down to very low levels to raise us up. This shows us that He loves us. That is why Chanuka *lecht* is a מצוה חביבה עד מאוד a very beloved mitzvah for us.

### The Message of the Chanukah *Lecht*

The *Kav HaYashar* (96) writes, "Every candle that is lit for a mitzvah is extremely holy. If we had *ruach hakadosh*, we would perceive the future when we light those candles.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* said: From the Shabbos candles, one

They tell us prophecy and resemble the times that the *navi* spoke and told us what he heard from Hashem's mouth. In the introduction to *Yam Shel Shlomo*, the Maharshal writes, 'Once, via a candle lit for a mitzvah, Heaven encouraged me and told me that [He is happy with my studies and my *sefarim*]...' The Maharshal was writing his *sefer*, *Yam Shel Shlomo*. He had a tiny candle burning in front of him, and it was about to burn out, but it continued burning for several hours... The Maharshal understood from this candle that Hashem was with him," and Hashem was happy with his studies and with his *seforim*.

The *Kav HaYashar* writes, "The miracle that occurred to the Maharshal was similar to the miracle of Chanukah, which

happened in the Beis HaMikdash. His merit should protect us. He is fortunate, as are his parents who gave birth to him."

One night, Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg *zy'a* was learning Torah by candlelight and a gust of wind blew out the candle. He didn't have a match to light it, so he went onto the porch to see if someone was passing by and could light his candle. Someone arrived, lit his candle, and Rebbe Shmelke went back inside to study Torah. Sometime later, Rebbe Shmelke thought to himself, "How did he light my candle? I was on the porch of the second floor!" He realized that Eliyahu HaNavi came to light his candle, so he could continue learning.

The Alter of Navardok *zt'l* had a small hut in the

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can know what will happen during the week, and from the Chanukah candles, one can know what will happen during the year.

forest where he studied Torah and *mussar*. One night, his lamp blew out, and he needed more oil. The Alter of Navardok told himself, "If Hashem desires it, He can send me someone with oil. Everything is possible. I trust that Hashem will help..." Since one is obligated to do *hithadlus*, he opened the door.

As soon as he opened the door, he saw a man passing by. "Do you have oil?" He did, and he gave it to the Alter. The Alter was able to study Torah and *mussar* for the rest of the night.

In the morning, the Alter took the oil that remained, and he stored it, so he could always remember the miracle that Hashem performed for him.

Once, there was a fire in his home, and the jar of oil was consumed in the fire.

The Alter said he was happy that this happened because "Why should I remember this episode more than all the other miracles Hashem performs for me? Every moment of life is filled with miracles."

As we wrote above from the Kav HaYashar, the lamps tell prophecies, like a *navi* prophesizing what he heard from Hashem. We don't have *ruach hakodesh* to understand the messages, but one is clear and true: The *lecht* tell us that Hashem loves us and He wants our Torah and mitzvos. Hashem lowers Himself even under the ten *tefachim* to reach us and draw us up again.

### הַנִּינָה - Undeserved Kindness

The *Machzor Vitri* says that הַנִּינָה comes from the word חַנּוּנָה (or חַנּוּם), largess, free gifts.<sup>9</sup>

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9. As it states, ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון, etc. and חנון means Hashem grants kindness, even to those who don't deserve it.

As the Ruzhiner *zt'l* says, "On Chanukah Hashem sends down bounty similar to the bounty that descends on Rosh Hashanah. The difference is that on Rosh Hashanah we receive the bounty if we are worthy, and on Chanukah, we receive the bounty even if we don't deserve it."

Rebbe Moshe of Razvadov *zt'l* also discusses the great bounty that comes to the Jewish nation on Chanukah. He said that it is hinted to in the prayer that the dove prayed when it brought the olive branch to Noach. As *Rashi* (*Bereishis* 8:11) writes, the dove said to Hashem, רבש"ע יהיו מזונותי מרורין כזית בידו של הקב"ה ולא מתוקין כדבש בידו בשר ודם, "May my *parnassah* be bitter like an olive, but given from Your hands, and not sweet like honey, given by a human being."

The Jewish nation is compared to a dove (see *Brachos* 53:). So we can say that the dove's prayer represents the prayer of the

Jewish nation. They say to Hashem, יהיו מזונותי מרורין כזית, let my *parnassah* come from Chanukah when we use olive oil, בידו של הקב"ה, because then the *parnassah* comes from Hakadosh Baruch Hu's compassionate hand. We prefer that more than the *parnassah* that comes from Rosh Hashanah, מתוקין כדבש, the time of year when we eat an apple with honey because then it is בידו בשר ודם, dependent on man's deeds. If one deserves it, he receives, and if he doesn't deserve it, he doesn't receive. Whereas, on Chanukah, every person gets *parnassah*. It is a time of חגיגה, gifts, even underserving gifts."

As we explain, the mitzvos of Chanukah bring down *parnassah*, even if we don't deserve it. But this shouldn't be our *kavanah* when we perform the mitzvos. Our intentions should be to reveal the miracles, to praise Hashem, etc. However, as we do these mitzvos, we will earn

*parnassah*, too. We can say that this is implied in Chazal (*Shabbos* 22.), אסור להרצות מעות כנגד נר חנוכה.<sup>10</sup> We can translate it, "It is forbidden to *want* money when lighting the Chanukah candles." *Parnassah* shouldn't be our focus when we light the Chanukah *lecht*, but it will undoubtedly come.

### Take Advantage of these Days

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 21) says, "On Chanukah...one mustn't give *hespedim* (eulogies)..." We add that we also shouldn't be giving *hespedim*, eulogies, after Chanukah passes about how we didn't use these holy days properly. Hashem gave us eight days of Chanukah to send us blessings and to elevate us to higher levels, and fortunate are those who

take advantage of these holy days.

In *Moaz Tzur* we say, בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו. This can be explained, the בני בינה, the wise, ימי שמונה קבעו, acquire these eight holy days of Chanukah so that it will remain with them throughout the year.

The *Kedushas Levi* (*Kedushah* 2) gives a *mashal* of a king who opened his treasury for a day, and whoever wants can come and take whatever he desires. "Woe to the fool who doesn't take advantage of this, and he sleeps all day long." This *mashal* describes the pitiful state of those who don't take advantage of Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Chanukah. We can receive so much good on Chanukah, when lighting the Chanukah *lecht*, by saying *Al HaNissim* and *Hallel*, by rejoicing in

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10. Literally, these words means, "One is forbidden to *count* money near the Chanukah lamps."

the miracles, and so on. All of these bring us immense bounty and goodness – both spiritual and material. Isn't it foolish to squander this opportunity?

The Kedushas Levi writes, "Due to the righteousness of Matisyahu ben Yochanan Kohen Gadol and his children, the gates of *chesed*, and the gates of miracles...are open during the eight days of Chanukah... Perhaps the gates open up when we light the Chanukah *lecht*.... And with Hallel and with Al HaNisim, one draws down the *chesed* and miracles below..."

The Sfas Emes (תרי"ד ר"ה) (לשנה) writes, "The holidays... are the pillars upon which the world stands. Therefore, they are called שלש רגלים (literally, 'three feet') for they are the pillars that hold up the world. In earlier generations, three holidays were enough. In the later generations, it was known clearly before our Father in heaven that it wouldn't be

enough to have only three holidays, so He added Chanukah and Purim. About us, it states, אין שומה נפגע, a fool doesn't feel anything.' [We are like fools because we don't realize just how vital Chanukah and Purim are for us.] But certainly, the early scholars and the true *ovdei Hashem* felt and saw... that it is impossible to exist without [Chanukah] and without Chanukah *lecht*, which illuminate the darkness... I think we can achieve more on these holidays [Chanukah and Purim] than by the three *regalim* because we can keep Chanukah and Purim in their entirety. During the other holidays [Pesach, Shavuos, Succos], we lack the mitzvah of עליה לרגל, to go up to the Beis HaMikdash, which was the primary joy of the holiday. But we can keep the mitzvos of Chanukah and Purim fully..." We can keep Chanukah and Purim precisely as they were initially established.

