



A Fascinating Insight from the Chasam Sofer During the First Seven Days of Chanukah HKB”H Sent Down a Heavenly Fire that Did Not Consume the Oil but on the Eighth Day It Did Miraculously Consume the Oil

Shabbas Chanukah approaches auspiciously. In its honor, we will examine the rationale for celebrating this festival eight days as taught to us by Chazal. Here is the pertinent passage from the Gemara (Shabbas 21b):

”מאי חנוכה, דתנו רבנן בכ”ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד ודלא להתענות בהון, שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד, נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים, לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאוהו ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.”

What is the reason for the festival of Chanukah? As the Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: On the 25th of Kislev, the days of Chanukah commence. They are comprised of eight days, on which it is prohibited to eulogize or fast. For, when the Greeks entered the Heichal, they contaminated all of the flasks of oil that were in the Heichal. And when the royal Chashmonai house prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil that was concealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol; it contained only enough oil to light the Menorah for one day. However, a miracle was performed with it, and they lit with it for eight days. In the following year, they established and rendered these eight days permanent festival days, celebrated with the recital of Hallel and the expression of gratitude.

In his commentary, Rashi interprets the question ”מאי חנוכה” as an inquiry as to which miracle the festival commemorates. For, we know that the miracle of Chanukah was comprised of two parts: (1) the military victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks and (2) the miracle of the oil required to kindle the Menorah. Regarding the first, we express our gratitude to HKB”H in Ahl HaNissim with the formula: **”מסרת גיבורים ביד חלשים, ורבים ביד מעטים, וטמאים—You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the tzaddikim, and the willful sinners into the hands of the diligent students of Your Torah.**

Regarding the second aspect of the miracle, we learn in the Gemara cited above that when the Chashmonaim entered the Heichal, they only found enough oil to last for one day. Yet, it miraculously kindled the Menorah for eight days. This is what prompted Rashi to inquire: **For which miracle did they establish this festival?** Did our blessed sages establish this festival to commemorate the astonishing military victory or the miracle of the oil? To which the Gemara answers that Chazal established Chanukah to commemorate the miracle of the oil.

Thus, it makes perfect sense that the Gemara’s answer to this question begins as follows: **As the Rabbis taught in**

a Baraisa: On the 25th of Kislev, the days of Chanukah commence. They are comprised of eight days. This is part of the Gemara's indisputable proof that the festival of Chanukah was established primarily to commemorate the miracle of the oil, which lasted for eight days, even though the flask they found only contained enough to kindle the Menorah for one day.

Notwithstanding, this does not imply that they did not establish the festival to also commemorate the miraculous military victory. After all, in the formula of Ahl HaNissim recited in the berachah of Modim, they instituted the following formula: **כשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי רצונך, ואתה ברחמיך הרבים עמדת להם בעת צרתם, רבת את ריבם, דנת את דינם, נקמת את נקמתם, מסרת גיבורים ביד חלשים, ורבים ביד מעטים, וטמאים ביד טהורים, ורשעים ביד צדיקים, וזדים ביד עוסקי תורתך.** **When the Greek regime rose up against Your people Yisrael, to make them forget Your Torah, and to compel them to stray from the statutes of Your will, You, in Your abundant mercy, stood up for them in their time of distress. You championed their cause, judged their claim, and You avenged their wrong. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the tzaddikim, and the willful sinners into the hands of the diligent students of Your Torah.**

In other words, the festival of Chanukah commemorates both miracles, but the miracle of the oil takes precedence over the military victory. This can be better understood based on a teaching of the Bnei Yissaschar (Kislev-Teves 2, 2). He explains that the reason the Greeks went to so much trouble to desecrate all the oil in the Heichal was because kindling the Menorah represents the dissemination of the light of the Torah. This is evident from the following passuk (Mishlei 6, 23): **"כי נר מצוה ותורה אור"—for a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light.** Hence, they taught in the Gemara (B.B. 25b): **"הרוצה שיחכים ידרים"—a person who wants to become wise should face south.** This means that when one davens facing east, one should lean slightly towards the south. To remember this, the Gemara provides the following

mnemonic: **(The Shulchan stood in the north, while) the Menorah stood in the south.** In other words, the light of the Torah is in the south. Therefore, the evil Greeks, who tried to make the people of Yisrael forget and abandon the Torah, contaminated all of the oil in order to prevent the kohanim from kindling the Menorah in a state of "taharah" to imbue Yisrael with the light of the Torah.

