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TOURO TORAH

• Lander College for Women • Divrei Torah Newsletter • Kislev •

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Dreidel: The Fall Furthers the Flight

By Chaya Tessler

“נס גדול היה שם” - “A great miracle happened there.” How many times have we heard this line as *Chanukah* approaches? How many times have we heard this explanation for the letters on the *dreidel*? And how many times have we wondered: Is this really it? This is why we all play the same game year after year? There must be more to it than that! There is indeed more to it – much more! The meaning behind the *dreidel* goes deeper than an easy game with a cute acronym. It is a reminder of our challenges in *galus* and the key to meriting the coming of *Mashiach*, thereby bringing our long exile to an end.

Let us start from the beginning. There are four letters on the *dreidel* – *Nun, Gimmel, Hey, and Shin*. Aside from the classic “נס גדול היה שם” acronym, there is another set of words that these letters can stand for: *Nefesh* (soul), *Guf* (body), *Seichel* (intellect), and *HaKol* (everything). A person can sin and misuse each one of these components of himself, causing a decline in his *avodas Hashem*. Misuse of these has been a specific challenge throughout the different exiles in Jewish history.



Nefesh corresponds to *galus Bavel*. The opulence of the Babylonian lifestyle appealed to the Jews, and their emphasis on food, drink and other worldly pleasures led us to overindulge in the beauty of this world and become caught up in aesthetics. Because we got lost in this form of physicality, we lost our connection to spirituality, to our *nefesh*.

Guf corresponds to *galus Paras U'Madai*. First, *Achashverosh* led the Jewish people to err with their bodies in partaking of his lavish feast. Then, Haman sought to wipe us out completely, threatening our physical existence.

Seichel corresponds to *galus Yavan*. With their emphasis on intellect and philosophy, the Greeks tried to lead *Bnei Yisrael* astray through their minds, plying them with false ideologies and beliefs.

HaKol corresponds to *galus Edom*. Throughout the many ages and eras of this current exile, the nations have used all three of the above tactics to induce us to forsake our special

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relationship with *Hashem*. However, despite all this, *Yisrael* has survived both spiritually and physically.

Another interesting observation about the letters on the dreidel is that the *gematria* of the letters *Nun, Gimmel, Hey, and Shin* is $50 + 3 + 5 + 300 =$

*“The only way to win a game
of dreidel is to make it fall.”*
—Chaya Tessler

358. This is the same numerical value as the letters of the word *Mashiach* (משיח: $40 + 300 + 10 + 8 = 358$).

Now, let's connect this to the *dreidel*. In order to play this game, the *dreidel* is spun with one hand twisting it from the skinny handle on top. The only way to win is for the *dreidel* to fall. This is really

a *mashal* for our life in *galus* and the way to attain the level at which we merit the final *geulah*, redemption.

In *Perek 30* in *Tehillim*, *Dovid Hamelech* writes, “אֲרוּמְמֶךָ - “I will exalt You, Hashem, because You have raised me up.” Rav Hirsch explains that the word *דלתיני* comes from the language of *דלי*, a bucket, which is lowered into a well and then raised. The purpose of lowering it is so that it can be raised full. As we have said, the only way to win a game of dreidel is to make it fall. In this game, it is impossible to achieve victory without first experiencing a failure. The same holds true in life. A person does not become great by being perfect his entire life. Greatness is achieved through the various mistakes a person makes in life, specifically through the lessons learned as a result. People fall. It is an inevitable part of being human. The key is our reaction. If we react properly, our falls build us and allow us to become greater than we were before we fell!

This applies not only to the life of an individual, but also to the process of *Bnei Yisrael* as a whole going through *galus*. The little stick on top of the *dreidel* is in the shape of the number one, representing the One G-d, *Hashem*, Who spins everything. It is His Hand which can be seen in every aspect of this world. As we spin through the various challenges of exile, we must strive to see His Hand in everything. We must take every aspect of *Nefesh, Guf, and Seichel* and use them to connect to *Hashem*. If we learn from our past, we will be able to grow and usher in a better future. By reacting to our mistakes properly, we will be *zocheh* to *Mashiach* through our falls!

