

Chanukah 2017

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Chanukah is the Jewish eight-day, wintertime “festival of lights,” celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods.

The Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication,” and is thus named because it celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple (as you’ll read below). Also spelled Hanukkah (or variations of that spelling), the Hebrew word is actually pronounced with a guttural, “kh” sound, kha-nu-kah, not tcha-new-kah.

What Chanukah Commemorates: In the second century BCE, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who tried to force the people of Israel to accept Greek culture and beliefs instead of mitzvah observance and belief in G-d. Against all odds, a small band of faithful Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple’s Menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum), they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks. Miraculously, they lit the menorah and the one-day supply of oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah.

How Chanukah Is Observed: At the heart of the festival is the nightly menorah lighting. The menorah holds nine flames, one of which is the shamash (“attendant”), which is used to kindle the other eight lights. On the first night, we light just one flame. On the second night, an additional flame is lit. By the eighth night of Chanukah, all eight lights are kindled.

Special blessings are recited, often to a traditional melody, before the menorah is lit, and traditional songs are sung afterward.

A menorah is lit in every household (or even by each individual within the household) and placed in a doorway or window. The menorah is also lit in synagogues and other public places. In recent years, thousands of jumbo menorahs have cropped up in front of city halls and legislative buildings, and in malls and parks all over the world.

We recite the special Hallel prayer daily, and add V’Al HaNissim in our daily prayers and in the Grace After Meals, to offer praise and thanksgiving to G-d for “delivering the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few ... the wicked into the hands of the righteous.”

When Is Chanukah?: Chanukah begins on the eve of Kislev 25 and continues for eight days. On the civil calendar, it begins on December 12, 2017.

Chanukah Foods: Since the Chanukah miracle involved oil, it is customary to eat foods fried in oil. The Eastern-European classic is the potato latke (pancake) garnished with applesauce or sour cream, and the reigning Israeli favorite is the jelly-filled sufganya (doughnut).

Dreidel: the Chanukah Game: On Chanukah, it is customary to play with a “dreidel” (a four-sided spinning top bearing the Hebrew letters, nun, gimmel, hei and shin, an acronym for nes gadol hayah sham, “a great miracle happened there”). The game is usually played for a pot of coins, nuts, or other stuff, which is won or lost based on which letter the dreidel lands when it is spun.

Chanukah Gelt: In today’s consumer-driven society, people tend to place great importance on giving Chanukah gifts. However, the tradition is actually to give Chanukah gelt, gifts of money, to children. In addition to rewarding positive behavior and devotion to Torah study, the cash gifts give the children the opportunity to give tzedakah (charity). This has also spawned the phenomenon of foil-covered “chocolate gelt.”

What It Means For You: Noting that one should spend time in close proximity to the Chanukah lights, the Previous Rebbe would say, “We must listen carefully to what the candles are saying.” So what are the flickering flames telling us? Here are some messages:

- Never be afraid to stand up for what’s right. Judah Maccabee and his band faced daunting odds, but that didn’t stop them. With a prayer on their lips and faith in their heart, they entered the battle of their lives—and won. We can do the same.
- Always increase in matters of goodness and Torah-observance. Sure, a single flame was good enough for yesterday, but today needs to be even better.
- A little light goes a long way. The Chanukah candles are lit when dusk is falling. Perched in the doorway, they serve as a beacon for the darkening streets. No matter how dark it is outside, a candle of G-dly goodness can transform the darkness itself into light.
- Take it to the streets. Chanukah is unique in that its primary mitzvah is observed in public. It’s not enough to be a Jew at heart, or even at home. Chanukah teaches us to shine outwards into our surroundings with the G-dly glow of mitzvahs.
- Don’t be ashamed to perform mitzvahs, even if you will feel different. Rather, be like a menorah, proudly proclaiming its radiant uniqueness for all to see.

http://www.chabadsiu.com/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/102911/jewish/What-Is-Hanukkah.htm

Jewish Story

As told by Arnold Geier (Judah's son) to Pesí Dinnerstein

Every year, Chanukah arrives just when we seem to need it most. When the days are at their shortest and the nights have grown unbearably long, the menorah casts its glow upon a people hungry for light. In 1938, the entire world found itself sinking into a darkness unlike any it had known in modern history. If ever there were a need for light to guide our way, it was on this cold December evening in Germany, as the eighth and final day of Chanukah was about to begin.

