



CHICAGO RABBINICAL COUNCIL

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

# Divrei Torah for Chanukah 5784



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# Lighting the Fire

Rabbi Yona Reiss  
*Av Beth Din*



**T**he festival of *Chanukah* is a time of illumination and inspiration. When we reflect upon the משירת נפש of the חשמונאים, it reminds us of our responsibility to keep the fire of Torah burning brightly despite all the challenges presented by the world around us, including during these tumultuous times following the recent attack upon the Jewish people in our Homeland and the confounding Jew-hatred that has emerged since that time from so many from whom we expected better.

The *Gemara Shabbos* 21b teaches us that כבתה אין זקוק לה – if the *Chanukah* lights are extinguished, they need not be rekindled. Nonetheless, the halakha is that if the candles were lit in a windy place where they could not possibly have retained their illumination for the requisite time-period of the obligation, one has not fulfilled their obligation (see *Mishna Berura* 673:25).

The Ramban notes in his commentary to the Torah (*Bemidbar* 8:2), based on the מגילת סתרים רבינו of רבינו and other midrashic sources,

that the candles of *Chanukah* constitute a continuation of the illumination of the menorah in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

The eternal מנורה is represented by the everlasting light of Torah – כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. Indeed, we are taught by our Rabbis that הרצה שיחכים (יזרים ב"ב כה). One who wishes to acquire wisdom is enjoined to focus in a southerly direction just as the holy menorah was located on the southern side of the בית המקדש.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Burack zt"l, the legendary Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchok Elchanan from 1919-1961, noted in his address to the *b'nei yeshiva* in 1949 (published in פרחי אהרן) that the lights of *Chanukah* symbolize the ability of כלל ישראל to sow the seeds of Torah during times of darkness and desolation, and that the קול תורה in our *batei midrashos* epitomize the triumph of Torah in the wake of the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust. However, pointed out Rabbi Burack, the lights of the Torah can only illumine properly if they

are left in their pristine state – אין לנו – רשות להשתמש בהם. The continuity of the lights from the days of the בית המקדש into contemporary times can only be assured if we do not tamper with our holy heritage.

Accordingly, even if the winds of persecution appear so powerful as to be capable of extinguishing our eternal light, we are assured כבתה – אין זקוק לה – that we need not be afraid as long as we take appropriate measures to preserve the pristine light of the Torah. However, if we willingly expose ourselves to a רוח of foreign influences and notions, then we have not fulfilled our obligation. הנרות הללו קדש הם – we are mandated to maintain the holiness of our Torah environment and our proud Jewish perspective towards the world.

In order to maintain this holiness, we need to demonstrate an abiding attention – הרגיל בנר הויין ליה בנים – (תלמידי חכמים שבת כג) – the fruits of Torah are sown through שמירת קביעת עתים, through הסדרים, through a עתים לתורה throughout the entire year, whether or not part of any official semester or structured לימוד. זמן. One of the goals of the יוונים was to abolish our own internal time schedule – the *mitzvah* of חודש, of declaring the new moon. We ensure the protection of our Torah lights from the seasonal winds, explained

Rabbi Burack, by transcending the calendar limitations of the academic year and re-focusing on our רגילות – our unabated devotion to the eternal illumination of Torah.

The B'nei Yissoschor comments on the verse וחמש את ארץ מצרים (Bereishis 41:34) that Yosef Hatzaddik, whose story is always read in conjunction with the celebration of *Chanukah*, preserved the heritage of the Torah during his sojourn in Egypt through the observance of "חמש" – of *Chodesh*, *Milah* and *Shabbos*, the three mitzvot that the יוונים sought to eradicate during the days of the Chashmonaim. In this vein, he explains the *midrash* (*Midrash Rabbah* 2:4) in connection with the verse וחשך על פני תהום (Bereishis 1:2) - that states that the word חשך stands for the kingdom of Yavan, which told the Jewish people על קרן השור כתבו – שאין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל – “write on the horn of the ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” The ox is representative of Yosef, who is described as בכור שור הדר לו, as being compared in beauty to an ox. We can thus understand the taunt of the Syrian Greeks as expressing their sentiment that Yosef’s ability to maintain his distinct identity in exile was no longer tenable during a time of evolving values and warped moral perspectives in the surrounding universe. To this challenge we must respond with the

brightness of the *Chanukah* candles, and their message of celebrating our uniqueness through the sanctity of Shabbos, through our mastery over our bodies, souls, and our calendar, and our refusal to subjugate ourselves to the distractions, diversions, and moral decadence of the world around us.

