

# הַמִּתְקַדְּמִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## THE MIRACLE OF HANUKAH

(שליט"א רבי דוד חנניה פּינטו)

**T**he miracle of Hanukah was one of the greatest miracles known by the Jewish people. It was so great that our Sages devoted a special holiday for it. It is a holiday in which we recite neither funerals eulogies nor supplications, and during which time we honor the daily Torah readings by reciting the passages dealing with the offerings of the leaders of Israel during the inauguration of the Altar in the desert.

It is fitting to take note of the miracle that took place during the era of the second Temple. The Greeks at that time had dominion over the Children of Israel, and obligated them to renounce their faith and to turn away from their practices. The Eternal came to their aid at a time of suffering. He gave strength and courage to the Children of Israel who had to fight a powerful army, an army of hundreds of thousands of men, soldiers that were battle-hardened and heavily armed. The Children of Israel, who were then weak and few in number, almost destitute of weapons, prevailed over their enemies. The Greeks suffered a terrible defeat and took to flight. As for the Children of Israel, they began to repent and applied themselves to observe Torah and mitzvot, to respect Shabbat and the laws of family purity, to wear Tefillin, and to publicly proclaim the holiness of Rosh Chodesh, without any shame or fear.

It was a great miracle, and we should well ask ourselves how it is that our Sages chose to celebrate Hanukah, meaning to say the inauguration of the purified Temple and the remembrance of the flask of pure oil, oil that had been miraculously found by the priests in the Temple and had allowed the Menorah to be lit once again. In fact, it is surprising to note that the Sages did not institute any festival to commemorate the extraordinary military victory of the Children of Israel over the Greeks. We may also be surprised to note that Hashem desired this miracle of the flask that burned eight hours instead of one. Was it not enough for the many to have been chased away by the few, the strong by the weak, and the impure by the pure? Did this last miracle not already constitute a great sanctification of G-d's name? Why then did Hashem perform for them the miracle of the flask of oil that burned eight days instead of one (eight days being

the time required to prepare new oil to keep the Menorah lit)? Was this miracle so important that Hashem judged it useful to perform it in addition to the miracle of the military victory?

Moreover, because of the miracle of the flask of oil, the Sages gave no importance to the miracle of the military victory over the Greeks!

In addition, we should ask ourselves why this holiday is called Hanukah. Even if we recall that the word Hanukah (חנוכה) is derived from Hanu (חנו) and Kah (כה), כה having the numerical value of 25 – “they found rest (חנו) on the twenty-fifth (כה) of Kislev” – the question is not fully answered, for we plainly see that the other holidays (Passover Shavuot, Sukkot, Purim, etc.) are not named after their dates, but rather by the events that they commemorate! Why then is this holiday the exception and designated by its date rather than by the event that it celebrates?

I have thought it appropriate to explain the following statement of our Sages, of blessed memory: “The ignoramus cannot be pious.” In effect, a man who has not studied Torah and who ignores its worth, even if he performs the Divine commandments, will not be able to perform them with love, as does someone who looks to accomplish the will of his Creator. In fact, when a man accomplishes the commandments in order to be relieved of his religious duties, he does so as taught. Yet come the day when he will not want to perform the commandments, and it will be then that he may transgress them without regret afterwards. In actuality, he is ignorant of the authentic value of these commandments, and for him they mean nothing.

For example, a man who understands the value of money and knows just how difficult it is to earn will automatically not waste any of it that was hard-earned, for he knows its worth. However for one who doesn't understand the value of money, just as he has acquired it with ease, likewise will he squander it with ease.

