



Chicago Rabbinical Council

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

Divrei Torah

CHANUKAH 5786



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RABBI YOSEF POSNER

There is No Other Choice

Rav Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din



At the time of the Chanukah miracle, the heroic *Chashmonaim* had to admit that things looked very bleak. Not only were they subject to the perfidious influence of the Greek-Seleucid Empire which sought to bring the forces of Hellenization upon the Jewish people, but they needed to contend with the traitors within their own midst – the *Misyavnim* – who enthusiastically joined in the efforts towards Jewish assimilation. The Ba'al Hamaor (*Nedarim* 62b) avers that the defilement of the stones of the Holy Altar in the Temple took place at the hands of these renegade Jews.

Nonetheless, despite the challenges from both without and within, the *Chashmonaim* persisted, knowing that their victory would surely depend upon a miracle. Even after vanquishing their enemies and reclaiming the Temple grounds, when halakhic principles would have allowed them to light the menorah with impure oil, they refused to compromise one iota and once again relied on miraculous Divine intervention that enabled one night's worth of oil to last for eight days.

Rav Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* in his *Michtav Me'eliahu* (*Inyanei Chanukah and Purim*, pp. 22-26) explains that the impetus for the iron-willed determination of the *Chashmonaim* under such trying and seemingly insurmountable circumstances was the attitude of “אין ברירה” – that there was no other choice. When the honor of Hashem and the future of Torah observance were being threatened, there could be no surrender. Even if they did not have the wherewithal to prevail under normal

circumstances, the *Chashmonaim* knew that they had an obligation to fight for the sake of Hashem because there simply was no other option.

This sense of indomitable spirit can be compared to the passage that we recite in the *Hallel*, which according to the codification of the *Rambam*, has a central place in the observance of the Chanukah holiday. Dovid Hamelech states (*Tehillim* 118: 10-12) כל גוים סבבוני בשם ה' כי אמילם. סבוני גם סבבוני בשם ה' כי אמילם. סבוני כדבורים – דעכו כאש קוצים בשם ה' כי אמילם – “all nations surrounded me; in the name of Hashem I shall cut them off. They encircled me, they surrounded me; in the name of Hashem, I shall cut them off. They encircled me like bees; they extinguished like a thorn fire. In the name of Hashem, I shall cut them off” [translation adapted from *Chabad*]. Even in the face of relentless odds, Dovid Hamelech recognized that he still needed to fight in the name of Hashem.

Ultimately, this strong-willed perseverance by Dovid in the face of adversity led to the following verse (*Tehillim* 118:13): דחה דחיתני לנפל וה' עזרני, – “you (i.e., the enemy) pushed me to fall, but Hashem helped me.” So too in the case of the *Chashmonaim*, explains Rav Dessler, it was the spirit of אֵין בְּרִירָה that led to victory. This can also be compared to Avrohom's willingness to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than betray his embrace of monotheism. By contrast, his brother Haran, whom according to *midrashic* sources, made a calculation that he would only agree to be thrown into the

furnace if Avrohom was saved, was not spared, because he failed to demonstrate the commitment of *אין ברירה* to stand up for Divine principles of truth.

We say at the time of lighting the Chanukah candles *שעשה נסים לאבותינו* - "Who has performed miracles for our forefathers, in those days, at this time." It is essential to recognize that the spirit of *אין ברירה* must inform our current response "at this time" to world events. More than at any other time in recent memory, we are confronted by forces both from without and within assailing our right to exist as Jews and our fundamental Torah values. Sometimes the fight against these powerful forces seems hopeless and futile. Nonetheless, we are reminded that it is precisely at such a time that we need to be suffused with the spirit of *אין ברירה*. We must stand up for ourselves, for our Torah, and for the sake of Hashem.

Based on the example of the *Chashmonaim*, if we conduct ourselves in this manner of *אין ברירה*, we too can have the faith and confidence that not only will we receive help and succor from Hashem, but that we will be able to declare with jubilation the following verse (*Tehillim* 118:14) *עזי*

וזמרת ה' ויהי לי לישועה - "the strength and the praise of Hashem served as my salvation" (translation based on *Metzudas Dovid* and *Metzudas Tzion* commentaries). We must not give up during these trying times, but instead we need to recognize with greater zeal and fervor than ever before, that this is time for us to fight for Hashem, and if we do so, we can count on Him to fight for us.

