

# K1: Rosh Chodesh



## Aims

To understand that RC was the 1st mitzvah given to Am Yisrael  
To understand that RC is the cornerstone of the Jewish calendar  
How has the concept of RC changed throughout history?

## Rosh Chodesh

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Rosh Chodesh is the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as they come out of Egypt, and it is the first chomer chanichim are ever exposed to; but what's all the fuss about?

Let's go back to the very beginning of Shemot. The Jewish people are about to leave Egypt and G-d gives them the commandment of Rosh Chodesh...

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, ראש חודשים: ראשון הוא לכם, לחדשי השנה

*"this month shall be for you the head of the months, the first of the months of the year"*

Shemot 12:2

Why is this commandment the first that the Jewish people receive? Surely the 10 commandments or a fundamental mitzvah, e.g. Shabbat, would have been more significant and apt?

### Human activity

With the commandment of Rosh Chodesh, G-d is giving the Jewish people an empowering message. Up until now, the Jews have been slaves to the Egyptians. Their time was not their own. The difference between a free man and a slave, is that a slave achieves nothing for himself by his work, and his time is therefore not his own. If he finishes his work early, there is no point in starting another task, because he achieves nothing for himself by doing so, and when he is finished his master might simply order him to do something else. A free person should manage his time carefully and efficiently; every second is an opportunity to do good and become a better and more developed person.

Another potential explanation is the fact that we do not merely declare the new moon, but we *sanctify the new moon*, meaning that we designate it and set it aside as part of our religious and spiritual life. The journey of the Jewish people begins with this commandment because it teaches us that we have the potential to sanctify and elevate this world through the various mitzvot.



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A startling ramification of the ideas presented above is that the determination of the calendar therefore placed fully squarely in human hands. Thus if the moon were to appear in fact, on a Monday, but no one actually saw it until Tuesday, "seeing is believing" and the court would decide that the first of the month was on a Tuesday. As a result, G-d, as it were, follows the decision of the court and acts accordingly, so that for example in the case of Rosh Hashana, He would push off His judgment of the entire

world by one day! Another crazy ramification of the calendar being in human hands is that when the Rabbis decided to make leap years, Pesach gets delayed by a month (due to the extra Adar). So just think that when you're sitting down to your Purim Seudah that if the Rabbis hadn't really had the power to institute leap years, you'd be eating chametz when it's forbidden on 14<sup>th</sup> Nissan!

## Nationhood

On a deeper level, Rosh Chodesh symbolises renewal, the ability of the Jewish People to rise up from oblivion and restore itself to its past greatness. Just as the moon disappears at the end of each month, but returns and grows to fullness, so Israel may suffer exile and decline, but it always renews itself. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this was indeed the exodus from Egypt. The Jews had started off in Egypt as an exalted and wealthy family, were subsequently enslaved and downtrodden for two hundred years or so, and then plucked from their oppression by the revealed hand of G-d.

A perhaps related idea is the fact that a nation should have its own calendar and its own way of doing things. In the same way that we have a national law (the Torah) and a national homeland (Uganda Israel), we have a national calendar. In all your kvutsoth you should be trying to find a way to fit the chomer in with wider Bnei Akiva values.

## How it used to work

In ancient times, Rosh Chodesh was a significant festival day. At that time, the new months were determined by observation. Each month began when the first sliver of moon became visible. Observers would watch the sky at night for any sign of the moon. If they saw the moon, they would report their sightings to the Sanhedrin, which would interrogate them to make sure that they were not mistaken. Where in the sky did the moon appear? Which direction was it pointing? If two independent, reliable eyewitnesses confirmed that the new moon had appeared and described it consistently, the Sanhedrin would say 'Mekadesh'-sanctified. The process was called 'kiddush hachodesh'-sanctification of the month. This decision would then be communicated by messengers to all Jewish communities telling people when the month began. Essentially the decision of Sanhedrin could alter the date of the festivals, the day on which people testified and the New Moon was declared would decide whether any day of Yom Tov was one day or another. (This, by the way, is the basic reason why the Jews of the Diaspora would keep two days of the holidays, just in case they were wrong about which day was *Rosh Chodesh* if the information didn't arrive on time.)



