



## UNDERSTANDING OUR PURPOSE IN THIS WORLD



## WHAT WAS THE KITRUG DURING CHANUKAH?

What is the central theme of Chanukah? What is the main mitzvah of Chanukah? Lighting the menorah is the major *avodah*. Try to imagine walking down the street and you meet somebody and they ask you, “Are you Jewish or Amish?” The Amish wear hats and the Jews wear hats. If he would say, “What is this big deal, what is this big holiday of the menorah?” What would you say? You might say, “There was a miracle that they put in oil for one day and it burnt for eight days.”

But you have to ask yourself, did the Yevanim have anything against the menorah per se? It would seem not, but it wasn't coincidental that there was a miracle with the menorah. Chazal tell us that the Yevanim went out of their way specifically and intentionally to be *metamei* the oil of the menorah. They broke every seal on the flasks of oil. The menorah really bugged them, they obviously didn't want it being lit. Why is that?

When the miracle happened with the menorah, it was not just a coincidence. Whatever the reason, the Yevanim challenged the menorah. There was some *kitrug* (judgment) on Klal Yisrael. That *kitrug* on Klal Yisrael caused the menorah to become *tamei*. It enabled the Yevanim to be *metamei* the menorah. Afterward, the menorah was restored and Hashem brought about a miracle. The fact that there was a miracle with the menorah is an indication that there was a *tikkun*, a rectification, for whatever the problem was that Klal Yisrael had done which had brought about the *tumah* of all the oils. There was a rectification here, a *tikkun*. We have to understand what this was about.

The Ramchal in his sefer, *Derech Hashem*, writes about Chanukah in the section on moadim.<sup>1</sup> He explains that the *inyan* of the menorah was something very specific. The Yevanim were *mekatreg* against what the menorah represented, *inyaneha v'tikuneha*. That is why the *kohanim* wanted to restore the menorah, to be *zocheh* to restore it to its proper place.

This is very instructive for us of how we have to view something. Things are not coincidental. When something happens to a person, it means that there is some kind of fault. If somebody comes into your house and destroys your sefer Torah, it is not just a random anti-Semitic act in the way that the world would have you believe. If a guy comes and breaks your menorah, it is not just a random anti-Semitic act. It means there is something wrong. If a guy pulls your *mezuzos* off, that is Hashem sending you a *shaliach* to mess around with your *mezuzos* and Hashem is telling you that there is some *kitrug* here and there is some *inyan* here that is missing, something that has to be corrected.

## THE MENORAH IS A TESTIMONY

In order to understand this, we have to go to learn a Gemara in Shabbos (22b). The Gemara there says the following: *מחוז לפרוכת העדות יערך* - you have to light the menorah in a certain place in the Beis Hamikdash. Asks the Gemara, *וכי לאורה הוא צריך*, does Hashem need (its) light? That place in the Beis Hamikdash is a very private place. There are no people walking around there. It is not a place that needs illumination. Why would Hashem command us to light the menorah there? Hashem doesn't need light! Doesn't it say, *והלא כל ארבעים שנה*, when the Yidden were in the *midbar* for 40 years they traveled by the light of Hashem?! *שהלכו בני ישראל במדבר לא הלכו אלא לאורו*. Hashem Himself is light. He definitely does not require any artificial lighting *עולם* *לביא* *עולם*, rather, it is a testimony for all the people in the world - not just the Jews. The menorah in the Beis Hamikdash is an *eidus* to all the *ba'ei ha'olam*. What is this testimony? *שהשכינה שורה בישראל*, that the *Shechinah* resides in Klal Yisrael.

Now, we have to understand this concept of the *Shechinah* residing in Klal Yisrael. What exactly does that concept imply and infer? Isn't the *Shechinah* all over the world? Don't we say: *מלא כל הארץ כבודו*, the whole world is the place of Hashem? So what does it mean that the *Shechinah* is *shoreh b'Yisrael*. Before we explain this, let us first give a small introduction.