The Famous Question of the Beis Yosef

The question of the Beis Yosef (O.C. 670) is well-known throughout the Torah-world. Why did our blessed sages establish Chanukah as an eight-day festival? After all, the Gemara states explicitly that they found enough pure oil to kindle the Menorah for one day. Thus, it was really only a seven-day miracle. So, why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days? The Beis Yosef provides us with three answers:

(1) They split the oil in the flask into eight portions; every night, they placed one portion in the Menorah, and it would remain lit until the morning. Thus, on each of the nights, a miracle was performed.

(2) We can posit that after they placed the appropriate amount of oil in the lamps of the Menorah, the flask remained full, as it was originally; thus, the miracle was evident even on the first night.

(3) On the first night, they placed all of the oil in the lamps, and they burned the entire night; yet, in the morning, they found all the lamps still full of oil; this happened each and every night.

In point of fact, the Pri Chadash (ibid.) takes issue with all three answers. Regarding the first answer, the Gemara expounds (Menachos 89a): **מערב עד בוקר, תן לה מדה שתהא דולקת והולכת מערב עד בוקר**—regarding the kindling of the Menorah, it says (Shemos 27, 21): **"from evening until morning."** This passuk teaches the kohanim to **give it** (the Menorah) **its full measure** (of oil), **so that it will burn continuously from evening until morning.** In other words, they were supposed to fill each of the lamps with the appropriate measure, so that it would burn all night long.

According to the second and third answers of the Beis Yosef, the Pri Chadash points out that there was no miracle on the eighth night. After all, since they only kindled from that flask for eight days, at the end of the eighth night, the flask of oil was no longer full, and the lamps were no longer full of oil—they were empty.

Hence, the Pri Chadash proposes an alternate answer: The first day of Chanukah commemorates the miracle of the military victory, when they rested and had a reprieve from their enemies. Then he adds: **If not for the miracle of the oil, they would have established for future generations a one-day festival of praise and gratitude. But on account of the miracle of the flask of oil, they established eight days for future generations.** To summarize, he asserts that the berachah on the candles on the first night commemorates the military victory, whereas the berachah on the candles on the other seven nights commemorates the miracle of the oil.

The Fascinating Explanation of the Chasam Sofer

I would now like to present to our royal audience the wonderful explanation of the Chasam Sofer, zy" a, regarding the question of the Beis Yosef. In Chiddushei Chasam Sofer (Shabbas 23b), he refutes the answer of the Pri Chadash: **In my humble opinion, this answer should be disregarded. For, if it was so, we should recite the berachah of "Shehecheyanu" at the lighting on the second day, since it commemorates something different than the first day.** Therefore, the Chasam Sofer proposes an entirely new and fascinating answer regarding the miracle of the oil on the eight days of Chanukah. Here is his sacred insight:

He refers to the last Tosafos in Maseches Chagigah that states that the fire on the mizbeiach was a heavenly fire that did not consume. He posits that HKB" H brought that fire down to the Menorah; hence, it did not consume the oil. On the eighth day, however, He performed another miracle: the fire that did not usually consume, consumed the oil that was in the Menorah. For, if the oil had remained, there

would have been no need for their oil. Thus, there was also a miracle on the eighth day.