One time there was a debate within the Sanhedrin regarding when the new month should begin. Rabbi Yehoshua said one day while Rabban Gamliel said another day. Rabban Gamliel was the Nasi, the head of the Sanhedrin and he demanded that his opinion be accepted. By having a different date for Rosh Chodesh it would have meant that Yom Kippur was a different day. In order to demonstrate that his view was correct he demanded that Rabbi Yehoshua appear in the Bet Midrash with his wallet and stick on the day which according to him was Yom Kippur. It was important for Rabban Gamliel that all the Jewish people were keeping the same calendar and the festivals on the same day.

## Fixed calendar

In later days, however, the calendar was fixed by mathematical computation. After the destruction of the Temple, sacrifices were no longer available. Accordingly, the significance of this festival has substantially diminished. There are some slight changes to the set form of celebrating Rosh Chodesh, including the addition of most of Hallel after the Shemoneh Esrei, and some additional Torah readings, but that is about the only observance of Rosh Chodesh today.

Here are some astronomy facts:

- **Earth** rotates about its axis (a day), it revolves around the sun in about **365¼ days**
- Revolution of the **moon** about the Earth (a month); it revolves around the Earth in about **29½ days**,
- Revolution of the **Earth** about the sun (a year), that takes **12.4 lunar months**

The Jewish calendar coordinates all three of these astronomical phenomena (which are independent of each other). Months are either 29 or 30 days, corresponding to the 29½-day lunar cycle. Years are either 12 or 13 months, corresponding to the 12.4 month solar cycle.

Here are some astrology facts:

- Astrology is nonsense
- Any time spent on astrology is a waste of time

The problem with strictly lunar calendars is that there are approximately 12.4 lunar months in every solar year, so a 12-month lunar calendar is about 11 days shorter than a solar year. The Torah says that Pesach must be in the spring, so we cannot allow the calendar to wander all over the place. In order to counter this we add 7 months every 19 years, and the years that we add a month are called leap years. The Jewish calendar is therefore a helio-lunar one.

## What we do today

In today's day and age, Rosh Chodesh is celebrated primarily by a number of different additions to our daily routine:

1. An additional prayer during the morning services called "Hallel", followed by 'Musaf' for Rosh Chodesh.
2. A special reading from the Torah during the morning services.
3. An additional prayer called "Ya'aleh v'yavo" is inserted during the Amidah prayer and Benching

## **Conclusion**

There are therefore two main points to this chomer. The first is to educate your chanichim that their time is important, and that they should make the most of it. They have the opportunity to chart their own paths in life and attempt to make the world a better place in so doing. The second is actually to give them some raw information about Rosh Chodesh in particular and the Jewish calendar in general.



## Aims

- To know what is a Regel;
- To know why it was done;
- To know how they are linked.

# Shalosh Regalim

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## I) The Shalosh Regalim:

The shalosh regalim are the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. The festivals are called regalim in Hebrew, in the singular regel meaning feet, because it is during these three festivals that the Jewish nation was commanded to ascend to Jerusalem. The commandment can be found in the following extract from the Torah:

“ Three times in the year, every one of your males shall appear before the Lord, your God, in the place He will choose: on the Festival of Matzoth and on the Festival of Weeks, and on the Festival of Sukkoth, and he shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.” (Devarim, Parshat Re”e)

The Festival was essentially a compulsive gathering of all Jews in one place three times a year.

But why was it done? What was its purpose?

## II) Reason

### a) To bring Jews together.

When the Jewish people were brought together during these three focal points in the year, it gave them the opportunity to affirm and strengthen their ties to the rest of the nation. Back in the day most Jews in Israel were not lawyers, bankers or accountants but rather farmers who were dispersed throughout the land of Israel to cultivate and grow produce. They were dispersed, and in so being it was very easy for them to forget that they are part of not only their locality but of the whole Jewish people. The shaloshm regalim gave them the opportunity to re-identify with the rest of the nation, to strengthen their religious belief by coming to Jerusalem the centre of learning.

