

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Chanuka

Timing is everything. This is true in financial matters, personal choices, national decisions, as well as in historical events. Nevertheless, we are able to see that the present is not necessarily the past and that options and opinions that are currently relevant and popular once held no sway. Our ancestors the Hasmoneans engaged in the same type of struggles, physical as well as spiritual, that challenge us today.

Surrounded by enemies meant to destroy the Jewish state and faith, and beset by a substantial amount of internal enemies willing to become Greeks, the Hasmoneans fought both enemies strongly and successfully. But they were fortunate that in the second century before the Common Era there were no NGOs, EUs, no media bias and a plethora of do-gooders.

The Hasmoneans would undoubtedly have been accused of war crimes, aggression, and of becoming occupiers of the land that in truth belonged to them. However, their timing was impeccable. By current day standards, there could never be a Chanuka holiday. This is not to say that hypocrisy and double dealing did not exist in the days of the Hasmoneans. Human nature has not changed significantly since Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden.

However, with the development of civilization, technology and the wide dissemination of information – both true and false- we must agree that the implementation of hypocrisy and false and unfair judgment has reached a new high in our time. And unfortunately, our small state and great people are the primary victims of this new, exalted perfidy.

Perhaps the Rabbis of Old, when establishing the holiday of Chanuka, realized that there would rise a later generation, Jewish and non-Jewish, that would not be proud of the courage and fortitude of the Hasmoneans. There would arise a generation that would have preferred that the Hasmoneans engage the Greeks rather than defeat them in battle. Perhaps this is why the Rabbis chose to emphasize the miracle of the light of the oil lamp as the basic theme and commandment of Chanuka.

It is hard to find fault with a small flame that somehow burned miraculously for eight days when it had only sufficient fuel for one day. This miracle of the small flame came to justify the entire epic of the Hasmonean struggle against the Greeks and against the Hellenists. If the Hasmoneans were in fact wrong in conducting their struggle against the Greeks in a forceful fashion, then the Lord would not have provided the miracle of the flame.

The rededication of the Temple and its purification from pagan defilement was again another indication of the correct struggle of the Hasmoneans, of their tactics, and behavior. The preservation of the Jewish people and of Torah values within that people is the ultimate strategic goal of our nation since the time of Abraham. This goal has not changed in our time and, in fact, all current events have brought it into sharper focus. This is the central issue which dwarfs all others in Jewish society and worldview.

The Rabbis framed one of the blessings over the lights of Chanuka as recognizing the events ‘bayamim hahem,’ in those days’ bazman hazeh,’ in our time. We always have to look at how past events play themselves out in the current scene. We have to make certain that national errors and wrong policies that were present ‘bayamim hahem,’ in past times, do not repeat themselves ‘bazman hazeh,’ in our current time.

And, we also have to be aware that the wisdom, traditions, and good sense of the past not be easily discarded by current fads and transient mores in order to fit ourselves into a perceived modern, politically correct time. This balance between the past and the present, between what was and what is remains the challenge of our generation.

Discarding our past has proven to be spiritually and even physically fatal to millions of Jews over the last centuries. And, ignoring the realities of the present, handicaps us in dealing with the problems and the struggles that we must yet endure. The lights of Chanuka serve to remind us that at one

and the same time we live ‘bayamim hahem,’ in those past days and ‘bazman hazeh,’ in our current world as well. The flames of Chanuka have survived for almost 23 centuries and remain the inspiration for our faith in our eventual achievement of Jewish sovereignty in our holy land and in the expansion of our spiritual values, Torah knowledge and observance.
Shabbat Shalom and Happy Chanuka

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Miketz

The main point in this week's parsha is that Yosef recognizes his brothers while they don't recognize him. The obvious reason for this is that Yosef, pursuing the fulfillment of his heavenly dreams, is looking for his brothers, while they, the brothers themselves, are not partners with Yosef in the dreams and therefore they cannot imagine that they are bowing before Yosef.

There are dreams that are private, personal, and many times impossible to share with others. However, sometimes there are dreams that are so transcendent and affect generations and nations that they must be shared with others. Yosef's dreams are of this very nature. The brothers misinterpreted Yosef's words as being an attempt to rule over them and control them. The dreams however truly implied that Yosef would save Yaakov and his family in a time of hunger and crisis.

Yosef wished that his dreams would be shared by his brothers as well. The brothers, who saw those dreams as being malevolent, did not want any part in their fulfillment or accomplishment. On the other hand, Yaakov does share in Yosef's dreams and though he reprimands Yosef for his attitude towards his brothers, he guards the message of the dreams and is somehow certain that they will be fulfilled.

Someone who does not share in the dream will find it difficult to identify with the dreamer or even to recognize affinity with him. Yosef who wishes his dreams to be their dreams immediately recognizes his brothers. The brothers, who as yet do not share Yosef's dreams, cannot really recognize him or identify with him.

The Jewish people over the ages have dreamt many dreams. Some of them were private dreams. As such, they did not really have a lasting effect. However, there were grand, national, and even universal dreams that were part of Jewish tradition and society. These dreams included the return to the Land of Israel, establishing a just and moral Jewish society based on Torah values, and a general commitment to further civilization and improve human society.

The test of the Jewish continuity and loyalty was whether the individual Jew shared in these great dreams. Those who did not eventually could no longer recognize their own brothers. Because of this, these Jews eventually became negative forces in Jewish society and in world society as well.

Jewish education over the ages not only taught Torah knowledge and Jewish tradition but it also implanted within the Jewish soul and mind the visions and dreams that are the lifeblood of Jewish survival. Many of the problems that exist in today's Jewish society, here in Israel, but especially in the diaspora, result from the fact that Jewish dreams are no longer shared by many Jews.

This explains much of the negativity and bitterness that is unfortunately present in the Jewish world. We need to see the dreamers as heroes and the visionaries as being the true leaders of our people. Yosef still lives with his dreams, his stubbornness, his hopes and his goodness. May we, his brothers, be wise enough to recognize him in our midst.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Chanuka

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Coming To A Theater Near You

"Seven years of famine..." (41:27)

As a young boy I remember sitting glued to the screen of the Golders Green Ionic, waiting to see the trailer of the next Steve Reeves epic. Steve would battle some unlikely plastic reptile with the shadow of the ice-cream lady falling all over him. Her torch usually managed to wash-out most of the picture until you could barely tell the difference between the lizard and Steve.

How things have changed.

On a recent trip to the States I was subjected to about an hour of broadcast television. I was amazed at how much time was taken up 'trailing' coming attractions. The identical trailer for some up-coming program was repeated ad nauseam.

We are rapidly reaching the Brave New World where trailers become so frequent and pervasive that there will be no time for the features themselves.

This will be the perfect paradigm for the dream-box which has always been long on promises and short on delivery.

At the root of this mania, however, is some solid reasoning. You can't get people to listen to you unless you can first grab their attention.

The most important part of a record is the first twenty seconds. By that point the listener has already decided whether he wants to listen further or not.

It's the same in a business interview. Much stress is placed on the way you look because first impressions are, as they say, lasting impressions.

In this week's Torah portion there's an interesting anomaly. When Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dream, he starts off by telling him about the seven years of famine. Chronologically, the seven years of plenty came first. Why didn't Yosef start by talking about them?

In a country as prosperous as Egypt talking about seven years of plenty would have been about as interesting as watching wallpaper. Yosef deliberately started speaking about the famine because he knew that this was a 'trailer' that would certainly make Pharaoh sit up and take notice.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas MIKEITZ

It happened at the end of two years to the day. (41:1)

On most years, Parshas Mikeitz coincides with Chanukah. The commentators explain that this is by design. In his notes to the Mordechai, Meseches Shabbos, at the end of Perek Bameh Madlikin, the Shiltei GiBorim writes that a number of allusions from the parsha render it a prime candidate for Shabbos Chanukah. At the opening words of the parsha, Mikeitz shenasaim, "At the end of two years," the letters of the word shenasaim, comprise a notreikun, abbreviation: shin - s'moel/left (side); nun - ner, candle; taf - tadlik, you shall light; yud - yemin, right (side); mem - mezuzah. This indicates that the Chanukah candles shall be lit and placed at the left side of the doorpost opposite the mezuzah. The author suggests that the words, v'tavoach tevach v'hachein, referring to Yosef's dinner for his brothers, is also an inference to Chanukah. The Ches of tevach, followed by the word v'hachein - vov, hay, chof, nun - are the letters of the word Chanukah. Additionally, the words v'tavoach tevach have a numerical value of forty-four, coinciding with forty-four candles that are lit during the entire holiday of Chanukah.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchev and the Koznitzer Maggid, zl, both offer a different pasuk that alludes to the Chanukah experience. When the brothers returned with Binyamin, Yosef prepared a lavish meal for them. He commanded his servant to give each one a portion. The pasuk reads, Va'tarev masaas Binyamin mimasas kulam chameish yados, "And Binyamin's portion was five times (hands) as much as any of them" (Ibid. 43:34).

The Torah uses the word yados, which means "hands," an atypical term for the portion that Binyamin received. Why is the word, yad/hand, used? They explain that the five yados are an allusion to the five yados connected with Chanukah: "You delivered giborim b'yad chalashim, the strong into the hands of the weak; rabim b'yad meatim, the many into the hands of the few, temaim b'yad tehorim, the ritually impure into the hands of those who are pure; reshaim b'yad tzaddikim, the wicked into the hands of the righteous; zeidim b'yad oskei torasecha, and the malicious, into the hands of the diligent students of your Torah."