The Meiri (*Shabbos* 21b) cites the custom of the *Gedolei HaTzarfatim* to wait until the conclusion of one's learning seder (scheduled time for Torah learning) before lighting the *Chanukah* candles- וכן נוהגים שם בני ישיבה להדליק אחר שעומדים מבית המדרש. This practice is puzzling, given the usual imperative of זריזין למצוות – of performing mitzvot with alacrity and immediacy. Perhaps we can explain,

based on the foregoing discussion, that the message of the *Chanukah* candles is to remind us of the inextinguishable and unperishable nature of Torah study and Torah living in our lives regardless of circumstances or surroundings. It is thus through the uncompromising preservation of our Torah learning and way of life, as expressed through the inviolate nature of our Torah learning times, that we are best able to prepare ourselves for the optimal performance of the mitzvah of lighting the *Chanukah* candles.

May the lights of the *Chanukah* candles inspire us to always keep our faith strong and overcome the darkness of these challenging times with the resplendent radiance of our eternal Torah tradition.



# Pirsumei Nisa

Rabbi Micah Greenland  
International Director of NCSY



**T**he commandment on *Chanukah* to publicize the miracle of our extraordinary salvation, פרסומי ניסא, seems at first blush to resemble other holidays for which we celebrate miracles and are commanded to tell the stories of redemption. On Pesach, we publicize the miracle of יציאת מצרים and spend the entire סדר night retelling the story, including vivid details of the miracles. On Purim, we are commanded to read the מגילה for the purpose of פרסומי ניסא, ensuring that everyone understands the miracle and the nature of our salvation from the threat posed by Haman and his ideologues.

However, there is a substantial distinction between the practice of פרסומי ניסא on those holidays versus the פרסומי ניסא that we do on חנוכה. Rav Moshe Shapira zt"l (שיעורי רבינו) points out the dichotomy. On Purim and Pesach, the publicity related to the miracles is made explicit. It is even codified in a specific text (the הגדה or מגילה) which we are commanded to read in order to directly spell out the נסים ונפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו, to verbalize the miracles performed

for our ancestors which we are now celebrating.

On חנוכה, there is no text. We light the candles – and the candles themselves are the publicity. The על הניסים that we recite in davening and bentching is only a very partial recounting of the *Chanukah* miracles. Furthermore, the recitation of על הניסים is certainly not the primary way in which we are instructed to publicize the miracle, which is done chiefly through lighting the candles.

Why the different approaches to publicizing the respective miracles?

This difference is particularly curious given how seemingly inadequate it is to rely on candle-lighting as miracle publicity. The candles themselves tell nothing about the miracle of our salvation! One has to be a real “insider” to understand from the נרות חנוכה what the nature is of the miracle that is being publicized. The reason for the publicity itself is concealed, both from the person lighting the candles and from the people observing the candles being lit or burning. What is it about the *Chanukah* miracle that led our sages

to choose to have it publicized in such an opaque way?

Rav Moshe Shapira explains that *Chanukah* is the first post-*נבואה* holiday, and that there is a significant difference between the other holidays which took place during the times of prophecy, and *חנוכה*, which is post-prophecy. This distinction is underlined by the Gemara:

*Rav Asi said: "why is Esther compared to the dawn? To illustrate that just as the dawn represents the end of the night, so too Esther represents the end of miracles." The Gemara questions this: "But what about Chanukah [which came after Esther and Purim]?" The Gemara responds: "[Rav Asi] meant that Esther was the end of miracles which could be written." (Yoma 29a)*

What's the difference? Why are miracles which took place during the times of prophecy written down in the Torah or in Tanach, but miracles which took place later are not "written," seemingly at all?