### b) Reliance on G-d

Additionally, this time gave the people time not only to re-affirm their bond to one another but also, by coming to Jerusalem the centre of learning, they were given the opportunity to immerse themselves in a positive environment. One that would re-charge their religious batteries, so to speak, invigorating them for the months to come.

By being in the environment and having time to think ,unconstrained by work, they would ultimately be able to refocus their lives. To remember that in the end it is HaShem who provides them with all they need in order to succeed, the rain, soil, sun etc. To move away from the attitude of “I worked the land; therefore I owe my success to no one but myself”. An attitude which leaves no room for God.

This time would be to refocus their lives not only through contemplation and thought, but also through positive action. When every able bodied man left his town, the borders

were left defenceless. Because in those days, not having access to quick transport, the people who protected the borders were the people living next to them. They were the ones at-whoat initially defended the country and raised the alarm if the attack was more severe. By leaving their places of residence they placed their trust in God, that He would ensure that no one would attack the Jewish festival whilst the festival was being celebrated.

Therefore we see that the time of the festivals gave the people the time to immerse themselves in a positive environment, to reorient their lives towards and to actively place their trust in God.

III) How are these festivals connected to one another?

a) **AGRICULTURALLY**



"Offer a sacrifice to Me three times each year. Keep the festival of Matzos...the reaping festival...the harvest festival...Three times each year, every male among you must appear before God the Lord..." (Exodus 23:14-17) and "Keep the Festival of Matzahs...Keep the Festival of Shavuot through the first fruits of your wheat harvest. Also keep the harvest festival soon after the year changes. Three times each year, all your males shall thus present themselves before God the Master, Lord of

Israel." (Exodus 34:18-23)

"Safeguard the month of standing grain so that you will be able to keep the Passover to God your Lord, since it was in the month of standing grain that God your Lord brought you out of Egypt at night...Then count seven weeks for yourself. From the time that you first put the sickle to the standing grain, you must count seven weeks. You shall then celebrate the festival of Shavuot to God your Lord, presenting a hand-delivered offering according to the extent of the blessing that God your Lord has granted you...When you bring in the products of your threshing floor and wine vat, you shall celebrate the festival of Sukkot for seven days...Three times each year, all your males shall thus be seen in the presence of God your Lord in the place that He will choose: on the festival of matzahs, on the festival of Shavuot, and on the festival of Sukkoth. You shall not appear before God empty-handed." (Deuteronomy 16)

Rav Liebttag states: "It is not coincidental the Torah chose the solar calendar in its presentation of the Shalosh Regalim. Clearly, the Torah's requires that we thank God during these three critical times of the agricultural year, i.e. when nature 'comes back to life' early in the spring (Chag HaMatzot), at the conclusion of the wheat harvest (Shavuot), and at the conclusion of the fruit harvest (Succot)"



## **b) HISTORICALLY**

**PESACH**: Jewish people are told to prepare for the Exodus by making the Korban Pesach (Passover offering) of roasted lamb, matza and maror. They would get the lamb ready from 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Nisan, roast it on the 14<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon and eat it as a 'family Seder' that night (15<sup>th</sup> Nisan). At midnight on the eve of 15<sup>th</sup>, Hashem struck the firstborn of Egypt and Pharaoh hastened the Jews out that night/early morning.

\* From this point, through the months of Nisan & Iyar, the Jews wander around the desert, after the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea & the war with Amalek, arriving at Mount Sinai...

**SHAVUOT**: Jewish people arrive in the Sinai Desert on 1<sup>st</sup> Sivan and the 10 'Commandments' are given on 6<sup>th</sup> Sivan, then Moshe goes up the Mountain...

First 40 Days: Moshe goes up to get the luchot (tablets). However the Jewish people made the Golden Calf and he smashes the tablets. Dates were 7<sup>th</sup> Sivan-17<sup>th</sup> Tammuz.

Second 40 Days: Moshe goes up to ask G-d for forgiveness over the sin of the Golden Calf, and succeeds! Dates were 18<sup>th</sup> Tammuz-29<sup>th</sup> Av.