In honor of the eight days of Chanukah, it gives me great pleasure to elaborate and delight in the sacred remarks of the Chasam Sofer, zy" a, based on the teaching in the Gemara (Chagigah 27a):

"אמר ריש לקיש אין אור של גיהנם שולטת בפושעי ישראל, קל וחומר ממזבח הזהב, מה מזבח הזהב שאין עליו אלא כעובי דינר זהב, כמה שנים אין האור שולטת בו, פושעי ישראל שמלאין מצות כרמון, דכתיב כפלח הרמון רקתך, אל תקרי רקתך אלא רקנין שבך, על אחת כמה וכמה."

Reish Lakish said: The fire of Gehinnom does not rule over the sinners of Yisrael. This is deduced from a "kal va'chomer" from the golden mizbeiach, upon which there is no more than a "dinar's" thickness of gold; yet, for many years the fire did not rule over (consume) it. Hence, regarding the sinners of Yisrael—who are full of mitzvos like a pomegranate (is full of seeds), as it is written (Shir HaShirim 4, 3): "Like a section of pomegranate are your temples." Do not read "your temples" but rather "the empty ones among you"—how much more so!

Tosafos cite a Midrash Tanchuma (Terumah 11): Moshe was perplexed by the fact that the wooden structure of the mizbeiach was not damaged and burned by the fire. To which the Almighty explained to him that this is the nature of heavenly fire; it does not consume, as was the case with the burning bush (Shemos 3, 2): **"But the bush was not consumed."**

We should point out that the exposition in the Gemara relates to the (inner) "golden mizbeiach," upon which the ketores was burned, whereas the exposition cited in the Midrash Tanchuma cited by Tosafos relates to the (outer) "copper mizbeiach," upon which all the korbanos were offered (Shemos 27, 2):

"And you shall cover it with copper." Rabbi Yehudah the son of Shalom said: Moshe said to HKB" H, "Master of the Universe, You told me to make a mizbeiach of 'shittim' wood and to overlay it with copper, and You also said to me (Vayikra 6, 6): 'A perpetual fire shall

burn on the mizbeiach.’ But will the fire not penetrate the overlay and burn the wood?” HKB”H replied to Moshe, “Moshe, this is what normally happens by you, but by Me, observe the malachim of glowing fire, and how many storehouses of snow and hail I possess,” as it states (Iyov 38, 22): “Have you entered the storehouses of snow, or seen the storehouses of hail?” And it also says (Tehillim 104, 3): “He Who roofs His upper chambers with waters.” The water, however, does not extinguish the fire, nor does the fire consume the water.

Based on these sources, we can begin to comprehend the fabulous answer of the Chasam Sofer to the question of the Beis Yosef. The miracle that occurred on the first seven days was that HKB”H brought down a heavenly fire to kindle the lamps of the Menorah—a fire that did not consume. Hence, the flask of oil remained full for the entire seven days. But this does not explain the miracle that occurred on the eighth day. For, on the eighth day, the oil was consumed, and after that they then lit the Menorah with fresh, pure oil that they made themselves.

Thus, the Chasam Sofer explains that the miracle of the eighth day was that the natural tendency of the heavenly fire that illuminated the lamps during the first seven days of Chanukah was altered. On the eighth day, it consumed the oil, so that Yisrael could subsequently continue to fulfill the mitzvah with an earthly fire.

Reconciling a Difficulty with the Answer of the Chasam Sofer

There is a difficulty, however, with this chiddush proposed by the Chasam Sofer. HKB”H commanded the kohanim to kindle the lamps of the Menorah. Undoubtedly, He intended for them to perform this mitzvah with a natural, earthly fire. So, how can the Chasam Sofer suggest that the priestly Chashmonaim fulfilled this mitzvah during the eight days of Chanukah with a supernatural, heavenly fire that did not consume the oil?

We can reconcile this difficulty by suggesting that he learned this from the Gemara (Yoma 45b). There, we are taught that the Menorah must be kindled with the fire from

the outer mizbeiach (of copper). This is learned from a “gezeirah shavah”: The word “tamid” is used with reference to the mizbeiach (Vayikra 6, 6): **אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא**—and it is also used with reference to the Menorah (Shemos 27, 20): **“להעלות נר תמיד”**.

