



Chanukah

IN **60** MINUTES (OR LESS)

BY RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

The Month of Kislev

Kislev is the ninth month in the Hebrew calendar when counting from the month of Nissan. Its Mazal [Zodiac sign] is the rainbow because it occurs during the rainy season when the rainbow is often seen. In fact, the very first rainbow recorded in the history of the universe was shown to Noah upon his emergence from the Ark during the month of Kislev.

The holiday of Chanukah, which occurs on the 25th day of Kislev is not scriptur-ally ordained and is entirely a creation of the Sages although there are faint allusions to it in Scripture. Moreover, no mention is found of this holiday in the Mishnah and the only mention of this holiday in the Talmud is found in Tractate Shabbat 21b.

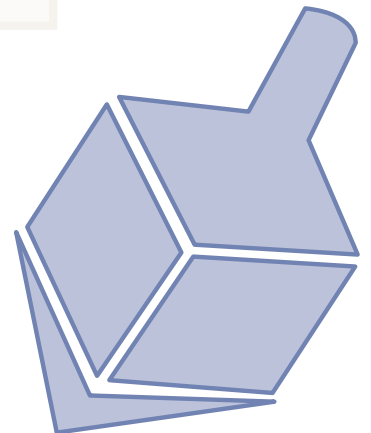
Chanukah in the words of our Sages

מאי חנוכה דתנו רבנן בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמיים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא/ב

“What is Chanukah? *The Rabbis have expounded: Beginning with the 25th of Kislev, eight days of Chanukah are observed, during which no eulogies are delivered, nor is fasting permitted. For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the holy oils used for the Menorah in the Temple, and when the Hasmonean house prevailed and vanquished them, they searched and found only one remaining jar of oil with the Kohen Gadol’s seal.*

Although it contained only enough oil to burn for one day, a miracle occurred, and the oil burned for eight days. A year later they [i.e. the Rabbis] designated these days as Yomim Tovim [holidays] on which praise and thanksgiving were to be said.” Tractate Shabbat 21

Maimonides, the great 12th century Jewish scholar and codifier, known as Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon), expands upon the above as follows:



The letters of the word **חשמונאים** [Chashmonaim] stand for all the mitzvos the wicked Greeks tried to do away with, but were restored by the Chashmonaim.

חודש = ח' Rosh Chodesh

שבת = ש' Shabbat

מילה = מ' Bris Milah [circumcision]

נידה = נ' Niddah [Laws of Family Purity]

ארוסה = א' Arusah [Decrees against the Jewish brides]

יחוד ה' = י' Yichud Hashem [Monotheism]

מזוזה = ז' Mezuzah



א) בבית שני כשמלכו יון גזרו גזרות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ובמצות ופשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחצום לחץ גדול עד שריחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתיים שנה עד החורבן השני.

ב) וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואבדום בחמשה ועשרים בחדש כסלו היה ונכנסו להיכל ולא מצאו שמן טהור במקדש אלא פך אחד ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה שמונה ימים עד שכתשו זיתים והוציאו שמן טהור.

ג) ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנוכה והן אסורין בהספד ותענית כימי הפורים והדלקת הנרות בהן מצוה מדברי סופרים כקריאת המגילה.

רמב"ם יד החזקה – הלכות חנוכה פרק ג

“During the period of the Second Temple, the Greek kings issued harsh decrees against Israel; they outlawed their religion, forbade them to engage in the study of Torah and prohibited the practice of mitzvat, laid hands upon their money and their daughters, entered the Sanctuary and ravaged it, and defiled all that had been ritually pure. They caused Israel great anguish, until the God of our Fathers granted them mercy and delivered them from the hands of their enemies.

The Chashmonai Kohanim Gedolim (High Priests) prevailed, slew them, and saved Israel from their hands. They designated a king from among the Kohanim, and the Kingdom of Israel was restored for more than 200 years, until the Second Destruction. Israel prevailed against their enemies and vanquished them on the 25th day of the month of Kislev.

They entered the Sanctuary and found only one jar of ritually pure oil that was sufficient to burn for only one day, but they lit the lights of the Menorah from it for eight days, until they could press olives and extract additional pure oil.

The Sages of that generation therefore decreed, that eight days beginning with the 25th of Kislev should be days of rejoicing, Hallel should be recite, and lights lit at the entrance of the house, on each of the eight nights, in order to publicize the miracle.”

