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## Chanukah Illuminates in the Areas “Lower Than Ten”

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### The Uniqueness of Chanukah—to Illuminate the Lowest Places

#### What Does it Mean for the *Shechinah* to Descend “Lower Than Ten?”

The *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 5b) tells us *למטה שכינה לא ירדה מעשרה טפחים*, the *Shechinah* has never descended to a place lower than ten *tefachim*. Chazal are speaking of the concept of *השראת השכינה* in this world, and the *Gemara* distinguishes between the area above ten *tefachim* and the space below it. The *Shechinah* doesn’t come down below ten *tefachim*, and Chazal bring proofs for this concept from various verses in *Tanach*.

However, when it comes to the *נר חנוכה*, many *Chassidische Sefarim* elaborate greatly on the idea that on Chanukah the *Shechinah* *does* rest below ten *tefachim*, and this is why we light *davka* below ten *tefachim*.

It is important to understand this concept of above and below ten *tefachim*—for, after all, isn’t the *Shechinah* everywhere?! Don’t we know that *מלא כל הארץ כבודו*, *the entire world is filled with His glory*?! If so, what is the difference between the space *below* ten *tefachim* and the space *above* it?

#### Feeling His Presence

The explanation for this is written in the *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh* on *Parashas Vayigash* where he explains that there are many levels within the concept of *השראת השכינה*.

The truth is that we’re not very equipped to grasp these concepts

of התגלות השכינה, *how, when and where the Shechinah* is revealed in this World. But inasmuch as the *Ribbono Shel Olam* allows us to understand—through the words of *Chazal* and the *Sefarim Hakedoshim*, the basic understanding is the following.. *Of course the Ribbono shel Olam is found everywhere—לית אתר פנוי מיניה—there is no place devoid of Him.* He animates everything, and there's *Elokus* in every part and place in the material world. For this reason, we use the word 'שכינה' when we speak about the Presence of *Hashem* who remains with all *Yidden* even in *galus*. This is the expression of *Hashem* that we use to describe the Presence of *Hashem* in dark places.

Says the *Ohr Hachaim HaKadosh*, the *Shechinah* is indeed everywhere, even in the lowest places, but **the degree to which we can sense its Presence, depends on every individual Yid**. For example, when a *Yid* is joyful, he becomes a vessel for השראת השכינה, and we can sense the G-dliness in him much more strongly. When a *Yid* is humble, he likewise becomes a vessel for the Presence of the *Shechinah*.

### Concealed Countenance

However, in a place of great darkness, the Presence is more concealed, and it is more difficult to sense. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is certainly found there, and He certainly animates and gives life to everything that can be found there (or else it would cease to exist) but the Presence is more concealed. There cannot be a revelation of the *Shechinah* in this place of darkness, for there are barriers that conceal it and prevent it from being revealed.

For example, when *Moshe Rabbeinu* davened for the *makkos* to cease, he was compelled to leave the city because it was filled with idolatry which disturbed the *kedushah* of his words. *Avodah zarah* brings about concealment of the *Shechinah*.

Conversely, the place where *Yitzchak Avinu* offered himself as a *korban* is the greatest place of התגלות השכינה. Everyone who came to the *Beis HaMikdash* experienced incredible revelations, seen with their own eyes!

## Holiness Brings Revelation

The definition of השראת השכינה is when we can sense Hashem's Presence and we can see the way the world is conducted through His actions, above nature. Indeed, in the *Beis HaMikdash*, one could see the boundaries and barriers of nature completely obliterated. There were incredible miracles happening there every day—because **the concealment has no power in holy places**.

Thus, there are factors which allow for greater revelation of the *Shechinah*, and there are elements that bring about greater concealment. When ten *Yidden* come together in one place, this brings about השראת השכינה, and we can thus recite קדושה and אמן יה"ר. When there are even more *Yidden*, there is even greater revelation (see *Mishnayos Berachos* 7:3).

## Toiling to Illuminate the Darkness

The aforementioned *Gemara* in *Sukkah* tells us that when the *Ribbono shel Olam* created the world, He designed it so that there will no השראת השכינה below ten *tefachim*. It doesn't descend below that. Why is this so? If Hashem is everywhere, why is there such a boundary of ten *tefachim*?

The answer is as follows: The *Ribbono Shel Olam* wanted us to work on ourselves, to strengthen our *emunah* so that through our *avodah*, we will arrive at an understanding that the *Ribbono Shel Olam can be found* even in the lowest places, in the הסתרה שבתוך ההסתרה, *the concealment within the concealment*.

For this reason, He designed that there shouldn't be השראת השכינה למטה—a term that symbolizes places where the order of טבע dominates—in order that *we* should bring the light to these places. Hashem specifically allows for there to be concealment in this area because He wants *us* to illuminate these dark places of טבע through our toil and our *bechirah*.

## When You Feel Nothing, *This* is When Your *Avodah Really Starts!*

Sometimes, a person reflects and thinks about times in his life that

were bright and illuminated. He felt so elevated—spiritually on top-of-the-world. He had an easy time overcoming *nisyonos*, and he was engaged and awake to *ruchniyus*. But then he encounters an area which is very difficult for him. He doesn't know why... but he can't overcome it. He thinks to himself: "What's happening with me? Am I an *ehrllicher Yid* or not? On the one hand, I have a feeling for matters of holiness and spirituality and I truly strive to improve myself. I exert myself to do many things even when it's hard. Why then is this *nisayon* so difficult for me? I simply can't get myself to overcome it. This *nisayon* makes me doubt who I am!

