

Esther and Mordecai. It is pertinent to wonder precisely what it was that helped to insure the amazing outcome which defied the odds.

I believe the answer is hidden in the prelude to the miracle of the oil. They found a small flask of pure oil, enough to last for only one day. Not knowing there would be a miracle, what made the Maccabees light the *Menorah*? Why begin what they could not finish? Why relight the *Menorah* when reason dictated that a day later it would go dark once again, unable to fulfill its purpose?

The Maccabees were not deterred by the seemingly impossible success of their effort. This was their secret: No matter how bad the situation, no matter how impossible the probability of success, we begin the task – and optimistically have confidence in G-d to somehow make our efforts prove fruitful. (Rabbi Benjamin Blech)

Driving School

I was a teacher in a Talmud Torah kindergarten. My class of twenty-five sweet little five-year-olds ordinarily kept me busy from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, with one or two breaks when another teacher supervised their recess periods. I must confess, however, that some days it seemed as though there were twenty-five hundred little boys vying for attention and seeking an outlet for their excess energy.

This particular day had all the makings of a twenty-five hundred-pupil day, and the children's energy level had reached an all-time high. At the lunch break I decided to deviate from the regular afternoon schedule. I would tell them a gripping educational story in the hopes that it would distract them.

When they had finished eating their lunches, I asked them each to take a chair and put it in the back of the room, in no particular order. What made me tell them to do that rather than place the chairs under their tables as they usually did, I still do not know. They did so and returned to sit quietly on the floor to hear the story, which they enjoyed. In the meantime I was trying to dream up an activity to occupy them for the remainder of the afternoon.

When I finished the story, their energy returned in full force, and one little boy suddenly ran to the back of the room, plunked down on one of the chairs and started to play "car." *What a great idea!* I thought.

"All right," I said. "Everyone choose a chair, and let's go for a ride in our cars."

In a matter of seconds, twenty-five little boys were driving twenty-five little cars at top non-speed at the back of the classroom.

Crash!

A window shattered and a baseball came flying through it, accompanied by thousands of shards of broken glass. The older classes were outside in the yard playing ball during their break. The tables at which my boys usually sat – and would have been sitting had I assigned them work in their workbooks – were covered with glass. The school had been in the process of replacing the glass windows with reinforced shatterproof plexiglass but had not yet completed the job. This was real glass!

As I moved dazedly toward the window, in shock, I noticed that one of the larger pieces of glass still bore a poster that had been taped to it – a picture of *Kever Rachel!* Yes, Rachel *Imenu* weeps for and looks after her children. (When the Time is Right)

Special Hanukkah Section



Laws of Hanukkah

The holiday of Hanukkah begins on Thursday night, December 10 and ends on Friday, December 18. Here are a few *halachot* regarding the holiday:

A) The optimum time to light the Hanukkah candles is 20 to 30 minutes after sunset, but they may be lit any time after that as long as there are at least two members of the household still awake.

B) On the first night, three blessings are recited: 1) להדליק נר חנוכה 2) שעשה נסים לאבותינו 3) שהחיינו. On subsequent nights, שהחיינו is not said. However, if one neglected to say שהחיינו on the first night, if he realizes within a half hour after he lit the candles, he can say it then. Otherwise, he should say it the following night when he lights the candles. All the blessings should be recited before one begins to light the candles.

C) The candles should be arranged in the *menorah* from the right side (facing the lighter). Thus, on the first night, the right-most candle will be placed in the *menorah*, on the second night, the two right-most, etc. The candles should always be lit beginning with the newest candle, which is the one that is the most towards the left side, proceeding down to the right side.

D) The candles should burn for at least a half hour on weekday nights. On Friday night, however, when the Hanukkah lighting takes place 20 minutes before sunset, they should last at least 1-1/3 hours. Therefore, the colored Hanukkah candles are unacceptable for Friday night, and Shabbat candles or oil should be used instead.

E) The *menorah* may not be moved from the place it was lit during that half hour.

F) If one's candles go out before the half hour goes by, he has still fulfilled his obligation, since the actual lighting is the primary obligation of the *misvah*. However, it is recommended that he re-light the candles without repeating the blessings (except on Shabbat).

G) It is a nice custom to train the children to light, but if they are under *bar/bat misvah* age, they should only be given the *shamosh* to light. NEVER LEAVE CHILDREN UNATTENDED FOR ANY PERIOD OF TIME WITH THE LIT CANDLES.

H) Both men and women are obligated to light the *menorah*. It is therefore advisable that if a man knows that he will be getting home after everyone is asleep, or if he is traveling away from home, he should have his wife light the candles at home at the proper hour. By this he will have fulfilled his obligation, and he may not light another *menorah* where he is with a *berachah*, or when he comes home, since each household is required to light only one *menorah*. However, if he wishes, he may light for himself without a *berachah*.

I) One may not use the light of the *menorah* for any purpose, not even to learn Torah by its light. Therefore, one may not light a match or an extra candle from a candle on the

menorah for the purpose of lighting another candle on the *menorah*. However, one may light one *menorah* candle directly from another candle.

J) After sunset, no work or meals are permitted before lighting the *menorah*. A snack is allowed.

K) On Friday night, light Hanukah candles before lighting Shabbat candles; on Saturday night make *Habdalah* first and then light the *menorah*.

L) The following changes are made in our daily prayers on Hanukah:

a) על הנסים is recited in every *amidah* and *bircat hamazon*. If one forgets to say it, he does not repeat the prayer.

b) Complete *hallel* with a *berachah* is recited all eight days of Hanukah. Women are not obligated to say *hallel* on this holiday, but may do so without a *berachah*.

c) *Sefer Torah* is read on all eight days of the holiday.

