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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON MIKETZ - CHANUKA - 5774

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**Ner Chanukah: A Truly Beloved Mitzvah**  
**Rabbi Avraham Shulman**

The holiday of Chanukah is associated with many beautiful minhagim. Of all these only the Menorah was given the distinction of being the vehicle through which the actual mitzvah of the chag, Hadlakos Neros, is performed. Our chachamim have provided us with the deeper meaning behind these holy lights, which can teach and inspire us as we observe this special mitzvah.

The Rambam writes in הל' הנוכה פרק ד' הל' יב' that the mitzvah of Ner Chanukah is: "הכיבה היא עד מאד" most beloved. Why is this mitzvah particularly beloved? We know that Chanukah was instituted as a chag כדי to offer thanksgiving and praise to Hashem. There is a specific obligation on the individual to appreciate the miracles that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has done and continues to do for us in our daily lives. The Menorah as the symbol of the נס that affirmed our victory and the return of kedushah to the Beis Hamikdash, is the מעשה מצוה, the act through which we evoke these feelings. The mitzvah of Neros Chanukah being one that serves to arouse feelings of love and appreciation for the השגחה ה', certainly is very precious and beloved.

This understanding of the mitzvah of Ner Chanukah provides a practical distinction. There is a major discussion in many areas of halacha regarding whether or not מצות צריכות כוונה. The chachamim debate the nature of the intention one needs while performing a mitzvah. We pasken that when it comes to mitzvos d'rabbanan כוונה צריכות-only the minimal intention of doing a mitzvah is needed. Chanukah as a mitzvah d'rabbanan normally would also not require specific intention. However due to the nature of hadlakas neros as a mitzvah of שבה והודאה, one would be required to have specific כוונה to fulfill the mitzvah. R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l in his sefer Minchas Shlomo in fact writes that ner

Chanukah is not like other mitzvos that we do and fulfill even if we do not fully comprehend the act that is being performed. Rather, the essence of the mitzvah is the הודאה, and through the lighting one must focus on the nissim that Hashem has done for us. This is why we have the minhag to recite הנרות הללו which details these miraculous events immediately after the lighting of the Chanukah candles.

Another aspect that the neros represent is the אור התורה, the light and understanding of the wisdom of Torah. The Gemara in Baba Basra 25b tells us that one who seeks wisdom should turn southward. The reason for this the Gemara says is that the Menorah which faced south in the Beis Hamikdash represented החמה. The Netziv writes that when Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to comprehend the words of Torah that he had been taught by Hashem he would face the Menorah. The aura of their light would provide Moshe with the comprehension needed to understand the divine command.

The Greeks sought to subjugate the Jewish people not physically but spiritually. They tried to extinguish the wisdom of the Torah and replace it with a worldview that placed man, rather than God as the source of ultimate truth. Our lighting of the Menorah affirms the eternal flame of the wisdom of Torah and its ideals. Especially during a season on the secular calendar which highlights materialism and assimilation, the neros should serve as reminder of our commitment and sacrifice to the ultimate source of wisdom: Hashem's Torah and the life of kedusha it brings us. May we all merit to benefit from the pure light of the Chanukah Menorah.

<http://koltorah.org/ravj/channukahlights.htm>

The Proper Time to Kindle Channukah Lights, from Volume 11  
Number 12: Vayeshev and Channukah

From Parshat Vayishlach Vol. 11 No. 12 Date of issue: 23 Kislev 5762  
-- December 8, 2001

### **The Proper Time to Kindle Chanukah Lights** **by Rabbi Howard Jachter**

In this essay, we will focus on the dispute over the ideal time for kindling the Chanukah light. We shall focus on when one may delay lighting and how a family should conduct itself when a member will arrive later than the optimal time for lighting.

The Ideal Time for Lighting The Gemara (Shabbat 21b) writes that the proper time for lighting the Chanukah light is "from the setting of the sun." The Rishonim disagree about how to interpret this somewhat ambiguous phrase. The Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 4:5) rules that it refers to the beginning of sunset (Shkiah). The Tur (Orach Chaim 672) and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 672:1) rule that the Gemara refers to the end of the process of the sun setting (Tzeit Hakochovim). This dispute has not been resolved. The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 672:4) writes that the generally accepted practice is to light at Tzeit Hakochovim, but he notes that some light at Shkiah.

The dispute over the precise time of Tzeit Hakochovim further complicates the question. This important dispute between Rabbeinu Tam, the Vilna Gaon, and the Yereim is summarized by the Biur Halacha (261:2 s.v. Mitchilat Hashkiah). No consensus regarding the exact time to light Chanukah candles has emerged because of these unresolved disputes.

There is a considerable range of opinions regarding the precise ideal time for lighting. When I served as an assistant to Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, he lit very long candles at Shkiah so that the candles should last at least a half an hour after Tzeit Hakochovim. I have heard that this was Rav Soloveitchik's consistent practice throughout his life. The objective of this approach is to satisfy both of the aforementioned opinions of the Rishonim. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yalkut Yosef 5:208) rules that in Israel the proper time to light is fifteen minutes after sunset. Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited in Rabbi Shimon Eider's Halachot of Chanukah

p.20), when living in New York lit thirteen to eighteen minutes after sunset. Rabbi Aaron Felder (Moadei Yeshurun p.7), though, cites Rav Moshe as ruling that the preferable time to light is ten minutes after sunset. Rav Aharon Kotler (cited in Rabbi Eider, *ibid.*) when living in the New York area lit twenty-five to thirty minutes after sunset. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzsky (cited in Emet Leyaakov p.251) believes that Chanukah lights in the New York area ideally should be kindled approximately twenty minutes after sunset. One should consult with his Rav regarding which opinion to follow.

An interesting question arises regarding one who is traveling in a time zone farther west than his residence. Poskim (see Rav Efraim Greenblatt, *Teshuvot Rivevot Efraim* 2:184) debate whether the traveler fulfills the Mitzva of Chanukah lights with his spouse's lighting at home, if at the time of the spouse's lighting it is nighttime at the place of residence and daytime in the place where he is traveling. Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited by Rabbi Aharon Felder, *Moadei Yeshurun* p.4) rules that the spouse's lighting does not fulfill the traveler's Mitzva in such a circumstance.

**The Latest Time to Light** The Gemara (*ibid.*) writes that the latest time to light is "when the people have left the market." The Rambam (*ibid.*) rules that this is approximately a half an hour after the ideal time to light. *Tosafot* (Shabbat 21b s.v. *Dee Lo*) write that nowadays, since we light inside the house, the lighting is focused on the members of the household. Thus, we may light even after people have left the market. The Rama (O.C.672:2) rules in accordance with *Tosafot*, but writes that we should nevertheless strive to light at the original ideal time. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*ibid.*) explains that, in general, we strive to fulfill rabbinical Mitzvot in the way that most resembles the manner that the Mitzva was fulfilled when Chazal established it. Since at the time of Chazal, Nerot Chanukah had to be lit at Shkiah or Tzeit we still try to light at that time even though the reason for doing so no longer applies. With the introduction of electric lighting, people travel in the streets long after nightfall. This constitutes yet another reason why it is acceptable (*Bedieved*) to light later than the ideal time specified in the Gemara.

The Mishna Berura (672:11) cites the Magen Avraham who rules that one may light with a Beracha only if there are others who are awake and see the Chanukah lights. However, the Chamad Moshe (cited in the Shaar Hatziyun 672:17) rules that one may recite the Beracha until dawn even if he is the only one awake in the home. The Chafetz Chaim (author of both the Mishna Berura and the Shaar Hatziyun) rules that since the dispute has not been resolved, one should refrain from reciting a Beracha in such a situation. However, he writes that one should not rebuke one who follows the Chamad Moshe. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Teshuvot Igrot Moshe* O.C. 4:105:7) rules in accordance with the Chamad Moshe. This dispute hinges on whether one fulfills the Mitzva of Chanukah lighting when one "publicizes" the Mitzva only to himself.

**Delaying the Lighting** Many people are unable to light with their families at the ideal time due to work and other obligations. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzsky (cited in Emet Leyaakov p. 251 and 254) believes that theoretically the Halacha requires the spouse who is home at the ideal time for lighting to light on behalf of the entire family and not wait for the latecomer. Nevertheless, Rav Yaakov rules that because of the great value of Shalom Bayit, it is proper for the family to postpone lighting until the latecomer arrives. Common practice appears to accord with this ruling. Rav Yaakov cites the Gemara (Shabbat 23b) as precedent for this ruling. The Gemara states that if a poor individual can afford to purchase either Chanukah candles or Shabbat candles but not both, he should purchase Shabbat candles. The Gemara explains that since Shabbat Candles promote Shalom Bayit they enjoy priority over Chanukah lights. Rav Yaakov reasons that since Shalom Bayit enjoys priority over Chanukah candles, one delay kindling Chanukah lights due to Shalom Bayit considerations.

**Yeshiva Students** Every year Rav Hershel Schachter hangs a notice in the Bait Midrash of the Yeshiva University Kollel during Chanukah. The

notice relates that when the YU Kollel was established in the early 1960's, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein (the original Rosh Kollel) asked Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik whether the Kollel students should interrupt their studies to return home to kindle Chanukah lights at the optimal time or remain in the Bait Midrash until the conclusion of their scheduled study period. The Rav responded that the students should continue their studies until the conclusion of the usual study time, even though the ideal time to light Chanukah candles will pass. The Rav cited as a precedent the Meiri to Shabbat 21b who noted the practice of Yeshiva students of his area not to interrupt their studies in order to kindle Chanukah lights at its ideal time. (The story is cited in Rav Schachter's recently published *Sefer, Peninei Harav*).

Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited in Rabbi Aaron Felder, *Ohalei Yeshurun* p.8) agrees with this ruling. He reasons that communal Torah study enjoys priority over lighting Chanukah candles at its optimal time. However, when I studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion, the Yeshiva interrupted its studies in order to fulfill the Mitzva of Hadlakat Nerot Chanukah at its optimal time. In addition, Rav J. David Bleich left the Yeshiva University Yadin Yadin Kollel early on Chanukah afternoons, because he did not subscribe to the rulings of Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Feinstein.

**Defense of the Ruling of Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Feinstein** The Rambam (*Hilchot Ishut* 15:2) appears to serve as a sound basis for the rulings of the Rav and Rav Moshe. The Rambam rules that one may postpone marriage in order to spend extra time studying Torah. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even Haezer* 1:3) codifies the Rambam's ruling as normative. The Rambam bases his ruling on the Talmudic principle of "one who is involved in one Mitzva is excused from performing another." The problem with the Rambam's ruling is that the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 9a) and the Rambam (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:4) rule that Talmud Torah excuses one from performing only a Mitzva that others are able to accomplish in his place. The Mitzva to marry and have children is an obligation that devolves upon the individual and cannot be accomplished by others.

Many Acharonim have grappled with this problem and have offered a variety of answers. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's article on this topic that appears in the Yeshiva University publication *Kovod Harav* summarizes the classic approaches to this problem and offers a novel solution. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Even Haezer* 1:13) and Rav Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Hearot, Yevamot addendum* 1) answer that Talmud Torah does not excuse one from performing a Mitzva, but it permits one to delay performing the Mitzva. The Rambam uses the principle of "one who is involved in a Mitzva is excused from performing another" in the context of Talmud Torah to mean that he is excused from performing the Mitzva expediently.

[According to this approach, we have a strong basis for the ruling of the Rav and Rav Moshe. Talmud Torah does not excuse a Yeshiva student entirely from lighting Chanukah lights. It does permit him, however, to delay fulfillment of the Mitzva. We should note that this ruling does not apply to women who study Torah, since they are obligated to light Nerot Chanukah but excused from studying Torah. Voluntary fulfillment of a Mitzva does not excuse one from optimal fulfillment of the Mitzvot he is obligated to observe.

**Conclusion** One should try to light Nerot Chanukah at the optimal time. However, defining the precise time has been an elusive task. It appears that common practice is simply to light when the men return from Maariv. Shalom Bayit and male communal Torah study might permit one to light after the optimal time.

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<http://koltorah.org/ravj/14-13%20Late%20Lighting%20of%20Chanukah%20Lights.htm>

**Rabbi Jachter's Halacha Files** (and other Halachic compositions)  
Parshat Miketz-Chanuka 28 Kislev 5765 December 11,  
2004 Vol.14 No.13

## **Late Lighting of Chanukah Lights by Rabbi Chaim Jachter**

**Introduction** A few years ago we discussed the question of what precisely is the optimal time to kindle Chanukah lights. In this issue, we will discuss situations when Halacha might tolerate lighting after the optimal time. I am indebted to TABC's Y9 class of 5764 for the insights they contributed when we studied this important topic.

**The Optimal Time** Although a variety of opinions exist on this matter, the optimal time for Chanukah lighting seems to be at Tzeit Hakochavim (Mishnah Berurah 672:1), which for this purpose (one could say) is approximately a half-hour after sundown. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 672:1 based on the Gemara, Shabbat 21b) states that one may light Chanukah candles "until the last people have left the marketplace." The Shulchan Aruch states that this is a half an hour after the optimal time for lighting. Today there are two reasons why Chanukah lights may be kindled even later than mentioned in the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch. First, the Rama (O.C. 672:2, citing Tosafot Shabbat 21b s.v. D'ee) rules that "in our times," we light inside our homes and the primary "target audience" for the Chanukah candles are our families and not the people passing outside our homes. Thus, today we may light even later than a half an hour past Tzeit Hakochavim. Second is that in the modern era when the streets are illuminated with electric lights, the last people do not leave the marketplace until significantly later in the evening. In some places, such as Manhattan or Hong Kong, this may be extremely late. Thus, one could suggest another reason why today we are permitted to light Chanukah lights even later than a half an hour past Tzeit Hakochavim (see Rav Moshe Shternbuch's Moadim Uzmanim 1:141 for further discussion of this issue). Nonetheless, the Rama (ad. loc.) writes that even in our times one should preferably light at the optimal time for lighting according to the standards established by Chazal. It is possible that this ruling is an application of the general rule of Zrizim Makdimim Limitzot, that one should perform a Mitzvah at the earliest possible time (see Pesachim 4a). The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 692:4) adds that our Mitzvot should be performed in a manner that is as close as possible to the original Takanah (enactment) of Chazal. This is a very fundamental assertion and seems to constitute an underlying theme and motivation for numerous Halachic rulings issued in modern times when circumstances have changed so dramatically. Despite the many changes, we nevertheless seek whenever possible not to deviate from the practices of earlier generations.

**The Practice at the Yeshiva University Kollelim** Students at TABC have always posed the question of why we do not end classes early on Chanukah to allow students to arrive home and light at the optimal time. Rav Yosef Adler (the Rosh Hayeshiva of TABC) always responds that when he studied at the Yeshiva University Kollel Rav Hershel Schachter would post a sign every year regarding the proper time for the Kollel students to light Ner Chanukah. The sign stated that when the Kollel began (in the early 1960's) the original Rosh Kollel, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, posed the question to Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik whether the Kollel Seder (learning period) should conclude early on Chanukah to allow the students to light Ner Chanukah at the optimal time. The Rav stated that they should not interrupt their studies and they should light only after they have finished their afternoon Seder at the usual time (which is well after Tzeit Hakochavim). The Rav cited as a precedent the Meiri (Shabbat 21b, first paragraph) who records the custom of Yeshiva students in France to not interrupt their daily learning schedule in order to fulfill the Mitzvah of Nerot Chanukah at the optimal time. Rav Schachter posted this sign during the years that I studied in the Kollel as well. This ruling applies to TABC as well since most of the Limudei Kodesh (Torah studies) for the Juniors and Seniors are in the afternoon. Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited by Rav Aharon Felder, Moadei Yeshurun p. 8) agrees with this ruling. He reasons that since essentially one may light late into the evening, it is not proper to interrupt the

Yeshiva's Seder in order to light at the optimal time. Interestingly, though, other than the Meiri there appears to be no source for this practice. Indeed, the ruling of the Rav and Rav Moshe (to the best of my knowledge) is not addressed in the Mishnah Berurah, Aruch Hashulchan, or any other major classic Halachic authority. Indeed, Rav Felder, who clearly mastered the Halachic literature on Chanukah, cites no authority who either agrees or disagrees with this ruling. However, I recall from my years of study in the Yeshiva University Kollel that Rav J. David Bleich (the noted Halachic authority who serves as the Rosh Kollel of the Yadin Yadin Kollel at YU) would leave in the middle of the afternoon Seder to light Chanukah candles at the optimal time. I recall hearing that Rav Bleich did not subscribe to the approach of the Rav and Rav Moshe to this issue. It appears that this dispute hinges on how one interprets and applies a ruling of the Rambam. The Rambam (Hilchot 15:2) rules that a man may postpone marriage (and his fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu) in order to further his Torah studies. The Shulchan Aruch (Even Haezer 1:3) rules in accordance with the Rambam. It seems that the value of Talmud Torah outweighs the value of Zrizim Makdimim Limitzot regarding the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu (the earlier one marries, the earlier he potentially fulfills the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu). The Rav and Rav Moshe (and the Meiri) seem to extrapolate from the Rambam that Talmud Torah always outweighs the value of Zrizim Makdimim Limitzot. Thus, Yeshiva students should not interrupt their studies in order to light Chanukah candles at the earliest time. Rav Bleich, on the other hand, seems to believe that one may not extrapolate a universal rule from this ruling of the Rambam. Pru Urvu might fundamentally differ from all other Mitzvot, as the Halacha tolerates delaying its performance past the age of Bar Mitzvah. This differs from all other Mitzvot which a male becomes obligated to perform at age thirteen (see Chelkat Mechokeik 1:2, Beit Shmuel 1:3, and Pitchei Teshuvah 1:3 for a discussion of this issue). Thus, even though Talmud Torah is more important than the timely fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu, nevertheless, Talmud Torah might not outweigh the timely fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Ner Chanukah. Moreover, the Halacha tolerates in theory (though we never practice this today; see Aruch Hashulchan E.H. 1:14) one who devotes his entire life to constant Torah study and never marries. The Halacha, by contrast, does not tolerate foregoing lighting Nerot Chanukah entirely in order not to interrupt one's Torah studies, according to all opinions. This seems to point to the fact that the Mitzvah of Pru Urvu is unique and thus it is open to debate as to whether one may extrapolate from the rules that govern Pru Urvu to other areas of Halacha. One might ask on the Rav and Rav Moshe's ruling why a Kollel student does not simply resume his studies after he lights Chanukah lights at the optimal time at home. We may answer that although he resumes Torah study at home, he will not return then to public study of Torah (Talmud Torah Dirabbim). Halacha attaches greater significance to Talmud Torah Dirabbim than Talmud Talmud conducted privately (see Megillah 3b). Thus, a Kollel student should learn until the usual conclusion time of the afternoon Seder in order not to miss the time of Talmud Torah Dirabbim. In addition, it appears that the ruling of the Rav and Rav Moshe applies only to a situation where it is difficult for the Talmidim to reassemble after they have returned home to kindle Chanukah lights. Thus, when I studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion we interrupted the afternoon Seder to kindle Chanukah lights at the optimal time and we returned to our learning soon afterward. This was possible because the vast majority of the Talmidim lived on campus.