## A NACHAS MACHINE: A MISTAKEN OUTLOOK ON LIFE

There is a fundamental misunderstanding as to what the main function of the Torah and the mitzvos is and what is our relationship with Hashem. Many people believe that a person is here in this world to live - and to live in the best way possible. Everybody wants to have *chaim tovim*, everybody wants to have a good life, everybody wants to have *parnassah*, children, and *hatzlachah bakol*, but we think that you cannot get it without HaKadosh Baruch Hu. That is how you get the *hatzlachah*. So what do you have to do to make Hashem give you that *hatzlachah*? You have to do Torah and mitzvos.

<sup>1</sup> חנוכה ופורים: ענין חנוכה ופורים הוא להאיר האור המאיר בימים ההם כפי התקונים שנתקנו בהם. חנוכה בתגבורת הכהנים על הרשעים בני יון שהיו מתכונים להסיר ישראל מעבודת ה' ונתחזקו הכהנים ועל ידם שבו לתורה ולעבודה. ובפרט ענין המנורה לפי תיקוניה שהיו הקטרגים נגד ענינה והחזירום הכהנים על בורים.

We think you have to pay your dues, do what Hashem wants you to do and then you will be *zocheh* to Hashem's gifts. We think, Hashem is the Boss, and you have to placate the Boss. No! This is not the case. You have to understand that this *mehalech* is the total opposite of what *Yiddishkeit* is! That is not what *Yiddishkeit* is. This is a very fundamental concept.

People go through their entire lives and they say this concept over and over. I have heard this from many people, "I am paying my dues. Why is Hashem not giving me what I want? I want a good life. I go to shul three times a day, I learn my Torah, I pay my dues. I am a dues-paying Jew. I pay taxes, I don't cut corners, I try to do my best." What is the *pshat*? The mistake over here is to understand that this fellow thinks that he is here to eat well, to drink well, to be healthy, to enjoy himself, to get married, have a family, *nachas*, etc. This guy is clueless. You are here in this world for what purpose? You are here to achieve *shleimus*; that is your *chovaso ba'olamo*. But that is not the reason that Hashem created you.

### CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

If you learn *Mesillas Yesharim*, it is right there in front of your eyes. Many people see it. Some people don't. There is a *gevaldige talmid chacham, be'emes*, a Yid that is a *Shas Yid*, who told me that he learnt *Mesillas Yesharim* about 70 times. When he was 70-years-old, he came running over to me one day and he said, "Yisroel! I have a *chiddush nifla! Nifla!*" I said, "What?" He said, "On the first page of the *Mesillas Yesharim!*" I said, "I know what the *chiddush* is." I told him the *chiddush*. He said, "You knew that *chiddush*? I saw it tens of times and I never got it." Rabbosai, the purpose we come to this world for is to enjoy a relationship with Hashem. That is what Hashem put you in this world for.

The goal, the ultimate *tachlis hachaim*, is not for this world. The *tachlis* of life is *olam haba*. But you have to go through *chayei olam hazeh* to get to *chayei olam haba*. The way and the means to enjoy a relationship with Hashem is by fulfilling His Torah and mitzvos in spite of all the challenges that are presented to us. But the goal is to have a relationship with Hashem.

Try to imagine the following scenario. A guy gets married and he reads a book on marriage. He reads a book, how not to tick his wife off. He finds out all the things he is not supposed to do. First, bring home the 'green'. Second, carry out the garbage. Third, provide her with babysitting, nannies, house cleaners, a nice car, a comfortable home. The guy reads the whole book and says, "I got it now." No, the guy doesn't get it. One day, his wife tells him, "You know, I want a divorce, I want out." He says, "But, I did everything in the book that said 'not to tick your wife off.' I never put you down." She said, "We don't have a relationship. You didn't get married for a relationship. You wanted a cook, you wanted a companion, you wanted someone who could take your shirts to the cleaners, somebody who is going to serve you, and for that you are doing a great job. But when I got married," she says, "I wanted a husband. I wanted to have a relationship with somebody."

