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Light points

— CHANUKAH —

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

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About this Publication

ב"ה

“כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר” (משלי ו, כג)

“For a *mitzvah* is a lamp, and the Torah is light.” (Mishlei 6:23)

The *Shaloh* observes that Chanukah has a bearing and effect on the entire world. In his words:

Chanukah, when the rededication of the *Beis Hamikdash* took place, hints also to a renewal that took place in the entire world. The world was created for the sake of the Torah and the fulfillment of the *mitzvos*, and the Greeks attempted to abolish the Torah and *mitzvos* among the Jewish people. When the Chashmonaim prevailed over the Greeks, the Torah and *mitzvos* prevailed, and thus the world was renewed And just as Creation began with “Let there be light,”³ so too the *mitzvah* of Chanukah begins with the lighting of candles.

As we prepare to light the Chanukah candles and call to mind the words “Let there be *light*,” it is our honor and privilege to present this collection of *Lightpoints*, concise Torah thoughts on the holiday and *mitzvos* of Chanukah culled from the illuminating teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, זצוקללה”ה נבג”מ ז”ע.

“We must listen to the story that the candles are telling us.” This small collection contains eight insights on the message of the holiday of Chanukah. This year, as you light the candles with your family each night of Chanukah, enjoy sharing these eight points, which shed “light” on the inner story of the candles in a way that will brighten your entire year.

A freilichen un lichtigen Chanukah!



Machon Or HaChassidus

20 Kislev 5781

חנוכה

Chanukah

Talmud, Shabbos 21b | שבת כא:

בית שמאי אומר: יום ראשון מדליק שמנחה, מפאן ואילך פוחת והולך. ובית הלל אומר: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מפאן ואילך מוסיף והולך. . . טעמא דבית שמאי פנגד פרי החג, וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.

Beis Shammai say: On the first day one kindles eight lamps and, from there on, gradually decreases the number of lights. Beis Hillel say: On the first day one kindles one light, and from there on, gradually increases ... Beis Shammai's opinion is that the gradually diminishing number corresponds to the bulls of the festival of Sukkos. Beis Hillel's opinion is based on the principle: One rises to a higher level in matters of sanctity and one does not descend. .

Before They Hatch

The schools of Shammai and Hillel are known for their vigorous debates throughout the Talmud on matters of Jewish law. Apart from a select few instances,¹ *Beis Shammai*, the school of Shammai, are generally stricter in their interpretation and application of the law, and *Beis Hillel* are more prone to leniency. When it comes to their debate concerning the pattern of the lighting of the Chanukah lamps—whether to kindle eight lights on the first night and gradually decrease (*Beis Shammai*), or to kindle one on the first night and gradually increase (*Beis Hillel*)—ultimately the same number of lamps are kindled regardless. However, here too, *Beis Shammai's* opinion is more “demanding” than *Beis Hillel's*.

1. See Mishna, Eduyos chs. 4 and 5.

The Talmud explains the debate (according to one answer) as a question of whether the Chanukah lights should demonstrate how many days of Chanukah have already passed or how many are still to come. Taking this a step further, this debate can be said to reflect our Sages' perspective on the original miracle of Chanukah, when a cruse of oil sufficient for only one day burned for eight days instead. On the one hand, we could say that the miracle grew from day to day with the oil burning yet another day. On the other hand, when considering the miracle after the fact, we could say that all eight days were contained in that miraculous single cruse of oil from the get-go. From that perspective, the amount of days of "miraculous potential" contained in that single cruse of oil was greatest on the first day, gradually diminishing as the days passed and fewer miracle days were necessary.

Therein lies the "leniency" of *Beis Hillel* and the "stringency" of *Beis Shammai* in regard to lighting only one lamp on the first night or lighting eight to commemorate the days to come. The average person, argued *Beis Hillel*, can be expected to acknowledge and give public thanks for G-d's miracles only once they have visibly materialized. *Beis Hillel* therefore said to light the menorah in a way that expresses how each additional step in the miracle was seen once the miracle had unfolded. *Beis Shammai*, however, demanded that the average person recognize G-d's miracles even when they are in potential form and are still in the making....

