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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON MIKEITZ & CHANUKA - 5786

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Compound Miracles: Then and Now

I. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) asks, "What is Chanukah?", which Rashi explains to mean, "for which miracle was it established?"

The Gemara records the miracle of oil which was enough to last only one day being lit for eight days. The military victory is mentioned only as it enabled the finding of the jug of oil.

By contrast, in Al Hanissim we focus exclusively on the military victory. The lighting of the candles is mentioned only as part of the purification of the Beis Hamikdash, and the miracle of eight days is not mentioned at all. Similarly, Haneiros Hallalu, recited when we light the candles, a text (Maseches Sofrim 20:4), whose thirty-six words correspond to the thirty-six candles (Mishna Berurah 676:8), refers to the salvations and wars, and omits the miracle of the oil completely.

The Gemara (ibid) concludes that Chanukah was established with hallel and hoda'ah. Rashi explains that hoda'ah refers to Al Hanissim, which is recited in the beracha of hoda'ah in Shemone Esrei and in Birkas Hamazon. Why isn't the miracle of eight days, the basis of Chanukah focused on in the Gemara, mentioned at all?

The Gemara indicates that Hallel celebrates the miracle of the oil. Tosafos (Ta'anis 28b) explains that we say Hallel for eight days because the miracle of the oil increased every day.

However, the Gemara (Pesachim 117a) states that whenever we are saved from a tzarah, such as the story of Chanukah (Rashi), we say Hallel on our salvation. This remark contradicts the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) which links Hallel to the miracle of the oil.

II. Harav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel zt"l (Mo'adim p. 302-309) answers that all these questions and contradictions assume that two distinct miracles took place: the miracle of the oil lasting eight days, and the miracle of the military victory. In reality, there was only one compound miracle. The military battle was fought to save us from the Greeks' attempt to make us forget the Torah and to violate its laws, the first sentence in Al Hanissim. They breached the walls of the azara (Middos 2:3) and made all of the oil impure (Maoz Tzur: Yevanim).

The military victory enabled us to sanctify the Beis Hamikdash and light the menorah. We thank Hashem in Al Hanissim for the victory by which we remembered the Torah and its laws, culminating in the restoration of avoda, especially the lighting of the candles, in the Beis Hamikdash.

This is the miracle of Chanuka, for which we say Al Hanissim and Hallel. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) merely explains why Chanukah lasts for eight days, rather than one. The miracle of the oil lasting for eight days is the conclusion of the victory over the Greeks, as the Gemara mentions. This miracle increased every day and obligates us to light the menorah and recite Hallel on all eight days of Chanukah.

III. The Rambam (Chanukah 3:1) recounts the Greeks' preventing us from observing our religion of Torah and mitzvos. They breached the walls of the heichal and defiled all that was pure. Hashem saved us, the Chashmonaim appointed a king, and the kingdom lasted for over two hundred years until the churban.

He continues (ibid 3:2) by describing the miracle of the oil lasting eight days and concludes (ibid 3:3) that we celebrate eight days of simcha and Hallel, and we light candles to publicize the miracle.

Most commentators, cited in the Frankel edition, write that simcha and Hallel relate to the military victory, and the candles commemorate the miracle of the oil. However, the Shalmei Simcha (Elberg) (5:41) writes that both rituals relate to both miracles. According to Rav E. B. Finkel there is only one compound miracle which obligates both mitzvos. If so, the word "miracle" in 3:3 refers to both 3:1 and 3:2.

IV. The Rambam, in stark contrast to the Ramban (Bereishis 49:10), writes positively about the kingdom of the Chashmonaim, as a continuation of the Chanukah miracle, notwithstanding the glaring spiritual deficiencies, serious military casualties, and infighting which led to the churban. It would not be until 1948 that an independent state of Israel would exist. This is a positive milestone in Jewish history, as Rav Soloveitchik taught nearly seventy years ago in his speech and article "Kol Dodi Dofeik". We thank Hashem for the military victories and the exponential resurgence of Torah, comparable to the compound miracle of Chanukah, notwithstanding the problems which exist now as they did then. Specifically, spiritual deficiencies, significant casualties and infighting still exist in the State of Israel.

Today, as then, the Temple Mount is the most significant location of the spiritual battle, the jihad, which animates our enemies. Sadly, the site is still defiled by mosques, and we must wait patiently for the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

In the interim, especially in the last two plus years, we must defend ourselves from mortal foes. Our soldiers are heroes, and one IDF brigade is even called Chashmonaim. We mourn the losses, of soldiers and citizens alike, in Eretz Yisroel. The rise of anti-Semitism has worldwide consequences, as recently as the horrific murder of innocent Jews in Sydney, Australia on the first night of Chanukah.

As we commemorate the compound miracle of the military victory and spiritual recovery of Chanukah and thank Hashem for the events of then and now, bayamim haheim ubazman hazzeh (Levush 682:2), we hope and pray for the ultimate chanukas ha'mizbeach, ha'menorah, and the Beis Hamikdash.

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<newsletter@torahmusings.com>

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Israel National News

Sometimes it's hard to see the light

Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph

It is all too easy to look around us and feel hopeless...

We were all shaken this week with the horrific news of the antisemitic attack at a Chabad Menorah lighting in Sydney, Australia. This only adds to the already existent gloom and fear that so many Jews are experiencing. An ever-deepening political divide in the US, never-ending conflict in Israel, infighting among our fellow Jews in the Holy Land, growing antisemitism on

both the left and right, and in our OU community we still feel the weight of the tremendous loss of Rabbi Moshe Hauer, zt"l.

It is all too easy to look around us and feel hopeless.

Three weeks ago, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations hosted five released hostages and their family members, before they traveled to meet with President Donald Trump. Each one shared their remarkable and moving story, but one comment stood out. When it was his turn to speak, Segev Kalfon described the horrific ordeals he overcame and specifically, the lack of clean water, devoid of dirt and bugs and even worms, severely impacting his hygiene and health. He then picked up the bottle of water before him and said, "All I want to say is that I am grateful for clean water."

If there is anyone who would be justified in having what to complain about, it was Segev, and yet he taught me how a change of perspective can fill us with gratitude.

Our tradition teaches us (Avodah Zara 8a) about the pre-history of the holiday of Hanukkah. During the very first winter, Adam watched as the days got shorter and shorter, the dark nights getting ever longer. He was filled with fear and despair that the waning light signified his coming death; he prayed and fasted for eight days. And then, one day, he noticed that the days suddenly started getting longer. He celebrated the winter solstice, reminding him and his offspring that "there is no room for hopelessness," and that the dark nights, with patience and the right perspective, can transform into glorious mornings.

There is a famous debate between Shammai and Hillel as to how we light the candles on Hanukkah. Shammai suggests that we begin with eight candles and each day we remove one candle. Hillel argues that we begin with one and add an additional candle each night.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook explains that Shammai and Hillel are not arguing, they are focusing on competing phenomena. Shammai is describing what is known as yeridat hadorot, the decline in spirituality and greatness that grows with every generation. Hillel acknowledges such a decline but argues that with the decline of the great lights of every generation, there is concurrently an aliyat hadorot, an ever-increasing light that can be found among the masses.

Despite the heartbreaking news from Sydney, we are heartened by the heroic actions of Ahmed al-Ahmed in disarming one of the attackers and the outpouring of love, unity, and support from the entire Jewish world. Despite the new adversaries that continue to crop up, we have received words of encouragement from faith leaders and the actions of complete strangers who support the Jewish People. Despite the political divide, we at the OU have experienced bi-partisan support for many of the values we fight for daily. And despite the terrible loss of Rabbi Hauer, zt"l, we have witnessed our team at the Orthodox Union step up and move forward with a newfound determination.

Jewish law accords with the ruling of Hillel. During this holiday of Hanukkah, as we proudly and fearlessly light our Menorahs, we are enjoined to focus our attention on the increasing light around us, how the dark nights of exile will give way to the brilliant light of redemption, and how fortunate we are to receive the incredible blessings of life, like a clean glass of water. Wishing you and yours an illuminated, glowing, and thankful Hanukkah. Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph is OU Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org> in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

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subject: Tidbits • Parashas Miketz - Shabbos Chanukah 5786

On Erev Shabbos Chanukah, many daven Minchah early so that Minchah will precede the lighting of the Menorah (to avoid the appearance of a tartei d'sasrei - an inherent contradiction - of lighting Shabbos' Chanukah lights and then davening Friday's Minchah). Menorah lighting may not occur before plag hamincha (approximately 1 hour before shekiah), and should be performed just before lighting Shabbos candles. The Menorah should contain

enough oil to burn at least until a half hour after tzeis hakochavim (approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes after Candle Lighting; note that many shorter 'colored candles' do not meet this criterion).

Rosh Chodesh Teves is Shabbos and Sunday, December 20th-21st. On Shabbos morning following [full] Hallel, three Sifrei Torah are taken out. Parashas Miketz is leined in six Aliyos (with shishi continuing until the end of the Parasha). The kariah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh (beginning with the mussaf of Shabbos - Bamidbar 28:9-15) is leined from the second Sefer as the seventh aliyah. The kariah for the 6th day of Chanukah (Bamidbar 7:42-47) is leined as maftir from the third Sefer Torah. The haftarah of Chanukah follows. Av Harachamim is omitted. Ata Yatzarta is said in Mussaf Shemoneh Esrei. Borch Nafshi is added at the end of davening (some add Psalm 30 as well). Tzidkas'cha is omitted at Mincha. On Motzaei Shabbos, one should return home without delay and light as soon as possible. The Shulchan Aruch notes that there is good reason to first make Havdalah, followed by Menorah lighting, or to first light one's Menorah, followed by Havdalah. If one is away for Shabbos Chanukah, it may be preferable to light Menorah at his host on Motzaei Shabbos (and preferably eat a small meal there as well) before departing, especially if one will be returning home late. Consult your Rav.

On Sunday, the second day of Rosh Chodesh Teves, the full Hallel is recited. Kerias Hatorah includes two Sifrei Torah. From the first sefer, the kariah of Rosh Chodesh (Bamidbar 28:1-15) is leined in three aliyos (instead of four; the usual first two aliyos are combined) from the first Sefer, followed by one aliyah for the 7th day Chanukah (Bamidbar 7:48-53) from the second sefer Torah. Mussaf of Rosh Chodesh follows. Davening ends with Borch Nafshi after the Shir shel Yom (some add Psalm 30 as well).

Tachanun and Lamenatzei'ach are omitted throughout Chanukah, as well as Kel Erech Apayim before Kerias Hatorah, and the Yehi Ratzons that follow. Fasting and hespeidim are generally prohibited. Al Hanisim is said in Shemoneh Esrei and Bircas Hamazon. The omission of Al Hanisim does not need to be corrected. However, if one remembers before completing Bircas Hamazon he may recite the compensatory Harachaman at the end of Bircas Hamazon, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu. Similarly in Shemoneh Esrei, one can add this compensatory Harachaman at the end of Elokai Netzor, followed by Bimei Mattisyahu.

After Chanukah, used wicks, cups and oil should be disposed of in a respectful manner (e.g. by placing them in a plastic bag before disposing of them). Some have the minhag to burn them on the last day of Chanukah; others do so during Bi'ur Chametz before Pesach.

