

# chosen words

A Gift For Chanukah

## The Miracle of Miracles

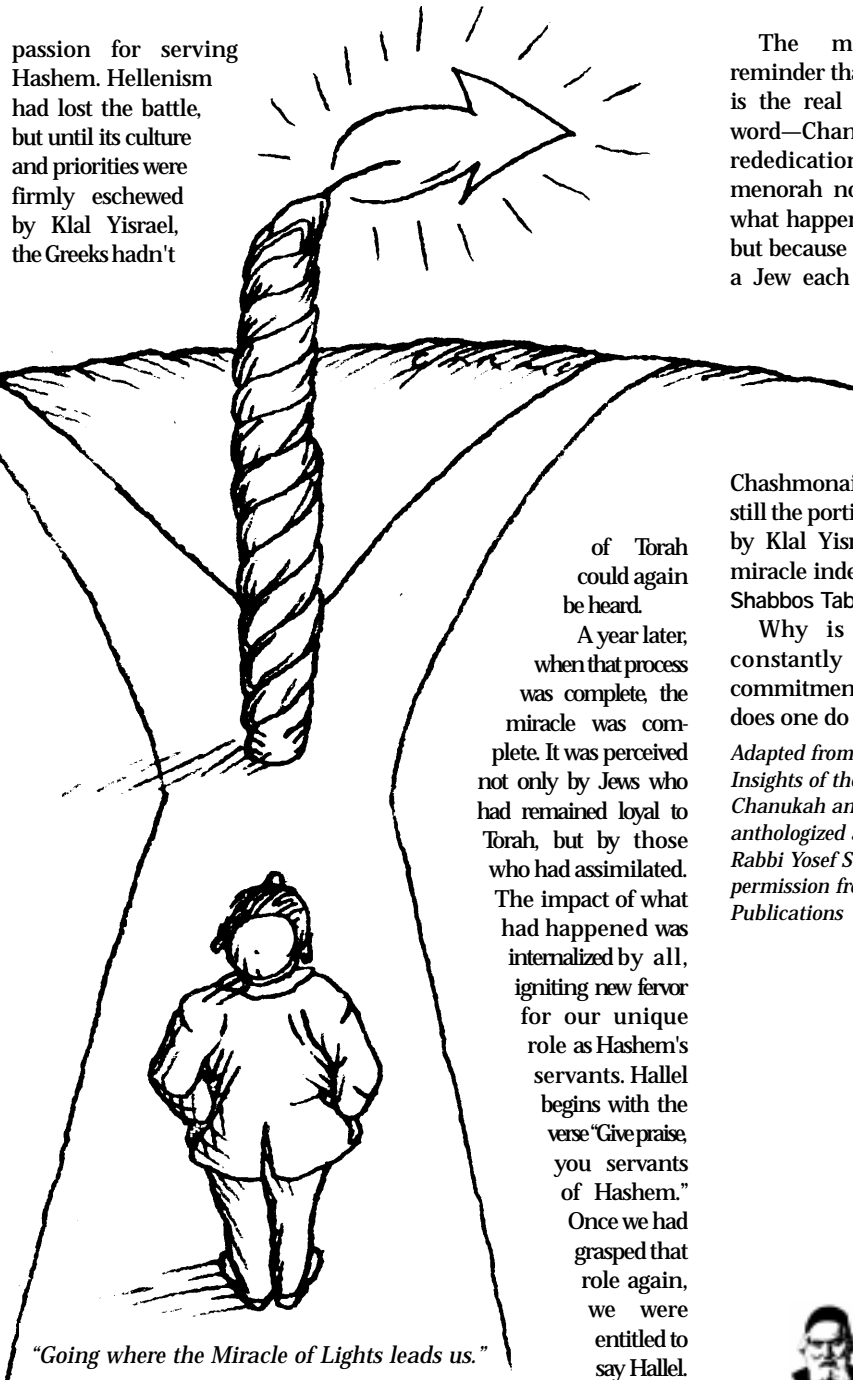
Imagine lighting a Chanukah candle—a slender little twist of colorful wax—the first night of Chanukah. Now imagine that a half-hour later, the candle stands as tall as it had when it was first lighted. An hour later, it's nearly the same. The next morning, it stands there, still burning, but hardly diminished. By now, the neighbors are crowding the living room to see this amazing sight. A team of scientists arrives to examine the phenomenon. Meanwhile, the candle burns on and on, for eight whole days.

In such a situation, you'd have no doubt: it's a miracle. Yet a strikingly similar phenomenon, occurring in the Beis Hamikdash at the end of a startling military victory, was not celebrated as a miracle right away. It took a full year before the Sages declared Chanukah a Yom Tov, and designated it as a unique, eight-day period marked by lighting a menorah and reciting a full Hallel.

