

A MONTHLY TORAH PUBLICATION BY STUDENTS AND

# THE CHODESH CHIDUSH

FACULTY OF THE WEINBAUM YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOL

VOLUME III ISSUE III

## Baby Steps

Nonny Gross '09

Each year, we celebrate Chanukah- “the Festival of Light.” We remember how the Maccabim fought and defeated the Greeks, despite their huge disadvantage due to the small quantity of Jewish soldiers. Their victory was great; not only did the Maccabim beat their oppressors, but they also fought the assimilation that had taken the minds of hundreds of Jews. They restored the Beit Hamikdash but were dismayed to find that they were at a loss for the pure olive oil needed to light the Menorah. As the story goes, the Jews found one small jug of oil that miraculously kept the Menorah burning for eight days, until new oil was processed. We still commemorate this great, unexpected miracle today- hundreds of years after its occurrence.

Not so miraculous, but still great, is the lesson that can be taken from the Menorah. Light is a powerful creation. When oil burns, it can completely illuminate a previously dark room. There is no other substance in the world that can so totally fill a room like this. In this sense, light is very much like Hashem. When a person is in a dark time in his life where everything seems hopeless and desperate, he must simply reach out to Hashem. By bringing Hashem into his life and forging a close connection with Him, he will leave his period of darkness and will instead be immersed in light. When the Jews were assimilated and caught up in Greek culture, they were considered as though they were in the dark because they distanced themselves from Hashem and the Torah. The Maccabim were the ones responsible for prevailing over the Greeks and bringing Hashem back into the Jews’ lives. With Hashem, the Maccabim also restored light and a connection to Hashem within Bnei Yisrael. We need to put forth as much effort as we possibly can in order to bring Hashem into our lives. Once the match has been lit, its light can burn for hours

on its own. So too, we just need to “light the match” and walk the first few baby steps- after that, Hashem will help us by pushing us the rest of the way and allowing our light to burn.

In Hashem’s world, there is no such thing as time or limitations. When you bring yourself into Hashem’s world and by doing so, bring Him into your world, numbers are insignificant. Once we spark and trigger Hashem’s presence, the possibilities are not limited by days or hours. Therefore, when the Maccabim took the first steps and did what they could concerning the Mitzvah of the Menorah, Hashem finished it up for them. This miracle that lasted for days was not considered a miracle in His world. It was a miracle to Bnei Yisrael because we are human and constrained by time.



It was unthought-of that such a tiny quantity of oil could last for more than a few hours, let alone eight days. But we see from this miracle that when we put in our effort in at the beginning, Hashem will light everything up and help us out, regardless of any time constraint, until we’re able to pick ourselves up and move on again.

Hashem realized that the Jews were putting in all the effort they could, so He filled in the gaps. Bnei Yisrael struck the match by putting in the little oil that they had, and Hashem lit the rest of the way for them and allowed them to fulfill the Mitzvah of the Menorah. We too, especially during Chanukah, which is specifically a time of light, must constantly strike the match and take the initiative to incorporate Hashem into our lives. May we all be zocheh to have our lives filled with light and Torah this upcoming Chanukah.

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# The Eternal Menorah

Meira Tirschwell '07

The word "miracle" is closely related to the holiday of Chanukah. What is so special about the Chanukah story that it was allotted eight whole days to be celebrated? So the Jews were the victorious underdogs...but aren't we always? The answer maybe found in a seemingly unlikely source, the Oxford dictionary:

miracle >noun 1 an extraordinary and welcome event attributed to a divine agency. 2 a remarkable and very welcome occurrence. 3 an outstanding example, specimen, or achievement.

-ORIGIN Latin miraculum 'object of wonder'.

The miracle of Chanukah symbolizes something that all the other miracles occurring to Bnei Yisroel were lacking. The holiday of Chanukah is the quintessential miracle—the miracle to end all miracles. In Maseches Shabbos (23b), the Gemora tells us that the Chanukah menorah is to publicize the miracle. Why is the miracle of Chanukah so important that we have to go out of our way to make it known?

The answer lies within the mind of the storekeeper who

religiously places an electric menorah in his or her display window. The menorah represents nationality, unity, perseverance, mesorah, and most importantly the only "divine agency"—Hashem. When Aharon was told that the menorah would last eternally, Hashem was not kidding. It survived the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash when all else was lost. It has survived until now because of what it symbolizes - the survival of the Jewish people, not only physically, but spiritually as well. The lights of the menorah signify the fire kindling in every Jewish soul waiting to burst into flame. When the Gemora says that the mitzvah of the menorah is to publicize the miracle it is talking about the symbolism behind the miracle, and the fact that the continual existence of our nation is in direct relation to the continual existence and function of the menorah. So this Chanukah when we are lighting the menorah let us think about all we can do to publicize the wonders of Hashem and draw those lost souls back to their roots, which will bring mashiach bemheira b'yameinu.