During Chanukah, there is a praiseworthy minhag of giving gifts to the melamid of one's children (R' C. Palaggi zt"l). This sets an example of hakaras hatov for your child and displays the importance of their chinuch. A gift accompanied by warm words of thanks is a tremendous source of chizuk for our Rebbeim and teachers.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Zevachim 97

Summary of Mikeitz

Miketz: Pharaoh's dreams • The Sar Hamashkim refers Pharaoh to Yosef • Yosef interprets Pharaoh's dreams as predicting 7 years of plenty and hunger • Yosef is appointed viceroy over Mitzrayim • Yosef marries Osnas • Menashe and Efraim are born • The famine begins • Yaakov sends the brothers to Mitzrayim for food • Yosef accuses the brothers of spying • After jailing Shimon, Yosef commands them to bring Binyamin • Yosef has their monies returned to their sacks; the brothers fear this is a ploy to harm them • Yaakov resists sending Binyamin • The famine worsens • Yehudah accepts responsibility for Binyamin • The brothers set out with gifts and the returned monies • Yosef is overwhelmed upon seeing Binyamin • The brothers are treated royally and sent home with abundant provisions • Binyamin is framed as stealing the royal goblet and the Shevatim are returned to Mitzrayim. The kariah for Rosh Chodesh pertains to the korbanos brought on Rosh Chodesh. The kariah of Chanukah corresponds to the Korbanos Ha'nesiim and the corresponding day of the Chanukas Hamizbeiach.

Haftarah: The haftarah of Chanukah (Zechariah 2:14-4:7) is leined. The haftarah discusses the Chanukas HaMenorah during the Second Beis Hamikdash.

Dvar Torah

מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים, ורבים ביד מעטים, וטמאים ביד טהורים

“You placed the mighty in the hand of the weak, the many in the hand of the few, the impure in the hand of the pure” (Al HaNissim - Chanukah)

While we understand that, generally, the more powerful army and the larger numbers of fighters would win the battle, righteousness and purity are not necessarily a weakness in battle. Why then do we recount “טמאים ביד טהורים”, which indicates that the pure defeating the impure is miraculous in nature?

Rav Yitzchak Feigelstock zt”l explains that aside from being far outnumbered by the nations of the world, Klal Yisrael faced another seemingly insurmountable problem in that essentially the art of war belongs to the nations of Eisav (see Bereishis 49:5 with Rashi). When Klal Yisrael engaged in war, such as in the time of Yehoshua at the City of Ai, they were eventually victorious only through miraculous means which came about when the battle was fought according to the dictates of Hashem and with complete emunah and bitachon in Him. Am Yisrael does not have the means to succeed when they employ standard strategies. It is only when the battle is ‘fought’ with the proper spiritual structure that we can defeat our enemies. Therefore, we thank Hashem for enabling our victories by giving us the spiritual means and ability to supernaturally conquer our enemies.

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from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com> date: Dec 16, 2025, 3:27 PM subject: Of Mitzet, Menorahs, and Majesty

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Miketz, Menorahs, and Majesty

RIETS Kollel Elyon Dec 16

The release of Joseph from prison, a moment of great drama and emotion, has also been the subject of unexpected halakhic inquiry. Some commentaries note, in light of the fact that his release took place on Rosh HaShanah, it is surprising that Joseph shaved at that time. Rashi comments that the shaving was done because of kevod ha-malkhut; honor for the king. Nonetheless, working under the assumption that the Avot (and, apparently Joseph included) observed the entire Torah before it was given, it would be expected that he would refrain from shaving on Rosh Hashanah. This question prompted an extensive literature in later generations, analyzing the halakhic considerations from every angle - is shaving a violation mi-d'orayta of Hilkhos Yom Tov; perhaps the action is to be considered a melakhah she'einah tzrichah li-gufah; can it be excused under his unique circumstances; what role does kevod ha-malkhut play in the question; perhaps the situation is considered pikuach nefesh; perhaps it is relevant that Joseph was presumably shaved by someone else, etc.

The Chatam Sofer, for one, seemed bothered by the very question itself. The notion of the Avot keeping the Torah, he argued, was a fine and important idea, but not an actual obligation. Kevod Ha-Malkhut, by contrast, is a genuine din, one that had to be observed even before the giving of the Torah, by force of law. Thus, kevod ha-malkhut, which was commanded, certainly overrides Yom Tov, which was “eino metzuveh vi-osh.”

The Chatam Sofer's comment is itself difficult to understand. Kevod ha-malkhut is also a law of the Torah, derived from verses. By what logic is this law separated from the other mitzvot of the Torah, that they are voluntary in the Pre-Sinaitic era, and this one is not?

In considering the obligation of kevod ha-malkhut, R. Simcha Zissel Broide, the late Rosh Yeshivah of the Chevron Yeshivah, posits a number of theories explaining its importance. Among the five points that he makes is what he considers a fundamental principle of the human personality: It is crucial for

one's spiritual development that he possess the ability to appreciate great things. One who is jaded and cynical, who views all things with disinterest, is unable to attain any kind of meaningful spiritual maturity. Thus, it is critical to hone one's awareness of the extraordinary, and the attitude one brings toward royalty is certainly reflective of this vital attribute.

It is interesting to note that there is another (seasonally appropriate) comment of the Chatam Sofer (Responsa, OC 204) that is also somewhat surprising. We are in the midst of celebrating Chanukah. We generally assume that Chanukah and Purim, clearly post-Biblical in origin, are observed as chiyuvim mi-de-rabanan. Nonetheless, maintains the Chatam Sofer, if one would let the occasions of Chanukah or Purim pass by without any acknowledgement, this would be the wrong thing on a level mi-d'orayta. Perhaps the common element between the two statements of the Chatam Sofer - his comment regarding Joseph, and his assertion regarding Chanukah - is the fundamental necessity of cultivating an appreciation for greatness and majesty. One who is unreceptive to the miraculous and the majestic is incapable of approaching the Torah with any potential for success. If one is unmoved by the extraordinary, then the greatest gift of all eternity can fail to move and inspire; not for any internal deficiency in the item, but because of the closed “eye of the beholder”.

This issue is indicated as well by the comments of Nachmanides on the verse following the giving of the aseret ha-dibrot, when Moses tells the Jewish people not to be afraid, because God has come “ba-avur nasot etchem”. Nachmanides understands this in the sense of nisayon, to test the Jewish people, to see if they are capable of feeling an appreciation for the awe-inspiring display that accompanied Matan Torah.

As R. Yitzchak Hutner explains, this “test” was a crucial part of the process of the bestowing of the Torah upon the Jewish people. If the Jews failed to be moved by such a display, then they cannot fulfill their roles as the guardians of the Torah; they will be unreceptive to the infinite treasures of its content, and thus immune to its influence.

In this sense, R. Hutner notes the Maharal of Prague's interpretation of the Talmud's statement that the churban ha-bayit took place because the Jews failed to recite Birkhot HaTorah. This passage has long challenged commentators, both because of the apparently disproportional nature of the punishment, and the well-known fact that the Jews of that era were guilty of several other egregious offenses. The Maharal explained that the Talmud is not claiming that the lack of Birkhot HaTorah is the punishable offense; indeed, the churban was provoked by the other offenses committed at that time. Rather, the Talmud's question was this: since we know that the Jews of that time were involved in the study of Torah, how is it also possible that they were guilty of such transgressions? Should not their Talmud Torah have influenced them toward a more righteous path?

To this, explains the Talmud, it is commented that the Jews of that time did not recite a berakhah on the Torah. They were not awestruck by the experience; they were not moved by the privilege to express gratitude to He who bestowed this great gift. If that was their attitude, they were not in a position to be influenced by the Torah's content.

The Chatam Sofer is reminding us, in his two comments, that no relationship with Torah can be complete without a sense of the majestic and the miraculous. Before the giving of the Torah, the avot were not technically obligated in mitzvot; but if they were lacking an awe of majesty, they would not have been the avot. Before the events of Chanukah, there was no obligation to light candles or recite hallel; but in the generations after, one who can casually fail to do so is shown to be flawed in his relationship with Torah at a fundamental level. The convergence of Miketz and Chanukah provides us with a reminder that allowing the magnificent to become mundane is a danger to the very definition of the Jewish personality. It can also be added that Joseph, by choosing to focus on honoring the king, was actually going to the essence of Rosh HaShanah, a reasonable approach especially before there was an actual commandment to observe its requirements technically. One of the central themes of Rosh HaShanah is malchiyut, recognizing the majesty of God. One reason that kevod ha-

malkhut is such a crucial concept is “Malka d’ara k’ein Malka d’rakia”, Earthly royalty is an illustration that allows humanity to picture the true royalty of the King of Kings. Joseph’s perceptive prioritization laid the groundwork for much of the spiritual growth that would lie ahead. RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack is free today. But if you enjoyed this post, you can tell RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack that their writing is valuable by pledging a future subscription.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> ravfrand@torah.org
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Rav Frand - A Bunch of Yeshiva Bochrin Defeated the Greatest Army of Their Time Through Mesiras Nefesh

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1361 – Can Women Make Latkes While The Chanukah Candles Are Still Burning and other issues? Good Shabbos!

The Shulchan Aruch paskens (Orach Chaim 187:4) that Al Hanissim is added to Birkas Hamazon before the bracha of “Al hakol” but if someone forgets to mention it, he does not need to repeat bentsching. (The same applies if someone forgets to say it in Shemoneh Esrei.) The Rama adds that if he forgets to say it in its proper place in bentsching, he may still insert it together with the other “Harachaman” statements by saying “The Merciful One should perform miracles for us like He did in those days at this time, etc.” And this, says the Rama, is our practice.

I heard a schmooze from Rav Yerucham Olshin, in which, he asks two interesting questions: First, he asks that we do not usually ask the Ribono shel Olam to perform nissim (miracles) for us. Why, then, do we ask, “Harachaman...should do nissim for us”?

How does Rav Olshin know that we don’t daven for nissim? He cites a very famous Gemara (Berachos 54a): If someone’s wife is pregnant and the person prays “May it be His will that my wife gives birth to a boy” this is a tefillas shav (a prayer in vain). From the moment of conception, the gender of the baby is already determined. Once someone’s wife is already carrying a boy or a girl, davening that the child be of a certain gender is a wasted prayer. Nothing is going to miraculously change after the gender has been determined.

However, the Gemara asks from the Medrash that Leah’s daughter Dena was originally supposed to be a male child and only “afterwards” did she turn out to be female. (At the time, Leah already had six sons and the two handmaidens each had two sons. Leah knew prophetically that Yaakov would father twelve sons and she didn’t want her sister Rachel to have fewer sons than the handmaidens so she prayed that the child she was carrying be a girl.) Leah prayed that her ‘son’ should be a daughter. The Ribono shel Olam made a nes (miracle) and He switched the embryos in utero. The embryo that Leah was carrying (Yosef) wound up in Rachel, and the girl with which Rachel was pregnant (Dena) wound up with Leah.

Nevertheless, the Gemara says this is not normal practice, and normative prayer protocol is not to ask the Ribono shel Olam to perform nissim for us. The Patriarchs have a different standard of tefilla, but the rest of us are not allowed to pray for changes to the natural order. If that is the case, asks Rav Olshin, why on Chanukah do we say “He should make miracles for us as He did in those days?”

