



THE GREENBERG EDITION

# CHANUKAH

*Discovering the Essence of the Day*

BY DON JARASHOW



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## *Nun, Ches, Lamed*

The berachah we recite when lighting the menorah is: “להדליק נר חנוכה.”

The Arizal teaches that the ראשי תיבות of this berachah spell the word “נחל.” This is a profound allusion to the *pasuk*: “נפשנו חכתה לה – *Our soul yearns for Hashem*” (Tehillim 33:20).

This teaches us that the act of lighting the menorah symbolizes our deep longing and connection to Hashem. It is not merely the performance of a mitzvah but an opportunity to express our spiritual yearning and devotion.

When we approach the mitzvah of הדלקת נרות, we must recognize the immense spiritual potential of this moment, of the *hadlakah* process, or more correctly so, experience. Before rushing off to a party or returning to our mundane daily routines, we should pause and inhale the holiness of these lights. These flames represent more than the miracle of the oil – they reflect our desire and anticipation for Hashem’s light and presence in our lives. “נפשנו – חכתה לה – *Our soul yearns for Hashem.*”

Let us seize this opportunity to connect deeply, allowing the flames of the menorah to illuminate not only our homes but also our hearts and souls.

Elucidating on the Sefas Emes, the Arizal offers another profound insight into the berachah of להדליק נר חנוכה, noting that the ראשי תיבות נחל align with “נוצר חסד לאלפים” from the י”ג מידות, the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. This phrase, which we fervently cry out on Yom Kippur in our plea for Hashem’s mercy and forgiveness,

serves as a reminder of His boundless compassion and His yearning to grant us purity and renewal through teshuvah.

When we light the menorah, we reconnect with this process. The act of kindling the flames is far more than symbolic – it is transformative. It draws down Hashem’s mercy and provides us with a unique opportunity to cleanse our spiritual essence and recalibrate our focus.

As my rebbi, Rav Yaakov Moshe Katz, would often emphasize, Chanukah is a time to cleanse our spiritual “glasses” which may have become fogged and obscured by the pervasive influences of Yavan. The נרות חנוכה are an opportunity to restore clarity and focus in our *avodas Hashem*. Through connecting to these sacred *neiros*, we strip away the layers of distraction and confusion, enabling us to experience the brilliance of Hashem’s presence once again.

This holy time of year reminds us that Hashem is our אב הרחמן, the infinitely compassionate and forgiving Father. He eagerly awaits our return, always ready to grant us a clean slate and bestow upon us the abundant goodness He has in store for us.

When we light the menorah, we invoke the attribute of “נוצר חסד לאלפים,” drawing upon Hashem’s endless kindness and mercy to renew and deepen our bond with Him. These sacred flames are not only a reminder of the miraculous events of Chanukah, but also a glowing expression of our belief in Hashem’s infinite love, compassion, and readiness to embrace us anew.

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# A Menorah of Love

The Midrash Rabbah relates the story of Yosef Meshisa. Yosef was a Jew who had completely severed himself from his people and aligned himself with the Romans, one of the infamous *misayavim*.

When the Romans infiltrated the Beis Hamikdash, they were afraid to enter. They believed that whoever went in first would die. So they turned to Yosef Meshisa and said, “You go in first. Whatever you take out will be yours.”

Yosef entered the Beis Hamikdash and emerged carrying the golden Menorah. When the Romans saw it, they said, “That is too precious for you. We will take it. Go back in and take something else.”

Yosef refused. “We made a deal, and the Menorah is mine. Is it not enough that I angered my Creator once? Must I anger Him again?” He would not go back in.

The Romans tried to entice him with promises of wealth and honor, even exemption from taxes for many years. He still refused. They then tortured him brutally. As they did, Yosef Meshisa cried out again and again, “Woe to me for angering my Creator.”

He died under torture, refusing to further desecrate the Mikdash. As he was dying, a *bas kol* descended from the heavens and proclaimed, “*Yosef Meshisa is prepared for life in the World to Come.*”

A man who lived a life of betrayal acquired his eternity in a single moment of clarity.