This is the underlying meaning of v'tarev masaas Binyamin, "and the portion of Binyamin was more." Binyamin's name can be broken up into the words, Ben Yamin, son of the right, referring to Klal Yisrael, who are Hashem's children from the yemin, right side, signifying the stronger position, reflective of Hashem's unstinting love for us.

We now understand why Yosef gave Binyamin five portions at the special banquet in the brothers' honor. It was a seudas Chanukah, festive meal commemorating (what would become) Chanukah. But why Binyamin? While it is true that his name signifies the Jewish people, there must be a stronger connection.

Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, quotes the Talmud Megillah 16a, as a source for his elucidation of this question. The Talmud cites the pasuk in Parshas Vayigash (45:22), "To Binyamin he gave... five changes of clothing." Chazal explain that Yosef's giving Binyamin five changes of clothing is an indirect reference to Mordechai, a descendant of Binyamin, who would one day walk out from his session with King Achashveirosh bedecked in five royal garments.

Why would Yosef need a "gift" of "five": first five hands; and now five changes of clothes? Applying the thesis of the Koznitzer Maggid and the Berditchiver, we now know that the first "five" was an allusion to Chanukah and the second "five" a reference to Purim. Thus, the Talmud questions the second "five," since we already know about Chanukah. Their response fits perfectly into the equation: Yes, the first "five" is about Chanukah; the second "five" however, is the Torah's allusion to Purim.

If one were to question the sequence of the two festivals (i.e., How do we know that the first "five" refers to Chanukah and the second "five" is a reference to Purim?), we would apply the pesukim at the beginning of Parshas Mikeitz, which indicates that this parsha belongs to Chanukah.

Rav Friedman takes this thesis to the next level. Five changes of clothes clearly has a stronger affiliation with the Purim miracle, since it was Mordechai's royal clothes that catch our attention. Additionally, Mordechai was from the tribe of Binyamin. That all seems to fit, but what compelled Yosef to give Binyamin specifically five yados, hands/portions, corresponding with the miracle of Chanukah. What relationship exists between Binyamin and Chanukah?

As usual, there is no dearth of esoteric explanation for their interrelation. The Arizal writes that the twelve months of the year correspond with the twelve tribes in sequence, coinciding with their positions of travel and encampment according to their degalim, banners. Thus, as is posited by the Bnei Yissachar, the ninth month of the year, Kislev, corresponds with Binyamin, who was the ninth tribe in the order of travel. Kislev is the month of Chanukah - but that is not all.

The Zera Kodesh writes that the ninth month of the year is Kislev. Corresponding with this month, Shevet Binyamin offered its sacrifice in honor of the chanukas, inauguration, of the Mishkan on the ninth day of Nissan. This is because the Torah writes concerning Binyamin, Yedid Hashem yishkon lavetach alav kol hayom, "Beloved of Hashem, he rests securely with Him. He caused His covering to rest upon him at all times and takes up His abode between his high places" (Devarim 33:12). This is a reference to the fact that the Bais Hamikdash was built in Binyamin's portion of Eretz Yisrael.

To take this idea even further, Rav Friedman quotes the Talmud Yoma 12a, that distinguishes between the parts of the Bais Hamikdash complex that were contained in Shevet Yehudah's portion and those which were included in Shevet Binyamin's portion. The Har HaBayis (Temple Mount), the Lishkos (Chambers), and Azaros, (the Courtyard), were in Yehudah's

portion. The Ulam, (antechamber), Heichal, (Sanctuary), and Kodoshei HaKodoshim (Holy of Holies) were included in Binyamin's portion. The Talmud Shabbos 21b teaches that when the Greeks entered into the Bais Hamikdash, they came through the Heichal and contaminated the oils that were there. This was situated in Binyamin's portion. Through their defilement of the oils stored in the Heichal, the Greeks created a blemish within Binyamin's portion. Thus, when the miracle of Chanukah occurred and the Jews emerged victorious from the battle with the Greeks, they cleansed the Bais Hamikdash, thus repairing the spiritual taint that existed within Binyamin's portion. This was foreshadowed by Yosef when he gave Binyamin five portions.

Yosef instructed Pharaoh to appoint overseers on the land, Yaase Pharaoh v'yafkeid pekidim al haaretz, v'chimeish es eretz Mitzrayim b'sheva shnei ha'sova, "Let Pharaoh proceed and appoint overseers on the land, and he shall prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of plenty" (41:34). The Bnei Yissachar writes that the word v'chimeish, "and he shall prepare," is an inference to Chanukah. In their diabolical plan to destroy the Jewish nation, the Greeks focused on three essential mitzvos: Chodesh, the sanctification of the New Moon, which essentially grants the Jewish Rabbinical court license to determine the calendar and decide when the various Festivals are to be celebrated; Milah, circumcision, which bonds the Jew with Hashem; and Shabbos, the day of rest, whereby the Jew attests to the Almighty's creation of the world. He is accorded a day during which he reflects on his mission in life and is able to commune with Hashem, unencumbered by mundane restraints. Exactly why these three specific mitzvos were selected by the Greeks is a separate thesis. For our purpose, however, we may take note of the chameish, the first letter of each of these mitzvos - ches - Chodesh; mem - Milah; shin - Shabbos, which collectively spell out chameish, which is the number five. Having discussed earlier the significance of the number five, we now have a further allusion from this parsha to Chanukah.

Yosef said to them on the third day, "Do this and live; I fear G-d." (42:18)

What is the significance of Es haElokim ani yarei, "I fear G-d"? What does this have to do with the fact that it was three days into their "visit"? Simply, Yosef was conveying to them that he had no plans to keep them all in Egypt while their families starved at home. He would detain only one of them as a hostage. He was doing this because he was a G-d-fearing man. Apparently, Yosef felt that by adding his G-d-fearing nature into the equation, it would immediately relax them and counteract the anxieties they must have been harboring concerning their "future."

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, underscores the significance of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, acknowledging that there is a Higher Power, a Supreme Authority, Who determines right and wrong and discharges appropriate punishment when necessary. On the other hand, if one is up against an individual who only pays lip service to G-d, to whom fear of the Almighty is something he declares, but does not mean, who thinks that it is all about "him" and that he has license to do whatever he pleases - he is in serious trouble. The Shivtei Kah were acutely aware of this verity. Thus, when Yosef assured them that he was G-d-fearing, they realized that they were not in danger.

There is a famous insight of the Malbim, which was quoted by Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, in a lecture to a group of Rabbanim in Germany in the early 1930's. Going back to Parashas Vayeira, as Avimelech complains to Avraham Avinu for claiming that Sarah Imeinu was his sister when she was actually his wife, Avraham replied, Rak ein yiraas Elokim ba'makom hazeh, "Only because I said there is no fear of G-d in this place" (Ibid. 20:11). A lack of Heavenly fear was prevalent in Gerar. Thus, Avraham feared for his life. The Malbim underscores the Torah's use of the word rak, "only," as if intimating that, indeed, Gerar was a wonderful place. It had culture, refinement; its people were upstanding, kind and polite. Regardless of the community's exemplary qualities, however, at the end of the day one's life could still be forfeited, if he were to stand in the way of someone's desire. Why? "Only" because Gerar lacks yiraas Elokim, fear of G-d. When mortal, subjective, prejudicial man is the ultimate authority, if laws are man made, then they have little value. Man makes the law; man can alter the law as he sees fit. The only law that will compel society to be disciplined and law abiding is Heavenly Law, the code authored and regulated by Divine Authority.

When Rav Elchanan spoke, it was prior to the malignant change in Germany's government. When the Nazi party came to power, it was all too obvious that Rav Elchanan's message was on the mark. Suddenly, the polite, cultured, refined German became a cruel monster, capable of committing the most heinous atrocities.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, relates a story he heard in the name of Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, which gives practical expression to the above. When Rav Hutner was learning in Slabodka, he remembers that Horav Avraham Elya Kaplan, zl, who later became rector of the Seminar in Berlin, went to Germany. He returned prior to Rosh Hashanah. The Rosh Yeshivah, reverently known as the Alter m'Slabodka, asked Rav Avraham Elya for his impression of the German people. Rav Avraham Elya raved about the German People's kindness, their impeccable manners and refinement of character. He even cited their manner of speech as demonstrating extreme politeness to one another. For instance, if someone asked for directions, the response would not simply be a curt set of directions. Rather, after completing the directions, the man would politely ask, "Nicht wahr? Is this not correct?" This indicated their refinement. By refraining from asserting himself in a definitive manner, he would always conclude the sentence with, "Nicht wahr," thus maintaining the questioner's dignity.

The students who were privy to this exchange between Rav Avraham Elya and the Alter debated if it was appropriate to praise the Germans. It was not as if we derived a way of life from other gentile nations. Why should the Germans be any different? What did they have to offer us that others did not? We do not learn from the gentile world how to live. Baruch Hashem, we have a Torah that guides our lifestyle. One student among them persisted in defending the Germans, maintaining that any people who ended their statements with "Nicht wahr?" indicated a sense of modesty and politeness worthy of emulating.

