
CHANUKAH II

THE CHANUKAH MIRACLES

How They Were Triggered and What They Teach

The first Morasha class on Chanukah discussed the nature of the conflict with Greece and the decrees they imposed. In this second Morasha class on Chanukah we will address the nature, symbolism, and implications of the Chanukah miracles. The third Morasha shiur will address the symbolism of the Menorah and how we commemorate Chanukah today.

This class seeks to understand:

- What were the two miracles of Chanukah?
- What is the connection between the nature of the Chanukah miracles and the Greek assault against the Jewish people?
- If God's *modus operandi* is minimizing the openness of miracles, why did He find it necessary to bring about the two Chanukah miracles?
- What is the significance of the Chanukah miracles, and miracles in general?

Class Outline:

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INTRODUCTION. A SOFT WINTER LANDING FOR A JET ON THE HUDSON

Mir'a'cle – (noun) – A wonderful happening that is contrary to, or independent of the known laws of nature (Thorndike Barnhart Dictionary).

We can be awed by events which have been called miraculous, as illustrated in the following article:

US Airways Flight 1549 with 155 people aboard lost power in both engines from striking birds after taking off from La Guardia Airport on Thursday afternoon. The pilot ditched in the icy Hudson River and all on board were rescued by a flotilla of converging ferries and emergency boats, the authorities said.

What might have been a catastrophe in New York – one that evoked the feel if not the scale of the September 11 attack – was averted by a pilot's quick thinking and deft maneuvers, and by the nearness of rescue boats, a combination that witnesses and officials called miraculous.

“We've had a miracle on 34th Street,” Governor David A. Paterson said at a late-afternoon news conference in Manhattan. “I believe now we've had a miracle on the Hudson. This pilot, somehow, without any engines was somehow able to land this plane. This is a potential tragedy that may have become one of the most magnificent days in the history of New York City. (Based on, Miracle on the Hudson, New York Times, January 16, 2009.)

Some miracles extend over long periods of time:

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, prompting the Gulf War, the US attacked Iraq on January 15, 1991. Saddam Hussein vowed to “incinerate” Israel with his Scud missiles. While the US ordered Israel to refrain from self-defense and retaliation, Iraq showered 39 Scud missiles over three months on the most densely populated area of Israel. Miraculously, only one Israeli was killed. In the wake of this war, the prestigious scientific journal Nature, as well as M.I.T., published articles trying to evaluate how Israel was spared massive tragedy. Scientifically and militarily, the casualties should have been far greater. In previous wars elsewhere in the world in which V-2 Scud missiles were launched, massive casualties ensued. (Based on simpletoremember.com)

Some miracles are breathtaking in their magnitude, such as the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea in Egypt. A recent example was the Six Day War:

In May 1967, Egyptian and Syrian troops massed on Israel's borders, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, and Egyptian President Gamel Abdal Nasser filled the airwaves with calls to drive the Jews into the sea. The mood in the 19-year-old-country of Israel was bleak. Facing five well equipped, Soviet trained Arab armies, Israel's defeat was virtually a foregone conclusion. The black humor on everyone's lips that Spring was: “The last one out, don't forget to turn off the lights.” Everyone knows that instead of defeat, Israel achieved a miraculous, stunning victory. On June 5 at 7:46 AM, Israeli planes destroyed the entire Egyptian air force on the ground. In six days, Israel tripled its territory, gaining the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, including Jerusalem's Old City and Temple Mount. (Based on Yocheved Rigler, Hidden Miracles, aish.com.)

One's appreciation for a miracle can last a lifetime, as the survivors and beneficiaries of the Six-Day War, the Gulf War, and Flight 1549 can attest. However, in the case of Chanukah, there is an additional unexpected consequence – the miracles of the war and the Menorah are not only one-time events that reshaped Jewish history, rather, the dedication of the Jewish people that led to these miracles also inspired an eternal, Divinely infused spiritual energy that is revealed each Chanukah, and is available to every Jew. By exploring the nature of the Chanukah miracles and why God made them, combined with a deep understanding of how Chanukah is commemorated, we can harness the extraordinary opportunity for spiritual growth that Chanukah provides us each year.

SECTION I. THE CHANUKAH MIRACLES

The Ramban (Nachmanides) states in Bereishit/Genesis (6:19) that God's ideal is to run the world minimizing overt miracles. Nevertheless, occasionally the Jewish nation has witnessed extraordinary open miracles, such as the Ten Plagues in Egypt, and the splitting of the Reed Sea. The Ramban explains in Shemot/Exodus (13:16) that these miracles were a one-time demonstration to instill faith in the Jewish people that He is the only God, guiding the world with Divine Providence.