Now, in the Gemara (ibid. 21a), they expound on the passuk (Vayikra 7, 7): **אף על המזבח, אף ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש על המזבח, אף** **“The sons of Aharon shall place a fire on the mizbeiach.”** They inferred from this passuk that **even though the fire comes down from heaven, there is a mitzvah to bring fire from ordinary sources.** The Gemara explains that the fire on outer mizbeiach upon which the wooden logs were arranged was composed of two types of fire—a natural fire from ordinary sources and a heavenly fire that descended from above. As such, they taught in the Gemara (ibid.): **“מעולם לא כבו גשמים אש של עצי המערכה, ועשן המערכה אפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ומנשבות בו אין מזיזות אותו ממקומו.”** **Rain never extinguished the fire of the arrangement of wood** on the mizbeiach, despite the fact that the altar stood in the courtyard, exposed to the elements. **And with regard to the smoke of the arrangement, even if all the winds in the world would come and blow it, they would not move it from its place.**

Thus we learn that the fulfillment of the mitzvah: **“A perpetual fire shall burn on the mizbeiach; you shall not extinguish it”**—involved an extraordinary combination of fires—fire from ordinary sources and fire from heaven. The same applied to the fire that kindled the Menorah; it was an extraordinary combination of fire brought by the kohen and fire that descended from above. The amount of heavenly fire, however, was limited, so as not to prevent the earthly, mundane fire from consuming the oil in the lamps. This was also the case with the **“נר המערכה”**; it was never extinguished. The Sefas Emes (Mikeitz-Chanukah 5654) explains that the term **“מערב”** is related to the Hebrew term meaning “mixed” or “combined.” In other words, its fire was a mixture of ordinary fire and heavenly fire (unlimited).

Now, let us apply what we have learned to the miracle of Chanukah according to the Chasam Sofer. They did not find

enough pure oil to last for eight days. Therefore, the oil was lit with a heavenly fire that combined with their mundane fire. They lit the Menorah initially with the earthly fire that they found which triggered the descent of the fire from above that did not consume the oil. Since they initiated the process, it was considered as if they performed the mitzvah for the entire eight days of Chanukah.

The Heavenly Fire of the Miracle of Chanukah Consumed the Forces of Tumah that Attempted to Make Yisrael Forget the Torah

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to latch onto the coattails of our distinguished teacher, the Chasam Sofer, zy"a, and embellish his insight. We will explain why HKB"H brought down a fire from above to kindle the lamps of the Menorah. We will rely on a precious, enlightening teaching from the Alshich hakadosh (Vayikra 1, 2). He focuses on the Gemara's statement above: **"Even though the fire comes down from heaven, there is a mitzvah to bring fire from ordinary sources."** This begs the question: If the kohanim brought fire from below, from ordinary sources, why was it necessary for HKB"H to also provide fire from above?

Additionally, we will endeavor to explain why HKB"H instructed a sinner to lean with his hands on the head of the sacrificial animal while he confessed. As it is written (ibid. 1, 4): **"וסמך ידו על ראש העולה ונרצה לו לכפר עליו"**—**he shall lean his hands on the head of the "olah"; and it will be considered pleasing on his behalf to atone for him.** Regarding this procedure, the Rambam writes (Ma'aseh HaKorbanos 3, 13-15): **The person performing "semichah" (leaning) must do so with all his power, with both of his hands on the head of the animal, as it states: "On the head of the olah" . . . He then places both his hands between its two horns and recites the (appropriate) confession . . . How does he confess? He says: "I sinned, I transgressed, I committed iniquity, and I did this-and-this, and I have performed teshuvah before You, and this is my atonement."** But

what is the rationale for leaning on the head of the korban with both hands, with all of one's might ("semichah")?