— *Likkutei Sichos, vol. 30, p. 301*

Talmud, Shabbos 21b | שבת כא:

בית שמאי אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק שמננה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך. ובית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך. . . טעמא דבית שמאי כנגד פרי החג, וטעמא דבית הלל דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין.

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Where to Begin?

The Talmud² famously relates that Shammai's expectations of individuals beginning their journeys toward authentic Judaism were more exacting than Hillel's.

We see a similar idea expressed in the debate between the schools of Shammai and Hillel

2. Shabbos 31a

whether to light eight lamps on the first night and gradually diminish (*Beis Shammai*), or to light one on the first night and gradually increase (*Beis Hillel*). According to one explanation in the Talmud, *Beis Shammai's* opinion reflects the pattern in which the seventy bull offerings were brought to the Temple over the course of the seven days of Sukkos: the greatest number of bulls was offered on the first day of Sukkos, with the number continually decreasing on each of the subsequent six days, whereas *Beis Hillel's* idea of gradual increase reflects the constant increase demanded in all matters of holiness.

The Chanukah lamps, which commemorate the rededication of the *Beis Hamikdash* after it was defiled, represent the steps a person must take when seeking to return to the Divine service, after his inner *Beis Hamikdash*, the Divine sanctuary that was intended to make within himself, has become less pure than it should be.

The seventy bull offerings correspond to the seventy nations of the world; the gradual decrease in the offerings over the days of Sukkos is explained by our Sages as representing the mitigation of the nations' harmful ways and the atonement of their sins.³ According to *Beis Shammai*, the first thing a person must do when ready to genuinely serve G-d is to rid himself of his internal ills and debasement, which starts off very challenging and requires tremendous strength and spiritual energy—symbolized by light—but eventually becomes easier as the negative becomes lessened.

Beis Hillel, however, tells the person desiring to rededicate himself to not wait until he has completed all the heavy lifting and rid himself of the negative. Instead that person should begin with a small *holy* act, and gradually increase the invested energy in good and positive things, until he is shining brightly and eventually will dispel all darkness and negativity.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 30, p. 302

3. See Talmud, Sukkah 55b; Yalkut Shimoni, Parshas Pinchas

Talmud, Shabbos 21b | שבת כא:

תנו רבנן: מצות חנוכה, גר איש וביתו. והמהדרין, גר לכל אחד ואחד. והמהדרין
מן המהדרין. . . יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.

The sages taught: the Mitzvah of Chanukah is to kindle one light per household [each night of Chanukah]; Mehadrin [i.e., those who eagerly pursue Mitzvos] kindle a light for every member of the household; Mehadrin min HaMehadrin [i.e., those even more eager than the standard mehadrin] ... kindle one on the first day, and on each following night increase the number of lights by one.

Taking the High Road

By the basic standards of Jewish law, if no pure oil can be obtained for the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Menorah may be lit even with oil that is ritually impure.⁴ Thus, the discovery of an undefiled cruse of oil when the Jews restored the *Beis Hamikdash* after its defilement by the Greeks allowed for a resumption of operations in the *Beis Hamikdash* on a level far beyond the minimum requirements. Commentators explain that this miraculous find was a show of G-d's love for the Jewish people and their worship; it was a unique act of Divine intervention to enable the Jewish people's renewed service in the *Beis Hamikdash* to be done in the most ideal manner.⁵

The public display of G-d's love for the Jewish people did not stop with the discovery of one night's worth of pure oil; rather, as we know, an additional miracle caused this minute amount of oil to burn for eight days instead of one.

That is why we find, specifically in regard to the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lamps, the universal practice of taking the highest level of observance outlined by the Talmud. Though the original establishment of this mitzvah required only one light to be lit per family on all eight nights, and even the "*mehadrin*" were expected to kindle additional lights based only on the size of their family, all Jews nevertheless embrace the even higher standard of "*mehadrin min hamehadrin*" and light *an extra* additional lamp on each of the eight nights.