## Strengthening Through Addition

Mimi Atkin '08

The Gemora describes the machlokes that occurred between Beis Hillel and Beis Shamai over the way in which to light the Chanukah candles. On the most basic level, Shamai argues that we should light eight candles on the first night, seven on the second, and so forth – decreasing by one candle each night. Beis Hillel, on the other hand, maintains that we should light one candle on the first night, two on the second, and so on – thereby increasing by one candle every night. Hillel bases his opinion on the principle of “elevating and not decreasing” – the idea that simcha and celebration should only grow as the holiday progresses. The debate between these infamous Halachic rivals extends deeply into the personal matters of internal refinement and spiritual growth. According to Beis Shamai, the way to go about purification is by gradually cleansing ourselves of our evils and sins. By removing the bad within us, we will hopefully, at the end of the process, reach our purest form of goodness.



Hence, by removing a candle each night, we are one step closer to the ultimate goal of purification. However, Beis Hillel disagrees with the ideology of Beis Shamai. Contrarily, Hillel believes that the way to reach definitive purification is by maximizing our potential and using our strengths to help us expand our characters. The addition of a candle each night symbolizes our efforts to develop our spirituality. By using the good we already have within us to enrich our characters we will efficiently refine ourselves and reach purification. Practically, we rule in accordance with Beis Hillel and increase our candle count by one each night. Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, it is crucial to apply the philosophy of Beis Hillel and to challenge ourselves in order to maximize our potential. During the holiday, when the Jewish people experience an intense closeness with Hashem, it is imperative that we make use of that intimate connection and concentrate on refining ourselves in order to better our service to Him.



## The Menorah in the Synagogue

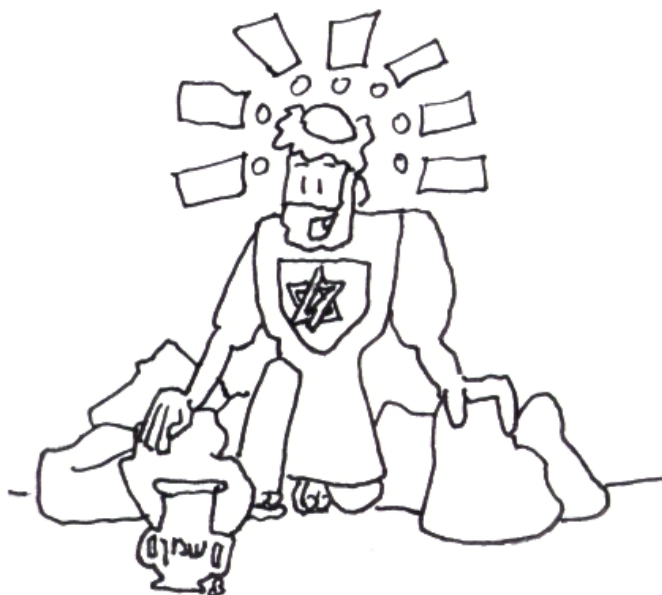
Rabbi Ben Sugerman  
Judaic Faculty

There is a universal custom of lighting the menorah in our shuls all eight nights of Chanukah. What makes this practice all the more interesting is that there is no reference in all of Shas of lighting the menorah in shul. In fact, the gemorah only focuses on the lighting in the home and the placement of the menorah in the home. Both the Rishonim and Acharonim attempt to explain what is behind the ubiquitous minhag of lighting in the shul.

The Tur quotes the Sefer Hamitzvos Hakatan, who is better known by his acronym, the Sma"k. The Sma"k writes that the menorah in the synagogue belongs on the south side to remind us of the menorah in the Temple which was placed on the south side. The Levush quotes the Tur's father, the Rosh, who elaborates on this idea: Each of our shuls are a Mikdash M'at / miniature temple. Just like we once lit in the temple using pure olive oil, we light in our synagogues during these eight days when we commemorate the miracle.

The Kol Bo suggests that the minhag is related to another minhag which is mentioned in the gemorah a gemorah that we are learning this year in WYHS. The gemorah (Pesachim 100b) states that they would make Kiddush on Friday night in shul. The purpose of this was that the people who stay at shul and eat in shul would be able to fulfill their obligation of Kiddush. In a similar vein, the Menorah was lit in shul for those same people who do not have a home to go to. The Kol Bo adds another reason that prompted this minhag. The mitzvah of lighting is enhanced when done in the congregation. When we light in the shul, in the presence of a quorum, it is an additional hiddur of the mitzvah, much like the concept of b'rov am hadras melech.

