



Chanukat HaBayit



Dear chaverim,

It is with immense excitement that we unveil the 5784 edition of Chanukat Habayit, focusing on all things Israel. In these challenging times for Am Yisrael, our collection of Divrei Torah, shared by chaverim throughout the tnuva, seeks to be a source of hope, along with our chanukiot, casting light across the lives of our chaverim globally. Let us immerse ourselves in these Divrei Torah, honouring our Bnei Akiva chaverim on the front lines who are safeguarding us, our families, and our nation.

As Albus Dumbledore wisely professed, "Happiness can be found in even the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light." May the profound insights within this publication act as a guiding beacon, bringing warmth and inspiration to all our chaverim.

A heartfelt thank you to each chaver who contributed to this edition, and a special expression of gratitude to our dedicated Shlichim—Rav Avichai, Rabbanit Aviya, Elad, and Lani. Your unwavering support and guidance are invaluable, and we deeply appreciate all that you do for us.

Bvirkat Chaveirim L'Torah v'Avodah,

Abi (Mazkira) and Sophie (Chinuch Director)



INCREASE OUR LIGHT

RAV AVICHAI
RAV SHALIACH

Am Yisrael are destined to illuminate: “I have placed you as a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations” (Yeshayahu 42:6).

However, opinions diverge on the question of what the most accurate way is to achieve the lofty goal of repairing the world. Yosef HaTzadik believed that the correct approach was involvement in general human culture and influencing the attitudes of the nations of the world. According to him, this is the preferable form of exile.

In his youth, he dreamed of the family acting as wheat binders feeding the entire world, like stars illuminating the darkness of exile. What he dreamt eventually became reality. Yosef became a provider, actively contributing to the



repairing of the world through his role in Egypt. This path was suitable for Yosef as an individual, as Rashi states: “And Yosef was in Egypt - he, in his righteousness.”, meaning that only he could remain in his righteousness within the depths of Egypt.

However, this path is perhaps not suitable for the nation as a whole. As history has shown,

despite the benefit that Israel brings to nations through their dispersion, a ‘new king always rises in Egypt who does not know Yosef’. Similar attempts were made throughout the generations, such as cosmopolitan Judaism that is detached from the Land of Israel. The bitter historical experience of the previous generation shattered this illusion during the terrible days of the Holocaust.

The struggle between Israel and Greece also pertains to the nature of the cultural ties between the Israelite and Greek cultures. According to the Greeks, there is certainly a place of honour for Torat Israel as part of the general culture, alongside the great works of human spirit... but not beyond that. The Greek admiration for the Torah as the “wisdom of the Hebrews” gave rise to the translation of the Seventy, integrating the Torah into the general cultural space without acknowledging its unique divine connection. Hence, the struggle of the Hasmoneans was not just about restoring the freedom of worship for the Jews but aimed to clarify that the method of enlightenment of the wisdom of Israel is fundamentally different from the Greek enlightenment. While Greek culture presents an aesthetic model devoid of personality, Israel’s Torah reveals the continuity of prophetic discourse even in a world where prophecy has ceased.

In our time, the question of enlightenment has yet to be resolved. Many still believe in choosing a cosmopolitan perspective, subjecting themselves to internal subjugation to Western values that see external culture as the criterion for assessing values. To them, everything, including the Torah, is measured according to its conformity to the prevailing spirit of both the modern and post-modern world. This mental subjugation feeds on the fact that there is no spiritual dialogue at the forefront of culture capable of influencing the dominant philosophy.

Let us increase our light, becoming privileged partners in the multiplicity of the Torah’s light, the light of love and faith, the sanctification of Hashem’s name with calm spirit and loyalty to all the values of the nation. We rely on the work with Hashem, illuminating every generation.



TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SOPHIE HARRIS
SHEVET MORASHA

1. Hanging the Menorah on the Wall

Most Ashkenazi Jews place a menorah in the window in order to publicise the miracle of Chanukah. In Morocco, Algeria and other North African communities, it is customary to hang the menorah on a hook in the doorway, beside the mezuzah. Putting the menorah near the mezuzah was thought to enhance the protection already offered by the mezuzah. If you look at menorahs made in North Africa, you will notice that many have a ring at the top, as well as a flat metal backing, so that the menorah could be safely hung.

Some Jews affiliated with Chabad also hang their menorahs. This tradition goes back to the Talmud (Shabbat 22a) which describes the menorah as being positioned on the doorpost like a mezuzah:

Rav Shmuel from Difti said: ... the Halacha is to place [the menorah] on the left so that the Chanukah lamp will be on the left and the mezuzah on the right. Then, one who enters the house will be surrounded by mitzvot.

2. Constructing a Menorah from Potatoes

Jews in Romania, as well as Austria and other central European communities, would scrape

out potatoes, filling each potato space with oil and a wick to serve as the menorah. Rather than putting all eight out at once, each day they would add another potato. While the origin of this custom is unclear, it likely came about due to economic struggles.

3. Lighting an Extra Shamash

The Jewish community of Aleppo, which comprised mostly Sephardic Jews who had escaped the Inquisition, lit an extra shamash (helper candle) on each night of Chanukah. Several explanations exist — some say that the second shamash was meant to honour G-d and acknowledge the divine intervention that brought them to safety. Others say the custom was a nod toward the non-Jews of Aleppo, who welcomed them as refugees.

4. Glass Boxes on Display

Before mass immigration and the establishment of the State of Israel in the 20th century, Jews lived in Jerusalem for centuries and followed the ruling that the menorah's lights needed to be placed outside the home for all to see. This decree originates in the Talmud (Shabbat 21b):

The sages taught in a Beraita: It is a mitzvah to place the Chanukah lamp at the entrance to one's house on the outside, so that all can see it.

However, Jerusalem winters are often wet and windy, so the community began crafting aquarium-like glass boxes to protect their flames. Inside, Jerusalem Jews put small cups of olive oil and lit a wick to correspond with each night.



Some of Jerusalem's oldest homes even have a shelf carved out of the home's exterior walls to place the glass boxes in.

Today, many Israeli Jews have adopted this practice, although some will simply place a hanukkah with candles inside the box, rather than using oil.

5. Chag HaBanut: A Celebration of Women

Jewish communities in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Morocco, Greece and Yemen celebrate another holiday during Hanukkah, known in Judeo-Arabic as 'Eid Al Bnat' or 'Chag HaBanut' in Hebrew, both of which translate to the 'Festival of the Daughters'.

Observed on Rosh Chodesh Tevet (which falls on the sixth night of Hanukkah), the girls and women of the community refrain from work and gather to recall Jewish heroines, particularly Judith, the Jewish woman who lived during the time of the Maccabees and helped prevent the impending siege of Jerusalem by decapitating the invading Assyrian general.

'Chag HaBanut' festivities vary from community to community, but often include eating sweets and fried treats, dancing, visiting the synagogue to kiss the Torah scrolls and singing well into the night. Girls approaching bat mitzvah age, as well as women who were engaged, were also publicly celebrated during 'Chag HaBanut'.

6. Neighbourhood Wine Tastings

The region of Avignon, located in southern France, is renowned for its wineries. During

the Saturday night that falls during Hanukkah, after Shabbat ended, the Jews of Avignon open a new bottle of local wine in their homes and make a toast. Then, each family travels around their neighbourhood to taste the wines chosen by their neighbours and to toast to the miracle of Chanukah

7. No Melachot Near the Menorah

It is a longstanding practice among North African and Middle Eastern Jewish communities, as well as Charedi Ashkenazi Jews, that as long as the menorah is lit, women refrain from doing melachot, (i.e. the types of work that are forbidden on Shabbat and holidays). While Hanukkah is not a holiday that requires Jews to refrain from labour, this custom can be traced back to laws codified by both Ashkenazi and Sephardic leaders who ruled, pre-electricity, that the light of the menorah was not to be used for anything besides enjoying the holiday

8. The Ninth Night of Chanukah

In some parts of Morocco, Jewish children spend the last day of Chanukah going from house to house to collect the leftover cotton wicks that Moroccan Jews used in place of candles. At sundown, the wicks are ignited to create a large bonfire, and each community gathers to sing, dance and even leap over the fire, which was believed to bring good luck to the jumper, especially to women seeking a partner or struggling to conceive.

These are only a sample of the many traditions that various communities around the world have developed over time.



ATLAS

Hillel was once asked:

“Teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.”

He could have said:

‘We are The Titans of ancient history, you have read about us in books.

“What is your origin?” - a rhythmic question we are often asked,

Seasons us ripe in prejudice, preparing us for our life’s task.

We are a People built on memory, cemented by values,

Morals wire our veins, written in greens and blues.

We sail with each other through prickly water,

Move with rough seas, taste sharply familiar.

We are experts in trends, forecasters of the future.

We are relics of nature, much like our menorah.

We are empaths of injustice,

for we walked out of Egypt and Auschwitz.

