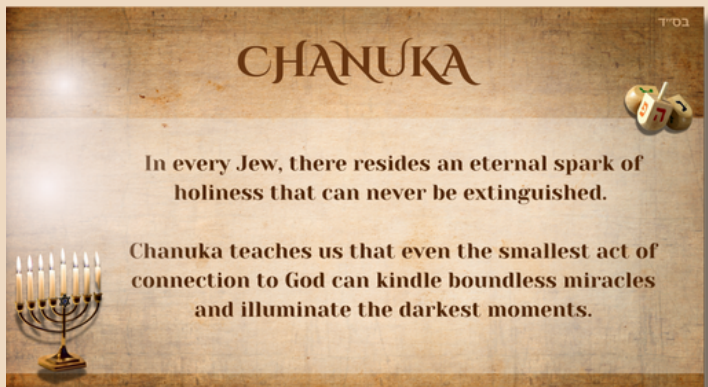


CHANUKA: A DIVINE ENCOUNTER HARNESSING THE LIGHT TO RECONNECT WITH HASHEM AND TRANSCEND LIMITATIONS



THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF CHANUKA

The story of Chanuka recounts the miraculous Jewish triumph over Greek oppression during the Second Temple period. Under the rule of King Antiochus IV, harsh decrees forbade fundamental Jewish practices such as Shabbat observance, circumcision, and Torah study. The Greeks desecrated the *Beit Ha'mikdash* (Holy Temple), offering sacrifices to pagan gods and defiling its sacred items.

In response, a small but determined group of Jews, the *Chashmona'im*, led by Matityahu and his sons, rose against the Greeks. Against all odds, they achieved a miraculous victory. Upon reclaiming the Temple, they discovered only one jar of pure oil with which to light the Menora. Though it seemed insufficient to last until they could produce more pure oil, the oil burned for eight days—a clear sign of Divine intervention.

GREEK OPPRESSION

VICTORY OVER THE
GREEKS AND
MIRACLE OF THE
OIL

Chanuka commemorates both the victory over oppression and the miracle of the oil. This is observed through the lighting of the Chanuka menorah, reciting *Hallel* every day of Chanuka, and expressing gratitude to Hashem for His enduring protection and providence.

THE NAME OF CHANUKA: DEDICATION, EDUCATION, AND GRATITUDE

Chanuka, as reflected in its name, embodies three interconnected aspects that highlight its meaning and enduring legacy.

Dedication (חנוכה): Chanuka commemorates the rededication of the *Beit Ha'mikdash* (Holy Temple) by the Maccabees, an act that restored its sanctity and reaffirmed the Jewish People's enduring bond with God. This event underscores the unwavering commitment of the Jewish people to preserving their spiritual identity, even in the face of oppression.

Education (חנוך): The root of the word Chanuka, *chinukh*, means "to educate" or "to initiate." The lights of the menorah symbolize the transmission of Torah values and Jewish tradition to future generations. Chanuka demonstrates that, even amid pressures to assimilate, it is possible to preserve and strengthen spiritual identity.

Rest and Gratitude (חנו כ"ה): The phrase *chanu kaf-heh* ("they rested on the 25th") marks the victory of the Maccabees on the 25th of Kislev—a day of rest following years of struggle. This moment encapsulates profound gratitude to God for enabling the Jewish people to return to their faith and practices.

THREE ASPECTS OF
THE NAME
"CHANUKA"

CHANUKA: RENEWING THE CONNECTION WITH GOD

In addition to the historical and symbolic themes of Chanuka—dedication, education, and gratitude—Chanuka also invites us to reflect on our inner world. Chanuka represents a profound spiritual opportunity to reconnect with God by rekindling the divine spark within us. This divine spark—*chelek Elokah mima'al* (a “portion of God above”)—is a fragment of God’s essence that resides within each human being.

The lights of the Chanuka menorah reflect the *Ohr Ha’ganuz*—the hidden primordial light of Creation—which is intimately connected to the soul. This extraordinary light, described in the Talmud (*Chagiga 12a*), shone during the first three days of Creation before being concealed by God and reserved for the righteous in the future. Unlike physical light, the *Ohr Ha’ganuz* reveals God’s presence permeating all of creation, bringing spiritual clarity that allows individuals to elevate their consciousness and reconnect with their divine essence. The Chanuka menorah’s lights act as a channel to temporarily reveal this hidden light on these special days.

