

Parsha Ponders

Chanukah | November 28, 2021 | 25 Kislev 5782

Igniting the flames of the past¹

ברוך אתה יקוק אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וציונו להדליק נר (של) חנוכה...שעשה ניסים
לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה

Blessed are you Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to ignite the light of Chanukah...Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this time²

The Sefas Emes makes an interesting observation³ regarding the blessing we say when we light the Chanukah candles. We say חנוכה נר (של) חנוכה, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to ignite the light of Chanukah. If we were composing the text of the blessing, what would it say? Probably something more like בחנוכה נרות להדליק נרות, that He commanded us to light candles on Chanukah. What does it mean to ignite the light of Chanukah? It sounds like there's some pre-existing light of the festival of Chanukah, and we're somehow tapping into it...Another question we can ask is on the second blessing, which says that Hashem performed miracles for our ancestors in those days, at this time. Why do we end with the phrase "at this time"? What does that add to the blessing?

We aren't able to access the original Menorah of the Temple. Or can we? We don't see the physical golden vessel before our eyes. Yet, the light that came into the world through the Menorah, that's something we have the power to ignite. When we light our own Menorah, we tap into that original light, and bring it back into the world. That truly makes it a *ner shel Chanukah*, a light of Chanukah. This light is not like any other light we have in our house. We therefore have to make it special, and treat it like it came from the Temple itself. A person that sees this light rightfully should make the blessing of *bayamim hamem*, in those days, *bazman hazeh*, as well as in this time. The same miraculous light from then is in our very own homes.

There's an interesting mind-bending idea⁴ regarding the splitting of the Reed Sea and our recital of *Shiras HaYam*, the Song of the Sea. Before the sea split, there was a major uproar in the Heavens⁵. The angels were questioning Hashem's intent. They said that the Jews worshipped idols, and so did the Egyptians⁶. Why should Hashem perform a miracle for the Jews, and not help the Egyptians? Hashem essentially ignored their complains, and split the sea anyways. Why? Hashem knows the future. Hashem saw that the Jews in the future, every day, would recite the *Shiras HaYam*, a song of gratitude for Hashem splitting the sea. The merits accrued over the millennia are what gave the Jews at that time the

¹ Based on a *shiur* given by [Rav Feivel Shuster](#) in 5781

² Blessings recited before lighting Chanukah candles

³ [Sefas Emes Chanukah](#) 5631, 5656

⁴ [Sidduro Shel Shabbos](#) 4:2,10,11, by [Rav Chaim Chernowitz](#) (18th century *Chassidic Rebbe*)

⁵ [Shemos Rabbah](#) 21:7

⁶ There's an often-quoted *Midrash* in which the angels say זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה. This phrase does not seem to have a source in *Chazal*. The closest is [Zohar II parshas Terumah](#) p. 170b, although that's the Aramaic version of this phrase, and it adds both were also guilty of illicit relations and murder. [Shemos Rabbah loc. cit.](#) only mentions that the Jews until recently were idol worshippers, with no mention of the Egyptians. See also [Shir HaShirim](#) 2:1, 8:8, that the ministers **in the future** will claim against the Jews אלו עובדי עבודת כוכבים, and [Midrash Tehillim](#) 1:18, 15:3, that the nations in the future will claim זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה

merit to have the sea split. What that means then is every day that I say *Shiras HaYam*, I'm not merely recalling the *chessed* that Hashem did for us. I am literally help create that miracle.

Some⁷ take this a step further and apply it to Chanukah. At the time of the Chanukah story, the vast, vast majority of Jews were Hellenized. A very small group of dedicated Kohanim decided to take up arms and fight the entire Greek army. Not only were the odds against them, they had seemingly zero merits on their side. Why should Hashem make a miracle that they would have a salvation? Why would they merit to the extra miracle of the Menorah burning for eight days? Similar to the splitting of the sea, it came from the future merits of the Jewish people. Hashem knew that for all generations, Chanukah would be the most observed Jewish holiday. Practically all Jews, from all walks of life, levels of observance, and locale, observe Chanukah. All those acts of gratitude for the salvation gave, and still give, the tremendous merit needed for the miracle in the first place.

This means that every time I light the Chanukah candles, I am literally helping create the Chanukah story. This gives another twist to the blessing that we say, that Hashem performs miracles not only in those days, but in these times. What we do today, creates the miracles of yesterday.

Have a *lichtege Chanukah!*

⁷ Yitav Panim *Hod VeHadar LeChanukah* § 6, by the Yitav Lev (19th century *Chassidic Rebbe*; grandson of the Yismach Moshe)