Rambam, Hilchot Chanukah, Chapter 3

The Holiday's name, **“Chanukah,”** is spelled *chet, nun, vav, kaf, hay*. The first three letters spell the Hebrew word “Chanu,” which means “They rested;” and the last two letters have a numerical equivalent [Kaf = 20, Hey = 5] of 25, the day upon which they rested. Hence, the name means that on the 25th of Kislev they rested from battling their enemies.



The Talmud writes that they established these days for “Hallel” [praise] and “Hoda’ah” [thanksgiving]; this is understood as follows: Hallel: The traditional song of praise known as Hallel [largely culled from the Book of Psalms] is recited on most holidays and Rosh Chodesh. However, on Rosh Chodesh, the complete version is not recited; some paragraphs are omitted, since Rosh Chodesh is only of rabbinic origin and therefore considered a more minor holiday. On Chanukah, although the holiday is certainly of rabbinic origin, the Sages decreed that the entire Hallel be recited each day of the eight days of the holiday. Hodaah: The insertion of the ritual text known as “Al HaNissim,” which describes the miracle in brief, in the daily Amidah and Birchat HaMazon [Grace After Meals].

THE OIL

Just about any type of candle or oil may be used to perform the mitzvah of lighting the menorah. Our Sages stressed, however, that to recall the miracle in as precise a manner as possible, one should strive to recreate the original miracle by using specifically pure and clear olive oil along with cotton wicks. Of course, when this isn't possible, any form of oil, paraffin, or wax may be used. Electric menorahs are not acceptable for use on Chanuka.

THE MENORAH

The menorah too, may be constructed of virtually any material with the exception of earthenware, which, after being used once becomes irreparably soiled and unfit for use for a mitzvah. The ceramic menorahs available for purchase nowadays, are generally of a higher quality and may be reused if desired. Of course, wherever possible, one should invest in a fancier and more beautiful menorah as doing so demonstrates his love for the mitzvah of lighting the menorah.

We add a candle on each successive night, and it is very important to ensure that each individual candle is clearly visible as distinct from the others. Therefore, the menorah may not be constructed in a circular fashion with lights in front and behind, or on an uneven plane which gives the impression of candles front and back. Instead, a straight menorah which features a reasonable amount of space between each light is to be used.

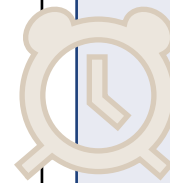
LIGHTING UP OR LIGHTING DOWN

There is a well – known dispute in the Talmud whether we light one light the first night and add a light on each of the successive nights, or if we begin with eight lights on the first night and subtract one each night. We rule in accordance with the opinion of Beis Hillel that we increase the number of lights as Chanukah proceeds.

תנו רבנן מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו והמהדרין נר לכל אחד ואחד
והמהדרין מן המהדרין בית שמאי אומרים יום ראשון מדליק שמנה
מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך ובית הלל אומרים יום ראשון מדליק אחת
מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא/ב

Our Sages taught: The obligation on Chanukah is that each person kindles a [single] candle for his household. Those who seek to optimize their fulfillment of the commandment kindle one light per household member. Those who wish to beautify the mitzvah even further, Beis Shammai rules:



Oily To Rise... — The miracle occurred with oil because oil teaches us an important message about the Jewish people. Just as oil refuses to mix with other liquids and rises to the top, the Jewish people must remain apart from the nations of the world and steadfastly adhere to their principles. In this manner, we will succeed in our mission to be a “light” unto the nations.

The letters of the word חנוכה are an acrostic for הלל כבית הלל – Eight lights and the Halachah is in accordance with Beis Hillel. *Abudraham*

From the Chassidic Masters –
A total of thirty-six lights are lit over the eight days of Chanukah. The Talmud tells us that in every generation there are thirty-six righteous men in whose merit the universe is sustained yet their greatness is concealed from us.

The thirty-six lights of Chanukah are symbolic of these hidden righteous men since they are lit during the darkest period of the year in the deep of winter, yet they illuminate the entire year.





On the first day of Hanukkah, we kindle eight lights; each day thereafter, we diminish the lights by one. Beis Hillel rules: On the first day of Chanukah, we kindle one light; each day thereafter, we increase the lights by one.