These are extraordinary days, and as the Kedushas Levi writes, only a fool won't take advantage of them.

### **Bitachon**

*Bitachon* is very powerful. It brings results.

The brothers showed Yaakov Avinu Yosef's blood-stained coat, so Yaakov will assume that Yosef was killed by a wild animal (see 38:31-34). The Rebbe of Radzimin zt'l, (*Bikurei Aviv*) asks, "Why did they have to do that? When Yaakov sees that Yosef wasn't coming home, he will assume, on his own, that Yosef was killed! ... The answer is, [if Yaakov didn't see the blood-stained coat] Yaakov would have *bitachon* that Yosef...will yet return home...and when one trusts in Hashem with all his heart, this draws Hashem's aid. Yaakov Avinu's *bitachon* was on a very high level. It would have drawn

Hashem's aid, and...the Egyptians [who were holding Yosef as a slave] would send him home. And then, Yosef would reveal to their father that his brothers sold him, and their father would be angry with them. Therefore, they slaughtered a goat, dipped Yosef's coat in its blood, and sent it to their father..." Yaakov was thus convinced that Yosef is no longer alive, and this prevented him from having *bitachon*.

Yosef is also praised for his *bitachon*. The famous *pasuk* that discusses *bitachon*: 'אשרי הגבר אשר יבטח בה', "Fortunate is the person who trusts in Hashem..." is written about Yosef HaTzaddik (see *Rashi* 40:23). An aspect of his *bitachon* is seen in this week's *parashah*:

It states (40:23), ולא זכר שר, "The *sar hamashkim* didn't remember Yosef and he forgot him." This *pasuk* needs commentary, because ולא זכר, "he didn't remember Yosef" and וישכחו "he forgot him"

are redundant. Why does the *pasuk* write twice that the *sar hamashkim* didn't remember Yosef?<sup>11</sup>

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* translates the *pasuk* like this: ולא זכר שר המשקים את יוסף, the *sar hamashkim* forgot Yosef, וישכחו and Yosef forgot the *sar hamashkim*. This expresses Yosef Hatzaddik's incredibly high level of *bitachon*. Most people in Yosef's place would repeatedly be thinking about the *sar hamashkim*. They would wonder, "Did he tell Pharaoh that I was imprisoned for no reason, as I asked him to? Will he succeed in freeing me from jail?" Yosef was already in prison for ten years, and this might have been his first hope to be released. But the Torah tells us וישכחו, Yosef forgot about the *sar hamashkim*. This is because

he trusted in Hashem and not in human beings. He did *hishtadlus*, as this is our obligation; however, he didn't put his trust in the *sar hamashkim*.

The Chashmonaim won the war against the Yevanim with *emunah* and *bitachon*. According to the rules of nature, a small army couldn't win this great war, but they trusted in Hashem, and Hashem saved them. כהן is *gematriya* בטחון. The Chashmonaim were *kohanim*, and they won their battles because of their *bitachon*.

Many people say יושב עליון בטהר עליון (*Tehillim* 91) after lighting Chanukah *lecht*. This chapter talks about *bitachon*. As we say, כי אתה ה' מאחורי, "You Hashem are my shield. לא תירא מפחד לילה, therefore I am not afraid..."

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11. Rashi answers, ולא זכר בו ביום, the *sar hamashkim* didn't remember Yosef on that day, וישכחו לאחר מכאן, and he forgot Yosef in the future, too.

There is no  $\text{א}$  in this chapter. The Abuderham writes that when one trusts in Hashem, he doesn't need  $\text{כלי זין}$ , weapons. Hashem, Himself, will destroy and subjugate all his enemies.

The *Midrash Chanukah* (quoted by the *Rokeiach*) tells that there was a Greek general called Gaskalgus (others say the name was Bagris). He had an enormous army. They arrived in Eretz Yisrael and found twelve Chashmonaim prepared to battle against them. The general scoffed them, "Fools! You want to wage battle with my army, with its innumerable soldiers!?"

The Jewish people raised their eyes to heaven and prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu... Hakadosh Baruch Hu seized the seventy angels of heaven, hit them with a fiery whip, and warned them to protect the Jewish nation. When a Greek soldier shot an arrow at Bnei Yisrael, a *malach* came, turned the arrow around, and aimed it at the

soldier who shot it, shooting it straight into his heart. The Chashmonaim saw these miracles and said,  $\text{ה' ילחם לנו}$ , "Hashem is fighting this battle for us!" When one of the Greek kings was killed, the *malachei hashares* confiscated his money and threw it into Jewish homes. (The Yidden couldn't take the money themselves due to the corpses).

Aliforni gathered an army of 120,000 strong warriors, 22,000 archers, and camels carrying an endless food supply. Aliforni had already conquered many large, powerful countries in the past. When the Yidden heard that he was approaching, they became very afraid... They shouted to Hashem together with their wives and children, and they did *teshuvah* with fasting and prayers. The *kohanim* wore sackcloth, and even the *mizbeiach* was dressed in sackcloth.... They shouted to Hashem... and they fell on their

faces... Then the Yidden ran after their enemies and killed 'piles' of them."

With their *tefillos* and with their *bitachon*, they defeated their enemies again and again.

### ***Emunah***

We explained that the Chashmonaim won the war with *bitachon*. It was also because of their *emunah* in Hashem.

חנונו stands for חנונו ב"ה, the Yidden rested from the war on ב"ה כסלו. No other holiday is named for the date it occurred. Purim isn't named for the 14th of Adar, Pesach isn't named for the 15th of Nissan. Why is Chanukah different?

The *Tzror HaMor* explains that the holidays are named after the miracle that occurred, and Chanukah is the same. ב"ה is *gematriya* 25, the number of letters in שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. Thus, חנונו means: חנונו, the Yidden rested and were

victorious in the war in the merit of ב"ה, their *emunah* in Hashem, which we proclaim with Shema.

Reb Shlomo Eiger of Lublin *hy'd zt'l* [son of Shevet Yehudah *zt'l*] taught: There are two ways to awaken someone: either with a loud sound or by turning on the lights. On Rosh Hashanah, we are awakened by the loud call of the shofar. On Chanukah, we are awakened by the bright lights of *emunah* that shine from the Chanukah menorah. We awaken to the light of *emunah*.

Once, at *shalash seudos*, the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* told his students, "The entire world is filled with heresy and denial of Hashem. I'm not referring solely to the non-religious Yidden or to the goyim who don't believe in Hashem. I'm referring to the faithful, *ehrlicher* Yidden. Listen to them speak, and you will hear *kefirah*. They discuss business and politics as though everything is in our

hands and not in Hashem's hands.

"Therefore," the Chofetz Chaim concluded, "in my opinion, everyone must strengthen himself with *emunah* for an hour, each day."

The Chofetz Chaim asked his students whether they are ready to dedicate an hour a day to think about *emunah*. They were

all silent. An hour is a long time. The Chofetz Chaim said, "I see that this is hard for you. So, I have another plan. When you daven, think about what you're saying, and you will have a daily lesson in *emunah*. If you think about the meaning of the words, you will have approximately an hour each day when you're thinking about *emunah*."<sup>12</sup>

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**12.** People tell a story about a *talmid chacham* who proudly told his friends that he saw Hashem in his dreams. His friends told him, "*Chazal* (*Brachos* 55:) say dreams are often just reflections of the thoughts one had during the day. You're a great *talmid chacham*, you are always thinking about Hashem, so you dreamed that you saw Hashem. It isn't necessarily a true dream...."