Pregnant with trauma, melted inside our weighty wombs,

Mourning- our inheritance, practically a perfume.

We pilot tradition, for we are well equipped with experience,

We are taught all of this, when we are mere children.

Words trickle our lips, when we echo our Hope,

These revered words, mark our Jewish family yoke.

The shield we wield, our chosen instrument,

Testudo formation, now, a noble legend.

We are authors of ancient times, with our editor close by...

We ascend, thank, our generational pride.

For We are The Titans of history.

Atlas, our long lost twin,

He shares what is sewn, deep within our skin.

Cosmos on our shoulder,

For we the protector of any danger

for our widow, orphan and any stranger

We bare the heavens above.

Soul job of Tikun Olam.’

....

But all that came out of Hillel’s mouth

“You shall love thy neighbour as you love thy self”.

-LARA K (November 2023)

(**Testudo formation: strong tight shield formation used in Roman warfare. When all soldiers had their shields up the entire unit was safe. If one person wavered, questioned the certainty in this tactic the formation would be vulnerable, crumble and the unit would face the consequences of every man for himself)



THE BATTLE OF CHANUKAH

TAMARA KAY
SHEVET OROT

Chanukah is when we spend 8 nights lighting candles to publicise the miracle of the oil, where a small container of oil for the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash lasted for eight nights, after it was expected to last for only one. This happened after the battle between the Jews and the Syrian-Greeks in 164 BCE. After witnessing the miracles and deliverance from hardship, we add 'Al Hanisim' into our Tefilla over Chanukah to thank and praise G-d. What are the battles we are thanking G-d for redeeming us from?

The first is with Antiochus, who wanted to destroy Israel and the Jewish people. Antiochus waged a war against the Land of Israel, conquering the physical land, and fighting to capture the Beit Hamikdash. However, there was another battle happening at the same time, which was between the Hellenist and the Jewish people.

Who were the Hellenists? Hellenists were Jews.

Hellenists were those who had partly assimilated, and believed that it was possible to combine the Torah and Greek culture within a Jewish national framework. The Kohen Gadol, Yochanan, foresaw the danger to Judaism from the penetration of Antiochus and the Greeks influence into the Holy Land. Rabbi Sacks zt"l writes that the Greek ideology focused on the outward beauty and the concept of tragedy. That at times we may achieve greatness, but that life has no ultimate purpose. However, in contrast, Judaism emphasises truth, morality and hope. We are here because G-d created us in love, and through love we discover the purpose of life.

So, we can see that there were two battles happening: between the Greeks and the Jews for the physical Israel and the Hellenists and the Jews, for the spiritual Israel. What can we learn from this? From all the battles, the struggles and the hardships that the Jewish people have experienced, spiritually and physically, they have always survived. Judaism is all about hope and the Chanukah lights are the symbol of that survival, of Judaism's refusal to abandon its values for the glamour and prestige of a secular culture, then or now. The Neshama (soul) is a pot of oil inside of us; it may seem small but we should never underestimate how far it can take you.





WE REALLY NEED CHANU- KAH RIGHT NOW

**SAM ROTHSTEIN
SHEVET MORASHA**

When the Greeks ruled over the Jews, as well as a general ban on Torah SheBal Peh (the Oral Law), they outlawed three specific Mitzvot: Brit Milah, Shabbat, and Kiddush HaChodesh (sanctifying the new month). They didn't stop the Jews from being Jewish, nor did they exile them from their land. Only these three things did they stop. Why? What was it about these things that the Greeks were so against?

The Maharal in his Sefer on Chanukah, Ner Mitzvah, relates the idea of what the Greeks represented, and why they were so against the Jews. A human being is made up of three parts: body, soul, and intellect. Whilst animals also have a body and some form of soul, the intellect is what separates humans from animals. This is often expressed in the wisdom that different cultures have. The Greeks had incredible wisdom that they spread across the world with their conquest. But the Jews also have wisdom, a Divine wisdom that comes from Hashem through the Torah. To have wisdom that is beyond human thought, that exists above anything else, was something the Greeks were against. That was their problem. This expresses itself in their cancellation of Torah SheBal Peh; how can there be wisdom above our own?

This concept even reaches the other mitzvot that they banned. The Kli Yakar (Shemot 20:8) writes that Shabbos has its own in-built Kedushah, and by us keeping it, it in turn sanctifies Hashem. But this idea of something being inherently holy and beyond the human is against the philosophy of the Greeks. Alternatively, the Ramban (Bereshit 2:3) writes that Shabbos is a hint and inside look into Olam Haba. Once again, this is something beyond the scope of human beings, and therefore irreconcilable with the Greeks.

Next is Bris Milah. The Medrash (Tanchuma, Tazria 5) brings a debate between Rebbe Akiva and Turnus Rufus, a philosopher. In an attempt to ridicule the idea of circumcision, he asks Rebbe Akiva "which are better, the works of G-d or the works of Man?" Rebbe Akiva replies "the works of man", probably not the response most people were expecting. To prove it he brings out some grain and some bread, and explains that however good the grain provided by G-d is, the bread that man makes is better. Turnus Rufus then asked "why didn't G-d make humans already circumcised?" Rebbe Akiva replied "Hashem only gave Mitzvot to Yisrael to purify them". We have the human body and we take it, improving Hashem's work, purifying through this mitzvah of Bris Milah. The Greek philosophy is that the body is perfect already and needs no improvement (they started the Olympics which celebrates the achievements of the body).

Lastly, we have Kiddush HaChodesh. The Ramban (Shemot 12:2) writes that we know that there are two months called Rosh HaShanah; Tishrei and Nisan. Tishrei is the month for counting the new year, but we count Nisan as the first month of the year for us as it is "ראשון לך" – "הוא לך" – "the first for you" (Shemot 12:2), to remember our redemption from Egypt. Hashem made this especially for us. The Gemara spends a lot of time detailing the laws of how the process of deciding the new month based on the moon works. It required two witnesses to come and testify that they saw the new moon. The Greeks would come along and say: 'the new month is fixed; we have a calendar'. But the special nature of this mitzvah is that WE decide when the new moon is. That is why Kiddush Hachodesh was given to us.

We as Jews believe in there being something beyond what is simply here in the world. The spiritual exists as something above what we see before our eyes. The Greeks wanted the uproot this belief, banning Mitzvot that helped us connect to holiness, stopping us from expanding our understanding of Hashem and delving into the depths of the wisdom of Torah. This can also be seen in the miracle of the oil. The Pachad Yitzchak (Chanukah 6:4) asks: why

the Greeks didn't destroy the Bet HaMikdash? He answers that they didn't hate the Jews, but instead were against this idea of them being different to any other nation. If there was no concept of holiness, then there was nothing to differentiate the Jews. Therefore, they made all the oil impure - to fight against the idea that anything could be holy.

What's interesting is that of the four kingdoms that have risen up against the Jews (Babylon, Persia and Rome being the others), the Greeks were the only ones to rule over us whilst we were still in the land with the Bet HaMikdash. We were not sent into physical exile, but our spiritual existence was under threat. Holiness was exiled from the land in an attempt to make us just like any other nation. But what arose after this was that the Maccabees became the rulers of Israel, which the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Chanukah 3:2) includes as one of the reasons to celebrate Chanukah.

Jews governing Jews is one of the criteria the Ramban includes in the mitzvah of **“ישׁוב ארץ ישראל”** – “settling the land of Israel”. Chanukah is the time to celebrate our ability to live

in Eretz Yisrael, not just as a people like anyone else, but as people controlling ourselves, with self-autonomy, and freedom to live out our religious beliefs the way we want to. No other nation decides what we do. This fits very well with an idea from Rav Soloveitchik in the book *Kol Dodi Dofek*, where he describes two covenants of the Jewish people; fate and destiny. ‘Fate’ means that we are grouped together with the common ground of being Jews; where we are passively moved throughout the world as an object acted upon. ‘Destiny’, however, is “when man confronts the environment into which he has been cast with an understanding of his uniqueness and value, freedom and capacity; without compromising his integrity and independence in his struggle with the outside world. [...] Man is born as an object, dies as an object, but it is within his capability to live as a ‘subject’”. In short, fate is living passively, destiny is living actively. The Chanukah story is the story which displays that the Jews can live actively, playing the primary role in their own future. We decide our own destiny.

One of the most amazing things to see at this time is the immense attitude of so many Jews

around the world to act and do something, reaching out for Kedushah or some connection to Hashem in their lives. Irreligious men have taken upon themselves to wear Tzitzit and put on Tefillin; women have started doing Hafrashat Challah and lighting Shabbat candles. Around the world rallies have taken place in solidarity with Israel and people have donated time, money, and whatever else they can to help soldiers and civilians alike. For 2000 years of exile, we as a nation we pushed from one oppressive country to another, with pogrom after pogrom, followed by Holocaust. But the time of the passivity of fate is over. Now is the time to live our destiny.