Miracles that took place during the times of prophecy are written, because then the words of the prophets – themselves conveying the words of Hashem – are the greatest expression that can be provided to reflect the miracles. The *תורה שבכתב* itself best expresses the miracle in all its detail. In those cases, the very best way to understand the miracles

is through the written accounting of those miracles.

However, miracles that took place after the times of the prophets, such as the miracle of *Chanukah*, are best compared to *תורה שבעל פה*. The Oral Torah, the concepts and ideas and principles that were provided to Moshe at Sinai to convey them orally to the Jewish People, loses something when it is written down. The ideas and concepts of the Oral Torah would become limited by the words on the page.

The same is true with the *Chanukah* miracle. The essence of the *Chanukah* miracle is best reflected in the Torah – the eternal ideas and concepts – that we learn from the miracle. The miracle lives in the hearts and minds of those of us who derive Torah lessons from it. When we light the candles – or even when we see the candles that have been lit by someone else – we learn our own authentic lessons from seeing the miracle publicized in this way.

This is the way Hashem desires that we appreciate and learn from the miracle of *חנוכה*. Rather than the miracle being prescribed in a specific way, with specific words, and with specific lessons, the *חנוכה* miracle is itself a reflection of our special relationship with *תורה שבעל פה*. The

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# Chanukah & Jewish Survival

Rabbi Netanel Isaacs

Sephardic Rabbi, Kehilat Chovevei Tzion

Founder, Morasha



**T**he Jewish nation today is going through a shake-up. Men, women & children are experiencing an intense awakening of their Jewish identity. Jews from all over the world from all backgrounds are experiencing an internal turmoil of their value system. Who are we? What are we? What do we stand for?

Although *Chanukah* is the last established holiday in classical Jewish history, its unique lessons give us strength & inspiration to remind us of who we are and how to overcome our challenges in the darkest of times.

Chazal in *Megillat Antiochus* point out that the Greek empire restrained the Jewish nation from performing three specific *mitzvot*. They forbade Jews from performing *Brit Milah*, and observing *Shabbat* and *Rosh Chodesh*. Many commentaries address the significance behind these three *mitzvot*; however the Gaon Chida (1724–1807) introduces a unique profound perspective.

The Gaon Chida<sup>1</sup> writes that it is common for *Parshat Miketz* to fall out around *Chanukah*. The *parsha* relates the story of Yosef's release from prison and his swift rise to power over the land of *Mitzrayim*. As Yosef prepared the region for an upcoming famine, he foresaw the Jewish nation having difficulty preserving their Jewish identity after being in a foreign land for so many generations. He therefore formed a strategy that would allow the Jewish nation to leave *Mitzrayim* earlier than expected. Yosef prophesied that the climax of the severe and inhumane slavery would be 86<sup>2</sup> years, during which time there would be labor proportionate to the anticipated 430 years prophesied through our forefathers.

However, in order for Hashem to grant the Jewish nation an early exodus for their excessive labor, the nation needed to preserve their holiness as children of the Almighty. Only a father puts into

1 שמחת הרגל הגדה של פסח ד"ה ונתבאר; ראש דוד ד"ה וצריכין

2 Although the Jewish nation was in *Mitzrayim* for 210 years, the Gaon Chida points out that the climax of the slavery in *Mitzrayim* was for 86 years.

consideration the effort of his child's work. Yosef therefore instituted into the law of the land that the Jewish nation be allowed to perform *Brit Milah*, and observe *Shabbat & Rosh Chodesh* well before his family's arrival in *Mitzrayim*. Only through observing these *mitzvot* would they be able to preserve their holiness as children of the Almighty. The Gaon Chida explains that this was Yosef's intention when he said to Pharaoh "וּחַמַשׁ אֶת אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם."<sup>3</sup> Yosef was outlining a strategy to aid the Jewish nation to leave *Mitzrayim* only after being in slavery for a fifth of the 430 years. Additionally, Yosef was insinuating these three distinctive *mitzvot* in the word *חמשה*. The acronym of *חמשה* (ו) alludes to, *חודש* (*Rosh Chodesh*), *מילה* (*Brit Mila/Circumcision*), & *שבת* (*Shabbat*). Through the observance of these *mitzvot* the slavery would be shortened to 86 years, a fifth of the 430 years, and the Jewish nation would be granted an early dismissal.