The *halacha* is like *Abayei* (with respect to lost articles) (*Bava Metzia* 21b) that *ייאוש שלא מדעת לא הוי ייאוש* - meaning that if a person loses an object and didn't realize that he had lost the object yet (even though he would have given up hope had he known the object was missing) that doesn't count as giving up hope, and therefore the finder may not keep the object. Based on this principle, the *Baalei Mussar* emphasize that in spiritual matters, any kind of giving up hope is "without realization," i.e., lacking in understanding, and therefore doesn't count. When it comes to overcoming the enemies of Jews and Judaism, there can be no such thing as *ייאוש* - of giving up hope. We have the right and responsibility to fight for the truth of Torah always, just like in the days of the Chanukah miracle.

A freilichen und lichtige Chanukah! ■



The Spiritual DNA of the Jewish People

Rabbi Michael Myers

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Shortly after being sold to an uncertain fate in Egypt, Yosef was acquired by Potifar, chief executioner to Pharaoh who quickly recognized the teenager's extraordinary talents. Yosef rose to a position of prominence where he quite literally caught the eye of Potifar's wife who attempted to seduce him. The Torah prefaces his response with one word, וימאן, refusal!

Among the rarest of the Torah's cantillation notes the "שלשלת", appears only four times in all of *Chumash*. Because of the unique vocal demands that it requires of the Torah reader and its helix-like structure in appearance, the *Shalsholet* arouses great anticipation in those attending the Torah reading.

Its first appearance is recorded during the account of the destruction of Sodom, above the word "ויתמהמה" (*Beraishit* 19:16) "he lingered" stressing the hesitation of Lot at the thought of leaving his possessions behind in his flight from the doomed city (*Unkelos* and *Rashi*). It appears again at a critical moment in Yosef's life. However, now the *Shalsholet* is placed above the word "וימאן" "refusal," a term that conjures the image of determined resolve.

In his classic work on Torah, *HaKetav V'haKabala*, Rav Yaakov Tzvi Meklenberg taught that the טעם (cantillation) over the word "וימאן" indicates Yosef's utter rejection of the seduction proposed by Potifar's wife. From the trop employed we become privy to intentions not expressly recorded in the text.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik observes that Yosef's refusal "stemmed from the unbroken chain of previous generations – the *Shalsholet*—his genealogy, his patrilineal descent—which impelled him to declare his refusal to be seduced. This unwillingness and obduracy surfaces instinctively; it is the characteristic of the Jewish people throughout the millennia....This obduracy is not rooted in logic or reason. It is an instinctive reaction. Dormant in the souls of the simple Jews lay engraved the trait of 'וימאן'."

Here, Rabbi Soloveitchik introduces the inspiring notion that Yosef's character was the product of the spiritual lineage of the men and women who were his ancestors, and that through them the spiritual transmission is activated, not by conscious nurturing, but "lies dormant" in every Jewish soul. In other words, "refusal" is a part of the Jewish DNA!

Perhaps we need not limit Jewish spiritual DNA to the transmission of the "Refusal Trait" alone. From the spellbinding story of Yosef and his brothers there emerges yet another mark of the Jewish generational linkage. When the brothers returned from Egypt without their brother Shimon and with Yosef's demand that Binyamin must accompany the brothers on their return, their father, Yaakov was heartbroken. All attempts by the brothers to persuade him to allow Binyamin to join them failed – until Yehuda proclaimed, אנכי אערבנו מידי תבקשני, I will be his guarantor. Hold me accountable

for his safe return.” In effect, Yehuda was willing to do anything necessary, including to offer himself in place of Binyamin should that be required.

These words of Yehuda resonate across the centuries. To paraphrase Rabbi Soloveitchik’s inspiring assertion, spiritual transmission is not activated by conscious nurturing. It “lies dormant” in every Jewish soul. Each Jew bears responsibility for the welfare of every other Jew. In other words, the “Trait of the Guarantor” is a part of the Jewish DNA.

As I compose this article, we received the bittersweet news that Hadar Goldin, HYD, is finally being lathe sacred soil of the land that he died defending. For eleven years, he lay lifeless and alone beneath the

sands of Gaza. But, the State of Israel, the collective persona of the Jewish people, through the bravery of its soldiers, and with Hashem’s loving guidance, has fulfilled the promise of our ancestor, Yehuda. אנכי אערבנו - מידי תבקשנו - “We shall guarantee his return” regardless of how long it may take!

The “Jewish Trait of Refusal” eliminated every hate-filled threat, while the “Jewish Trait of the Guarantor” taught the entire world the true meaning of אהבת ישראל.