If God's *modus operandi* is minimizing miracles, why did He find it necessary to bring about the two Chanukah miracles: the victory in the Syrian-Greek war and the oil in the Menorah burning eight days instead of one? Furthermore, if the Greeks had already interrupted the Temple service for three years, why was the miracle of the Menorah so pressing when the Jewish people only needed eight days to replenish their oil supply? To answer these questions, we need to understand the nature of the Greek assault against the Jews.

PART A. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GREEK ASSAULT AND THE CHANUKAH MIRACLES

The Chanukah miracles are in effect a Divine statement with regard to the philosophy of the Greeks, whose ideology begged to undermine the fundamentals of Judaism. As we explained in the first Morasha Chanukah shiur, the main thrust of the Greek weltanschauung was the self-sufficiency of mankind, and the corresponding lack of Divine intervention in the affairs of the world. What you see, stated the Greek worldview, is what there is, and nothing beyond. The miracles of Chanukah came to uproot this philosophy.

1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, pp. 82 – The Greeks viewed the world as a random collection of events.

The outlook of the Greek thinkers was in opposition to the teachings of the Torah. The Greek position is that the world always existed and God did not create the universe from absolute nothingness, and He has no ability to change anything in the world. According to them, the world "always was, is, and will be," for it always existed, and is not susceptible to change.

From this we derive another principle of the Greeks: that the forces of nature rule the world. All circumstances and events throughout a person's life are not in compensation for any good or bad actions (they deny the Jewish principle of faith of God's capabilities and reward and punishment) rather they are consequences of totally random acts of nature ...

דעת חכמי היוונים - בניגוד לאמונת התורה - היא שהעולם הוא קדמון והשי"ת לא חידשו מן האין המוחלט, ואין ביכולתו לשנות בעולם מאומה. ולפי שיטתם העולם הוא "היה, הוה, יהיה" כי הוא קדום ובלתי ניתן לשינוי.

ומכך נובע יסוד נוסף בהשקפת עולמם, והוא שכוחות הטבע הם השולטים בבריאה וכל המאורעות והמקרים העוברים על האדם בימי חייו אינם באים עליו כגמול על מעשיו הטובים והרעים (וכפרו ביסוד אמונת ישראל של יכולת ה' ושכר ועונש) אלא הם תולדות הטבע העיוור באופן מקרי לחלוטין...

2. Ibid. – Judaism believes in creation ex-nihilo and Divine Providence; the concealment of God in nature enables free will.

Jewish belief is opposed in principle to the

אמונת ישראל מנוגדת בתכלית לדעת חכמי יוון

Greek philosophers and their thinking. Our belief is that God alone created the world from absolute nothingness and created everything according to the Torah ... This means that God, and not forces of nature, continually directs the world and everything in it, corresponding to the good and bad actions of the Jewish people in their fulfillment of the Torah and mitzvot, with a particular supervision for the good of Israel ...

Therefore, the Torah and the Jewish people are the prime inner causative factors for the general and specific events that occur in the course of history. And that which appears superficially – that the forces of nature rule the world in a seemingly completely haphazard manner – is a concealment by God to enable man to have free will. In fact, the laws of nature are only an external covering for the spiritual foundations of God's concealed Divine Providence of the Jewish people at all times, which is an ongoing hidden miracle.

Through this concealment, everything runs according to a "natural framework." God provides the opportunity for whoever wants to mistakenly deny Divine Providence to do so, and this enables free will.

והשקפתם, אמונתנו היא שהשי"ת לבדו חידש את העולם מהאין המוחלט ובראו על פי התורה... כלומר הקב"ה - ולא כוחות הטבע - מנהיג את העולם ואת כל אשר בו בכל עת, על פי מעשיהם הטובים והרעים של עם ישראל בקיום התורה והמצוות, בהשגחה פרטית לצרכם של ישראל...

נמצא שהתורה וישראל הם הסיבה האמיתית- הפנימית לכל המאורעות הכלליים והפרטיים במהלך ההיסטוריה, ומה שנדמה במבט שטחי שכוחות הטבע הם השולטים בבריאה ומנהיגים אותה מעצמם במקריות גמורה, את ההסתרה הזו עשה השי"ת כדי לתת לאדם את אפשרות הבחירה, ובאמת הנהגת הטבע היא רק לבוש חיצוני לשורשים הרוחניים של הנהגת ה' הפנימית בהשגחה פרטית על עם ישראל בכל עת, שהיא נס נסתר תמידי.