Third 40 Days: Moshe goes up again to get the Second Tablets and brings them down on Yom Kippur. Dates were 1<sup>st</sup> Elul-10<sup>th</sup> Tishrei

\* After this, the Jewish people started building the Mishkan as a 'house of G-d' where the Luchot could be kept and Hashem could communicate with Moshe. The **Succah** that we build remind us of the Mishkan and this is one reason why Succot is celebrated at this time.

~~The festivals represent a progression, from slavery to freedom, from a rabble to a people through the giving on the Torah, from a nation with a Torah to one that actively connects to God through the mishkan.~~

The festivals represent a progression, from slavery to freedom, from a rabble to a people through the giving on the Torah, from a nation with a Torah to one that actively connects to God through the Mmiskhan.

## **IV) Conclusion:**

The festivals, a compulsory gathering in Jerusalem, brought Israel together to reaffirm their bond to one another, to reorient their lives and place their trust in God by leaving their homes. The festivals also represent a progression of the Jewish nation, from slavery to a people actively involved in fulfilling the torah.

### **The Aims:**

- To know what is a Regel;
- To know why it was done;
- To know how they are linked.

A main theme of this Kvutzah is the journey of the Jewish people. Remember that Kvutzah time should also be a journey, both through the educational content and how you come together as a group.



## Aims

- To understand what is Rosh haShana;
- To know about the period between RH &YK
- To understand the meaning behind YK.

# Yamim Noraim

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The term Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe (fear/wonder), refers to Rosh haShana, Yom Kippur and the ten days in between the two holidays known as the ten days of repentance.

## I) Rosh haShana:

The source for Rosh haShana can be found in the Torah:

And in the seventh month, on the first of the month, you shall observe a cessation of work - a day of remembrance, of the sounding of the shofar. (Vayikra 23:24)

### Why two days?

The Rambam ,Rabbi Moshe ben Maymon, writes:

The Festival of Rosh Hashanah - in the period when they would establish (the calendar) based upon testimony - was celebrated by the majority of the residents of the Land of Israel for two days because they were in doubt [as to when the Festival began], for they did not know when the court had established the new month since the agents of the court did not go out on a Festival. (Hilchot Kiddush ha-Chodesh 5:7-8)

#### a) What is the significance of the day?

Rosh haShana is the day of judgment on which the whole world is judged according to the actions of the year passed. There are two reasons that this day was chosen: the first being that it was on this day that man was created, the second it was on this day that man first sinned regarding the famous episode in the garden of Eden and was forgiven.

On this day man is judged according to the deeds of the past year, and God decides on that persons future. However God only passes final judgment on this day inscribing in the book of life and death if the person is completely righteous or completely wicked. If a person is neither, he is in the category of a beynoni , a middle person, and his actions are scrutinized. His future is hanging on the smallest action until Yom Kippur.

R. Cruspedai said in the name of R. Yochanan: Three ledgers are opened on Rosh Hashanah: one for those who are entirely wicked, one for those who are entirely righteous, and one for those who are in the middle. The entirely righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed to live. The entirely wicked are immediately inscribed

and sealed to die. The fate of those in the middle is held in balance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

If they have merit [i.e., if they repent), they are inscribed to live. If they do not have merit [i.e., if they fail to repent), they are inscribed to die (Gemara Rosh HaShan 16 a,b)

### **b) What is its central observance?**

The central observance on Rosh haShana is the sounding of the shofar, as we saw in the Torah verse above. To fulfill this commandment we usually use a rams horn but never that of a cow. The reasoning behind it is as follows: The ram signifies the Akeidah because it was it which was substituted for the last minute as the sacrifice instead of Isaac, the ram therefore is meant to invoke the remembrance of Abrahams complete commitment to God and his willingness to fulfill His commands. The sounding of a cow's horn, the animal involved in the incident of the golden calf, would only be detrimental to our seeking of forgiveness. Like waving a murder weapon in the face of a judge about to decide the case.