He replied, "Why do you say 'I am always thinking about Hashem?' I hardly ever think of Hashem. I'm so busy davening and learning, I don't have time to think about Hashem! In fact, that's how I know the dream is true..."

That is how people are: they do mitzvos, learn Torah, and even daven, and don't think about before whom they are doing these deeds.

Chanukah *lecht* is destined to solve this problem. The Chanukah candles shine *emunah* into our hearts, so we can live with *emunah* all our days, with everything we do.

The Sma'g lists the 613 mitzvos, and he writes in his introduction, "In a dream, I had a vision, which told me, 'Behold, you forget to

### Chanukah: A Time for Teshuvah

*Al HaNissim* discusses the miracles of the war.

מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים רבים ביד מעטים,  
"You handed over the mighty into the hands of the weak, many into the hands of few."

The next words are ותמאים ביד טהורים, רשעים ביד צדיקים, וזדים ביד [You gave over] those who were *tamei* into the hands of those who were *tahor*, *resha'im* into the hands of *tzaddikim*, sinners into the hands of those who study Torah." The Bardichover Rav zy'a said that these words need an explanation, for why is it considered miraculous when the pure, *tzaddikim*, and Torah scholars win a war? We understand that it is a miracle when the weak

and few win a battle, but why is it miraculous for Torah scholars to win a war?

The Bardichover Rav answers that due to this war, a great wave of *teshuvah* began. Everyone witnessed how a handful of *tzaddikim* miraculously won a battle against the mighty Greek army. This resulted in many non-religious Yidden doing *teshuvah*. *Al HaNissim* is discussing that wave of *teshuvah*: תמאים ביד טהורים means the impure people did *teshuvah* and became pure. רשעים ביד צדיקים, means that the *resha'im* became righteous. And זדים ביד עוסקי תורתך implies that the sinners began studying Torah. These words aren't discussing the miracles of

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list the primary mitzvah, השמר לך פן תשכח ה' אלקיך, Be cautious, lest you forget Hashem your G-d (*Devarim* 8:11).<sup>1</sup> I wasn't planning on listing that *pasuk* among the Torah prohibitions (לאוין), and the Rambam didn't list it either. But after I had this dream, I thought about it in the morning and I realized that it is a primary mitzvah for attaining *yiras Hashem*..."

the war, rather the wave of teshuvah that came from it.

A woman approached the Yesod HaAvodah (Slonim) *zt'l* as he was walking down the street together with his *gabbai*. She asked them, "Which one of you is the Rebbe?"

The *gabbai* pointed at the Rebbe, and the Rebbe pointed to the *gabbai*. Confused, she said, "Don't make me into a fool. I must speak with the Rebbe."

The Yesod HaAvodah asked her what the problem is. She told him that her daughter strayed off the path and that she ran away from home.

The Yesod HaAvodah asked, "Do you have a garment that belongs to your daughter?"

She said that she does.

"Turn the garment into wicks and use them to light the Shabbos *lecht*."

She did so. There were immediate results. That

Friday night, the girl returned home while the family was in the middle of their Shabbos *seudah*. She said, "I acted foolishly. I regret running away. I want to return home. I want to return to Yiddishkeit."

The joy was immense. Mother and daughter embraced.

The Beis Avraham *zt'l* repeated this story and added that this is implied in the *brachos*, להדליק נר של שבת, because להדליק doesn't mean "to light;" it means "to ignite." The *segulah* of the Shabbos *lecht* is that it ignites the Yiddishe *neshamah*.

The Beis Avraham adds that also on Chanukah we say להדליק נר חנוכה, because Chanukah *lecht* also has this *segulah* to ignite the *neshamah* and the hearts of the Jewish nation, to draw them to *teshuvah*.

The *Meir Einei Chachamim* (12:2) writes,

"Believe with *emunah sheleimah* that when you stand to light Chanukah *lecht*, all the sparks of your soul and of your fathers' and grandfather's *neshamos*, all the way up to Adam HaRishon are standing there with you. This occurs to every Yid who lights Chanukah *lecht*, as these *neshamos* hope that perhaps with your inspiration by Chanukah *lecht*, they will merit a rectification and they can reach their origin and source."

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozmir *zt'l* wouldn't permit his chassidim to watch him light Chanukah *lecht*. He explained: Chazal (*Bava Basra* 57:) say that "it is forbidden to look at women when they are washing..." Women represent the Jewish souls. It is forbidden to look at them when they are being washed from their blemishes. When

Rebbe Yechezkel would light the Chanukah *lecht*, he washed the souls of the Jewish nation.

*הנוכה* comes from the word *חינוך*, which means training, to train oneself, or to train children, to live properly. The holiday is called *הנוכה* because during these eight days, we train ourselves to serve Hashem properly.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* adds that since Chanukah is a time for *teshuvah*, it is recommended to say *Tehillim* on Chanukah because *Tehillim* helps a person in his quest for *teshuvah*. The Beis Aharon writes, "A person must believe that by saying *Tehillim*, he can leave all his foolish ways and all his problems, and he can overcome thoughts of *yeush* that the *yetzer hara* brings onto a person."<sup>13</sup>

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13. A story is told of a yid from Eretz Yisrael who traveled to Australia, approximately fifty years ago. He didn't know the

language, and he didn't know how he could find Yidden. He would have gone to the beis medresh, but how do you find it when there was no one to ask?

He came up with a plan. Erev Shabbos he went to a fish store and he waited. He figured Yidden would come there to buy fish for Shabbos. The plan was on target. A yid came to the store to buy a large fish for Shabbos. The yid (from Eretz Yisrael) asked him whether he can be his guest for Shabbos.

The man cordially agreed. "It isn't every day that I have the opportunity to perform *hachnasas orchim*," he said.

They spent a very pleasant Shabbos singing *zemiros* and speaking *divrei Torah* together.

On Motzei Shabbos, he said to his host, "Thank you for your hospitality. It was truly a wonderful Shabbos. You have a beautiful house. It is evident that Hashem blessed you with wealth. But there is something I was wondering about. May I ask you about it?"

"Go right ahead."

"I noticed that in your showcase in your dining room you have a broken olive oil bottle displayed there. Why do you save it?"

The man replied, "That oil bottle is very precious to me. I am where I am today because of that bottle. I'll tell you my story:

"My father died when I was still young. I was the oldest child, so it became my obligation and responsibility to support my widowed mother and my younger siblings. Kind people had *rachmanus* on me, and they helped me get into the field of business. Baruch Hashem, I had immediate success. There was always plenty of money in the home. However, together with my financial growth came my spiritual decline. The first thing to go was my *yarmulke*. Soon afterwards, the mitzvos left, too.

"One afternoon, I saw a Jewish child sitting on the curb near my house, crying. Being an orphan, myself, it is always very painful for me to see a child crying, so I asked the child whether he wants to discuss what happened. The child said, 'Chanukah is

**Hallel and Al HaNissim**

from Reb Shlomo Kluger  
zt'l (חכמת שלמה הרפ"ג):

One of the mitzvos of Chanukah is to say *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim*.

To get an indication of the importance of these praises, we repeat a lesson

A Jewish prisoner was granted a brief leave, of just a few hours, on Chanukah. The question posed to Reb Shlomo Kluger was whether he

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approaching, and my father sent me to buy olive oil. He warned me to be cautious, because we are poor, and he will be upset if the bottle breaks. I was cautious, but then a cat ran right up to me. Startled, I fell, and the bottle broke.' He showed me the broken bottle, lying in the gutter. He said, 'How can I go to my father, without the Chanukah oil?'