... על ידי ההסתרה הזו שהכל מתנהל במסגרת הטבעית, נתן השי"ת את האפשרות לטעות ולהכחיש השגחת ה' למי שרוצה בכך, ובוז מתקיימת הבחירה החופשית של האדם.

3. **Ibid. p. 84 – God provided the Chanukah miracles in response to the Jews' dedication to Judaism, revealing His Presence and thereby refuting Greek disbelief.**

Based on the Greek worldview described above, that the Greeks focused on the external, physical running of the world ..., the Greeks battled to nullify the Jewish belief in God, which is the deeper reality of the world, as well as the Torah – the goal of which is to improve and refine the inner character of a person. Since the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans) went beyond the natural boundaries of behavior by giving of themselves totally and selflessly for the pure concealed faith in the Torah, therefore God conducted Himself directly according to their behavior and made an open miracle for them – the miracle of the oil that broke the boundaries of nature.

לפי האמור במהות השקפת העולם של היוונים, שכל חכמתם היא חיצונית, והם מאמינים רק בכוחות הטבע החיצוניים, לכן לחמו לבטל מישראל את האמונה בהשי"ת שהיא פנימית, ולבטל את התורה שהיא חכמה פנימית ומטרתה להטיב ולשפר את האישיות הפנימית של האדם. ומכיוון שהחשמונאים התנשאו מעל למגבלות הטבע ומסרו את נפשם למען הפנימיות הטהורה של האמונה והתורה, לכן השי"ת התנהג עמם בהנהגת מידה כנגד מידה ועשה להם נס גלוי – נס השמן השובר את מגבלות הטבע.

While prophecy was present in the world, the intervention of God in worldly affairs remained revealed for all to see. The concept of prophecy, beginning with the prophecy of Moshe (Moses) and the word of God

that gave the Ten Commandments, forms an unquestionable link between humanity and the Divine that is beyond the level of this world. During the time of the Greek empire, and, specifically, when Alexander the Great spread the Greek worldview throughout the civilized world that he had conquered, prophecy departed from the world (*Seder Olam*, Ch. 30). The world ruled by Greek philosophy could not contain the direct Divine intervention of prophecy.

As the Midrash teaches (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:4), the Greek exile is therefore termed “darkness,” since Greek ideology plunged the world into spiritual darkness. Prophecy could not coexist with Greek philosophy, which conquered the world, and which remains dominant until this day. The miracles of Chanukah, which were initiated by the self-sacrifice of the Hasmoneans, came to offset this new state of spiritual darkness. In a darkened world, the miracles came to show that the intervention of the Divine is not absent, but only concealed.

PART B. THE MILITARY VICTORY

Chanukah commemorates two miracles – one military, the victory over the Greeks, and one of spiritual nature, the miracle of the Menorah. In this section we will briefly outline the miracle of the military victory.

1. **Based on Rabbi Berel Wein, *The Miracle of Chanukah*, www.jewishhistory.org and Rabbi Ken Spiro, *Crash Course in Jewish History #29*, www.aish.com – The Jewish revolt begins as a small band of priests catalyze the resistance against Greek religious oppression. They regain control of the Temple in Jerusalem and eventually carve out Jewish sovereignty against all odds.**

About the year 166 BCE, a group finally stood up to the Greeks: Matityahu and his family, known as the Hasmoneans. They were of noble descent from the priestly class (*Kohanim*), including those who had served as High Priests. They lived in a small town called Modi'in, which was about 12 miles northwest from Jerusalem. (The town exists today, and is about 20 miles west of modern Jerusalem.)

One day, a Greek contingent marched in, set up an altar, gathered all the Jews and forced them to sacrifice a non-kosher animal to Zeus. They then asked for a Jewish volunteer to perform the sacrifice. One stepped forward. As he approached the altar, Matityahu stabbed him to death. Chaos broke out. The Greek army attempted to subdue the crowd, but the Jews were armed and defeated the Greek patrol. There was no turning back now. Matityahu had five sons, all of whom were pious, committed Jews: Johanan (Yochanan), Simon (Shimon), Jonathan (Yonason), Judah (Yehudah), and Elazar.

They ran to the caves and organized an army – not to fight an open war, but a guerilla war. Originally they organized a force of about 3,000 men. Eventually it grew to 6,000 and never reached more than 12,000 men.

An enormous, highly trained Syrian-Greek army, numbering almost 50,000 men, with a herd of war elephants, marched into Judea. Judah the Maccabee marshaled his forces and with guile and courage outmaneuvered the far larger Greek army, forced it to divide and then destroyed its various components, killing many thousands and forcing the survivors to flee north to Syria.