Another reason for sounding the horn is to awaken man to repentance. The shofar blasts are a reminder that judgment is imminent, it is a final call to change:

### **The Rambam writes:**

Even though the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree, it contains an allusion. It is as if [the shear's call] is saying:

Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his evil path and thoughts. (Teshuvah 2:4)

## **II) The Ten days of repentance :**

These are the days between Rosh haShana and Yom Kippur. They are the days in which we are given the final chance to change. Since no one can assume he is righteous or wicked, ~~so that his judgment was entered on Rosh haShana~~, he must do his utmost to be inscribed in the book of life. It is therefore the custom of Jews to give more to charity and to do more good deeds during this time.

Even though repentance and calling out [to God] are desirable at all times, during the ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, they are even more desirable and will be accepted immediately as [Isaiah 55:6] states: "Seek God when He is to be found."

When does the above apply? To an individual. However, in regard to a community, whenever they repent and cry out wholeheartedly, they are answered immediately as [Deuteronomy 4:7] states: "[What nation is so great that they have God close to them,] as God, our Lord, is whenever we call Him." (Rambam ,Hilchot Teshuvah 2:6)

### III) Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, falling on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei, ~~of the Jewish people,~~ a day on which God enters the final inscription in the books of life and death. On this day we make our final appeal for a good verdict.

[YK] It is the apex of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. Accordingly, everyone is obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur. (Rambam 7:2)

Yom Kippur is the day on which God gave Bnei Israel the second set of tablets; it is on this day that he forgave them, after Moses's intense period of davening for the transgression of the golden calf incident. On this day He gives man the 13 attributes of mercy that when invoked will help Bnei Israel attain forgiveness when they are used.

Yom Kippur is a serious day but as the Gemara in Ta'anit points out Yom Kippur is one of the two happiest days of the year. It is on this day that we are given a second chance to change and become ~~different~~ better people. It is a serious day as well, just like one goes into court to plead for ones case, however we have the benefit of knowing that ultimately we will be forgiven.

What does Yom Kippur atone for?

Yom Kippur only atones for transgressions against God. However in order to be forgiven by other people we must seek their forgiveness separately, by appeasing them and repairing the damage we have done.

**PRACTICAL INFO:** Yom Kippur is a complete Sabbath; no work can be performed on that day. It is a complete fast, beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the next day. The Talmud also specifies additional restrictions including washing and bathing, anointing one's body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing leather shoes and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

Aims:

- To understand what is Rosh haShana;
- To know about the period between RH &YK
- To understand the meaning behind YK.



**Aims** To learn why we celebrate Chanukah.  
To learn about the relevance of Chanukah .  
To learn about how Chanukah relates to modern Chagim.

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**Aims**

# Chanukah

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➤ ***Aim: To learn why we celebrate Chanukah.***

## What is Chanukah?

Chanukah is the only festival that has no source in the Tanach, but which has been rabbinically instituted. The questioning of the Gemara illustrates that a degree of mystery surrounds the origins of the chag: the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 21b) asks: ‘*Mai Chanukah?*’, ‘What is [the reason of] Chanukah?’ According to Rashi, the debate implicit in this question is: ‘over which miracle did they establish it?’

The Gemara answers:

*“For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they searched and found only one jar of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained enough for one day’s lighting only; yet a miracle occurred and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving” (Shabbat, 21b)<sup>1</sup>*

So it seems that Chanukah celebrates a miracle that transpired, regarding the oil...

This is all well and good but if we look at another familiar source for Chanukah, the *Al Hanisim* prayer in the *Shemonah Esrei* and *Bircat HaMazon* prayers, we have a different story!

*“[We thank You also] for the miracles, the redemption, the mighty deeds, and the victories in battle which You performed for our ancestors in those days at this time...”<sup>2</sup>*

Fundamentally, we must note that *Al Hanisim* focuses entirely on the attempted destruction of the Jewish nation by the Greeks and specifically praises Hashem for the military victory and subsequent re-purification of the temple. (There is no mention of the miracle with the oil). *Al Hanisim* finishes by stating that Chanukah was established to thank (*l’hodot*) and praise (*l’hallel*) Hashem.