This story is a beautiful illustration of the power of *teshuvah*, a powerful *hisorerus* for Yom Kippur. But when we look closely, one detail stands out. The Menorah seems to play a central role in the story.

How did Yosef Meshisa go from fully succumbing to the Yevanim and becoming one of them, to

suddenly turning his life around, ultimately dying *al kiddush Hashem* within moments of entering the Beis Hamikdash? How does a man who lived a life of betrayal, in a single instant claim his portion in the World to Come? How could a *rasha* accomplish this in just a few moments?

The Ponevezher Rav, answers with a *yesod*: There is a *koach* in a few moments of absolute purity.

Yosef Meshisa spent only a short time inside the Beis Hamikdash. But when a person enters the Beis Hamikdash, he does not leave as the same person. He encountered concentrated, unfiltered truth. In such a place, there is no process, no gradual build-up. Truth is immediate, and its impact is total.

The power of pure truth can ignite radical change in an instant. A *rasha* can become a *tzaddik* in a moment.

My friend R’ Zevi Liteman, based on the Torah of Rav Shimshon Pincus, takes it deeper:

In reference to the mitzvah of the Menorah, the Torah writes:

ועשית מנרת זהב טהור... ירכה וקנה גביעיה כפתריה ופרחיה ממנה יהיו.

The Menorah had to be fashioned with *kafzor va’ferach*, knobs and flowers. This detail is striking. Why flowers? What is so essential about roses and blossoms that they must be etched into the very form of the menorah? A כפתור, a knob or rounded protrusion, serves a structural role. It suggests connection, stability, and transition from one section to another. Even when decorative, it still looks functional, something that helps hold the form together. We can intuitively accept it as part of the Menorah’s structure.

But why flowers? What place does a פרח have in a כלי שרת meant for *avodah*? Flowers are fragile, fleeting, purely aesthetic. They grow, bloom, and wither. They seem out of place in something eternal, fixed, and precise like the Menorah.

Rav Shimshon Pincus explains the deeper significance of flowers through a Midrash on the *pasuk* in Tehillim 45:1:

למנוח על שושנים לבני קרח משכיל שיר ידידות.

Chazal give a *maschal* of a king who entered a province. His people brought him crowns of silver, crowns of gold, and crowns adorned with precious stones and pearls. The king said, “I do not desire silver, and I do not desire gold. I desire only roses.” So too, HaKadosh Baruch Hu says, “I do not want silver, and I do not want gold. I want only roses.” This is the meaning of “*al shoshanim*,” a song of love.

At first glance this is puzzling. If the king wants roses, he can easily acquire them himself with all the wealth at his disposal. Rather, the point is that the king is not interested in the possessions of his subjects, but in their hearts. When a subject brings a rose, something that has no real monetary value, he is revealing love, loyalty, and connection. That is what the king desires.

This, explains Rav Shimshon, is the deeper meaning of the Menorah. It represents a relationship of love that is not dependent on achievement, output, or necessity. It is אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר – an unconditional and unadulterated love.

This casts a new and deeper understanding on the story of Yosef Meshisa.

When he entered the Beis Hamikdash and saw the Menorah, he did not merely see gold. He saw flowers. He encountered a symbol of Hashem’s deep love for His people. In the presence of that love, he could not bring himself to desecrate the

Mikdash again, even at the cost of his life.

In that moment, he saw truth in the place of absolute truth. No process was needed. No time. Like the scientist in the lab when one failed experiment suddenly explains them all, everything clicked at once. The reaction, the change, and the commitment were immediate and concrete.

When he emerged, all the Yavan within him melted away. The truth was burning. He had held in his hands the vessel that embodied ultimate love, adorned by command with flowers. When he saw that, when he touched it, the transformation happened. It was so powerful that it gave him the resolve to give up his life rather than betray that truth again.