The last famous battle was for the fortress of Antonius, which guarded the Temple. When Antonius fell, the Jews came back to the Temple. It took twenty-five years of fighting and a great many casualties on both sides until the Seleucid Greeks finally reached a peace agreement with the Jews.

The military victory is memorialized in the additional prayer added to the daily prayer service on Chanukah.

2. **Al HaNissim Liturgy – On Chanukah we praise God for the miraculous military victory.**

In the days of Matityahu the son of the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons; when the evil Greek Kingdom rose up against Your Nation Israel to make them forget Your Torah and to turn them away from the statutes of Your Will; You, in Your abundant mercy, stood by them in their time of distress. You defended their cause, You judged their grievances, You avenged their cause. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the diligent students of Your Torah. And You made Yourself a great and sanctified Name in Your world. And for Your people, Israel, You performed a great deliverance and redemption unto this very day.

Afterwards, Your sons entered the Holy of Holies of your Abode, cleaned Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, and kindled lights in Your holy Courtyards, and designated these eight days of Chanukah to thank and praise Your Great Name.

בימי מתית'הו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי ובניו.
 קשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל
 להשיבם תורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך:
 ואתה ברחמיך הרבים עמדת להם בעת צרתם.
 רבת את ריבם. דנת את דינם. נקמת את נקמתם.
 מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים. ורבים ביד מעטים. וטמאים
 ביד טהורים. ורשעים ביד צדיקים. וזדים ביד עוסקי
 תורתך. ולך עשית שם גדול וקדוש בעולמך. ולעמך
 ישראל עשית תשועה גדולה ופרקו פהיום הזה:

ואחר כן באו בניך לדיביר ביתך. ופנו את היכלך. וטהרו
 את מקדשך. והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך. וקבעו
 שמונת ימי חנכה אלו. להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול:

By describing the miracles in the terms that it does, the Al HaNissim prayer sheds light on the way the miracle worked.

3. **Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon, Matnas Chaim, p. 60 – Why did the Hasmoneans merit winning the war?**

Many people have difficulty understanding the “Al HaNissim” prayer. Of course, the fact that the weak conquered the mighty and the few conquered the many was a wondrous miracle, but what is miraculous about the impure falling into the hands of the pure, the evil into the hands of the righteous and the immoral into the hands of those who toil in Torah? ... It can be said that our Sages were coming to teach us *how* the miraculous victory of the few over the many came about – only because the Hasmoneans were pure, righteous, and toiled in Torah [did they merit this miracle].

על הנסים ועל הנפלאות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות
 שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה... מסרת
 גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים וטמאים ביד
 טהורים ורשעים ביד צדיקים וזדים ביד עוסקי תורתך.
 רבים מקשים דבשלמא גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד
 מעטים הרי זה נס ופלא, אבל מזהו המופת של טמאים
 ביד טהורים ורשעים ביד צדיקים וזדים ביד עוסקי
 תורתך... אפשר לומר שמהלכו של הנס שנו כאן,
 שבאו חז"ל בזה להאיר עינינו להכיר איך נצחו המעטים
 החלשים האלה את הגבורים הרבים ההם – הוי אומר
 מפני שהיו טהורים וצדיקים ועוסקי תורתך.

As noted in the first Morasha Class on Chanukah (Section V, Part A), the spiritual cause of the Greek oppression had been the Jews’ laxity in their service of God. The Al HaNissim prayer reminds us that the miracles of Chanukah occurred because the Maccabees fought fire with fire by reinvigorating Jewish commitment.

PART C. THE MIRACLE OF THE MENORAH

Chanukah is best known for the miracle of the one-day supply of oil burning for eight days in the Menorah. It is this central miracle that we directly commemorate in the lighting of the Chanukah lights.

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Shabbat 21b – What was the miracle of the oil?

What is Chanukah? ... When the Greeks entered the Holy Sanctuary they defiled all the oil that was there. And when the dynasty of the Hasmoneans grew strong and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil with the stamp of the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) that had been set aside; and there was only enough oil to burn for one day. A miracle occurred and they lit [the Menorah] from this oil for eight days. The following year, the Sages established these days for praise and thanks.

מאי חנוכה... שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית השמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו גם והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

We understand that the miracle was that the oil lasted for eight days, but why was such a miracle necessary? Does it really take eight full days to make olive oil?

2. Rabbi Yosef Karo, Beit Yosef on Tur, Orach Chaim 670 – Why was an eight-day miracle necessary?

The reason they needed to light the Menorah for eight days from that very container of oil was because all of the Jewish people were ritually impure [*tamei mait* from the war] and it was impossible to prepare new pure oil until a seven-day waiting period had passed, in addition to the one day required for the pressing of the olives and the procedure to prepare pure oil.