But the truth is that it's no wonder at all.. Some areas of *avodas Hashem* are easy for you because you have התגלות השכינה in them. You *feel* the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in those areas, and this gives you the *kochos* to endure. However, in the place of your struggle, you're experiencing concealment and הסתרת פנים.

**Every person has their own erehw,"למטה מעשרה טפחים" the Ribbono shel Olam conceals Himself from him.**

When a *Yid* feels like he's struggling, and nothing is going well, it means that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* is telling him: "Until this point, I was here in the open, in a revealed manner. Things were pretty easy. **From here and on, I want you to work harder in order to reveal My light.**"

Now begins the work of *davening*, reciting *Tehillim*, giving *tzedakah*, pleading with *Hashem* to open your eyes, and performing other actions in order to illuminate oneself.

When we begin this path, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* says, "Incredible! You got the hint! This is what I wanted you to do. Persist... Stay on course, and I will surely help you!"

### **Illumination is Always Followed by Concealment**

This is the way it always works in *avodas Hashem*. We see this with the concealment of the *Sefirah* days that follow Pesach. On the night of Pesach, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* reveals Himself in incredible ways—לילה



כיום יאיר, *the concealment of night is turned into the brightness of the day*. It's a night of illumination and elevation where every Yid is so uplifted. We perform so many *mitzvos* and we sing and praise the *Ribbono Shel Olam* with great *deveikus*.

Then the *Seder* night goes away and all the lofty *madreigos* are removed from us, as the *Sefarim Hakedoshim* tell us. At that point, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* says to us: "Now I want you to toil with your own *kochos*!"

So this Yid begins to work on himself, and he's not very successful. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* turns to him and says, "*This is part of the necessary process! Of course, you won't be entirely successful. But you must continue to work on your own — it must come from you!*" *On your own*," doesn't mean without the *Ribbono Shel Olam* Who *always* helps us; rather, it means that we should turn to Him and recognize that we haven't turned to Him sufficiently, and to recognize that we haven't done enough. This is how the process always works.

### On Chanukah There's No Concealment

On Chanukah, however, the system is different., The *Tzaddikim* tell us that on Chanukah,, the light permeates *even* the area beneath ten *tefachim* — even in the darkest places!

How can this be? Did the design of the entire creation change for this week?! What happened to the need for us to toil to bring light to the darkness?

The answer is that this *Yom Tov* is different from all others. On *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkos*, the aura of the *Yom Tov* begins with an *אתערותא* *רלעילא*, *an arousal from Above*. It is the *Ribbono Shel Olam* Who initiates the aura of the *Yom Tov*, and this is why we say *אלוקינו באהבה* *ותתן לנו ה' אלוֹקֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה מוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה*, *You have given us these days with love*.

The *נס חנוכה*, however, came through the *mesirus nefesh* of the *חשמונאים*. The *Yom Tov* and its preceding events were aroused and initiated from below. There was nothing special about those days; and they didn't have an inherent light. To the contrary, there was a terrible cloud of the *kelipah*

of *Yavan* that dominated the world at that time. But the חשמונאים toiled and fought to dispel the darkness.

For this reason, the light of these days actually *does* descend even below ten *tefachim*—because it originates from the *avodah* of the Jewish People! This is a “*Klal Yisrael*” Yom Tov! It came from our end!

Amazingly, this explains how it can be that the *Chachamim* should institute a Yom Tov that doesn’t come from the Torah. Where do they get this ability? The answer is that this is indeed a different kind of Yom Tov altogether, a Yom Tov created by us. And this type of Yom Tov can be added by the *Chachamim* (as a *DeRabbanan*)..

## The Light that Illuminates Now More Than Ever

### The Light of *Mashiach* is Being Revealed

The Yom Tov of *Chanukah* is alluded to in the Torah in very hidden and indirect ways. In all of *Mishnah*, *Chanukah* is only mentioned once—in *Masechta Bava Kamma*—and even in the writings of the *Arizal*, *Chanukah* is spoken about in very few words. It took the arrival of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and his *talmidim* to elaborate greatly on the holiness, the power, and the uniqueness of *Chanukah*. Indeed, studying the teachings of the *Chassidic* masters on *Chanukah* is a special *ohr* in itself.

*Tzaddikim* explain that the reason for this is that *Chanukah* is the light of *Mashiach*. There are many levels of *kedushah*, and *Chanukah* is the last stop. For this reason, its light is being revealed *davkah* in the last generations before *Mashiach*.

*Chanukah* is the *avodah* of למטה מעשרה, beaming in that light into the lower places of concealment.

### Difficult but Eternal

This aspect of our *avodah* is one that we must toil for much harder and longer. But at the same time, the results are eternal. To take a state

of darkness and transform it into light is very difficult work. We must make our way into a space where's there's no revelation of the *Shechinah*, and we must toil with our ten fingers—with *mesirus nefesh* and with *tefillah*—to illuminate the place with *השראת השכינה*. This is very difficult work, but it is eternal—and this *avodah* is the purpose of the creation of the world!