Delay for Shalom Bayit Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky is cited (Emet Liyaakov p. 254) as ruling that one may delay the lighting of Chanukah lights until his wife returns from work so that the family kindles Chanukah lights together. As a source for this ruling, he cites the Halacha (Shulchan Aruch 678:1 based on Shabbat 23b) that if one has a choice of either lighting only Ner Shabbat or Ner Chanukah (such as someone who finds himself with only one candle), that one should light

Ner Shabbat. Since Shabbat candles are lit to ensure Shalom Bayit (domestic tranquility), they enjoy priority over Chanukah candles. Thus, if Shalom Bayit overrides Chanukah lighting altogether, it certainly suffices to delay Chanukah lighting. Interestingly, Rav Yaakov's ruling states that one may delay lighting Chanukah lights until his wife returns from work. Why does Rav Yaakov not also rule that Chanukah lighting may be delayed until the husband returns from work? An answer might be that the husband might not be upset if the family does not wait for him, as it is possible (as my student Yoni Safier noted) for the family to reassemble when the husband arrives in the house for his lighting. However, this might not be sufficient to avoid the wife being upset (see Bava Metzia 59a). We should note that there might be a problem for the husband to light long after his family has lit, since he could potentially fulfill his basic obligation through their lighting. See the Rama (O.C. 677:3) and the Mishna Brura (677:16) for a discussion and ruling concerning this issue

**Late Lighting or Better Lighting** My Talmid Daniel Orlinsky posed the following Halachic question to me during Chanukah 5764, when he lived at home with his parents in Fair Lawn, NJ. One of the evenings of Chanukah, he planned on leaving his home during the day and not returning until late in the evening when no member of the family would be awake. Daniel asked if it is preferable for his mother to light on his behalf at the optimal time or for him to light when he arrives at home late at night. Although the Rama (O.C. 671:2) rules that it is preferable (Hiddur Mitzvah) for each family member to light his own Menorah, it might be preferable to fulfill the Mitzvah through his family members who light at the ideal time. This question appears to be conceptually identical to a theoretical question that was reportedly raised by the Brisker Rav (Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, the Rav's uncle). He asked which of the following scenarios is the preferable way to fulfill the Mitzvah of taking the Etrog – taking an ordinary Etrog at the optimal (earliest, Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot) time (sunrise) or taking an extraordinarily beautiful Etrog that one will have access to only later on in the day. The question is which Halachic value is a priority, Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot or Hiddur Mitzvah (performing the Mitzvah in a beautiful and preferable manner). Daniel also was faced with the dilemma whether the value of Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot outweighs the value of Hiddur Mitzvah or vice versa. This quandary seems to lie at the heart of the dispute regarding the earliest time to recite Kiddush Levanah. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 426:4) rules that one should not recite Kiddush Levanah until seven days from the Molad (birth of the new moon) have passed. The Mishnah Berurah (426:20), though, writes that the majority of Acharonim disagree with the Shulchan Aruch and permit reciting Kiddush Levanah after three days from the Molad have passed. Sephardic Jews (see Teshuvot Yechave Daat 2:24) and Chassidim follow the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch, while non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jews recite Kiddush Levanah after three days from the Molad have passed. It seems to me that this dispute hinges on the dispute whether the value of Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot outweighs the value of Hiddur Mitzvah. Non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jews would seem to acknowledge that reciting Kiddush Levanah on a "fuller" moon is a more Mehuddar way to perform the Mitzvah (as the moon is more beautiful when it is has "reached" half of its size). The Gemara (Shabbat 133b) states that it is preferable to use a more beautiful pair of Tzitzit, Shofar, Lulav, Sukkah, and Sefer Torah. Similarly, it seems preferable to recite Kiddush Levanah on a more beautiful moon (provided that it is recited before the latest time permitted by Halacha for Kiddush Levanah). Thus, the non-Chassidic Ashkenazic tradition values Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot over Hiddur Mitzvah. The Sephardic and Chassidic tradition, on the other hand, seems to value Hiddur Mitzvah over Zrizim Makdimim Limitzvot. Based on this logic, since Daniel is a non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jew, I told him that he should ask his mother to kindle Chanukah lights for him, since for him Zrizim Makdimim

Limitzvot outweighs the value of Hiddur Mitzvah. There are additional Halachic benefits to this approach. First, it is questionable whether Daniel is permitted to recite a Bracha when he lights Ner Chanukah at a very late hour when hardly anyone is walking outside and no family members are awake. The Chafetz Chaim (Shaar Hatziyun 672:17) cites various opinions about this matter and does not issue a clear-cut ruling. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrat Moshe 4:105:7) rules that one should recite the Bracha. Furthermore, Daniel avoids the problem of eating before performing a Mitzvah (see, for example, Shabbat 9b). Most important, he avoids the risk of forgetting to light Ner Chanukah when he arrives at home late at night exceptionally tired. Thus, it appears that for many reasons it is better for Daniel to have his mother light for him at the optimal time rather than light himself late at night.

**Conclusion** One should make every effort to light Ner Chanukah at the optimal time. There are, however, circumstances where the Halacha tolerates or even encourages delaying the fulfillment of this Mitzvah.

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**There Always Is Hope  
by Shlomo Klapper**

After Israel's famine became too severe for Yaakov's fortitude, the Torah asserts that "VaYar Yaakov Ki Yesh Shever BeMitzrayim," "Yaakov perceived that there were provisions in Egypt," (Bereishit 42:1) and therefore instructs his sons to descend to Egypt to obtain these provisions. Why does the Torah employ the seemingly inaccurate language of "perceived," since confirming Egypt's alleged sustenance requires merely obtaining information and not conjecturing? Additionally, since "VaYar" is utilized only in a sense of seeing literally with one's own eyes, its use here is flummoxing, as Yaakov obviously could not literally witness Egypt's happenings. Ergo, Rashi substitutes "Shever" with "Sheiver," or hope, explicating that Yaakov foresaw that hope resided in Mitzrayim via inadvertent prophecy, but that Yosef's presence there spawned that optimism was concealed. While Peshuto Shel Mikra renders Shever as foodstuffs and the Sages homiletically translate it as hope, what is the two different interpretations' correlation?

Yaakov comprehended Egypt's unique holiness, since Egypt was privileged to ensure the world's survival by meting out food to others. However, Yaakov wondered why such an immoral country deserved to save the world, an opportunity that theoretically should originate only from an exalted person. When Yaakov saw Egypt's "Shever," food, and that the dissolute Egyptians surprisingly allocated it to others, a flicker of "Sheiver," hope, glowed in his mind that perhaps Yosef, his long lost son, was orchestrating this moral effort. Only Yosef, embedded with Jewish morals, could cause such an ethical and decent episode, since Yaakov knew that even when faced with adversity, Jews are an Or LaGoyim, beacons to nations, due to their entrenched morals, honesty, and decency. Using Chazal's play on words, Rabbi Elimelech of Gordzisk sanguinely explicated this Pasuk by changing "Yesh Sheiver BeMitzrayim," "there is hope even in Egypt," to "Yesh Sheiver BeMetzaram," "there is hope even in narrow, astringent straits," teaching that even when spiritual constriction and narrow perspectives constrain a person, he never should disregard the constant silver lining of "Sheiver," hope. As David HaMelech said, "Ashrei SheKeil Yaakov BeEzro Sivro Al Hashem Elokav," "Praiseworthy is one who has the aid of the God of Yaakov, whose hope is in Hashem, his God." The Meor Einayim alternatively suggests an additional outlook, based on the Midrash that deals with the many other, failed worlds that God destroyed before

creating the perfect planet in which we presently reside. Kabbalistic literature refers to the other worlds' annihilations as "the breakage before the Tikun (perfection)." Yaakov's family's descent to Mitzrayim was the preliminary "breakage" that led to the formation of the perfect nation – the Bnei Yisrael that left Egypt and received the Torah on Har Sinai. Thus, Egypt's only task was to prepare Bnei Yisrael for Kabbalat HaTorah on Har Sinai. Yaakov saw "Shever," or breakage, in Egypt, but comprehended that his nation's settlement there was a temporary sojourn and was meant to ripen them for spiritual opulence and religious sumptuousness on Har Sinai.

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***Promises***

There was recently a fairly bruising primary election here in Israel for leadership of the Labor Party, the main current opposition faction in the Israeli Knesset. As is always the case in electioneering, the two candidates made many solemn promises to their voters. "Vote for me and I promise you that I will do great things for you and for our party," was their mantra.