May we, on this Chanukah resolve to resist the many enticements that threaten our mission in this world and may we proclaim our gratitude for Hashem’s kindness with unsurpassed fervor:

על הגסים ועל הפרקן ועל הגבורות ועל התשועות
ועל המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם
בזמן הזה!! ■



Chanukah: A Clarion Call for Clarity

Rabbi Chaim Pollock

Dean Emeritus and Senior Consultant, Michlalah Yerushalayim



It may not be well known, and perhaps it may seem peculiar, but our sages were connoisseurs of bread, wine and oil and more; they knew how to discern the best from the runners-up and even gave rankings: alpha being the highest. However, those ratings were not for chefs; they were made for the *kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdosh* to use the choicest items for the various *korbonos* that they offered, as we learn in *Masseches Menachos* (*Perek* 9).

Olive oil was used for the daily lighting of the menorah and the daily grain-offerings. *Chazal* teach that even though various grades of olive oil could be used for the grain-offerings, only its supreme level met the requisite standard for the menorah. That oil was derived from the very best of olives and obtained in a slow and careful process to produce the most refined and purest of oils.

We learn in *Masseches Bava Basra* (25 b):

הרצוה שיחכים ידרימ... וסימניך... ומנורה בדרום:

One who seeks wisdom will posture himself somewhat to the south when davening. The menorah is its symbol because its place is in the southern section of the *Beis HaMikdosh*.

What is the connection between wisdom and the menorah? Can the menorah provide instruction in *Gemara* or in mathematics?

זית, שמן, is particularly clear and that which was used for the menorah was uniquely pure. Thus, the wisdom that a person seeks, one who turns southerly, towards the menorah, is of unadulterated clarity. The key to all wisdom is clarity of thought (See *Pirkei Mavo* of *Nesivos*

Shalom). Without clarity of thought, accurate comprehension is impossible. The greater the confusion, the greater the likelihood that understanding will be limited or, even worse, will be understood in a manner completely opposite of its intended meaning.

What is the underlying idea that transforms the menorah into the vehicle through which we celebrate Chanukah?

Chanukah and Purim are the two *Yomim Tovim* that were designated by *Chazal*. Their celebrations are different because the nature of their salvational miracles differ and so it follows that their commemorations must be distinct.

Mishnah Brurah (670/2) explains why Chanukah is celebrated only with the menorah, *Hallel* and *Al Hanissim*, whereas Purim is celebrated with food and drink, together with the reading of the *Megillah* and *Al Hanissim*. Purim commemorates physical safety and redemption. Haman



wanted to annihilate Am Yisrael and we celebrate our redemption with appropriate physical signs of life: eating, drinking and interpersonal camaraderie.

Chanukah was a struggle for the *neshama* of the Jewish People and its redemption was marked by rededication of the menorah, lit with precious and pristine olive oil. Our celebration of Chanukah is to honor a purely spiritual event and thus, that remembrance must be particularly spiritual.

The olive oil of Chanukah was to provide clarity of wisdom - complete coherence regarding the event, when it took place and in its annual commemoration. Clearness and lucidity are demanded if our celebration is to be honest and authentic. The event was spiritual and when precisely and appropriately remembered, our spirituality is continually enhanced and inspired throughout the ages.

The need for such clarity is ongoing, even more so when our Holy Sanctuary is awaiting its rebuilding. When I learned Chanukah songs as a child, we were taught to sing
מי ימלך גבורות ישראל...
בכל דור יקום הגבור גואל העם

We speak of the valor of Israel...in every generation there will arise a mighty one who will redeem the people.

I did not know then that these words were an obliteration of the message of Dovid HaMelech who writes in *Tehillim* (106/2):

מי ימלך גבורות ה' ישמיע כל תהלתו:

Who will express the might of Hashem,
let all hear His praise!

I did not know then that there was such a verse and even when I did discover it, the contrariness of our Chanukah song escaped me until many years later.

When *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* authored *Al HaNissim*, they contrasted the *Hasmoneans* with their enemies in five ways, on two planes: physical and

spiritual. The physical shows the odds that were against us. Pointedly, our brave and courageous ancestors were referred to as *חלשים*, weak as well as *מעטים*, few and outnumbered. The enemy was described as *גבורים*, mighty warriors, and *רבים*, possessing overwhelming numbers. There was no mistaking the fact that were it not for G-d, their rebellion would have been stillborn. Were it not for the spiritual profile of the *Hasmoneans* noted by their purity (*טהורים*), righteousness (*צדיקים*) and dedication to Hashem's Torah (*עוסקי תורתך*), and their enemies being the complete opposite, our lot would have been one of total defeat.

The battle cry of the *Chashmonaim* was *מי לה' אלי*; echoing the ancient words of Moshe Rabbeinu as he battled the Golden Calf. They had no doubt that they were the representatives of Hashem. They fought valiantly; but the battle was His! They were His servants demonstrating superior dedication in their belief and stirring future generations to not wave a white flag before enemies whom it seems impossible to defeat.