### All *Avodah* Illuminates for Future Generations

We have merited the *Yom Tov* of *Chanukah* only through the toil of previous generations who have paved the way for us, who began the work of illuminating the world for future generations.

We have a wealth of *Chassidische Sefarim* which illuminate the world for us. We have so many teachings on the power of *אמונתך בלילות*, seeking and finding Hashem in the greatest darkness. In our recent history alone, how many stories do we have of *Yidden* who exhibited ironclad *emunah* in the depths of the Holocaust? They believed in the *Ribbono Shel Olam* even with a sharp sword hovering over them!

Yet, in that generation, these teachings weren't as available. The *Yidden* who came before us didn't have knowledge of these stories of *chizuk* and *emunah*. The revealed *ohr* had not yet appeared, and the awareness that even the simplest *Yid* can strengthen himself and cleave to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in even the darkest moments of his life wasn't readily understood.

But **this *ohr* has been revealed in our time**, and there are thousands of *Yidden* who live this way because of this revelation. **This is a light that was centuries in the making.**

### There's More *Chizuk* Than Ever

Today, you can have a *Yid* who isn't necessarily the greatest *eved Hashem*, he seems like a regular *Yid*. He does what he's supposed to every day without fanfare. But when he experiences times of darkness and challenges, suddenly, he is surprised to see that he has the tools to fight and to emerge stronger.. He's able to strengthen himself with stories

of *Tzaddikim* from throughout the millennia, passed on from generation to generation. This *Yid* will later relate how much light these stories brought him in his most difficult moments. Today, when a regular *Yid* experiences a difficult situation of darkness, he has avenues of recourse; He has the ability to pull himself out of the situation in ways that didn't exist in past generations.

In the olden days, when *Yidden* lived in *shtetlach* and hamlets, they didn't have *sefarim* to strengthen them. Sometimes, they didn't even have a *melamed* to teach them *aleph-bais!* **There was often no *rov* or spiritual guide who could teach this person to sing and dance in his darkest moments. No one told him that “The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is with me.... The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is helping me!”** He didn't have the *chizuk* to be joyful and to *daven* with serenity and *emunah*. But our times are different –because many *Yidden* and *Tzaddikim* toiled with *mesirus nefesh* to bring down this *ohr* of *chizuk* to the world.

### *Mesirus Nefesh* Illuminates the Low Places

This is the essence of the *Yom Tov* of Chanukah. The *kelipah* of *Yavan* was at its most powerful point, yet a small band of חשמונאים stood up against them. All seemed lost, but they didn't give up. They persevered with joy *trusting* that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* will help them. They managed to rebuild everything and reignited the light of Torah, which manifested itself with the miracle of the menorah.. This *mesirus nefesh* drew down an *ohr* for all generations to come. They brought the world closer to its pinnacle because *this* is what the world was created for.

One might ask, who says that this was an enduring light? Maybe it was just a one-time event? Who said that the world was changed forever because of this victory? The answer is that the *Gemara* tells us that לשנה אחרת קבעום בהלל והודאה, *the following year, Chazal instituted a Yom Tov*, and the *Kedushas Levi* explains why they waited a year to declare it a *Yom Tov*. They sought to ascertain whether something changed in the world, whether they would feel an eternal *ohr* coming down during these days even the following year. When they saw that a special light did descend, they instituted a *Yom Tov* for eternity.

They understood that when the *ohr* is initiated through אתערותא דלתתא, *an awakening from below*, it is possible to cause illumination with the Presence of the *Shechinah* even below ten *tefachim*, even in the lowest places where the *Shechinah* is usually concealed.

The entire world waited for the *avodah* of the חשמונאים within the darkness, and they left an eternal impression, giving strength and ability to every *Yid* in future generations to feel this light. When a *Yid* toils to bring the light down to the darkness, the effects are everlasting, and this is indeed the fulfillment of the purpose of the creation of the world.

### Our Strength is Derived From *Mesirus Nefesh* of Yore

The *Ba'al HaTanya* poses a fascinating question. Why is it that the event of עקידת יצחק is held up as the greatest act of *mesirus nefesh* for eternity? Haven't we seen *Yidden* sacrifice their lives for the *Rib-bono Shel Olam* throughout the millennia?! What is so unique about the sacrifices of Avraham and Yitzchak? The Rebbe explained that **it was only the *mesirus nefesh* of our forefathers that implanted this strength and courage into the hearts of their offspring.** The event of עקידת יצחק gave the strength to *Klal Yisrael* for all future generations to sacrifice for *Hashem*.