Accordingly, we can understand how Yosef Meshisa, a *misgyaven* and a *rasha* moments earlier, was able to claim what many spend a lifetime striving for. His teshuvah was not superficial. It was the deepest and most absolute return, born from certainty and clarity. Hashem has a special place for such teshuvah.

The power of a moment. The power of true return.

On Chanukah we light the Menorah. Whether is simple or expensive, it is not about how it looks or how much it cost. It is about what it represents.

The Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash had golden flowers not for beauty, but to symbolize Hashem’s boundless, unconditional love for us.

We are inspired by the light, but we cannot forget the Menorah itself, and the message of its flowers. Hashem loves us unconditionally. And if you never knew the story of Yosef Meshisa and the Menorah, remember it. Remember the potency of a single moment of truth.

One moment can change everything, in this world and the next, forever.

# That Little Boy

It happened during the *hadlakas neiros* of the Toler Rebbe, an exquisite moment following meticulous preparations for the sacred ritual. From crafting the wicks with precision, to pouring the oil and focusing on the *kavanos*, an aura of great holiness enveloped this particular mitzvah. The anticipation peaked when at last, the Rebbe lit the candles. However, the sanctity of the atmosphere was abruptly disrupted when a young boy accidentally knocked into the menorah, causing the lights to extinguish. The chassidim eagerly waited to see how this unexpected turn of events would unfold.

Perhaps more inspiring than the Rebbe's *neiros* was his response to the boy. The Rebbe extended a comforting hand and warmly said, "I owe you great thanks." Puzzled, the boy listened as the Rebbe continued, "You've given me the opportunity to fulfill the halachah of *kavsa ein zakuk lah* (if it is extinguished, one is not obligated to relight it)."

The *sefarim* use the concept of *kavsa ein zakuk lah* as a model for the life of a Yid. Sometimes we try to light a fire, we work on ourselves, on our *avodah*, and to our greatest dismay, a wind blows us out. Yet, like *neiros Chanukah*, the halachah is *ein zakuk lah*, one is not obligated to return and light. We must try our best, but after that, it's up to Hashem to determine the results.

This concept is reflected in various aspects of the laws of Chanukah:

- The Gemara (*Sukkah* 5a) tells us that the *shechinah* does not descend below 10 *tefachim*, yet on Chanukah, we specifically light the menorah under 10 *tefachim*. Hashem comes to us wherever we are.

- Chazal allowed various levels of the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *neiros Chanukah*: מהדרין מן המהדרין, מהדרין-נר לכל אחד ואחד, נר איש וביתו. While Chazal present the greatest *biddur*, what one should do *l'chatchilah*; less ideal choices are acceptable as well.
- We find a very unique berachah called *birkas haro'eh*, allowing one to make a berachah on another's candlelight. Again, this highlights the fact that the Chanukah lights are meant to reach and impact everyone. Even if you are not currently lighting your own menorah, in our collective light, we connect and unify. No one is excluded.
- The Mishnah (*Shabbos* 21a) says, פתילות ושמינים שאמר חכמים אין מדליקין בהן בשבת, מדליקין בהן בחנוכה. The wicks and oils with which the Sages said one may not light on Shabbos, one may, nevertheless, light with them on Chanukah." This underscores that while Shabbos has its specific requirements, Chanukah welcomes all, even if one feels distant or inadequate.

As Rabbi Yaakov Meir Schechter says, when one feels unable to absorb or produce light from the oil and wicks of Shabbos, on Chanukah, whatever we can do is cherished regardless of personal perceptions of unworthiness. The lights of Chanukah are here to uplift us from the shackles of darkness and pain to the greatness and holiness represented by the illuminated candles. At times, we all may feel like the little boy who accidentally knocked down the Rebbe's candles. However, on Chanukah, we are reminded that we are doing just fine. Hashem loves us wherever we are.

## Holy House

The Mechaber in 671:1 writes:

צריך ליזהר מאוד בהדלקת נרות חנוכה ואפילו עני המתפרנס  
מן הצדקה שואל או מוכר כסותו ולקוח שמן להדליק.