The Gaon Chida extends this insight to reveal why generations later the Greeks specifically restrained the

Jewish nation from performing these three *mitzvot*. The Greeks wanted to deplete our significant relationship with Hashem. Their goal was to jeopardize our prestigious status as children of the Almighty, so we could no longer be under His divine protection. By abolishing these three *mitzvot* the Jewish nation would lose their identity as G-d's children and submerge themselves to the other nations of the world. The Gaon Chida extends his enlightening perspective by answering the famous question of Maran Bet Yosef (1488-1575), as to why *Chanukah* is eight days, if in reality the miracle of the oil was only for seven.<sup>4</sup> The Gaon Chida explains that the three *mitzvot* the Greeks desired to abolish are prodigiously hidden in the Holiday of *Chanukah*. Every *Chanukah* has a *Shabbat & Rosh Chodesh*.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, although the miracle was only for seven days, the eight days of *Chanukah* are meant to correlate to the eight days of *Brit Milah*.

The Ben Ish Chai (1835-1909)<sup>6</sup> extends the Gaon Chida's perspective

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3 בראשית מא:לד "עָשָׂה פְּרֵעָה וַיִּקְדֹּד וַיִּקְדֹּד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַחֲמִשׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְעַת שָׁנֵי הַשָּׂבָע:"  
 "And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty."

4 The Bet Yosef asks: "If the eight days of *Chanukah* are in remembrance of the jug of oil lasting for eight days when it was only meant to last for one, then *Chanukah* should be celebrated for seven days & not eight, since the first day wasn't a miracle."

5 *Rosh Chodesh* Tevet always falls out at the end of *Chanukah*.

6 Ben Ish Chai *Parshat Vayeshev* 1.

to give a deeper<sup>7</sup> understanding as to why we have the custom to eat dairy on *Chanukah*. The word חלב (milk) corresponds to these three *mitzvot*. The "ח" represents the first letter of חדש (*Rosh Chodesh*), the letter "ל" represents the middle letter of מילה (*Brit Milah/Circumcision*), and the "ב" represents the middle letter of שבת (*Shabbat*).

*Chanukah* is the last holiday in Jewish history to be implemented by *Chazal* in the Jewish calendar. The story of *Chanukah* demonstrates to us the everlasting lesson of Jewish survival. Our Torah observance and relationship with the Almighty is the

only way for us to preserve our Jewish identity through spiritual dark times. The Gaon Chida displays to us that it is only through the perseverance of our relationship with the Almighty that we were able to make it through harsh times in history. Most of us have not experienced what we are experiencing today. The rampant spiritual desire from all demographics of Jewry to observe more is beyond belief. Our willingness to put our differences aside and prioritize our relationship with the Almighty should serve as a merit for the Jewish nation.

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<sup>7</sup> The simple reason as to why we have the custom to eat dairy on *Chanukah* is in commemoration of Yehudit's courage for killing the Greek general after feeding him cheese and wine.

## ***Pirsumei Nisa* | Continued from Page 6**

more we delve into understanding the nature of the miracle, and the more Torah we derive from it, the closer we are to the depth of what *Chanukah* is here to teach us. May we all merit to learn a little bit more

this חנוכה than last year and to get closer to Hashem and to a true appreciation of His Torah through the unique nature of של פרסומי ניסא חנוכה.

## Ner Chanukah and Shalom

Rabbi Chaim Twerski

Rosh Yeshiva, Hebrew Theological College

Rabbi, Bais Chaim Dovid



רמב"ם הלכות חנוכה פרק ד: מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד וצריך אדם להזהר בה כדי להודיע הנס ולהוסיף בשבח הק-ל והודיה לו על הנסים שעשה לנו, אפילו אין לו מה יאכל אלא מן הצדקה שואל או מוכר כסותו ולקח שמן ונרות ומדליק. הרי שאין לו אלא פרוטה אחת ולפניו קידוש היום והדלקת נר חנוכה מקדים לקנות שמן להדליק נר חנוכה על היין לקידוש היום הואיל ושניהם מדברי סופרים מוטב להקדים נר חנוכה שיש בו זכרון הנס. היה לפניו נר ביתו ונר חנוכה או נר ביתו וקדוש היום נר ביתו קודם משום שלום ביתו שהרי השם נמחק לעשות שלום בין איש לאשתו, גדול השלום שכל התורה ניתנה לעשות שלום בעולם שנאמר (משלי ג') דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