By gazing at and contemplating the flames of the Chanuka menorah, one can access deeper awareness, recognizing the soul’s divine origin and aligning it with God’s will. This awareness enables the perception of God’s presence in all aspects of life, both spiritual and material. As a result, spiritual barriers are dissolved, and the *neschama* (soul) perceives its true reality—an expression and reflection of divine holiness.

Each flame of the Chanuka menorah represents a step toward a more profound connection with God, but this connection must be nurtured and sustained through mitzvot. Observing mitzvot allows divine light to flow into the *neschama*, fortifying and nourishing the divine spark

RECONNECTING TO
OUR DIVINE SPARK

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OBSERVING
MITZVOT TO
INCREASE THE
DIVINE SPARK
WITHIN

within, and aligning one's actions with Hashem's will. When nurtured, this spark manifests as spiritual clarity, a deep sense of purpose, and a lasting connection to the Divine, reflecting inner stability, peace, and the capacity to share and receive divine blessings.

However, straying from this alignment diminishes the spark, allowing *kelipot* (spiritual "shells") to form. These *kelipot* block the flow of divine energy, leading to instability, confusion, and a sense of emptiness. By returning to Torah and mitzvot with intention, these barriers can be dissolved, restoring vitality to the divine spark. This realignment allows the uninterrupted flow of *berakha* (blessing), eternally open and available to nourish the *neshama* and reconnect it to God's infinite light.

DIMINISHING THE SPARK AND FORMING OF KELIPOT

CHANUKA'S INCLUSIVE FLAME: REKINDLING EVERY SOUL'S POTENTIAL

The allowance of materials unsuitable for Shabbat candles in the Chanuka menorah carries yet another profound and inclusive message: every soul, regardless of its current state or distance from God, Torah, and mitzvot, has the potential for renewal and reconnection.

EVERY SOUL HAS THE POTENTIAL FOR RENEWAL AND RECONNECTION

Even those who feel far from Hashem can tap into this unique moment, reigniting their inner spark and contributing to the collective light of the Jewish people. This reconnection is far more accessible during Chanuka than at other times, precisely because of the extraordinary spiritual potential inherent in these days.

This inclusivity embodies the core essence of Chanuka: the belief that no soul is beyond redemption and that every individual has a vital role in dispelling darkness and bringing light into the world.

CHANUKA: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO BRING LIGHT

THE NUMBER EIGHT AND TRANSCENDENCE

In Jewish tradition, the natural world operates within a framework of seven, reflecting order, cycles, and physical reality. However, the number eight represents a level that surpasses the natural, pointing toward divine intervention and a reality infused with holiness.

The central miracle of Chanuka, where a single day's supply of oil burned for eight days, demonstrates this transcendence. The eight days of Chanuka remind us that God's presence can elevate what seems natural and limited into the miraculous and infinite. The *Ohr Ha'ganuz* (primordial hidden light) accessed during Chanuka is itself a reflection of this transcendent realm.

The number eight teaches us to look beyond the constraints of nature and the physical world. During Chanuka, when we light the menorah, we connect with this transcendent energy.

- According to the *Maharal of Prague*, the Chanuka menorah's eight lights represent the Jewish ability to rise above the limitations of time, history, and material existence. The Jewish people's victory over the Greeks was not merely a physical triumph but a spiritual one—a victory of divine light and holiness over assimilation and darkness.
- The *Sefat Emet* emphasizes that Chanuka serves as a reminder that Jews are not bound solely to the physical world. By observing mitzvot and connecting with the miraculous light of the Chanuka menorah, we elevate ourselves into a state that transcends human frailty and connects directly with the infinite.

The number eight, embodied in the eight days of Chanuka, symbolizes transcendence, eternity, and the miraculous. It calls upon us to elevate ourselves beyond

TRANSCENDING
HUMAN
LIMITATIONS

MAHARAL: EIGHT
SYMBOLIZES
TRANSCENDING
TIME AND HISTORY

SEFAT EMET: THE
MENORA AS A
SYMBOL OF
CONNECTING
WITH THE DIVINE

the limits of the natural world and connect with the infinite light of God. Lighting the menorah each night provides a tangible opportunity to access this divine dimension, reminding us that with faith, commitment, and connection to the Divine, even the finite can reflect the infinite.

ASCENDING TO HASHEM ON SHABBAT, RECEIVING HIM ON CHANUKA

Shabbat and Chanuka offer two contrasting ways of connecting with Hashem, each reflecting a unique dynamic in the relationship between the Divine and the physical world.