The Children of Israel saw the great miracles that the Holy One, blessed be He, performed for them against the ungodly Greeks. The latter were very cruel, for they had killed hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people,

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and they tried to uproot the Jews' faith in their Creator. They did this in order that the Jews become assimilated to their culture and live in ignorance of the Master and Creator of the world. Almost all the Children of Israel became Hellenized and influenced by Greek culture. They forgot that they were Jews and began to imitate Greek ways, for the Greeks had killed most of the righteous of that generation and left few remaining. Therefore there was no one from whom the Children of Israel could draw a spiritual example. At first, the rebellion against those ungodly men, who had strength on their side, consisted of a handful of righteous men. They fought the Greeks and eventually conquered them (as for the rest of the Greeks who survived, they fled from Jerusalem). Thus the Divine Name was sanctified among the Children of Israel, and the peoples of the earth and the entire world knew there was a G-d in Israel Who protects and guards them, as it is written: "The Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

The Sages did not want to celebrate the miracle of the military victory because they feared that the Children of Israel would turn this solemn observance into a day that celebrates their strength against the Greeks. The Sages feared that the Children of Israel would forget that it was Hashem Who had come to their aid. Such a commemoration would only have led to mistaken concepts for the generations to come, for we would have surely forgotten even the essence of the miracle.

During the time of the Hasmoneans, the Children of Israel were entirely removed from Judaism. They were almost completely Hellenized. A holiday that would have commemorated military victories would have made them forget, after a few years, that it was Hashem Who had come and rescued them. Without doubt, they would have in the end attributed their victory to their own strength and intelligence. A man without Torah doesn't understand the value of this. He doesn't realize that he owes all of his success to his Creator.

The Sages desired, therefore, that the celebration of this miracle be related to something spiritual, not material. This was done in order that credit for the victory be attributed to Hashem only, and also that its memory be perpetuated forever. In fact, had the Sages not related the holiday to a spiritual miracle, we would have ended up by forgetting the miracle of the military victory, or we would have attributed it to the strength and intelligence of the people. Because of what the Sages did, however, the remembrance of an entirely spiritual miracle that was performed solely by G-d will always remain indelibly engraved in the memory of the Jewish people. We will always remember that G-d is present, ensuring that the light of Judaism is never extinguished.

This is why the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the day when the Children of Israel rid themselves of their enemies (and above all, the rapid assimilation that threatened them), was proclaimed a holiday. Beginning from that day, even those among them that had become assimilated began to repent. The Hasmoneans began to purify the Temple, and through this action the hearts of the Children of Israel

also became purified. The more the Hasmoneans cleaned and purified the Beit Hamikdash of the impurities and the idolatry found therein, the more the hearts of the Children of Israel came closer to Hashem and rid themselves of the assimilation that they had been impregnated with.

Hashem then saw the efforts of the Children of Israel and the difficulties of the Hasmoneans, who found themselves without oil to light the Menorah. The Hasmoneans realized that in the same way that the Temple had been purified, the Children of Israel had also, they themselves, reached the level of the Tzaddikim. Yet they still lacked a flame, meaning the Divine forces that irresistibly lead to Hashem. The Greeks had influenced them so much, and the people had been rendered so ignorant and so devoid of mitzvot, that the Hasmoneans feared that everything was but a burning ember that would extinguish itself soon afterwards. A man without Torah has great trouble in facing this world.

The Hasmoneans therefore looked for pure oil, oil that had the power to maintain this flame during the time that it took the Children of Israel to once again inculcate the Torah within themselves and face the trials of this world. Let us note that the word Hashemen – השמן ("oil") – is composed of the letters as the word Neshama – נשמה ("soul") – the same as the word Shemona – שמונה ("eight") – which relates to the eight days of Hanukah.

The discovery of the flask of pure oil came and confirmed to the Hasmoneans that Hashem Himself ensured that the flame that had been lit in the hearts of the Children of Israel would never be extinguished.

Hashem, addressing Himself to the Children of Israel, said to them: "Open for me a door like the eye of a needle, and I will open for you doors as wide as those of a palace." It is therefore by Divine will that on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Children of Israel found true rest by the discovery of this flask of pure oil. This is why the holiday is called Hanukah, for on this day, the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the Children of Israel found a way that allowed them to advance with their own strength in the path of the Torah.

This is why the holiday of Hanukah was instituted for the generations to come, in order that from year to year we may arouse in ourselves an awakening against wicked thoughts and foreign influences that seek to overwhelm us.