Rav Olshin quotes his second question in the name of his grandfather, Rav Aharon Kotler, zt”l. The Mishna (Avos 5:7) says that ten nissim were done for our fathers in the Beis Hamikdash. Among them was that no woman ever miscarried from the smell of the sacrificial meats, the sacrificial meats never spoiled, no fly was ever seen in the house of meat cutting, the Kohen Gadol never had a seminal emission on Yom Kippur, the rains never extinguished the fire on the Mizbayach, and so on. The point is there were nissim there on a regular basis. If so, why is such a big deal made about this nes with the minute amount of pure oil for the Menorah lasting for eight days? No holidays were proclaimed to commemorate the ten nissim mentioned in Pirkei Avos. What was so special about the nes of the oil?

Rav Olshin suggests that there are two kinds of nissim. He quotes a Ramchal that the nissim we are familiar with that happened throughout Tanach (whether it be the splitting of the sea or the war with Og king of Bashan or the Mann, and so forth) were pre-programmed into creation. The Ribono shel Olam set up the world in such a way that these miraculous events were (for lack of better terminology) already “baked into the cake.”

There is, however, a different type of nes. That is a nes that the Ribono shel Olam does for someone who is moser nefesh (exhibits self-sacrifice) for a particular mitzva. If a person is moser nefesh for a specific mitzva, the Ribono shel Olam responds on a personal level and makes a nes for that particular person as a reward for the mesiras nefesh that he exhibited. This is the nature of the nes of Chanuka.

The nissim that took place on a regular basis in the Beis Hamikdash were part of creation. They were pre-programmed into His world and we don’t make a special Yom Tov for those kinds of nissim. But, as the Bach explains at the beginning of Hilchos Chanuka, Ner Chanuka is different. The Greeks knew that if they could extinguish the light of the Menorah, the Jews would be lost. They sensed intuitively that the light of the Menorah gave spiritual and physical strength to the Kohanim and the rest of the Jewish nation. Therefore, they went out of their way to defile the oils. Likewise, the Kohanim made exceptional efforts to find and procure pure olive oil. When the Kohanim exerted extreme mesiras nefesh for the mitzva, they brought out kochos that they didn’t even realize they possessed. The Ribono shel Olam will, in fact, perform nissim in response to such devotion. That is why we can ask “May the All Merciful One perform miracles for us as He did in those days at this time.”

This means that in response to our mesiras nefesh and devotion, the Ribono shel Olam will, in fact, perform nissim. The nes of Chanuka embodies this capacity that many people possess – to be able to reach beyond their means. The nes of Chanuka represents people who were not realistically capable of defeating such a mighty army, and yet found the inner strength to reach beyond their means and be moser nefesh, such that they achieved such a military victory.

One of the takeaway lessons of Chanuka is that we all have such strengths that are hidden inside of us. We always need to ask ourselves: Am I doing as much as I can do?

There is an interesting Medrash (in Sefer Shemos): When Moshe Rabbeinu went out to see the suffering of his brethren in Mitzrayim and he saw how tortured they were, he saw that the Egyptian taskmasters assigned jobs appropriate for big and strong people to small and weak people, and jobs appropriate for small and weak people to big and strong people. Men’s jobs were assigned to women and women’s jobs were assigned to men.

Rav Efraim Wachsman recently said at the Agudah convention that it is understandable why it would be considered torture to have a woman do a man’s work and a weak person do a strong person’s work. But why was the reverse considered torture – for strong people to do work that was appropriate for weaker individuals? How is that to be understood as “and they embittered their lives” (Shemos 1:14)? It would seem like these strong men had a lucky day. They were only asked to schlep five pounds of bricks when, in reality, they could have schlepped twenty five pounds of bricks! Rav Wachsman answered that when a person knows he is capable of doing more and he doesn’t have the opportunity to do what he is capable of, that is a bitter experience. Everyone wants to feel satisfied and fulfilled with their accomplishments in life. When a person feels that he is wasting his time and potential, the experience can indeed be called “va’yemareru es chayeiheim.” The nes of Chanuka proves that the Chashmonaim were moser nefesh and went beyond their means and beyond their apparent capabilities. That is one of the lessons we need to take away. The Chashmonaim were like a bunch of yeshiva bocuhrim and they were nonetheless successful in defeating the greatest army of their time. They saw that they had kochos that they couldn’t imagine. Therefore, the nes of Chanukah includes the prayer “May the Ribono shel Olam perform nissim for us.” If we will be moser nefesh like they were moser nefesh, the Ribono shel Olam will perform nissim for us as he did “in those days at this time.”

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Miketz is provided below:

035 – Chanukah Issues # 077 – Prohibitions During Times of Crises # 126 – Dreams in Halacha and Hashkafa # 173 – Dreams in Halacha II # 219 – Chanukah Issues II # 263 – Women and Chanukah Candle Lighting # 309 – “Lo Sechanaim” Giving Gifts to Non-Jews # 353 – Chanukah and Hiddur Mitzvah # 397 – Lighting Neiros in Shul; Other Chanukah Issues # 441 – Taanis Chalom # 485 – Miracle Products and Other Chanukah Issues # 529 – Ner Chanukah: Where, When, and Other Issues # 573 – The Silver Menorah and Other Chanukah Issues # 617 – The Bad Dream # 661 – Davening for the Welfare of the Government # 705 – Chanukah Candles, Hotels and Chashunas # 749 – Solomonic Wisdom # 793 – Oops! 3 Candles on the 2nd Night # 837 – Hairbrushes on Shabbos – Permitted or Not Permitted # 881 – The T'reifa Chicken Scandal # 925 – Kavod Malchus – How Far Can You Go? # 968 – The Minyan: Must Everyone Be In The Same Room? #1012 – Preparing for Shabbos – Thursday or Friday? And other Issues #1056 – Oops! I Made A Bracha On The Shammash #1099 – Havdalah or Ner Chanukah – Which Comes First? And Other Issues #1142 – Must I Give Up My Hiddur Mitzvah For Your Kiyum Mitzvah? #1185 – A Smorgasbord of Chanukah Delicacies #1229 – Which Is Better: Lighting Menorah Yourself Later or with a Shaliach/wife at Proper Time? #1273 – Chanukah Lights Motzei Shabbos: How Early? Havdala Before or After Chanukah Lights? #1317 – Oops! I Benched Shabbos Candles But I Forgot To Bencht Chanukah Light. Now What? #1361 – Can Women Make Latkes While The Chanukah Candles Are Still Burning and other issues #1405 – Can You Light Chanukah Candles In Your Car and other Chanukah issues #1448 – I Had a Dream #1493 – Should I Worry If I Have a Bad Dream? #1537 – The Annual Issues with Lighting Chanukah Neiros on Erev Shabbos Chanukah (2022) – Solomonic Wisdom A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadychiel.org or visit <http://www.yadychiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. <http://www.torah.org/>

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Massacre in Australia: Hanukkah in the Shadow of Terror by Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

December 14, 2025

How do we light candles, gather with family, sing songs of gratitude, spin the dreidel, and eat latkes in the shadow of such devastating loss and tragedy?

The light of Hanukkah this year is dimmed and diminished even before it is lit. The news of a horrific terror attack at a Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach in Australia has shaken us to the core. Eleven innocent people were murdered at the time of this writing, among them the Chabad Rabbi, Rabbi Eli Schlanger. Australia has become a hotbed of antisemitism, met far too often with a grossly insufficient response by government and authorities. Hanukkah begins with a painful reminder that when our enemies march to the chant of “globalize the intifada,” they mean it. And they must be confronted.

It is far too soon to truly process or respond to such a heinous crime, but anyone with a sensitive soul cannot avoid the question that rises unbidden in the heart. How do we light candles, gather with family, sing songs of gratitude, spin the dreidel, and eat latkes in the shadow of such devastating loss and tragedy?

Two years ago, six holy hostages held captive by the evil Hamas terrorists gathered around a makeshift menorah fashioned from paper cups to light Hanukkah candles. In an act of cruelty meant to compound the suffering of the hostage families, their wicked captors recorded the moment on video. That footage was later discovered by the IDF in Gaza, shared privately with the families, and only recently released in time for Hanukkah this year. The video shows each of the hostages thin, weakened, but still alive. Some even smile at the camera. Among them is Hersh Goldberg Polin, missing the lower half of his left arm, blown off by a grenade on October 7.

In the video, almost impossible to comprehend, the hostages can be heard singing the blessing of Shehechyanu, thanking God for enabling them to reach that moment. Ultimately, all six, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Eden Yerushalmi, Ori Danino, Alex Lobanov, Carmel Gat, and Almog Sarusi, were brutally murdered by their captors in a tunnel in Rafah on August 29, 2024. Their bodies were discovered by Israeli troops two days later. Released hostages later shared that when they encountered Hersh in captivity, he strengthened them with words of encouragement. He would quote the teaching made famous by Viktor Frankl, that those who have a why to live can bear almost any how. That belief empowered Frankl to survive the Holocaust. Though Hersh was ultimately murdered, it gave him the courage to live each day in captivity, and through it, he helped others survive and return home.

On that recently released video, as Hersh and the others light the menorah, he can be heard likening their circumstance to the Holocaust, saying, “There’s that picture of the Hanukkah with a Nazi flag above it.”

If six hostages held captive by the evil enemies of our time, tortured and starved, could nevertheless push back the darkness with the light of the menorah, then we too can find the will and the way to respond to darkness with light. If they could smile and sing Shehechyanu in that moment, then we can not only say Shehechyanu, but sing it and mean it, more grateful than ever to be alive and present in this moment.

Light in the Darkest of Places The Jews of Australia, and Jews around the world, are not the first to confront the challenge of lighting Hanukkah candles against a backdrop of darkness. One year ago, six hostages found a way to light in the darkest of places. Over eighty years before them, in the depths of Bergen Belsen, Jews also found a way to light and to sing Shehechyanu.

In her Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust, Professor Yaffa Eliach shared the extraordinary story of Hanukkah in Bergen Belsen:

Hanukkah came to Bergen Belsen. It was time to kindle the Hanukkah lights.

A jug of oil was not to be found. No candle was in sight. A menorah belonged to the distant past. Instead, a wooden clog, the shoe of one of the inmates, became a menorah. Strings pulled from a concentration camp uniform became wicks, and black camp shoe polish became oil.

Not far from heaps of bodies, living skeletons assembled to participate in the kindling of the Hanukkah lights. The Rabbi of Bluzhov lit the first light and chanted the first two blessings in his pleasant voice, the melody filled with sorrow and pain. When he was about to recite the third blessing, he stopped. He turned his head and looked around as if searching for something.

Then he turned back to the quivering lights and, in a strong, reassuring, comforting voice, recited the third blessing. “Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.”