The *Ba'al HaTanya* refers here to *Yidden* who sacrificed themselves for *Hashem* in the most literal sense—to give up their lives for His sake. But the *Tzaddikim* explain that this *nisayon* takes on a different form in our generation. Most people in our time aren't being asked to die *al kiddush Hashem*—but rather to live *al kiddush Hashem*! **We're being tested with the greatest darkness—darkness of lust and temptation, and darkness of confusion in *emunah*.**

### Our *Avodah* Will Illuminate for the Future

The *Heiliger Ruziner* has already foretold that our generation—the one before the coming of *Mashiach*—will struggle mightily to retain the *emunah* that *Hashem* runs the world and that we can do nothing alone... that everything that happens is for the best, and that we should give constant thanks and praise to *Hashem*... that we should sing and rejoice in ev-

ery situation in which we're placed. **This is that place of למטה מעשרה in which we must illuminate!**

The *Ribbono Shel Olam* challenges us with great confusion, and we wonder: How can this be? The *Ribbono shel Olam* is so good, why would He place us into such darkness?

But we have the power and the *kochos* to strengthen ourselves and to illuminate the darkness through the tradition of those who came before us, through the great heritage of the teachings of our *tzaddikim*. We must *daven*, plead and meditate on *emunah* based on their teachings. Indeed, we constantly invoke the traditions of our forefathers—because their *avodah* gives us the *kochos* to this day.

When a *Yid* studies this and toils in this work, he illuminates the darkest places—and through this he impacts future generations as well!

## The Purpose of “Weakening of Generations”

### Falling or Rising?

When we hear such words, we may ask: Is the world more pure and greater as a result of the sacrifices of our predecessors? Shouldn't all of their *avodah* have combined to make the world holier and greater? Why then do we always mention ירידת הדורות? This seems like a contradiction: On the one hand, we see a clear weakening of the generations and we're not on the same level as *Yidden* of the past. The entire world seems to be descending into darkness. The entire atmosphere is filled with heresy, *kefirah*, *ta'avah*, lust, and temptations. At the same time, we know that the *avodah* of previous generations accumulates and stands by us in the future. So, how does this all work?

### A Veiled Light

The answer to this dilemma is a very important and foundational one. It depends where a *Yid* finds himself. There's a great difference between the time *before* a *Yid* begins to work on himself and afterward. As long as

a *Yid* hasn't begun to serve the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, the concealment and the hiddenness are greater than in the past generations. This was always the plan—since *ששת ימי בראשית*—that the world will become darker, and *Hashem's* Presence more concealed, with each ensuing generation.

But at the same time, the *Ribbono shel Olam* has also designed that in every generation, there is the potential for the light to descend lower and lower. When a *Yid* toils for it, he is able to illuminate even the greatest and deepest darkness.

We find ourselves currently in the generation of *עקבתא דמשיחא*, a time of *למטה מעשרה*. Rav Chaim Vital teaches us that if we want a sign of the imminent coming of *Mashiach*, we should look to see how low the generation has fallen. If we have hit rock bottom and we can't fall any lower, we should expect to be redeemed soon. This is because we must illuminate the lowest places in the world before the world can be rectified and redeemed.

### Painting Until the Bottom

This is akin to a painter who prepares to repaint a room. He takes a ladder, and starts from the top. He begins with the ceiling, and then goes to the upper part of the wall. From there, he moves on to the middle part of the wall. But then, as he prepares to paint the lower part of the wall, he must get off the ladder, and stand on the ground. And when he wants to paint the very bottom, he must get all the way down on the ground in order to do so.

This painter has lowered himself on to the ground—but he has an important purpose for doing so; to brighten and whiten the room!

The same applies to all of us. We experience lowliness and darkness in order to bring *Shechinah* there and lift up the entire world. This is all in the design of the world, and on Chanukah, we celebrate this descent of the light to the lowest places.

In this vein, the *Me'or Einayim* tells us regarding the *halachah* that the types of wicks and oils that may not be used for *נר שבת* can however we

used for *נר חנוכה*. “Wicks and oils” allude to the weaker *neshamos* who cannot receive rectification and repair on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* due to their inability to feel the holiness. But on Chanukah—when the light reaches lower—even these *neshamos* shine bright, and can receive their תיקון.

## The *Chanukah* Flame Gives us the Ability to Illuminate

The *Me’or Einayim* explains that every *Yom Tov* has its own unique *mitzvah* which enables us to access the light of that *Yom Tov*. The *matzah* helps us leave behind the impurity of *Mitzrayim*; the *sukkah* surrounds us with Hashem’s lovingkindness; *Purim* gives us the power to eradicate *Amalek*; and so forth.

**On Chanukah, we’re given the *mitzvah* to light a flame lower than ten *tefachim*, because this gives us the ability to illuminate the lowest places in our lives and in the world.**

He says further that during the events of *Chanukah*, the *Yevanim* sought to remove Torah and *mitzvos* from *Klal Yisrael* — להעבירם מעל חוקי רצוניך — but great miracles transpired which allowed Torah to remain intact. “So too,” says the Rebbe, “each and every Chanukah gives us the ability to cleave and hold on to our Torah and *mitzvos*.”

## Banishing Darkness with Light

Another aspect of the way the light of *Chanukah* reaches to the lowest places is taught to us by the *Beis Aharon*. The *Gemara* says that the time for *Chanukah* lighting goes *עד שתכלה רגל מן השוק*, until the people cease walking in the street. *Regel*, says the *Beis Aharon*, can also mean habit. The *נר חנוכה* illuminates until our bad habits are removed from the *שוק*, (the place where the *yetzer hara* dominates).