Of course we all know that it is apparently impossible to be elected if one has not strewn the electoral landscape with promises. But by now any voter with a modicum of sense knows or should know not to believe in the promises of political candidates.

As the cynic so wisely noted, promises are made in order to be broken. Rabin was elected because he promised to smite the PLO "foot and thigh." Instead, he brought them back from Tunisian exile and installed them in corrupt power until today. Peres promised us a new Middle East, a veritable Garden of Eden. But it is the old Sunni-Shiite Middle East that still confronts us and the rest of the Western world.

Sharon promised to defend Israel's right to build anywhere in the Land of Israel and instead evacuated Gaza causing wars, deaths and untold privations to thousands of innocent hapless Israeli citizens. Obama promised Americans that under his health plan law they could keep their current health insurance policies. That has been proven to be blatantly untrue.

The elder George Bush promised not to raise taxes – "read my lips," he famously said – but when in office he did raise taxes no matter what his lips said. The list of broken diplomatic, military, legislative and governmental promises made and broken is endless.

Our prime minister now promises us that he will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. I hope and pray that he is able somehow to keep that promise. But I am wary of any human promises. Humans are oftentimes unable to fulfill their promises, no matter how well intentioned they were when first proposed.

The Talmud warns against making a promise to a child and not fulfilling that promise - thereby teaching the child that it is acceptable to lie. So, great caution should be employed when making promises. The observant Jew always qualifies one's stated commitment to others with the statement bli neder, (without a vow intended) which, in effect, softens the promise and weakens the commitment.

It at least allows for the entrance of unforeseen circumstances that may not allow the promise to be actualized. This is not meant as a cunning loophole to escape the fulfillment of one's word. Rather it is an admittance of human frailty and impotence in the face of the unknown and ever changing future.

Who truly knows what tomorrow may bring. The Psalmist had it right when he wrote "There are many plans in the hearts of humans but only God's plan will truly arise." We are always thwarted by uncertainty and unpredictability.

All of this should engender within every one of us, and especially in those that purport to be our leaders, a sense of humility and caution. That is one of the ideas that lies behind the words of the rabbis that "the words of the wise should be said softly."

The wise have also too often been found to have been mistaken in their assessment of the future and even in their own capabilities to influence that future. I am always skeptical of those who claim that they can somehow read God's mind, so to speak.

Caution in behavior and in speech always pays dividends. Promises easily made are a sign of arrogance and hubris. Great people who assume leadership roles must have some smattering of arrogance within them. The Talmud allotted to them one-sixty-fourth portion of arrogance in their personality makeup. But, that is a limitation that few in political leadership can confine themselves to.

It is arrogance that leads to scandal and criminal behavior amongst the high and mighty. One views one's self as being above the law. And this is in the main due to the attempt to fulfill unattainable goals and foolishly made promises. In England's darkest hour, Winston Churchill promised his people only blood, sweat and tears.

That promise was fulfilled but it was the promise that brought victory to the Allies in World War II. Hitler promised a thousand year Reich. Khrushchev promised that the Soviet Union would bury the Western democracies. As is true in most areas of human life less is more – as it is with promises as well.

Shabat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***Miketz***

All of the people involved in the human drama described for us in this week's Torah reading are haunted by their past actions, behavior and attitudes. Pharaoh is disturbed by his dreams of an empire where the strong overwhelm the weak and suddenly this past dream turns into a nightmare of the weak devouring the strong. Pharaoh's butler thought that he had placed his past indiscretions behind him and could safely forget everything and everyone associated with his time in prison.

He is now forced to recall the young Jewish Yosef and once again bring back the entire sordid story to the attention of Pharaoh. Yosef rises to power and position and attempts to build a new life for himself far away from his homeland and his family.

And, lo and behold, there now appear before him his ten brothers with whom he disagreed vehemently years ago and were the agents in his being sold as a slave to Egyptian aristocracy. Suddenly his heavenly inspired dreams of long ago and the bitterness of his relationship with his ten brothers descend upon him once more. The brothers do not realize that they are standing before their brother Yosef. But they remember remorsefully the feud with him and their less than charitable behavior towards him and see their current danger in Egypt as somehow being Divine retribution for their callousness and lack of compassion towards a brother.

And back in the Land of Israel, the old father Yaakov is inconsolable over the disappearance of Yosef for he remains convinced that the old dreams of Yosef were true prophecy and thus somehow must yet remain valid and will be fulfilled.

The past never disappears, not in personal life nor in national and international affairs. All attempts to "move on" so to speak are always

hampered by the baggage of the past that we are always forced to carry with us. Our generation of Jews is still haunted by the Holocaust. The nations of Europe are still possessed of their ancient and almost inbred disdain and hatred of Jews and Judaism. They cannot expunge that demon from their very being. The Left is still haunted by the false vision and unattainable economic and social theories of nineteenth century Marxism with all of its malevolent byproducts. The past compresses upon our world and gives us little room for serenity and comfort. But there is a positive past that also exists in the Jewish world - the past of Sinai and Jerusalem, of Torah and chosiness, of thousands of years of traditional Jewish life and unwavering moral values. That past is also slowly returning to many Jews who had forgotten about it or who never really knew much about it. The past is therefore a mighty weapon in shaping our present and certainly our future. It is the past that saves Yosef and his brothers and restores Yaakov to be the father of the nation of Israel. The past is not always pleasant to recall. But it is always necessary and instructive. As we dream on of a glorious future we must remember that our past always accompanies us on life's journey. Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Mikeitz**  
*For the week ending 30 November 2013 / 27 Kislev 5774*  
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)  
Insights

#### **The Hidden Light**

*"When behold! Out of the river emerged seven cows" (41:2)*

One of the most difficult things in life is to take the wisdom of happiness into the despair of depression.

The depression and happiness are two different worlds, two different realities.

They have no point of contact.

It's like visiting time at the State Penitentiary when the telephone has broken down.

A one-inch wall of glass separates them like a prisoner from his wife. They gesture to each other, but their mutual isolation is total.

It's like two people on different islands waving flags at each other, but neither understands the other's signal.

It's like two people who don't know a word of each other's language, trying to hold a conversation using a dictionary in which every word is mistranslated.

Depression cannot understand the language of happiness.

Seven cows emerge from the river. They are beautiful to behold, strong and healthy. Then, seven other cows emerge from the river. These cows are as dissimilar from the first cows as is possible. They are gaunt, skinny, and malnourished. And then, these evil looking creatures devour the fat cows. Nothing is left. The fat cows are gone and the thin cows are as thin and as miserable-looking as before.

In life, a person must use his days of optimism, the good days, the days that are full of holiness and closeness to G-d to fix in his heart the light of that holiness so that when lean gaunt days come upon him he is prepared. Then he will understand that the light has not vanished; it is only hidden. The light seems to have been swallowed up completely by evil, but in fact it is merely in exile.

At the beginning of time, there shone a unique light called the Ohr Haganuz — the "Hidden Light". This light was not like any light that you or I have ever seen. With this light you could see from one end of the Creation to the other. In other words, you could see the connection between cause and effect. It was self-evident why things happen the way they do.

The Ohr HaHaganuz was a spiritual light that revealed the existence of the unseen world of spirituality. G-d hid away the Ohr Haganuz after the first thirty-six hours of Creation so that evil would not be able to exploit its power. However, there are times when you can still catch glimpses of its hidden glow.

On the first night of Chanuka, we light one candle, on the second night two. Thus after two nights, we have lit three candles. If you do your math right you'll find that the total number of candles that we light on Chanuka is thirty-six (excluding the shamash). The thirty-six lights of Chanuka correspond to the thirty-six hours during which the Ohr Haganuz shone.

The power of depression is that it tries to usurp the light. It tries to usurp the true reality of things. It tries to tell us that the good days have been devoured by the bad. That the light has gone forever and that the bad days are now firmly in command. That's the message of this week's Torah portion, and it's also the message of Chanuka. The thin cows want us believe that the healthy cows are gone forever.

That they rule in their stead. The nations of the world want us to believe that we no longer have any portion in the G-d of Israel— that He has hidden the light forever. However, those thin cows will only be in business for just as long as G-d allows them to keep the good cows in exile. They have no independent power. One day, very soon, that Hidden Light will blaze once more in this world of darkness and the rule of the gaunt and evil cows will be revealed as no more than a dream.

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**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Miketz**

*Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h*

*"Two Kinds of People"*

"There are two kinds of people." I am sure that you all have heard one variation or another of that theme.

We seem to have a well-ingrained habit of dividing people into two categories. For example, we say that there are those for whom the cup is half-full, while others for whom the cup is half-empty. There are two types of people: some are optimists, and others are pessimists.

There are other dichotomies that we utilize. We distinguish between those individuals who are rational, guided by their heads, and those who are emotional, who follow their hearts. There are men and women of reason, and there are men and women of feeling.

The British political philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin, wrote an entire book about such a dichotomy. He entitled it, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. He bases this title on a remark made by one of the ancient Greek philosophers: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." The fox has many little tricks up his sleeve, by which he can evade his pursuers. But the hedgehog has but one defense and, by the use of his prickly quills, can successfully defend himself against his enemies.

Sir Isaiah applies this distinction to the field of literature; specifically to the great Russian novelists such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev. Some excel at portraying details, while others are masters of depicting grand themes. If we transfer Sir Isaiah's approach from literature to, say, medicine, we can certainly easily distinguish between the specialists and the generalists.