והטעם שהוצרכו להדליק שמנה ימים מאותו פך מפני שכל ישראל היו בחזקת טמאי מתים ואי אפשר להתקין שמן טהור עד שיעברו עליהם שבעה ימים מיום טומאתם ויום אחד לכתישת הזיתים ותיקונם להוציא מהם שמן טהור.

The first opinion cited above maintains that the Hasmoneans had to wait one week in order to purify themselves of the ritual impurity contracted by coming into contact with a human corpse. Since they had just fought a war, everyone had had such contact and was in need of purification. Another reason is offered for the necessity of eight days:

3. Ibid. – The oil was far away.

The Ran writes [the eight-day period was necessary for a different reason]: the pure oil was available at a distance of four days' travel, and eight days were necessary for the round trip.

והר"ן (שם) כתב שהיה להם שמן טהור רחוק ארבעה ימים והוצרכו שמנה ימים בין הליכה וחזרה:

So the oil lasted for eight days, but the flask already contained enough for one day. Doesn't that mean that the miracle was really only for seven days? Why then do we commemorate it with an eight-day holiday?

4. **Rabbi Yosef Karo, Beit Yosef on Tur, Orach Chaim 670 – Wasn't the miracle only for seven days?**

We need to understand why Chanukah was established for eight days, for since there was already enough oil in the flask for only one night surely the miracle lasted for only seven nights!

One explanation is that they divided the oil in the flask into eight portions and each night they put one portion into the Menorah and it remained lit until the morning, so we find that a miracle took place on each night ...

Another explanation is that after they poured the required amount of oil [from the flask] into the lamps of the Menorah, the flask remained as full of oil as it had been originally and the miracle was obvious even on the first night.

Another explanation is that on the first night they poured all the oil into the lamps and it stayed lit all night. In the morning they found the lamps full of oil, and this occurred on each of the [eight] nights.

ואיכא למידק למה קבעו שמנה ימים דכיון דשמן שבפך היה בו כדי להדליק לילה אחת ונמצא שלא נעשה הנס אלא בשבעה לילות.

ו"ל שחילקו שמן שבפך לשמנה חלקים ובכל לילה היו נותנים במנורה חלק אחד והיה דולק עד הבוקר ונמצא שבכל הלילות נעשה נס...

ועוד י"ל שלאחר שנתנו שמן בנרות המנורה כשיעור נשאר הפך מלא כבתחלה וניכר הנס אף בלילה הראשונה.

אי נמי שבלי לראשון נתנו כל השמן בנרות ודלקו כל הלילה ובבוקר מצאו הנרות מלאים שמן וכן בכל לילה ולילה:

These are just three of the possible resolutions to the question raised by Rabbi Yosef Karo, but hundreds of others have been offered over the years!

PART D. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO MIRACLES

We have seen that Chanukah celebrates two miracles, the war and the Menorah. How do these miracles combine in the single commemoration of the Chanukah festival of lighting the menorah?

1. **Maharal, Ner Mitzvah, p. 22 – The miracle of the oil comes to disabuse us of the notion that the war was won through human effort alone.**

The essence of the establishment of the festival of Chanukah was the military defeat of the Greeks, except that it was not apparent to them that this victory was a miracle ... Therefore, the miracle of the lights of the Menorah was performed for them so that they would know that everything was a miracle from God, Blessed be He.

...עיקר מה שקבעו ימי חנוכה בשביל שהיו מנצחים את היונים רק שלא היה נראה שהיה כאן נצחון הזה על ידי נס ... לפיכך נעשה הנס על ידי נרות המנורה שידעו שהכל היה בנס מן השם יתברך.

In keeping with the essential theme of the Chanukah miracle, which came to demonstrate the continued Divine intervention in worldly affairs (contrary to the Greek worldview), it is fitting that the principal miracle was specific to the Menorah, rather than to the war. The menorah is a spiritual essence that symbolizes Torah, and it was only here that a truly revealed miracle took place, shattering the regular order of nature.

The Greeks desired not the destruction of the Temple, but its defilement; they didn't mind if the Jews continued to exist as long as they were disconnected from any spiritual elevation. The miracle came to restore this elevation, which is manifest, more than anywhere else, in the Temple.

2. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 84 – The revealed miracle was with the oil, not the war.

