

# Parsha Ponders

Chanukah | Dec 5, 2023 | 22 Kislev 5784

## Publicizing the victory<sup>1</sup>

ואחר-כן באו בניך לדביר ביתך ופנו את-היכלך וטהרו את-מקדשך והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך וקבעו שמונת ימי חנוכה אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול

Afterwards Your children went to your Holy abode, cleaned out Your *Heichal*, purified Your Sanctuary, and lit candles in Your Holy courtyard. They established these eight days of Chanukah for praising and thanking Your great Name<sup>2</sup>

Seemingly the first day of Chanukah is no different than the other days of Chanukah. However, the *Pri Chadash* notes<sup>3</sup> that in the original Chanukah story, the first day seemingly didn't contain any miracle. They found a jug of oil which was enough to last one day. The fact that it lit for one day isn't a miracle. He concludes then that the reason why we celebrate eight days and not seven is that the first day commemorates the miraculous victory of the tiny Jewish forces against the vast Greek Empire. The Jews reclaimed the Temple and were able rebuild the destroyed Menorah and light it.

However, this approach is problematic. If the only reason for celebrating the first day of Chanukah is because of the victory against the Greeks, why then do we celebrate it by lighting the Menorah? Seemingly, only the other seven days should be celebrated this way, as they commemorate the miracle with the oil. There must be more going on here.

To figure this out, we first have to analyze the text of the *Al HaNissim* prayer that is recited during Chanukah. We mention that the *Chashmonayim* lit the Menorah "in Your Holy courtyard". Now, this language is very difficult. The courtyard is a reference to the *Azarah*, where the Temple Altar stood<sup>4</sup>. However, the Menorah was in the *Heichal*, deeper within the Temple<sup>5</sup>. Why then did they light the Menorah in the *Azarah*?

We know that the Greeks didn't intend on destroying the Jewish people in the physical sense, like other Empires throughout history. Rather, their intent was a spiritual one, to Hellenise the Jews, to make them forget their G-d and their Torah. Antiochus declared himself a god, and hated the fact that the Jews observed the Torah openly and publicly. Therefore, he imposed harsh decrees against them, banning ritual circumcision, Shabbos, and the like. These public and prominent *mitzvos* made it obvious the Jews weren't subservient to him. In particular, the Greeks made every effort to defile and corrupt the Temple, especially the Menorah.

Our Sages tell us<sup>6</sup> something astonishing when it comes to the Menorah. When the *Kohanim* would light the Menorah in the Temple, every single courtyard in Jerusalem would be lit up from its light. This was

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Moadim U'Zmanim 2:138, by Rav Moshe Shternbuch *shlita*

<sup>2</sup> *Al HaNissim* Prayer, *Shemoneh Esrei*

<sup>3</sup> Pri Chadash *Orach Chaim* 670:1

<sup>4</sup> See Zevachim 56a

<sup>5</sup> Rav Chaim Kanievsky in Ta'amah D'Krah *parshas Vayeishev* s.v. והדליקו says this isn't a question, as we see from Ezekiel 44:17 with Rashi and v. 19 with Metzudas Dovid that the term courtyard can also refer to the *Heichal*. See there for other approaches

<sup>6</sup> Midrash Tanchuma *Tetzaveh* § 3

an astounding miracle, where the light of the Menorah was recognizable throughout the entire city<sup>7</sup>. This *mitzvah* in particular publicized the greatness of Hashem. It makes sense then why the Greeks were so bent on removing it.

Getting back to the victory over the Greeks, we can understand why the *Chashmonayim* were very keen to reestablish the lighting of the Menorah. By lighting the Menorah, the entire city would be illuminated by its light<sup>8</sup>. They wanted to publicize that once again the Jews are fulfilling Hashem's Will publicly. They were able to light the Menorah, unhindered by the Greeks. The entire city realized that the Jews won, and they no longer had to hide. In truth then, the main joy of that day was the miraculous victory over the enemy. However, their victory wasn't totally discernable until they lit the Menorah outside, in public. The miracle was then publicized, and everyone realized they had achieved total victory. These days then became affixed as days of praise, thanks, and lighting, for the victory over their enemies.

Now it fits very well that we say that they lit the Menorah *in Your Holy courtyard*. They intentionally lit it outside the *Heichal*, in full view of the nation. It made the light even more palatable in the entire city. The defeat of the Greeks was fully broadcast. The announcement was clear: now the Jews can publicly observe Hashem's *mitzvos*, without fear of persecution. This prayer text also fits nicely with the opinion of the Rambam, who rules<sup>9</sup> that that it's permissible to light the Menorah if it was taken out of the *Heichal* into the Temple courtyard. Even according to the Ra'avad, who argues<sup>10</sup>, that's only because it's prohibited to take out the Menorah. In the case of the *Chashmonayim*, they built a new Menorah in the courtyard. In that instance, especially since there was a need to publicize the victory, all could agree that lighting there would be permissible.

If the above is correct, we have a terrific answer to a popular question. We have a rule that if the congregation is impure, then there's no problem lighting the Menorah with impure oil<sup>11</sup>. Why then did the *Chashmonayim* specifically seek out pure oil, to the point that they needed a miracle for the small jar to last for eight days<sup>12</sup>? Now, when the congregation is impure, the *mitzvah* is definitely fulfilled through impure oil. However, the miracle described by our Sages can't occur with impure oil. For the Menorah's light to spread throughout the city, only pure oil can be used<sup>13</sup>. Since the *Chashmonayim* had such a strong desire to publicize their victory, it's no wonder then why they specifically sought pure oil.

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<sup>7</sup> This fits nicely with Menachos 86a, which says the Menorah is a testimony to the whole world that the Divine Presence rests with the Jews. Without this miracle, seemingly most people couldn't see the Menorah lit within the *Heichal*

<sup>8</sup> It's interesting that Rav Moshe Shternbuch assumes that this miracle, described by the *Midrash*, still existed in the times of the Second Temple, when all of the miracles associated with the Temple had already ceased. However, he does discuss why Yoma 21a, when listing the miracles of the Temple, doesn't list this miracle. He answers that it's because it for whatever reason left out the entire topic of the Menorah, which we know had other miracles associated with it

<sup>9</sup> Mishneh Torah Hilchos Bias Mikdash 9:7

<sup>10</sup> *Ad. loc.*

<sup>11</sup> Mishneh Torah Hilchos Tamidim UMussafim 3:10

<sup>12</sup> *Inter alia*, Mizrachi in his *chiddushim* to the Semag Hilchos Chanukah

<sup>13</sup> See Pesachim 84b, which also discusses something disqualified fulfilling an obligation and yet not being the same as something valid for the *mitzvah*

This approach resolves another difficult *gemarra*. Our Sages say<sup>14</sup> that someone who regularly lights candles will merit children who are Torah Sages. Many authorities say<sup>15</sup> this is referring to lighting Chanukah candles. However, how can someone “regularly” light Chanukah candles, which only occurs eight days out of the year? Perhaps the intent is the above idea behind Chanukah. If someone performs Hashem’s *mitzvos* publicly, without hiding, like the *Chashmonayim* did with the Menorah, then they’ll merit children who are Torah scholars.

May it be His Will that we merit to such Divine service. Have a *lichtege* Chanukah! Happy Chanukah

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<sup>14</sup> Shabbos 23b

<sup>15</sup> Rabbeinu Chananel, Rosh, Ran ad. loc.