Among those present was Mr. Zamietchkowski, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Bund, a sincere and thoughtful man with a passion for discussing faith and truth. When the ceremony concluded, he pushed his way to the Rabbi and said, “Spira, I understand your need to light Hanukkah candles in these wretched times. I can even understand the second blessing, ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season.’ But the third blessing I cannot understand. How could you thank God for keeping us alive when hundreds of Jewish bodies lie in the shadows of the Hanukkah lights, when thousands of living skeletons walk this camp, and millions more are being massacred? For this you are thankful? This you call keeping us alive?” “Zamietchkowski, you are one hundred percent right,” the Rabbi answered. “When I reached the third blessing, I too hesitated. I asked myself what to do. I turned my head to ask the Rabbi of Zener and other distinguished rabbis standing near me whether I could recite it. But as I turned, I saw behind me a large throng of living Jews. Their faces were filled with faith, devotion, and focus as they listened to the kindling of the Hanukkah lights.

“I said to myself that if God has such a nation, a people who at a time like this, when they see before them the bodies of their beloved fathers, brothers, and sons, when death lurks in every corner, still stand together listening with devotion to the blessing ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season,’ then I am obligated to recite the third blessing.” That night in Bergen Belsen, Mr. Zamietchkowski saw only what lay before him, death and unbearable suffering. The Rebbe saw that as well. But he also saw another layer of truth that was just as real. He saw a people who clung to faith and refused to surrender their spiritual dignity even in the most horrific circumstances.

Sadly, we have a long history of Hanukkah overlapping with tragedy and loss. But we also have a sacred tradition of finding faith despite circumstance, and of stubbornly insisting on bringing light even when surrounded by darkness

from: **Ben Olam Haba** <ben@halachafortoday.com>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 6:15 PM

subject: Halacha For Today: Erev Shabbos Kodesh, Erev Rosh Chodesh Teves 5786, December 19, 2025

Halachos for **Erev Shabbos** Kodesh

1) When Rosh Chodesh Teves falls out on **Shabbos Chanukah** (as it does this year, 5786) the Birchas Hamazon is very lengthy, as "Retzei", "Ya'aleh V'Yavo" and "Al HaNisim" are added.

It's especially important to use a Bentcher or a Siddur, and stay focused, so you remember all the additiona.

If Al Hanisim is inadvertently omitted from Birchas Hamazon, it isn't repeated.

If "Retzei" or "Yaaleh V'yavo" [in certain cases on Shabbos] is omitted, the Birchas Hamazon is repeated.

2) There is a dispute among the Poskim regarding one who omitted Al Hanisim (which doesn't necessitate repeating the Birchas hamazon) and also omitted Retzei (which does necessitate repeating the Birchas Hamazon).

Some Poskim maintain that when you repeat the Birchas Hamazon you do not say Al Hanisim (Magen Avraham 188:13, Elya Rabbah, Shulchan Aruch Harav 188:4 and others)

Others maintain that once you are repeating the Birchas Hamazon already, you need to also include the Al Hanisim (Pri Megadim, Chaye Adam Klal 154:39, Sha'ar HaTzion 188:21 and others)

It is best to try and not to forget, as it isn't clear which of the above opinions the Halacha follows. (See also Shu"t Har Tzvi Orach Chaim Vol.1 Siman 54) Halachos Shabbos Kodesh

1) On Motzaei Shabbos Chanukah, there is a question as to what comes first, Havdalah or the lighting of the Menorah

2) This question is the subject of great debate and there are many of Poskim on each side of this issue, and thus both opinions are halachically acceptable.

Indeed, the Mishna Berura (Siman 681 S"K 3) writes that each individual can choose which opinion to follow.

Of course, if one has an established family minhag or a kehila minhag, they should stick to that.

<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-chanukah-rabbi-brander-5786/>

Shabbat Chanukah: Maoz Tzur and Spiritual Resistance – From Gaza to Sydney

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated to the victims of the horrific antisemitic attack on the first night of Chanukah in Bondi Beach, Australia. As reflected in the article below, their deaths tragically connect our generation to the enduring story of faith, resilience, and spiritual resistance expressed in Maoz Tzur. May their memories be a blessing, and may all those wounded merit a refuah shleimah. Deep in a dark tunnel under Gaza two years ago, a group of six Israeli hostages lit Chanukah candles and sang Maoz Tzur. Watching this unbelievable scene unfold on a recently released video, recovered in Gaza by the Israeli military, is the strongest example I have seen of how this prayer Maoz Tzur represents the spiritual strength of the Jewish people during times of challenge. Viewed now, knowing that just eight months after this scene was filmed that these six hostages would be murdered in captivity, these scenes are as heartbreaking as they are inspiring. Just three days after these videos moved the Jewish world, at least 15 Jews were gunned down at a Chanukah party on Australia's Bondi Beach, including Chabad shlichim Rabbi Eli Schlanger zt"l and Rabbi Yaakov Levitin zt"l, darkening the world before the sun even set to usher in the first night's candle lighting. Still, millions of Jews went on to light candles around the world and sing Maoz Tzur. These six hostages, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Almog Sarusi, Or Danino and Alex Lubanov, along with the victims of the massacre in Australia – and all of the grief and fear we face as Jews – is likely on all of our minds as we light our Chanukah candles each night.

With its repeated formula of adversity and salvation, Maoz Tzur is more than a Chanukah song; it is an anthem of Jewish resilience throughout history. While the identity of its author remains unknown, the acrostic formed by the first letter of its first five stanzas spells "Mordechai", presumed to be his name. The sixth and final paragraph is a later addition to the poem, likely

composed before 1250, toward the end of the Crusader period. At least twenty-seven tunes have been composed to this hymn of spiritual fortitude, attesting to its centrality in Jewish identity. This song brought the holiday of Chanukah to life throughout the generations. It gave strength to our people in their darkest hours of distress, and it continues to echo in our reality today. The first stanza of Maoz Tzur expresses our trust in God as a savior and anchor in turbulent times. The second recalls the miracle of the Exodus, the third, the redemption of the Jewish people after seventy years of Babylonian exile; and the fourth recounts the drama of Purim. The fifth stanza is the only one centered on Chanukah – detailing the threats and destruction wrought by Antiochus and the Greeks, and the miraculous divine salvation of the weak from the strong, symbolized by the small jar of olive oil. The meta-narrative running through the song is that Chanukah is but one example within a broader arc of crisis and redemption. Our unshaking commitment to God, and the spiritual strength we maintain even in times of trouble, forms a larger Jewish story, symbolized by this holiday, but manifested across centuries and places.

The final stanza of Maoz Tzur takes the form of a prayer for ultimate redemption, but its immediate focus is on the threat posed to the Jews in the Middle Ages by Christian rulers and societies. Some scholars have suggested that the adversary "Admon" mentioned at the song's close might be a veiled reference to Frederick Barbarossa (i.e., Red-Beard), the Roman Emperor around the time of the poem's composition. The vision of the "seven shepherds" at the song's conclusion is a reference to a prophecy of Micha (5:4), interpreted by the Talmud (Sukkah 52b) as describing the great leaders and progenitors of Jewish and human civilization throughout history who stood up for justice and holiness even in the face of adversity and oppression. The Jewish dynamic of spiritual resistance and faith-based resilience, of course, continued long after the Middle Ages. Dr. Yaffa Eliach, a noted scholar of the Shoah, recounts in *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* about how Jews lit Chanukah "candles" in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp using an inmate's wooden clog as a menorah, strings pulled from a camp uniform for wicks, and black shoe polish for oil. Even as countless Jews were being murdered every day, the camps' inmates, living skeletons, nevertheless assembled to perform the mitzvah. So many inmates crowded to witness the lighting that the Bluzhever Rebbe made a point of reciting the celebratory third blessing – shehechiyanu. When questioned how such a blessing could be recited in the concentration camp, he pointed to the spiritual resistance of hundreds of Jews around him choosing faith, even in the midst of unimaginable darkness.

In the same vein, Ralph Melnick, in his article "Our Own Deeper Joy, Spiritual Resistance after the Holocaust," testifies how thousands of women in Auschwitz defiantly sang Maoz Tzur on Chanukah, affirming their faith that the Almighty, with His outstretched arm, would ultimately redeem his people and avenge their innocent blood. These stories, and many, many others, including the hostages in Gaza, who managed to sing and light candles, show how even thousands of years after the events of Chanukah, Jews continued to engage in amazing acts of faith and spiritual fortitude, continuing to set their sights on redemption and salvation even at the lowest nadirs of human suffering.

We, in our own generation, continue the inspiring Chanukah tradition of channeling spiritual strength to overcome terrible challenges. In the wake of October 7th and the difficult war that followed, we have held fast to our faith in God and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Communities facing antisemitism in the Diaspora continue to display their lights in public. Our soldiers have held their heads high while lighting candles and reciting Maoz Tzur in the ruins of Gaza, in the brush and mires of Lebanon, at the top of the Hermon ridges overlooking a troubled Syria. Uncertainty and fear will remain part of our reality, but the light of our faith will not flicker or fail. And with God's help, we will continue to spread the light of Torah and the message of Chanukah throughout a world that, one day, will be stronger, safer, and better. Shabbat Shalom.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 2:33 AM

subject: **Rav Kook** on Mikeitz: Interpreting Dreams

Mikeitz: Interpreting Dreams

The Sages made a remarkable claim regarding dreams and their interpretation: “Dreams are fulfilled according to the interpretation”

(Berachot 55b). The interpreter has a key function in the realization of a dream: his analysis can determine how the dream will come to pass.

The Talmud substantiated this statement with the words of the chief wine-butler: “Just as he interpreted, so [my dream] came to be” (Gen. 41:13).

Do dreams foretell the future? Does the interpreter really have the power to determine the meaning of a dream and alter the future accordingly?

The Purpose of Dreams Clearly, not all of our dreams are prophetic.

Originally, in humanity’s pristine state, every dream was a true dream. But with the fall of Adam, mankind left the path of integrity. Our minds became filled with wanton desires and pointless thoughts, and our dreams became more chaff than truth.

Why did God give us the ability to dream? A true dream is a wake- up call, warning us to correct our life’s direction. Our eyes are opened to a vivid vision of our future, should we not take heed to mend our ways.

To properly understand the function of dreams, we must first delve into the inner workings of divine providence in the world. How are we punished or rewarded in accordance to our actions?

The Zohar (Bo 33a) gives the following explanation for the mechanics of providence. The soul has an inner quality that naturally brings about those situations and events that correspond to our moral level. Should we change our ways, this inner quality will reflect that change, and will lead us towards a different set of circumstances.

Dreams are part of this system of providence. They are one of the methods utilized by the soul’s inner quality to bring about the appropriate outcome. The Function of the Interpreter But the true power of a dream is only realized once it has been interpreted. The interpretation intensifies the dream’s impact. As the Sages taught, “A dream not interpreted is like a letter left unread” (Berachot 55b). When a dream is explained, its images become more intense and vivid. The impact on the soul is stronger, and the dreamer is more primed for the consequential outcome.

Of course, the interpreter must be insightful and perceptive. He needs to penetrate the inner message of the dream and detect the potential influences of the soul’s inner qualities that are reflected in the dream.

Multiple Messages All souls contain a mixture of good and bad traits. A dream is the nascent development of the soul’s hidden traits, as they are beginning to be realized. A single dream may contain multiple meanings, since it reflects contradictory qualities within the soul.