Talmud Tractate Shabbat 21b

If one has a standard menorah of eight lights, he begins the first night lighting from the right side [for all mitzvos begin with the right side which is more prominent,] and the following evening, he adds a light and lights the new one [to the left] first. This is in order to recall the fact that each night the oil continued to burn, the miracle was increased and even more impressive.

Although technically speaking, a maximum of only eight lights need be lit, in practice; we light an additional light on each night of Chanukah. This extra light is known as the Shamash and is located in the center of, or, sometimes, to the side of, the menorah. The reason for the Shamash is to avoid the prohibition against benefitting from the lights of the menorah while the mitzvah is being fulfilled. This additional light is the one which should be used for all extraneous purposes instead of one of the primary eight lights. To show that it is distinct from the other lights, the Shamash is raised above them.

The menorah should be lit shortly after sundown but if one cannot light then, he may still light well into the night, so long as others will be around to see it. The lights should also burn for at least 30 minutes and they may even be extinguished once that time has passed.

WHERE SHOULD I PUT IT?

תנו רבנן נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ אם היה דר בעלייה מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרשות הרבים ובשעת הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו ודין

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף כא/ב

“Our Sages have taught: The lights of Chanukah, it is a mitzvah to place by them outside the entrance of his home. If he lived on an upper floor, they should be placed in a window that faces the public domain. During a time of danger, they should be placed on a table inside the home and that is sufficient.”

Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 21b

There is much discussion among the halachic authorities regarding why we don't currently light the menorah outside [it should be noted that in Israel, many people do light the menorah just outside the doorway,] and various explanations are offered. Some attribute it to anti-Semitism, some to the winter weather which would not allow it to remain lit for a long enough time, some to the possibility that the menorah will be pilfered etc. Regardless of the reason, while some still insist on lighting it adjacent to the doorway, most people nowadays light the menorah in a window that faces the public domain to ensure that the maximum amount of people will see it and recall the miraculous events of Chanukah.



THE BLESSINGS

On the first night of Chanukah, three blessings are recited just prior to lighting the menorah:

1. *'Baruch ata Hashem, Elokenu melech ha'olam, asher kidshan b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.'*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us to light the Chanukah lamps.

2. *'Baruch ata Hashem, Elokenu melech ha'olam, she'asah nisim la'avotenu, bayamim hahem bazeman hazeh.'*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has performed miracles for our fathers in bygone days, at this time.

3. *'Baruch ata Hashem, Elokenu melech ha'olam, she hecheyanu, vekiyemanu vehigi'anu lazeman hazeh.'*

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has given us life, and has sustained us, and has brought us to this time.

On all subsequent nights, only the first two blessings are recited.

MAKE IT A FAMILY AFFAIR

If possible, the entire family should be gathered together while the Chanukah lights are lit. In this manner, the miracle gains maximum publicity, a theme stressed repeatedly throughout the writings of the Sages. Some have a custom that every child lights his or her own menorah, others restrict the lighting only to boys. In most households, a married woman relies upon her husband's lighting to fulfill her obligation unless he is incapable of lighting.

SING ALONG ALL TOGETHER NOW

As soon as the first light is lit, the custom is to begin singing the traditional "Haneiros HaLallu" in which we declare the purpose for lighting the menorah as a means of recalling the miracles of that Chanukah saga and that we may not utilize the lights for our personal benefit since they are sacred.

Following the completion of the lighting ceremony, additional songs are traditionally sung including the ever popular "Maoz Tzur."

This poem, thought to date back to the 13th century, recalls the many times when Jewish communities were saved from the people around them. The second stanza tells of the exodus from Egypt. The third stanza tells of the end of the Babylonian captivity. The fourth retells the miracle of the holiday of Purim. The fifth speaks about the Hasmonean victory that is commemorated by celebrating Chanukkah.

In bygone days, at this time – The miracles and spiritual manifestations that occurred back then, reoccur each year during the days of Chanukah.
– Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zt"l

from the Chassidic Masters – One Chanukah, while enduring a wretched existence in Bergen Belsen, the Bluzheve Rebbe, Rav Yisroel Spira zt"l somehow managed to obtain oil and a wick and lit the Chanukah lights at great risk to himself and all those who assembled to partake in the mitzvah.