Personally, I believe that such dichotomies are simplistic, failing to take the complexity of human beings into account. Few of us are so rigidly one-dimensional. Most of us fluctuate between optimism and pessimism. We occasionally rely upon our reason, but in other circumstances become quite emotional. We shift our focus from fine details to the overall picture and back again.

It is fascinating to find such dichotomies in our traditional Jewish sources. Perhaps the most famous of them relates to two schools of thought that pervade Talmudic literature: Hillel and Shammai and their respective schools. These two great sages debate each other on hundreds of subjects, ranging from the question of whether it would have been better that man had never been created to laws regarding the fine points of ritual purity. They each prescribed different sequences for the blessings which constitute the Havdalah service, and they even differed as to the precise wording of some of those blessings.

Many scholars have assumed that fundamentally, different philosophies of life were at the root of their disagreements. One attempt to identify such an underlying rationale was made by a sage of the last generation, Rabbi Solomon Joseph Zevin, who fortunately escaped the prisons of the Soviet Union and lived to teach and write in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Zevin believed that all of Hillel and Shammai's differences of opinion could be reduced to one basic difference between them. Shammai, he argued, held the future potential of a situation to be more critical than the actual current situation. Shammai was concerned with probable future consequences; Hillel, with present realities.

Hillel, felt that the actual situation with which a person is confronted takes precedence over considerations of what might happen in the future. Rav Zevin's dichotomy puts Shammai's priority on potential eventualities against Hillel's belief that actual present circumstances took priority.

Their contrasting approaches to religious life is exemplified in the well-known story of the aspiring convert to Judaism who approached first Shammai and then Hillel with the request that they teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai angrily rejected him, while Hillel welcomed him, famously

declaring that the essence of the Torah could indeed be taught while standing on one foot: "Do not do unto others what is hateful to you." Hillel then went on to advise him that the rest of the Torah was just commentary that he could study independently.

Following Rav Zevin's approach, when Shammai was confronted with the bizarre request of the convert, he suspected, with good cause, that this man would not be a good candidate or a lasting conversion—sooner or later, he would revert to his pagan ways. Characteristically, Shammai considered potential.

But Hillel was not troubled by what the potential future might hold in store. Here was a man who wished to convert. That was all that mattered. The actuality of the present moment prevailed.

With another of their many debates, we finally come to this week's special Shabbat, the Shabbat of Hanukkah.

Hillel ruled that one begins the holiday by lighting just one candle and then increases the number of candles day by day. Shammai ruled in the opposite manner, beginning with eight candles and then gradually decreasing the number of candles night after night.

We are all so accustomed to lighting one candle of the menorah on the first night and then adding an additional candle for each successive night that many of us are unaware that this procedure follows Hillel's opinion. Shammai insisted that things should be done differently. He and his entire school lit eight candles on the first night and proceeded to light in descending order, from eight down to one.

Applying Rav Zevin's analysis can gain a fresh understanding of the candle lighting ceremony of Hanukkah. For Shammai, the miracle was powerful at that specific time in history when it occurred. But, concerned as he was about the potential future, he was convinced that, with time, the memory of that miracle would fade and its lessons would be forgotten.

Hillel had a different view. We can return, he asserted, to the moment in history when the miracle occurred. At first, on day one, the phenomenon was almost insignificant. But as each day passed and the oil of the Temple's menorah continued to burn, the wonder grew and grew. That was the nature of the situation at that moment in time, the awe increasing gradually day after day.

Hillel had an additional insight. Always holding the present moment in focus, he realized that that bygone moment did not have to disappear over time. It could be preserved. It could forever be experienced in all of its wonder.

The victory of more than 2,000 years ago remains ever present, right up to this very year. Memories need not fade. Such is the nature of the Jewish historical memory: events can be relived.

Hillel's teaching about the primacy of the present moment and our ability to perennially relive that moment lies at the core of the Hanukkah holiday. This teaching is encapsulated in the words of the blessing we recite just as we light the menorah:

"Blessed are You, Lord our God... who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days, and at this time."

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<http://www.rabbisacks.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

***The Power of Dreams***

In one of the greatest transformations in all literature, Joseph moves in one bound from prisoner to prime minister. What was it about Joseph – a complete outsider to Egyptian culture, a "Hebrew," a man who had for years been languishing in jail on a false charge of attempted rape – that marked him out as a leader of the greatest empire of the ancient world?

Joseph had three gifts that many have in isolation but few in combination. The first is that he dreamed dreams. Initially we do not know whether his two adolescent dreams – of his brothers' sheaves bowing down to his, and of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him – are a genuine presentiment of future greatness, or merely the overactive imagination of a spoiled child with delusions of grandeur.

Only in this week's parsha do we discover a vital piece of information that has been withheld from us until now. Joseph says to Pharaoh, who has also had two dreams: "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in

two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (Gen. 41: 32). Only in retrospect do we realise that Joseph's double dream was a sign that this too was no mere imagining. Joseph really was destined to be a leader to whom his family would bow.

Second, like Sigmund Freud many centuries years later, Joseph could interpret the dreams of others. He did so for the butler and baker in prison and, in this week's parsha, for Pharaoh. His interpretations were neither magical nor miraculous. In the case of the butler and baker he remembered that in three days time it would be Pharaoh's birthday (Gen. 40: 20). It was the custom of rulers to make a feast on their birthday and decide the fate of certain individuals (in Britain, the Queen's birthday honours continue this tradition). It was reasonable therefore to assume that the butler's and baker's dreams related to this event and their unconscious hopes and fears (ibn Ezra and Bekhor Shor both make this suggestion).

In the case of Pharaoh's dreams Joseph may have known ancient Egyptian traditions about seven-year famines. Nahum Sarna quotes an Egyptian text from the reign of King Djoser (ca. twenty-eighth century BCE):

I was in distress on the Great Throne, and those who are in the palace were in heart's affliction from a very great evil, since the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short. (Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, New York, Schocken, 1966, 219.)

Joseph's most impressive achievement, though, was his third gift, the ability to implement dreams, solving the problem of which they were an early warning. No sooner had he told of a seven-year famine than he continued, without pause, to provide a solution:

"Now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine." (Gen. 41: 33-36)

We have seen Joseph the brilliant administrator before, both in Potiphar's house and in the prison. It was this gift, demonstrated at precisely the right time, that led to his appointment as Viceroy of Egypt.

From Joseph, therefore, we learn three principles. The first is: dream dreams. Never be afraid to let your imagination soar. When people come to me for advice about leadership I tell them to give themselves the time and space and imagination to dream. In dreams we discover our passion, and following our passion is the best way to live a rewarding life. (One of the classic texts is Ken Robinson, *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, Penguin, 2009.)

Dreaming is often thought to be impractical. Not so: it is one of the most practical things we can do. There are people who spend months planning a holiday but not even a day planning a life. They let themselves be carried by the winds of chance and circumstance. That is a mistake. The sages said, "Wherever [in the Torah] we find the word *vayehi*, 'And it came to pass,' it is always the prelude to tragedy." (Megillah 10b) A *vayehi* life is one in which we passively let things happen. A *yehi* ("Let there be") life is one in which we make things happen, and it is our dreams that give us direction.

Theodor Herzl, to whom more than any other person we owe the existence of the state of Israel, used to say, "If you will it, it is no dream." I once heard a wonderful story from Eli Wiesel. There was a time when Sigmund Freud and Theodore Herzl lived in the same district of Vienna. "Fortunately," he said, "they never met. Can you imagine what would have happened had they met? Theodore Herzl would have said: I have a dream of a Jewish state. Freud would have replied: Tell me, Herr Herzl, how long have you been having this dream? Lie down



on my couch, and I will psychoanalyze you. Herzl would have been cured of his dreams and today there would be no Jewish state.” Fortunately, the Jewish people have never been cured of their dreams.

The second principle is that leaders interpret other people’s dreams. They articulate the inchoate. They find a way of expressing the hopes and fears of a generation. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech was about taking the hopes of African Americans and giving them wings. It was not Joseph’s dreams that made him a leader: it was Pharaoh’s. Our own dreams give us direction; it is other people’s dreams that give us opportunity.

The third principle is: find a way to implement dreams. First see the problem, then find a way of solving it. The Kotzker Rebbe once drew attention to a difficulty in Rashi. Rashi (to Ex. 18: 1) says that Jethro was given the name Jether (“he added”) because “he added a passage to the Torah beginning [with the words], “Choose from among the people ...” This was when Jethro saw Moses leading alone and told him that what he was doing was not good: he would wear himself and the people to exhaustion. Therefore he should choose good people and delegate much of the burden of leadership to them.

The Kotzker pointed out that the passage that Jethro added to the Torah did not begin, “Choose from among the people.” It began several verses earlier when he said, “What you are doing is not good.” The answer the Kotzker gave was simple. Saying “What you are doing is not good” is not an addition to the Torah: it is merely stating a problem. The addition consisted in the solution: delegate.

Good leaders either are, or surround themselves with, problem-solvers. It is easy to see what is going wrong. What makes a leader is the ability to find a way of putting it right. Joseph’s genius lay not in predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but in devising a system of storage that would ensure food supplies in the lean and hungry years.