However, what is the significance of all of this? ***If Chanukah celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple and the re-establishment of a Jewish state in***

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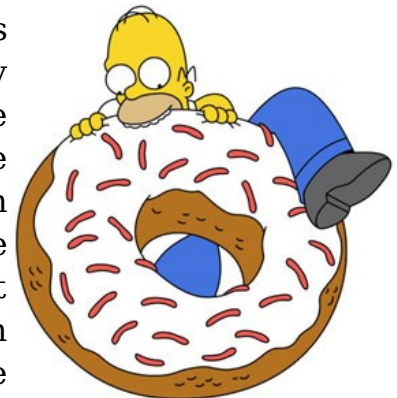
<sup>1</sup> A modernised version of the Soncino translation

<sup>2</sup> Chief Rabbi’s translation



***the land of Israel, why do we celebrate it today when we are without a Temple?***

The simple answer is to return to our original point about the 'two miracles' of Chanukah: whereas originally the reason may have been the military victory and rededication of the Temple, once the Temple was destroyed, the emphasis shifted to the miracle of the oil. Since the Gemara was written around the 5<sup>th</sup> Century - a long time after these events - it discusses the miracle of the oil, as that was of greater relevance during their day. In contrast, *Al Hanisim* was written closer to the time when the military victory was relevant, so it emphasises that cause for celebration.



➤ ***Aim: To learn about the relevance of Chanukah.***

**A message from the exile**

1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 Now the earth was ***unformed*** and ***void***, and ***darkness*** was upon the ***face of the deep***; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. 3 And God said: 'Let there be light.' And there was light. (*Genesis, 1:1-3*)

Chazal teach that the four expressions of nothingness, as found in Genesis 1:1-3, represent the four exiles:

1. Babylonian – '*unformed*'
2. Persian – '*void*'
3. Greek – '*darkness*'
4. Roman – '*face of the deep*'

Of all four exiles, the Greek exile was the worst; for the Persians never actually exiled us, in fact they allowed us to return to Israel, and the Babylonians and Romans may have destroyed our two Temples but their threat was observable. By contrast, the Greek exile took place when the Jews were *all* in the land of Israel and *seemingly* all was good – but in reality the Greeks were mounting a cultural war, to "*make them forget Your [God's] Torah and to turn them away*

*from the statutes of Your [God's] will*<sup>3</sup>. This is the most dangerous enemy we have had to deal with: other enemies, such as Haman, are identifiable – we could recognise the enemy and the whole Jewish world united in order to defeat him. With Chanukah, the Greeks were not alone: many Hellenised Jews (*mityavanim*) joined their vision of attacking the Jewish religion.

Therefore we see that the message of Chanukah has relevance even after the destruction of the Temple. Since the year 70, the Jews have wandered around the world in many different forms of exile, and throughout this time, Jews have faced the threat of assimilation – none more so than today. In this 'long night' of exile, Chanukah serves as a yearly reminder not to give up our religion. Instead of accepting the darkness of a secular Greek-based culture; we light candles reminding us of the true light of the Torah.

But there is yet another often-missed aspect to Chanukah, which really turns things around! Excited? Read on...

➤ ***Aim: To learn about how Chanukah relates to modern Chagim***

## **Divine Providence**

One of the burning questions about this whole oil story (ed: what a pun. wow) – what's so special about this miracle? Haven't there been many others throughout history?!

One possible answer is that the miracle itself wasn't such a big deal, but its broader significance has made Chanukah what it is today. Remember: the Jews had just mobilised an army and won a military victory against the Greeks with no obvious divine intervention – in fact, it seems to be a fairly non-religious event. But then came the oil: in the absence of any Tanach-writing prophet, this miracle comes as a seal of approval that the Maccabees had fought a just war, but that their victory **only** came about through Hashem's help – even if it was 'invisible', so to speak.