The purpose of a miracle is to awaken in the world recognition of Hashem. The Jewish people were chosen as the primary agents for that awakening; it's our life's mission to glorify Hashem's name. In light of that obligation, it seems strange that the Sages would hesitate even one minute to declare Chanukah a Yom Tov.

But the celebration couldn't be declared in what would seem a timely manner. That is because the full miracle hadn't yet happened. We had salvation. We had victory. We had oil. But we still hadn't regained our

passion for serving Hashem. Hellenism had lost the battle, but until its culture and priorities were firmly eschewed by Klal Yisrael, the Greeks hadn't



"Going where the Miracle of Lights leads us."

lost the war. Little by little, Jews grasped the meaning of the Chashmonaim's victory. Little by little, the call of Hellenist culture faded, and the call

of Torah could again be heard.

A year later, when that process was complete, the miracle was complete. It was perceived not only by Jews who had remained loyal to Torah, but by those who had assimilated. The impact of what had happened was internalized by all, igniting new fervor for our unique role as Hashem's servants. Hallel begins with the verse "Give praise, you servants of Hashem." Once we had grasped that role again, we were entitled to say Hallel.

We were entitled to the Yom Tov. Only when the message of Chanukah had become part of us were we ready and able to publicize the miracle.

The menorah is our reminder that spiritual renewal is the real miracle. The very word—Chanukah—relates to rededication. We light the menorah not only because of what happened way back then, but because of what happens to a Jew each day, as he strives to connect to Hashem, feel His presence and serve him wholeheartedly. Centuries after the

Chashmonaim's victory, this is still the portion grasped joyfully by Klal Yisrael, and that is a miracle indeed.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

Why is it necessary to constantly be renewing our commitment to Hashem? How does one do that?

*Adapted from "Days of Joy: Insights of the Sfas Emes on Chanukah and Purim," anthologized and adapted by Rabbi Yosef Stern, used with permission from Mesorah Publications*



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# Solo

A Chanukah menorah shines in the window, a quiet, refined light. Yet the menorah's light speaks in a loud, unequivocal voice, to everyone who sees it. Its message: "Hashem alone runs this world." The story of Chanukah is indeed an exciting one—a riveting tale of courage, loyalty and victory against the odds. But the menorah doesn't tell that story. Instead, it simply states that Hashem is the source of all that happens, and that is the essential, the primary, the single most important message that a Jew must instill within himself and carry into the world.

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We learn of the primacy of this message from a ruling in the Shulchan Aruch: A poor person who needs charity to survive is still required to light Chanukah candles, even if he has to borrow money or sell his clothes in order to buy them. This stringency is unprecedented in rabbinically ordained mitzvos, and rare even in mitzvos found in the Torah. The Talmud declares that if a person can't afford both wine for Kiddush and Chanukah candles, he must forgo the wine. Why? Because the Chanukah lights proclaim a miracle.

Proclaiming a miracle reinforces the core belief of a Jew;

Hashem rules over all. Nature itself is an expression of Hashem's will, and every astounding detail of it is a miracle in itself. But it is only when the natural order of things is upended that we are startled into the realization that Hashem has been holding the strings all along. That astonishment is an essential reinforcement for our belief in Hashem, essential to each and every Jew, no matter what the condition of his finances.

Ultimately, the menorah is a praise of Hashem, an acknowl-

edgment of the incomprehensible wisdom and power with which He alone directs history. By kindling the menorah, we create a light that carries this message inward to the depths of our souls, and outward to illuminate the world.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

Are there other ways to awaken the recognition that Hashem runs the world? Are they as powerful as a miracle?

*Adapted from "Reb Michel's Shmuessen," by Rabbi Michel Barenbaum, with permission from Mesorah Publications*

## Effective Prayer

# Thanks for Everything

Chanukah is the only Yom Tov in which we say a full Hallel, prayers of thanks and praise, for eight days straight. This practice not only acknowledges the eight-day miracle of the oil; it actually imprints the special influence of Chanukah upon every day throughout the year.

By repeating Hallel for eight consecutive days, we train ourselves, forming a habit of thankfulness. Hallel brings us to focus upon the many kindnesses that Hashem does for us. When we open ourselves to the words of Hallel, we are instilled with a sense of gratitude, and can offer with truer, deeper kavanah the many expression of thanks that occur throughout tefillah. Through this, we become appreciative of the many kindnesses we receive from the hands of

family and friends. A person with a strong sense of thankfulness, who savors all the kindness bestowed upon him, has light in his life for the eight days of Chanukah and every day thereafter.

To do:

Think of one thing for which you are deeply grateful, and call it to mind during the appropriate part of tefillah.

—CCHF

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