With this lesson in my mind, playing *dreidel* on *Chanukah* becomes an entirely new experience. Now, when the *dreidel* spins, I think: “This is the spinning of Jewish history, which will inevitably lead to *Mashiach*, not *despite* our falls, but *because* of them.”

(Based on classes given by Mrs. Rubinfeld and Rabbi Yossi Cohen, BYA Seminary)



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More than a Miracle

By Hannah Levinson

"It is not always necessary for an event to be miraculous in order to be great, and not every miraculous event is a great event." – Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik. An event is great only if the following things occur: it fosters change, it impacts the person, it ushers in a new era, and it produces great things. Whether or not the event was miraculous or natural is not the critical point. No matter how miraculous an event is, it is of small significance if it is a wasted experience. This concept is seen when we compare the description of the burning bush – one of the most famous miracles of all time – with that of the events of *Channukah*, another famous miracle.

In *parshas Shemos* (3:3), *Moshe* stands in front of the burning bush and witnesses an event which defies the laws of nature: The bush is on fire and, astonishingly, the leaves and branches are not consumed by the flames. In the face of this incredible occurrence, *Moshe* states, "וַיֹּאמֶר אֵת הַמְרָאָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֶּה" – "and I see this great sight". Rabbi Soloveitchik asks: Why did *Moshe* not call it a *nes*, a miracle? Why did he simply say, "I see something great"?

Although *Moshe* was aware that he was witnessing a miracle, that was not what intrigued him. Rather, what riveted *Moshe* was the message that he heard. It was a great sight for one reason: it inspired *Moshe* to respond to the call of God.

This teaching speaks directly to the miracle of *Channukah*. When we speak about the events of our struggle with the Greeks, we say, "נֶס גְּדוֹל הָיָה שָׁם" – "A great miracle happened there." True, these events were miraculous – we won a war in which we were greatly outnumbered, and a small flask of oil remained unbroken and was able to burn for eight days rather than one. But these events were only great because they produced a transformation of the Jewish people. The Jews proved to themselves and the world that not only could they defeat a fierce enemy on the battlefield, but they could also purify the spiritual defilement of an entire population.

"Life did not remain the same as before. At that time, the Jews took advantage of the new opportunity that was offered to them: a spiritual revival and a rededication to religious values."

-Hannah Levinson

The events witnessed during the days of *Channukah* inspired change. Life did not remain the same as before. At that time, the Jews took advantage of the new opportunity that was offered to them: a spiritual revival and a rededication to religious values. The Jewish people engaged in a national rededication to the *Torah* and tradition. In fact, "rededication" is the very meaning of the word "*Channukah*". *Chazal* waited a full year before they declared *Channukah* a holiday. Why did they not establish the holiday immediately after the miracles took place?

Chazal waited to see whether the change was lasting. Had the Jewish people truly transformed their lives? Only then, when *Chazal* saw the impact, did they consider this story to be worthy of celebration for all time. Only then was the miracle of *Channukah* considered to be great. As we celebrate these events each year, we should also aspire to emulate this remarkable form of change in our own lives.

(Based on "Making a Miracle Great: Rabbi Soloveitchik on the Miracle of *Channukah*".)



Burning Brighter and Higher

By Chana Goldberg

Channukah: the taste of *latkes*, the sound of *ma'oz tzur*, the feeling of twisting a *dreidel* between your fingers. Most striking of all is the sight of the candles – flames glowing brightly outside of our windows into the darkest of nights, warming the bleakest and coldest part of the year. While the symbolism of darkness and light is always beautiful, we still must ask ourselves: What do these candles mean to us on a personal level? What is *Channukah* all about?



On *Channukah*, many say that one should recite Chapter 30 of *Tehillim*, which begins with the *passuk*, “מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר הַנְּגִינָה הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד” - “a song of dedication of the house of *Dovid*.” The *perek* then continues with the words, “אֶרְוַמְךָ ה' כִּי דָלִיתִנִּי וְלֹא שִׁמְחָתָה אֹיְבֵי לִי” - “I will exalt you *Hashem* because You have raised me up and not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me.”