A *bracha* that we recite nightly when lighting the menorah, the beacon of clarity, concludes with the words *בזמן הזה*, in those days, at this time.

בזמן הזה, in those days our ancestors had clarity. We must seek that very same clarity *בזמן הזה*, recognizing the Divine Providence that unfalteringly continues guiding us as we come ever closer to the long-awaited *שלמה*. ■

Money May Talk, but Listen to the Chanukah Gelt

Rabbi Yosef Posner

Rabbi, Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie



Why do we give Chanukah gelt on Chanukah? What connection is there between Chanukah and gifts of money?

The Magen Avraham writes at the beginning of the Laws of Chanukah (OC 670), that it is customary for the children of the poor to go around to Jewish homes collecting money during Chanukah.

This can be further explained as being rooted in the *halachos* regarding whether the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights takes precedence over other mitzvos such as wine for *Kiddush* or candles for Shabbos in a case where the person does not have funds for both. By establishing the practice of giving money to the poor on Chanukah we avoid putting them in a situation where they need to choose between oil for Chanukah lights and wine or candles for *Kiddush*.

But that only explains why there is a custom of giving increased *tzedakah* during Chanukah. It does not explain why we give Chanukah gelt to all children rich and poor, including our own.

The Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Schneerson, in a short letter written Erev Chanukah 1935 (*Igros Levi Yitzchak*, page 358) offers an interesting insight.

He notes that there is a reference to Chanukah and money in the *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 22a): "It is prohibited to count money by a Chanukah light." The *Gemara* is teaching that it is prohibited to make use of the Chanukah light. But, why the specific example of counting money? It seems that there is some reason specifically on Chanukah to have money to count, and therefore the *Gemara* needs to tell us, "don't

do it near the Chanukah lights!"

Perhaps that reason for handing and giving the money is in order to be able to make this very statement that the money is to be kept away from the Chanukah lights. We give the money to the children to be able to say to them that as good as money may be, it doesn't come close to the light of Torah and mitzvos. "The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of gold and silver." (*Tehillim* 119:72)

Now, if the idea is to show that the light of Chanukah, the light of Torah and mitzvos, is more important than money, gold and silver, why not just leave money out entirely?

The holiday is called Chanukah and the word Chanukah is related to the Hebrew word *chinuch*. *Chinuch* is often translated as education or training. *Chinuch* also means dedication or induction by beginning to use an item for its intended purpose (see *Rashi, Lech L'cha* 14:14, for example). So,



Chanukah is related to education and especially to the beginning of education, i.e. the introduction of children to the study of Torah.

When children are just starting out, we don't expect them to learn Torah out of appreciation of the fact that it is G-d's Will and Wisdom, or because it is the guide to holy living. Rather, we offer incentives such as sweets and money (see Rambam's introduction to *Perek Chelek*) so that the young minds should associate Torah with pleasures that a child can relate to. So, we give the children money on Chanukah, but at the same time caution them not to count their Chanukah *gelt* by the light of the Chanukah candles. This communicates to the child that while for now they may think money is valuable, they should be aware that there is something much more valuable. The light of Torah and mitzvos is so valuable that money can't even come close.⁰

Money is a medium of exchange and represents everything of value in the material world. Chanukah *gelt* is a reminder that money is useful only if we can keep it in perspective and realize that there are higher things which money cannot duplicate. When we view money that way, we realize that we need to use money the way that

Hashem would like us to, giving some of it to *tzedakah* and using the rest of it in ways that bring G-dliness into the world. This goes against the prevalent tendency for an abundance of money to lead to indulgence in ways that are more darkness than light. And this is the message of Chanukah, to overcome the darkness and bring light into the darker recesses of the world.

The Greeks wanted to remove our connection to the spiritual and G-dly, and to have us focus only on the material. On Chanukah we reject that and insist that the material be infused with holiness. So, we give the children money representing the material world, with the message that this is not just money; it is Chanukah *gelt*, money which is infused with the power of Chanukah, when the "pure prevail over the impure, and those who engage in Torah prevail over those who do evil." Money can be used for *tzedakah*, to buy items needed for other mitzvos such as *tzitzis* and *matzah*, or to serve Hashem in our everyday lives by buying and eating kosher food, and so on.

Through our using our money as Chanukah *gelt*, money which spreads the light of Chanukah, may we hasten the moment of the revelation of *Moshiach* NOW! ■



FROM THE Dayan's Desk

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Av Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council

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