The Geier family was sitting in their second-class compartment on a train headed from Berlin to Holland as they watched the winter sun slip beyond the horizon. It had been a long and terrifying trail that led from Kristallnacht (“The Night of Broken Glass”) to this moment. They could still hardly believe they had managed to obtain an American visa and were now finally on what they prayed would be an uneventful journey to freedom.

Judah and Regina Geier and their two children, Arnold and Ruth, spent the duration of the train ride staring out the window, nibbling on sandwiches, reading, dozing, and trying to behave as if the world were still a normal place. But unlike most of the other passengers, the Geier family remained acutely aware of the dangers that awaited them as the train approached the German-Dutch border. There, Nazis, German police, and officers of the Gestapo would all be present for a final check of passports and travel papers.

For Judah Geier, however, there was an additional heaviness that weighed on his heart. As an Orthodox Jew and a cantor, his whole life had been devoted to following the ways of the Torah. Yet, here it was, almost nightfall, when the flames of the Chanukah menorah should have been rising to spread their light, and he was forced to sit quietly in his seat with only the harsh glare of a naked bulb to illuminate the graying sky. Surrounded by strangers, he was afraid to strike a match or recite a blessing for fear of calling undue attention to himself and his family. Regina Geier, sensing her husband’s inner struggle, tried to reassure him that G-d, who sees and knows all, would surely understand his situation and, no doubt, grant him many more Chanukahs to celebrate properly.

Judah nodded gratefully, but did not seem comforted. In a place and time of such spiritual darkness, the light of the menorah seemed more important than ever – especially on this eighth night of Chanukah, which represents the culmination of the holiday, when all the candles are lit simultaneously to proclaim the miracle of Jewish survival. Under these dangerous circumstances, how could he possibly light the menorah? But, then again, how could he possibly not?

Judah turned the issue over and over again in his head as the train continued onward. Suddenly, the train screeched to a halt at the German-Dutch crossing,

where it sat in the station for the longest ten minutes of Judah’s life as the border police and the Gestapo prepared to check everyone’s documents. He felt his wife’s body go still next to his, and even his children sat frozen in fear. One wrong answer, one nervous twitch, could mean the difference between escape and imprisonment, between a new life and certain death.

Then, it happened. A Chanukah miracle arrived at the German border just in the nick of time. With no warning, the entire station and every corner of the train was thrust into total darkness. All the lights were extinguished at the very same instant, leaving the passengers and the approaching officers groping in the darkness.

Without a second’s hesitation, Judah seized the moment and reached for his overcoat on the luggage rack above. He put his hand into one of the pockets and pulled out a small package. Before anyone realized what was happening, he struck a match, lit a candle, and quickly warmed the bottom of eight other candles. He then planted them firmly in a neat row upon the windowsill and, in a breathless whisper, recited the Chanukah blessings. As his family looked on in amazement, Judah carefully lit each candle and placed the ninth one – the shamash – off to the side. In the bright warmth of the menorah, his face radiated joy and peace for the first time in months.

Seeing the unexpected light in the window, the Gestapo and the border police came running. The sound of their boots striking the pavement with intensified blows echoed throughout the stillness.

Nevertheless, Judah continued to focus his thoughts on the Chanukah lights while his heart pounded as loudly and rapidly as the quickening footsteps.

When the officers burst through the door, Judah was braced for the worst, perhaps even the end. However, instead of responding with rage to this brazen display of Jewish ritual, the officers only noticed the opportunity that it provided. By the light of the flickering candles, they would now be able to see clearly enough to begin checking passports and papers, and so, with characteristic Nazi efficiency, they set to work. As soon as the process was completed and they were about to leave, the chief officer of the border police turned to Judah and thanked him personally for having had the foresight to carry “travel candles” on his trip.