God did not make the miracle in the war obvious – in an external way. For if He had done that, it would have been possible to mistakenly think that 1) the goal of the war was the quest for national statehood, and 2) the miracle of the oil came only to confirm this purpose... Rather, the revealed miracle that God made was *within* – inside the Temple – for its goal was spiritual: the observance of mitzvot and the lighting of the Menorah in purity.

The miracle was not only that the oil burned beyond the laws of nature, rather, even the very existence of the container of oil was miraculous. For the Greeks intentionally defiled the oil in order to abolish the Menorah service, and God hid this container of oil from them. Also, through this miracle came the expression of a concealed spiritual foundation, for the Jews found the container of oil with the seal of the High Priest, hidden within the Temple.

השי"ת לא עשה להם את הנס הגלוי במלחמותיהם – בחיצוניות, כי אילו היה עושה כך היה אפשר לסבור בטעות שכל מלחמתם היתה מלחמה לאומית-חיצונית כדי להשיג עצמאות מדינית-גשמית-חיצונית, וכפי המטרה שלמענה לחמו נעשה להם הנס, אלא השי"ת עשה להם את הנס בפנים – בתוך המקדש (ולא גלוי לכל) ובענין פנימי-רוחני שהוא קיום מצות הדלקת המנורה בטהרה.

הנס היה לא רק בשמן שדלק מחוץ לגררי הטבע, אלא גם בעצם מציאת פך השמן, שהרי היוונים טמאו את השמנים בכוונה כדי לבטל מהם את עבודת המנורה אלא שהשי"ת העלים מעיניהם את פך השמן הזה. וגם בנס זה בא לידי ביטוי יסוד הפנימיות, כי מצאו את פך השמן חתום בחותמו של כהן גדול, מוצנע בתוך בית המקדש.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ∞ The Jewish revolt against the Greeks was against the odds both in terms of numbers and military know-how and equipment. Nevertheless, the Jewish forces secured a miraculous victory against the Greek oppressors, which eventually set the stage for Jewish sovereignty.
- ∞ When the Jewish forces recaptured the site of the Holy Temple and sought to restore it, they needed oil for the Menorah. Either because they were in a state of ritual impurity or because pure oil was inaccessible, they needed an eight-day supply. Even though they only found enough oil for one day, it miraculously lasted the entire eight days.
- ∞ The principal miracle of Chanukah, commemorated in the lights we kindle, is the miracle of the oil. This was chosen by God as the truly “revealed” miracle of Chanukah. The military victory was miraculous, but it did not defy the laws of nature.
- ∞ The fundamental theme of Chanukah is the negation of the Greek worldview whereby God and humanity have no interaction. The Greeks taught that man cannot affect the spiritual world, and the Divine, spiritual world has no bearing on ours. The miracle of the Temple Menorah brought light into the darkened world of the Greek exile. So too, today, our commemoration of the miracle continues to light up our still darkened world with the light of Divine intervention.

- ∞ At the same time, the miracle of the Menorah shed light on the miracle of the war, placing the victory in a spiritual, rather than purely physical context.

SECTION II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIRACLES AND NATURE

As noted above, the miracle of the oil revealed the miraculous nature of the military success. Such is the pattern of miracles: the open flaunting of nature comes to help us appreciate the Divine intervention latent in the regular workings of the world.

1. Ramban, Shemot 13:16 – Macro miracles reveal the micro miracles.

From the great and obvious miracles one comes to appreciate the hidden miracles.

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים.

Ramban teaches that all that happens in daily life should not be seen as “nature,” or the regular functioning of the world. Rather, all aspects of life should be viewed as miraculous, part and parcel of the Divine intervention that is always with us. The same God Who made a small flask of oil burn for eight days brought about the great military victory over the Greeks.

The lights of the Menorah teach us to look around and notice the miracles that are going on all the time.

2. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, Chanukah, p. 45 – Miracles occur on a daily basis; we just need to be sensitive enough to see them.

There are those that ask how we explain the words [in the Al HaNissim prayer], “In those days at this time” – how do we see miracles in our times? All the miraculous stories are about events that happened in the past: the splitting of the Reed Sea, the Jews’ passage on dry land, the miracles of the Jews’ entrance into the Land of Israel, the miracles in the Temple, etc.

Why is it that only those generations saw miracles but we, in our days, do not see miracles occurring? Was it only the generation of the desert or the Hasmoneans that merited witnessing Divine miracles while we do not possess this merit?