By the merit of the light of Hanukah, the obscurity that attempts to take over man's heart will disappear. Thus, in publicly displaying our lights to the world, we will eliminate the influences of foreign civilizations from ourselves, as did our ancestors during the time of the Hasmoneans.

May it be G-d's desire to always illuminate our path, in order that we may continually serve Him in reverence and with all our strength. Amen.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### *From the Maggid of Dubno*

**I**t is written, "For a dream comes from much concern" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Concerning this verse, the Midrash says: "Pharaoh said, 'Who derives life from whom? Me from my gods, or my gods from me?' Joseph responded, 'You from your gods.' Rabbi Yochanan said, 'The wicked dominate their gods' ([Pharaoh] was standing over the river" [Genesis 41:1]), but for the righteous, it is G-d Who dominates them ("The L-RD was standing over him" [Genesis 28:13]).'

This text seems completely incomprehensible. First of all, we cannot see what the passage from Ecclesiastes is doing in this context. A parable can help us to better understand.

A rich man had a business that was greatly flourishing, to the point that all the retailers in the neighboring towns came to him. He was accustomed, almost every day, to staying at synagogue until noon. One day, someone from another town came asking for him at his home. When his wife replied that he had not yet come back from the Beit Midrash, the man left and went on his way. When the rich man returned and his wife told him what had happened, and he became angry: "You shouldn't have let him go. You should have called me from the Beit Midrash!"

Some time later, a stranger came by and asked for him. The woman replied, "Please sit down, I'll go and get my husband." The rich man made it back home, greeted the stranger, and asked who had sent him. The stranger proved to be destitute man without any means, a man who was asking for assistance. Having no choice, the rich man gave him a little something, and after the stranger's departure, the rich man flew into a rage against his wife and said, "It was to do me wrong that you went and got me!"

"But the last time you yourself told me to call you when there would be someone at the house!" his wife responded.

He replied that it was first necessary to find out who was asking for him, and only then – if she was sure that it was for his benefit – was she to come and get him. If it was someone asking for charity, she was to tell the person that there was no one home.

Pharaoh did not know what to think of his dream, and he did not know if it alluded to a beneficial development for him or the opposite. Now our Sages have said, "A dream that is not interpreted is like a

letter that has not been read" (Berachot 55a), and further: "All dreams depend on the interpretation. As long as a dream has not been interpreted, it is like a hidden letter; it does neither good nor bad" (ibid.). Pharaoh very much desired to understand the message of the dream, but he feared recounting it to just anybody lest it be interpreted to his detriment. This is why, when Joseph was presented to him, Pharaoh began by telling him, "I will tell you my dream, however you'll only interpret it if you have a feeling that it consists of a joyful event for me. In the opposite case, keep your explanations to yourself and prevent them from coming to your lips!"

We now understand the words of the Midrash. It tends toward several directions, both advantageous and detrimental, and as long as it is not interpreted, there is nothing to fear. In his worry, Pharaoh therefore took the initiative by asking Joseph, "Who derives life from whom? Me from my gods, or my gods from me?" This was a way of asking if the dream alluded to the greatness that awaited him, or the opposite. When Joseph told him, "You from your gods," this meant that he perceived in the dream a strengthening of his kingdom. This is besides what he told him: "It is G-d Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare" (Genesis 41:16). In fact, this is what happened, for after the famine all the country's money was found in Pharaoh's treasury.

## THE PATH OF THE JUST

### PRIDE – PART II

A person can act arrogantly with his ears, by not listening to the cries of the poor, or by his nose, if he is disgusted by standing near the poor or going to their homes because of the smell. One can also be arrogant by one's words, by making haughty and brazen remarks against the upright. Pride can be recognized by eating and dressing habits, with the man who wears pretentious clothing. The Torah warns us concerning this: "Do not follow the ways of the nations." Arrogant men are abysmal in G-d's eyes – "All haughty hearts are loathsome to G-d." These people will be delivered to their desires because G-d, Who loathes them, will not come to their aid. And even if a man does not demonstrate his arrogance to others by his actions or his words, but rather keeps it in his heart, he is called "loathsome," for it is written: "All haughty hearts are loathsome to G-d" – even if his pride is only in his heart.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

## RABBI YITZCHAK ELCHANAN, THE RAV OF KOVNO

**R**abbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, who was known as the Rav of all Israel, was the Rabbi of Kovno. He was born in 1817 (5577) and died in 1896 (5656). He led various communities, amongst others the city of Novardok from 1851 to 1864 (5611 to 5624). Yet his renown in the Jewish world comes essentially from the last place where he served as Rav, the city of Kovno, where he remained for more than 30 years.