Dream dreams; understand and articulate the dreams of others; and find ways of turning a dream into a reality – these three gifts are leadership the Joseph way.

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### **8 Short Thoughts for 8 Chanukah Nights**

*Rabbi Sacks has written eight short thoughts, one for each night of Chanukah. Why not read one each night with your family just before lighting the Chanukah lights? Enjoy the latkas and doughnuts!*

#### **1. INSPIRED BY FAITH, WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD**

Twenty-two centuries ago, when Israel was under the rule of the empire of Alexander the Great, one particular leader, Antiochus IV, decided to force the pace of Hellenisation, forbidding Jews to practice their religion and setting up in the Temple in Jerusalem a statue of Zeus Olympus.

This was too much to bear, and a group of Jews, the Maccabees, fought for their religious freedom, winning a stunning victory against the most powerful army of the ancient world. After three years they reconquered Jerusalem, rededicated the Temple and relit the menorah with the one cruse of undefiled oil they found among the wreckage.

It was one of the most stunning military achievements of the ancient world. It was, as we say in our prayers, a victory of the few over the many, the weak over the strong. It’s summed up in wonderful line from the prophet Zechariah: not by might nor by strength but by my spirit says the Lord. The Maccabees had neither might nor strength, neither weapons nor numbers. But they had a double portion of the Jewish spirit that longs for freedom and is prepared to fight for it.

Never believe that a handful of dedicated people can’t change the world. Inspired by faith, they can. The Maccabees did then. So can we today.

#### **2. THE LIGHT OF THE SPIRIT NEVER DIES**

There’s an interesting question the commentators ask about Chanukah. For eight days we light lights, and each night we make the blessing over miracles: she-asah nissim la-avotenu. But what was the miracle of the first night? The light that should have lasted one day lasted eight. But that means there was something miraculous about days 2 to 8; but nothing miraculous about the first day.

Perhaps the miracle was this, that the Maccabees found one cruse of oil with its seal intact, undefiled. There was no reason to suppose that anything would have survived the systematic desecration the Greeks and their supporters did to the Temple. Yet the Maccabees searched and found that one jar. Why did they search?

Because they had faith that from the worst tragedy something would survive. The miracle of the first night was that of faith itself, the faith that something would remain with which to begin again.

So it has always been in Jewish history. There were times when any other people would have given up in despair: after the destruction of the Temple, or the massacres of the crusades, or the Spanish Expulsion, or the pogroms, or the Shoa. But somehow Jews did not sit and weep. They gathered what remained, rebuilt our people, and lit a light like no other in history, a light that tells us and the world of the power of the human spirit to overcome every tragedy and refuse to accept defeat.

From the days of Moses and the bush that burned and was not consumed to the days of the Maccabees and the single cruse of oil, Judaism has been humanity’s ner tamid, the everlasting light that no power on earth can extinguish.

#### **3. CHANUKAH IN OUR TIME**

Back in 1991 I lit Chanukah candles with Mikhail Gorbachev, who had, until earlier that year, been president of the Soviet Union. For seventy years the practice of Judaism had been effectively banned in communist Russia. It was one of the two great assaults on our people and faith in the twentieth century. The Germans sought to kill Jews; the Russians tried to kill Judaism. Under Stalin the assault became brutal. Then in 1967, after Israel’s victory in the Six Day War, many Soviet Jews sought to leave Russia and go to Israel. Not only was permission refused, but often the Jews concerned lost their jobs and were imprisoned. Around the world Jews campaigned for the prisoners, Refuseniks they were called, to be released and allowed to leave. Eventually Mikhail Gorbachev realised that the whole soviet system was unworkable. Communism had brought, not freedom and equality, but repression, a police state, and a new hierarchy of power. In the end it collapsed, and Jews regained the freedom to practice Judaism and to go to Israel.

That day in 1991 after we had lit candles together, Mr Gorbachev asked me, through his interpreter, what we had just done. I told him that 22 centuries ago in Israel after the public practice of Judaism had been banned, Jews fought for and won their freedom, and these lights were the symbol of that victory. And I continued: Seventy years ago Jews suffered the same loss of freedom in Russia, and you have now helped them to regain it. So you have become part of the Chanukah story. And as the interpreter translated those words into Russian, Mikhail Gorbachev blushed. The Chanukah story still lives, still inspires, telling not just us but the world that though tyranny exists, freedom, with God’s help, will always win the final battle.

#### **4. THE FIRST CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS**

One of the key phrases of our time is the clash of civilisations. And Chanukah is about one of the first great clashes of civilisation, between the Greeks and Jews of antiquity, Athens and Jerusalem.

The ancient Greeks produced one of the most remarkable civilisations of all time: philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, historians like Herodotus and Thucydides, dramatists like Sophocles and Aeschylus. They produced art and architecture of a beauty that has never been surpassed. Yet in the second century before the common era they were defeated by the group of Jewish fighters known as the Maccabees, and from then on Greece as a world power went into rapid decline, while the tiny Jewish people survived every exile and persecution and are still alive and well today.

What was the difference? The Greeks, who did not believe in a single, loving God, gave the world the concept of tragedy. We strive, we struggle, at times we achieve greatness, but life has no ultimate purpose. The universe neither knows nor cares that we are here.

Ancient Israel gave the world the idea of hope. We are here because God created us in love, and through love we discover the meaning and purpose of life.

Tragic cultures eventually disintegrate and die. Lacking any sense of ultimate meaning, they lose the moral beliefs and habits on which continuity depends. They sacrifice happiness for pleasure. They sell the future for the present. They lose the passion and energy that brought them greatness in the first place. That’s what happened to Ancient Greece.

Judaism and its culture of hope survived, and the Chanukah lights are the symbol of that survival, of Judaism’s refusal to jettison its values for the glamour and prestige of a secular culture, then or now.

A candle of hope may seem a small thing, but on it the very survival of a civilisation may depend.

#### **5. THE LIGHT OF WAR AND THE LIGHT OF PEACE**

There is a law about Chanukah I find moving and profound. Maimonides writes that ‘the command of Chanukah lights is very precious. One who lacks the money to buy lights should sell something, or if necessary borrow, so as to be able to fulfil the mitzvah.’



The question then arises, What if, on Friday afternoon, you find yourself with only one candle? What do you light it as — a Shabbat candle or a Chanukah one? It can't be both. Logic suggests that you should light it as a Chanukah candle. After all, there is no law that you have to sell or borrow to light lights for Shabbat. Yet the law is that, if faced with such a choice, you light it as a Shabbat light. Why? Listen to Maimonides: 'The Shabbat light takes priority because it symbolises shalom bayit, domestic peace. And great is peace because the entire Torah was given in order to make peace in the world.'

Consider: Chanukah commemorates one of the greatest military victories in Jewish history. Yet Jewish law rules that if we can only light one candle — the Shabbat light takes precedence, because in Judaism the greatest military victory takes second place to peace in the home.

Why did Judaism, alone among the civilizations of the ancient world, survive? Because it valued the home more than the battlefield, marriage more than military grandeur, and children more than generals. Peace in the home mattered to our ancestors more than the greatest military victory.

So as we celebrate Chanukah, spare a thought for the real victory, which was not military but spiritual. Jews were the people who valued marriage, the home, and peace between husband and wife, above the highest glory on the battlefield. In Judaism, the light of peace takes precedence over the light of war.

#### 6. THE THIRD MIRACLE

We all know the miracles of Chanukah, the military victory of the Maccabees against the Greeks, and the miracle of the oil that should have lasted one day but stayed burning for eight. But there was a third miracle not many people know about. It took place several centuries later.

After the destruction of the second Temple, many rabbis were convinced that Chanukah should be abolished. After all, it celebrated the rededication of the Temple. And the Temple was no more. It had been destroyed by the Romans under Titus. Without a Temple, what was there left to celebrate?

The Talmud tells us that in at least one town, Lod, Chanukah was abolished. Yet eventually the other view prevailed, which is why we celebrate Chanukah to this day.

Why? Because though the Temple was destroyed, Jewish hope was not destroyed. We may have lost the building but we still had the story, and the memory, and the light. And what had happened once in the days of the Maccabees could happen again. And it was those words, *od lo avdah tikvatenu*, "our hope is not destroyed," became part of the song, *Hatikvah*, that inspired Jews to return to Israel and rebuild their ancient state. So as you light the Chanukah candles remember this. The Jewish people kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive. We are the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind.

#### 7. INSIDE / OUTSIDE

There is more than one command in Judaism to light lights. There are three. There are the Shabbat candles. There is the *havdalah* candle. And there are the Chanukah candles.

The difference between them is that Shabbat candles represent *shalom bayit*, peace in the home. They are lit indoors. They are, if you like, Judaism's inner light, the light of the sanctity of marriage and the holiness of home.

The Chanukah candles used to be lit outside — outside the front door. It was only fear of persecution that took the Chanukah candles back inside, and in recent times the Lubavitcher Rebbe introduced the custom of lighting giant menorahs in public places to bring back the original spirit of the day.

Chanukah candles are the light Judaism brings to the world when we are unafraid to announce our identity in public, live by our principles and fight, if necessary, for our freedom.

As for the *havdalah* candle, which is always made up of several wicks woven together, it represents the fusion of the two, the inner light of Shabbat, joined to the outer light we make during the six days of the week when we go out into the world and live our faith in public.