The Rivash writes that the purpose of lighting in the shul is for the purpose of *pirsumei nisa* / publicizing the miracle. In truth, the entire institution of lighting in the home is to meet that purpose, but the Rivash notes that nowadays we don't light in the front of our homes as initially instructed due to the dominance of the non-Jews. In order to augment the publicity of the miracle, we developed the minhag of lighting in the synagogues.



A number of issues come up regarding the menorah which is lit in shul. The first issue we will tackle is the bracha. Lighting at home is a mitzvah d'rabanan which warrants a bracha. Lighting in the shul is a minhag; we normally don't make a bracha on a minhag. The Shulchan Aruch (671:7) instructs us to make a bracha. The Mishna Brurah explains that this is no different than the abridged Hallel that we say on Rosh Chodesh which is also a minhag and yet we make a bracha.

Understandably, this is a point of controversy. Making a bracha on Hallel of Rosh Chodesh is subject to a major debate amongst the Rishonim. (see Tosfos Brachos 14a and Tosfos Sukka 42b) The Rambam adopts the position that no bracha is said on Hallel of Rosh Chodesh and the Shulchan Aruch accepts his position. We would have expected the Mechaber to say that due to the fact that lighting in shul is only a minhag, no bracha should be said, yet the Shulchan Aruch does demand a bracha. The Chacham Tzvi (siman 88) notes the inconsistency in the Shulchan Aruch, and leaves the question unresolved. (See the Aruch Hashulchan 671:26 who also recognizes the problem and attempts to reconcile the issue.) The Maharam Shik quotes his Rebbe, the Chasam Sofer who also was very reluctant to make a bracha on the menorah in shul. Despite all this, it has been universally accepted to light the candles in the shul with a bracha.



Another question: Do we need a minyan to light in shul? The question seems academic, since we light in shul after mincha, and presumably we had a minyan during Mincha. The question takes on relevance on Friday afternoon where there is a tendency for people to come late to shul and there is an increased possibility that there is no minyan during the lighting of the menorah. (Apparently, coming late to shul is not a modern phenomenon.) The Beur Halacha quotes the Mor Uk'tzia who says that you need a minyan during the lighting. If no minyan is present, then we should light but without a bracha. The Mor Uk'tzia focuses on the 2<sup>nd</sup> explanation of the Kol Bo, that lighting is a function of Rov Am, and can only be accomplished when there is a quorum of ten men. The Beur Halacha strongly disagrees; he feels that even without a minyan, a bracha should be made. The Beur Halacha focuses on the Rivash, that lighting in the shul is a function of pirsum, which is accomplished with even less than a quorum. The Beur Halacha further argues that even if there isn't a minyan present during the actual lighting, eventually there will be a minyan to see the lit candles which would justify a bracha in expectation of the minyan. As a proof, he cites the Avudraham. The Avudraham is bothered by a basic question. The gemorah tells us that the person who didn't light but passes by a house and sees a lit menorah makes the bracha of she'asa Nissim. Where do we ever find a bracha on simply witnessing a mitzvah? There are many brachos for simply seeing something, but never is there a bracha on just seeing a mitzvah, only on performing a mitzvah. The Avudraham answers that the bracha we say is directed toward the pirsum that is being accomplished. Clearly, pirsum can be accomplished through a menorah which is already lit. Likewise, even if there aren't ten men

presently, knowing that a minyan will see the lit menorah is enough to warrant a bracha at the time of lighting.

There is another universal minhag to light the menorah in shul before shacharis all eight days of Chanukah except Shabbos morning, albeit without a bracha. This has no formal source, neither in the gemorah nor in the Rishonim. It is difficult to ascertain where this minhag started and what the basis for this practice is. For most of the reasons stated above, there is no reason that would legitimize the minhag. If lighting in the shul is for the homeless, or to enhance the pirsum, or to give more honor to the mitzvah, then the only appropriate time to light in the shul would be at night, where the mitzvah d'rabanen exists. The Binyan Shlomo, authored by Rav Shlomo of Vilna, posits that the only way to explain the minhag would be within the opinion of the Sma'k, that lighting in the shul is reminiscent of the Beis Hamikdash. This is also subject to some controversy. According to most Rishonim (see the Kesef Mishna, Hilchos T'midim Umusafim 3:10) the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash was only lit during the night, and the lamp was cleaned in the morning. The Rambam (ibid 3:10-12) is of the opinion that the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash was lit again in the morning for the duration of the day in the event that the fire went out overnight. The Binyan Shlomo explains that since in the Temple the menorah was attended to, and, if necessary, relit, according to the Rambam, our synagogues which are a miniature temple go through the same process on Chanukah.

The staff of the Chodesh Chidush wishes everyone a freilechen Chanukah.

## THE CHODESH CHIDUSH

Founded in 2004

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**Yeshiva**  
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