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Parsha

Mikeitz

Candle Lighting

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Ilui Neshamos for the Bondi Kedoshim

Gematria on the Parshah: Responding to Darkness

By: Moshe Herskovits



What can Parshat Mikeitz and Chanukah teach us about responding to the darkness of the world?

Rebbe Nachman explains that much suffering comes not only from pain itself, but also from our struggle to understand why Hashem, who is entirely good, allows evil and hardship. While we can never fully grasp why the righteous suffer, the Torah guides us in how to respond to darkness.

Yosef HaTzaddik is our teacher. At just 17 years old, he is sold into slavery by his brothers out of jealousy. He is later falsely accused by his master's wife and thrown into prison, where he remains for 13 years. Yosef could have given up, become bitter, and consumed by self-pity. Yet Yosef responds in a radically different way.

The Chiddushei HaRim of Ger asks: How does Yosef ultimately leave prison? Not through argument or intellect, but through empathy. While imprisoned, he notices the suffering of two fellow inmates, Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Instead of focusing on his pain, he asks, "Why do you look so distressed today?" Yosef's suffering becomes fuel for empathy, and that moment of compassion opens the door to his redemption.

Chanukah always falls during Parshat Mikeitz, when we read the story of Yosef. This is no coincidence. The central symbol of Chanukah is oil. Amazingly, the gematria of יוסף בן יעקב (Yosef the son of Jacob) is 390, the same as שמן, oil. Oil is produced by crushing olives under heavy weights. Yosef, too, was crushed by the loss of his mother Rachel, by his brothers' betrayal, and by false accusation and imprisonment. Just as crushing olives releases their oil, Yosef's suffering releases something deeper within him, it refines his character and brings out his inner light.

At the beginning of Parshat Vayeishev, Yosef lacked sensitivity. He reported on his brothers to his father Jacob and shared his dreams about him rising above them without regard for their jealousy. But suffering refined him. It transformed Yosef from immaturity into a true tzaddik, defined by empathy, humility, and concern for others. His empathy in prison is pivotal. A true tzaddik is

not one who escapes suffering but one whose suffering expands his heart. This is one way we can respond to suffering: by allowing it to open our hearts to greater empathy for others.

The Menorah Must Face the Public Domain

This message is embedded in the mitzvah of Chanukah as well. We light the menorah by the window to publicize the miracle, but there is a deeper symbolism. By placing our light facing the public domain, we declare that the light we possess is not meant only for ourselves. It is meant to illuminate those suffering around us, bringing warmth, hope, and meaning into their lives.

The gematria of אורות, lights, is 613, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. Every interaction is a call from Hashem to bring the light of a mitzvah into someone else's life, turning ordinary moments into opportunities to make a difference. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn teaches that we must ask ourselves: Why am I meeting this person, and what mitzvah can come from this interaction?

Why do we ideally light with oil and not a candle? Oil reminds us of crushed moments, times we felt stuck, broken, or forgotten. Chanukah teaches us that those moments are not wasted. They are meant to become fuel: fuel to shine light, fuel to develop compassion, fuel to help alleviate the suffering of others.

A challenge: Think of three people in your life who are struggling and consider one concrete action you can take to help each of them. Chanukah is not about keeping the light in our homes; it is about bringing light into the world, illuminating the lives of others through Hashem.

The Deeper Significance of the Dreidel

What can the dreidel teach us about responding to darkness? On the surface, it seems like a simple game of chance. We spin the dreidel, representing the act of putting a thought, a word, or an action into the world without knowing the outcome. Will it land on ש, where it feels like we lose everything, or on א, where our dreams are realized, or somewhere in between?

The dreidel reminds us that our lives are not random. Wherever we land, our mazal comes from Hashem. Hashem is spinning the dreidel of

our lives, and in one moment we can go from a ש, where all seems lost, to a א, where everything is gained. This is exactly what happened with the Maccabees. Against overwhelming odds, their victory was made possible through Hashem's providence.

The gematria of 130 סביבון (dreidel) equals אמונה ב' (faith in Hashem). The dreidel teaches us to trust that every spin, every choice, and every action is guided by Hashem. Even when we are afraid, we must remember that Hashem is behind our fears and can save us from any situation. The gematria of 513 לא אירא רע equals נס גדול היה שם (do not fear evil). Miracles remind us that Hashem is behind everything, fully in control, able to save us instantly.

The letters of the dreidel also correspond to the gematria of 358 משיח. Just as Yosef rose in a moment from the darkness of prison to the light of rulership, so too Hashem will speedily bring us out of the darkness of galut to the light of redemption with a single spin of the dreidel. Our task is to be like Mattisyahu, who stood firmly for Hashem's will even in the most difficult circumstances, and like Yehudah HaMaccabee, who completely trusted in Hashem's power to overcome every challenge.

The Ruzhiner Rebbe taught that during times of darkness, we must remember moments when Hashem's light was completely clear. We should recall the instances of divine providence in our own lives and make it our task to share those stories with others. Encourage those around you to share their experiences as well, thereby deepening our collective awareness of Hashem's presence and guidance in every situation.

Stories of Inspiration

By: Rabbi Joshua Kaller

*"All He Wanted for X-Mas Was a Pair of Tefillin"*

I recently met an individual from a distant part of the Western Hemisphere who shared a remarkable journey of struggle, faith, and transformation. He grew up in a Catholic home. While still in his early twenties, his father tragically passed away, forcing him to shoulder responsibility for his family and their finances far sooner than he ever expected.