### A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

That is what marriage is. And developing a relationship with Hashem, 'להתענג על ה' that is the reason why Hashem put me and you in this world. You cannot make up the terms of the relationship - just like a husband cannot tell a wife, "Let me tell you how I am going to relate to you." It doesn't work like that. There are certain rules of relationships. A guy says, "I am not talking to my wife. Every time I talk to her, I get into a fight with her. I am just going to do what I have to do and not talk to her. Whenever she wants to talk, no talking." The guy is out of his mind! I say, "What do you mean you don't want to talk to her?" He says, "Well, I get into a fight every time I talk to her." My friend, if you don't talk to somebody you don't have a relationship with them! It is not an automated machine that produces sandwiches and produces things when you put the coins in.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu is the exact same thing. A wife, and children, and a job, and clothing, and everything Hashem provides you with, is a means to build that relationship with Hashem. So surely if you don't do mitzvos, or you do mitzvos but you think you are paying taxes - you are a dues-paying Jew - but you are not doing it to build a relationship with Hashem. It's like a guy who is paying taxes to his wife. It is not about taxes, it has to be a relationship!

This relationship is what is unique to Klal Yisrael. The *umos ha'olam* do not have this relationship. They were never created for that purpose. This is strictly the domain of the Am Yisrael. That is an amazing *chiddush*.

Do you know where we say that? Where do we express that all day long? When you say, "Hashem Elokeinu," Hashem is our Hashem. Hashem is our Hashem? Isn't Hashem the world's Hashem? Hashem created everybody in the world. There is no other Creator. What does that mean, "Hashem Elokeinu"? It means that we have a unique relationship with Hashem. The reason why we are *mekabel malchus shamayim* and not the *umos ha'olam* is because of that. When we say: שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, we are saying, "Hashem, we acknowledge that You are Elokeinu, our Hashem and therefore, because You are Elokeinu, I am going to be *mekabel* Your *malchus* upon myself. I am going to be Your subject. I am going to be part of Your world, part of Your existence and become part of You." It is a *passuk* in the *chumash*, כי חלק ה' עמו.

What is the definition of Hashem being our Hashem more so than He is the Hashem of others? The meaning of that is that Hashem's *hashgachah* is upon us, Hashem's relationship, His interactions with us are on a totally different plane than with the *umos ha'olam*. Because Hashem is my Hashem, I can expect, and I could daven, and I could hope, and I could reach out to Him - because He has a special *hashgachah* with me. I am not subject to *teva*, I live above *teva*. The Rashbam writes (Devarim 6:4), that we say שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו, that is why we are *mekabel malchus shamayim* on ourselves

- because we say Hashem is Elokeinu.<sup>2</sup> He is our Hashem. He is my Hashem. He is not the Hashem of the guy working in the yeshivah, or the guy who drives the Uber. It is a most amazing, *peledige zach* that a Jew does not live for that (unfortunately).

### HERE COME THE GREEKS

Came along the Yevanim. The Yevanim were rationalists. The Rambam says that their whole *shitah* was, that only things which can be proven scientifically are *emes*. Whatever a person can be *margish* with his eyes, and his hands, and his feet, is *emes*. Anything that is not scientific, anything that cannot be felt, anything that cannot be seen, is not *emes* and is non-existent. *Bobbeh maasehs*. Here, there are brilliant, scientific, educated Greeks. They had a brilliance to them, they had tremendous *chochmah*. They were tremendous scientists, mathematicians, and astrologers. Then they encountered this nation called Klal Yisrael, whose entire existence is built on something that cannot be *murgash*, cannot be felt. Their whole claim to fame is that they have a connection with this higher power that is individualized to them. They say the connection is based on certain mitzvos.