When the interpreter gives a positive interpretation to a dream, he helps develop and realize positive traits hidden in the soul of the dreamer. A negative interpretation, on the other hand, will promote negative traits. As the Zohar (Mikeitz 199b) admonishes:

“A good dream should be kept in mind and not forgotten, so that it will be fulfilled.... Therefore Joseph mentioned his dream [to his family], so that it would come to pass. He would always anticipate its fulfillment.”

It is even possible to interpret multiple aspects of a dream, all of which are potentially true. Even if they are contradictory, all may still be realized. Rabbi Bena’ a related that, in his days, there were 24 dream-interpreters in Jerusalem. “Once I had a dream,” he said, “and I went to all of them. No two interpretations were the same, but they all came to pass” (Berachot 55b).

Dreams of the Nation These concepts are also valid on the national level. Deliverance of the Jewish people often takes place through the medium of dreams. Both Joseph and Daniel achieved power and influence through the dreams of gentile rulers. The Jewish people have a hidden inner potential for greatness and leadership. As long as this quality is unrealized, it naturally tries to bring about its own fulfillment — sometimes, by way of dreams.

When a person is brought before the Heavenly court, he is questioned, “Did you yearn for redemption?” (Shabbat 31a). Why is this important?

By anticipating and praying for the redemption, we help develop the inner quality of the nation’s soul, thus furthering its advance and the actualization of its destined mission.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 222- 227)

from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

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subject: Parashat Mikeitz and Chanukah

Havdalah or Chanukah Lights – Which Comes First?

By **Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

Rishonim and Acharonim have debated which should be done first on Motza’ei Shabbat, Havdalah, or Nerot Chanukah. This debate is recorded as early as the Meiri (Shabbat 23), who lived during the thirteenth century. This is a situation of competing Halachic principles, and Poskim have endlessly debated which one has priority.

Tadir VeSheAino Tadir, Tadir Kodem

On the one hand, one could argue that Havdalah should be performed first because of the principle of Tadir VeSheAino Tadir, Kodem, which states that the activity performed more often should be performed first (Zevachim 89a). This principle has firm Torah roots, as BeMidbar chapter 28 teaches that the Korban Tamid (the daily communal sacrifice) should be offered before the Korban Mussaf (special sacrificial offering for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Yamim Tovim). The Torah (BeMidbar 28:23) even states why the Tamid sacrifice is offered before the Mussaf: because we offer the Korban Tamid more frequently (and see Zevachim 89a).

We suggest a reason for this Halachah based on an idea I heard from Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. We tend to cherish events that occur infrequently, because they constitute a break from the daily routine. The Gemara (Megillah 21b) states that people find reading Megillah and reciting Hallel more “beloved” than Kri’at HaTorah. We tend to be more excited about a once-a-year visit to a beloved aunt or uncle than seeing our immediate family every day. However, the people and events that are part of our daily existence are often more important than those that we encounter infrequently. The man who spends a considerable amount of time every day with his children but does not take them on a spectacular vacation is a far superior father than one who spends little time with his children almost all year but takes them on a fancy vacation one week a year. Similarly, the activity that we perform more often has priority over the less frequently performed Mitzvah.

There are numerous applications of the Tadir principle. Men put on Tallit before Tefillin in part because of this principle (see Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 25 s.v. VeAchar). In Kiddush, we recite the Brachah of Borei Pri HaGafen before the Brachah on the Kedushat HaYom in part because of this principle (Pesachim 114a). It is partly because of this principle that we read the portion of Rosh Chodesh before the portion of Chanukah during Kriat Hatorah on Rosh Chodesh Tevet (Tosafot Shabbat 23b s.v. Hadar). The Mishnah Berurah (52:5), citing the Chayei Adam, rules that if one arrives late to Shul on Shabbat morning, he should skip the added sections of Pesukei DeZimrah for Shabbat in favor of the portions of Pesukei Dezimra that we recite daily. However, this rule is not universally applied. For example, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 643:1) rules that the Brachah of Leisheiv BaSukkah precedes the Brachah of Shehechyanu on Sukkot. Moreover, Tosafot (Shabbat 23b s.v. Hadar) note that the Tadir only rule decides which Mitzvah should be performed first. However, the Tadir rule does not decide which of two Mitzvot should be performed when only one of the two Mitzvot can be performed.

Afukey Yoma Me’Acharinan

On the other hand, Afukei Yoma Me’Acharinan, we seek to prolong our observance of Shabbat. For example, when Yom Tov occurs on Motzaei Shabbat, we recite Kiddush before Havdalah because of this principle (Pesachim 102b-103a, Rashbam 102b s.v. Rav Amar Yaknah). The Terumat Hadeshen (number 60) rules that Sefirat HaOmer should be recited before Havdalah because of this principle. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 489:9) codifies the Terumat HaDeshen, and the Mishnah Berurah does not record a

dissenting opinion. The Rama (O.C. 693:1) rules, based on this principle (see Mishna Berura 693:3), that we should first read Megillat Esther and only later recite Havdalah. The Mishnah Berurah also does not record dissenting opinions to this ruling.

Pirsumei Nissah

One might argue that Havdalah should precede Nerot Chanukah because Havdalah is a Torah-level obligation (at least according to the Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 29:1), and Nerot Chanukah is merely a rabbinical obligation. This argument, however, might not be valid, as the Gemara (Shabbat 23b) states that Nerot Chanukah take precedence over Kiddush (which is also a Torah obligation, according to the Rambam, *ibid.*). The Gemara speaks of a poor individual who has sufficient funds to purchase either Nerot Chanukah or wine for Kiddush. The Gemara states that he should buy Chanukah candles because they publicize the Chanukah miracle. On the other hand, the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 29:6) believes that wine for Kiddush is only a rabbinical obligation. Nonetheless, the Gemara does indicate Nerot Chanukah's elevated status because it "publicizes the miracle." Indeed, the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:12) writes, "the Mitzvah of Nerot Chanukah is exceedingly beloved, and one must exercise care about it, to inform people of the miracle and contribute to the offering of praise and thanks to Hashem for the miracles he has made on our behalf."

The Opinions – Rishonim and the Shulchan Aruch with its Commentaries
The Meiri (Shabbat 23) records the debate among the Rishonim as to whether Nerot Chanukah should be lit before or after Havdalah. The Meiri writes that the custom in his locale is to light Nerot Chanukah first. He explains that on Motza'ei Shabbat, we light Nerot Chanukah after the optimal time. The Meiri explains that we wish to light the Chanukah lights as early as possible, to minimize the amount of time we must light the Nerot Chanukah after its ideal time. On the other hand, the Terumat HaDeshen (number 60) and other Rishonim rule that in the synagogue, one should light Nerot Chanukah first because of the rule of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan. Another reason offered is the priority accorded to Ner Chanukah because of its role in publicizing the miracle. On the other hand, the Raavad (Temim Deim 174) and several other Rishonim rule that Havdalah should be recited first. Among the reasons these Rishonim offer is the Tadir principle, and that it is inappropriate to light Nerot Chanukah before reciting the blessing on light within the framework of Havdalah.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 681:2) rules that Chanukah lights should be kindled in the Shul before Havdalah. The Rama (*ibid.*) adds that one should also light Nerot Chanukah before reciting Havdalah at home. The Taz (O.C. 681:1) argues vigorously and at great length that one should first say Havdalah when lighting at home. The Taz emphasizes the importance of the Tadir rule, noting its Torah origin.

The Taz seeks to prove from various Talmudic passages that the Tadir rule enjoys precedence over the principle of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan. Moreover, the Taz argues that one does not extend Shabbat by lighting Chanukah candles first, because kindling Nerot Chanukah is forbidden on Shabbat. The reason for Afukei Yoma is that we do not want to treat Shabbat as a burden that we are eager to shed. However, when one lights Ner Chanukah, he has, by definition, completed Shabbat. Thus, one does not accomplish the goal of Afukei Yoma Me'Acharinan by lighting Nerot Chanukah before Havdalah. This point, explains the Taz, is what distinguishes Nerot Chanukah from Sefirat Ha'Omer and Megillah reading. The latter two activities are not forbidden to perform on Shabbat, and thus one can legitimately delay Shabbat's termination by performing them first. Acharonim and Later Codes

The accepted practice for Shul is to light Chanukah lights and subsequently perform Havdalah (Biur Halacha 681 s.v. Madlikin and Ben Ish Chai Parshat VaYeshev 21). In Shul, only one person kindles the Chanukah candles. Thus, when we light Chanukah candles first in Shul, Shabbat is prolonged for everyone except for the one who lit the Chanukah lights. Moreover, the Aruch HaShulchan (O.C. 681:2) explains that since great "publicity of the Chanukah miracle" occurs when lighting Chanukah lights in Shul, there is more reason to light Nerot Chanukah first in Shul than there is at home.

Thus, the consensus accepts that Shul Chanukah lighting enjoys priority over Havdalah. The debate, however, about what to do at home continued to rage during the period of the Acharonim. The Vilna Gaon, Eliyahu Rabba, Chamad Moshe, Beit Meir, and Chayei Adam codify the Rama. The Maharal of Prague, Pri Chadash, and Tosafot Yom Tov side with the Taz.

The later Acharonim encountered difficulty in resolving this debate. The Mishna Berura (681:3) concludes that this dispute remains unresolved; therefore, one may follow either opinion. Sephardic Jews (Ben Ish Chai, Parashat VaYeshev 21 and Rav Ovadia Yosef, Teshuvot Yechaveh Da'at 1:75) at home recite Havdalah and subsequently kindle Chanukah lights. Various communities had established practices for resolving this debate. Rav David Zvi Hoffman (Teshuvot Melamed Lehoil 1:122) records that the Minhag in Germany was to follow the Taz and perform Havdalah first. The Aruch HaShulchan (O.C. 681:2) writes that the practice in Lithuania was to perform Havdalah first, unless he heard Havdalah in Shul.

Conclusion

The debate over whether to light Chanukah candles or recite Havdalah has been partially resolved. The accepted practice in the Shul is to light the Chanukah candles first. The question regarding what to do at home has not been determined for Ashkenazim, but Sefaradim customarily recite Havdalah first. In my experience, the custom to recite Havdalah first has become accepted by most Ashkenazim at this point, as it seems the more intuitive option.

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 6:25 PM

subject: Torah Weekly - Parashat Miketz

PARSHA INSIGHTS

In the Heart of a child

"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon..." (41:14)

Little children find it difficult to do things alone. They need constant help and encouragement. They can be bold when a parent is near, but when out of sight, tears replace bravado until, once again, the child feels the parental hand that comforts.

Our first steps as babies are greeted by parental glee; hands reach out and guide our every step. When we falter, Mom and Dad are there to stop the fall.

A day comes, however, when we stumble and fall. Tears fill our eyes, dismay fills our hearts. We look around: "Mommy? Daddy? Are you there?" Only when our parents let us fall can we learn to walk. Only when our parents let us become adults can we stop being children. If, as parents, we never let our children fall, they will never learn to stand by themselves. Everything has its season, of course, and a child challenged beyond his capabilities may lose hope in himself, but a challenge at the right time is an opportunity to grow and discover who we really are.

