

original lighting. This is an application of the principle that “the lighting makes the *misvah*.” This symbolizes the Jewish view that in life generally our responsibility is to make our decisions and act to carry them out; but if, in the end, the bright dream of success is extinguished, it does mean we have failed. Our job is to decide and to act; success or failure is God’s business.

Jewish Ambition: In spiritual matters, there is the principle of *ma’alin bakodesh*, ascending in holiness. This is exemplified by the way in which we light Hanukah candles. We light one candle on the first night, two on the second, and so on, until we conclude the festival with eight candles burning. In Hanukah, it is meant to convey the specific message of the increase of the miracle, as the one-day supply of oil continued to burn and burn for eight days. In a general sense, though, it expresses the Jewish concept of ambition: that we should always strive to attain greater and greater appreciation of the miracles that God does for us, and to reach for ever higher levels of spirituality.

Great and Small: On Hanukah there is *Hallel* and *Hoda’ah*. *Hallel* is a song of praise of G-d for the miracles He does for the Jewish people. *Hoda’ah* is an acknowledgement of the fact that we are undeserving of the great things He does for us. A Jew must go through life with this dual recognition: of the greatness of G-d, on the one hand; and of the smallness of His creatures, on the other. (Rabbi Yisrael Rutman)

Elijah’s Light

At the conclusion of every 16-hour work day in the hell called Bergen-Belsen, the block commander liked to have some fun with his Jews.

The meal at the end of the day consisted of old dry bread, filthy watery soup and a pat of something like margarine made from vegetable fat.

The margarine was scooped out of a large tub, and after the meal had been distributed and the tub was empty, the commander allowed the starving prisoners to jump into the empty tub and lick the remaining margarine from the walls of the tub. The sight of starving Jews licking up bits of margarine provided nightly entertainment for the commander and his guards.

One prisoner, however, refused to be a part of the commander's show. Though like all the rest he was a withered, starving shadow of a man, he would never allow himself to scavenge for a lick of margarine. The other prisoners called him Elijah. In some unspoken way, the others drew strength from Elijah's refusal to join the frenzy.

Then, one night, something happened that seemed to shatter whatever spirit remained in the prisoners. Elijah cracked. All at once he threw himself into the greasy vat and furiously rolled around like a crazed beast.

And how the commander howled. It was a deep belly laugh of satanic satisfaction. The last of the Jews had been broken.

Later, after the guards left and the Jews were in their barracks, Elijah took off his shirt and began to tear it to shreds. The others looked on in silence. Had Elijah gone mad?

He studied the shirt for a moment, carefully looking it over, as if searching for some exact location, and then tearing that area into a strip. He looked up. His eyes were on fire.

"Do you know what tonight is?" he demanded. "It's the first night of Hanukah."

Elijah studied the shirt again, finding another choice spot to tear. A spot he had purposely saturated with grease from his roll in the margarine tub.

That night Elijah led the others in the lighting of the Hanukah flames. The wicks came from the strips of his shirt, and the bits of margarine Elijah had furiously scavenged was the oil.

Elijah's light continues to shine. (*Aish Hatorah*)

Special Hanukah Section



Laws of Hanukah

The holiday of Hanukah begins on Sunday night, November 28 and ends on Monday, December 6. Here are a few *halachot* regarding the holiday:

A) The optimum time to light the Hanukah 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 Hanukah lighting takes place 20 minutes before sunset, they should last at least 1-1/3 hours. Therefore, the colored Hanukah 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 *shamash* 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.

Enlightening the Present

Our Sages have written much about the lighting of the Menorah: Which oils to use, where the Menorah should be placed, and of what materials we should fashion the Menorah, for example. One lesson found (*Sofrim* 20:3) concerns the type of Menorah to be used: It is forbidden to use an old lamp. “Old,” according to most commentators, means in a condition that renders the Menorah unattractive, such as used, unglazed earthenware. The lighting of the Menorah is a celebratory *misvah*, and should therefore be performed in a respectful and honorable manner. The use of an old and unappealing Menorah does not accord to this *misvah* the respect that is due.

The *B'nai Yisaschar* has another explanation of the prohibition on using an old Menorah, on an allegorical level. The nation of Israel has been the grateful recipient of many of G-d's miracles. Clearly, we do not commemorate all these miraculous occurrences for generations as holidays. We do, however, commemorate miracles on two holidays that are not mentioned in the Torah: Hanukah and Purim. There are different types of miracles. For some, the “light of G-d” that is evident when a miracle occurs appears only at that particular point in time. However, G-d performs some miracles with an added level of affection for the nation of Israel. The “light of G-d” emanating from these miracles not only appears at the time of the miracle's appearance. It is evident each year, at the time of the anniversary of the miracle. These are commemorated as holidays.