Don't Mention It

Many people ask the following question: Hanukah is an eight-day holiday. There are dozens and dozens of laws in *Hilchot Hanukah* in *Shulhan Aruch*. The holiday is packed with *halachic* detail. And yet in the entire *Talmud* there are barely two and a half *daf* or two-sided pages, primarily in *Masechet Shabbat*, which mention the holiday of Hanukah and its laws. Other than as very peripheral references, it is not mentioned in the *Mishnah*. There is no *Mishnah* and no *Masechet* that deals specifically with Hanukah.

Purim—also a Rabbinic holiday—is all of one day, and it gets its own *Masechet* (*Megillah*) but Hanukah, which is eight days, gets just two and a half *blatt* as incidental mention in a *Masechet* dealing with another topic. Why is Hanukah not mentioned in the *Mishnah*?

The *Hatam Sofer* says something that you need to be the *Hatam Sofer* to say. He writes that Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, who was the editor of the *Mishnah*, was a descendant of the Davidic Dynasty. The Hashmonean heroes of the Hanukah story, despite the fact that they were righteous individuals, did something that was forbidden. They took the position of *Melech* (King). *Kohanim* are not allowed to be *Melachim*. Ya'akov's blessing to Yehudah was "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet..." [*Beresheet* 49:10]. The *Hashmonaim*, who were descendants of the Tribe of Levi, were in violation of this law when they usurped the monarchy for their own family. Consequently, *Rabenu HaKadosh*, the editor of the *Mishnah*, did not want to give Hanukah the same prominence as Purim, because of this spiritual error that the *Hashmonaim* made. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

Lessons in Devotion

One of the main rituals associated with Hanukah is the lighting of the *Menorah*. The *Menorah*, an eight branched candelabra, is lit to commemorate the great miracle which occurred at the time of the Maccabees: a flask of oil which could only last for one day miraculously lasted for eight days. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (*Orach Hayim* 673:1) writes that it is preferable to use olive oil when lighting the *Menorah* because it is easily drawn into the wick, its light burns clearly, and the miracle of Hanukah happened with olive oil.

There is another aspect to olive oil that makes it an appropriate choice for use on Hanukah. The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Vayikra* 31:10), when discussing the use of olive oil for the *Menorah* in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), mentions a parable. "Rav Avin said 'It is

comparable to a king whose legions rebelled against him. However, one of his legions remained faithful and did not rebel. The king said that this legion that did not rebel, from them I will take for my rulers and governors.' So did Hashem say – This olive brought light to the world in the time of Noah, as we see 'the dove came...and it had an olive branch in its mouth.'"

The *Rada"l* explains when exactly the olive did not "rebel" against G-d, thus earning it a special place in history. In the time of Noah, the entire world was corrupt. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* explains that not only did mankind engage in immoral, base, and corrupt behavior; the animal and plant world did as well. One specie of animal tried to breed with a different one, and one type of plant attempted to "graft" itself to other forms of vegetation. The only plant that withstood the corruption that permeated the entire world at that time was the olive tree. It remained pure. It withstood the pressures to engage in the perverse behavior that was in vogue at the time. The olive remained faithful to the world order as G-d created it, and for that reason, it is considered the "legion that did not rebel." Because it remained faithful to G-d, the olive was chosen to be the sign of rebirth and renewal after the flood. It was chosen to be the source for light in the holiest place in the world. It was chosen to be the source of light for generations to come.

Hanukah is a holiday on which we celebrate our freedom from religious oppression. The Syrian-Greeks' oppression of the Jews was not physical. They did not want to annihilate the Jews. They did, however, want to annihilate Judaism. They applied whatever pressure they could to "convince" the Jews to abandon the ways of their fathers. Many Jews indeed succumbed to this pressure. Hellenism made inroads in to the Jewish communities. At times, the pressure to give in to popular culture was overwhelming. Ultimately, the Jews withstood this pressure and fought with all their might against it. The Jews were victorious. Today, all that we know of the Syrian-Greeks is from history books, while Judaism lives on. When we look at the olive oil burning bright on Hanukah, we should be reminded that the olive is a symbol of the fortitude our forefathers had. The olive withstood the pressure to deviate from the word of G-d. Our forefathers at the time of Hanukah withstood the pressure to deviate from the word of G-d. We should allow the light of the olive oil to inspire us to stand steadfast against the pressure, whatever it may be, to deviate from the word of G-d. (Rabbi Yehudah Prero)

Never Give Up Hope

It is perhaps one of the most overlooked parts of the story. Yet it is an aspect of the miracle of Hanukah which I believe has the most relevance for us today as we are again confronted with a comparable Maccabean struggle for Jewish survival.

We know that the ancient battle pitted the few against the many, the pure against the profane, the righteous against the wicked. Somehow, an aged priest by the name of Matityahu together with his five heroic sons were able to overcome a powerful empire and restore the Temple from idolatry back to worshipping G-d.

How was a small family able to lead a nation to such an astonishing triumph? What was their secret? To simply declare Hanukkah as a Divine miracle, an incomprehensible event made possible only through G-d's intervention, is to ignore the human component – the difficult struggle as well as the war which preceded the rededication of the house of G-d and the relighting of the *Menorah* in the sanctuary.

Like Purim, Hanukah is a holiday commemorating a victory achieved by the joint efforts of G-d and the Jews, of the Almighty and the Maccabees, similar to the story of