It took a half a century for the truth to be publicized, for that same student to declare his error publicly. Rav Hutner had just concluded his shiur, lecture, when a Jew walked in and asked, "Do you remember me? I was that student in Slabodka who complimented the German manner of speaking, who was amazed by their gentle manner and refinement of speech." The Rosh Yeshivah said that he did remember the man and stuck out his hand to give him "Shalom aleichem." The Jew reciprocated, but, instead of a hand, there was a hook, where his hand had been amputated. Apparently, he had lost his hand during his internment in the concentration camp.

The man looked at Rav Hutner and said, "When the Nazi cut off my hand, do you know what he said?" He said, "It hurts - Nicht wahr - Is this not correct?" - You were right - I was wrong!"

Rav Elchanan observed; Hashem created man after He had created all of the creatures. Animals, both domesticated and wild, all fowl and beasts - all preceded mankind. Rav Elchanan commented that man is a composite of all of the preceding creations. He has in him the nature of every creature. Thus, at times, he may manifest the qualities of the most docile creation, while, at other times, he acts like a venomous snake or a vicious man-eating lion. What keeps all of these natural inclinations in check? What controls are in place to see to it that the man remains a decent, ethical and virtuous human being? Only one guarantee exists: yiraas Elokim, fear of G-d. With it - one is a mentch. Without it - he is sadly capable of the worst abominations and the most cruel, heinous brutalities against his fellow man.

He took Shimon from them and imprisoned him before their eyes. (42:24)

The Yalkut Shimoni shares an intriguing Midrash with us. Yosef sought to incarcerate his brothers. He sent a message to Pharaoh, "I need seventy of your strongest men to apprehend a group of foreigners." When the soldiers arrived, Yosef told them to take chains and place them on his brothers. Shimon stood in front, while the rest of his brothers stood back at a distance. As they closed in on Shimon, he gave a loud scream, the sound of which shattered the teeth of all seventy men. Observing the debacle, Yosef turned to his son, Menasheh, who was standing by his side, and said, "You, take the chains and place it on his (Shimon's) neck." Menasheh approached Shimon, subdued him, and placed the chains on his neck, effectively taking him prisoner. Shimon declared, "This blow is from my father's house," indicating that only someone connected to the family of the Patriarch had the ability to overpower him.

An incredible story, but is its focus to teach us that only someone from Yaakov Avinu's home had the physical strength to subdue Shimon? Is this a lesson concerning who was stronger - Shimon or Menasheh? The Pardes Yosef offers an all-too-realistic homiletic rendering of this Midrash. Klal Yisrael is compared to a sheep among seventy wolves, an analogy that has, over time, proven itself true. We are not winning the popularity contest in the world. No one is for the Jewish People. We are tolerated, accepted by some, envied by others, but there is no one out there that is really on our side. No nation in the world, other than one engaged in pursuing its own self-interest, has our back. We have only Hashem upon Whom to rely, and we can live with it, because that is how the Almighty wants it. The less we have to do with them, the stronger is our spiritual health.

From a practical perspective, all seventy soldiers/nations of the world want to put the chains on Shimon/us. Shimon, however, is not interested in being subdued by them, so he screams out in prayer, as we do to the Almighty, entreating Him for help. The hands of Eisav are rendered powerless, when the kol, voice, is the kol Yaakov, the voice of Yaakov, in prayer, since prayer is what we do best, because it

is our function and vocation. Eisav cannot subdue a Klal Yisrael that is committed to Hashem. His power is only when we remain spiritually docile, assimilated, and far-removed from the "Yaakov" we are supposed to represent.

We can deal with the external enemy; it is the internal antagonist whom we have little success in overpowering. When some Yisrael emerge from within our own ranks, then our lot is very bitter. Shimon realized that he could best the Egyptian soldiers with one scream, but when he saw a member of his own family strike him, it had a sobering effect on him. This "one" would be different. This one will not go away so fast. Such an adversary requires a much different game plan for success. When the enemies are from within - be they secularists with their cowardly liberal agenda; a member of our own camp who seeks to make a statement and garner personal recognition; or even a member of our own community, our own shul, whose insecure and low self-esteem provoke him to pour out virulent diatribe against anybody he can, for this is the only way he can promote himself and his agenda - such a disputant is a most difficult opponent.

Horav Reuven Abitbul, Shlita, quotes a sobering Midrash that is worth publicizing. When Hashem created steel, the trees began to shake with anxiety. After all, an ax/saw blade has the power to take down the strongest/tallest tree. So the (creation of) steel asked the trees, "Why are you afraid? As long as you do not put any wood into the eye of the axe-handle, the blade cannot function." In other words, the trees are in danger from the steel only if their own wood participates in their destruction. Am Yisrael, our nation, can stand up and survive the onslaught of the nations of the world. We will triumph over them. It is when our own people are bent on destroying us that we come up against a most difficult adversary. In such a war - nobody wins.

He searched; he began with the eldest and finished with the youngest. And the goblet was found in Binyamin's pack. (44:12)

In the Talmud Pesachim 7b, Chazal state that Bedikas Chametz, searching for chametz, should be performed by the light of a candle. This is supported by the process of derivation whereby the metziah, finding of chametz, is derived from another instance of metziah, which is connected to the word chipush, searching, which is derived from another instance of chipush, which is - in turn - connected to neiros, candles. Thus, finding is achieved via searching, and searching is executed through the medium of candles. The pasuk used to derive metziah, finding, from chipush, searching, is the above pasuk that describes the search for - culminating in the finding of-- the silver goblet in Binyamin's bag. There is also an earlier pasuk in Parashas Vayeitzei (31:35), when Lavan searched for his terafim, Va'yechapeish v'lo matza es ha'terafim, "And he searched, but did not find the terafim." Why do Chazal not use this pasuk to prove that chipush and metziah are connected?

Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, quotes the Tchebener Rav, zl, who cites the custom of placing ten crumbs of bread throughout the house prior to the bedikah. Many have questioned this custom, since the obligation is to "search" - not necessarily to "find." Thus, let the person search; if he discovers chametz in his house - fine; if he does not - also fine. The Rav cites the above statement of Chazal which supports the notion that the word chipush, search, applies even under such circumstances that the person is aware, not only that he will find, but also, where it is located. On the other hand, concerning Lavan, he had no clue if he would find the terafim or where. Since we derive from Yosef's search that bedikah/chipush/metziah apply even under such conditions in which the objective of the search is to go through the motions, since Yosef knew where the goblet was to be found, we may place the crumbs of bread, even though we know that we are not searching in the dark - we will locate the crumbs.

Rav Weinberger suggests a profound meaning to this Torah thought. Although we know we will find, and probably where - we search nonetheless. That is the Jewish way of life. We have a deep faith in Hashem's protection. Netzach Yisrael lo yeshaker, "The eternity of Yisrael will not lie." Yet, we pray for salvation. Mordechai knew that Hashem would not destroy the Jewish People in Shushan. Yet, he cried out bitterly and prayed with incredible fervor. As a result of his prayers, the Purim Festival is a reality. He catalyzed a transformation from fasting and mourning into joy and festivities. Why? Because he prayed. He did not sit back waiting for the fulfillment of Netzach Yisrael lo yeshaker. A similar response occurred with regard to the neis, miracle, of Chanukah. The Chashmonaim "found" a small flask of oil that still had the seal of the Kohen Gadol affixed to it. They could have easily kindled impure oil, since the entire congregation was involved, allowing for such a dispensation. Yet, they adamantly refused. They wanted to expunge the spiritual contamination brought about by the Greeks. Their unstinting, uncompromising devotion and commitment to taharas ha'kodesh, pure holiness, is a tribute to them and a mandate for us.

Va'ani Tefillah

V'haer eineinu b'Sorasecha. Enlighten our eyes through Your Torah.

There is a mistaken notion that success in Torah scholarship is reserved for only the most brilliant minds. It could not be further from the truth. As Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, observes, every Jewish soul has his personal portion in the Torah. Only

he can discover it, and no one can take it from him. Torah is not a mundane discipline. It is not a secular scholastic treatise which is mastered only by the most astute mind. Torah is Divinely authored and Divinely transmitted. Hashem gives His Torah to the serious student who is seeking enlightenment and is willing to expend diligent effort in pursuit of his goals.

Thus, we ask Hashem to grant us the ability to discover the hidden treasures of His Torah, to locate our personal share in His Torah. As Rav Schwab notes, despite the multitude of commentaries on the Torah, individuals - such as the late Acharonim and others until this very day - are revealing new insights into Torah and Talmud interpretation. The Torah is a sealed book which is opened by its Author to those who are sincere, committed to glorifying His work and those who seek deeper and greater clarity and meaning. The falsifiers, who misinterpret the Torah to suit their self-serving needs, are only doing themselves and their followers a gross disservice. In honor of the milestone birthday of Dr. Stanley Brody; May he enjoy many more years of health and happiness together with his dear wife, Libby.

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**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Miketz
Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h**

"Sparks in all Directions"

My many years of teaching experience have taught me many lessons. One is that when students are encouraged to express their own ideas, they inevitably do so. Moreover, they do so with great creativity and originality. The class that I had been leading on the subject of leadership, drawing upon the text of the book of Genesis, was no different.