THE LIGHT OF BERESHIT

ODELLE EPSTEIN
SHEVET HINEINI

Why do we celebrate Chanukah on the 25th of Kislev?

On the 25th of Kislev, 2186 years ago in 164 BCE, the miracle of the Menorah happened. This was the miracle where the oil for the Menorah lasted 8 days instead of one. What's interesting about this is that the Maccabean revolt lasted another 4 years after this moment; the Temple was probably still in ruins during this miracle – so why not make Chanukah when the Temple was finished? Or when the war was over? Why was it of such importance to light the Menorah even though they were nowhere near the end of the war?



To answer this, how about we go back to the first reference to light in Jewish literature. [Bereshit 1:3] when G-d creates light for the first time ever. Was it in response to darkness? Not quite. It was as a response to the Chaos - **תהו ובהו**. This laid the blueprint for Jewish people everywhere that the response to Chaos is not order - it's light! So, in the middle of all the fighting with the (then) strongest empire on the planet - the Greeks - the Jews had the opportunity to make light in the middle of all that chaos... and they took it without hesitation.

If creating light was the first step in response to chaos, what do we do next? Let's see what G-d did. After creating light, in Bereshit 1:4, "G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated the light from the darkness." Here's the list so far: Step 1: Make light, Step 2: G-d actively appreciated the Light. Step 3: After that, G-d separated the Light from the Darkness. What

we learn from this is how we need to appreciate the Light before we do anything else and then we can start to make some sense of the darkness.

For the past two months that's what the Jewish people all over the world have been doing. Making light when every way we would turn, all we could see was darkness and chaos. We didn't respond with darkness, we didn't respond with boundless chaos, and most impor-

tantly: we didn't just sit down and give up. We actively made light.

We learn everything we know from Hashem... and the first thing He taught us was to make light! First, we must create and appreciate the light we create, and only then try and understand what's gone wrong, and continue fighting - like the Maccabees did from 164-160 BCE. Just as we, today, are in the middle chaos, mess and unimaginable hate we've seen from the most unexpected of places – even here, we created light. We started donating, volunteering, praying, learning, fighting (whether in the trenches, online or at protests). We are the Menorah; we are the oil that lasted 7 days longer than it should have. Once this is all done, we will rebuild the Temple through places like Be'eri, Nachal Oz, Re'im, etc. In the meantime, appreciate the Light because "it (is) Good" [Bereshit 1:4].



CHANUKAH'S ETERNAL LIGHT

MILLIE KOSLOVER
SHEVET HINEINI

In Tehillim, David Hamelech opens with “For the conductor, with the songs, on the eighth” (Psalms 6:1). The Midrash explains this verse as hinting to the eight days of Chanukah. As we delve deeper into this connection, the Midrash Shocher Tov unveils a profound narrative of Am Yisrael’s resilience through four exiles, each comprising two integral parts, totalling eight distinct periods. The 8 periods are: Bavel (Babylon) paired with Kasdi (the people of Babylonia), Paras (Persia) with Madai (ancient people of Iran), Yavan (Greece) with Macedon (the Macedonians), and ultimately Yishmael (descendants of) with Edom (descendants of Esav). The pairs represent different empires and peoples that played a role in the historical challenges faced by the Jewish people. The idea is that these challenges had two parts, leading to a total of eight difficult periods.

This array of challenges holds as a testament to the endurance and strength of Am Yisrael. The Midrash paints a vivid picture of redemption, envisioning a future where praises to Hashem echo for deliverance from all eight exiles, bringing the scattered nation back to the embrace of the land of Israel.

However, a puzzling question arises: Why should we praise Hashem for deliverance from all eight exiles in the final redemption, given that we have already been saved from the first six? The Midrash provides a profound

answer—residue. Despite overcoming the initial challenges, remnants of difficulty persist to this day, shaping the ongoing narrative of Am Yisrael.

This gives rise to a novel answer to the Beit Yosef’s famous question about why we celebrate eight days of Chanukah when oil only lasted longer miraculously for seven. Our Midrash suggests that the eight days of Chanukah originate from the future redemption of all eight exiles, including both the past and those yet to transpire. Even though the Am Yisrael were saved from the first six challenges, the Midrash says there’s still residue of the difficulty from each of them that persists to this day. As we kindle the lights of Chanukah for eight days, we are reminded that this celebration goes beyond the miraculous extension of oil. It symbolises a beacon of hope, a promise of future redemption from all eight challenges. The eight days of Chanukah, as our Midrash suggests, are rooted in the anticipation of a future redemption that encompasses the entirety of Am Yisrael’s historical journey.

The last two challenges of exile, represented by Edom and Yishmael, are considered the most intense. Galut Edom experienced outside the boundaries of Israel and Galut Yishmael, currently confronted by Israel, represent the climactic and ultimate expression of the Chanukah redemption. The redemption from the past exiles now becomes a source of hope, a prayer for redemption in the ongoing challenges, particularly the current struggles in Israel. As we celebrate Chanukah, may the glow of Chanukah illuminate a path to lasting peace, security, and merit swift redemption for the ongoing war in Israel.





BNEI AKIVA IS NOT A SAFE ENVIRONMENT – AND THAT’S A GOOD THING

ELAD ESHEL
NORTHERN SHALIACH

Bnei Akiva has a reputation for not being the most organised of operations – running late, haphazard Shabbaton/Machane meals and ‘rosh gadol’ improvisation are all par for the course. But is this a problem we should be trying to fix? Or perhaps, is this actually one of our greatest features?

Let me explain by first taking a fresh look at the Chanukah story...

There is a troubling question that is not often raised when learning about the rebellion of the Maccabim. The persecution of the Greeks against the Jews was unique within the long list of persecutions in our history. We read in the ‘Al HaNisim’ addition to our tefilla which tells us that the goal of the Greeks was **“להשכיחם את תורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי רצונך”** – to make us forget our Torah and give up our practice of the mitzvot.

From here and elsewhere we learn that there was no terribly sinful behaviour that they were forcing us to commit – certainly there is no mention of the ‘big 3’ (murder, idolatry, adultery), nor was there an active threat to our lives. And so, the question we must ask is, what justification was there for the Maccabim to risk their lives in order to fight the Greeks? Halacha places pikuach nefesh, protecting our

lives, above almost all considerations, and only under very particular circumstances are we allowed to act against this value. Did the Maccabim do the right thing?

There is another, very important, less well-known, exception to the rules of pikuach nefesh – ‘sha’at hashmad’ during a period of persecution. When the Jewish People are under threat of any kind because of their religion, and the practice of Judaism is being specifically targeted and suppressed, suddenly all the normal rules go out the window, the Halacha is flipped, and one is required to give up their lives in order to fulfil even the smallest, seemingly most insignificant mitzvah.

The Torah does not want us to lose our lives in order to fulfil the mitzvot – indeed the opposite is true. The Torah tells us to give up on the momentary violation in order to live a lifetime full of Torah and mitzvot. We prioritise the system, the totality, over one single instance of sin. But when the system is under threat, when Judaism itself is being persecuted, the Torah demands that one sacrifice their own individual life in order to preserve the system and the totality of the Torah itself.

And this was the greatness of the Maccabim. They were able to look past their own immediate concerns, their own safety and personal Halachic considerations, and realise that something bigger was at stake – the future of their people. From this perspective, though as individuals they could have claimed that they were not under the obligation to risk their lives. But they saw the reality around them for what it was, the cultural menace of Greek civilisation that threatened to overwhelm the Jewish People. And so, they put their own lives on the line in order to ensure that Torah would survive. If



they had not stood up, the entire Jewish People and their special mission in this world was at risk of ceasing to exist.

And this brings us back to our original question.

A safe environment is one without risk, where everything is planned to a tee, and there are no unknowns. And this safety is desirable for exactly this reason – there is no risk, no one will get hurt and everything will be fine. However, by focusing on safety above all else, we also lose out, for on the other side of risk, is growth. When we confront the unknown, when we are challenged, when we are forced to engage with a situation and to help, a beautiful thing happens. All of a sudden, we realise that we can make a difference to the outcome, that we have strengths and abilities we never realised were there, and we begin to appreciate that we can make a difference in the world.

While some might claim this is a downside, or from the outside it might appear to be the result of shortcomings or mismanagement – those who have seen the magic up close appreciate that it is actually our biggest strength. The lack of structure or organisation provides a vacuum that forces our chaverim – madrichim and chanichim alike – to take the initiative and fill the void, stepping up to the plate to do what needs to be done.

Through this ‘controlled chaos’ we embrace the spirit of the Maccabim, as we are pushed to look beyond ourselves, beyond our comfort zone and confront reality, embodying the words of our sages “in a place where no one is [doing what needs to be done] – try to be that person.” (Avot 2:5) It is no secret that many Bogrim of Bnei Akiva have gone on to fill sen-

ior leadership positions, found and run major chessed and chinuch organisations, and are known for their initiative and drive in all things communal. This is no coincidence nor is it an accident. This is the mark of a successful Bnei Akiva education, which has endowed the values of ‘Rosh Gadol’, selflessness and brazenness into a marvellous concoction for creating leaders and Jewish citizens that are a cut above the rest.