"I gave the child some money and said, Go back to the store and buy two bottles of olive oil. Bring one bottle to your father and one bottle to me. I didn't light Chanukah *lecht* for several years, but this year, I will."

The host explained, "When the child said, 'How can I go to my father without the Chanukah oil?' something turned inside of me. I reminded myself of how my father would lovingly and joyously light the Chanukah *lecht* each year. I thought to myself, 'The day will eventually come when I will leave this world and I will meet with my father in heaven. How can I go to my father without Chanukah *lecht*? How can I go to him, without this mitzvah?' I took the shards of the broken bottle from the gutter, because something told me that this was a turning point in my life.

"That year, I lit the Chanukah *lecht*. Soon, I was keeping Shabbos. Then, came *tefilin*. And now, *baruch Hashem*, I have a beautiful family, all of us following in the ways of the Torah. This all began because of that broken olive oil bottle. Now you understand why I saved it all these years."

should go out at nighttime so he can light Chanukah *lecht*, or should he leave in the morning so that he can say *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim* in the beis medresh?

Reb Shlomo Kluger answered that it is preferable to leave prison in the morning to say *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim*.

This isn't the answer that most people would expect. In most people's minds, Chanukah *lecht* is the highlight of Chanukah. But from this episode, we should reconsider. It could be that saying *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim* are the highest points of Chanukah.

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* writes that the words of the Gemara, לשנה אחרת קבעום בהלל והודאה, implies that saying *Hallel* and *Al HaNissim* make the holiday. The

praises we say draw down the miracles and creates Chanukah each year.<sup>14</sup>

Reb Shmuel Munkes *zt'l* (renowned student of the Baal HaTanya *zt'l*) once overheard a *melamed* teaching young students the first Mishnah in *Bava Metzia*, which discusses two people debating the ownership of a garment. זה אומר כולה שלי וזה אומר כולה שלי, "This one says 'it is entirely mine,' and the other one says, 'it is entirely mine.'

Reb Shmuel joined their conversation and asked an interesting question. He said to the *melamed* and the children, "Perhaps you can explain this to me: In *Hallel* we repeat some *pesukim* twice. For example, we say, אורך כי עניתני ותהי לי לישועה, two times. The printer of siddurim prints these words in large print for the

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14. The ב' in בהלל והודאה implies that קבעום they made it a holiday, בהלל, because of the Hallel. The Hallel makes it a holiday. Otherwise, it would state להלל והודאה, קבעום, "They established these days to say Hallel and Al Hanissim," with a ל' and not a ב'.

first time, and for the second time, he uses a smaller print. But in the Mishnah, the words זה אומר כולה שלי are repeated twice, and both times they are printed in large letters. Why?"

No one knew the answer. Reb Shmuel told them: When two people fight over a garment, they both shout כולה שלי, "it is entirely mine!" They speak with all their heart and soul. They are energetic; they mean what they say with all their heart and soul. Therefore, the printer writes זה אומר כולה שלי, twice, in large letters, to represent the loud voices of the people saying it. But when we say *Hallel*, people become lazy. Even if they say it the first time loudly, by the second time, they say it silently, without inspiration. Therefore, the second time is written in smaller print." This was how Reb Shmuel Munkes impressed upon the

children the importance of saying *Hallel* with fervor.

We will be saying the same words of *Hallel* for eight days, but don't become tired and lazy. It is one of the highlights of the holiday.

The Chebiner Rav *zt'l* said, "*Hallel* on Chanukah shouldn't be said like *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh, because *Hallel* on Rosh Chodesh is a *minhag*, while the *Hallel* on Chanukah is a *mitzvah*."

Some Rishonim maintain that *Hallel* is a *mitzvah* from the Torah (see Reb Yeruchem Fishel Perlow's commentary on *Sma'g, mitzvas asef* ג-ם, p.258).

*Masechta Sofrim* (20:9) states, "We say the entire *Hallel* during the eight days of Chanukah...and we make a *brachah* before and after *Hallel*, and one must say it בנעימה, sweetly, pleasantly."

It states (*Mishlei* 27:21), מצרף לבסוף ובור לזהב ואיש לפי מהללו. The Chida explains a

furnace purifies silver and gold, איש לפי מהללו and a person becomes cleansed and pure when he praises Hashem.

It states (*Tehillim* 106:47), להשתבח בתהלתך. This means the person becomes improved, בתהלתך, by praising You.<sup>15</sup>

Someone suffering from a *dibbuk* was brought to the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* on Chanukah. The Divrei Chaim said, "Bring him to beis medresh when we say *Hallel*."

They did so, and the *dibbuk* immediately left his body and flew out a window.

This is because every *tumah* within a person can be extricated by saying *Hallel*.

Saying *Hallel* also saves us from all problems. The

Gemara (*Pesachim* 117) says, "על כל צרה וצרה, שלא תבא עליהן," for every *tzarah* that shouldn't come..." The Ben Ish Chai says that these words imply that *Hallel* is *mesugal*, על כל צרה וצרה, שלא תבא עליהן, that troubles won't befall us.

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Kislev*, 4:134) teaches that one can pray via praising Hashem. For example, in the second *brachah* of *Shemonah Esrei* we praise Hashem, רופא חולים, for healing the ill. As one says these words, one can think, "You cure the ill, so please heal..." This thought contains a prayer, concealed within the praise that he is saying. The benefit of such a *tefillah* is that the *malachim* will always permit such a prayer to go up to heaven. When one says a standard *tefillah*, the *malachim* may prevent it from going up,

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15. Because if להשתבח means to praise Hashem, it would state לשבח. It states להשתבח, because the person becomes praised and better בתהלתך, by praising Hashem.

claiming the person doesn't deserve to request it from Hashem. But who can stop a Yid from praising Hashem? The praises go up, Hashem reads between the lines, understands the intention, and fulfills his request.

This is the meaning of the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 18:4), מהולל מאקרא ה' ומן אויבי אשוע, "I call out to Hashem from the midst of praises, and I am saved from my enemies."

Similarly, it states, אודך כי עניתני ותהי לי לישועה, I praise You when I'm suffering, and with the praises, I will have my salvation.

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* said that when one says אגא ה' in *Hallel*, all his requests can be fulfilled. Chassidim thought the Sfas Emes was referring to the *pasuk*, אגא ה' הושע נא, "Please Hashem, save us, now." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* said that he thinks the Sfas Emes was referring to the *pasuk*, כי אני עבדך, "Please Hashem, because I am Your servant..."

When we say על המחיה, we don't add a line for Chanukah (as we do on Shabbos, *yom tov*, etc.) This is because when one praises Hashem, one shouldn't create one-line shortcuts. Praise requires elaboration.

When people did favors for Reb Aharon of Belz *zt'l*, he would thank them himself. His *gabai'im* asked him, "For more important matters, you send your *gaba'im*. Why can't you send us to thank those who helped you? Why do you make an effort to thank them, yourself?"

The Rebbe replied, "When the *chazan* says מודים, the congregation recites מודים along with him. This is because when it comes to thanking, one can't send a *shaliach*. One must do so, himself."

### Children *Talmidei Chachamim*

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 23:) states, הרגיל בנר הויין ליה בנים תלמידי, חכמים, "A person who is

cautious with lighting candles [of Shabbos and Chanukah - *Rashi*] will merit children who are *talmidei chachamim*, as it states, *כי נר מצוה ותורה אור*."

Rabbeinu Yitzchak, the son of the Raavad, asks, "Why don't we see everyone becoming *talmidei chachamim*? People are cautious to light Chanukah *lecht* each year, so why don't we see their children becoming *talmidei chachamim*?!"