I have also learned that a point occurs where the teacher can simply no longer control the conversation. Each student has something to say, often from very different perspectives, and there is no repressing the energy in the classroom. The teacher has to simply let it happen.

The evening that we focused on this week's Torah portion, Miketz (Genesis 41:1-44:17), was the evening at which this class reached that point. I entered the room two or three minutes late, and the buzz of conversation was already building.

Alex, whose comments were usually words of criticism of another's contributions, was initiating the discussion this time. "This parsha is loaded with implications for our topic," he began. "Everything we read about Joseph is related to the subject of leadership. I don't always agree with his style, but there can be no doubt that he was destined for leadership, chosen for leadership, and a very effective and practical leader."

Almost all of the rest of the class immediately responded, so that it was impossible for me to control the dialogue.

Zalman's voice prevailed: "There is a two-word phrase, early on in the parsha, which appears twice, and which for me is the essence, the nucleus, of what leadership is all about."

Alex responded, challenging Zalman: "if there's one thing we have learned so far, it is that leadership is a very complex matter. I can't imagine that it can be boiled down to a two-word phrase."

Zalman smiled triumphantly, relishing the challenge. "It is Joseph himself," he asserted, "who first uses the phrase. In advising Pharaoh as to what he can do about his disturbing dreams, Joseph says that Pharaoh should select a person who is navon v'chacham, understanding and wise, and appoint him over the land of Egypt. Pharaoh accepts Joseph's advice, and says, 'There's no one as understanding and wise as you.'"

"Now, what is the exact meaning of those two words, 'understanding' versus 'wisdom'? How are they different from each other? And why do Joseph and Pharaoh agree that those are the two qualities which will make a person fit to guide Egypt through the approaching years of famine?"

"I really don't know," admitted Alex. "But one of the techniques that this class has already taught me is to pay careful attention to the Hebrew original text. Perhaps the answer lies in the contrast between the Hebrew words for 'understanding' and 'wisdom.'"

"Precisely," Zalman responded gleefully, "precisely. In biblical Hebrew, 'wisdom' is chochma, and 'understanding' is binah. And there is a great difference between the two. As I understand it, chochma is the flash of insight, the creative concept. Having chochma is a great gift in itself, but it is insufficient. Good ideas often go nowhere unless there is an ability to apply them in real life situations. That ability is called binah."

Sam, as usual, summarized: "I see what you're saying, Zalman. Joseph was suggesting that the leader suited to Pharaoh's needs must have inspired ideas but, more importantly, must be able to translate those ideas into plans of action. The

leader must have intellectual skills, but he must also have what we today call executive skills."

Othniel spoke up first, taking the conversation in an entirely different direction. "I think it is a mistake to think of leadership as being a set of skills with which a person is endowed. I think that leadership emerges from the interaction between one person and another. Joseph alone could interpret dreams. But he can only do so because Pharaoh had those dreams and presented them to him, and because Pharaoh responded enthusiastically to Joseph's interpretations.

"I can't compete with Zalman in quoting Jewish sages. As you know, I was not brought up as a Jew and have had a very limited Jewish education. But in the Christian seminary that I attended back in Poland, we were required to read the works of Albert Schweitzer. Here is something that he said:

"In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit."

"Joseph's fire was surely dimmed by his experience in the dungeon. It was his encounter with another human being, in this case Pharaoh, that allowed his fire to burst into flame. Joseph's leadership emerged out of that encounter, and so too do the qualities of every leader. Leadership is a response to another human being."

Priscilla, ever practical, took the floor: "There is something that we are missing in our discussion of this week's Torah portion. It is Hanukkah tonight, and I am told that the parsha of Miketz is invariably read on the Shabbat of Hanukkah. I was pondering the leadership lessons that could be learned from the Hanukkah story and then you, Othniel, introduced the imagery of fire and flame, the symbols of this holiday.

"Let me share with you a beautiful insight which I heard in the name of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He points out the stark contrast between the Menorah that was lit daily for centuries in the Holy Temple, and the menorah that we light in our homes on Hanukkah.

"In the Temple, the number of lights in the menorah remained constant, in contrast to Hanukkah, when a new light is added each evening. In the Temple, the candles were lit during the day, and they were kindled inside the Temple's inner chamber, whereas the lights of Hanukkah are lit when darkness falls, and they are placed facing the outdoors.

"The Menorah in the Temple represents the response to times of peace and plenty, when we can be constant in our behavior and need not strive for change and growth. At such times, there is no threatening darkness which needs to be illuminated, and we can remain comfortable, even complacent, in our own homes.

"On the other hand, the story of Hanukkah takes place at a time of great challenge, physical and spiritual. Accordingly, we cannot be satisfied with a status quo, but we must grow and increase our efforts beyond what we are already doing. Hence, we light additional candles each and every night.

"To carry the metaphor even further, during the story of Hanukkah, the Jewish people faced the challenge of darkness, and it is after darkness falls that we light candles tonight. Finally, we can be content to remain private citizens only when times are tranquil. When times are stormy, and I would add that they are stormy today, we are required to reach beyond ourselves and assert our beliefs to the rest of the world. We light the Hanukkah candles for all to see."

Once again, Sam summarized: "I see what you are saying, Priscilla, and I see the implications of the idea you shared with us for leadership. There are times when dynamic and assertive leadership is not necessary, when we can be satisfied to each 'sit under our own fig tree and olive tree.' But such were not the times of Hanukkah, nor are they our times. Then and now, bayamim hahem bazman hazeh, we must all don the mantle of leadership. And leadership calls for the mustering of new additional inner resources for dispelling darkness, and for warm and glowing outreach."

Simultaneously, Alex, Zalman and Othniel had the last word, in unison and as a chorus, and exclaimed: "That's exactly what we said, but in different words."

What came to my mind was the classical Talmudic image that uses the metaphor of the hammer striking the anvil and sending sparks flying in all directions. Indeed, that evening, when our class coincided with the Festival of Lights, sparks were flying. They were sparks of Torah, of wisdom and understanding, and of genuinely heeding the words and thought

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
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Disguise

Joseph is now the ruler of Egypt. The famine he predicted has come to pass. It extends beyond Egypt to the land of Canaan. Seeking to buy food,

Joseph's brothers make the journey to Egypt. They arrive at the palace of the man in charge of grain distribution:

Now Joseph was governor of all Egypt, and it was he who sold the corn to all the people of the land. Joseph's brothers came and bowed to the ground before him. Joseph recognized his brothers as soon as he saw them, but he behaved like a stranger and spoke harshly to them... Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. (42: 6-8)

We owe to Robert Alter the idea of a type-scene, a drama enacted several times with variations; and these are particularly in evidence in the book of Bereishit. There is no universal rule as to how to decode the significance of a type-scene. One example is boy-meets-girl-at-well, an encounter that takes places three times, between Abraham's servant and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, and Moses and the daughters of Jethro. Here, the setting is probably not significant (wells are where strangers met in those days, like the water-dispenser in an office). What we must attend to in these three episodes is their variations: Rebekah's activism, Jacob's show of strength, Moses' passion for justice. How people act toward strangers at a well is, in other words, a test of their character. In some cases, however, a type-scene seems to indicate a recurring theme. That is the case here. If we are to understand what is at stake in the meeting between Joseph and his brothers, we have to set it aside three other episodes, all of which occur in Bereishit.

The first takes place in Isaac's tent. The patriarch is old and blind. He tells his elder son to go out into the field, trap an animal and prepare a meal so that he can bless him. Surprisingly soon, Isaac hears someone enter. "Who are you?" he asks. "I am Esau, your elder son," the voice replies. Isaac is not convinced. "Come close and let me feel you, my son. Are you really Esau or not?" He reaches out and feels the rough texture of the skins covering his arms. Still unsure, he asks again, "But are you really my son Esau?" The other replies, "I am." So Isaac blesses him: "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field blessed by G-d." But it is not Esau. It is Jacob in disguise.

Scene two: Jacob has fled to his uncle Laban's house. Arriving, he meets and falls in love with Rachel, and offers to work for her father for seven years in order to marry her. The time passes quickly: the years "seemed like a few days because he loved her." The wedding day approaches. Laban makes a feast. The bride enters her tent. Late at night, Jacob follows her. Now at last he has married his beloved Rachel. When morning comes, he discovers that he has been the victim of a deception. It is not Rachel. It is Leah in disguise.

Scene three: Judah has married a Canaanite girl and is now the father of three sons. The first marries a local girl, Tamar, but dies mysteriously young, leaving his wife a childless widow. Following a pre-Mosaic version of the law of levirate marriage, Judah marries his second son to Tamar so that she can have a child "to keep his brother's name alive." He is loathe to have a son that will, in effect, belong to his late brother so he "spilled his seed," and for this he too died young. Judah is reluctant to give Tamar his third son, so she is left an agunah, "chained," bound to someone she is prevented from marrying, and unable to marry anyone else.