If we need any encouragement or inspiration to convince us of the importance of cultivating this attitude and perspective amongst our chaverim, we need look no further than the events of Simchat Torah and the many weeks since. Since that day, countless stories of true courage, tremendous heroism and unfathomable selflessness have been shared of our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Israel has a society that raises people who are willing to jump on a grenade, drive through bullet fire to rescue innocents and injured, to sacrifice themselves for their family and for their country – not as an exception, but as the rule. This is the sign of a people who have what to live for, who understand that their true value in this world is measured by what they give and the values they lived by.

As part of Bnei Akiva’s love for and dedication to Israel, we do not just encourage our chaverim to join and build this model society, but additionally we strive to instil the spirit of the Nation of Tzion within them, so that they too will echo the words of the Navi:

‘Then I heard the voice of Hashem saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me.”’





AND ZIONISM WAS BORN

DYLAN DAVILA
SHEVET
HASHACHAR

We all know the history of Zionism, at least in its very basic form; Herzl, the Zionist Congresses, the Balfour Declaration, the World Zionist Organisation, the Shoah, UN Resolution 181, the founding of the State, its early years and wars, until today.

But this conventional account is missing something, namely the presence of a group of people who today make up the majority of Jews living in Eretz Yisrael - the Mizrachim and Sephardim. For the Jewish people, an urge to return to the land of Israel has been a part of our identity as a people practically since we first left, and for the Sephardim this is no different - if anything it is even more pronounced. We see cases of great people so driven to make Aliya even at a time when to do so was near-impossible; perhaps most famously, R' Yehuda HaLevi, born in Spain in the 11th Century, who made the treacherous journey with the aim of living out his last years in the Holy Land. His poems written whilst living in Spain, show a true sense of desperation to live in the land of Israel and despair at its utter destruction over a thousand years earlier (in fact, many are sung amongst the Kinot of Tisha B'Av in both Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities). They continue to provide us in the Diaspora today with an outlet for our feelings today. On a personal note, I felt his famous words 'My heart is in the East, though I am at the furthest West' resonating with me strongly after the events of October 7th.

Moving closer to modern times, even before Herzl came to form the Zionist Organisation and 'create' Zionism in its political form, an early 'proto-Zionism' which also believed in the goal of resettling and re-establishing a Jewish state in the land of Israel came to exist in Sephardi circles in and around Europe. Rabbanim like Yehuda Bibas (of Gibraltar) and Ye-

huda Alkalai (of Sarajevo) were inspired by the events occurring around the world towards a belief that the Jewish people needed to take over the land. The Greek War of Independence particularly moved R' Bibas. Whilst we have no writings of his remaining, we know from second-hand accounts that he strongly believed that the Jewish people needed training in science and with weapons in order to take over the holy land from the Ottoman Empire, as the Greeks had done with their land.

His student, R' Alkalai, has, though, left us a number of works, and had many ideas which to us are as familiar as Herzl's, such as organisations to promote international recognition of the Jewish right to Israel, the creation of a Jewish parliament and army, the need for Hebrew language schools, and aiding Jewish settlement throughout the land. His Zionism was initially a Kabbalistic-Messianic one. He believed that calculations showed the time of Mashiach to be approaching, and it was thus necessary for the Jewish people to themselves take steps in order to return to the Holy Land, but over time became informed also by contemporary Nationalism and the concept that all peoples have the right to a land.

(An interesting, and often-overlooked, fact about R' Alkalai's life was his personal relationship with Simon Loeb Herzl, the grandfather of Theodor; he possessed an early copy of R' Alkalai's book 'Goral LaHashem' laying out his ideas on Zionism, which may have had some influence on the younger Herzl). The Jewish response to the Damascus Affair, an event which particularly inspired R' Alkalai, was one that was spearheaded by another Sephardi proto-Zionist, Sir Moses Montefiore of the London Spanish and Portuguese Congregation. He is best known today for his philanthropy, but he strongly believed that in the future Jerusalem would be 'the centre of the Jewish Empire'. To this end he contributed huge sums of money in order to build new neighbourhoods in and around Jerusalem which still exist today, in order to repopulate our ancient capital.

This short look into the beliefs and work of these early figures gives us an insight into

a mindset which continued throughout the 20th Century in the Sephardi community. Just to give a few examples, R' Yosef and Shalom Messas (both of Morocco, then Israel) both fully endorsed the recital of full Hallel on Yom HaAtzmaut and the celebration of the day as a minor chag (though R' Shalom refrained from supporting making a bracha, solely in deference to an earlier ruling from R' Ovadia Yosef). R' David Buzaglo (also of Morocco, then Israel) wrote poetry and songs paralleling R' Yehuda Halevi's early despair at not being in the land with R' Buzaglo's own euphoria at being able to make 'aliya to the new Jewish state'.

As can be seen, 'Sephardic Zionism' took a unique and different form to that in the Ashkenazi world. Zionism, for us, has never been treated with ambivalence or even active opposition, as it has been (and sadly still is) in many quarters of the charedi world, but rather is seen as a fundamental and natural expression of religious belief and identity. All of the figures I have mentioned above were Rabbanim, or immensely involved in their local religious commu-

nities (Sir Moses Montefiore's seat at Bevis Marks Synagogue is, to this day, kept cordoned off for only the most special guests to use). Even the secular Zionists of the World Zionist Organisation were met with immense enthusiasm by the religious establishment in North African communities; a visit to Tunis in 1913 by one of their emissaries brought out members of the Bet Din and many others to listen to him speak, leading him to remark that 'opposition, especially of the sort we find here in Europe, is non-existent'.

To this very day, I would argue this holds true. Those of us from outside of the Ashkenazi world, then, can also hold our heads high, knowing that we are the proud bearers of a different-yet-similar Religious Zionist tradition of our own; may we continue our forebears' ideological legacy of true passion for the land of Israel, and take pleasure in the knowledge that we, in our days, can see in the State of Israel what those who came before it so strongly dreamed of.





THE RESTORATION OF JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY

DANIEL ROSS
SHEVET MORASHA

Rambam, as a prelude to outlining the Halachot of Chanuka, first recounts the Chanuka story, writing that after the oppression by the Greeks and subsequent military victory Chashmonaim, “they appointed a king from the Kohanim and sovereignty returned to Yisrael for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Bet haMikdash”.

Rav Neventzal shlit'a and Rav Soloveitchik zt'l, among others, explain that the return of Jewish sovereignty is what enables the recitation of Hallel on Chanuka. The Gemara (Megilla 14a) states in the name of Rava that we don't recite Hallel on Purim as “we were still slaves to Achashverosh”, however with the restoration of self-governance in the Chanuka-era a new anthem emerged: “In the past we were slaves to Paroh, slaves to the Greeks, but now we are servants of HaKadosh Baruch Hu!”.

Whilst this explanation nicely explains why we say Hallel on Chanuka, it suggests that sovereignty is the freedom from oppression by a foreign entity and having no master but Hashem. Though this may be true, the notion of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael represents far more.

Rav Soloveitchik, in a 1956 address, explained that the establishment of Medinat Yisrael, the return of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael represented the end of an era of *hester panim* (G-d hiding His face, as it were) as it demonstrated that contrary to other theological pronouncements, Hashem had not forsaken His people. Therefore, we can say that Jewish sovereignty serves as a *kiddush Hashem*. Additionally, Ramban (Bamidbar 33:53 and Hasagot al Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzva 4) explains that there are two components to the mitzva of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael: living in the land of Israel and having sovereignty over it. Perhaps based on this, Beit Yosef (OC 561:1) suggests that though the destruction of the cities of Ye-

huda and Yerushalayim can be expressed by a lack of Jews living where they once lived (a technical ‘*churban*’), nonetheless even if Jews are living in Yehuda and Yerushalayim but under foreign rule, this lack of Jewish sovereignty renders it still ‘destroyed’ (a national ‘*churban*’).

What then is the national significance of sovereignty? Does the geo-political state in a small country in the Middle East have any religious bearing on a Jew in England? Though Ramban is critical of the Chashmonaim for ascending to the monarchy and thereby not only failing to keep *malchut* and *mikdash* separate but also for establishing a king who was not from Shevet Yehuda, Rav Soloveitchik justifies their decision. He explains that it was necessary for the Kohanim to have political control (sovereignty) in order to fulfil their responsibility to protect the *Kodesh haKodeshim*, and, we can add, to protect the spiritual wellbeing of the nation in an era of heretics, the Greek prohibition of keeping Shabbat and performing Brit Milah and their desire to cause Jews to forget and desert Torah.