He answers, "Only a minority keeps this mitzvah with all its details and laws." If we keep the mitzvah properly, we will merit children *talmidei chachamim*.

Furthermore, the Meiri adds a condition that needs to be fulfilled to merit children *talmidei chachamim*: The Meiri writes, *הרגיל בנר דרך חיוב מצוה והערה מפורסמת הוין לו בנים תלמיד חכמים*, "Whoever is cautious with the candles of Chanukah to light them *with love and inspiration* will

be granted children who are *talmidei chachamim*." Thus, lighting the candles, alone, may not be enough to be granted children *talmidei chachamim*. However, when one lights the candles, *דרך חיוב מצוה והערה מפורסמת*, with love, enthusiasm, and joy, it will occur.

Reb Chaim Ozer Grodinzki *zt'l* was in Krakow one Chanukah. He came to a tailor's home and asked him to fix his jacket. "I didn't light Chanukah *lecht* yet," the tailor replied.

"I'll wait," Reb Chaim Ozer said. He thought it would take a few minutes. But it took much longer. He listened, mesmerized, as the tailor sang songs near the *lecht* and was enjoying the mitzvah. The tailor had put on his Shabbos clothes and sang by the *lecht* for a half-hour.

Reb Chaim Ozer said, "By the way the tailor lit the candles, I understand why Krakow merited so

many great *talmidei chachamim* throughout the generations." This is because Chanukah *lecht* is *mesugal* for children who are *talmidei chachamim*, especially when one performs the mitzvah דרך חיוב מצוה והערה מפורסמת מפורסמת, with love and inspiration.

Chassidim were once discussing the wealth of the legendary Count Pototsky. They were saying that he would pour sugar over the mountains in the summer so he could go skiing.

The Bardichover Rav overheard their discussion, and he asked, "Does he light Chanukah *lecht*?"

"No." Count Pototsky wasn't Jewish.

"Then he doesn't know what true joy is."

May we merit to light the candles with joy and inspiration. As the Rambam (4:12) writes, מצות נר הנוכח מצוה חביבה היא עד מאוד, "The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah *lecht* is an extremely cherished and beloved mitzvah." And then we will merit children who are *talmidei chachamim*.<sup>16</sup>

### Looking at the Chanukah *Lecht*

The Chavas Ya'ir (הגהות) (מקור חיים הרע"ב ב') writes, "In my opinion, the primary mitzvah is that the one who lit the *lecht* should be near the *lecht* for half an hour, to look at them, and be happy with them."

The Yeitav Panim writes, "The *minhag* in Klal Yisrael (which is Torah) is to sit and gaze at the candles. The reason for that is to draw down the miracles of

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16. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* adds that also the one who lights the candles will become a *talmid chacham*. Because if it is *mesugal* that his children will become *talmidei chachamim*, it is certainly *mesugal* that he, too, will become a *talmid chacham*.

Chanukah by gazing at the Chanukah *lecht*.”

The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* said that those who have pure eyes can see Hashem's name הוי"ה shining in the Chanukah *lecht*.

It states (*Bamidbar* 21:8), עשה לך שרף ושים אותו על נם והיה כל הנשוק וראה אותו וחי, “Make a snake, place it on a pole, and whoever was bitten will see it and live.” This *pasuk* refers to the *brachos* of Chanukah. עשה לך שרף hints to the first *brachah*, להדליק נר, because שרף means burns as candles burn. ושים implies the *brachah* שיעשה ניסים לאבותינו. And וחי hints to שהחיינו. Chanukah is hinted to in this *pasuk* because if

someone was נשוק, bitten, by the *yetzer hara*, וראה אותו, he should gaze at the Chanukah *lecht*, וחי, and he will become like a new person.

There are various *minhagim* after Chanukah *lecht*. Some say (*Tehillim* 91) יושב בסתר עליון seven times. The *Sefer Zechirah* (69:1) writes, “A helpful *segulah* to be protected the entire year is to say seven times the chapter יושב בסתר עליון each night of Chanukah, after lighting the candles.

Some say chapter קי"ט in *Tehillim*, because it contains many requests for success in Torah and mitzvos.<sup>17</sup>

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17. The *Leket Yoshar* (p.43) writes that his rebbe, the Terumas HaDeshen would say chapter קי"ט in *Tehillim* every day. Certainly, it is a good time to say it while looking at the Chanukah *lecht*.

The *Tosefta* (*Maasar Sheni* 5:15) writes, “When one performs a mitzvah, it is an ideal time to daven to Hashem.”

Similarly, the *Rabbeinu b'Chaya* (19:3) writes, “When a woman lights the Shabbos candles, she should pray that she merit children who are *talmidei chachamim*, who shine in Torah, because the *tefillah* is heard more after doing a mitzvah.”

We say אין לנו רשות להשתמש בהם אלא לראותם, "We don't have permission to use them, only to see them..." The Divrei Chaim *zt'l* understood from the expression "We don't have permission to use the *lecht*, only to see them..." that although we can't use the *lecht*, we can use the *lecht* by seeing them. This means, looking at the *lecht* is a form of using the *lecht*. He compares this to going to a doctor who looks into the patient's eyes, and thereby he knows the illness and the cure. Similarly, by looking at the Chanukah *lecht*, one can attain a *refuah* for all ailments of his *neshamah*.

The Beis Avraham (נר ד') אלא לראותם בלבד (ד"ה רק) says that looking at Chanukah *lecht* is a *refuah* and rectification for sins related to guarding the eyes.

## **Simchah**

The Gemara (*Taanis* 28) states, "The Yevanim forbade donating wood for the *mizbeiach*, and they banned bringing *bikurim* to Yerushalayim." Why did they target specifically these two *mitzvos*? The Maharsha explains that it is because these *mitzvos* were performed amidst joy and celebration (as the Mishnah in *Bikurim* states, "the flute played before them..."). The Yevanim didn't want the Jewish people to be happy.

Yavan appreciated culture. They had no problem with Yidden keeping Torah and *mitzvos* as a culture. But Jewish people keep the *mitzvos* with passion and joy, and that is something the Yevanim couldn't tolerate. They, therefore, strived to take away any *mitzvah* associated with joy.

Unfortunately, the Yevanim were somewhat successful. The Bach (670)

teaches that the Yevanim were able to conquer and take over the Beis HaMikdash because the Jewish people became lax with the *korbanos*. The Shem MiShmuel (680) explains that this doesn't mean they didn't keep the halachos of the Beis HaMikdash. They brought all the *korbanos*, and were scrupulous with all the obligations, but they did so without happiness, and that is why the *korbanos* were taken away from them.

Four elements comprise the makeup of the world: (1) fire (2) water (3) wind (4) earth. David HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 40:3), ויעלנו... מטיט היין, "Hashem saved me from the mud of Yavan..." The Sfas Emes explains that mud is made from earth and water, but there's no fire there. This exemplifies the approach of Yavan, who desired to extinguish the inner fire of a Jew.<sup>18</sup>

The Skulener Rebbe (Rebbe Eliezer Zusia) *zt'l* would say that on Rosh

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**18.** Rebbe Meir Yechiel of Ostrovitze *zt'l* was a great Torah scholar; his father was a simple baker. Once, Rebbe Meir Yechiel was at a rabbinic gathering, and everyone present was asked to tell something that they learned from their father. Most people present had rabbinical parents, and they repeated something inspirational they heard from their fathers. When it was Rebbe Meir Yechiel Ostrovitze's turn he said, "My father was a baker. He taught me that fresh bread is better than stale bread." He was hinting to them that "Although my father wasn't a Torah scholar, I am a scholar, and that is more important than someone who is a rabbi solely because his father was a rabbi.