Megillat Esther, which is read on Purim, comes with its own set of laws. One of these laws is that we cannot read the *Megillah* backwards. This law, explained allegorically, is that we cannot read the *Megillah* looking only toward the past - as merely a recitation of long ago events, as a history lesson. One has to recognize that each year, Purim and its miracles are still relevant. G-d's presence is apparent on Purim, each year. If one reads the *Megillah* without making it relevant to this day and age, looking at it as merely a story from days of old, one cannot fulfill the *misvah* of reading the *Megillah*.

Hanukah does not have a *Megillah* detailing the events leading up to the miracle. Hanukah merely has the kindling of the Menorah. The lights commemorate the miracles that occurred to the Maccabees: that a small flask of oil lasted for eight days, and that they were victorious in their battles with the Syrian-Greeks. If one lights an “old Menorah,” as just another antiquated ritual commemorating some ancient happenings, the lighting is improper. The lighting of the Menorah has to be done with the perspective that the Hand of G-d seen at the time of the miracle of Hanukah is still seen today. G-d's light shines in the world today just as it did in the days of the Maccabees. The lighting has to be a “new” lighting, not a lighting for the past, an “old” lighting.

Why is it that these two holidays, Purim and Hanukah, are celebrated nowadays? Why were the miracles on these holidays so special that the light of G-d seen in

conjunction with these miracles is still seen today? These two holidays represent two different types of salvation: physical destruction thwarted by spiritual endeavor, and spiritual destruction thwarted by physical endeavors. G-d's hand was evident in both types of salvation, and is evident in each generation when the Jewish people are confronted with spiritual and physical persecutions. These two holidays represent two different types of danger the Jewish people have faced. They represent two different types of dealing with these dangers. And in both instances, because the dedication of the Jewish people to G-d was steadfast, His light was evident and we, via miracles, were saved.

Today, and in every generation, the Jewish people are faced with trials and tribulations. Hanukah and Purim are living lessons that we can and we will persevere. G-d is with us and His Divine assistance is forthcoming. On both holidays, we must make the connection between the history of the holiday and its current application. We must take note that the light of G-d that shone in the days of Hanukah and Purim still shine today. We must light a new Menorah and read the *Megillah* forwards. An “old” Menorah and “backward” *Megillah* readings just do not work. May the light of our new Menorahs shine brightly on the entire nation this year! (Rabbi Yehudah Prero)

Hanukah Insights

The powerful images of the miracles of the Jewish victory over the Selucid Greeks in the 2nd Century B.C.E. and the miracle of the one-day supply of oil burning eight days in the re-dedication of the Temple are an annual inspiration to Jews everywhere. A close examination of the laws and customs of Hanukah yields some surprising insights.

Sharing: If a person has only enough oil and wicks for himself for the eight days of Hanukah, whereas his impoverished neighbor has none, he should share with him, even though he will not have enough for all eight candles at the end of the festival. This is because the idea of adding on a candle each night until we reach eight is what is known as *hiddur*, a beautification of the *misvah*; the essential *misvah* is just one candle per night per household. Better to share your oil and enable another Jew to fulfill the essential *misvah* along with you, than to beautify your own while he has nothing.

A Unique Blessing: Most of us are familiar with the blessings said by the person lighting the candles. What is less well known, though, is that there is also a blessing for one who is not lighting. Upon seeing the Hanukah candles burning, he makes a blessing on the miracles that were done for our fathers. It is unique to Hanukah that someone not performing the *misvah* (and no one is doing it for him) makes a blessing just on seeing a *misvah* done by others. This, too, may be explained by the special concern that the Sages felt for all Jews, including the non-observant. The candles were made a public display for their sake. Therefore, when a Jew who, upon seeing the lights burning, is aroused by them to take a renewed interest in his Jewish identity, that special dimension of the *misvah* has been fulfilled, and a blessing of thanks to G-d is in order.

Priorities: The *Talmud* raises the question regarding a person who has only enough oil for either Shabbat or Hanukah candles, but not both. (Each year, Shabbat and Hanukah coincide at least once during the eight-day festival.) Which takes precedence? The *Talmud* determines that Shabbat takes precedence because of *Shalom Bayit*, family harmony. The Hanukah candles (that were then placed in the doorway) publicize the miracle of the oil, but the Shabbat candles illuminate the home. It is deemed more important that there be light in the home for the enjoyment of the Shabbat meal.

G-d's Business: The candle should contain sufficient oil (or wax) at the time of lighting to burn until at least half an hour after the stars come out. In the event that the light is extinguished before the prescribed time, it is proper to re-light (without a new blessing). However, one is not obligated to re-light; he has fulfilled the *misvah* with the