One of the witnesses, a Jew who had long ago abandoned his faith, accosted the Rebbe and demanded to know how he could recite the blessing, "Who...has sustained us, and has brought us to this time?" He protested that a blessing thanking G-d was not appropriate considering the wretched conditions in which they found themselves.

Rav Spira responded, "I too, have thought about this for a long time and I actually hesitated before reciting the blessing. Then I looked around at the faces of all the assembled, each of whom risked his life to participate in the mitzvah, and I realized that we are truly blessed to have experienced this incredible event wherein Jews under the most dire circumstances are prepared to give their lives just to perform a mitzvah! That, my friend, is certainly deserving of a blessing!"

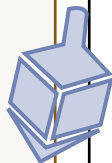


The Married Couple! – The Greeks went well beyond merely restricting the practice and observance of Judaism. They also try to destroy the traditional family structure, specifically by driving a wedge between husbands and their wives. Many decrees were enacted to accomplish this goal, among them that the Greek governor was entitled to spend an evening with each prospective bride just prior to her marriage. In lighting on behalf of his wife, the husband is stating that the two are inseparable and that their hallowed family structure is intact.



FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

On the morning after Chanukah, the wife of Rav Shlomo of Karlin zt"l showed him that the wall of their home was blackened by the flames of the menorah which had been placed too close to the wall. Rav Shlomo clapped his hands in glee and exclaimed, "Wonderful! Wonderful! Now at least some remnant of the holy lights of Chanukah will remain with us in our home for the rest of the year!"



At the Pesach Seder we do not sing about Chanukah, and on Purim we do not mention the exodus from Egypt. Why do we discuss these, and other exiles, on Chanukah?

The shape of the menorah contains an interesting message about how G-d brings salvation to His people. It features seven lights branching forth from a central stem. This indicates that all the lights of the menorah, which appear independent of one another, actually stem from one central force. The center light of the Menorah represents the Divine Presence and all the lights of the menorah draw their source from there. G-d is the source of all our strength and only once we recognize this do we merit His salvation. This was the case in each of the exiles which we successfully passed through once we appreciated that the source of our salvation must be the Almighty.

On Chanukah we sing about all the exiles, for each of the exiles could conclude only when the Jewish People learned the lesson of the menorah. Similarly, when we take this message to heart, our final exile, too, will end, and we will merit the rebuilding of the Holy Temple.

Chanukah Customs

PARTIES

Although there is no law mandating festive meals on Chanukah [unlike other holidays upon which one must feast and rejoice,] there is a widespread custom to celebrate the festival through parties at which the miracle of Chanukah is discussed along with the laws of Chanukah. When so doing, an otherwise mundane feast is sanctified as a Seudas Mitzvah — a feast for the sake of a mitzvah.

CHANUKAH GELT

The word Chanukah is also connected to the word, "Chinuch" which means "to educate." Especially since the study and teaching of Torah was forbidden by the Greeks, it became customary on Chanukah to celebrate our victory by focusing on the importance of training our children to study and love Torah. One means of doing so was by rewarding the children for their study by giving them gifts and money. Hence the custom of Chanukah gifts and gelt.

SPINNING THE DREIDEL

Another popular custom is to play the game of dreidel which entails spinning a four-sided top marked with the letters Nun, Gimel, Hey, Shin [Peh in the Land of Israel] and either contributing to, or withdrawing from the communal pot depending on the letter that comes up. This custom originated based on the fact that children would arrive home early to light the menorah and then would have little with which to occupy their time throughout the long winter nights. The Chanukah gelt was used to play this game and they were encouraged to take this time to relax so they could then devote the remainder of the winter to their studies.

LATKES

In commemoration of the miracle of the oil, some have a custom to eat food fried in oil such as latkes, and donuts.

WO-MEN AT WORK

There is an ancient custom for women to refrain from performing any household labor while the menorah is lit. This custom derives from the fascinating story of Yehudis, a young and beautiful girl who was the daughter of Yochanan the High Priest. Appalled by the Greek decree mandating that every bride spend an evening in the company of the Greek general, she invited herself to the palace and pretended to be interested in his company. As part of her ruse, she fed him aged cheese and to quench his thirst, she gave him aged wine to drink. He soon fell into a drunken slumber. She decapitated him and brought his severed head to the Jewish warriors who displayed it on the walls of Jerusalem in full view of his soldiers. When they saw that their leader had been killed his soldiers were so frightened that they fled for their lives and were easily vanquished. To commemorate the heroism of this brave woman, many Jewish women undertook to refrain from household labor while the menorah remained lit.