**T**he Rambam ends the halachos of Chanukah with the following words.

*The mitzva of Ner Chanukah is a very precious mitzvah. One must take care to do this mitzvah in order to publicize the miracle and one should add praises and thanks to Hashem for those miracles that He performed for us. Even if a person is so poor that he depends on alms for his food, he should still borrow money or even sell his shirt in order to acquire money to buy oil and lamps to light the Chanukah candle.*

*If a person has but one perutah and has the option of buying wine for kiddush or a candle for Chanukah he should prioritize the purchase of oil to light the candle over the purchase of wine for kiddush. Since each of these is equally a rabbinical obligation it is better to give preference to Ner Chanukah which has the advantage of being a remembrance of the miracles.*

*If one has a choice between the candle for his house or Ner Chanukah, or if the choice was between wine for kiddush and a candle for the house, the candle for the house takes precedence, for the sake of peace in the home. Great is peace, for Hashem's name is erased in order to promote peace between and man and his wife. How great is peace, for the entire Torah is given in order to bring peace to the world as it is written [concerning the Torah], "Its ways are all pleasant and all its pathways are peace."*

The Rambam closed *hilchos Chanukah* and *Sefer Zemanim* with poetic flair. This is not unusual, for he did so at the conclusion of other *sefarim* of *Mishnah Torah* as well. Nonetheless, he seems to stress the concept of *shalom* excessively in explaining why the *mitzvah* of נר ביתו

נר and יין לקידוש takes priority over חנוכה.

The source of the *halachos* regarding which *mitzvah* to prioritize is from a *memra* of Rava (שבת כג:), taken almost word for word. Rashi, commenting on נר ביתו states that this means the *mitzvah* of candles for Shabbos. He references a *Gemorah* later (שבת כה:) which comments on a *passuk* in *Eicha* lamenting on what was lost in the *Churban*- וחזנה משלום, נפשי-זה נר שבת, “Peace has left me,” this refers to [the lack of] *ner Shabbos*.

It would make sense to say this, since comparing one *mitzvah* with another is deciding which to give preference. We wouldn't expect that this should refer to a mundane act.

However, it seems clear that the Rambam did. He makes no mention of נר ביתו as referring to the Shabbos candle. Indeed, the term for the *mitzvah* of Shabbos lights throughout the Talmud is always נר שבת. As we are aware, the ברכה that is recited is להדליק נר שבת or להדליק נר של שבת, not להדליק נר הבית. The Rambam's *halacha* indicates that the regular candle for the home on any night of the week is that important that it overrides the *mitzvah* of *Ner Chanukah* despite the extreme importance of the latter (indeed, this interpretation of the Talmudic passage can also be gleaned from the *Ritva*, *Shabbos* 23b). Sitting

in the dark is not conducive to *shalom bayis*, and the need for *shalom* trumps both *Ner Chanukah* and wine for *kiddush*. There is abundant logic to apply this requirement to every night, for are we to be concerned about peace of the home only on the night of Shabbos? Isn't this equally true every night of the week?

If so, we can understand why the Rambam stresses the importance of peace, and how central it is to the Torah itself. After writing how important is the *mitzvah* of *Ner Chanukah*, and how one places it above wine for *kiddush*, and how even the poorest of the poor should either borrow money or sell clothing to obtain provisions for the *Chanukah* candle, he informs us that above that is the simple candle of the house, on a regular weekday. Light promotes peace in the house, whereas darkness promotes sadness and depression. The *Chanukah* candles cannot provide both, since *Chanukah* candles are placed outside the house, and furthermore, we are not permitted to benefit from its light. Therefore, despite the high importance of the *mitzvah* of *Ner Chanukah*, one must use the one candle for the home and omit the *mitzvah* of *Ner Chanukah*. Rava, the author of this statement, did not bring authoritative proof to his assertion. He stated at the outset that this is so obvious that proof is not needed!

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**Featuring Rav Yona Reiss**

Av Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council

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