The years pass. Judah's own wife dies. Returning home from sheep-shearing, he sees a veiled prostitute by the side of the road. He asks her to sleep with him, promising, by way of payment, a kid from the flock. She asks him for his "seal and its cord and his staff" as security. The next day he sends a friend to deliver the kid, but the woman has disappeared. The locals deny all knowledge of her. Three months later, Judah hears that his daughter-in-law Tamar has become pregnant. He is incensed. Bound to his youngest son, she was not allowed to have a relationship with anyone else. She must have been guilty of adultery. "Bring her out so that she may be burnt," he says. She is brought to be killed, but she asks one favour. She tells one of the people to take to Judah the seal and cord and staff. "The father of my child," she says, "is the man to whom these things belong." Immediately, Judah understands. Tamar, unable to marry yet honour-bound to have a child to perpetuate the memory of her first husband, has tricked her father-in-law into performing the duty he should have allowed

his youngest son to do. "She is more righteous than I," Judah admits. He thought he had slept with a prostitute. But it was Tamar in disguise.

That is the context against which the meeting between Joseph and his brothers must be understood. The man the brothers bow down to bears no resemblance to a Hebrew shepherd. He speaks Egyptian. He is dressed in an Egyptian ruler's robes. He wears Pharaoh's signet ring and the gold chain of authority. They think they are in the presence of an Egyptian prince, but it is Joseph – their brother – in disguise.

Four scenes, four disguises, four failures to see behind the mask. What do they have in common? Something very striking indeed. It is only by not being recognized that Jacob, Leah, Tamar and Joseph can be recognized, in the sense of attended, taken seriously, heeded. Isaac loves Esau, not Jacob. He loves Rachel, not Leah. Judah thinks of his youngest son, not the plight of Tamar. Joseph is hated by his brothers. Only when they appear as something or someone other than they are can they achieve what they seek – for Jacob, his father's blessing; for Leah, a husband; for Tamar, a son; for Joseph, the non-hostile attention of his brothers. The plight of these four individuals is summed up in a single poignant phrase: "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him."

Do the disguises work? In the short term, yes; but in the long term, not necessarily. Jacob suffers greatly for having taken Esau's blessing. Leah, though she marries Jacob, never wins his love. Tamar had a child (in fact, twins) but Judah "was not intimate with her anymore." Joseph – well, his brothers no longer hated him but they feared him. Even after his assurances that he bore them no grudge, they still thought he would take revenge on them after their father died. What we achieve in disguise is never the love we sought.

But something else happens. Jacob, Leah, Tamar and Joseph discover that, though they may never win the affection of those from whom they seek it, G-d is with them; and that, ultimately, is enough. A disguise is an act of hiding – from others, and perhaps from oneself. From G-d, however, we cannot, nor do we need to, hide. He hears our cry. He answers our unspoken prayer. He heeds the unheeded and brings them comfort. In the aftermath of the four episodes, there is no healing of relationship but there is a mending of identity. That is what makes them, not secular narratives but deeply religious chronicles of psychological growth and maturation. What they tell us is simple and profound: those who stand before G-d need no disguises to achieve self-worth when standing before mankind.

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Rabbi Yisrocher Frand - Parshas Miketz & Chanukah

Straightening Out The Cause And The Effect

At the beginning of the parsha, the pasuk says, "Miketz shnatayim yamim..." (At the end of two years) [Bereshis 31:1]. The Medrash Rabbah relates these words to a pasuk in Iyov "Ketz sam l'choshech..." (He put an end to the darkness) [Iyov 28:3]. The Almighty determined that after the two year period in which Yosef was destined to sit in prison, the time had come for his release. Since the time for Yosef's release had now arrived, Pharaoh had his dream.

The Beis HaLevi makes a very important point. We often get confused between cause and effect. A simple reading of the narrative at the beginning of Parshas Miketz gives us the impression that the "cause" was Pharaoh's dreams and the fact that his advisors could not interpret them to his satisfaction. The effect was that Yosef was brought out of jail to interpret the dreams and thereby rose to a position of authority in Egypt. The Beis HaLevi points out that the Medrash is teaching us that just the reverse is true. The CAUSE was that it was time for Yosef to be released from prison and take up a leadership position in Egypt. The EFFECT was that G-d made Pharaoh dream troubling dreams, which his advisors could not interpret.

The world has a Grand Plan. G-d makes things happen in the world so that the plan will be carried out. The Almighty calls the shots, not man.

A second Medrash also makes a very interesting comment. The Medrash contrasts the pasuk "And Pharaoh dreamt and behold he stood upon the Nile" [Bereshis 41:1] with the pasuk "And behold Hashem stood over him" [Bereshis 28:13] (written by the dream of Yaakov Avinu). The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River. And yet Pharaoh stood above the river (his god). By Yaakov, his G-d stood over him. Despite the fact that Pharaoh deified the Nile, he still believed that he was in charge and stood upon the river. It is a man-centered world. "I call the shots." Yaakov knew that Hashem stands over him. He knew that man does not call the shots. It is a G-d centered world. He manipulates the world to match His Grand Plan.

Several years ago, we commented that this is also hinted at by the grammar of our pasuk. "V'hinei Pharaoh cholem" (behold Pharaoh is dreaming) is stated in the present tense. It should really have said "After 2 years Pharaoh had a dream". But in light of what we just mentioned, it makes more sense to use the present tense: Because the two years were up and it was time for Yosef's release from prison, Pharaoh had to start dreaming.

A Connection Between Parshas Miketz and Chanukah

The Shiltei Gibborim on the Mordechai in Tractate Shabbos writes that in most years, Parshas Miketz falls out to be Shabbos Chanukah. He notes that there is a symbolism from the expression in the Parsha "u'tevoach tevaCH V'HACHEN" (and to have meat slaughtered and to prepare) [Bereshis 43:16]: The Shiltei Gibborim notes that taking the last letter (ches) of the word "tevaCH" and putting it together with the rearranged letters of the following word "V'HACHEN" produces the letters of the word CHANUKAH.

What on earth is this supposed to mean? What does the fact that Yosef tells his servants to prepare a meal for his brothers have to do with Chanukah?

It could be that the relationship is based on what we learn in the Medrash Rabbah in Sefer Bamidbar, which says that the pasuk "The one who preceded me, I will pay him back" (Mi heekdeemani v'ashalem) [Iyov 41:3] refers to Yosef. Yosef observed the Sabbath before it was given. The Medrash cites as the source for this fact the very pasuk of "u'tevoach tevaCH v'hachen".

Rabbi Yochanan states that it was Friday afternoon and Yosef told them to prepare a Shabbos meal. The word "hachen" [prepare] refers to a Shabbos meal, as it is written "And it will be on the seventh day, they should prepare [v'heichinu] (ahead of time) that which they will bring" [Shmos 16:5]. Yosef is the first person who prepared a Shabbos meal ahead of time. G-d rewarded him by saying "Yosef, you kept Shabbos even before it was given, I will pay you back such that your descendant will offer his sacrifice on Shabbos, which is not the case of ordinary individuals who cannot offer private sacrifices on Shabbos."

The Torah readings on Chanukah are the readings of the offerings of the various Princes at the time of the dedication of the Mizbayach [Parshas Nasso]. Each of these offerings had the status of a Korban Yachid – an individual's private offering. The inviolate rule is that a private offering never overrides the Shabbos. And yet, says the Medrash, the Prince whose turn it was to offer his Dedication Offering on the seventh day of the inauguration ceremony – his sacrifice did override Shabbos. Who was that? It was the Prince from the Tribe of Ephraim.

The Satmar Rebbe asks on this Medrash: What is the logic behind saying that since Yosef kept Shabbos, his grandson would bring a sacrifice that pushes away the sanctity of Shabbos? It seems counter intuitive. The Satmar Rebbe answers that since the private offering was in preparation for the Mizbayach that eventually would host the public offerings, this very act of preparation (even though it was a private offering now) for later public offerings was already considered like a public offering. It was already imbued with the importance of a Korban Tzibur. This is based on the principle that "hazmanah milsa hi" – preparation counts and has importance in and of itself.

This is the "measure for measure" reward that Yosef was granted. You, Yosef, prepared for Shabbos. You instituted the concept that preparation has importance. Therefore, I will accept your grandson's offering – even

though it is private – on Shabbos. It too is preparation – preparation for a Public Offering.

What do we prepare for? We prepare for things that are important. If one has a big case or a big customer coming or is expecting an important guest – one prepares ahead of time. No lawyer worth his salt falls out of bed on the morning of a big court case and goes into court and wings it. If a person has a meeting with the IRS auditing his tax returns for the last 3 years, he does not just get his checks together on the morning of the audit and march into the IRS office hope for the best. He prepares! We prepare for things that are important. The reason we spend the better part of Friday and sometime the better part of Thursday preparing for Shabbos is because Shabbos is important. That is why the Talmud teaches that the Amoraim themselves made preparations for Shabbos. Rava personally salted the fish. Rav Safra would personally singe the head of a cow [Shabbos 119a]. They had servants who could have done those things, but they wanted to personally honor the Shabbos. That which is important deserves preparation.

This concept was introduced by the righteous Yosef, who the Medrash credits with being the first person to ever prepare for Shabbos.

The Bach writes in the beginning of the laws of Chanukah that the reason the Jewish people suffered the terrible fate of the Greeks taking over and defiling the Bais Hamikdash and stopping the Bais Hamikdash Avodah [Service] for years was that the people became negligent in carrying out the Bais Hamikdash Avodah. It was not so important in their eyes. It became "old hat", just another thing to do. Therefore, G-d took it away from them.