The reason for this is that our habits and proclivities—the areas where we feel stuck, trapped, and beholden—are the domain of *מעשרה*. We can’t seem to shake them off and we don’t feel any light or התגלות in those places. But on Chanukah, the light reaches everywhere, even to the lowest places.



The *Ribbono Shel Olam* illuminates even there, and this enables a person to leave behind the undesirable places of his *nefesh*, allowing the light of אמונה and of the *Ribbono Shel Olam* to permeate the entire world.



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## Chanukah: The Light of Emunah Illuminates Our Most Challenging Situations

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### Emunah's Radiance Brightens Even the Toughest Times

#### Don't Hold on to Bitterness

A central element of *Chanukah* is that the *ohr* of the נר חנוכה illuminates and brightens even the lowest places in our lives. We must allow the light of this *Yom Tov* to permeate our souls so that the challenges and difficulties we may be experiencing can become radiated through the light.

Sometimes, a person finds himself in an utterly broken situation. He was hurt by someone, and he lost his *parnasah* as a result... or there's a family feud, and he's truly torn up because of it... or he's experiencing any other situation that makes him sad and unhappy. He's *really* in a state of "למטה מעשרה", or as one might say, "he's really down, and deep underground." He's bitter and sad, and he wants to express his pain to anyone who will listen.

Shlomo HaMelech says that דאגה בלב איש ישחנה, *if one has worry in his heart, he should speak about it to others*. The purpose of speaking to others about problems is so they will provide guidance and counsel on how to let go of the problem. But there are some people who go overboard in the שיחנה לאחרים. Some can't stop talking about the pain and it makes one wonder if he wants to be helped at all.

We must be careful to follow the advice of *Shlomo HaMelech*, and utilize this tool only as a method of getting out of the problem. The point is to *minimize* the problem, not to exaggerate it and fixate on it.

## First Aid

When a person finds himself in a state of darkness and challenge, and he calls out for help, the helper will ask, "What and where is your emergency?" Sometimes the person will not know what to answer and he'll say, "I don't know exactly, but it's really dark where I am... it's extremely למטה 'מעשרה. Can you please come here and see if you can figure out a way to help me?"

Now, when someone calls Hatzolah, they will often be coached on some first aid measures to do until they get there. Similarly, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* will respond to this suffering *Yid*, "Of course I am here, and I am everywhere, and I will always be right here for you. But right now you find yourself in a place of concealment of the *Shechinah*. So, until you can reveal a little light I will give you some instructions. **Do you perhaps have a candle with you? If you can find one, light it where you are. This will give you some relief for the meantime.**"

This is an important and effective *mehalech* for a *Yid* to help himself in his darkest moments; simply to add a little light, to make the darkness a little less.

### The Flame of *Eemunah*, Even if You're Not Feeling It

What do we mean by this? Sometimes, a *Yid* feels completely dry and he can't find the *chizuk* or light to illuminate his situation. Nevertheless he should proclaim simply: **"I know that the Ribbono Shel Olam is with me.** I know that everything is for my good. I will do my best to remain positive even if I am consumed with worry and pain."

A person may not feel inclined to do this and may not see the merit of thinking positively. "I'm just not there... how will it help me to say these things I don't mean? Of course, I believe that there's a *Ribbono Shel Olam* and that everything is for the good. But my situation is dire and depressed and I just don't feel like kindling a flame of *emunah*."

This attitude stems from a lack of belief in the power of *Torah* and *mitzvos*. This person thinks that in order for him to see salvation some major event must happen. But the truth is that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* is

with you right here, right now! There's only one question: is the light on or off? **The light is here in any case—the question is whether it will be revealed for you.**

The rule of the world is that when we're *למטה מעשרה*, we must be the ones to illuminate that place. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is here and He wants to reveal Himself but only after you put in the work on your end, only after you have ignited the flame.

### When Hashem Prepared the Rolls

The more a *Yid* lives this way—insisting on illuminating even in the darkness—the more he will merit to see the *Ribbono Shel Olam's* hand, and he will automatically become joyful and uplifted. In fact, it's the sweetest pleasure when we encounter the *Ribbono Shel Olam* specifically in the deepest darkness.

A *Yid* related that he goes to the bakery every *erev Shabbos* to pick up 100 rolls for his *shul's melaveh malkah*. One week, he came very late, and there was nothing left. Since he was a good customer, the proprietor said to him: "I have 120 rolls sitting in the freezer. It'll take 20 minutes for me to bake them. For you, I'll do it right away." Returning to his car with the warm rolls in tow, he spied a harried woman coming to the bakery beside herself as she saw it was closed.

"I just got an unexpected group of guests, and I desperately need *challah* to feed them," she said aloud.

"How many do you need?" asked the *Yid*. "Is twenty enough?"

She took them and thanked him profusely.

### Revelation Elevates

Leaving the establishment, the *Yid* reflected on what happened here. The bakery should have been closed already, but the *Ribbono Shel Olam* didn't forget this woman who needed *challos* for her guests, and He provided them fresh out of the oven, right when she arrived!

When we hear such a story, don't we feel the sweetness of revelation, of התגלות השכינה? When we experience such open revelation, how do we proceed into the holy Shabbos from there? Doesn't our כי טוב take on another meaning? The *chessed* and the Presence of *Hashem* literally washes over the person because he has encountered the *Ribbono Shel Olam*!