We demonstrate how dear Judaism is to us and take the level of menorah-lighting that the Talmud regards as "doubly" exceeding our basic requirements. We thereby mirror the double miracle of discovering the pure oil and its subsequent burning for eight days, whereby G-d displayed His adoration of the Jewish people and enabled us to rededicate the *Beis Hamikdash* in a manner well beyond the basic Halachic requirements.

—*Toras Menachem, vol. 29, pp. 287-288*

4. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Temidin U'musafin 3:10

5. See Pnei Yehoshua, Shabbos 21b.

Bamidbar 8:2 | במדבר ח, ב

בְּהֶעֱלִיתָ אֶת־הַנֵּרוֹת (במדבר ח, ב).

When you raise the lamps. . .

Step Up

When the Torah speaks of kindling the lamps of the Temple Menorah, the term used regarding lighting the lamps is *beha'aloscha*, which literally means, “when you cause to ascend.” From this, the Sages understood that a step stood in front of the Menorah, which the *kohen*, the priest, ascended while preparing the lamps.⁶

The kindling of the Menorah is also a metaphor for kindling the G-dly flame within each of us—“The lamp of G-d is the soul of man,”⁷ —i.e., to cause someone’s soul to shine brightly with the light of Torah and *mitzvos*.⁸

Accordingly, the step that stood before the Menorah teaches us that when a person ignites the G-dly spark in his fellow Jew, the igniter himself has an “ascension” as well. Like the *kohen* who would ascend in order to prepare the *menorah* lamps, a person who takes upon himself to kindle the soul of his fellow Jew is elevated spiritually in every aspect of his life. And from this elevated state, he will be additionally successful in all aspects of his mission of light.

—*Sefer Hasichos 5748, vol. 2, pp. 486-487*

Talmud, Shabbos 21b | שבת כא:

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: גֵּר חֲנֻכָּה מְצוּוָה לְהַנִּיחָהּ עַל פֶּתַח בֵּיתוֹ מִבְּחוּץ . . . וּבְשָׁעַת הַסַּכָּנָה מְנִיחָהּ עַל שְׁלֻחָנוֹ וְדִיּוֹ.

It is a mitzvah to place the Chanukah lamp by the door of one’s house on the outside... In times of danger one places it on the table, and that is sufficient.

Inextinguishable Lights

It is noteworthy that, concerning the mitzvah to light Chanukah candles, the Talmud includes—in the original outline of the mitzvah's basic rules—instructions on how this mitzvah can be observed even in times of crisis. “In times of danger,” says the Talmud, “one places it on the table, and that is sufficient.” The indication at the very core of the mitzvah of the Chanukah lights is the

6. Rashi.

7. Mishlei 20:27.

8. See also Mishlei 6:23.

inability of this mitzvah to be disturbed by a change of circumstance; it is as accessible in times of difficulty as in times of wellbeing.

Similarly, Ramban writes that the Chanukah lights are, in a certain sense, superior to those kindled on the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash*.⁹ This is because the lights of the Menorah were dimmed with the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the subsequent *galus*, the exile of the Jewish people from our homeland. However, the lights of Chanukah remain unaffected by *galus* and continue for all times.

These ideas express the symbolism of the Chanukah lights as something eternal and immutable—i.e. the Jewish soul’s unbreakable attachment to G-d. Therefore, an integral component of the mitzvah is the method in which the lighting of the Chanukah lamps can be observed under *all* circumstances, even when we are surrounded from the outside by physical threat. Moreover, the constancy of the mitzvah of Chanukah lights, even when the Jews are in exile, highlights the fact that even the darkness caused by our own misdeeds, such as our sins that brought about the exile¹⁰, can never weaken the Chanukah lights. For the lights of Chanukah represent the Jewish soul’s attachment to G-d, a bond that can never be undone.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 3, p. 818*

Talmud, Shabbos 23b | שבת כג:

אמר רב הונא, הרגיל בְּנֵר הַיָּיִן לִיה בָּנִים תְּלָמִידֵי חֲכָמִים.