For this reason some have a custom to eat dairy foods on Chanukah, as well.



Chanukah in History

Although the 25th of Kislev upon which the holiday of Chanukah occurs is primarily a celebration of the victory over the Greeks, our Sages teach us that it was pre-destined for greatness from earlier times as well.

1. Although the Mishkan [Tabernacle] was only erected on the first day of the month of Nissan, its construction was actually completed on the 25th day of Kislev.
2. When Ezra the Scribe led the return of the Jews to Israel to rebuild the Holy Temple, the work was interrupted due to unfriendly elements and delayed for twenty-two years. They finally resumed the construction and completed the dangerous and grueling work of laying the foundation on the twenty-fourth of Kislev, and rejoiced on the twenty-fifth.

WHY EIGHT DAYS?

As much as light symbolizes an outpouring of wisdom, the holiday of Chanukah has inspired innumerable Torah insights into the nature of the holiday and the miracles. Often, one question inspired dozens of original and creative insights. The most well-known example of this phenomenon is the following intriguing question posed by Rabbi Yosef Karo zt"l:

*If there was enough oil found to last one day, it only burned for seven **extra** days. Why then do we celebrate eight days of Chanukah?*

Hundreds of possible answers have been offered to resolve this question. Here are several to consider. See if you can think of others.

1. Finding the untainted jug of oil itself was a miracle worthy of celebration. The first night we celebrate the miracle of finding the oil, and on the remaining nights we celebrate the miracle of the oil burning continuously.
2. The first night we celebrate the unlikely victory over powerful adversaries, and the miracle of the oil the remaining seven nights.
3. After emptying the flask into the menorah, they kindled it and the next morning they found that it had not been consumed at all. This miracle repeated itself all eight days.
4. The Greeks strove tirelessly to convince the Jewish people that nature controls the world, not G-d. The miracle of the oil demonstrated that G-d controls nature and that we must be grateful to Him for all that exists in nature as well. For seven days we celebrate the miracle and for one day, we celebrate the "miracle" of nature — the fact that oil burns under normal conditions.
5. Some have a version of the story that the jug of oil that was found intact did not even have enough to burn for one night. Thus, the fact that it burned all through the first night itself was a miracle too.
6. One of the primary decrees of the Greeks was to abolish the mitzvah of milah [circumcision] which occurs on the eighth day. To commemorate our dedication to this precious mitzvah, our Sages instituted the holiday for eight days.

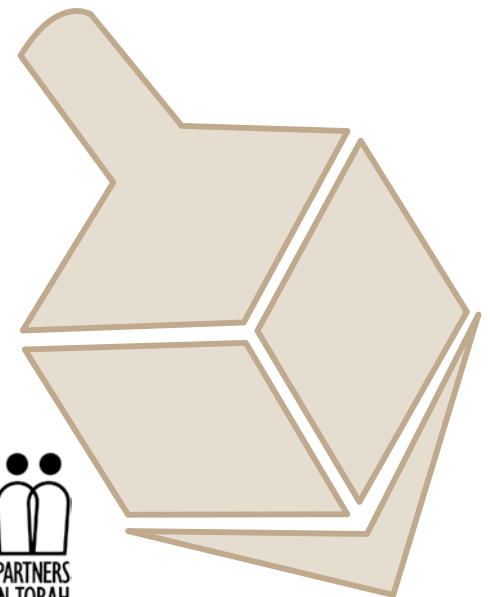
From The Chassidic Masters

Rav Yissachar Dov of Belz zt"l explained that the reason for Chanukah Gelt lay in an unusual law regarding the mitzvah of menorah. Typically, one who cannot afford to fulfill a mitzvah is exempt from its performance. Lighting the menorah, however, is an exception for our Sages have told us that even a pauper must beg, or sell the shirt off his back in order to fulfill this mitzvah. To spare the destitute the indignity of having to beg from others, it became customary to distribute money to the impoverished without their even having to ask. To further minimize their shame, it became routine to distribute money even to children so that it would not be obvious who were the prime recipients of our charity.