To explain the matter, the Alshich hakadosh relies on the fact that when a person sins, he generates a negative, bad malach, who is a harmful and destructive force. This is taught in the following Mishnah (Avos 4, 11): **"רבי אליעזר: בן יעקב אומר, העושה מצוה אחת קונה לו פרקליט אחד, והעובר עבירה בן יעקב אומר, העושה מצוה אחת קונה לו קטיגור אחד."** **Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says: A person who performs one mitzvah acquires for himself one advocate (a supportive, corroborative malach); while a person who commits one aveirah acquires for himself one accuser (a prosecuting, adversarial malach).** In his commentary, the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh (Shemos 30, 12) teaches that **"a prosecuting malach" is a malach who is a destroyer.** This angelic destroyer generated by one's transgressions lies within a person and persuades him to sin, keeping with the notion of (Avos 4, 2): **"עבירה גוררת עבירה"—one aveirah leads to another aveirah.**

So, for this reason, HKB"H commanded a sinner to bring a korban, to lean on it with all his strength with both hands, and to recite his confession. This drives the destructive force out of his body and into the sacrificial animal being offered up on the mizbeiach. He is essentially removing the stain of tumah from himself caused by his sins, ridding himself of the force of tumah they generated within him, and returning to Hashem wholeheartedly.

The Fire from Above Descends to Consume the Destroyer Generated by the Iniquity and Transgression

In this manner, the Alshich hakadosh explains the reason HKB"H brings a heavenly fire down onto the mizbeiach. Since the power of tumah of the destructive malach is so great, it cannot be incinerated with a mundane, human fire. The fire from above is more spiritual, holier, and stronger; thus, it is capable of subduing this formidable tumah and obliterating it completely.

Let us complete the insight of the Alshich hakadosh by explaining why it was also necessary to bring a fire from

ordinary sources to consume the meat, fat, and blood of the korban. In his commentary on the Torah, the Ramban (Vayikra 1, 10) explains why HKB"H commanded a sinner to bring a korban: **The sinner must imagine that everything being done to the korban should have been done to him. Because he sinned against G-d with his body and soul, his blood deserved to be spilled and his body burned. It is only due to the Almighty's kindness that a substitute was accepted in his stead. In this manner, the korban provides atonement—its blood in place of his blood, its life in place of his life.**

We have now explained satisfactorily the rationale for this magnificent combination of fire from below and fire from above. Firstly, the ordinary fire consumes the flesh of the korban that served as a substitute for the sinner himself. Secondly, the heavenly fire consumed and obliterated the destructive malach generated by the aveirah; this could not be accomplished with a physical, earthly fire; it required a spiritual, heavenly fire.

We have now shed light on the words of the Chasam Sofer. For the miracle of Chanukah, HKB"H employed a fire

from above that did not consume the oil in the Menorah. Nevertheless, it did consume the mighty forces of tumah of the Greeks. As we know, the seventy nations of the world are managed by seventy ministering angels. They delegate their forces of tumah to combat Yisrael. Hence, when the Greeks decided to impose themselves and their perverted culture on Yisrael and attempted to make Yisrael forget the Torah of Hashem, they rallied the full force of their tumah and their klipah to accomplish this feat.

This prompted HKB"H in His infinite rachamim and chesed to bring down a fire from above. In the same way, every year, we eliminate the external forces of evil—"chitzonim"—and the klipah of Greece that rise up against us in every generation with the goal of making Jews abandon the teachings of Hashem's Torah. By lighting the Chanukah candles annually to commemorate the miracle that occurred with the Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash, we ensure that the light of the Torah continues to shine brightly in every Jewish home for us and our children until the coming of the Mashiach—the righteous redeemer—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

Yoselovsky Family - לעילוי נשמת
his father Reb Shabsy
Ben Yitzchok Isaac ע"ה

Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת
their dear mother
Lea bat Virgini ע"ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren
His Father נשמת ע"ה ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com