The same applies every time a *Yid* finds himself "למטה מעשרה". The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is waiting to reveal Himself right there—but *we* must be the vessel and the conduit to bring the *Shechinah* there.

This is how it always works. Whenever a person is in a quandary, it is incumbent upon him to turn on the light. Just as the *mizbei'ach* required an אש של הדיוט, *for the people to bring their own fire*, and only afterward did Hashem send down an אש של מעלה to consume the *korbanos*, so too must we live in the same fashion.

After we have illuminated the darkness with our first step toward light making a small flame, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* will show us sweetness and light. Then, once we encounter the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, we won't need anything more than that. This will prevent us from being fixated on our problems and remaining bitter about them.

### Using Our "Sense of Smell"

One of the wondrous things that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* has created is the fact that fresh and healthy food has a pleasant scent, while spoiled and rotten food has a foul odor. This is a wonderful thing because it warns people to stay away from foods that are bad for them. Imagine a world where the smell would never change or if good foods would have a terrible odor. Life would be difficult and unpleasant. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* is filled with goodness and kindness so of course He didn't design the world that way but did the opposite.

This arrangement doesn't only apply to food. We find a similar phenomenon of warning signs in interpersonal relationships and interactions. People's expressions and words give us a clear indication of whether we have honored them or offended them. Imagine a world

where we would have no idea whether we have helped a person or hurt them deeply.

A wise person will use his “sense of smell” to guide him. If he sees that that his current trajectory isn’t working or is counterproductive, he will quickly change it while there’s still time. This is relevant for the *chinuch* of our children and it applies to our *shalom bayis*, as well as in any employer-employee relationship. Every time we say something to another person, we can immediately gauge the reaction, and allow ourselves to be guided by it.

### No One Appreciates a Whiner

Let’s return to our *Yid* who finds himself in a struggle and goes around whining and complaining about his problems all the time. He doesn’t stop but does it all day to anyone who will listen (or not). “This person offended me... The other guy wasn’t nice to me...”

This *Yid* would be wise to employ some self-awareness to gauge whether this is helpful or not. He should look around and see whether people avoid him because of this. No one says, “This guy is an excellent communicator; he’s able to express and describe his problems at work so well...” *No one* says this. To the contrary, if a potential boss inquires about him, his friends may avoid answering the question and deny even knowing the person.

Why is this? Because this person essentially takes existing darkness—and adds even more bitterness and darkness. “Let’s add some more darkness...” he practically says, as he digs his hole even deeper. He forgot that there’s a *Ribbono Shel Olam*, and he forgot that this darkness is by design. **When we forget this—this itself deepens the darkness.** This person mixes darkness with more darkness, and it’s not helpful for anyone.

How different it is when a *Yid* says: my job is to swim against the current. People complain all around me but I’ll be the person who says: “Let’s try to be happy! We’re feeling down and upset now but as long as we’re stuck in this situation, let’s at least be happy!” This person illuminates the darkness!

## Faith and Gratitude

Every one of us can learn how to light a flame in the darkness.

The first step is to say—even if we aren't feeling like it—"The *Ribbono Shel Olam* has designed my situation with precision. It has nothing to do with anything around me. It has nothing to do with this other person, and it has nothing to do with anything I did. I have to learn to let go! The *Ribbono Shel Olam* designed it this way for good reason, and everything is certainly for the good."

This is the first step—to be strong enough to say this, even if we're absolutely not feeling it. We must muster all our courage and strength to say the words forcefully.

The second, more difficult step is **to even thank the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for the situation**—as Chazal have taught us: One is obligated to give thanks for the bad just as he does for the good.

### Finding the Good in the Darkness

## We Can Always Find A Silver Lining

There's a third aspect of illuminating the darkness, even when we're at a low point, and that is when we look with all our might for the good within that situation—challenging ourselves to find the good. If we look hard enough, we will find much good in even the toughest of situations.

I once heard from an individual who works very long hours—*mamash* from morning till night, every day of the week, including Sunday and Friday, who told me: "I don't want to be the kind of person who has the liberty to decide, 'I want to take a nap at eleven o'clock in the morning.' I don't want to be the person who can say 'Today, I'm not going into work.'... I just don't want to be a person who has an empty day and doesn't have anything better to do. I would prefer to be occupied, even if it means being harried and busy."

## Every Coin Has Two Sides

On a practical level, we will see that every single thing in the world has two aspects, two sides to it. Just as there's wealth and poverty, and each one has merits and drawbacks—so too with every other area of life. Every neighborhood has pluses and minuses to living there, and every type of work has benefits and downsides. There are benefits to being a boss, and there are positives to being an employee. Every situation has some benefits.

Now, since you're on one of the two sides, you may as well embrace it, and look for the good of that side. You're not being asked to lie; it's *true*! If so, why are you fixated on the negatives alone? The mistake is twofold: First, you're denying the good of the side that you're on, and second, you're also looking away from the negatives of the other side, pretending that it's all good on the other side of the fence. **You're sitting in the darkness for no reason.**

## A King Without a Car

Once, there was a group of *rebbeim* in a *yeshiva* in Eretz Yisrael. Each one of them would arrive by bus, the more common mode of transportation, except for one *maggid shiur* who had his own car and would arrive to *yeshiva* every day in style. One day, this *maggid shiur* walked into the faculty lounge with a big smile on his face, and announced, "Today I'm a king!"