So the Greeks said, "Let's study the Torah." Do you know what they did? They got a whole bunch of Rabbanim together and they said, "Interpret the Torah for us. We want to study it." This was a monumental undertaking. And they produced a copy of the Torah. The Greeks looked at it and saw all these laws. They said, "Forget about these laws. What is the difference - these laws or those laws? Everybody has laws." The Yidden said, "The Torah is our connection to Hashem." The Greeks wouldn't accept that. "Are you crazy? There is no connection to Hashem. What is the mitzvah of Shabbos? אור גדולה היא ביני לביניכם, it is a big *os*, you are not doing work, you are sleeping, you are eating, you are praying. Where is your *os gedolah*? Where do you see that Shabbos is different from Sunday?" Then *milah*. "What is *milah*? Oh, if you circumcise yourself, that is how you make a *bris*, that is how you bond. That is how you take a child and you introduce him into the world of *Yahadus*. You make a bond with him and Hashem, and you make a pact. You cut off a piece of skin and boom! "You are out of your mind," they said. "This makes no sense. It cannot be. Why would you mutilate yourselves?" They were furious at the concept that we Jews have some unique relationship with Hashem. And that is why so many of the Jews went over. You know why?

### THE ALLURING WORLD OF SCIENCE

Before the Greeks came along, everybody was a bunch of farmers, a bunch of hicks. All the *umos ha'olam* were *mamish* rednecks. And all of a sudden, came these classy, educated, important scientists, with books, and libraries, and schools, and universities, and philosophers who actually *klered sha'alos*! And this confused the Yidden. They said, "These guys are the real thing. Here we are finally meeting people, human beings who use their minds, live by their minds, actually have philosophical debates and seem to be very rational people!" So many Yidden plumbed the depths of science in the world, which is the *chochmah* of Hashem, and they concluded that there is no Hashem. Only what you see, what you touch, what you experience - is what exists. It is a world of science. And many Jews fell by the wayside.

They still 'paid their dues,' but there was no relationship with Hashem anymore. They became totally Hellenistic and they decided that they were going to study the ways of the *goyim* because they said, "Look what *chachamim* they have in the colleges!" *Nebach*, they fell by the wayside. There was one family of *kohanim* that realized that Klal Yisrael was falling apart.

The *hisnagdus* of the Yevanim to the menorah was because the menorah was the שורה בישראל. "What?! We hate that menorah." They said, "Let's study that menorah." They went to that menorah, they took out the oil, they sent it to some Greek lab and Aristotle stuck his nose in the oil. Another guy cooked latkes in the oil. Another guy cooked hashbrowns in the oil. They said, "This is a regular oil, nothing different. What, just because you put it in this fancy candelabra? We can also make a simple candelabra and it will be the same thing!" The Yidden said, "No, no, no, this is the *eidus* that *Shechinah* is שורה בישראל." There were some super-natural things that transpired in the menorah because every day there was a *ner ma'aravi* in the menorah. The *ner ma'aravi* never went out. They would light it every day. All the candles would go out, but the *ner ma'aravi* stayed. And each night, they kept on relighting the menorah from that *ner ma'aravi*. So the scientists said, "Ah, this must be some kind of science trick. It has got to be some scientific trick."

### A PROFESSOR WHO REACHED FOR STRAWS

A big professor came to me one time and he said, "You know, I heard your speech about *Krias Yam Suf*. You know, I was thinking about it. I looked in the Torah, I opened the Bible in English and I read it. You know what it said there? The wind was blowing all night long. You know what I figured out? The wind blew the things apart. One wind was going this way, and one wind was going that way with such a powerful gale, that it *pashut* created a wall." I told him, "Wow, you are a smart man, aren't you? Has anybody ever told you that you are a very bright man?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I am sorry to disappoint you, but they were lying." He said, "What?!" I said, "They were lying. You failed to realize that there were 12 separate and distinct tunnels that were opened up for the Jews, one for each tribe." He said, "Oh, how am I going to figure out that one?" I said, "Well, maybe G-d had 12 straws and there were a couple of elves blowing with the straws, and the 12 guys were lined up and they blew 12 holes." He said, "That would really be science." "By the way, it says it was dry. How did it get all dry? And how did stuff start to grow out of the walls? It says, והמים להם חומה, how do you get a *chomah*, a wall of water?" I said, "My friend, you are reaching for straws, and you are reaching for nothing."