Then Rebbe Meir Yechiel added, "My father also told me that when you bake bread, you must fill the oven with wood and seal it hermetically, for even the slightest draft can ruin the bread..." With this, he was hinting that we must be cautious from foreign,

Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos, we build a beautiful (spiritual) edifice, which is the source for bounty and blessings for the new year. Yet, something is missing. There is no light. Everyone understands that if you have a building without electricity, the building isn't finished yet. Something essential is missing. Similarly, the new year without light isn't complete. Chanukah adds the light. Now the new year is complete.

The light is the joy of *Yiddishkeit* and happiness with the mitzvos. That is the light of Chanukah, which we add into the new year.

### **Preparation for the Mitzvah**

A chassid found a place to hide and watch the Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* as he prepared to light the Chanukah *lecht*. The chassid saw the Rebbe's intense devotion, his fiery *hislahavus*, as he poured the oil and prepared the wicks. The chassid thought, "If this is the way the Rebbe prepares for the mitzvah, I can only imagine the great fire of excitement that will be seen when the Rebbe lights the candles." But when the Rebbe lit the candles, the Rebbe suddenly became very regular. He said the *brachah* and lit the candles just like thousands of other Yidden do. At least externally, one couldn't see anything

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non-Jewish influences. Even the smallest draft from the outside can ruin what we are cooking inside.

This is one of the reasons it is important to show the family joy for the mitzvos. That keeps matters warm inside, and things will "bake well." But if the mitzvos are performed cold, without vigor and joy, it may not be passed on to the next generation.

unique. The chassid wondered, "It doesn't make sense; shouldn't the mitzvah itself be performed with even greater *hislahavus* than the preparations?" He couldn't come out of his hiding place to ask the Rebbe this question since he was there without permission, so he kept his questions to himself.

The Rebbe perceived the chassid's question through his ruach hakodesh. The next day, the Yismach Yisrael came over to the chassid and said, "A person's part in a mitzvah is his preparation for the mitzvah. When he performs the mitzvah, Hashem gives the inspiration from above. At that point, it isn't in his hands anymore."

Therefore, if we want to light the Chanukah *lecht* properly, we should do a good *hachanah* (preparation) beforehand. We don't have much control over what happens when we perform the mitzvah, as that is in

Hashem's hands. Perhaps Hashem will give us *hislahavus* and joy, and maybe not. But the preparations are in our hands, and we should prepare for the mitzvah as best we can.

Rebbe Yechiel Yehoshua of Biala *zt'l* sent his grandson to watch the Beis Yisrael of Gur *zt'l* as he prepared to light Chanukah *lecht*. The grandson arrived at the Rebbe's residence and told the *gabai*, Reb Chanina Shiff, that his grandfather, the Biala Rebbe, sent him to watch the Beis Yisrael prepare for Chanukah *lecht*. The *gabai* opened the door to the Rebbe's room, and he saw the Rebbe pacing with immense concentration and excitement. The *gabai* quickly shut the door and said, "I don't dare disturb the Rebbe at this time, so I can't bring you in. If you want to follow through on your grandfather's request, go in on your own."

The grandson decided to do just that. He opened the door, but as soon as he saw the Beis Yisrael's holy face aflame, he quickly shut the door in fright.

He returned to his grandfather and told him what he saw. His grandfather replied, "That was exactly what I wanted you to see."

The more one prepares, the more he will receive. The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* explained this with a *mashal*:

An oil merchant came to town, and people came to him with their pots and containers, asking him to fill their utensils with oil. Eventually, people ran out of containers, and they told him, "We want to buy more, but we don't have anywhere to put it."

The merchant replied, "Believe me, I also want to give you more. Bring more pots and pans, and I will fill them with oil."

The *nimshal* is, Hashem wants to give us immense light on Chanukah, and we also want to get it, but we can't receive it without vessels. Each preparation creates another vessel to contain the light of Chanukah.

Rebbe Dovid Moshe of Chortkov *zt'l* taught: A precious gem shines in the correct setting. Put it on a velvet cloth, and it appears beautiful. Put it in a gold ring, and it appears exquisite. Take the same gem and place it in a paper bag or a dirty bowl, and it won't have the same appeal.

He said that this is hinted at in the words, *ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבתם* (*Shemos* 10:23). The *אור*, brilliant light of Chanukah varies, *במושבתם*, on its setting. If we prepare ourselves well, we become a proper receptacle to contain the great light of Chanukah.

## **Do the Mitzvah the Best You Can - Even if it isn't Perfect**

We want to light the Chanukah *lecht* in the best way possible; however, we mustn't forget that we are limited human beings and have a yetzer hara trying to disturb us. Therefore, the goal is to always do the best you can under the circumstances and be happy with whatever you can do.

We will tell some stories that demonstrate this principle:

After the Yesod HaAvodah of Slonim *zy'a* was *niftar*, the chassidim discussed who they should appoint to be their next Rebbe. One elderly person recommended that they appoint the Divrei Shmuel *zt'l* (the Yesod HaAvodah's grandson) to be the successor, and he supported his recommendation with the following incident:

The Divrei Shmuel was an expert in the halachos of Chanukah, and he would spend a lot of time each year, arranging that he should have olive oil for the mitzvah. One year, he prepared his menorah, filled it with olive oil, and before lighting it, he went to his grandfather's house to watch the Yesod HaAvodah light Chanukah *lecht*. When he returned to his home, he saw that someone had used the *lecht* that he prepared. There was no time to set up another Chanukah menorah because it was almost Shabbos. All he could do was light one candle, made from animal fats.

That night, he didn't perform the mitzvah with olive oil. He didn't even light the number of candles that one is supposed to light (because he only had one candle). But he did the best he could under the circumstances, and he was

very happy with the mitzvah.

The elderly chassid concluded, "If he can be happy even then, he deserves to be the Rebbe." His nomination was accepted.

The Divrei Shmuel's attitude was passed down to his son, the Beis Avraham of Slonim *zt'l*.

One year, on Friday afternoon, the Beis Avraham was just about ready to light the Chanukah menorah when his child ran by and accidentally knocked over the menorah. The oil spilled, and there wasn't enough time before Shabbos to prepare the menorah again. The Beis Avraham said with a smile, "The same Creator who commanded us to light Chanukah *lecht* commanded us not to become angry."

When Rebbe Yochanan of Tolna *zy'a* (Yerushalayim, Bayit v'Gan) would light

Chanukah lecht, people from the neighborhood would come to watch the *pirsumei nisah*. Once, due to pushing, a child fell onto the Rebbe's Chanukah menorah, toppling it. The child felt terrible, but the Rebbe said, "My dear child, I'm so grateful to you. Now I can keep the words of Chazal, בבהה אין זקוק לה, that if the candles blow out before one half-hour passes, one isn't obligated to light the candles again. How often do I have the opportunity to keep this Chazal?"

Instead of being angry or disappointed (and instead of rebuking the child or the one who pushed him), he rejoiced that he could finally practice a statement from Chazal. (Afterwards, the Rebbe lit the candles again because the Mishnah Berurah rules that if a half-hour didn't pass yet, one should rekindle the candles.)

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* said that he was once in Reb Nachum Kaplan's home on Chanukah. It was time to light Chanukah

*lecht*, but Reb Nachman Kaplan waited until his Rebbetzin came home.

The Chofetz Chaim said to his rebbe, Reb Nachum Kaplan, that halachah states one should light at the right time even if everyone isn't home.