He became the leader of his generation, and regardless of the domain, be it communal good or individual life, nothing was done without his advice or his consent. Questions were asked of him from all corners of the world, and a great part of his thousands of responses were compiled in his books Beer Yitzchak, Nachal Yitzchak, and Ein Yitzchak.

The Natziv (Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Judah Berlin) of Volozhin said that Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector had merited all this because of his exceptional diligence in Torah study. "He is the greatest matmid [diligent one in Torah study] of our generation," said the Natziv, who was also known for his exceptional diligence.

Indeed, when we read the story of his life it is impossible not to marvel at the great work ethic that he demonstrated from his earliest age. To give an idea of the attention that he drew, even in the eyes of the greatest of matmidim, we shall give a few examples.

It goes without saying that from his earliest youth, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan was plunged into study practically without any stop. Even when, for whatever reason, he had to leave the Beit Midrash, he would begin leaving the hall while still reading a book, continuing to do so until he approached the table closest to the exit. There he would lay it down open to the page that he had been studying. When returning to the Beit Midrash, he would pick the book up and once again begin studying where he left off, without the least delay.

When he arrived early at his father-in-law's for lunch and the meal was not yet ready, without losing a moment he would wash his hands and quickly eat a piece of dry bread left on the table. Even before those of the household had the time to ask him to wait for the meal, he was already off to the Beit Midrash.

At the end of Yom Kippur, he would leave synagogue running. He would then arrive home, perform Havdalah without waiting, and then eat something and run out once again to the Beit Midrash – even while the last of the faithful still hadn't had time to leave!

These are but a few examples that point to the nature of his study, which allowed him to become a great teacher in Israel.

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan was the greatest authority of his generation. People the world over addressed themselves to him. One of the areas for which he was most sought was that of agunot (married women whose husbands had disappeared, and who could not remarry without proof that their husbands were dead), where he worked wonders. The pain of women in misery, whose husbands had disappeared without leaving a trace, shook the heart of the Rav of all Israel. In order to find a way to liberate these women in accordance with the law of the Torah, he invested all of his energy into every question brought before him, without leaving himself any time to eat or sleep. And when G-d allowed him to find a legal allowance to allow a woman to remarry, his joy was very great. In numerous cases involving agunot, the strength of his Torah demonstrated itself and everyone could see that Heaven was in agreement with him.

When he was still leading the community of Novardok, he was presented with a question concerning an agunah whose husband was presumed to have drowned in the Mediterranean ("waters without end"). He was asked to see if there existed any doubt as to whether the husband could have managed to reach the coast on the other side of the sea. He remained studying this question for days and nights, and came to the conclusion that the husband was in fact dead and that the woman had the right to remarry without hesitation.

It happened that on the following day, people found the body of a man who had been washed ashore. In carefully examining his clothes, a set of keys was found that definitely belonged to the missing man.

In another case, there was an agunah whose husband had disappeared, and the Rav of the city where this woman lived had not found a way to liberate her from her status. The question was brought before the Rav of Kovno, and he examined it for a long time. In the end he allowed the woman to remarry. When the Rav of the woman's town found out about this decision, he expressed many doubts. He even went to Kovno to challenge the decision itself. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan listened with great patience to this Rav, who himself was great in Torah, yet in the end he said, "I gave this woman complete permission, and I do not want to come back to it."

When the Rav returned back to his home, it happened that his city decided to excavate certain areas around town. During this operation, the body of a man was discovered at one of the excavation sites, and it was later identified by its clothing as being that of the missing man.