<sup>2</sup> ה' אלהינו ה' אחד - ה' הוא לבדו אלהינו ואין לם אלוה אחר עמו. וכן בדברי הימים: ואנחנו ה' אלהינו ולא עזבנוהו - כלומר, עימכם עגלי זהב אבל אנו ה' הוא אלהינו ולא עזבנו אותו כבית ירבעם, שאתם משתחיים להם.

The Greeks were so desperate not to accept the *hashgachah* and the *koach* of Hashem's presence in this world that they hated the menorah. Their biggest *hisnagdus* was the menorah. Because the menorah symbolized one thing: שהשכינה שורה בישראל.

Hashem said, "You know what, my *kinderlach*, you are not behaving right. You want to understand and appreciate My presence with you?" So He allowed the Greeks to come in and destroy the menorah and contaminate all the *shemen*. They saw all these seals on the glasses and they asked them, "What is this?" The Jews said, "This is special, kosher oil." They said, "Did the rabbi bless it?" A lot of goyim say that. "Blessed by the rabbi." That's what they think kosher oil is, blessed by the rabbi. You don't tell them the truth, that your grubby, little, dirty fingers that you 'only used Irish Spring' on, touched it. "Those fingers of yours contaminated this oil." "How did we do that? We use Irish Spring?" "Do you use Irish Spring body wash?" "Yes, we do." "It is still going to be *metamei*. You know why? Because it is *you*. And you are a *shtick tumah*. That is the problem." "But come on, don't we look the same?" To that I say, "Looks could be deceiving." They were *metamei* all the oil.

They found one flask with a seal. Finally, Hashem allowed them to find the one flask that was left - to see if Klal Yisrael were going to make a comeback. And the *Chashmona'im* showed, "Yes, we are making a comeback." Now you understand.

### THE WAR ON "B'EZRAS HASHEM"

What are the earliest bumper stickers that we are aware of? They didn't have cars obviously, but they had oxen. The Greeks made a rule that you should put a bumper sticker on your ox's horn and it has to say like this: אין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל (Yerushalmi, Chagiga 2:2). That is what they said. That is a weird bumper sticker. Let it say that I don't believe in mitzvos. They stopped us from doing Shabbos, from *milah*, from Torah. What is this *shtikel* of אין לכם חלק באלקי ישראל? You know what? That is what they couldn't understand.

"Prove it to me. I want to see proof that you are different from me. You are the same as me, we were all created by one G-d," they claimed. But the Yidden were adamant, "No, we are Jewish, we have a special relationship with Hashem, כי חלק ה' עמו. The *keshet* that we have is not what you have." That is what ticked off the Yevanim when Hashem created this miracle for us.

They had another thing also. The Gemara says in Rosh Hashanah (18b) that they had a tremendous issue, they hated the fact that Jews said all day long, "Baruch Hashem," שם שמים שגור על פיהם, whatever they did, they said, "Hashem should give a blessing. Be'ezras Hashem, *b'siyata d'Shmaya*." They said all kinds of things. So the Greeks instituted not to be *mazkir Shem Shamayim* even once.<sup>3</sup>

Did you ever wonder that when people write letters, why they write ב"ה, בס"ד? When people write documents, business documents, they write on the top, ב"ה, בס"ד. What is the reason for that? The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah says it was because the Yevanim made such a decree - that you cannot be מזכיר שם שמים בפיהם. So after the *Chashmona'im* won, they instituted that we are going to add *Shem Shamayim* to all of our *shtaros*. That is where it comes from. So, when you sign on a *shtar*, let's say when you are selling something to somebody, a car, and you don't see the בס"ד, write it on the top of the page. You know why? Because it is only with Hashem's help. This whole deal is Hashem's deal. That is what we believe. If a person believes that and a person acknowledges that, then he has a *shaychus* to *Yahadus*.