Rav Huna said: One who is habitual in kindling the lamps will have children who are Torah scholars.

Light among Lights

The merit of having children who are Torah scholars is the result, per the Talmud, of parents’ diligence in *mitzvos* involving light. As Rashi explains, “The verse states, ‘For a mitzvah is a lamp, and the Torah is light;’¹¹ through the mitzvah lamps of Shabbos and Chanukah the light of Torah will come’:¹² the lamps that we create through the *mitzvos* that involve lamps serve as the beacon through which the Torah—called light—shines, causing the cultivation of Torah scholarship within our families.

The verse in *Mishlei* that Rashi cites refers, in fact, to *all* mitzvos, calling them lamps. Yet, the Talmud (per Rashi), attributes the reward implied by this verse specifically to the *mitzvos* of

9. Bamidbar 8:2.

10. As we say in our prayers, “יִמְכְּנֵנוּ חַטָּאתֵינוּ גְּלוּנוֹ מֵאֶרֶצְנוּ”, “But because of our sins, we were exiled from our land.”

11. Mishlei 6:23

12. Shabbos 23b.

Shabbos and Chanukah lights. The implication is that the “light” that is brought about through the fulfillment of any mitzvah is *particularly great* in the *mitzvos* that involve actual physical light.

Every mitzvah that we fulfill draws a flow of G-dly light into the world. One famous example is the mitzvah of tzedakah, through which we draw blessings for long life in this physical world for ourselves and our families.¹³ Nevertheless, the association between the mitzvah and its effects is not visible to the naked eye or logically provable. The light drawn through these *mitzvos* is thus limited to its spiritual and nonvisible nature.

However, concerning the *mitzvos* that involve the kindling of physical lights, whose inherent theme even on a practical level is the radiation of *visible* light in this physical world, the idea that *mitzvos* draw G-dly light into the world is sensed more, and the effects of that spiritual light are more revealed as well. It is therefore these *mitzvos* in particular that constitute the *lamps* from which the Torah radiates in our families in a revealed way.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 10, p. 283;*
vol. 17, p. 143

Ramban, Bamidbar 8:2 | ב, במדבר ח, ב

וראיתי עוד . . . “אמר לו הקב”ה למשה: לך אמור לאהרן . . . הקרבנות כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים הן נוהגין, אבל הנרות לעולם אל מול פני המנורה יאירו - וכל הברכות שנתתי לך לברך את בני אינן בטלין לעולם.” והנה, דבר ידוע שכשאין בית המקדש קיים והקרבנות בטלין מפני חורבנו אף הנרות בטלות, אבל לא רמזו אלא לנרות חנכת חשמונאי, שהיא נוהגת אף לאחר החורבן בגלותנו.

I further saw ... “G-d said to Moshe: Go tell Aaron ... The sacrifices are brought only as long as the Temple is in existence, but the lamps give light ... forever; and all the blessings that I have given you with which to bless My children will never cease.” But being that the Temple is not in existence, just as the offerings have not been brought since its destruction, so the lighting of the lamps has also ceased? The sages of the Midrash must have been alluding to the lights of the Chanukah of the Chashmonaim, which are lit even after the destruction of the Temple.

Non-Stop Holiday

The Midrash comments that sacrifices brought in the *Beis Hamikdash* ceased once the *Beis Hamikdash* was no longer standing, whereas the lights kindled in the Menorah are eternal. Ramban, noting the obvious difficulty with this statement since the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash* is no

13. See, for example, Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim 15: When the soul of a poor man is on the verge of leaving its body because of hunger, and you give him food and help him to live, be assured that I will repay you soul for soul. In the future, when your son or daughter becomes deathly ill, I will recall on their behalf the good deed you performed for the poor man, and I will save them from death.

longer lit either, explains that this midrash refers to the lights of Chanukah which are “forever... and will never cease.”