When we live as Jews in private, filling our homes with the light of the *Shekhina*, when we live as Jews in public, bringing the light of hope to others, and when we live both together, then we bring light to the world.

There always were two ways to live in a world that is often dark and full of tears. We can curse the darkness or we can light a light, and as the Chassidim say, a little light drives out much darkness. May we all help light up the world.

#### 8. TO LIGHT ANOTHER LIGHT

There's a fascinating argument in the Talmud. Can you take one Chanukah light to light another? Usually, of course, we take an extra light, the *shamash*, and use it to light all the candles. But suppose we don't have one. Can we light the first candle and then use it to light the others?

Two great sages of the third century, Rav and Shmuel, disagreed. Rav said No. Shmuel said Yes. Normally we have a rule that when Rav and Shmuel disagree, the law follows Rav. There are only three exceptions and this is one.

Why did Rav say you may not take one Chanukah candle to light the others? Because, says the Talmud, *ka mach-chish mitzvah*. You diminish the first candle. Inevitably you spill some of the wax or the oil. And Rav says: don't do anything that would diminish the light of the first.

But Shmuel disagrees, and the law follows Shmuel. Why?

The best way of answering that is to think of two Jews: both religious, both committed, both living Jewish lives. One says: I must not get involved with Jews who are less religious than me, because if I do, my own standards will fall. I'll keep less. My light will be diminished. That's the view of Rav.

The other says No. When I use the flame of my faith to light a candle in someone else's life, my Jewishness is not diminished. It grows, because there is now more Jewish light in the world. When it comes to spiritual goods as opposed to material goods, the more I share, the more I have. If I share my knowledge, or faith, or love with others, I won't have less; I may even have more. That's the view of Shmuel, and that is how the law was eventually decided.

So share your Judaism with others. Take the flame of your faith and help set other souls on fire.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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#### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Miketz and Chanuka**

##### ***How Yosef Got His Job***

When Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's dream (and gave a solution for the situation foretold therein), the Torah writes: "And the matter was good in Pharaoh's eyes and in the eyes of all of his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants 'Is there another man to be found (like Yosef) who has the spirit of G-d within him?'" [Bereshis 41:38-39] Pharaoh then went ahead and appointed Yosef as overseer of the massive campaign to collect the food in order to prepare for the years of famine.

In one day, Yosef went from being a common petty prisoner in the dungeon to becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt, arguably the second most powerful man in the world. This is a very unlikely scenario. How does Pharaoh take a person who was in jail yesterday and elevate him in a moment to be the second in command in the Empire?

Did he not have other trusted advisors -- a Secretary of Agriculture or a Secretary of Commerce who could have implemented Yosef's suggestions? How does a common criminal suddenly become the "Mishneh L'Melech" ("vice-President")?

I saw an answer given in the name of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. As an analogy, let us ask -- why did George W. Bush pick Dick Cheney to become his vice president? The process was that Dick Cheney was the person in charge of finding the right candidate to run on the ticket with Bush for the position of vice president. Lo and behold, Bush picked Cheney himself to be that person. Admittedly, Dick Cheney is a very smart person and he shared Bush's agenda, but Dick Cheney brought to the job something that no other candidate would have brought to the job. It was the most admirable quality a presidential candidate may look for in picking a running mate -- someone who himself does not want to become president!

There have been very caustic comments made about the office of vice president and exactly what its value is. As George Bush (the first), who held the office of vice president for 8 years before he become president, once explained it in defining the office: "You die, I fly." To go to funerals for a living is not something that most people aspire to. Why then does anyone become vice president? Usually, they become vice

president because they want to become president. Anytime a president goes into a second term, this right away causes problems. The vice president does not want to become tarnished by the record of his boss, so during the second term, he needs to start "distancing himself" from the person who gave him his job! This was Al Gore's problem. He did not want to be tainted with Clinton's problem. It is always problematic to take a person who wants to be president as vice president, but most vice presidents do want that top job. Dick Cheney brought that quality to the office -- he did not want to be president.

L'Havdil, Pharaoh saw in Yosef the quality which made him say "This is the man who I want as my vice-president, second in command!" When Pharaoh told Yosef "I've heard that you have this uncanny ability to interpret dreams" Yosef answered "I don't do it by myself, the L-rd will answer the welfare of Pharaoh." [Bereshis 41:16] In other words, he told Pharaoh, "my only power is that sometimes G-d gifts me with the ability to interpret dreams.

Now let us put ourselves in Yosef's shoes. He has just been taken out of prison. He has the opportunity to make a good impression, be released permanently from prison, and even become part of the government. The King gave him a compliment. Any other person would have reacted in a way which would acknowledge the King's description of him as having great talent. "Well, that's what they say sir. I do have this talent. I have done this before..." We would expect self-promotion. But what does Yosef say? "I can do nothing by myself..."

Pharaoh sees in Yosef a selfless, self-effacing individual who has no self-aggrandizing agenda of his own. Seeing this, Pharaoh said, this fellow might have been a prisoner yesterday, but tomorrow he is going to be my viceroy. A person who is so honest, self-effacing, and non-egotistical -- this is the person I trust to be my second in command.

### ***The Torah Readings Of Chanukah***

In the Torah Reading on Chanukah is from Parshas Nasso - the respective chapters of the offerings of the Nesiyyim [Princes] during the 12 days leading up to the dedication of the Mishkan. Our tradition is that they started building the Mishkan on the 11th of Tishrei (immediately after Yom Kippur, the day Moshe descended for the third time from Mt. Sinai, having achieved atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf) and the Mishkan was completed on the 25th of Kislev. The actual inauguration of the Mishkan was put off until the first day of Nisan, which is when the Nesiyyim started bringing their offerings. But since the Mishkan was actually completed on the 25th of Kislev, we read the section of the Nesiyyim on Chanukah, to link the rededication during the Chanukah period with the original dedication of the Mishkan in the time of Moshe. The Medrash points out an anomaly in Halacha that exists here but nowhere else. We never allow a private person's offering (Korban Yachid) to be brought on Shabbos. Only public offerings (Korbanos Tzibbur) are "doche Shabbos" [may be brought on Shabbos]. Nevertheless, the offerings of the Nesiyyim, which were private offerings, were brought for 12 consecutive days, which obviously spanned a Shabbos. Specifically, the offerings were started on Sunday and the offering of the Nossi [Prince] of the Shevet [Tribe] of Ephraim was brought on the seventh day, on Shabbos. This was a 'Horaas Sha-ah' -- a special one-time dispensation that a private offering could be brought on Shabbos.

The Chofetz Chaim offers a suggestion to explain this anomaly. The Medrash indicates that when the Nesiyyim brought their offerings, every Shevet had in mind what they would be bringing. The first day, Nachshon ben Aminadav of the Shevet of Yehudah brought his offering. The second day was the turn of Nesanel ben Tzuar of the Shevet of Yissachar.

The second person to offer was faced with a dilemma. What should I bring? The first person brought a beautiful offering, but what should I bring? Should I bring the same offering? No! That is not going to be

good enough anymore. He was tempted to bring something even more impressive, which would have put pressure on the third Nossi to bring something even more expensive and so on down the line.

It is very easy to fall into the trap of one-ups-man-ship. It is like kiddushim in shul. The first week's sponsor has one potato kugel. The second person to make a Kiddush the following Shabbos has to add kishke to the menu. By the third week they are adding "herring from New York". It quickly becomes a contest of outdoing one's predecessor. What did Nesanel ben Tzuar decide? He resisted the temptation. He recognized that the purpose of the Mishkan was to bring unity to the Jewish people, not strife and competition. He recognized if they began the inauguration of the Mishkan with competition, there would not be 'achdus' [unity] amongst the Jewish people, there would be dissension. Therefore, he took heroic action and brought exactly the same type of Korban as did Nachshon ben Aminadav, thereby sending a message -- my friends, this is not the time for competition or ones-up-man-ship. His example was followed by the third, fourth, and fifth Nesiyyim and so on down the line.

This explains why the Torah, which is so frugal with its words, spends 60 plus pasukim in repetition of that which we already knew. The Torah could have told us in a pasuk or two that they all brought the same offering. Why go through the repetition, over and over again? The Almighty is teaching: "It is so precious and dear to Me that you each brought the same offering and did not play ones-up-man-ship that I will give each Nossi the exact same amount of 'print' in the Torah."

The Chofetz Chaim suggests it could be for this reason -- the Almighty's pleasure at the unity of His children by this non-competitive gesture -- that He made an exception and ruled that 'This private offering can even negate the laws of Sabbath.'

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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<http://www.vosizneias.com/147558/2013/11/27/new-york-halachic-musings-thanksgiving-on-chanuka/>

### **Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

Rosh Chaburah and Shoel U'Meishiv at the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

### ***Halachic Musings: Thanksgiving On Chanuka?***

New York - This year, 5774/2013, in what is being billed as a 'once in eternity overlap', the American holiday of Thanksgiving falls out on Chanuka! Although it turns out that that label is not entirely accurate, nevertheless, with the next possible co-incidence being 2070, and subsequently followed by 2165 (however, then Thanksgiving will not fall out on the first day of Chanuka, rather the first night of Chanuka will occur on Thanksgiving), it still may be correctly dubbed a 'once in a lifetime occurrence'. Therefore, it bears finding out what, if any, halachic impact this calendrical synthesis has.