*One needs to be very diligent in kindling the Chanukah lights. Even a poor man living off charity must ask or sell his clothes and buy oil to kindle with.*

Nevertheless, if one doesn't have a house, he is not obligated to buy one to light menorah. Rather, he says *birkas haro'eh*, a berachah recited if one doesn't have his own menorah; he makes this berachah upon seeing the menorah in someone else's house.

Now, this leads us to a question. If the menorah is symbolic of the menorah that the Kohen Gadol lit in the Beis Hamikdash, why does the poor person make *birkas haro'eh* on someone else's menorah

in the house? Why can't he light a menorah in shul where there is the most *kedushah*, where his lighting would be even more similar to the lighting in the Beis Hamikdash?

Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein answers profoundly. The answer is that the holiest place, the greatest *makom kadosh* must be a *Yiddishe shetub* – a Jewish home. The *birkas haro'eh* is a more befitting option than lighting in shul, to convey this message, that the sanctity of a house must be unparalleled.

Astoundingly, the gematriah of בית – house is 412, מקדש – Beis Hamikdash is 444; and the difference between the two is 32, which is לב – heart. When one exerts his heart to make his house a holy edifice, it becomes a מקדש.

## Elaka D'Meir Aneini

The Gemara in Avoda Zara 18a recounts a story of Rav Meir, who went to save his sister-in-law. He approached the guard and said, "Give her to me." The guard expressed fear, stating that doing so might lead to punishment by the government. Rabbi Meir proposed a solution: "Take this vessel full of dinars; give half to the government as a bribe, and half will be for you." The guard questioned, "But when the money is finished, what shall I do?" Rabbi Meir advised, "Say: אלקא דמאיר עיני (God of Meir, answer me)!" The guard followed this advice and was saved.

The Maharsha asks: How could Rav Meir evoke Divine intervention in this manner? There is a principle that "Hashem doesn't unify His name on behalf of the living." So, how did Rav Meir employ

this invocation? The Maharsha provides two answers. Firstly, Rav Meir may not have meant it literally on his name but as a reference to Hashem being the king of "me," Meir, and the entire world. Secondly, Rav Meir may not have intended his name at all but used "מאיר" in the sense of shining. Just as Hashem shines on the world and protected us during the miracle of Chanukah, so too should He shine on the guard.

The second answer of the Maharsha needs explanation. He equates the shining of the sun with the miracle of Chanukah. How can this be, as the sun shining isn't typically considered a miracle?

Rav Akiva Grossnass, ר"מ מתיבתא בית שרגא, insightfully explains that even things perceived as

*teva* – nature – are, in essence, miracles. The miracle of Chanukah and the sun shining are both expressions of the miraculous nature of the world.

Expounding on this further, he addresses the question raised by the Beis Yosef regarding the eight nights of Chanukah. The Beis Yosef wonders why there are eight nights when the first night

wasn't a miracle, since there was enough oil to last one night. In response, the Alter of Kelm provides an answer: The first night was indeed a miracle, no less than the eighth night. There is no such thing as nature, as emphasized by the Maharsha; everything is a manifestation of Hashem's will, and without Him, nothing can happen.

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## Held Hostage

In 1970, amidst a series of terrorist hijackings orchestrated by Arab extremists, the esteemed rosh yeshivah Rav Yitzchak Hutner found himself held captive. Following relentless efforts and continuous advocacy, the long-awaited news eventually arrived. Rav Hutner, along with his entourage, had been released and they were on their way to the United States.

Upon their arrival, Rav Moshe Feinstein stood on the tarmac, positioned to be the first to greet Rav Hutner. In a poignant moment, Rav Hutner shared with Rav Moshe, “As I looked into the eyes of our captors, I discerned a deep-seated anger stemming from the realization that ‘*lo yirash ha’am hazeh*’ this nation will never inherit the Land.”