Thus, Jewish sovereignty serves as the framework upon which Am Yisrael can actualise our responsibility to be a “nation of priests and a holy nation” (Shemot 19:6). Indeed, Ramban writes that first we must establish Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael and only after this will we have the building of the Bet haMikdash. “Jewish sovereignty precedes, therefore, the building of the Mikdash,” writes Rav Drukman zt'l. “Certainly, the purpose is to reveal the holiness of Yisrael which culminates with the revelation of the Shechina in the Bet HaMikdash, but this holiness can be revealed in its entirety only on the basis of Israel's independence and peace.” Therefore, Rav Druckman elsewhere (BeChail u'BeRuach) argues, “Only after the Chashmonaim begun to establish an ‘Israeli’ government in Eretz Yisrael and renewed their political independence, could they also enter the Mikdash and renew its service and light the Menorah.”

As Rav Kook zt'l writes, “When the holy nation is healthy and strong in body, holiness is strengthened in the world. When the children of Israel will be strong, healthy and solid the air of the world will be holy and pure. All physical material of *tzaddikim* ele-

vates the entire world in its spirituality. ... And it's understood through this that the healthy and strength of Klal Yisrael is the foundation of light in the world, holiness in the world, the revelation of G-dliness in the world, the purification of middot, the elevation of justice and the emergence of moral victory in the world. The development of physical courage in Israel will bring out from the strength into action wonderful soul embraces, and the supreme



NETZACH YISRAEL
RABBANIT AVIYA
RABBANIT SHLICHA

During the days of Hanukkah, we add the prayer Al Hanisim to our Tefilla. In this prayer, we emphasise the victory of the Hasmoneans over the Greeks against all odds, as we highlight, “You delivered the many into the hands of the few, the weak into the hands of the strong.” Undoubtedly, such a miracle, where the few prevail over the many, the weak overcome and drive away the mighty, is a great miracle that goes against the laws of nature.

In light of this, the behaviour of the Hasmoneans raises wonder: how were they willing to rely on the miracle? What crossed their minds before entering into battle against forces much superior to theirs? In addition to the logical wonder, there is also a halakhic dimension of wonder. The general halakhic principle (Kiddushin 39b) is that one should not rely on a miracle. The Hasmonean heroes were not familiar with Al Hanisim and were unaware that Hashem would save them through miracles beyond natural means. If so, how did they dare to raise the banner of rebellion against the Greeks when all the odds were against them? The answer is that when it comes to the general existence of the people of Israel, we do not engage in natural deliberations; rather, we must go out and act. In the end, after our efforts, we also merit seeing miracles from G-d.

According to realistic calculations, Israel should have long ceased to exist in the world. Israel is likened to a lamb among sev-

light of the Torah will find the firm foundation it deserves, and there will arise for us luminaries of the world, men of divine spirit, mighty men, who sing with G-d and with people and are capable of them.” This Chanuka, let's remember the significance of Jewish sovereignty in that it enables us to take the light from the re-kindled menorah in the Bet HaMikdash and use it to illuminate the entire world around us with G-dliness and G-dly values.

enty wolves, and those wolves never cease to seize opportunities to prey on the lamb. The phenomenon of “Netzach Yisrael” (the eternity of Israel) is a miraculous phenomenon with no logical explanation. A tiny nation, exiled for thousands of years, subjected to decrees and persecutions, slaughters and pogroms, and yet, despite everything – Am Yisrael Chai!

The existence of the people of Israel goes beyond realistic calculations. Faith in the supernatural dimension has accompanied our existence since the beginning of our nationhood. When Avraham stood against the whole world, he was alone and isolated. He left his land, his birthplace, and his father's house. Alone, he stood on one side of the world, and all the rest of humanity on the other (P'sikta Rabbati, Lekh Lekha 33). What did Avraham think to himself? Can one individual change the entire world?

Yes! Avraham believed so, and he was right, and we continued in his path. Like Avraham, so do we continue in his path. Even today, in our times, we can look at the reality around us and think that we have no chance. Enemies from all directions surround Israel, and these days, Jews in many places around the world are afraid to walk in public places. How can we continue to talk about Geula, Shivat Tzion, being “Or La'goim” when we have so many enemies and challenges? However, when making calculations for the nation, especially if these calculations are for the long term, we must not narrow our thoughts due to concerns or immediate motives. Am Yisrael are an eternal people. Our dreams and missions in the world are tasks connected to eternity. And this eternity is not limited by anything. Like in the time of Hanukkah, and so in our days.

בְּיָמֵינוּ הַיּוֹמִים, בְּזִמְנֵנוּ הַזֶּה.



ON SUKKOT AND CHANUKA

QUINCY BARRETT
SHEVET HINEINI

This year it felt like sukkot didn't really come to an end. Just as we entered the day of Shemini Atzeret, the whole Jewish world started hurting. Shemini Atzeret, a day on which the gemara tells us that Hashem wants to be close to us alone, a day of simcha, became a day on which divinity seemed absent.

However, the idea that Sukkot is not really over, or that Sukkot is out of its right time, has occurred many times in Jewish history.

The first time we see this occur is in SeferMelachim, in which the evil king of the north, Yoram specifically moves Sukkot to the wrong month. This triggered a descent into Avoda Zara and, ultimately, the start of the end of Yoram. This comes only a few perakim after we see Shlomo use Sukkot to dedicate the newly built Temple. In fact, Shemini Atzeret becomes a final day on which the nation is so filled with simcha that they bless Shlomo. These stark contrasts really highlight the highs and lows of Sukkot.

In the days of Ezra and Nechemya, the returnees from Galut Bavel experience the extreme beauty of Sukkot. We are told that not since Yehoshua had the people been so sameach on Sukkot. This is of course very bittersweet. It is beautiful to see the Geulah enlightening the eyes of those who had never celebrated Sukkot before. And yet, it is sad to think that even during the days of David Hamelech, Sukkot had not been so happy.

But you may ask, what does all of this have to do with chanukah? The link comes because chanukah has two histories, two paths of development. One is the spiritual path - that of the miracle of the oil which lasted for 8 days. The other is of the physical path - that of the miracle of the Chashmonayim, a small group

of fighters taking back Har Habayit. This latter history is expounded in the Book of the Maccabees.

When the Maccabees finally declared, Har Habatit Byadeinu, it was again bittersweet. The story of chanuka is one where we take tragedy and create hope. The Chashmonaim broke back into the Bet Hamikdash and restored it to its former glory. They finally restored the Bet Hamikdash on the 25th of Kislev, but the fighting had meant that they were unable to celebrate Sukkot earlier that year. Some saw this as nothing but a lost chag, thinking they missed their chance. The Chashmonayim did something radical, and said - 'we are going to celebrate Sukkot right here, right now. 2 months later.' They said that 'no matter how dark our history, we will continue to sing and dance'. Our hands that once held swords, shall now hold our lulav, the sword of Hashem; the fire of the Simchat Bet Hashoeva shall burn brighter than ever for we are in the darkest month, Kislev. The Chashmonayim took darkness and destruction and turned it into light and creation.

In many ways it is rather appropriate. Chanuka literally translates as the dedication, for the Chashmonayim rededicated the temple. Many see this as not the rededication of the second Temple, but the main dedication of the Temple, that really revealed the beauty and power of the Bet Hamikdash. Therefore, it was specifically on the festival of Sukkot that the Temple was dedicated (albeit deeper into winter). Some would even say that it is the other way around. Sukkot is the festival in which we dedicate temporary houses, Sukkot, the time where we historically dedicated Temples. In fact, the entire festival is a remembrance of the dedication of the Jewish people to Hashem whilst traveling in Sinai. The Chashmonayim were celebrating Sukkot when they rededicated the Temple, because it is Sukkot which is the festival of dedication.

Now I turn to the awful attacks of October 7th, which came at a time when we did not expect them. But just as Sukkot is time for dedication, it becomes our job to utilise the events of Oct

7th and use all our energy to dedicate evil into good. To take the awful events that have happened to us and turn them into hope. As someone said to me, these cries need not be in vain; they can indeed be the cries of childbirth, where we bring life into the world through our pain. And therefore, as we enter Chanuka,



WHAT MAKES CHANUKAH SPECIAL?

LANI ESHEL
NORTHERN SHLICHA

The gemara (Arachin) discusses the reasons why we recite Hallel on certain Chaggim, but not on others. We say Hallel for all eight days of Chanuka, of course, because of the miracles HaShem performed for us. Why then, asks the Gemara, don't we say Hallel on Purim?

There are several answers discussed, the first being that Rav Nachman says "the reading of the megillah is its Hallel". He believes that instead of saying various Tehillim that compromise Hallel, we read Megillat Esther instead.

However, the answer that I want to focus on is the answer given by Rav Yitzhak. He states that "we do not sing praise for a miracle that occurred outside the land". With this logic, you might now be wondering now why we say Hallel on Pesach, however the Gemara explains that the Exodus from Egypt occurred before the Jews had ever entered Eretz Yisrael. Once we had entered, Hallel was no longer recited on miracles that took place in Chutz La'aretz. Why is this the case? Surely, we want to thank Hashem for the miracles He performs for us no matter where they occur? Are we less thankful when Hashem saves our lives in Chutz La'aretz than when He does in Eretz Yisrael?