Why Thanksgiving?

Americans commonly trace the holiday of Thanksgiving to the 1621 Pilgrim celebration at Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts. The Pilgrims were expressing gratitude to God for a successful harvest after surviving a particularly harsh winter; mainly due to the aid of Squanto, the English speaking Native American, and the Wampanoag tribe, who taught them how to hunt (turkeys) and plant (maize) in the New World, and shared food supplies with them. A second Thanksgiving was observed on July 30th, 1623 in appreciation of an abundant harvest after a refreshing 14-day rain following a nearly catastrophic drought. Similar sporadic celebrations occurred locally throughout the New England area for the next century or so, but never on a national level until 1777, during the Revolutionary War, when 'The First National Proclamation of Thanksgiving' was given by the Continental Congress.

In 1782, John Hanson, the first United States president under the Articles of Confederation (and mysteriously somehow forgotten from the history books), declared the fourth Thursday of every November was to be observed as Thanksgiving. Several years later, President George Washington issued 'The First

National Thanksgiving Proclamation' (under the Constitution), designating November 26th 1789, as a day of Thanksgiving. He did so again in 1795. Yet, it was not until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, when the holiday as we know it was formally established by President Abraham Lincoln, at the urging and behest of Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of Godey's Lady Book, who was lobbying for a national day off from work. Thanksgiving has since been observed annually as a national holiday across the United States. But our subject is defining how Thanksgiving observance is viewed by Halacha.

Chukos HaGoyim?

To answer this question, a little halachic background is needed. In Parshas Acharei Mos (Vayikra Ch.18, verse 3), we are exhorted not to follow in the ways of the Goyim, "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu". According to the Rambam and later codified by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Y"D 178, 1), this prohibition includes manners of dress, haircuts, and even building styles. Tosafos (Avodah Zarah 13a s.v. v'ee) mentions that this prohibition includes two distinct types of customs: idolatrous ones, and those that are nonsensical; implying even if they are not done l'sheim Avodah Zara, they would still be assur to practice.

However, the Ran (Avodah Zara 2b s.v. Yisrael) and Maharik (Shu"t Maharik, Shoresh 88, Anaf 1) define the prohibition differently. They maintain that a nonsensical custom of the Goyim is only prohibited when it is entirely irrational, with no comprehensible reason for it, or when it has connotations of idolatrous intent. Additionally, following a custom that would lead to a gross breach of modesty (pritzus) would fit the category. However, observing a simple custom of the Goyim that has no reference to Avodah Zara, would be permitted. Although the Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGr"a (Y"D 178, end 7) rejects their understanding of the prohibition, and the Gilyon Maharsha (ad loc. 1) seems to follow Tosafos, nevertheless the Rema (Y"D 178, 1) explicitly rules like the Maharik and Ran, as does the Beis Yosef. Accordingly, they hold that as long as a custom is secular, with no connection to Avodah Zara, we may observe such a custom as well.

[For more on the parameters of the prohibition of "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu" and its nuances at length, see Shu"t Melamed L'Hoyeel (O.C. 16), Shu"t Seridei Aish (old print vol. 3, 93; new print Y"D 39, Anaf 1, 5 - 14) and Minchas Asher (vol. 3, Vayikra, Parshas Emor, 33, ppg. 197 - 205).]

Thanksgiving: Religious or Secular?

But to understand how this affects us and possible Thanksgiving observance, we must first ascertain whether Thanksgiving is truly a religious holiday or a secular one. Of the aforementioned Thanksgiving observances, all were declared as a unique day expressly designated to thank God for all of his 'gracious gifts'. This implies that it is meant to be a religious holiday. Yet, only the Continental Congress's proclamation made reference to the Christian deity. Additionally, there is no actual religious service connected with the day at all. Furthermore, nowadays, the vast majority of Americans simply associate Thanksgiving with food (mainly turkey), football, and family, and take the day off. This implies that its observance is strictly secular. Will the real Thanksgiving please stand up?

Contemporary Rulings

As with many issues in halacha there are different approaches to Thanksgiving observance. In fact, Rav Moshe Feinstein alone has written four different responsa on topic (Shu"t Igros Moshe (E.H. vol. 2, 13; O.C. vol. 5, 20, 6; Y"D vol. 4, 11, 4; and Y"D vol. 4, 12). Although in the earlier teshuvos he seems to be against the idea of a Thanksgiving celebration, (possibly there were more religious connotations involved in the early 1960's celebrations than in the 1980's), nevertheless, in his later ones he allows a Thanksgiving observance (he notes that it is not a religious celebration) with turkey being served, as long as it is not seen as an obligatory annual celebration, but rather as a periodical 'simchas reshus'. All the same, Rav Moshe concludes that it is still preferable not to have a celebration b'davka for Thanksgiving.

Other contemporary Gedolim who allowed eating turkey on Thanksgiving include Rav Eliezer Silver, Rav Yosef Dov (J.B.) Soloveitchik (the Boston Gaon; cited in Nefesh HaRav pg. 231), Rav Yehuda Hertzl Henkin, and the Rivevos Efraim. They maintain that Thanksgiving is "only a day of thanks and not, Heaven forbid, for idol celebration", therefore eating turkey on Thanksgiving cannot be considered Chukos HaGoyim.

Yet, other contemporary authorities disagree. Rav Yitzchok Hutner is quoted (see Pachad Yitzchak - Igros U'Michtavim shel HaRav Hutner 109) as maintaining that the establishment of Thanksgiving as an annual holiday that is based on the Christian calendar is, at the very least, closely associated with Avodah Zarah and therefore prohibited. He explains that its annual observance classifies it as a 'holiday' and celebrating Gentile holidays is obviously not permitted.

Similarly, Rav Menashe Klein (Shu"t Mishna Halachos vol. 10, 116) ruled that it is a prohibited to celebrate Thanksgiving. Aside for citing the Gra's opinion, which would prohibit any such celebration, he mentions that although the Thanksgiving

holiday was originally established by (Pilgrims) rejoicing over their own survival, that they didn't starve due to their finding the turkey, and might not be considered Chukos HaGoyim, nevertheless there is another prohibition involved. In Yoreh De'ah (148, 7), the Shulchan Aruch, based on a Mishna in Maseches Avodah Zara (8a), rules that if an idolater makes a personal holiday for various reasons (birthday, was let out of jail, etc.) and at that party he thanks his gods, it is prohibited to join in that celebration. Rav Klein posits that the same would apply to Thanksgiving, as it commemorates the original Pilgrim Thanksgiving, thanking God for the turkey and their survival, and would be certainly prohibited, and possibly even Biblically. An analogous ruling was given by Rav Dovid Cohen (of Gevul Ya'avetz), and Rav Feivel Cohen (author of the Badei HaShulchan), albeit for different reasons. Rav Feivel Cohen takes a seemingly extreme approach, maintaining that not only is it forbidden for a Jew to celebrate Thanksgiving, it is even prohibited for a Gentile to do so as well. Rav Dovid Cohen, on the other hand, writes that for a Jew to eat turkey on Thanksgiving expressly for the sake of the holiday should be prohibited by the rule of Tosafos, as it would be deemed following an irrational rule of theirs that is improper to follow. Yet, he concedes that it is not prohibited for a family to get together on a day off from work and eat turkey together, as long as they do so not to celebrate Thanksgiving, but rather because they like turkey. Even so, he concludes that it is still preferable not to do so.

Trotting Out the Turkey?

With several differing major approaches to Thanksgiving advanced by contemporary authorities, which is the prevailing custom? Should turkey be on our plates this Thursday? The answer is that it depends. As shown, there are many authorities who felt that Thanksgiving dinner should be avoided. However, many people do eat turkey on Thanksgiving, albeit some with non-Thanksgiving related intent. (Remember, even kosher turkey prices drop for the holiday!) Yet, one should not make an 'exclusively for Thanksgiving' party. Everyone should follow his community practice and the lead of their knowledgeable halachic authority. Anecdotally, my own grandmother, Mrs. Ruth Spitz (May she have a Refuah Sheleimah), would buy a turkey, but instead of serving it for Thanksgiving dinner, would rather save it and serve it l'kavod Shabbos on the Shabbos immediately following Thanksgiving. This way one is not compromising on tradition nor halacha, and additionally receives the benefits of kavod and oneg Shabbos. Although nowadays for many in Yeshivish and Chassidic circles the idea of observing some semblance of Thanksgiving may seem an anathema, it is interesting to note that many authorities of the previous generation did not seem too concerned with it. In fact, as is widely known, the annual Agudas Yisrael Convention, attended by many Gedolim, was traditionally held over Thanksgiving weekend for many decades, with turkey on the menu (As attested to in Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky's 'Streets of Life' column in Ami Magazine #143, October 2, 2013, titled 'Tagging Along' pg. 94)! Additionally, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's authoritative Ezras Torah calendar (with halachos for the whole year) noted Thanksgiving along with other secular holidays.

Come what may, this year, with Thanksgiving falling out on the first day of Chanuka, it most definitely will be a day of thanks giving, lehodos u'lehallel. In fact, in an interesting turn of phrase, whether or not one is talking turkey, it will be a day when we can all truly exclaim "Hodu Lashem Ki Tov!"

Many of the shittos of Rabbanim mentioned in this article first appeared in the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (vol. 30, pg. 59).

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