On Shabbat, by refraining from performing *melakhot* (categories of creative labor forbidden on Shabbat), humanity and the world withdraw from the material realm, ascending toward a purer connection with Hashem. This cessation of labor signifies a detachment from mundane activities, allowing the *Shekhina* (the aspect of God that dwells in the world, bridging the infinite Creator and the finite creation) to unite with Hashem in the higher spiritual realms.

Chanuka, in contrast, represents the reverse movement: Hashem descends into our world to meet the *Shekhina* and, by extension, every individual.

The Ari (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria) teaches that Chanuka is one of the rare times during the year when Hashem enters the material realm, bringing light and sanctity into places and states that typically seem distant from the Divine.

This descent is symbolized by the placement of the Chanuka menorah. It is ideally positioned below ten *tefachim* (handbreadths), a height associated with

REFRAINING FROM
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SHABBAT AND THE
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HEIGHT OF THE
CHANUKA MENORA

humility and proximity to the human level. This halakhic detail, discussed in the Talmud (Shabbat 21b), reflects Hashem's approach to the lower realms, bringing light to transform darkness into sanctity.

CHANUKA FLAMES: TARGETING IMPURITY AND RESTORING HOLINESS

The mitzva of lighting Chanuka candles begins at sunset and continues until the streets are empty of pedestrians, as stated in the Talmud (*Shabbat 21b*): "*The mitzva is from the time the sun sets until pedestrians [regel, lit. foot] cease from the market.*" This timing ensures the candles fulfill their purpose of publicizing the miracle of Chanuka, a celebration of both the oil that burned for eight days and the victory over Greek oppression.

Beyond its practical implications, this Talmudic teaching contains deeper spiritual meaning. According to Jewish mysticism, the phrase "*until the foot [regel] ceases from the market*" symbolizes the cosmic struggle between holiness (*Adam d'Kedusha*) and impurity (*Adam Bliya'al*), two realms mirroring each other. Holiness draws vitality from Hashem, the ultimate source of life, while impurity relies on "fallen sparks" of holiness trapped within its domain. These sparks, scattered since the sin of Adam and Chava, are essential to sustaining the forces of impurity.

In Kabbala, the "feet" represent the lowest and least conscious aspects of holiness, which have fallen into the domain of impurity. The "public market" (*reshut ha'rabim*) symbolizes a fragmented perception of reality that denies Divine unity. Impurity thrives in this realm, feeding off doubt, despair, and separation from Hashem's truth.

THE DEEPER
MEANING OF
"UNTIL
PEDESTRIANS
CEASE FROM THE
MARKET"

THE SYMBOLISM
OF THE "PUBLIC
MARKET"

The Chanuka menorah is a beacon that sends its light out into the *reshut ha'rabim*. Its precision-guided photons target the sparks that are trapped inside the *kelipa*—the splinters of light that together comprise the heels of our holy fallen Adam. A candle, says the Zohar, is not just a source of illumination. It is a living symbol that broadcasts the truth of Divine oneness into the psyche of those looking on.

Whoever desires to grasp the wisdom of holy oneness should observe a flame ascending from a burning candle. [Zohar 1:51a]

The soul is fluent in reading symbols. It prefers them to words. On Chanuka our souls are flooded by candlelight and the message of oneness that it transmits. The hope and prayer (and theory) is that these sparks trapped in *reshut ha'rabim* consciousness will absorb that light, awaken, and return to the truth of their soul.

Let our Chanuka *menorot* inspire a mass *aliya* of fallen sparks returning to their holy land, the *reshut ha'yachid* mindset, where truth rules and faith prevails.

Bereft of life-juice, let the *kelipa* wither along with the rage, envy, lies, and shame that are its proxies. Let it be now, on this Chanuka, that the “foot finally ceases from the shuk—תכלה רגל מן השוק—and the gates fly open to our reward phase of history, growth-through-joy, mashiach and beyond.

FREEING THE
TRAPPED SPARKS

Compiled based on:

- *Days of Joy: Sfas Emes: Ideas and Insights of the Sfas Emes on Chanukah and Purim* by Rabbi Yosef Stern - Artscroll Mesorah Publishing House
- *Until there are no stragglers in the marketplace & Chanukka and the Feminine* by Sarah Yehudit Schneider, published on A Still Small Voice.