Chanukah celebrates two events: The defeat of the vast Seleucid Greek army by a handful of Jews and the miracle of the one flask of pure oil that burned for eight days. At first glance, the defeat of our oppressors seems the greater cause for celebration; yet our focus rests on the miracle of the lights. Why? Chanukah occurred after the last of the Prophets - Chagai, Zecharia and Malachi - passed away. Hashem no longer communicated directly with humans. We were suddenly like children alone in the dark. From the darkness, we would need to forge our connection with Hashem in the furnace of our own hearts. We needed to grow up.

But growing up is difficult. "Mommy, Daddy...Are you still there?" The heart can grow a little cold with longing. We needed a little help.

The joy of Chanukah is not so much because we got what we prayed for - the defeat of our oppressors - but that our prayers were answered...with a miracle. From the center of a world where spiritual decay had tainted the holiest places, light burst forth; Hashem was still there.

That little flask would burn and burn, not just for eight days but for millennia. We would take those lights with us into the long dark night of

exile and we would know that Hashem is there with us, even in the darkest of nights.

More Jews observe Chanukah than any other Jewish festival. Those lights burned for more than just eight days. They've been burning for over two thousand years. However far one may be from their Jewish roots, a menorah still burns in their window. A little spark lingers on; a holy spark hidden in the heart of a child.

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from: **Shlomo Katz** <skatz@torah.org>

to: hamaayan@torah.org

date: Dec 17, 2025, 10:05 PM

subject: **Hamaayan** - Two More Years

Parshas Miketz - Two More Years

BS"D Volume 40, No. 10 30 Kislev 5786 December 20, 2025

Sponsored by 1) Faith Ginsburg on the yahrzeit of her sister Ann Rita Schwartz (Chana Rut bat Naftali Hertz a"h); 2) Milton Cahn in memory of his mother, Abby Cahn (Bracha bat Moshe a"h) and his wife Felice Cahn (Faygah Sarah bat Naftoli Zev a"h); 3) aron & Rona Lerner in memory of Mrs. Arline Katz (Chana Surah bat Moshe Aharon a"h); 4) The Vogel family on the yahrzeit of grandmother Miriam bat Yehuda Leib Kalkstein a"h

This week's Parashah opens, "It happened at the end of two years to the day—Pharaoh is dreaming that behold!—he is standing over the Nile." Why does the verse say, "at the end of two years," rather than "after two years"? Also, why does the verse say "is dreaming," in present tense? Lastly, what does "behold!" add, compared to saying simply that Pharaoh "was standing over the Nile"?

R' Tuvya Ha'levi z"l (Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael; 16th century) writes: Perhaps the phrase "at the end of two years" alludes to the two extra years that Yosef was required to remain in prison because he sought the help of Pharaoh's cupbearer. (See inside.) However, he writes, there is another explanation that will answer all of these questions.

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile because they were confident that it had the power to save them from any famine. The rest of the world needs rain, and G-d can withhold rain when He is angry. The Nile, however, never stops flowing, they reasoned.

The famine that Pharaoh's dream foretold was meant as a wake-up call to the Egyptians. But, the Torah is foretelling, the Egyptians would not get the message. "At the end of two years," i.e., when Yaakov will come to Egypt after two years of famine (see 45:6), Yaakov will bless Pharaoh that the Nile's tide should always rise to meet him (see Rashi z"l to 47:10). This will end the famine early. As a result, Pharaoh will still be "dreaming" that, "behold," even then, "he is standing over the Nile" with nothing to fear. (Chein Tov)

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

Midrash Rabbah applies to Yosef the verse (Tehilim 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust, and did not turn to the arrogant and to strayers after falsehood." Says the Midrash: Because Yosef said, "If only you would think of me . . . and mention me," he had to remain in prison two more years. [Until here from the Midrash]

Many commentaries ask: The Midrash seems, at first, to be praising Yosef for his Bitachon ("Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust") and it further says that he "did not turn to the arrogant." Then the Midrash seems to do an about face and criticize Yosef for turning to Pharaoh's cupbearer for help in getting out of prison.

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers a novel explanation (a different novel explanation by R' Kluger was presented last week): Our verses in fact demonstrate Yosef's great trust in Hashem. The Mishnah (beginning of Avodah Zarah) teaches that one must avoid engaging in certain transactions with idol-worshippers within three days before their holidays—including the king's birthday—so that they do not give thanks to their idols. When Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's cupbearer's dream, Yosef was concerned that the Egyptian might give thanks to his idol for the good interpretation he received. Therefore, Yosef said to him: Do not think that

the good interpretation of the dream is a reason for you to be thankful. To the contrary, you had that dream and are being released from prison "only [so that] you will think of me . . . and mention me." Yosef was not afraid to tell the cupbearer that the latter was merely a pawn in the process.

Why, then, was Yosef condemned to remain in prison two additional years? Because, though Yosef understood that Hashem has many agents and Pharaoh's cupbearer was just a tool, the latter did not share Yosef's complete trust in Hashem and he might give thanks to his idol that he was chosen to be the instrument for Yosef's release. For this slight miscalculation, Yosef had to remain in prison another two years. (Avodat Avodah: Introduction) R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (1878- 1953; Bnei Brak, Israel; the "Chazon Ish") explains the above Midrash as follows: On the one hand, Yosef was a person of very strong Bitachon. Yosef knew that his release from prison was not dependent on any initiative of his own, but he also knew that the way of the world is that a person must engage in some Hishtadlut / making efforts to help himself. Therefore, he asked the cupbearer for help. In this case, that was wrong because the Egyptian—referred to by the Midrash as "arrogant" and a "strayer after falsehood"—was not the type of person who would remember to feel gratitude to Yosef and remember to help him. As such, Yosef's request was not proper Hishtadlut; it looked like an act of desperation, and that is prohibited. (Emunah U'bitachon 2:6)

R' Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains the Midrash's indictment of Yosef as follows: Hashem created a world in which a person must engage in Hishtadlut; not only is it necessary, it is what Hashem wants. Just as wheat must be planted, watered, weeded, etc.—it will not grow if one merely has Bitachon—and just as food requires cooking and other preparation, so nearly all aspects of life require some effort on a person's part in order for them to succeed.

However, R' Mintzberg continues, the degree of Hishtadlut that is appropriate varies from person-to-person and from time-to-time. Everyone is required to examine his own life experience to determine how much Hishtadlut is expected of him. When people do that, some will find that nothing comes easily to them—a sign that Hashem expects significant Hishtadlut on their part. Others will find that they are successful with minimal effort—an indication that significant Hishtadlut on their part is wrong; instead they should rely on their Bitachon. (Of course, we don't know how Hashem determines in which group a person will be.)

We read about Yosef in last week's Parashah (39:2-3), "Hashem was with Yosef, and he became a successful man . . . whatever he did Hashem made succeed through him." We read further (39:23), "Whatever he did Hashem made successful." As such, Yosef should have realized that he was a person who should minimize his Hishtadlut and have greater Bitachon. For Yosef, in his personal circumstances, even the little bit of Hishtadlut he did by asking the Egyptian for help was too much. (Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah: Vayeishev)

"Now let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt." (41:33)

Why did Yosef believe that it was part of his role as a dream interpreter to offer advice to Pharaoh?

R' Aharon Friedman shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh in Israel) writes: Perhaps another reason Yosef had to remain in prison for an additional two years is that if he had been released merely because he correctly interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's baker and cup-bearer, he would have become just one more member of Pharaoh's existing staff of dream interpreters, spending the rest of his life interpreting nonsensical dreams for anyone and everyone in the palace. During those two more years that Yosef sat in prison, he reflected on why he was left to languish there, and he concluded that he was meant to interpret a very important dream and to make a big impression. That is why he offered the suggestion recorded in our verse.

R' Friedman adds: There is a lesson for us in this episode. One can choose, for example, to offer commentary about the economy or society's ills, or one can choose to make a difference. Likewise, a person can be someone who

theorizes about the future Geulah / redemption, or he can choose to be someone who helps to bring that Geulah closer. (Parashat Milchamah)

Shabbat “Barchuni l’shalom / Bless me for peace, angels of peace . . .” (From the poem Shalom Aleichem)

R’ Gedaliah Aharon Konig z”l (1921-1980; leader of the Breslov community in Tzefat, Israel) writes: Someone asked me how we can request of the angels to bless us, as if it is in their power to do so. Should we not be directing our prayers to G-d alone? The person who asked me this question noted that some people do not recite Shalom Aleichem because of this difficulty.

I answered him, R’ Konig records, that we have no right to refrain from reciting any of our liturgy just because we do not understand it, after generations of the Jewish People have accepted to recite that liturgy with awe and love for Hashem. As R’ Nachman of Breslov z”l (1772-1810; Ukraine) wrote: When a person starts to rely on his own intellect and wisdom, he falls into many deep traps and makes many mistakes. The essence of Judaism is to walk in the way of faith, without calculations. If we start editing our liturgy based on our own understanding, R’ Konig continues, where will we draw the line? How many Mitzvot and holy customs of our ancestors will we “edit” as well, based on our own understanding? Of course, we should try to understand what we are doing, but we have no right to stop any accepted practice just because we do not understand it. (Quoted in Otzrot Geonei Ha’dorot: Shabbat Kodesh II p.293) Hamaayan © 2023 by Torah.org.

<https://aish.com/why-the-first-day-of-hanukkah-is-a-miracle/>

Why the First Day of Hanukkah Is a Miracle

by **Peter Himmelman** *

December 10, 2025

What Hanukkah teaches us about wonder in the age of AI.

There are at least a thousand things in the Torah that people don’t think of as “real.” The splitting of the Red Sea. A talking donkey. Manna falling from the firmament. Angels who look and act like human beings. A ladder to heaven. Babies born to elderly couples. An entire universe created in six days, with a weary God resting on the seventh.

I know what reality is, they say. It’s me sitting here, typing out words on my computer, looking out the window where I can see our lawn, now as verdant as an Irish meadow. Last week it was nothing but brown, dead grass. Then came a massive rainfall, almost five straight days, and the grass seeds that our gardener spread across the yard suddenly took hold. Everything sprang into life. Three straight days of sunshine helped too. All of that is normal, undeniably so. Nothing like the stuff in the Torah.

Could it be that our perception of grass as “real” comes from the way repetition has inured us to its sheer prevalence, creating a dulling of my imagination?

What if we had never seen grass growing before? What if there had only been pebbles? Would we be shocked at seeing this magical green carpet we call grass? I think I would. I think we all would.

What if one morning the sky went from jet-black to a blaze of gold just that single time, would our casual appraisal of the sun rising turn to radical amazement?

How about the sun? A ball of fire that rises only in the east, hangs above us each day to brighten and warm the world, and sets only in the west. What if this had happened only once? If one morning the sky went from jet-black to a blaze of gold just that single time, would our casual appraisal turn to radical amazement?

It would also bring with it a great sense of fear, of excitement, and, with its intense beauty, untold pleasure.

Reclaiming Astonishment Is the sun real? Is our sentience real? Is grass truly nothing to be excited about? Would we dismiss their supposed normalcy, their unquestioned reality, so easily if we were seeing and feeling them for the first time?

How about the idea that a fully formed human being exits a human body after a predictable nine months in the womb? How do we so easily compartmentalize the birth and life of human beings into the category of known, understood, normal—and then, off we go? How did birth, of all things, end up in nearly the same mental file as “traffic” and “Sunday morning bagels”?