### KNOWING WHAT TO ANSWER YOURSELF

When you light the menorah on Chanukah, and you think, "Hashem, you showed us that the *Shechinah* was *shoreh b'Yisrael*. You made a miracle that defied science." Yes, it defied logic. It defied all the rules of science and mathematics. The Yevanim could not explain these things. It was inexplicable. And Hashem said, "I did it for you. In the menorah, in that *keli* that represents *Shechinah shoreh beYisrael*, I did it using specifically that vessel. I pledged allegiance to My relationship with Klal Yisrael." When you light the menorah tonight, say, "Hashem, I am being *me'iid eidus* that the *Shechinah* is *shoreh b'Yisrael*." Even though we may not see the miracle of שהשכינה שורה בישראל today, we have to know that we are commemorating the episode where Hashem demonstrated to us that the *Shechinah* is *shoreh beYisrael*. יש לנו חלק באלקי ישראל. When you say Shema tonight, when you say, ה' אלקינו, or when you make a brachah, when you say, ברוך אתה ה', אלקינו, you are saying: ה' אלקינו - that is my relationship with You, Hashem. I have a connection with You."

I am not just another piece of flesh and bones walking around the streets! I am a Yehudi and that is what being a Yehudi means! If somebody comes over to you in the street and says, "Why do you wear that black beanie on your head?" Instead of answering, "You know, I have no idea. I don't even know what it represents," you will know what to say. Someone once showed me an article in a magazine. It was discussing the source of the yarmulka. There were a lot of different opinions. The funniest one was that it comes from herring. The Jews ate herring and the yarmulke symbolized the herring the Jews liked. "Are you crazy?" I said, "Only a dumb Jew could have thought of that. Even a goy couldn't have thought of such an idea." The one answer about *yarei Malkah* (fearing the King) was not one of the reasons. That wasn't even one of the *pshatim* over there, *yiras Shamayim*.

<sup>3</sup> שגזרה מלכות: וזו גזרה שלא להזכיר שם שמים על פיהם, וכשגזרה מלכות חשמונאי ונצחום התקינו שהיה מזכירין שם שמים אפילו בשטרות. וכן היו פותחים: בשנת כך וכן ליוסון כהן גדול לאל עליו. [וכששמעו חכמים בדבר, אמרו: למחר זה פורע את חובו ונמצא שטר מוטל באשפה, וביטלים, ואתו היום עשאוהו יום טוב. ואי סלקא דעתך בטלה מגילת תענית - קמייטא בטול, אחרקייטא מוסיפין!]

The reason why we wear a kippah is: I am trying to show I am different. In what way am I different? Because me and the guy on the street are like we are in two different worlds. He has no *hashgachah*, he doesn't have Hashem Elokeinu. He doesn't have any of that, and I do!! I have a relationship with Hashem. And I am continuously building a relationship with Hashem through my Torah and mitzvos. We have to get this into our *kishkes*, rabbosai!

Now when you wish somebody a *lichtige* Chanukah, you will know what you are really wishing him? A *freilichen Chanukah* I understand. He should get a lot of presents, a lot of latkes, and a lot of good food. But a *lichtige Chanukah*? We are wishing the person, "Your eyes should be opened up to become aware that you are the Am Yisrael of Hashem Elokeinu and there is no one like us!" Only we enjoy this position and status. And even when the Yidden fell, they came back and they were *mesakein* their ways. There was a small handful of *Chashmona'im* who restored that. Hashem, once again, showed us His beautiful Hand and He was *mekarev* us and He restored light within the darkness.