Rav Hirsch explains that the word *דליתני* comes from the language of *דלי*, a bucket. A bucket is drawn up by a rope, but the minute the person pulling it lets go, the bucket plunges downward once more. So too are we supported by *Hashem* – were He to let go for even a second, we would immediately sink to the depths. We are bound to *Hashem* Above, and by strengthening our connection to Him, we strengthen the “rope” that lifts us and prevent ourselves from falling below.

In the next *passuk*, *Dovid Hamelech* writes: “ה' אֱלֹהֵי שׁוּעָתִי אֵלֶיךָ וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי” - “*Hashem*, I have cried out to You and You have healed me.” The *Malbim* explains that the *bayis* referred to in the first *passuk* of the *mizmor* is a *mashal* for the *guf* (body), which serves as a “house” for the *neshamah*. Ultimately, what defines us as human beings are our *neshamos*. When *Dovid* became sick, when his “house” was shaken up,

“ Just like the Jewish people rebuilt themselves after the defilement at the hands of the Greeks, so too, *Channukah* is a time of redefinition and re-dedication of ourselves on a personal level.”

he cried out to *Hashem*. He realized that the sickness was rooted in his *neshamah*, which resides within the body. He knew his problems stemmed from his sins. Therefore, healing could only come once he took that first step toward repairing his relationship with *Hashem*, when he called out in *tefillah*.

Human nature is to cling to our current reality and assume that things will always stay the same, but we must recognize that our lives are only going the way they are because *Hashem* wills it to be so. In this *perek*, *Dovid* is saying: When I was healthy, I thought it was natural to be alive and well, but now that I am sick I see that, all along, my health

came from You, *Hashem*!

In the last line of the *perek*, *Dovid* writes: “לִמְעַן יִזְכְּרֶךָ כְּבוֹד וְלֹא יָדָם ה' אֱלֹהֵי לְעוֹלָם אֲדַבֵּר” - “I want to live so that my soul can praise You, *Hashem*!” The *Malbim* interprets *kavod* as referring to the *neshamah*; it is the only thing that separates us from animals, thereby giving us *kavod* as human beings. This message is especially important to keep in mind during the time of *Channukah*, when we fight the influence of the Greeks, who emphasized the animalistic parts of humanity – physicality and the body. This *perek* emphasizes that one’s *neshamah* is his identity and it should always be in a state of connection to *Hashem*.

As previously mentioned, the introduction to this *perek* is the line “מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר הַנְּגִינָה הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד” - “a song of dedication of the house of *Dovid*.” The *Nesivos Shalom* explains that this *perek* is talking about rebuilding and rededicating yourself after experiencing a difficult time, about having a *הנְגִינָה הַבַּיִת* for your “house”, your body, which is newly reconnected to your *neshamah*. Just like the Jewish people rebuilt

themselves after the defilement at the hands of the Greeks, so too, *Channukah* is a time of redefinition and rededication of ourselves on a personal level. Each one of us always has a little light within us that can grow and become as bright as day. It is in the cold of winter and the darkness of night that *Hashem* comes to help us rekindle our flame.

This year, when gazing at the contrast of the candles against the dark night, we should remember that the message of *Channukah* is never to despair. We can reconnect to *Hashem* even during times when we feel distant. We can rebuild ourselves even when it feels as if all the odds are stacked against us. At the end of the day, *Hashem* is on our side and that is all that we need to raise ourselves higher.

(Based on a class given by Mrs. Yehudis Landeau, Machon L'Torah Seminary).



The Light of Past Miracles

By Mori Berman

Shabbos Channukah usually occurs during the week we read *Parshas Mitzet*, part of the story of *Yosef* in Egypt. The *parshah* begins with Pharaoh's butler remembering *Yosef*, two years after he himself had been released from prison. Pharaoh had disturbing dreams that none of the Egyptian diviners could interpret correctly, and the butler thought *Yosef* would be able to do what the interpreters could not. The first few *pessukim* of the *parshah* detail Pharaoh's dream, relating that seven beautiful cows came up out of the Nile, after which seven thin and ugly cows emerged, stood next to the beautiful cows, and subsequently ate them: (מ"א:ד').