Have we lost something essential in having seen these things so many times that we have failed to see the obvious? Have we trained ourselves out of wonder?

Maybe the real problem isn’t that the Torah is full of unreal stories and the lawn is full of real grass. Maybe it’s that once something repeats often enough, we exile it from the realm of the miraculous and demote it to “just the way things are.” Grass, having appeared once, would shatter our minds. The sky, lit once, would blow our minds. The first birth would draw us to our knees. But seen a thousand times, or even a half dozen, they become scenery. Hanukkah and the Miracle of the Ordinary There aren’t eight days of Hanukkah because the miracle lasted eight days—it only lasted seven. Once oil burns, that first day is already taken for granted. We expect flame when we light something. But the rabbis insisted that the very first day was miraculous too. Not the extension of the oil, not the spectacle, but the ordinary itself—fire responding to wick, sustaining light, obeying laws that are themselves miraculous. The miracle begins even before it stretches into the unexpected; it begins the moment flame appears at all.

The natural world itself is the miracle, albeit one we are used to.

In that light, the Torah begins to look a little different. Maybe it is not trying to provide a journalist’s account of physics-defying events. Maybe it is attempting to describe the world as it actually is: inexplicable at its core. The larger point isn’t so much about miracles. It’s understanding that the natural world itself is the miracle.

Science, physics, mathematics, artificial intelligence, as useful and astonishing as they are, have not come close to explaining the nature of reality, the fundamentals of consciousness, or the state of being. They have given us powerful names and models, precise measurements, and dazzling predictions. They have shown us how certain processes unfold. But they have not told us, with any finality, what existence is, why it matters, or what it asks of us.

If we see grass only as a product of biology and chemistry—things which give us hints about its properties, its growth, its reproductive abilities—we may have missed something profound: a sense of wonder about the world. We may not be able to escape from a purely rote apprehension of the vast forms and phenomena of the universe, and in our own inner-universe: the mind. By narrowing the frame to what can be measured, we risk cutting ourselves off from what can only be marveled at. By insisting that “real” means “fully explained,” we shrink reality to fit the size of our explanations. AI and the Triumph of the Predictable We are building machines whose entire purpose is to make everything far more accessible, and therefore, more commonplace.

And just as we are forgetting how to be astonished, we are building machines whose entire purpose is to make everything far more accessible, and therefore, more commonplace. Artificial intelligence systems that can predict what we will say, what we will buy, what we will fear, what and who we will trust—before we are even conscious of deciding. They scan our words, our patterns, our hesitations. They answer our questions. They finish our sentences.

In one sense, they are miracles of a kind. In another sense, they are the final triumph of mystery-reducing repetition. If grass is “just biology,” the sun is “just astrophysics,” and a human life is “just chemistry plus time,” then AI becomes “just computation.” The world grows more manageable and less enigmatic at the same time. Everything can be modeled, forecast, optimized—and nothing is quite allowed to be holy.

Striving for Truth The Torah has a word for truth—emet—that I’ve begun to hear differently. It isn’t a narrow fact-check, a little green badge announcing “accurate.” It suggests something more like the reliability of an entire story, from beginning to end: aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to mem,

the middle, to taf, the last letter. Emet is not simply, “Did this happen?” It is, “What kind of world are we living in? Can it be trusted? Is there a deep coherence beneath all this seeming chaos?” And if so, might we go so far as to think of God as that coherence?

Our sciences and our machines will go on naming things. They will get better and better at telling us how. Emet, truth, asks why. Why this grass? Why this sun? Why this child, this life, this love, this death? Why this brief, flickering consciousness that is uniquely mine—and not yours? Having been born, what then, is our role?

Imagine, for a moment, that we succeed at some of the things our age keeps promising. We cure many of the dread diseases. We feed far more people. We house them. We keep them safer than any generation before. Our machines help us coordinate all of this. The bluntest edges of existence are softened.

If, in such a world, we still walk past the grass without seeing it, still watch the sunrise without feeling anything, still treat our daily affairs as items on a calendar, then all our explanations and successes will indeed have accomplished a great deal. They will ease suffering, feed the hungry, cure illness, and shelter those who need shelter. But they will not, by themselves, bring us any closer to a more profound sense of life, a feeling of meaning and purpose that makes living worthwhile. Without that, even our greatest achievements may ring hollow. We will have information without emet. We are standing at a threshold. The changes coming toward us—through medicine, through technology, through AI—are far beyond what even just a few years ago we could have imagined. They are not decades away; in historical terms, they are moments away. We may soon live in a world that is, paradoxically and by many measures, more controlled, more predictable, more “ordinary” than any that came before it.

The question is what we will bring with us across that threshold: a further numbing of our sense of mystery, a reflex to call the Torah fiction and the lawn reality and leave it at that—or a willingness to see that everything we have ever called ordinary is, in fact, extraordinary.

Curing disease, ending hunger, providing shelter and safety, building astonishing machines—these may be the prelude. Emet is something else. It has to do with the quality of our insight, with whether we allow ourselves to recognize that grass and Red Seas and newborns and algorithms all hang on a thread we did not create. If we can recover even a homeopathic dose of that awareness, then perhaps the world we are hurtling toward will not only function better, it might also feel as if we had reclaimed some of the mystery and beauty that surrounded us when we were young.

And in that mystery, in that beauty, lies everything.

* Peter Himmelman is a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated songwriter, composer and author [and a baal teshuva]. His latest book, *Let Me Out (Unlock Your Creative Mind and Bring Your Ideas to Life)*, was released in fall 2016 by Random House.

from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

date: Dec 18, 2025, 7:00 AM

subject: Morals and Meanings in Miketz

Miketz

Two Extra Years – Understanding Bitachon

After having interpreted the chief butler’s dream as saying that he would be released from prison in three days’ time and restored to his former position, Yosef asks that he remember him to Pharaoh. However, as our parsha concludes, the butler did not remember Yosef. Indeed, as we are told in the beginning of the following parsha, it would be two years before he did so.[1] As is well known, the Midrash[1] states that these two years were a punishment for Yosef’s words at that time, for they represented a breach of bitachon (trust in Hashem) on Yosef’s part. However, we need to understand why this request was looked upon in such a negative light. By that stage, Yosef had been in jail for ten years and the butler’s release presented an opportunity for him to secure his own release. Is it not acceptable to engage in hishtadlus (effort) alongside bitachon? Was he expected to do nothing? Additionally, why did this infraction lead to two extra years?

Bitachon is typically referred to as a “trait”. However, a more meaningful understanding of bitachon is that it is a mood. After all, when one trusts in someone else and relies on him, one’s mood is free from the anxiety that would exist if he had to deal with the situation by himself. Indeed, this is the description of bitachon as found in the classic work Chovos Halevavos:[2] “Trust” is the peace of mind that one has as he relies on someone else.

In other words, bitachon is not defined by what one does or does not do. Those actions are expressions of bitachon; bitachon itself is a mood and a state of being.

In this light, let us consider the following fascinating and profound approach as to where Yosef was found wanting, provided by R’ Shlomo Kluger. It may well have been acceptable for Yosef to ask the butler to remember him, as that represents basic hishtadlus. However, even if the request itself was legitimate, the question remains — when is the right time to ask? Yosef has just established, through his own interpretation of the dream, that the butler will be released from jail in three days’ time. This means that until day three, he is not going anywhere. But Yosef asked him immediately, even though he does not need to mention this to the butler for another two days. Why does he ask now? In terms of the exceedingly high standard of bitachon expected of Yosef, making this request two days early was a symptom of unease and anxiety. It was as if he couldn’t afford to wait another two days. For the level of reliance expected from Yosef, this was a breach of the mood of bitachon, for which he spent another two years in jail. Moreover, we now understand why the extension was for two years specifically, one for each day that preceded his request.

As always, we are not expected to conduct ourselves in accordance with the level expected of the greats of the Chumash. We are, however, fully expected to learn the relevant lessons from them, to be applied at our own level. Every application of the mood of bitachon into our own experience will serve to give more meaning to those two extra years through which the Torah taught it.

[1] Cited in Rashi to Bereishis 40:23 s.v. vayishkacheiyu. [2] Shaar Habitachon chap. 4

from: **Rabbi Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

date: Dec 17, 2025, 9:44 AM

Chanukah Lights

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Introduction

A peculiarity of the Mishnah is that there is no maseches devoted to discussing the laws of Chanukah, as opposed to other mitzvot derabbanan, such as Purim and Eruvin. There are several mishnayot that mention Chanukah, all tangentially, and in only one of these does it refer to the Chanukah lamp. A Mishnah in Bikkurim (1:6) states that the last time for bringing bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash every year is on Chanukah. A Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (1:3) states that beis din sent out messengers to advise people which day was Rosh Chodesh so that they could observe the holidays on the correct day. The Mishnah teaches that these messengers informed people when Rosh Chodesh Kislev was so that they could observe Chanukah on the correct day.

Another instance is a Mishnah in Bava Kama (6:6) that states that someone who placed a lamp outside his house is obligated to pay damages should an animal knock over the lamp and start a fire. However, Rabbi Yehudah states that if the lamp was someone’s neir Chanukah, he is exempt from paying damages since he had permission to place the lamp this low. It should be noted that only this last Mishnah is making any reference to the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) discusses whether this latter Mishnah proves that it is a mitzvah to place the Chanukah light near the ground. A subsequent passage of Gemara (Shabbos 22a) concludes that the neir Chanukah cannot be placed more than 20 amos above street level. If the menorah is placed more than 20 amos above street level, people will not notice the neir Chanukah, and publicizing the miracle will not be achieved.

Masseches Shabbos Notwithstanding the lack of a masseches devoted to the laws of Chanukah, there is extensive discussion about it in the Gemara. The second chapter of Masseches Shabbos, Bameh Madlikin, which discusses the kindling of the Shabbos lights, discusses the laws of Chanukah. The Mishnah there explains which wicks and oils may be used for the Shabbos lights, and the Gemara states that the same wicks and oils may be used to kindle the Chanukah lights. Interestingly, when the Rif begins discussing the laws of Chanukah in his halachos to Masseches Shabbos, he has a subheading about neir Chanukah, something very unusual for him.

Using the Chanukah lights Although sometimes the laws governing the Shabbos lights and those regarding the Chanukah lights are identical, there are many applications for which the laws are very different. For example, halacha requires that we use the Shabbos lights and that there should be light everywhere in the house that someone walks on Shabbos. However, the amora'im dispute whether one may use the Chanukah lights. Rav Huna and Rav Chisda permit using the neir Chanukah, whereas Rav prohibits it. Rava (Shabbos 21b) adds, that according to Rav's opinion, one is required to have a lamp near the Chanukah lights, which we call the shamash. Rava rules that if a significant fire, such as an active fireplace, is near the Chanukah lights, there is no need to also have a shamash since the light of the fire is sufficient. Even so, for a prominent person, who would not use a bonfire or fireplace as his source of light, a shamash should be lit, notwithstanding that there is a bonfire.