Reb Nachman replied, "The Gemara tells us, שלום, ביתו עדיף, *shalom bayis* is more important than lighting Chanukah *lecht*.<sup>19</sup> I know that my wife will be upset if I light the candles when she isn't home, so I'm waiting for her. *Shalom bayis* takes precedence."

This lesson is important to remember. Sometimes, due to our *hislahavus* to perform the mitzvah in the very best way, at the very best time, and so on, it could cause friction in the home. It isn't worth it.

Don't cause your *shalom bayis* to suffer because of Chanukah *lecht*, because שלום ביתו עדיף, *shalom bayis* is more important. We strive for the best, and then we are satisfied with the best that we can do.

### Nature is also Miraculous

The Beis Yosef asks: Why do we celebrate the first day of Chanukah? It seems that no miracle occurred on that day. The Chashmonaim found a jug of oil that had just enough to last one day, so the menorah lighting of the first day wasn't really a miracle.

The Alter of Kelm *zt'l* answers that on the first night of Chanukah, we are celebrating the miracle that oil burns – for that too is a *nes*. It is natural, but a miracle, nonetheless.

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19. *Shulchan Aruch* (ת"ת) writes, "If a person doesn't have enough money to buy candles for both Shabbos and Chanukah, he should buy for Shabbos so there will be *shalom bayis*," because when it is dark in the home, there isn't *shalom bayis*.

The Alter explains that nature is the greatest miracle. The miracles that we generally celebrate are ones where nature changes, but nothing new was created- יש מיש. (For example, when the menorah burned for eight days, it wasn't a new creation, but rather a change in the laws of nature. Similarly, the laws of nature dictate that the weak and the few will be destroyed by the mighty and many. But in the war of the Chashmonaim, the few and the weak won against the large and powerful Greek army. This wasn't a new creation, rather a change in the rules of nature.) Whereas, creation is a יש מאין, something emanating from nothing.

We are accustomed to the miracles of nature, and therefore we don't recognize them. But on Chanukah, when we celebrate the great wonders that occurred, we become aware of natural miracles. On the first night of Chanukah, this is precisely what we notice. We

celebrate the natural fact that oil creates light.

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* quotes this lesson from the Alter of Kelm, and he adds that we can now explain why we make a *brachah* for seeing the Chanukah *lecht*. As it states in *Shulchan Aruch* (676:3), "Someone who isn't going to light Chanukah *lecht* that night should make the *brachah* שעשה ניסים when he sees Chanukah *lecht*. He should also say *shehecheyanu*". We don't say a *brachah* for seeing any other mitzvah. What is unique about the Chanukah *lecht* that we do so?

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* explains that on Chanukah, we train our eyes to see things correctly. We see nature as Hashem's miracles; we see Hashem's *hashgachah pratis* in the world. Therefore, on Chanukah, we make a *brachah* just for seeing because this is precisely

the lesson of Chanukah - to view the world correctly.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 22.) says, "Chanukah *lecht* placed higher than twenty *amos* are *pasul*" because people won't see the candles burning, and it won't publicize the miracle.

The next line of the Gemara seemingly speaks about an entirely different subject, as it discusses a *pasuk* in this week's *parashah*. It states (*Bereishis* 37:24), והבור ריק אין בו מים, "The pit [that Yosef was thrown into] was empty; it didn't have water." The Gemara asks, "Isn't it obvious that if the pit was empty, it didn't have water? The *pasuk* hinted that the pit was empty from *water*, but there were snakes and scorpions inside."

The Gemara teaches us here two lessons, which don't seem to be related: (1) A Chanukah menorah can't be higher than twenty *amos*, because people won't see it. (2) The pit that Yosef was

thrown into had snakes and scorpions.

The *meforshim* attempt to find a connection between these two lessons. There must be a reason why these two very different lessons were placed together in the Gemara.

Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* answers as follows:

As we explained, the Chanukah *lecht* reveals that even nature is miraculous. This lesson is essential because people can look at the miracles of creation and not recognize them. In this week's *parashah*, Yosef was thrown into a pit where there were snakes and scorpions, and yet he remained alive! The brothers saw this amazing phenomenon, but they didn't recognize it (and therefore sold him). We must take heed to the message of the lit menorah and make sure to place it in a noticeable place

Lighting Chanukah *lecht* is like turning on the lights in a dark room. In the dark, we couldn't see the miracles in life, and when the lights are flicked on, we can. But even after opening the lights, the surroundings remain dark for those who keep their eyes closed. On Chanukah, we have the potential to see the world in all its beautiful glory, but that will only happen for those who open their eyes and consciously seek to internalize this lesson.

In the morning, we say the *brachos* פוקח עורים and המעביר שנה מעיני. Both *brachos* seem to be thanking Hashem for our ability to see. What is the difference between these two *brachos*?

Reb Shimon Schwab *zt'l* answers that one *brachah* is thanking Hashem for our eyesight, and one is for our perception. Sometimes we see, but we don't recognize the miracles and wonders that Hashem performs for us. We praise Hashem for the ability to

see and for the ability to recognize the miracles.

### The Beis Yosef's Question

The *Navi* (*II Melachim* 4, see commentaries) tells that the wife of Navi Ovadyah told Elisha that she owes money, and the collector warned her that if she doesn't pay, he will take her two sons as slaves. Elisha asked her, מה יש לך בביה, "What do you have in your home?"

She said that she has some oil. Elisha said, "Borrow empty utensils from the neighbors and pour the oil into the utensils." Miraculously, the oil kept flowing until all the utensils were full, and she could pay back the debt.

The Taz (670:1) quotes the following *Zohar*:

Elisha asked (*ibid*, *Melachim* 4:2) מה יש לך בביה, "What do you have in your home?" because Hashem sends his blessings onto

something that is already there. As we see in this instance, the small amount of oil turned into a lot of oil. Hashem doesn't perform a miracle by creating something brand new.

With this concept, the Taz answers the Beis Yosef's question. The Beis Yosef asks that since they found a jug of oil that had enough in it for one day, it seems that there was no miracle on the first day of Chanukah. The Taz answers, "Looking back, they realized that a miracle happened on the first night... If the oil had been totally consumed on the first night, there wouldn't be any substance left for the miracle to grasp onto the next night. It is therefore certain that some oil remained from the first night, and the miracle occurred from what remained, to increase it..." Thus, the miracle of the first night was that the oil wasn't totally consumed,

allowing room for a miracle to take place on the following nights.

Reb Aryeh Leib Tzinz (קומץ למנוחה, דרוש לחנוכה ז') explains this with a *mashal*:

Someone had ten crates filled with gold coins. Nine were stolen. Using the gold coins in the tenth crate, he hired police to search for the nine stolen crates. He also vowed that he would give three gold coins from each crate to tzedakah if they are found.

The nine crates were found, and true to his promise, he gave a *gabai tzedakah* 27 gold coins, three from each crate.

The *gabai* wasn't satisfied with that and asked for another three gold coins from the tenth crate. The man didn't understand. "That crate wasn't stolen. My gratitude to Hashem is that He brought back the nine crates. Why must I thank Hashem for that tenth

crate, which was never stolen?"

The *gabai tzedakah* explained, "If that was stolen, you wouldn't have money for the search. The fact that it wasn't stolen is part of the miracle, and you should thank Hashem for that, too."

On the first night of Chanukah, we thank Hashem for the oil leftover because, without that oil, the miracle couldn't have occurred.

### Miracles Beyond Nature

Generally, we don't daven for miracles because Hashem wants to lead the world according to the rules of nature. The Gemara (24.) tells a story about a man who got *malkus* in Rava's *beis din* for a sin he committed. He couldn't handle the *malkus*, and he died. The Babylonian government heard about this, and the king wanted to punish Rava. The king's mother warned the king

that he shouldn't start up with the Yidden, because Hashem does miracles for them.