He explained that he's done driving his car! He doesn't have the patience to drive in traffic and doesn't have the money to fill the tank up with gas... and then, when he finally arrives, he has to search for parking. "I decided to give up my car, and this morning I got on to the bus. I learned a bit, napped a bit, and here I am, refreshed and ready for work! I feel liberated!"

This person wasn't joking, and he wasn't trying to make himself feel better. **He meant it—because he truly felt this way!**

Every one of us has the ability to look at life this way. We can always find the good within our situation, and this is the definition of illuminating the darkness.



## The Benefits of a Small Apartment

A *Yid* related to me that he once rented his apartment in *Yerushalayim* to a wealthy *Yid* from America. When he entered the tiny apartment, the guest was amazed and said: “Look at this! Everything is on the same level! You don’t have to go up and down the stairs like *I* do, living in a home with three floors. It’s so much better this way!”

Perhaps it’s easier to speak this way when we’re in *someone else’s* apartment, but we can also choose to say this when we’re in *our own* apartment. This *Yid* related that it’s been thirty years since that encounter, and these words help him remain happy with his apartment even today. “It’s amazing! I live like a wealthy man!... I don’t need to walk up and down all day.”

It’s no joke. When it comes to cleaning for *Pesach*, it’s so much harder in a large home, and so stressful on the entire family.

There are always positives and benefits to all kinds of living—and we must all give thanks for *our benefits*. There’s no need to darken our situation, and make it worse than it is, by denying the good therein. **Illuminate! Light the flame!** Think about the good, and give thanks and praise to *Hashem* for it!

## The New Neighborhood

The same applies to people who think they must purchase a home precisely in the neighborhood where they were raised. They simply can’t leave home. Now, if they can swing it, and remain near their parents and in-laws, it’s a wonderful thing. But if it’s impossible, and the cost is prohibitive, it is no coincidence. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* priced you out of the neighborhood so you should move elsewhere. **Do you know how many positives that other place has?** Stop complaining and trapping yourself. If the *Ribbono Shel Olam* designed it this way, then you must see the good of the new area, speak of its good, and give thanks for it. **This is how you illuminate the situation!**

Once, there was a family living in a 2.5 room apartment in *Yerushalayim*, and some real estate agents tried to convince the family to move.

“If you sell your apartment in *Yerushalayim*, you can buy an apartment in the outlying neighborhoods with *seven* rooms! Instead, you insist on living here like this?! Don’t be silly. Sell it!”

The owner looked up at these people and said: “I don’t know what you want! I *love* my apartment! I enjoy living here! I don’t even understand what you’re suggesting to me. I know this neighborhood, and I have everything I need here. You’re trying to convince me that *it’s not good*?! I am telling you that *it is good*!”

Even when a person doesn’t feel that it’s good... **he must be able to accept that this is the reality, and there are still many benefits to his situation.**

The days of *Chanukah* have the power to illuminate this reality. In fact, there are two elements to *Chanukah*. There’s *נר חנוכה* and there’s the *הלל* והודאה—and these two elements are intertwined: *How* do we illuminate? “למטה מעשרה” By giving praise and thanks to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for *every* situation!

### It’s A Waste of Time

Some people think that if they complain, they’ll convince even the *Ribbono Shel Olam* to help them. If I forget about my troubles for even a minute, who’s going to know that this person wronged me? Who will help me feel that I am right? I must speak about it and shout it from the rooftops. I must sit and reiterate my pain, and this way, everyone in the family will know that it’s wrong to make a *Chanukah* party when one of the siblings can’t make it!

There could be some logic to the complaint but it’s still not usually worthwhile to voice it. We always have the choice to either sit and wallow or to emerge from the hole and do our best to distract ourselves from the pain and discomfort.

On today’s technological devices, people have the ability to check how much time they wasted on their devices—and similarly, we can all make a *cheshbon* of how much time we wasted on talking about our problems.

One hour? Three hours? Today, I mentioned my pain 731 times! And as we become aware of this, we must change it. It's unhealthy and counterproductive. We do not help ourselves by engaging in such fixation.

### No "Dead Space"

So it is in every situation that seems to us to be undesirable, including when a person waits for a *shidduch* or for children, may all *Yidden* be helped *b'karov*. A good architect takes the space that he has and makes the most of it, maximizing every centimeter. Here you can put a closet, and here you can place a freezer, and there you can make another door. Here's a structural beam. What can we do with that? If we design an apartment without thinking about this, we will end up with a lot of dead space.

A *Yid* must internalize this into his bones. If he has extra time as he waits for a *yeshuah*... *put in a closet!* There's no such thing as empty space and time in which we wait and do nothing. A wise person who goes to a doctor and knows that you can wait for two hours will bring along something to learn.

### Making the Most of Our Time

I once spoke with a *Yid* who travels often from *Eretz Yisrael* to California—a trip of about 15 hours. I asked him how he manages such a long trip, and he said, "I will tell you the truth. I prepare so much to learn on the plane, that when we land, I am always disappointed that I didn't get in as much learning as I planned." Similarly, sometimes when we prepare a lot to do on a trip and we haven't finished, we will ask the driver to go around the block once more...