When the Chashmoneans refused to accept this anymore and came to fight the Greeks, there was rejuvenation in the performance of mitzvos. This is why they made such a big deal about getting the pure oil. Halachically speaking, they could have used defiled oil (based on the principle that the laws of impurity are set aside when the majority of the congregation is impure – Tumah dechuyah b'Tzibbur). However, since the whole Greek persecution came about because the Bais Hamikdash Avodah was not important in their eyes, the corrective action required elevating the Bais Hamikdash Avodah to such an important status that great effort would be exerted to see that it was fulfilled in the most optimum way possible.

The lesson of Chanukah in ten words or less is that "good enough, is not good enough." This is virtually the only mitzvah that everyone fulfills in the mode of "mehadrin min hamehadrin" (the most perfect way possible). Why? It is because the point of Chanukah is that the Bais Hamikdash Avodah is important and we had not considered it to be important enough. This concept of treating mitzvos with the appropriate level of importance is identical to the concept of preparing oneself ahead of time for the performance of a mitzvah. One cannot just fall into a mitzvah. One needs to prepare for it. This is the connection between Yosef and Chanukah and this is the connection between Tevoach TevaCH V'HACHEN. Yosef taught us the lesson that if something is important, one treats it so. In essence, this is what Chanukah is about. It was taken away from us because we did not treat it properly. It was given back to us when Jews once again showed that the Divine Service is indeed important to them.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
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Chanukah: Conflict of Cultures Then and Now

I
The ancient Greeks loved wisdom and philosophy (lit. love of wisdom). Therefore, explains the Maharal (Ner Mitzva, Machon Yerushalayim edition, p.29), they opposed the Torah and tried to stop Am Yisrael from learning and practicing it (Al HaNissim). Non-Jews can achieve great wisdom, as the Rambam writes of Aristotle (Guide 2:22, cited in footnote 173 in Ner Mitzva). However, Torah is beyond them (Eichah Rabba 2:9).

Nonetheless, they had the Torah translated into Greek, the most beautiful of all languages (Rashi, Megilla 8b), to show that they were the wisest of all nations. Their affinity for wisdom caused them to be jealous of the Torah and to try to destroy it (p. 33, see footnote 191 citing Avodah Zara 55a).

The Maharal (p. 83) notes that the Greeks defiled all the oil in the heichal, the portion of the Beis Hamikdash which contained the mizbeach and the menorah (Shabbos 21b). The numerical value of Yavan (66) is greater than that of heichal (65). Presumably, the unique intellectual and cultural standing of Greece gave them power and desire; power to overcome the purity of the heichal and the desire to cause Yisrael to forget the Torah and violate the mitzvos. Defiling all the oil used to sanctify the Kohanim and the holy vessels (Shemos 30: 24-33) represented this sinister plot.

One flask avoided the notice of the Greeks with the seal of the Kohen Gadol intact. This represents the highest level of sanctity of the Kodesh Kodashim, where only the Kohen Gadol could enter. This inner and hidden level, indicated by the silent yud in heichal, was beyond the reach of the Greeks (p. 85). Perhaps the remaining letters of the word heichal, which spell ha'kol, everything, refer to all that is physical. The Greeks denied the spiritual which they could not grasp (Ramban, Vayikra 16:8 cited in footnote 74).

The Maharal (p. 87-90) adds that the Kodesh Kodashim represents the supernatural. The number seven represents nature, as the world was created in seven days. The number eight represents the supernatural, as was the oil, which burned for eight days. The Kohen Gadol, who wore eight garments, entered the Kodesh Kodashim, which housed the Aron and the Torah, which are above nature. The word "Aron" relates to or, light, which is the Torah (Shir HaShirim Rabba 4:4), which was given after seven weeks.

Bris mila, performed on the eighth day, represents the supernatural, and enables man to rise above his natural instincts (see Defying Nature). Aharon entered the supernatural Kodesh Kodashim in the merit of Bris Mila (Vayikra Raba 21:5).

II

The Greeks, who are called darkness, (Breishis Raba 2:4), the opposite of light, forbade bris mila (Megilas Antiochus). They sought physical pleasures without restraint or shame. Historians have documented the existence of state sponsored brothels in ancient Greece. While individual immorality is reprehensible, institutional sin is much worse. The Akeidas Yitzchak (p. Vayeira) decries this phenomenon in medieval times, and traces its origins to S'dom. Similarly, the Greek intellectual and cultural elite instituted a mentoring program which had a homosexual component. This is reminiscent of the recognition of same sex marriage which led to the destruction of the generation of the flood (Breishis Rabba 26:4).

An additional reason for their destruction (ibid., see Rashi 6:2), the violation of brides by powerful lords, was part of the Greeks' persecution of the Jews (Rashi Shabbos 23a, see Kesubos 3b and Rambam Chanuka 1:1). Women are obligated to light Chanuka candles because they were spared from this cruel decree by a woman (Rashi). This refers to the daughter of the Kohen Gadol who fed cheese to the enemy general. When he fell asleep she decapitated him and the enemies fled. Therefore, we eat cheese on Chanuka (Ran, Orach Chaim 670:2, Mishnah Berurah 10).

Modern society has returned to some of these practices. For example, a homosexual relationship was never considered a marriage in Talmudic times (Chulin 92b). Nowadays, it is. Non-marital and even extra-marital relationships, criminalized or at least criticized until recently, are now practiced openly.

In ancient Greece, many Jews became Hellenized and viciously opposed Torah and mitzvos. Unfortunately, in today's post-modern non-judgmental world, many liberal Jews are at the forefront of the recent changes in American society and sensibility.

These changes are reflected in today's media and culture. Movies and television are dramatically more decadent now than in previous generations, and must be regarded as spiritually dangerous. The dangers of

the internet are even more insidious and ubiquitous. Appropriate safeguards are absolutely critical.

Torah values are under constant attack, here and in Israel. The celebration of Chanukah by Jews who identify with Hellenist ideology and oppose the fundamentalism of the Chashmonaim is an irony (Ma'ariv, Chanuka 5726, translated in The Jewish Observer, Feb., 1966).

Orthodox Jews are not immune to the negative influence of modern American culture. "Orthodox Assimilation on College Campuses", a pamphlet authored by two alumni of prestigious universities, describes an ongoing crisis. Again, these campuses are dramatically more decadent than in previous generations. Too many Orthodox youngsters are being defiled by neo-Grecian philosophy and hedonism. Parents must recognize their responsibility for their children's spiritual welfare (See Berachos 32a).

Chanuka teaches that Am Yisrael must rise above the Greeks and nature, and pursue a life of sanctity and modesty. The temptations of modern society and culture, heirs to Greek mores and ideals, are powerful and pervasive. Only by dedication to the supernatural concepts of Torah, represented by the Kohen Gadol, the Kodosh Kodashim and Bris Mila, can we remain loyal to the sanctity and modesty that the Greeks attempted to destroy.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Chanukah: Richness of Spirit

The holiday of Chanukah raises a number of questions:

Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? After all, there was enough oil to burn for one day, so the miracle was really only for seven days. Since the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, we should celebrate for only seven days.

The minimum requirement is for each family to light one candle each night. It is customary, however, is to light with two hiddurim (embellishments): every member of the family lights, and the number of candles corresponds to the day of Chanukah. Why do we perform these two hiddurim?

The Talmud in Menachot 28b relates that the Maccabees were unable to obtain a solid gold Menorah for the Temple as the Torah specifies. Lacking the means for such an expensive Menorah, they constructed a simple one out of iron rods plated with tin. Why was there a miracle for the oil but none for the Menorah itself?

Two Hiddurim

The truth is, had the Maccabees not found the small cruse of pure olive oil, they could have used any oil. While it is best to use olive oil, any oil that burns well may be used in the Temple Menorah.

The miracle of Chanukah could have been the Menorah burning all eight days with 'miracle oil.' But while 'miracle oil' is as good as any other oil, it is not olive oil. Thus the miracle of the first day of Chanukah was not the burning of 'miracle oil,' but that the Maccabees found ritually pure olive oil. This discovery was quite unexpected, and it enabled them to light with the optimal type of oil.

In addition, since the majority of the nation at the time was ritually impure, the Maccabees could even have used impure oil. The miracle of finding the cruse of olive oil thus allowed them to fulfill two hiddurim: lighting on the first day with olive oil, and lighting with ritually pure oil. We commemorate this miracle by similarly performing two hiddurim, with every family member lighting, and lighting multiple candles.

Guarding the Inner Spirit

But why was there no comparable miracle with the Menorah itself? Why didn't the Maccabees also find a gold Menorah in the desecrated Temple?

The Menorah corresponds to the material state of the Jewish people. It is a vessel for holding the oil. The olive oil, on the other hand, is a metaphor for the nation's inner spirit.

While it is fitting that the external vessel should be aesthetically pleasing, there are times when the physical reality is harsh and discouraging. During such times, we make do with what we have, even if it means lighting with a Menorah improvised out of iron rods.