God governs the world through a system of nature and also by actual miracles. Miracles occur around us daily and yet people are not affected nor do they realize what is happening around them. Just as certain sound waves exist in the world’s atmosphere and can only be detected

יש המתעוררים לשאול כיצד מבינים את נוסח התפילה “בימים ההם בזמן הזה”, איך בזמן הזה, בימים שאנו חיים בהם רואים נסים? כל הסיפורים של הנסים הם על אירועים שקרו בעבר. פעם היתה קריעת ים סוף, וכל עם ישראל עברו בתוך הים ביבשה. נסי הכניסה לארץ ישראל, והנסים שהיו בבית המקדש וכו’.

אך מדוע רק הדורות ההם ראו נסים ואנו לא רואים בימינו התרחשות של נסים? וכי רק לדור המדבר או לחשמונאים היתה הזכות לראות בחוש נסי שמים, ולנו אין את הזכות הזו?

הקב“ה מנהיג את העולם בדרכי הטבע, ואף בנסים אמיתיים. סביב כל אדם קורים נסים של ממש, בכל יום. אך בני האדם אינם מושפעים ואינם קולטים את המתחולל סביבם. כפי שגלי קול רבים קיימים בחלל העולם, ומבלי כלי קליטה מתאימים אי אפשר לשמוע

by special instruments, likewise God provides man with plenty of miracles even “in our times,” but our challenge and task is to open our eyes and ears to all that is happening around us.

ולקלוט אותם, השי"ת מספק לכל אדם מספיק נסים גם "בזמן הזה", אך הקושי והעבודה שלנו הם היכולת לפתח "עין רואה ואוזן שומעת" לכל המתרחש סביבנו.

Of course, the concept of miracles does not negate the idea of a natural world. The point made by Ramban is not that there is no natural order – for God *did* create a natural order in the world – but only that the way in which the natural world influences mankind is a pure expression of the Divine Will.

The same principle applies to our own achievements. Although we make an effort to accomplish particular goals, their actual attainment is only reached by means of Divine assistance. This concept forms another aspect of the Chanukah miracle: The Hasmoneans made a tremendous effort to battle the Syrian-Greeks, thereby meriting the great Divine revelation of the Chanukah miracles.

3. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, pp. 119-120 – The results of one's efforts are also miraculous.**

This is the secret of the miracle of Chanukah: The victory of the few over the many seemed to be impossible. Despite this, the Hasmoneans roused themselves by making a decision that they had no other choice [except to fight]. They therefore merited Divine assistance above the natural order of events. The miracle of Chanukah teaches us that there is no room for despair in situations where the options seem closed or naturally limited; one must gather his strength, as there is no other choice, and then new gates of Divine assistance will open.

The eight days of Chanukah teach us that the Heavenly blessing that lights up our hearts through the success of our *daily endeavors* is in fact a miracle, beyond our natural abilities.

זהו סודו של נס חנוכה: נצחון המעטים על הרבים היה נראה כנמנע בדרך הטבע. למרות זאת התחזקו החשמונאים – מתוך החלטה של "אין ברירה" – ומשום כך זכו לסייעתא דשמיא למעלה מדרך הטבע.... נס חנוכה מורה לנו שאין מקום ליאוש במקום שנראים הדרכים חסומים ומוגבלים בדרך הטבע. יתאמץ ביותר כיון שאין ברירה, ואז יפתחו לו שערי סייעתא דשמיא חדשים.

שמונה ימי חנוכה מלמדים אותנו שההארה העליונה (בחינת ח') שמאירה אל תוך לבותינו על ידי השתדלותנו במה שביכולתנו – בדרך נס היא באה לנו, למעלה מטבענו.

If a person lands a new job, he should therefore not pin his achievement on his good resume, his good interview, or his good looks. These might of course be factors that helped him get the job, but the underlying force behind all these factors is the Divine Will that he should get the job. In this sense, getting a job is a “miracle” – it is part of the Divine intervention that is with us always. The same applies to all of our accomplishments in life.

However, we should not deduce that achievements do not require human input – for if they are all miracles, then we can simply put our feet up and rely on Divine intervention. On the contrary, the Chanukah miracle teaches us that miracles are wrought for us only after the required human input.

4. **Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, p. 73 – Spiritual accomplishments are only achieved through hard work.**

Another observation concerning the miracle of

עוד נתבונן בנס חנוכה מה שאמרו חז"ל (שבת קל, א)

Chanukah is in regard to our Sages' statement (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 130a) 'Every mitzvah for which the Jews sacrificed their lives is still kept by them, such as distancing themselves from idol worship and performing circumcision'... This is because all spiritual accomplishments can only be achieved through hard work – even to the point of self-sacrifice, as this is the main purpose of man's existence in this world ...