Rashi comments that this is a sign which portends doom, as seen later on in the *parshah*. Egypt would have seven years of abundant growth and plentiful food, but once these days drew to a close, the joy of the rich years would be forgotten in the pain of the famine. With as much goodness and plenty as there would be, human nature would override any remembrance of them. The people would forget the seven amazing years in the face of the seven difficult ones.

The *gemara* in *Shabbos* (23b) tells us that the *mitzvah* of *Channukah* is to publicize the miracles that *Hashem* did for us when He enabled the Maccabees to defeat the Greeks' far larger and stronger army and caused the only uncontaminated oil left in the *Beis Hamikdash* to last for eight days.

On *Channukah* we have an obligation of *pirssumei nissa*, publicizing the miracle. But what does it mean to publicize the miracle? By publicizing

“ The Torah warns us of a common occurrence in times of distress: we tend to get consumed by our challenges and forget that it was once good. *Channukah* teaches us to remember. ”

- Mori Berman

something, we communicate it to ourselves and to others. However, this communication is only possible if we first remember the event. In order to explain the miracle of *Channukah*, we must remember it; we are forced to recall an experience in which we saw *Hashem* clearly, and His miracles resulted in good times for *Bnei Yisroel*.

The intrinsic connection of *Channukah* to the *parshah* we read on *Shabbos Channuka* thus becomes clear. The *Torah* warns us of a common occurrence in times of distress: we tend to get consumed by our challenges and forget that things were once good. *Channukah* teaches us to remember. Remember, when it is difficult and dark, the times when the light of *Hashem's* miracles shone clearly. Through that memory, we will be able to see Him always, in the dark times as well as in the brighter ones.

To Illuminate a Soul

By **Rochie Pacht**

Channukah. As everyone knows, *Channukah* is the Festival of Lights. But because we are Jews, it is also the Festival of Questions *about* Lights. What is the significance of the *Channukah* candles? And, of course, the age-old debate between *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shammai* – do we start with one candle on the first night and work up to eight, or do we start with eight and work down to one? We know the answer – after all, we do it every year! But *why* is beginning with one and working up to eight the correct approach? And what is the underlying symbolism of *ner Channukah* that presents us with this question in the first place?

In order to understand this *machlokes*, it is first necessary to understand *Hillel* and *Shammai*. There are many stories about them throughout the *gemara*, some more well-known than others. At first glance, the stories may seem disjointed and random. But, in truth, at the heart of each tale and each *machlokes* lies the essence of *Hillel* and *Shammai*, the ideology that is the driving force behind each one's stories and *halachic* opinions. Every story and every *psak*, when looked



at more carefully, is an embodiment of who each one is and what he stands for, one part of a harmonized whole with a unified philosophy of one of the two. All too frequently, however, we do not bother looking more carefully. We take it at face value, never thinking to ask the questions staring us in the face.

A classic example is the story in which a Gentile declares, “גירני – על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת” – “I will convert on the condition that you teach me the entire *Torah* while I stand on one foot.” *Shammai* chases him out the door. *Hillel* cleverly sums the entire *Torah* up in the line, “דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד” – “that which you dislike

do not do to your friend,” and sends him to learn the rest of the *Torah*. It seems straightforward enough – until we stop to ask ourselves why a giant *talmid chacham* and leader of *Klal Yisrael* such as *Shammai* would chase a potential convert out the door as if he was a “lost cause”.

A beautiful answer to this question is given by Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, one that gives us a deeper insight into this story and answers our initial question as well. He says that at the root of the *machlokes* between *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shammai* lies the following question: What is the *mitzvah* of *ner Channukah* – to light a fire, or to provide light? If the *mitzvah* is to light a fire (as it is in the case of the fire that was to be constantly lit on the *mizbeach*), the *ikkar* is the flame itself. If the *mitzvah* is to provide light (as in the

case of *ner Shabbos* which is kindled for the sake of *shalom bayis*), the *ikkar* is the light that is provided. But why would a seemingly irrelevant distinction change the proper way to perform a *mitzvah*? Why is fire so different from light?