Before I answer that question, a word of introduction from Rav Moshe Lichtman; why is Eretz Yisrael so special? Why do our sages lavish so much praise on the land? Many Rishonim and Achronim answer this question based on a verse in Devarim (11:12):

when we celebrate the Chashmonayim being victorious over our enemies back then, I give everyone the challenge: use this period of re-dedication to think, how can I dedicate myself to good over evil, to hope over tragedy, so that we shall be victorious over our enemies of today? נצח ישראל לא ישקר.

ארץ אשר ה' אלקיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלקיך בה מרשיית השנה ועד אחרית השנה

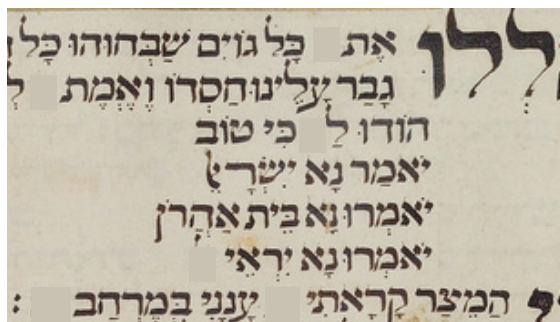
A land that the Lord Hashem seeks out; the eyes of the Lord Hashem are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

Meaning that Hashem is directly involved in the affairs of Eretz Yisrael. He oversees everything that goes on here and provides its inhabitants with an extra measure of Hashgacha pratit. In Chutz La'aretz on the other hand, Hashem appoints angelic ministers to supervise matters and care for the needs of its inhabitants.

The Marasha uses this concept to explain the difference between Chanuka and Purim in terms of Hallel. The Miracles of Chanuka were a direct result of Divine Intervention, because they occurred in Hashem's land. The miracles of Purim however were accomplished through messengers sent by Hashem, and therefore it is fitting that we say Hallel only on miracles that Hashem himself performs.

This is the difference between Chanuka and Purim, at least in terms of Hallel; On Chanuka, the Jews were in Hashem's land, and He was directly looking out for us, He himself intervened. May we be zoche to see His intervention, to feel His miracles, and to have more reasons to say Hallel.

Chanuka Sameach!





VISIONS & MENORAHS

SOPHIE HARRIS
SHEVET MORASHA

In this piece we are going to take a short look back at Haftorah of Shabbat Chanukah – the prophecy of Zecharia. His vision contains a vision of the golden Menorah which both acts as a symbol in the prophecy, and connects with the obvious theme of Chanukah! Zechariah prophesies that this will adorn the Second Beit Mikdash when it is built, bringing with it joy and the celebration of the return of G-d's presence to Jerusalem. The promise of such days brings us the ultimate point of hope in our days.

I wanted to find out what the true significance of the Menorah is – an icon of the Jewish people within and outside of Israel since ancient times. Why does it stand as a symbol for Judaism above all of the other constructions in the Beit Mikdash, and why was it was the object chosen to represent the festival of Chanukah? First, let's look at some context behind the Haftorah...

The angel shows Zechariah a vision of a Menorah with 7 lamps, draped with two olive branches, whilst promising peace. Zecharia asks, 'what is that'? Not understanding its significance at first. The angel explains the vision: 'And he (the angel) replied and spoke to me (Zechariah) saying, "This is the Lord's word to Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by (military) force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit," says the Lord of Hosts.'

Rabbi Hirsch explains that there is a certain power of victory within the spiritual light of Divine Law, suffusing us with innate strength and victory, without the need to achieve military might, and even enabling us to defeat armies. Thus, we can understand that there is something innately spiritual about the menorah and what it symbolises within the Beit Mikdash, and may even contain the key to understanding the Jewish nation.

Indeed, the emblem of the State of Israel which we are all so familiar with, is taken exactly from the verses of this Haftorah! The "solid gold lampstand (with) seven lamps... (and) two olive trees by it" [Zechariah 4:3-4] contains a message of hope, drawing back to Israel's roots of Torah. We learn from the Torah that the lamps of the menorah were lit daily, "from evening until morning", starting with the shamash. Miraculously, the first lamp kindles would never run out of oil during the time of the first Beit Mikdash and most of the second, according to Rashi.

The Talmud teaches us that the Menorah symbolised the idea of wisdom and enlightenment. "Rabbi Isaac said: He who desires to become wise should incline to the south [when praying]." (The Menorah was on the South side of the Beit Mikdash). [The following ideas are built off of Rabbi Raphael Zarum's insights]. The menorah represents LIGHT, or enlightenment. Whilst now we do not require the light of fire to see, in days of old, fire was the only means by which one could learn beyond the hours of daylight – allowing one to see to study texts and information. We know that oil was the most preferable means of lighting the Menorah and remains to be today for our Chanukiot. Yet Rabbah bar Nachmani suggested in the Talmud (Shabbat 23a) that sesame oil may be preferable, as its light is longer lasting. He then yields to Rabbi Yehoshua, as he sees that olive oil produces a 'clearer light'. But is there something inherently significant in the use of OLIVE oil?

Olive oil, interestingly, was essential to Greek culture (Athens, the ancient capital, took its name from Athena the goddess of wisdom, because she introduced them to the olive tree). Even today, the Greek euros present the olive branch on one side of the coin. The Olympic Games which stemmed from Greece were crowned with a wreath made from an olive branch, and granted a lifetime supply of olive oil.

So how can we reconcile these two images in one – the Greek Hellenistic ideals and Jewish

ideals, brought together by the symbol of the oil? Perhaps, the very structure of the menorah can lend us an answer. The Netziv teaches us that the middle stem of the Menorah symbolises the wisdom of the Torah, whilst the three wicks on either side represent other forms of knowledge. Yet all the wicks face the centre – lending us a truly Modern Orthodox approach! Everything we learn in and gather from life must circle back to G-dliness. We should not forsake these paths but use them to feed the whole of the ‘menorah’.

Chanukah epitomises the might of spirituality and wisdom over Hellenistic bodily ideals. But the true win is not completely disregarding the virtues that Greek culture, or indeed ‘secular’ culture nowadays gives to us. Infused with poetry, writings, art, philosophy, glory and aesthetics, the world has undoubtedly been formed and enhanced immeasurably through different cultures which have passed through it. The Greeks failed when they failed to under-

stand that all branches must not be cultivated and grown for their own means, but rather that all should ‘point towards the middle’.

Rabbi Zarum writes that the true battle of Chanukah was the battle of priorities; the seduction of a Hellenised society threatened to overcome their own ideals, threatening to cause them to forget their Jewish identities and true focus. Yet we regained them, and regained our core, through the Chanukah story. As we light our chanukiot, adding a light each night, we draw all of our ‘worldly’ knowledge into the centre. We sit and benefit from the light of the menorah without external distractions, for a minimum of 30 minutes, and release the true light which binds together our existence – the light of G-dliness. We spend time with family and speak Divrei Torah. This is the difference between the Jewish nation and the secular ideals of glory, wisdom and competition, which fall cold with no centre candle. This is the light which illuminates us on Chanukah.



THE ETERNAL LIGHT

RAFI DAVIS
SHEVET OROT

Cutting Chanuka to the core

Rav Pincus, in Nefesh Shimshon, wrote how the Jewish calendar is like an upwards spiral. Every year you go over the same points, but you are interacting on a higher level with each of the moadim throughout your life.

Understanding the essence of the Yomim Noraim and Shalosh Regalim is a mostly straightforward affair; we can look at the relevant passukim which will implicitly and explicitly tell us the essence of these occasions.

However, for Chanukah, and indeed for Purim, we have to plumb the depths of the words of Chazal who themselves decided that the themes and core messages of these occasions warranted being enshrined in Halacha to be observed for generations to come.

The Gemara primarily deals with Chanukah in the second perek of Masechet Shabbat and in fact explicitly questions what Chanukah is about. Let’s briefly list the points which the Gemara answers in response:

1. From the 25th Kisleiv there are 8 days of Chanukah.
2. You may not fast or eulogise on them.
3. The Greeks entered the sanctuary of the Mikdash and made all the oil there impure
4. When the Chashmonaim were successful they found a single unaffected, suitable jar of oil sufficient for one day
5. There was a miracle and it lasted for 8 days
6. From the following year they was established as yomim tovim - days of praise and thanks.

The Nesivos Shalom suggests this poses two key questions for us: What was the goal of the Greeks in their actions of tarnishing all the oil, preventing the menorah from being lit seems like a strange military tactic? 2. Rashi understands the gemara to not simply be asking what is Chanukah, but on what miracle was it established? Clearly the gemara focuses on the oil, why is the military victory, the most essential component of the salvation only mentioned in passing?