However, the spirit - the oil that nourishes the inner flame - must always remain spiritually rich, with all of the hiddurim of purity and holiness. This is an important part of the message of Chanukah: the miracle occurred, not with the Menorah, but with the oil. We may suffer physical hardships and deprivation, but our inner spiritual life should always shine with a clear and pure light.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 116-117. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, p. 797)

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Snakes and Scorpions

Rabbi Dov Lior (Written by the rabbi)

Dedicated to the memory of Yossef ben Simcha

yeshiva.org.il / Bet Midrash - Friday, 1 Tevet 5773

Joseph the righteous has for generations served as a symbol and model for the survival of the Jewish people in foreign lands. Just as Joseph retained his purity and moral distinction despite being cut off from his home, so have Jacob's children and their progeny survived and remained loyal to their Jewishness despite their lengthy sojourn among hostile nations.

If we look closely at the story of Joseph we will discover that the Torah develops this idea. And it is no coincidence that this portion is read at Chanukah time; this proximity contains an important lesson.

When the Torah describes the pit into which Joseph was thrown, it says "The well was empty; there was no water in it" (Genesis 37:23). The sages explain, "There was no water in it – but it did contain snakes and scorpions." Outwardly this verse presents a description of reality, but it also contains a great and lofty idea.

"Water," in prophetic literature, is an allusion to the essence of Jewish life – the Torah. And if somebody thinks that it is possible to detach oneself from the Torah and to replace it with some other culture, he is mistaken: If there is no water, there will be snakes and scorpions. If the Jewish people do not fill their hearts with divine content – the only content that provides us with a truly good and happy life – in its place will come "snakes and scorpions," i.e., moral bankruptcy and corruption, all sorts of infirmities, and a loss of the true Israeli nature.

This is what happened in the days of Chanukah. The Hellenists believed that they could exchange the faith of Israel with Greek philosophy; but this, in fact, only led to "snakes and scorpions." Today, too, to our great chagrin, some people would like to blur the identity of our nation so that it resemble other nations. This is a terrible mistake, and we can see the results for ourselves – the rise in violence among teenagers and the collapse of numerous behavioral norms.

This Chanukah, may God help us draw strength and spiritual fortitude from the spirit of the Maccabees who stood up to the Greeks and the Hellenists. May we be strengthened through the Torah, and may we come to realize that only in this manner will we succeed in strengthening the spiritual state of our youth. Let us strive to give a Jewish character to our state and let us elevate the national spirit and fill it with the strength needed to face of all those who rise up against us.

Shiur Delivered on Kislev 5769

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Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Lighting the Menorah: Halachah and Custom

The method of performing the mitzvah chavivah ("precious mitzvah") of kindling the Chanukah lights has generated countless halachic debates over the years. For many questions regarding the particulars of fulfilling this mitzvah there is no clear consensus and the practical halachah will depend on the traditions and customs of each family. The following Discussion highlights some of the unresolved disputes concerning the lighting of the menorah and makes recommendations for those who do not have a clear-cut family custom:

Issue: The proper time to light Chanukah candles l'chatchillah is a subject of much halachic debate. Some are careful to light Chanukah lights right at sunset, others a little bit later, while others wait for nightfall. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, the preferred time to light is 20-25 minutes after sunset.1

Issue: Where to place the first light on the menorah—at the extreme right or the extreme left. In addition, there are various customs as to which direction the lighting takes on subsequent nights—from right to left or from left to right. One who does not have a specific family custom should place the first light at the extreme right side of the menorah (facing the person who is lighting). On subsequent nights, each additional light is placed to the left of the first one, and the lighting begins from the newest light, going from left to right.2

Issue: Whether or not married women should light a menorah in their home. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, married women should not light,³ and if they do, they should do so before their husband lights.⁴

Issue: Whether or not single girls living in their parents' home light Chanukah lights themselves. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise, it is better that they not light.⁵ All agree that a single woman or girl living alone is obligated to light Chanukah lights.

Issue: There is a three-way dispute as to the correct text for the conclusion of the first blessing over the lights. It is either lehadlik ner Chanukah,⁶ lehadlik ner shel Chanukah,⁷ or lehadlik ner shelachanukah (one word, patach underneath the lamed).⁸ If you have a family custom, follow it. If not, follow the third option.⁹

Issue: At the conclusion of the second blessing, some say bazman hazeh while others say bizman hazeh. Follow your family custom. If you don't have one, either text may be used.¹⁰

Issue: At the conclusion of the blessing of shehechyanu, some say lazman hazeh while others say lizman hazeh.¹¹ Follow your family custom. If you don't have one, say lazman hazeh.¹²

Issue: Some complete the recitation of all of the blessings and then begin to kindle the lights. Others begin to light after reciting the first blessing of lehadlik.¹³ Unless that is your family custom, recite all of the blessings and then begin the lighting.¹⁴

Issue: Reciting Haneiros halalu after lighting the first light or after all of the lights are kindled.¹⁵ If you have a family custom, follow it. If not, recite Haneiros halalu after all of the lights have been lit.¹⁶ All opinions agree that one may not begin reciting Haneiros halalu before lighting the first light, and if one did so, he must repeat the blessing of lehadlik, since it is considered as if he spoke between reciting the blessing and performing the mitzvah.¹⁷

Issue: In some families, the custom is not to eat a meal while the candles are lit. There is no halachic basis for this custom, so if that is not your custom, do not adopt it.¹⁸

Issue: Women refraining from doing certain household chores while the candles are burning. Some women refrain from doing these chores the entire Chanukah, while others refrain during the first and last day only.¹⁹ Some women refrain from sewing, doing laundry and heavy cleaning,²⁰ while others refrain from cooking, baking and other light kitchen work as well.²¹ Some women refrain from work for half an hour after lighting candles while others refrain from work as long as candles are burning anywhere in the community, which may be as late as midnight.²² If you have a family custom follow it. Otherwise, refrain only from sewing, doing laundry and heavy cleaning throughout the eight days of Chanukah, but only for an half an hour after the menorah was lit.²³

Issue: Whether or not Havdalah takes precedence over Chanukah lights on Motzaei Shabbos. If your family has a specific custom, follow it. Otherwise recite Havdalah first.²⁴

Issue: Some say al ha-nissim during Shemoneh Esrei and v'al ha-nissim during Birkas ha-Mazon, while others say v'al ha-nissim both times. All agree that during Birkas ha-Mazon one must say v'al ha-nissim. Unless one has a family custom, he should say v'al hanissim both during Shemoneh Esrei and Birkas ha-Mazon.²⁵

Issue: Reciting magdil or migdol during Birkas ha-Mazon. If you have a family custom, follow it. Otherwise say magdil.²⁶

1 As was the custom of the Chazon Ish, Rav A. Kotler, Rav Y. Kamenetsky and many other Gedolei Yisrael.

2 O.C. 676:5. This is the view of the Arizal as well and the most widely observed custom.

3 Mishnah Berurah 675:9.

4 Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun 1:4).

5 Shalmas Chayim 380, based on Chasam Sofer, Shabbos 21a.

6 O.C. 676:1, and Peri Megadaim. This is the text of the Arizal and the Gra as well.

7 Mishnah Berurah 676:1, based on early sources quoted in Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 1.

8 Maharshal, quoted by Magen Avraham and all the poskim.

9 Since this is the most correct according to dikduk rules; see R.S.Z. Henna in Siddur Sha'arei Tefillah. This was the custom of the Chazon Ish (Orchos Rabbeinu 3:17) and Rav Y. Kamenetsky.

10 Siddur Yaavetz, Aruch ha-Shulchan 676:3, Orchos Rabbeinu 3:17 and Koveitz Halachos 6:3 recommend bizman hazeh, while several dikduk authorities recommend bazman hazeh (see Ohr Yisroel 15:3) and that has become the more widely accepted custom. Some have a custom to say u'bizman hazeh, but that has not been widely accepted.

11 Mishnah Berurah 676:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 676:3.

12 This has become the universally accepted custom and is recommended by dikduk authorities.

13 Avudraham, quoted in Bais Yosef, O.C. 676.

14 Rama, O.C. 676:2.

15 Both customs are quoted in Mishnah Berurah 676:8.

16 Custom of many contemporary poskim (Orchos Rabbeinu 3:21, Minchas Yitzchak 4:115-3, Rav M. Feinstein, Rav Y. Kamenetsky, Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, Rav C. Kanievsky).

17 Minchas Yitzchak 4:115-3; Rav C. Kanievsky (Ohr Yisrael 15, note 618); Koveitz Halachos 6:6.

18 Ohr Yisrael 1:16, quoting Mikdash Yisrael 16.

19 Chayei Adam 154:3.

20 Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 8; Halachos of Chanukah, pg. 4); Rav Y. Kamenetsky (Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 670, note 584); Shraga ha-Meir 6:87.

21 See Halichos Shelomo 16, Orchos Halachah 14.

22 Magen Avraham 670:2, quoted by Be'er Heitev 2 and Siddur Ya'avetz.

23 This is the most widely accepted custom.

24 See Aruch ha-Shulchan 679:2 who explains that those who have the custom to light the menorah first do so because they already heard Havdalah in shul. But those who did not hear Havdalah in shul are certainly required to recite Havdalah first at home.

25 Mishnah Berurah 682:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 282:1. See Siddur Yaavetz.

26 This is the accepted custom.

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Kindling Chanukah Lights in Shul By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Most people do not realize that kindling the Chanukah menorah in shul falls under the category of custom, and it is not part of the mitzvah that our Sages instituted. How did this practice become so established that we even recite a beracha on it? For that matter, when do we ever recite a beracha prior to observing a custom?