The king asked, "Which miracles does He do?"

His mother replied, "Whatever they ask from Hashem, He gives them."

"How do you know?"

"When they need rain, they pray, and it immediately begins to rain."

"Perhaps they prayed a moment before it was about to rain. Let them request rain now, in the middle of the summer, and then we will know whether Hashem listens to their prayers or not."

It was Tamuz, a month in which it never rains in Bavel. The king's mother sent a message to Rava, explaining the gravity of the matter, and asked him to pray hard for rain.

Rava prayed, but it didn't rain.

Rava said, "Ribono Shel Olam, we heard about the miracles You performed in the past, but we never experienced Your miracles!" After saying this, it began to rain. The streets of Mechuzah were flooded, and the waters flowed into the Chidekel River.

That night, Rava saw his father in a dream. His father said, "How can one make Heaven work so hard [to bring rain in the wrong season]?"

His father told him that he shouldn't sleep in his bed. Rava immediately awoke, and slept elsewhere. In the morning, Rava looked at his bed and saw

that it was stabbed with a knife many times. (The *sheidim* were given permission to harm Rava, and were told where he sleeps.)

We learn from this Gemara that it is dangerous and improper to pray for a miracle.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, on Chanukah, we do pray for miracles. As it states (*Shulchan Aruch* 187:4), "If one didn't say *Al HaNisim* [in *Birchas HaMazon*], he doesn't bench again. Rather, he can say it in the הרהרמן. He can say, הרהרמן הוא יעשה לנו נסים כמו שעשה בימים ההם בזמן הזה בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן.. "The compassionate one should make miracles for

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20. Praying for a *refuah sheleimah* isn't called praying for a miracle, even when doctors have given up. Doctors were given permission to heal, but they weren't given permission to cause people to despair.

Similarly, one can pray for *parnassah*, *shidduchim*, *nachas*, and all other kinds of *yeshuos*. Never lose hope. The Gemara teaches, "If one davened and his *tefillos* weren't answered, he should pray again. As it states (*Tehillim* 27:14), 'קוה אל ה' חזק ויאמן לבך וקוה אל ה', 'Trust in Hashem, strengthen your heart, and trust on Hashem.'"

us as He performed miracles in those days..."<sup>21</sup>

The Shaul u'Meishiv (*Diorei Shaul*) *zt'l* asks that it is improper and dangerous to daven for a miracle, so why do we do so on Chanukah?

The Shaul u'Meishiv answers, the prohibition is to daven for miracles throughout the year, when the world is being run by the rules of nature. But on Chanukah, the world is in a different mode, one of miracles, therefore we may pray for them.

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**21.** Similarly, if one forgot to say *Al HaNisim* in *Shemonah Esrei*, he can say *הרהמן* at the end of *Shemonah Esrei*, before *ויהי לרצון* (*Mishnah Berurah* 682:4).

When one says *Al HaNisim* in the right place, one doesn't daven for miracles. But when one forgets *Al HaNisim*, he does. It seems that by forgetting to say *Al HaNisim* he earns a bonus, because now he can pray for miracles.

Perhaps the explanation is, when one forgets to say *Al HaNisim*, he is heartbroken, because he lost out on a special opportunity. His broken and humble heart makes him a fitting candidate for miracles. He should pray for miracles because it is likely that miracles will occur due to his broken heart.

*Bederech tzachus*, Rebbe Zusha of Chernobyl (Bnei Brak) *zt'l* explained:

During the eight days of Chanukah, the Chanukah miracles should always be on our mind. But this person forgot Chanukah (evident by the fact that he forgot to say *Al HaNisim*). He needs a salvation and a miracle to become a better Yid, for he is apparently on a very low level. Therefore, he needs to pray that Hashem should miraculously elevate him. Whereas someone who didn't forget *Al HaNisim* doesn't have to pray for that miracle.

The Maharal explains that Chanukah is eight days long to express that these are days beyond nature. The world is based on the number seven, as it states (*Mishlei* 9:1), חצבה עמודיה, שבעה "Hashem established the world on seven pillars." Therefore, a week has seven days, music is comprised of seven notes; there are seven wisdoms, and so on. In the era of Moshiach, the world will be run with the number eight. As it states (*Tehillim* 6:1), למנצח על השמינית, "a song played on a harp of eight strings." Similarly, Chanukah is eight days, beyond nature.

The Maharal (*Ner Mitzvah*) writes, "The natural world is comprised of seven... Eight is beyond nature... *Milah* is on the eighth day, because *milah* is beyond nature... Torah is beyond nature. Therefore, it was given after seven, as it states (*Devarim* 16:9) 'Count seven weeks...' and after

the seven weeks, on the fiftieth day, the Torah was given... Chapter (119) in *Tehillim*, which discusses Torah has eight *pesukim* for each letter of the alef beis (תמיניא אפי)... representing that Torah is beyond nature..." The Maharal explains that the Chanukah miracle came in the merit of Torah, which is beyond nature. Therefore, the menorah miraculously remained lit for eight days.

We learn from this that on Chanukah we enter a world that is beyond nature, a world where miracles are the norm.

The Gemara (*Gittin* 30:) states, "If someone tells you that your friend died, you can believe him, but if someone tells you that your friend became wealthy, don't believe him." This is because the world follows the laws of nature, and generally, the poor remain poor. But on Chanukah, everything can turn

around. It is the world of eight, where the rules of nature don't apply.<sup>22</sup>

Tzaddikim tell us: The way to earn miracles throughout the year is to serve Hashem beyond nature.

Everyone has their comfort zone, the level they are accustomed to

serve Hashem. If a person can go beyond this limit to serve Hashem, he will merit miracles. This rule applies to every day of the year, and especially on Chanukah. If you serve Hashem beyond your limitations, Hashem will perform great miracles for you.<sup>23</sup>

**22.** The laws of Chanukah begin in *Shulchan Aruch* with the *simanim* (תרע-תרעא) הרעא. In Aramaic means gate. The Beis Yisrael zy'la said that this is because on Chanukah, the gates of heaven are opened and everyone can go inside.

**23.** The Mishnah teaches: "Be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, and strong like a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven." Why does the Mishnah express itself with animals? It could have written in brief, "Be brazen, light, swift, and powerful."

We can answer that animals act according to instinct. The deer doesn't *decide* to run fast, and the lion doesn't make a decision to be brave and powerful. They do so instinctively. This is how one should serve Hashem. He should be swift like a deer, powerful like a lion, and almost instinctively do Hashem's will.

In *parashas Vayeira*, when the angels came to visit Avraham, they asked him, "Where is Sarah, your wife." (18:9). The Ksav Sofer explained *bederech tzachus* that the angels said, "It is known that women are stingier with their guests than men are. Since you have prepared a very generous meal for us, we assume that she probably isn't home. Is that correct?"

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Avraham told them that she was home, in the tent.

The angels replied, *חדל להיות לשרה אורה כנשים*, Sarah is different than all other women. The angels promised that she will bear a son. This is because she went beyond her nature, and that brings miracles.

The Kesav Sofer tells us that he is writing this *bederech tzachus*, however, he adds, the lesson is true. When one serves Hashem beyond his limitations, he will merit miracles beyond the rules of nature.

People were discussing the miracles some chassidic Rebbes performed. One person said, "Whatever my Rebbe asks for, Hashem fulfills."

The son of the Chofetz Chaim was present, and he said, "I don't know whether Hashem does everything my father requests, but I do know that my father does everything Hashem requests."

When one has this approach, even to go beyond the rules of his nature to do Hashem's will, he will merit miracles, beyond nature, and Hashem will indeed do for him everything he requests.