The custom of playing dreidel was so precious that the holy Chasam Sofer [Rav Moshe Sofer zt"l] who never wasted a moment, used to play it on one of the nights of Chanukah. He even reserved a special silver dreidel for this purpose.

Similarly, the sainted Rav Aharon of Belz zt"l used to play dreidel several times throughout the holiday in order to fulfill this hallowed custom

The twenty-fifth word of the Torah is "Ohr" — light. This alludes to the light that was revealed on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev.



WHAT WERE THEY FIGHTING ABOUT?

Unlike many of our persecutors who sought to commit genocide against the Jewish people [i.e. Haman, Hitler etc.,] the Greeks had no such designs. Their primary interest lay in obstructing our ability to observe Judaism faithfully. They wished for us to see the glories of assimilating into Greek culture and sought all types of devious means to accomplish this. They outlawed Jewish observance including circumcision, Shabbat, and Torah study, under the penalty of death. As well, many Jews — called Hellenists — began to assimilate into Greek culture, assuming Greek names and marrying non-Jews. This led to the decay of the foundations of Jewish life and practice.

It was in response to these decrees and religious persecutions that we, the Jewish people, led by Matisyahu, and later his son, Judah the Maccabee, instigated a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Syrian—Greek army. At first only small numbers joined the battle, but eventually, the Jews began to realize that with G-d's help, the mighty Greek army could be overcome, and many more joined and supported the cause.

This was a rare occurrence in Jewish history, where Jews actually instigated a war, not of physical survival, but of religious survival.

Especially in the early stages of the campaign, their cause was not popular among many Jews who preferred to jettison their religion in favor of maintaining the status quo with the Greek rulers, or in exchange for full acceptance in the foreign society. Only the small band of fighters recognized how crucial it was to fight for their religious freedom even if there was little hope they would emerge victorious. They knew, as Jews have learned for

thousands of years, that before G—d, no army is too mighty and no general too wise. If we are committed to Him, He will ensure our survival.

They also knew that a Judaism that one is not prepared to die for is a Judaism not worth living for. Abraham readily agreed to sacrifice his life for his faith. Isaac was prepared to ascend the Altar if that was what G—d sought. Jacob risked his life countless times in order to adhere to the principles of monotheism. Throughout the ages, the Jewish people have understood that Judaism is life itself and to forfeit our faith is as unthinkable as forgoing the right to breathe.

Just as a flame, no matter how small, cannot survive without oxygen, the Jewish people cannot survive without Torah and mitzvos. The Maccabees knew that while war is unpleasant, spiritual death is unthinkable!



Make It Meaningful

If Chanukah this year is just like all the others in past years, it will not have the same meaning. Here are six suggestions for how you can make this Chanukah even more meaningful than all the others:

- Oil is best! Don't settle for a plain wax candle any longer. Recreate the original miracle by switching to pure olive oil.
- Better yet, don't purchase ready-made wicks. Roll them yourself and make them nice and thick so they burn clearly.
- Study the section in *Tractate Shabbat 21a & b* which discusses the laws of Chanukah and understand it like never before
- Don't just give your children gifts, find a worthwhile Jewish charity and help them as well.
- A Chanukah party without latkes is no fun, but when you add some inspiring Torah thoughts it's positively de-light-ful.
- Learn the meaning to the words of the traditional Chanukah songs so they're not just catchy tunes, but inspiring poems.

Points to Ponder...

A Jewish holiday is more than an excuse to partake of delectable food and drink. It's designed to make us think about who we are and where we stand in relationship to G-d. Here are a few points to ponder this Chanukah as you light the menorah and attend the innumerable Chanukah parties:

1. Would I have joined the Chashmonaim in their battle against the Greeks and religious persecution?
2. Does it trouble me that so few Jews are educated in the rudiments of their faith?
3. What am I prepared to do to reverse that trend in my own family?
4. Do I allow the Torah to illuminate my life?
5. What's wrong with rampant assimilation anyhow?
6. Are my gifts to my children a reward for excelling in their Torah studies, or merely an attempt to mimic my Christian neighbors?
7. Do my children understand how important Judaism is to me and my commitment to it?

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Rabbi Eli Gewirtz, *Director*

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