The Indicative Berachot

Before we answer these questions, let's first look at an alternative way of understanding the essence of any of our festivals: the primary mitzvot. In the same way as the sukkah and the shofar help encapsulate the energy of those chagim, the Menorah can teach us about Chanukah's soul.

In particular, the bracha we make beforehand serves to focus our minds to perform the mitzvah with the fullest intentions, can help us unlock this mitzvah. So to explain in reverse: berachot can indicate to us about mitzvot which informs us about the relevant chag. When lighting our chanukiot we say two berachot: "Who sanctified us with his mitzvot and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah lights" "Who did miracles for our fathers in those days, at this time". This second bracha, echoed before reciting megillah on purim is a recognition that our historical, divinely assisted triumph, is to be re-lived in our collective consciousness over and over.

According to Rav Hirsch, the connection of these two berachot is a crucial indicator in understanding Chanukah. The root of the word 'Chanukah' is 'chinuch', which can mean both 'education' and 'consecration'. Rav Hirsch explains that this marriage of meaning represents a uniquely Jewish concept of Chanukah. Whereas education is a dedication which endures for life, Chanukah is not a summit followed by a decline, but more like charting a course and starting out the journey - hitting the white ball with the pool cue and watching it roll steadily towards the pocket (my mashul, not Rav Hirsch's).

Rather, Chanukah reoccurs throughout our history, in an increasingly stronger light guiding us with strengthening dedication to our national goal. When the Chashmonaim placed the chanukiah, the light of dedication, in the hands of every household to ensure the spirit of rededicating the Mikdash would be captured and renewed by every Jewish home, working together towards our national goal.

This is how these berachot are brought together: our kindling of the menorah represents us tuning into the frequency of the Chanukah's of old, the times where we experienced a rededication to our educational lifeforce and our national mission of spreading the light of Torah to the world. This is why we

invoke the miracles performed, because they are crucial to the success of this mitzvah of keeping the ancient flame burning for generations to come.

Now let's come back to our two questions. The Ramban, based on a Midrash, at the start of Parashas Beha'alosacha tells us that Hashem assuring Aharon about the eternal nature of the menorah in the mikdash, even in a state of destruction, is reflected as a continuation in our annual lighting. This is reinforced through the idea that we light a Chanukiah of eight rather than a menorah of seven, as the Mahral emphasises the change from the seven of physical perfection and completion to the eight of beyond the natural world. When the Temple stood, we had a physical place for the light of Hashem, shechinah to dwell and for the menorah to capture this constant presence through being continually lit. However, in our 2000 year galus, without a home for Hashem, the light can only be continued on a more detached, distant plane beyond the natural world and we are only truly able to continue this light in a much more limited fashion for 8 days a year, in our homes. The Greeks understood the power and symbolism of the menorah, of Hashem's or and how they sought to blot it out by striking at our spiritual foundations, removing the light of Hashem would leave Am Yisrael stumbling around in the dark, losing sight of who they are.

When the Chasmonaim triumphed, the one tiny jar of oil found showed that no matter how strongly you may try to eradicate the flame we have been cradling, a tiny spark will still remain, which with Hashem's help can be magnified to a far greater extent, eightfold in this case, to give us a fresh Chanukah experience, giving us the necessary encouragement to rededicate ourselves to our national mission. The military victory was no doubt significant but Hashem has helped us win battles more unlikely than that before. However, the message of the oil reminds us of the need to amplify the concept of consecration, physically manifested through an "or chadash".

Some years this light may burn brighter, other years, like this one, powerful forces are at work to try extinguish our light, yet Chanukah provides us all an opportunity to remember that we each hold a small chelek in maintaining the slender presence that

the shechinah has in the world. By lighting and absorbing the message of chanukah, we bring ourselves closer to being able to return the chanukiah to being a menorah, bringing

the shechinah back into this world with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, Bimheira B'yameinu! Chanukah Sameach!

”אור חנוכה על-ציון תאיר ונזכה בלנו מטהרה לאור”



WHAT IS SIGD?

SOPHIE HARRIS
SHEVET MORASHA

This article combines the Israel, or Zionist theme of this publication together with Moreshet, as we dive into the Ethiopian holiday of Sigd. Having grown up in an “Ashkenormative” (if that is a term now being used?) home and school in the UK, the opportunities to learn about different Jewish cultural practices are often overtaken by other priorities. So until this name popped up on my Jewish calendar a few weeks ago, I personally had not even heard of this day. Let’s take a look at it: Sigd is celebrated on the 29th Cheshvan, exactly 50 days after Yom Kippur. The name ‘Sigd’ means ‘prostration’ in an ancient Ethiopian. The day is themed around accepting the Torah, and yearning for Israel and the Beit Mikdash. It is thought to be the date on which Hashem first revealed himself to Moshe. This day does not only mark the unwavering commitment of Ethiopian Jewry to the Land of Israel, but also recalls the covenant between the community and Hashem.

The Ethiopian Jewish community lived in complete isolation to the rest of the Jewish community, and most likely originally arrived in Ethiopia between the 5th-6th centuries, called the ‘Beta Yisrael’. Many of their accounts of their own origins, however state that they stem from the ancient migration of part of Shevet Dan to Ethiopia during the split of the northern and southern Kingdoms. Despite some periods of persecution, on the whole they were treated well by the Ethiopian monarchy, dividing themselves into smaller communities with little communication be-

tween them, and no overarching leader. Since they were so separated from the rest of the world, they developed a unique set of religious practices which may seem very different to the Judaism we are used to!

During times of exile and hardship, Ethiopian Jews clung to their faith, expressing their yearning for Jerusalem through prayers and aspirations for a return to Israel, and never giving up on these dreams.

Traditionally, members of the community fast on Sigd, read from their scriptures (called the Octateuch – the 5 books of the Torah plus Yehoshya, Shoftim and Rut, recite Tehillim, and pray for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash.

It is also considered a time, like Shavuot, of the renewing of the covenant with Hashem. Interestingly, there is also crossover with Yom Kippur. As well as fasting, the Beta Yisrael would prepare themselves by purifying themselves before the festival, and wearing clean clothes (preferably white, with coloured fringes) and – bearing a stone – climb a mountain top in a significance village in the area, which would be compared with Har Sinai. The fast ends mid-day with a feast and dancing.

“Sigd is about hope. The hope of living in Israel and rebuilding the temple. Until the day that happens, we need to keep our Jewish and Ethiopian identities alive and thriving,” shared Qes Efraim (New York Shlichim for the Jewish Agency in 2020). “The holiday may have started



as an Ethiopian holiday but it's now a Jewish one and meant to encourage Jews all over the world to strengthen their identities and be a light unto the nations."

The aliyah of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, often referred to as Operation Moshe and Operation Solomon, marked a historical moment in the Zionist narrative (1984 and 1991), although the 'First Wave' came along in 1934, and continued to come over in small groups. A youth group even arrived in Israel in the 1950s to undergo training in Hebrew education, and returned to Ethiopia to educate the young Beta Israeli community members there. It was only in 1975 that the Israeli government of Yitzchak Rabin officially accepted the Beta Yisrael as Jews for the purpose of the Law of Return. Many within

Israel unfortunately provided initial resistance towards the integration of the new community, questioning the status of their Jewish heritage and requiring many to convert (or re-convert) to Judaism. Despite these questions and obstacles, including most of the community being unable to read or write Hebrew even in 1999, today, much progress has been made and Ethiopian Jews are integrating increasingly into mainstream Israeli society. Moreover, the Ethiopian government is an important ally of Israel today, offering mutual protection and assistance to one another.

Rav Druckman also established a Mechina for the Ethiopian boys within his Yeshiva, and would celebrate Sigd in Yeshiva every year.



PROPHETIC ISRAEL: SAM STONEFIELD NORTHERN SHLICHA

The Israelite nation has long considered itself special beyond simply being the recipients and representatives of the Torah. Whilst this does have biblical origins there is a strongly held belief within the national Jewish consciousness that there is something inherently unique about Jewish civilisation. What then sets apart the people Israel? What has our civilisation brought to the human story that no other national enterprise has?

Whilst this is a very open question that could be answered in a variety of ways, I want to focus on one of the fundamental institutions of Jewish society. We pride ourselves on our judges and our judiciary, but many civilisations have had their lawgivers and courts long before we did. Our priesthood has played a role ranging in Jewish society from Sinai till today. This has morphed and developed across a spectrum from the political, to the educational to the bureaucratic but always under the umbrella of spiritual service. But again... many nations have had priests. The Jewish people have long

boasted an impressive array of kings, ranging from supremely righteous to downright psychotic and evil (often within a generation of each other) but many other nations had kings before us and many have since (as the country of my birth still attests).