We find some discussion among rishonim whether one should recite a beracha when kindling the shul's Chanukah menorah. Although a few rishonim opposed reciting a beracha on this kindling,¹ in the course of time we find the practice gaining full acceptance. In the Fourteenth Century, a scholar named Rabbi Amram ben Meroam queried the Rivash,² one of the greatest halachic authorities of his era,³ as to why we kindle the menorah in shul. Rabbi Amram reports that he had been unable to find a halachic reason for why the beracha recited upon this kindling is not considered a beracha levatalah, a blessing recited in vain. After all, each individual is required to light in his own home, and no one fulfills the mitzvah with the shul kindling.

Rabbi Amram considers the possibility that the kindling in shul is for the sake of the destitute, who cannot afford to purchase oil or candles for Chanukah, but he rejects this approach. Even the poorest of the poor is, after all, required to kindle Chanukah lights at home, just as he is required to observe a seder and drink four cups of wine on Pesach, because these mitzvos accomplish pirsuma nisa, publicizing the miracle. The Rivash responded that kindling Chanukah lights in shul is a time-honored practice that began when Jews were no longer able to light Chanukah lights outside, as Chazal had originally ordained. When the kindling of the menorah was moved indoors, pirsuma nisa still took place with respect to our families, but we lacked the true pirsuma nisa that a public kindling accomplishes. Therefore, explains the Rivash, the custom of kindling Chanukah lights in shul developed, whereby the entire community could witness the commemoration of the miracle and thereby fulfill the ideal of a public pirsuma nisa.

The Rivash implies that he accepts Rabbi Amram's position that no one fulfills the mitzvah with the kindling in shul. Nevertheless, we recite a beracha, notwithstanding the fact that it is technically a custom, and not a mitzvah instituted by Chazal. The Shulchan Aruch and, to the best of my knowledge, all later authorities, accept this ruling that one recites a beracha prior to kindling the Chanukah lights in shul.

Regarding the question of how we can recite a beracha on a custom, the Rivash compares this to our practice of reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. Although the Gemara⁴ states explicitly that this recitation is not required according to halacha and is a custom that developed,⁵ we make a beracha prior to reciting it.⁶

The Kolbo⁷ cites two other reasons for the practice of kindling the Chanukah menorah in shul:

(2) We kindle on behalf of those who do not observe the mitzvah in their own homes. (This appears to be the exact reason that Rabbi Amram and the Rivash rejected.)

(3) We kindle in shul, our mikdash me'at, to commemorate the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash.

In addition, the Beis Yosef⁸ suggests two more reasons:

(4) To educate those who do not know how to recite the berachos.

(5) Similar to the custom of reciting Kiddush in shul Friday night, which originally was established so that guests, who stayed and ate their meals in the shul (or in nearby rooms) would be able to hear Kiddush, the kindling is done so that travelers would thereby fulfill the mitzvah.⁹

The Beis Yosef meant that a wayfarer who slept in the shul would fulfill his mitzvah with the menorah there. It may also include the situation of a traveler who will be unable to fulfill the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights, and thus is required to recite the berachos of she'asah nissim and shehechyanu when he sees Chanukah

lights burning. According to the Beis Yosef, it is possible that the traveler may rely on the shul Chanukah menorah for his berachos. This matter is discussed by the late authorities.¹⁰

Do these variant reasons have any effect on the halacha?

Indeed, they do. According to the reason given by the Rivash, no one fulfills a mitzvah with the shul menorah, and this is, in fact, how the Rama¹ rules, whereas according to some of the other reasons, the menorah was kindled specifically to assist people in fulfilling the mitzvah. Following are several other differences in halachic practice that emerge from this dispute.

When Do We Light?

The Rama² states that we kindle the lights in shul between mincha and maariv, which is earlier than the optimal time for kindling the Chanukah menorah. The Mishnah Berurah notes we kindle the shul menorah before maariv, since that is when everyone is gathered and, as a result, there is greater *pirsuma nisa*. This approach assumes that the kindling in shul is because we want to fulfill *pirsuma nisa* in a public forum, the first reason mentioned above. If, however, the basis of the custom is to enable travelers or others who would not otherwise be lighting to fulfill the mitzvah, one should kindle the shul menorah at the halachically optimal time, which is after maariv.

Is the Shul Menorah Kindled for Shacharis?

Common custom, mentioned by many authorities,¹³ is to rekindle the shul's menorah, without a beracha, and have it burn during Shacharis. Yet this practice appears unusual, since Chazal required commemorating the miracle only by kindling Chanukah lights at night, and there is no custom of kindling the Chanukah lights in the daytime at home. Several authorities explain that the reason for kindling the shul's Chanukah menorah in the morning is to commemorate the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash, whose lights burned in the morning. Thus, we see that this reason (#3 above) manifests itself in our practice.

When Do We Extinguish the Shul Menorah?

There was a common practice in many communities to extinguish the Chanukah lights after maariv, although they had not yet burned for a half-hour after dark, which is the minimum time that halacha requires. The Melamed LeHo'il¹⁴ permits the continuation of this practice, although other authorities object to it.¹⁵ Indeed, the dispute hinges on why we kindle the menorah in shul. The Melamed LeHo'il contends that if the kindling in shul is for public *pirsuma nisa*, then there may be no requirement to leave the menorah burning. However, if the reason for the minhag is so that some individuals could thereby fulfill the mitzvah, then one must allow the lights to burn for the same amount of time as when they are lit at home.

May a Child Kindle the Shul Menorah?

Again, this should depend on the reason for the minhag. If no one fulfills any mitzvah with the shul menorah, then a child could kindle the shul's menorah. However, if we are kindling for adults to help them thereby fulfill the mitzvah, only an adult should be permitted to kindle the menorah.¹⁶

Kindling the Menorah at a Wedding

If someone is making a wedding on Chanukah, should he kindle his menorah at the wedding or celebration rather than, or in addition to, kindling at home? Assuming that he already kindled at home, may he recite a beracha upon the kindling outside the home?

One Chanukah, I attended the wedding of the son of a prominent talmid chacham and noticed that the baalei simcha brought their huge silver menorahs to the hall and kindled them there. I assumed that the talmid chacham had also kindled at home, but he told me that he felt that there was greater *pirsuma nisa* through kindling at the wedding, and since he was at the wedding hall all evening, he considered it his "home" for that night of Chanukah. I personally did not agree with his decision, since the halacha is that one is required to kindle Chanukah lights in his own home. Subsequently, I found a teshuvah from Rav Moishe Shternbuch about a similar case – a minyan davening maariv at a wedding on Chanukah -- in which he rules that lighting in shul is a specific, established minhag, and that we cannot randomly extend this minhag to other situations and permit making a beracha.¹⁷

I tell people in this situation that if they cannot be home the entire evening, they should arrange for someone to kindle their menorah for them at their house as their agent (see Mishnah Berurah 677:12). If they are concerned about leaving unattended lights burning, they should have their agent remain with the lights for half an hour, and then the "menorah sitter" may extinguish the lights.

Lighting at a Concert

During Chanukah, various concerts and other similar community celebrations and events often take place. May one recite the berachos if one kindles a menorah at these events? Although lighting a menorah at the assembly will also be an act of *pirsume nisa*, one fulfills no mitzvah or minhag by doing so. Therefore, most authorities I have seen rule that one should not recite a beracha on this lighting.¹⁸

1. 1 Shiblei HaLeket #185; Sefer Tanya, quoted by Birkei Yosef, Orach Chayim, 671:6. 2 Shu't HaRivash #111. 3 The Rivash, Rav Yitzchak bar Sheishes, a disciple of the Ran and Rabbeinu Peretz, was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1326, where he earned his living as a merchant until his early 40's. He then assumed rabbinic positions in Spain; in Saragossa, Catalayud and Valencia. During the massacres in Spain of 1391, he fled to Algiers, North Africa, where he was appointed the *rav* and *av beis din*, a position that he held until his passing sixteen years later. 4 Arachin 10a 5 Taanis 28b 6 See Tosafos, Taanis 28b. 7 Kolbo #44 2. 8 Orach Chayim Chapter 671 9 The Shiblei Leket mentions this basis, but feels that when there are no longer guests staying in the shul, that there is no reason to kindle, and no reason to recite a beracha. 10 Several sources are quoted in Chovas Hador Chapter 2, fn. 46. 11 Orach Chayim 671:7 12 Orach Chayim 671:7 13 Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 670:2; Binyan Shelomoh #53; Shu't Melamed LeHo'il 1:121 14 1:121. The Melamed LeHo'il reports that the minhag in Frankfurt was to kindle very long candles in shul that would burn all night until after shacharis; and the minhag in Berlin was to extinguish the candles after maariv and rekindle them in the morning. 15 Shu't Shevet Halevi 8:156 16 Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 6:65:1 17 Teshuvos VeHanhagos 1:398 18 Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 6:65:3; Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 15:30; Shu't Divrei Yetziv, Orach Chayim 286:3; Shu't Shevet Halevi 4:65; Teshuvos VeHanhagos 1:398; cf., however, Shu't Az Nidberu 5:37 who rules that one may recite berachos at these kindlings. Shu't Yabia Omer 7: Orach Chayim: 57 rules that if a shul has several minyanim for maariv through the night, one may recite a beracha before the kindling that precedes each minyan.