The purpose of Creation is to strive for spiritual accomplishment in order that one should acquire his portion in the World to Come ... as our Sages said, "Torah, the World to Come and the Land of Israel are acquired only through difficulty" ... This concept is true regarding every individual's personal growth ... and it depends on each person's freedom of choice.

Anything that a person achieves through his own effort is meaningful to him and he guards it, because he cares about the hard work he has expended. Anything that comes easily to a person, he regards lightly ... To quote our Sages, "When someone does a good deed for another person, who does not appreciate the kindness, it is as if he threw a stone into *Markolis* [a form of idolatry which destroys valuable objects]." In effect, it is as if he did not actually perform the deed at all.

In order to achieve accomplishment in Torah and in all areas of spirituality, Heavenly assistance is required, and if one does not recognize the Divine origin of this assistance it can be discontinued, as support is not awarded to one who does not appreciate it ...

On the one hand, making an effort to study Torah enables the recognition of its importance, conversely, recognizing its value brings one to study.

כל מצוה שמסרו נפשם עליה עדיין היא מקוימת בידם, כגון ע"ז ומילה... והענין, כי כל הקנינים הרוחניים אין להשיגם אלא בעמל רב עד כדי מסי"נ, ועד בכלל. דזה עצם תכלית בריאת האדם בעוה"ז....

ותכלית הבריאה הוא העמל על הקנינים הרוחניים, שיקנה בעמלו את עולמו, וזהו שאמרו (ברכות ה:א) וכולם תורה ועוה"ב וא"י – לא ניתנו אלא ע"י יסורין... וכן הוא דרך קנינו של היחיד... כי זה תלוי בבחירתו.

כי כל דבר שבא לאדם בטורח חשוב בעיניו ושומר עליו, כי חס על טרחתו וכוחותיו, וכל שבא לו בקלות נקל בעיניו.... וכמשאז"ל (חולין קלג:א) כל העושה טובה למי שאינו מכירה כאילו זורק אבן למרקוליס, היינו שאינו עושה לו טובה בעצם.

והנה לתורה, ולכל עניני רוחניות, צריך סייעתא דשמיא, ולמי שאין מכיר בערך הדברים אין נותנים, דאין עושים טובה למי שאין מכיר בה....

והנה העמל בתורה מביא להכרת חשיבותה, ומצד שני הרי הכרת ערך התורה הוא המביא לידי עמל....

KEY POINTS OF SECTION II:

- ⇒ Just as the miracle of the oil revealed the miracle of the war, so too do all open "violations" of nature come to teach us that nature itself is replete with both personal and national miracles.
- ⇒ When we recognize that all is in God's hands then we start to appreciate the miracles happening around us all the time.
- ⇒ Another lesson of the Maccabees is that when we put in the effort God rewards us with the results. This process is necessary in order to help us value the end result.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT WERE THE TWO MIRACLES OF CHANUKAH?

Chanukah celebrates two miracles: the military victory over the Greeks and the miracle of the oil of the Menorah. The military victory went against all the odds as a small band of priests led a beleaguered revolt against a massive, trained occupying force.

The miracle of the oil took place when the Jews were rededicating the Holy Temple after it had been recaptured. When oil was needed for the Menorah, a small flask of oil enough for one day lasted for eight.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE NATURE OF THE CHANUKAH MIRACLES AND THE GREEK ASSAULT AGAINST THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

The Chanukah miracles were performed to make a Divine statement with regard to the philosophy of the Syrian-Greeks who sought to undermine the fundamentals of Judaism.

The main thrust of the Greek weltanschauung was the self-sufficiency of mankind, and the corresponding lack of Divine intervention in the affairs of the world. What you see, stated the Greek worldview, is what there is, and nothing beyond. The miracles of Chanukah came to uproot this philosophy.

IF GOD'S MODUS OPERANDI IS MINIMIZING THE OPENNESS OF MIRACLES, WHY DID HE FIND IT NECESSARY TO BRING ABOUT THE TWO CHANUKAH MIRACLES?

In the times of Greece, the world was plunged into spiritual darkness. Prophecy could not coexist with Greek philosophy, which conquered the world, and which remains dominant until this day.

The miracles of Chanukah, which were initiated by the self-sacrifice of the Hasmoneans, came to offset this new state of spiritual darkness.

The miracles revealed God's Presence, which intrinsically refuted Greek disbelief.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHANUKAH MIRACLES, AND MIRACLES IN GENERAL?

The miracle of the oil demonstrated the miraculous nature of events that seem to occur simply by cause and effect. The supernatural oil shed light on the "natural" events of the war, revealing that God had been fighting the battle of the Maccabees all along.

All miracles come to show us that daily events are also miracles – we just need the occasional reminder to see it.