The answer is that fire and light have different purposes. Fire is destructive; its purpose is to burn the *kochos ha-ra*, the *tumah* in the world and in ourselves, until at last they are consumed. Light represents the *or ha-Torah*, the

light of the *neshamah*. Its purpose is to illuminate, to light up ourselves and, by extension, the world. In the story of *Channukah*, both of these powers are utilized. The Jews are forced to fight a physical war and to burn away the rampant *tumah* generated when the *Yevanim* brutally labor to destroy the *kedushah* of our land and nation. The Jews do not stop until the *tehorim* (pure ones) conquer the *temeim* (impure ones) and the *kochos ha-ra* are consumed. But even once that is done, the job is not complete. The Jews

“What is the *mitzvah* of *ner Channukah* – to light a fire, or to provide light?”
– *Rochie Pacht*

“But when a candle is ignited for its light... it spreads – to every corner and every crevice, every place and every person, dispelling the darkness and illuminating the world.”
– *Rochie Pacht*

had simply set the stage. They then had to light the *or* of *Torah* so it could illuminate the world once more.

This is the machlokes: Which one of these two aspects is one supposed to commemorate for generations? Beis Shammai's position, which represents gevurah, din, and sur me-ra, states that we are commemorating the aish. Shammai holds that the priority must be the fire, for he feels that it is not possible to have the or ha-Torah while the kochos ha-tumah remain. In order to kindle a soul, and, in turn, the world, one must set it on fire, purge it of its impurities, and only then will it be fit to be elevated. That is why, when the Gentile comes to him with a question that reflects "hashkafas olamo" - "his worldview," it is a clear demonstration that the kochos ha-ra are still within him, and Shammai chases him away. As far as Shammai is concerned, there can be no Torah until the job of the fire is complete.

"The aish is necessary – but it is nothing more than a means to an end. The end goal is the or. "

–Rochie Pacht

Beis Hillel's position, on the other hand, which represents patience, chessed and ahavah, takes a different approach. Hillel says that we are commemorating or. The aish is necessary – but it is nothing more than a means to an end. The end goal is the or. If a neshamah is kindled with or – even if it is impure – the or will illuminate it, and the person will be inspired to change his ways. This is the reason that, when approached by an impudent Gentile who is steeped in the nonsense of the secular world, Hillel trusts that if he ignites the light of Torah within him, the darkness will be dispelled.

And what about the *neros* we light on *Chanukah*? It is very simple. The longer fire burns, the more the "kindling" is consumed – and the less amount of fire is required. When *all* the "kindling" has been consumed, there is no longer a need for the fire at all. So, if we are commemorating the *aish*, we would start with the maximum amount of fire – and slowly work our way down as the *kochos ha-ra* are consumed by the flames. Each day, less fire would be required, culminating in the final day – when only one lone candle would be needed to fight the *kochos ha-ra*, until finally the *tumah* and the fire would both be gone.

However, when a candle is ignited for its light, it does not slowly become diminished as its role is fulfilled. On the contrary, it spreads – to every corner and every crevice, every place and every person, dispelling the darkness and illuminating the world. When we light a candle to represent the *or ha-Torah*, we may be forced to start with one, but every day we add to it, candle after candle, spreading the light further and further. The light of hope. The light of *yeshuah*. The light of *Torah*. There are times when we *do* need the fire of *Shammai*. Yet, the priority and commemoration for generations, the way to kindle the impure soul, is the *or* and, ultimately, "*halacha ke-beis Hillel...*" - "We follow the opinion of *Hillel*."

A few months ago, I stood at the levayah of a loving husband, cherished friend, and beloved member of my community. Though it was not as early as he would have liked, Aryeh Leibl ben Menachem Mendel had the tremendous zechus of discovering the or of Torah, and his devotion to it was an inspiration to everyone who was fortunate enough to know him. May this article be an aliyah for his neshamah and may we all continue to be inspired by the lessons he taught us.

חנוכה שמח!

~Touro Torah~

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