Not long after, tragedy struck again—another



close family member became paraplegic.

In the midst of overwhelming loss, pain, and responsibility, he found himself confronting the deepest questions a person can ask: What is my faith in moments like this? What have I been given? And what can I draw strength from when everything feels shaken?

And yet, even though he grew up in a Catholic home, his mother's Jewish roots remained dormant—quietly present, waiting within him. As he searched for meaning and truth, something familiar yet unspoken began to stir.

Though raised Catholic, he found himself increasingly drawn to Judaism—its wisdom, its values, its depth, and its meaning. As he explored further, something resonated deeply within him. He began taking on mitzvot, step by step, and discovered a spiritual home he hadn't known how to name before.

In 2026, he hopes to take on his next major mitzvah: tefillin.

What makes this story even more striking is that his grandparents—devout Catholics on his father's side—are not only supportive, but actively encouraging him. They want to be the ones to gift him his first pair of tefillin for Christmas.

The irony is powerful. And the message even more so.

A Jewish neshama longs to come home. It yearns to be connected to Hashem—our Father in Heaven. No matter how distant a person may seem, geographically or spiritually, the light of Yiddishkeit burns deeply within every Jew.

Even when darkness descends—emotionally, financially, or spiritually—the inner beacon never goes out. It calls from within, quietly but persistently.

When we look at the Chanukah candles, we should realize: that flame is us.

It burns within us this time of year—and all year long—reminding us of our kedushah, our inherent holiness, that emanates from the deepest core of who we are. It is our internal beacon system, calling us back again and again, reminding us that we come from a high place—rooted beneath the Throne of Glory, intimately connected to Hashem.

The greatest gift we can ask for is to remember this always.

To live with this mission and vision before us at all times. Chag Chanukah Sameach.

The Inner Light of Chanukah

By: Daniel Klasner



The Lubavitcher Rebbe emphasized light as a powerful force against darkness, focusing on individual action: "Even in... total darkness, the light of a single candle can be seen far and wide" and that a "little bit of light dispels a great amount of darkness," each person is a lamp unto the world through good deeds and Torah study, bringing light to others and revealing G-d's presence everywhere, even in hardship, transforming dark struggles into bright joy.

Hannuka is the miracle of lights, hannuka is an idiom of chinuch — consecration or dedication.

The miracle of hannuka was finding a jug of oil sealed by the high priest, by Torah law it would have been permissible to light the menorah in the sanctuary to use the oil that was defiled for the sake of community (Pesachim 80a). Nevertheless the Almighty performed a miracle which not only made it possible for us to have a new mitzvah of lighting the menorah, but also made it that it would be performed in the highest way possible (with finding a jug of oil with the seal of the high priest). This teaches us that when we perform a mitzvah we should do it in the highest way possible from the get go, especially with regards to chinuch. If we want our children to not be challenged when they are older we should do whatever is necessary to mechanuch them from young age in the highest way possible.

As we celebrate Hannuka may we all merit the ultimate light with the coming of Moshiach.

Adapted from Likutei Sichos.

Approaching Shabbos Chanukah with the Right Intentions

Shabbos Chanukah brings a rare meeting of kedushot. The light of Chanukah shines specifically in times of concealment, revealing Hashem in places that seem distant or obscured. Shabbos, by contrast, lifts a person above concealment entirely, restoring the neshama to its natural state of clarity and peace. When these two forms of illumination come together, the holy Berdichever, the Kedushas Levi, writes that a Jew can receive a deeper sensitivity to Hashem's presence — the ability to sense meaning, direction, and purpose even within the ordinary moments of life.

One of the Berdichever's central teachings is that the heart becomes a vessel for bracha when it recognizes Hashem's kindness. Shabbos Chanukah therefore invites a person to pause and take note of the good that fills his life — not in general terms, but with genuine awareness. This recognition softens the inner world and draws a person closer to Hashem, not by repeating ideas of gratitude, but by awakening a fresh appreciation for the gifts that surround him.

Chanukah also draws down a unique kind of light — a light of renewal. The miracle of the oil was not only about endurance; it symbolized the ability to begin again with purity. Shabbos Chanukah is therefore a moment to realign one's avodah, to consider where one's heart is pointed, and to renew commitments that may have faded over the course of the year. This renewal is at the core of chinuch, dedication, which is the essence of Chanukah.

A deeper intention of the day comes from reflecting on how spiritual growth often emerges from struggle. Oil is produced only through pressure, and so too the refining of the neshama often occurs through the challenges a person endures. On Shabbos Chanukah, a Jew can look at his experiences with new eyes — seeing not only difficulty, but the inner strength, compassion, and maturity that were shaped through them. This is not repetition; it is a shift in perspective that transforms past experiences into sources of light.

Finally, the Berdichever teaches that the purpose of spiritual light is to illuminate others. The menorah faces outward because Jewish light is never meant to remain private. Shabbos Chanukah therefore calls a person to consider whom he can uplift — whether through a kind word, a moment of patience, or simply by noticing someone who feels unseen. When a Jew shares his light, even in small ways, he becomes a partner in revealing Hashem's presence in the world.

May the holiness of these days bring refuah, nechamah, and shalom to ourselves, our families, and all of Klal Yisrael.

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As Klal Yisrael mourns together, may the neshamos of the kedoshim of Bondi have an aliyah, and may Hashem send refuah and nechamah to all of Klal Yisrael.