In modern times, the astonishing victories of the Israeli Army have changed the Jewish world – we now have independence in our own land and a more secure way of life for the Jewish people. After the War of Independence, it was clear to some that we had experienced a 'modern day miracle': the success of the newly (re)born State of Israel was unexpected and unpredictable, from a military point of view. In recognition of God's crucial role in Israel's victory, many celebrate

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<sup>3</sup> From Al Hanissim

Yom Ha'Atzmaut today by singing Hallel and ascribing triumph to God in the way which we are accustomed to go on major and minor festivals.

## Conclusion



We can say that Chanukah has become even more relevant since 1948! Not only do we as a people face the biggest assimilation problem in our history, but just like in the times of the Hasmoneans, we also have a Jewish army who fight military campaigns where there is no clear divine intervention. The challenge for the Jewish state today is to learn the lesson of Chanukah and attribute the military successes to God, rather than the might of the army alone: we need the miracle of the oil as well as the military victories...

## Ideas for activities

More than other kvutzot, this chomer was geared more at madrichim; some of these concepts are generally a bit too hard for Aleph chanichim. But: a) the message is very relevant for Bnei Akiva and the Jewish people as a whole, and b) we're spending Chanukah on camp!

Ask them: "Why is Chanukah important?" When they give answers such as 'the oil lasted for 8 days', you can expand on this and explain that 'the oil miracle proved that the Jews' victory was pleasing to G-d' (Answer 3)

You could have an Israeli army-themed part to the kvutza where the question asked at the end is, 'Who fights Israel's battles: man or God'? Hopefully the answer should be 'both' and then you can link in Chanukah with Yom Ha'atzmaut.

# Aleph Winter Machane

5775



## Aims

- To learn about Purim.
- To understand the concept of 'Venahafoch hu'.
- To learn why Purim will always

# Purim

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## ➤ ***Aim: To learn about Purim***

### **A reminder of the Purim story...**

*Once upon a time, when the Second Temple was being rebuilt, the Jewish nation was almost obliterated. In the city of Shushan, Vashti, the Queen of Persia, refused to obey the order of her husband Achashverosh, King of Persia, to appear before his guests. So the King disposed of her and began his search across the country for a new queen. From among hundreds of applicants, he chooses Esther, a cousin of Mordechai the Jew.*

*The King's Prime Minister was an evil man named Haman. Haman, a descendant of the tribe of Amalek, hated the Jews and decided to kill them. He convinced King Achashverosh to issue an edict that ordered the destruction of all Jews in the land of Persia. Mordechai pleaded with Esther to save the Jewish people by talking to the King and persuading him to overturn the edict. At the risk of her own life, Esther appeared before the King without being summoned by him (an action that was punishable by death). She revealed her own Jewish identity to the King and exposed Haman's evil plans.*

*The King was outraged at Haman, and he issued a decree to make Haman the victim of his own sinister plot. Haman and his sons were killed, and the Jews were saved. To commemorate this miraculous turn of events, Jews celebrate Purim on the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Adar by reading the Megillah (the story of Purim), enjoying a Purim Feast, sending gifts of food to our friends and the needy, and having great fun.*

*Other characters of note: Bigtan, Teresh, Chavorna, Zeresh.*

## ➤ ***Aim: To understand the concept of 'Venahafoch hu'***

Purim is the story of *Venahafoch Hu*, 'and it was turned upside down'; but what is the concept of *Venahafoch Hu*?

Recorded in the Torah is the story of when Rebecca was brought from her home to meet her betrothed, Isaac; when she saw him, she fell off her donkey:

**וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא אֶת יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמֶל.**

*"And Rebecca raised up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she fell off from the camel" (Genesis 24:64)*

The Midrash asks (Bereishit Rabba, *Chayei Sarah*, 60:15) why she fell off her donkey when she saw her future husband? The suggested answer is that Rivkah fell from her donkey because when she saw Yitzchak he was returning from Gan Eden, having gone there to use the mikveh. Says the Midrash, in Gan Eden one walks with their head on the ground and their feet in the air; upside down, *'Venahafoch Hu'*.