Among the rishonim we find several opinions as to why it is forbidden to use the Chanukah lights. Some explain that this is because of a concept called bizuy mitzvah, treating a mitzvah object in a contemptuous manner. The source from a pasuk teaches that it is forbidden to perform the mitzvah of kisuy hadam by pushing the earth with your foot. The mitzvah should be done by picking up the earth with your hand and placing it atop the blood. Another situation that violates this rule is to dispose of an object that was used for a mitzvah, such as worn-out sechach or tzitzis, by putting them in the regular trash. There is no requirement to place these items in sheimos (genizah), because they have no sanctity, but they should not be treated with disdain (Shabbos 21a-b); placing them in the regular garbage is demeaning for an object that was once used to perform a mitzvah. Returning to the laws of neir Chanukah, the Ba'al Hamaor explains that it is prohibited to use them because of the law of bizuy mitzvah, and then explains that this is true only if one uses them for his own benefit. In his opinion, it is permitted to perform a mitzvah using the light of the neir Chanukah.

The Rosh seems to hold an approach similar to that of the Ba'al Hamaor. He rules that one may not use the light of the menorah to perform a permanent job or other work that he considers inappropriate. It is permitted to do something temporary when does not give the impression that he is treating the mitzvah disdainfully.

All halachic authorities agree that (1) there is a concept called bizuy mitzvah and (2) that it is probably prohibited min haTorah. However other rishonim do not consider this an adequate reason to explain why someone cannot benefit from the neiros Chanukah. Covering the blood of shechitah by kicking the soil rather than using your hand to perform the mitzvah demonstrates disdain for a mitzvah. But why is it disdainful to use the Chanukah lamp light to read or to perform a mitzvah? Even using this light to eat dinner does not seem to be treating these lamps with scorn! Thus, it is understandable that other rishonim propose other reasons to explain the prohibition against using the Chanukah lights.

Rashi (Shabbos 21b) explains that the reason we cannot use the Chanukah lamp is so that it is obvious that it was kindled to fulfill a mitzvah. Yet another approach is that, since the neiros Chanukah are kindled to represent the lights kindled in the Beis Hamikdash, just as those lights may not be used for personal benefit, so, too, the lights of the menorah should not be used (Ran).

Differences in halacha Are there any halachic differences among these various opinions? The Beis Halevi (commentary to the Torah, page 56) explains that there are. In his opinion, Rashi holds that the prohibition not to use the Chanukah lights is limited to the members of the household who

kindled them for the mitzvah, whereas according to the Ran (and certainly those who prohibit its use because of bizuy mitzvah) no one may use the light of the Chanukah lamps.

Rav Ya'akov Molcho (Shu't Ya'akov Molcho #49, quoted by Birkei Yosef 673:5) permits using the light of the neiros Chanukah to look up a halachic question about the neiros Chanukah themselves. Since this is a Chanukah need, it is permitted. It would seem that this opinion could hold like Rashi that we want it demonstrated that these lamps are designated for a mitzvah -- using them to research a question about their observance does not take away from that acknowledgement. Alternatively, Rav Molcho could hold like those rishonim who prohibit using the lights because of bizuy mitzvah, and using them to research a Chanukah question is not a bizuy mitzvah. However, according to the approach of the Ran that it is because the Chanukah lights should be treated like the lights of the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash, one would not be allowed to use the Chanukah lights to research a halachic inquiry just as it is forbidden to use the Beis Hamikdash menorah lights for this purpose.

If they went out The Gemara (Shabbos 21a-b) discusses the following question: If the Chanukah lights were all set up properly with the correct wicks and oil such that they should burn just fine, but for some reason they went out anyway before the required time that they should be lit, is one halachically required to rekindle the lights? This is referred to as kavsah zakuk la, if it becomes extinguished, he is obligated to rekindle it (Rav Huna) or kavsah ein zakuk la, if it becomes extinguished, he is not obligated to rekindle it (Rav and Rav Chisda). The halacha is kavsah ein zakuk la (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 673:2). In a responsum related to this issue, the Rashba was asked: After reciting his berachos and kindling his Chanukah light, someone was trying to have it burn clearer. While doing this, he extinguished his lamp. Is he required to rekindle it, and, if he does, does he recite the berachos again? The Rashba rules that he is not required to rekindle his lamps, and, should he choose to rekindle them, he should not recite any berachos (Shu't Harashba 1:539, quoted by Ran).

When to light? The Gemara (21b) also states that the mitzvah is to kindle the lights from "sunset" until people are no longer walking in the marketplace. In earlier days, after it got dark, people basically remained home -- there were no street lights. The Gemara states that there was an ethnic group, called the Tarmudai, who would remain in the streets selling people kindling wood. Someone who discovered that he was short of kindling wood to start his home hearth would go out in the street to purchase kindling wood from the Tarmudai. The Tarmudai were the last people on the unlit streets; when they disappeared, there was no longer any mitzvah to kindle the Chanukah lights, since no one was outdoors for whom to publicize the miracle. Thus, someone who neglected to kindle the Chanukah lights after the Tarmudai went home did not fulfill any mitzvah; if they recited a beracha, it would be a beracha in vain.

The halachic authorities note that since today people do go outdoors much later at night, there is a mitzvah to kindle Chanukah lights later in the evening, should one be unable to kindle them as it gets dark.

How many? The Gemara presents a lengthy discussion regarding how many lights one should kindle oneach night of Chanukah. In halachic conclusion, the rule is that the mitzvah requires that one kindle only one light each night. However, the Gemara also presents mehadrin methods of fulfilling the mitzvah. In practice, there are two approaches: Ashkenazim -- each individual kindles the number of lights corresponding to the night of Chanukah. Sephardim -- the household as a whole kindles only one menorah, again with the number of lights corresponding to the night of the festival. Public kindling The Gemara (21b) states that it is a mitzvah to kindle the Chanukah lights outside. In general, this approach is observed today only in Eretz Yisrael, whereas in chutz la'aretz the accepted practice is to kindle the Chanukah lights in a window that can be seen from the public area. The poskim explain that, at the time of the Gemara the primary pirsmei nisa was for those outside. In chutz la'aretz today, the primary pirsmei nisa is for the members of one's household (see Rema, Orach Chayim 672:2 and commentaries thereon). A consequence of this is that, in our generation,

should one return home late at night, when no one is in the street but his household members are awake, he may kindle his Chanukah lights then. What berachos? What berachos does one recite prior to kindling neir Chanukah? The Gemara (23a) states that, on the first night of Chanukah, one recites three berachos, Lehadlik neir shel Chanukah, She'asah Nissim and Shehecheyanu. On the other nights, we recite only the first two. The Gemara teaches that someone who is not kindling the lights and is not fulfilling the mitzvah by having someone kindle the lights for him, recites the second and third beracha (on the first night) upon seeing the lights in someone else's home. After the first night of Chanukah, someone who is not kindling his own menorah recites the beracha of She'asah Nissim upon seeing someone else's lights burning.

The Gemara proceeds to ask how we can recite a beracha on neiros Chanukah that states that You Hashem commanded us concerning this mitzvah, when the mitzvah to kindle neiros Chanukah is a rabbinic requirement, not a Torah mitzvah. How can we say vetzivanu when Hashem did not command us? The Gemara concludes that, since the Torah commanded us to observe what Chazal teach us, when they command us to keep a

5 mitzvah this is equivalent to the Torah commanding us – hence the wording vetzivanu is fully appropriate. I saw an interesting question raised by Rav Meir Mazuz, the late rosh yeshiva and posek of the Tunisian community in Eretz Yisrael. As we learned at the very beginning of our article, the entire discussion of the laws of neir Chanukah is a tangential discussion in the second chapter of Masseches Shabbos, whose focus is on the details of the mitzvah of lighting lamps for Shabbos. Since kindling Shabbos lights is also a mitzvah miderabbanan, Rav Mazuz asked: why does the Gemara (Shabbos 23a) discuss the wording of the beracha on a mitzvah derabbanan when discussing the mitzvah of kindling neir Chanukah? Why not ask the identical question about the beracha recited when kindling the Shabbos lights? This question should be asked first, since the entire chapter of mishnayos discusses kindling Shabbos lights, whereas kindling Chanukah lights is a side point discussed in the Gemara that is not mentioned in the Mishnah? Rav Mazuz suggests that, at the time of the Gemara, no beracha at all was recited on kindling Shabbos lights – this practice developed later, during the era of the geonim. House and two courtyards The Gemara discusses a case of a house that opens onto two different courtyards, each of which has a separate entrance to the street. This passage of Gemara is based on what is called mar'is ayin, raising suspicion that one violated halacha. Another way of describing this is: “Oh, my goodness, what will the neighbors say?” As mentioned above, in the time of the Gemara, kindling Chanukah lights was primarily to publicize the miracle of Chanukah to those outside the house. Every house and every courtyard had a lamp kindled that could be seen from the street. The Gemara rules that someone whose house opened on two different courtyards is required to kindle a menorah in both places. If he kindled only one, the people in the street that passes the other courtyard might think that he neglected to observe the mitzvah of kindling Chanukah lights, which is a violation of mar'is ayin. Based on this passage, the Beis Halevi questions a ruling that we quoted above, in which it was concluded that kavsah ein zakuk lah – if the lamp went out after being properly prepared, halacha does not require you to rekindle it. The Beis Halevi questions why he is not required to kindle it because of mar'is ayin, the neighbors will think that he did not kindle a light? Actually, this question is recorded earlier (Sha'arei Teshuvah 673:7, quoting Shu't Shevus Yaakov 3:48) who answers that should the lamp go out early, he must leave the oil and the wick in place until the required time is passed. This way, those who see that no lamp is burning will also, upon inspection, see that there was a lamp set up, and realize that this was a case of kavsah, and that he indeed fulfilled his halachic requirement. (The Beis Halevi himself provides a different answer to this question, requiring that you rekindle the lamp because of mar'is ayin, notwithstanding that kavsah ein zakuk lah. He notes that his position is at odds with what is written in the halachic authorities, all of

6 whom imply that, since we paskin kavsah ein zakuk lah, there is no obligation to rekindle a lamp if it was burning properly and then subsequently went out before a half hour transpired.) Mixing lights Some authorities contend that you should not kindle some of your lights from wax and others from oil on the same night, because people will think that this is two different people lighting (Shu't Shaar Efrayim #39). However, the Birkei Yosef (673:2) disagrees, noting that there is no mar'is ayin since you are not required to kindle more than one light. Women and neir Chanukah The Gemara rules that women are obligated in neir Chanukah, because of the reason that they were also included in the miracle. Nevertheless, several prominent authorities rule that a married woman should not light if her husband is home and kindles the menorah (Mishnah Berurah 671:9); others contend that even single women should not kindle the menorah if there are men kindling in the house (Chasam Sofer, commentary to Masseches Shabbos 21b s. v. Vehamehadrin; however, cf. Shu't Sha'ar Efrayim #42). Conclusion The Gemara (Shabbos 23b) states that someone ragil beneir will merit sons who are Torah scholars. Rashi explains that this refers both to the lights of Shabbos and those of Chanukah, whereas the Rosh mentions only those of Chanukah. The Gra says that the Rosh also meant the Shabbos lights, whereas the Maharitz Chayes disagrees. Some authorities contend that ragil beneir includes having a nice menorah (Birkei Yosef 673:7, quoting earlier poskim).