Thus, even from a practical perspective, everyone understands that it is wise and prudent not to wallow, not to fixate, but rather to look at the good and be grateful for our situation. In this way, the *yeshu'ah* will come sooner—both on a practical level as well as from an *emunah* and *bitachon* perspective.

**Illuminate the darkness of your space! Light the flame and work**

**from there!** Every *Yid* who does so will see illumination because הלל והודאה is one of the best ways to ignite the flame and to illuminate the darkness of our lowest "למטה מעשרה" situations.

The *avodah* of *Chanukah*—and the power that we have during these days—is to illuminate the spaces of concealment. When we do our part to bring brightness and illumination, we will merit that the *Ribono Shel Olam* will brighten and illuminate as only He can.



# נקודה למעשה

זאת חנוכה

## What Should We Ask for on *Zos Chanukah*?

### A Day of Divine Will

The *Heiliger Ruziner* said that even a simple and regular *Yid* can daven on *Zos Chanukah* for things that the greatest *tzaddikim* can only receive on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. The day holds such incredible revelation that every single *Yid's tefillos* will be accepted On High. It's a day of *pnimiyus* and inner connection, a day of extraordinary closeness to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, a day when the doors are open to our every request.

This being the case, we must have the wisdom to know what to ask for.

### Praise for Much, Ask for Little

Let us study a short passage of a *Gemara* and we will discover how to *daven* on this special day.

The *Gemara* tells us (*Berachos* 50a) that when we *bentch* with a *zimun*, we must say *ובטובו חיינו*, with a *beis*, and not with a *ומטובו*, *mem*. This slight difference makes all the difference in the world. Reciting the word with a letter *mem* indicates thanking *Hashem* from His good from which He has given us life, and if he says that then the *Gemara* states we know that he's an *bor*, and *ignoramus*.

*Rashi* explains that the problem with this expression is that it suggests he is thanking *Hashem* only for the basics of life's needs,, which is but a small portion of *Hashem's* benevolence and blessing granted to him. This *Yid* should have praised *Hashem* for so much more than the minimum.

However, the *Gemara* differentiates between thanking and *asking*, and when it comes to asking we *should* ask for just a little.

*Rashi* explains that we should come as paupers requesting charity by the door, only asking for a small amount. Such a person pleads with humility, and doesn't dare ask for too much.

### Spiritual Plenty

Yet there's one area, explains the *Gemara*, where we are enjoined to ask for a lot from *Hashem*, and that is in *ruchniyus*. For Torah and *avodah*, for *kedushah* and *taharah*, we have every right and duty to come to *Hashem* with big requests.

This is what the *Gemara* teaches and guides us to do.

### Utilizing the Day

If *Zos Chanukah* is a day when we can get our prayers answered more than any other day, then we must surely utilize the day to *daven* for *ruchniyus*. The day itself cries out *הרחב פִּיךָ וּאִמְלֵאֵהוּ*, *open your mouth and I will fill it* (which is the *pasuk* the *Gemara* above quotes).

So what should we ask for? We must ask for that which Chazal tell us to ask: for *divrei Torah*, holiness and spiritual growth. We must ask for the knowledge of *Hashem*, and for the *Ribbono Shel Olam* to remove the barriers which cloud our hearts.

### The Villager Who Knows No Better

This can be likened to a villager with no *השגות* of materialism, who arrived at a festive banquet. The waiters made the rounds from table to table, carrying trays and trays of delicacies. As they approached the simple man, they asked him "What can we serve you?" He looked at all the delicious delights, and said, "Do you have some bread and water?"

A wise man who was sitting nearby understood what was happening, and he told the waiter, "He doesn't know what to ask for because he has no exposure or experience with these fine foods. Please come back in 15 minutes. I'll explain some things to him and then he'll know what to order."

We're all the villagers in the story. Our understanding of *ruchniyus* can be likened to the understanding of the wagon drivers of yore. When it comes to pleading for *ruchniyus* from Hashem our levels and goals are embarrassing when truly considered by those who are much closer to Hashem. This is a crying shame because this last day of *Chanukah* is a day when we can ask for anything.

**The Ribbono Shel Olam is offering us the greatest delicacies and delights**, with true inner connection to Him, but we don't even know how to appreciate it. **Even if we're already asking for *ruchniyus*, we don't understand what to ask for.** For how should we know what to ask for, if we have never tasted it?

### In Their Words

Therefore, since we don't possess the appropriate maximum *hasagos* on our own, it's best to utilize the deep and beautiful words of *Dovid HaMelech* and from other previous *tzaddikim* who supplicated Hashem for *ruchniyus*. **They *did* taste it, and therefore they knew how to ask, and what to ask for.**

In addition, we should make the following statement a major part of our tefilos. We should tell Hashem that, "We don't know how to ask properly but, You, ***Ribbono Shel Olam***, **You *do* know what I need.** You know the greatest depths of Torah that I can attain. Please help me get there!

Our poor man's *tefillah* will surely get us through the doors that are so open wide on this exalted day.