Meanwhile, the Geier family sat in stunned silence for close to half an hour, unable to take their eyes off the windowsill. Just as the candles were beginning to grow dim, every light in the station suddenly flashed back on. Judah, still in awe at what he had just witnessed, put his arm around his twelve-year-old son. With tears in his eyes, he drew him close. “Remember this moment,” he declared softly. “As in the days of the Maccabees, a great miracle happened here.

Judah was braced for the worst, perhaps even the end

Chanukah Messages from the Rebbe

The Chanukah Lights which are kindled in the darkness of night recall to our minds memories of the past: the war that the Hasmoneans waged against huge Syrian armies, their victory, the dedication of the Temple, the rekindling of the Menorah, the small quantity of oil that lasted for many days, and so on.

Let's picture ourselves members of the little band of Hasmoneans in those days. We are under the domination of a powerful Syrian king; many of our brethren have left us and accepted the idolatry and way of life of the enemy. But our leaders, the Hasmoneans, do not commence action by comparing numbers and weapons, and weighing our chances of victory. The Holy Temple has been invaded by a cruel enemy. The Torah and our faith are in grave danger. The enemy has trampled upon everything holy to us and is trying to force us to accept his way of life which is that of idol worship, injustice, and similar traits altogether foreign to us. There is but one thing for us to do-to adhere all the more closely to our religion and its precepts, and to fight against the enemy even if we have to die in this fight.

And wonder of wonder! The huge Syrian armies are beaten, the vast Syrian Empire is defeated, our victory is complete.

This chapter of our history has repeated itself frequently. We, as Jews, have always been outnumbered; many tyrants attempted to destroy us because of our faith. Sometimes they aimed their poisoned arrows at our bodies, sometimes at our souls, and, sad to say, many of our brethren have for one reason or another turned away from G-d and His Torah and tried to make life easier by accepting the rule of the conqueror.

In such times of distress we must always be like that faithful band of Hasmoneans, and remember that there is always a drop of 'pure olive oil' hidden deep in the heart of every Jew, which, if kindled, bursts into a big flame. This drop of 'pure olive oil' is the 'Perpetual Light' that must and will pierce the darkness of our present night, until everyone of us will behold the fulfillment of the prophet's promise for our ultimate redemption and triumph. And as in the days of the Hasmoneans

'the wicked will once again be conquered by the righteous, and the arrogant by those who follow G-d's laws, and our people Israel will have a great salvation.'

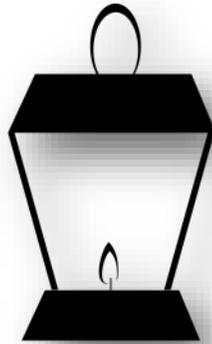
I was once privileged to hear from my father-in-law [Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe] that his father, Rabbi Sholom Dovber, of saintly memory, was once asked, "What is a Chabad-Lubavitch Chassid?"

He replied, "A Chassid is like a street-lamp lighter." In olden days, there was a person in every town who would light the street-lamps with a light he carried at the end of a long pole. On the street-corners, the lamps were there in readiness, waiting to be lit; sometimes, however, the lamps are not as easily accessible. There are lamps in forsaken places, in deserts, or at sea. There must be someone to light even those lamps, so that they may fulfill their purpose and light up the paths of others.

It is written, "The soul of man is the candle of G-d." It is also written, "A Mitzvah is a candle, and the Torah is light." A Chassid is one who puts his personal affairs aside and sets out to light up the souls of Jews with the light of Torah and Mitzvot. Jewish souls are ready and waiting to be kindled. Sometimes they are close, nearby; sometimes they are in a desert, or at sea. There must be someone who will forgo his or her own comforts and conveniences, and reach out to light those lamps. This is the function of a true Chabad-Lubavitch Chassid.

The message is obvious. I will only add that this function is not really limited to Chassidim, but is the function of every Jew. Divine Providence brings Jews to the most unexpected, remote places, in order that they carry out this purpose of lighting up the world.

May G-d grant that each and every one of us be a dedicated 'street-lamp lighter,' and fulfill his/her duty with joy and gladness of heart.



Jewish Joke

Three Jewish mothers are sitting on a bench in the shopping center talking about (what else?) how much their sons love them.