Rav Hutner reflected on the enduring truth that the Land promised by Hashem to Avraham Avinu, passed down to his sole heir Yitzchak and his descendants, would never be inherited by those with hostile intentions.

There is deep-rooted profound hate from the nations. Physical attempts don't suffice for our enemies. It's about destroying our minds, our connection, our *bitachon*. Holding hostages, *rachmana litzlan*, embodies this exact idea, then and now. Even more than killing people, this is the greatest manifestation of their ruthless hatred. And by showing

hostages the most horrific images, they're instilling powerlessness and hopelessness.

The Satan does the exact same. Just when we feel good, accomplished, and connected, he says, “You fool, don't you remember what you did yesterday? You're going to work on your *kavanah*; you haven't *davened* properly in years. You're working on *shmiras halashon*? Do you remember how you ripped your neighbor to shreds yesterday?”

The Yevanim have done the same.

As the Medrash in Bereishis Rabbah 2:4 relates: החשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגרותיהן, שהיתה אומרת להם, כתבו על קרן השור שאין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל. *The Greeks darkened Israel's eyes with their edicts, as they used to say to them: 'Write on the horn of a bull that you have no portion in the God of Israel.'*

Why did the Yevanim want this engraved specifically on the horn of a bull? The Maharal explains that at this vulnerable time, when the Jews felt hopeless and faced imminent obliteration, the Yevanim wanted to compound this feeling of despondency and remind them of their worst moment ever – the Cheit Ha'Eigel.

They wanted to remind the Jews that even after all the good they had experienced – the *makkos*



in Mitzrayim, the splitting of the sea, the Divine Presence in the desert culminating with *kabbalas haTorah* – they had brazenly betrayed Hashem. The Yevanim sought to emphasize how they had turned on the King of Kings and bowed to a golden calf. They wanted to remind them of their *pirud*, their disconnect from Hashem.

It wasn't enough for them to try and physically attack us; they needed us to be disconnected from Hashem. Aware of our holiness and of our covenant with Hashem, the Yevanim knew exactly where to attack – to remind us of our greatest mistake of all time, the Cheit Ha'Eigel.

The *koach* of Yavan lingers in our *neshamos*, in our hearts. שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו. They will come in different forms, but their influence is constant, both physically and, perhaps even more so, spiritually.

The strategy of Yavan, in all its forms – Hamas,

the Satan, the oppressors of previous generations – is to remind us of our greatest weaknesses, our lowest points in history, in life. They are acutely aware of the fire that burns in the *neshamah* of every Yid. They know we don't give up. They know we have been around since the beginning of creation, and we aren't going anywhere.

As we see in the current war with Yishmael, it is no coincidence that the shapes of the letters of the word יון descend; this is symbolic of their ceaseless desire to take us down. This is Yavan. This is the Satan. Yet, in the end, at the darkest and most hopeless of times, Hashem miraculously rescued us from the hand of our enemy.

During the time of Chanukah, the yom tov of *nitzachon*, triumph, we must overcome the dark shadow Yavan tries to envelop us in. Feel the fire. Become uplifted by its illumination and warmed by its glow.

## Not Just the Last Day

The Bnei Yissachar quotes the Arizal, stating that Zos Chanukah is an extension of the Yamim Nora'im. This connection is drawn from the Mishnah in Shekalim (5:5):

מי שאבד ממנו חותמו, ממתינן לו עד הערב.

*One who lost his seal, they would wait to resolve his problem until the evening.*

The *sefarim* interpret “the evening” as a reference to Zos Chanukah. The gematria of עד is 74,

corresponding to the 74 days between Yom Kippur and Zos Chanukah.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe would say that what tzaddikim can accomplish on Rosh Hashanah, every Yid can accomplish on Zos Chanukah.

It has been a long journey indeed. הכל הולך אחר – everything goes after the ending. Zos Chanukah isn't just the last day. It's the culmination and creation of the future. Make it great.

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Dedicated by Joey and Marina Greenberg (Minneapolis, MN) in gratitude to Hashem for all that He does for us

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