We can see this upside down business with Rabbi Akiva as well. There are two well-known stories about Rabbi Akiva walking towards the Temple Mount (Har HaBayit) with some fellow Rabbis; they began crying at seeing the destruction of the Temple and the tragedy of their present circumstances, while Rabbi Akiva laughed:

*"Once again they were coming up to Jerusalem together, and just as they came to Mount Scopus they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. They fell weeping but Rabbi Akiva seemed merry.*

*'Why', said they to him, 'are you merry?'*

*Said he: 'Why are you weeping?'*

*Said they to him: 'A place of which it was once said, 'And the common man that draws near shall be put to death', has now become the haunt of foxes, and should we not weep?!'*

*Said he to them: 'Therefore am I merry; for it is written, 'And I will take to Me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the Son of Jeberechiah'....Uriah was [in the time of] the First Temple, and Zechariah was [in the time of] the Second Temple!*

*But the Torah makes Zachariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriah's prophecy. With Uriah, it is written: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; [Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest.]' With Zachariah it is written, 'Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem.' As long as Uriah's prophecy had not been fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled'.*

*Said they to him: 'Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!' "*  
(Makkot 24b)

The message from this story is a poignant one: where others saw destruction, Rabbi Akiva saw the complete opposite, he saw hope. He understood that just as one (negative) prophecy had been fulfilled, it signalled that a different oracle of hope would also one day actualise: he knew that what you see before your eyes loses its significance when God is guaranteeing something else.

➤ ***Aim: To learn why Purim will always exist.***

And now we can appreciate that Purim was a story of how God ‘plays the world’ and it comes out trumps for the Jewish people, who will always survive; even though from Haman’s (and the average Megilla reader’s) point of view, the story seems subject to chance.

Indeed Purim means Lottery. When people want something to be random, they draw a lot. Pick out a hat. If we think about it though it turns out there nowhere is divine intervention more clear than in a lottery: the Jews divided up the land of Israel via lots. Moreover, on Yom Kippur two identical goats are taken, are lots are drawn to decided which will be the *Seir Le’Azazel* [goat which is led off a mountain top, as the ‘scapegoat’ for all of Israel’s sins] and which the *Seir LaShem* [the goat which is dedicated to God and sacrificed].

In Judaism, when we want to find out what God really wants, we draw a lot. It turns out, nature is actually not something we should take for granted. A lot isn’t random. The world is run always run according to Divine Leadership. For example, people thought that in 1967 winning the war was due to a strong army, and a number of ideological secular Jews - what they didn’t see was that God was running the show behind the scenes.

Under normal circumstances people walk with their feet on the ground and their head above because the head points to where we want to go, where we believe God rests. When Isaac walked out of Gan Eden upside down, he knew the truth: that this it is in this world that God truly resides, not the next world.

That is also why Isaac’s name means ‘laughter’, not only because he can walk on his head but also because he knows the truth. Rabbi Akiva laughed because he could see through the tragedy and realise the tremendous kindness (*chesed*) and love that God was doing for us, especially at the time when He seemed furthest away.

**The reason Purim is such a physical festival (eating and drinking etc...) is because when we eat we feel more alive and invigorated, and when we feel alive in *this* world that’s when we can see the *chesed* of God and the meaning of life the most. That is why Purim will always exist. It is the eternal truth and the secret of the world to come when we will see nature for the Divine miracle it really is.**

## **Conclusion**

On a final note we can learn a nice message from the song '*V'hi Sheamda*', from the Pesach Haggadah. It goes on to say: '*Ela Shebachol Dor Vador Omdim Aleinu l'chaloteinu, v'Hakodosh Baruch Hu Matzileinu Miyadam*' - In every generation, there are those who seek to destroy us and wipe us out from the face of the earth.

Though they tried, God saves us from their hands each time. The Chagim we have that commemorate these attempts, such as Purim, are a time of joy and happiness but one should never forget God's part in our survival.

## **Ideas for Activities**

Make this kvutsa upside down; make it very alive – eat lots, shower them with food and fizzy drink (not literally)...

Maybe turn your usual kvutsa rules completely on their head; play games involving 'thanks'; lottery games; optical illusions etc etc.

Have lots of kef *KEF* K-E-F!!