Sadie says "You know the Chagall painting hanging in my living room? My son, Arnold, bought that for me for my 75th birthday. What a good boy he is and how much he loves his mother."

Minnie says, "You call that love? You know the Mercedes I just got for Mother's Day? That's from my son Bernie. What a doll."

Shirley says "That's nothing. You know my son Stanley? He's in analysis with a psychoanalyst in Harley Street. Five sessions a week. And what does he talk about? Me."

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*In loving memory of
Mrs. Hinda Scheiman OBM*

Middos– Character Development

The Torah puts great stress on character development — on becoming better people. This is called Tikkun [correcting] Middot [our character]. We must always strive to correct our faults and improve our character. The Torah also lays down a number of moral laws. The following is a shortlist of ways to better ourselves and a number of moral laws.

Yetzer Tov — Yetzer Hora

Inside us we all have a Yetzer Tov — a good inclination [voice] and a Yetzer Hora — a bad/evil inclination. The Yetzer Tov constantly advises us to do good and act in a proper manner. The Yetzer Hora constantly challenges the Yetzer Tov and tries to advise the person to sin. There is a constant battle between the two, but with G-d's help and our own will power, the Yetzer Tov can win.

Derech Eretz

We must conduct ourselves in a way that does not offend those around us. Judaism requires each of us to behave in a respectable fashion. This is called Derech Eretz. Included in Derech Eretz is respect for elders and teachers and respect for the laws of the land in which we live.

Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem

Kiddush Hashem — The sanctification of G-d's Name.

Chillul Hashem — The desecration of G-d's Name.

Since the Jews were chosen by G-d to receive the Torah — G-d's teaching to mankind, the Jews must behave positively, in an upright manner, and set an example to all mankind. Non-Jews will judge us by our actions, ["see how beautifully those whom G-d has chosen behave."] When a Jew behaves correctly, he makes a Kiddush Hashem — a sanctification of G-d's name.

The opposite is Chillul Hashem. When a Jew misbehaves, commits a crime, or offends against the laws of the land, not only does he disgrace himself, but also the entire Jewish people and the name of G-d Himself. There is no greater sin than Chillul Hashem.

Tzedakah — Charity

The word Tzedakah comes from the word Tzedek which means righteousness, or the right thing to do. Giving charity from our own money is the right thing to do.

Consider it as if G-d has given you money to give to the poor. The money does not really belong to you and you are obliged to give it away.

A person must give charity according to his means. In general, one should always give away 10% of one's income. Even a poor person must give charity.

It is customary to have a Tzedakah box [Pushka] in every Jewish home, and the family is encouraged to give Tzedakah daily, especially before praying.

One should never refuse a request for Tzedakah. The Tzedakah should be given with a happy heart, a smiling face and an open hand.

G-d repays a person for every bit of Tzedakah he gives. The rabbis tell us that if you want to become rich, you should give a lot of Tzedakah. Tzedakah should preferably be given anonymously, i.e. without anybody knowing [unless you want to show an example to others].

Tzedakah brings the coming of Moshiach closer.

Hachnasat Orchim

The Jewish home must always be hospitable. Guests must always be welcome at our table, particularly on Shabbat and festivals. The mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim is so great that even when Abraham was being visited by G-d, he ran out to meet his guests and invite them in for a meal. From this we learn that welcoming guests is greater than greeting the Divine Presence.

Bikkur Cholim

We must visit friends who are sick, provide for them, cheer them up and pray for them. One must visit whether the person is rich, poor, young or old. G-d visited Abraham after his circumcision.

A special prayer may be said by the reading of the Torah for a sick person. This prayer is called Me Shebayrach. It is customary to give Tzedakah in merit of the sick and wish them a Refuah Sheleimah — a complete recovery.

Ahavat Yisrael — Love of a Fellow Jew

Rabbi Akiva said: "Love your fellow Jew as yourself." This is the general principle of the Torah.

We must always have a feeling of love and respect for our fellow Jew, for really we are brothers in the same family. This is a golden rule never to be forgotten, and, as Rabbi Akiva said, a great principle of the Torah. One should never hate another person.

To be continued...