What office then, what facet of Jewish civilisation, is truly unique? I would like to cast a light on a uniquely Jewish occupation that has a tendency to be lost in the sea of contemporary Jewish thought - that of the prophet. The prophet was a unique stratum in Jewish (or rather Israelite) society. Whilst they were granted certain clairvoyance, it was not the job of the prophet to tell the future nor especially to tell the past; the job of the prophet was to tell the present, in all of its unvarnished and unpleasant regalia. To aid him (or her) in this endeavour, the prophet was not constrained by wealth or by class, and felt as comfortable preaching in a palace as they did a field. The prophet could not be bribed or intimidated, nor could he be curtailed or silenced, making them the ultimate wild cards in a society where religious and political power was finely balanced by the crown and the priesthood.

We have long preserved nineteen books of prophecy (not including Chumash which stands in a category all of its own). But with

some exceptions, they sit in anonymity, untouched and unloved by the wider Jewish world. Even those that are famed are treated as barely more than children's stories.

Why then have we neglected our prophets? For a very long time, the study of the prophets (and Tanakh more broadly) was neglected simply because it wasn't a priority. During two thousand years of exile the questions raised by Tanakh weren't at the forefront of the Jewish consciousness. When living under gentile rule, questions of how a Jewish society should operate and how its mechanisms of power should be balanced were not as important as practical law. Thus, the study of the Talmud became the centrepiece of Jewish learning (and rightly so) as the study of Gemora is integral to understanding how to be a Jew, how to interpret laws and how halacha should develop and grow into new societies and environments. But if Gemora is the book of our heritage, Tanakh is the book of our national destiny. If Gemora teaches us how to be a Jewish, then Tanakh teaches us what it means to be Jew.

Our tradition teaches that forty eight male and seven female prophets are recorded to have prophesied to the Jewish people, but the total number of prophets that presided in Israel was double the number of those who left Egypt. Why then do we only have such a small number of prophetic books? The Gemora answers this question immediately by explaining that our prophetic books are le-dorot, for the generations, i.e., they bear important messages not just for their immediate recipients but for all of Israel throughout all of history.

So, what range of topics are so timeless? What exactly was it that the prophets discussed? If these are individuals that come in contact with the divine, it would not be a surprise to learn that they evaluate the eternal questions of the human condition such as, 'what does it mean to exist?' or 'humanity within the divine hierarchy' but instead we find them preaching about the widow and the orphan. When they should be guiding us through the beautiful architecture of human thought, they are instead scandalised by bribery and corruption. They see

not the aesthetics and complexity of creation, only the transient injustices of contemporary society. Their outrage often borders on hysteria, as A.J. Heschel so neatly puts it: "To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world."

The campaigning of the prophets was not of a transcendent nature but bound inexorably to the problems at the root of the human ego. Their issues were not conceptual but real and gritty; they cut through the trappings and finery of society to the despair and misery that lay just under the surface. They spoke simultaneously for the Almighty as well as the downtrodden. Ostensibly lecturing on power, injustice, history, ethical behaviour and teshuvah, the prophets invested great effort into redefining these terms in accordance with the values of the Torah, tearing down the rot of paganist thought that had infected Israelite society.

Our prophets were both somehow anti-establishment and pillars of the establishment, vandalisers of status quo but the great protectors of their people. And, they most often failed. They failed because no matter how right or charismatic a leader may be, people who do not wish to be inspired, won't be. But we don't have to be like that. To get to grips with the prophets we must first become familiar with them and their works. Like with all learning, understanding requires much thought and time. But that has to begin with at least a sense of curiosity – which was my aim with this essay. Curiosity to understand what societal and cultural furnaces forged such characters as the prophets, (none of whom I have even named because I haven't the space to do them or their messages justice). Perhaps another time.

They are a diverse group of individuals from a range of backgrounds, linked together by their passion and zealotry but ultimately the love of those around them. People who didn't just shine, but burned with G-d's light. Surely that's got to be worth a peek.



THE DIVINITY OF ISRAEL'S AGRICULTURAL CYCLE

ZAC BENJAMIN

SHEVET HASHACHAR

Stage 1- Foundation

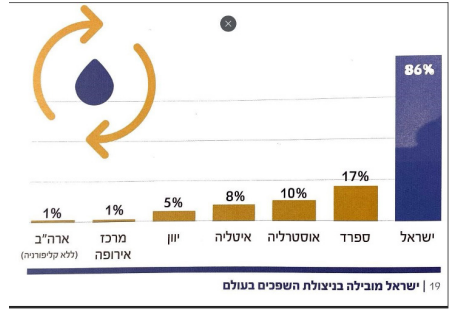
In sefer Devarim, Moshe exhibits to Am Yisrael an agricultural cycle that is embedded in the Land of Israel and in the wording of the Torah. Moshe begins by displaying the passuk (דברים ח:ז)

כִּי הַמְבִיאֵךְ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נְחָלִי מַיִם עֵינָהּ וְתַהֲלֹחַ יֵצְאִים בְּבִקְעָהּ וּבְהָרֶיךָ:

'For your G-d is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill'

When beginning any process/cycle one needs to start with the foundation. The foundation is what holds the entire project together – whether it is a building or an essay, everything created in this world - both man made and natural - all come from a bedrock root. It is evident that the ultimate source for every process in this world is G-d, although G-d created sub-sources for each process and project. For example, in the literal sense: a building needs its foundation to support all the walls, staircases, floors etc. In the agricultural process, the desire is to produce, sustain and grow crops and food. This outcome can only be achieved by a source of water (its foundation). The method that plants use to grow needs water as a fundamental reactant to nurture itself for production. Therefore, Moshe begins this trilogy of passukim by describing the water sources of the Land of Israel. To present the agricultural possibilities that the Land G-d gave to us has to offer. A land of flowing water, a lack of stagnancy, with myriads of opportunities to undergo this very process. In addition, this beginning stage is not only a foundation stage, to support the latter stages, it is also a stage which will provide Am Yisrael in its own right. Am Yisrael as a people are a nation that allow

for development, technological advancements and utilising the divine resources that have been given to us by G-d. This can be proven in the modern advancements of our ability to desalinate water, as shown in the graph below:



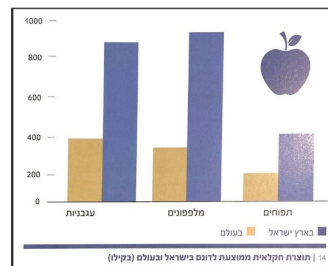
Stage 2- Produce

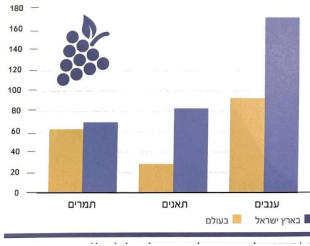
(דברים ח:ח)

אֶרֶץ חֲטָהּ וְשֵׁעֶרָה וְגֶפֶן וְתַאֲנֶה וּרְמוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵיתֵי שֶׁמֶן וְדָבָשׁ:

'a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey'

Subsequently, Moshe then parades the שבעת המינים as the next step in this cycle. After describing the richness of water that our Land has to offer, and the multitude of agricultural possibilities G-d has given us, Moshe explains some of the many products that will come from our Land. The bedrock of this cycle, water, is so strong and providing, that it has the power to sustain some of the most diverse products in the world, in a geographically dense land. Therefore, this step in the cycle is presented by Moshe as a miraculous stage; the agricultural system in the Land of Israel is unique as it is injected with divinity. It is true that the cycle runs through the same stages as any other cycle, yet no other cycle is infused with G-d's divinity. This can be portrayed through today's statistics of produce from Eretz Yisrael.





These graphs explain only a tiny sector of Israel's produce. However we can conclude that there is indeed divinity in our Land's agricultural cycle, it is not only proven in the practically unexplanatory statistics. It is also proven by the very wording of Moshe in these passukim.

Stage 3- Appreciation

Accordingly, we have now uncovered 2 stages from this cycle, both having been proven statistically to have a "secret ingredient". Although the cycle does not stop here. The passuk below explains our commandment to praise G-d for infusing our cycle with his divine powers: (דברים ח:י)

ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את יקוק אלקיך עליה ארץ הטובה אשר נתת לך:

'When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to your G-d for the good land given to you.'

The final stage of the cycle is the stage is up to us as Am Yisrael to complete, not G-d. We have experienced the very gift of G-d, therefore, once we have enjoyed this gift, we need to thank and praise him. Arguably, the ambiguous word in this passuk is 'ושבעת'. How can one know when they are "satiated"? Perhaps, in this passuk, the obligation of 'ברכת' is not on any specific foods one eats; perhaps it is our commandment to praise G-d on his divine presence in our entire agricultural system as a whole. רמב"ם states that in order to recite ברכת המזון one must be in a state of 'Vesavata' (משנה תורה הלכות ברכות א). Meaning, after experiencing the great power of G-d's part in our agriculture (eating to the point of satiation), one's obligation is to bless Him on a large scale.

In these three passukim, Moshe exhibits the divine agricultural system that Eretz Yisrael will be blessed with, and our obligation to bless G-d in return. It is our duty to recognise G-d's creation of our agricultural system, utilise the very produce of our Land and to finally praise G-d for giving us this miracle.

חנוכה שמח!



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