The meaning of Chanukah’s immutability is explained in *Chassidus* that the spiritual light radiating in the world on Chanukah is drawn from a level of Divine light that transcends the possibility of change and progression. Chanukah is therefore permanent; even as it is observed in this limited and ever-changing world, it is not affected even by the changes that were wrought upon the *Beis Hamikdash* and thus continues throughout our exile.

But is Chanukah truly *above time*? Is it not observed for only eight days a year and no longer? Is Chanukah more transcendent of time than any of the other holidays that we observe even in the times of exile?

Though the observance of Chanukah takes place only in these eight days, in truth, the effects of Chanukah radiate throughout every moment of the entire year.

The theme of Chanukah is *mesirus nefesh*, the self-sacrifice of the Chashmonaim and the Jews of their time in the face of their Greek oppressors, which we likewise arouse within ourselves when we celebrate Chanukah each year. Unlike the themes of other holidays and other aspects of our Divine service, self-sacrifice is a constant. As the Alter Rebbe explains in *Tanya*, “The fulfillment of the Torah and its commandments is contingent on one’s being constantly aware of his readiness to surrender his life to G-d for the sake of His unity,”¹⁴ i.e., a person must remember that he would be willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of G-d’s unity if the situation warranted it.

The light of Chanukah is thus truly perpetual: not only does it transcend the changes of history, but its effects are also continuous throughout every moment of a Jew’s life throughout the year.

—*Toras Menachem*, vol. 21, pp. 287-290

נוסח הנרות הללו | Text of Haneiros Halalu

וְכֹל שְׂמוֹנַת יָמֵי הַנִּסָּה הַנִּרְוֹת הַלְלוּ קִדְשׁ הֵם.

Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, these lights are sacred.

When Seven is Not Enough

Though the Chanukah lights recall the kindling of the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Chanukah lights are notably different from the Temple Menorah in a number of ways. Whereas the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash* was lit during the day, the mitzvah on Chanukah is to light “when the sun sets.”¹⁵ Whereas the Menorah stood *inside* the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Chanukah

14. Chapter 25.

15. Talmud, Shabbos 21b

lights are ideally lit outside the doorway.¹⁶ And most significantly, whereas the Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash* was made of seven branches, the mitzvah on Chanukah is to ultimately light eight lamps, not seven.

The number seven reflects the realm of time, like the weekly cycle—a set of seven. Like time itself—a cornerstone of the limitations of the created world—the number seven represents the Divine energy that radiates in a defined and limited fashion, animating the existence of a defined and limited world.¹⁷ The symbolism of eight, i.e. *beyond* seven, is thus the Divine light that transcends definition and limitation.

The Menorah in the *Beis Hamikdash* faced no conflict; it stood in sacred space, and was lit in the daytime, a metaphor for a spiritually illuminated environment. To radiate G-dliness in such agreeable surroundings, even the light of seven, the Divine light of limitation, was sufficient.

The lights of Chanukah, however, radiate even when we are in exile, when the *Beis Hamikdash* no longer stands. They are lit after dark and face the unfriendly trends that roam outside, a metaphor for the forces beyond the pale of holiness. To illuminate even this dark space with Divine light, a light that transcends all definition, the light of eight candles is necessary.

This then is the great celebration of Chanukah. It is the holiday when the unlimited light of “eight” radiates in the world, enabling us to dispel even the greatest darkness.

—*Likutei Sichos, vol. 3, pp. 811-812*

16. Ibid.

17. See *Teshuvos HaRashba* 1:9.

קובץ זה נדפס לזכות
מנחם משה הכהן בן פרידה
גילת בת נעמה
עדי בת גילת
שיחיו



להצלחה מופלגה בגשמיות וברוחניות,
מתוך שמחה, בריאות איתנה
ופרגסה בהרחבה גדולה