

8 - THE SYMBOL OF ETERNITY

by Rabbi Label Lam

Here are eight ideas to ponder about Chanukah - little points of light that I hope may brighten the days ahead!

1. The word for candles, NER, Nun-Reish, stands for Nefesh (soul) and Ruach (spirit). The numerical value of NER is 250 which equals the 248 limbs dedicated to the 248 positive action Mitzvos plus Ahava-Love and Yira- fear. (Sefas Emes)
2. Actually a candle represents all the Mitzvos as King Solomon said, "A candle is a Mitzvah and Torah is light!" Chanukah is a time for refocusing our attention and committing ourselves to what's ultimately important-Mitzvos -growing night after night one step at a time! (Shelah HaKodesh)
3. The Talmud tells us the following about a candle, "Ner L'Echod- Ner L'Meah"- "A candle for one is a candle for one hundred!"(Shabbos 122A) A candle is the paradigm of ruchnios- spirituality. Physical things are a "zero-sum",finite by definition. The more of a pizza pie I eat the less there is for you. However, if I learn Torah or love HASHEM more it does not detract from your ability to do the same. It adds! When one improves others are improved too. When lighting from one candle to another, even the one that is doing the lighting is never diminished. Spiritual things are not divisible, they tend to multiply.
4. The Chanukah Menorah is modeled after the Menorah in the Temple whose light was holy. We are not allowed to use the Chanukah lights either. In anticipation of a protracted exile our sages saw fit that we should all take a "souvenir" from the Holy Temple, Ner Ish U'Beiso, as when the Jewish people came down to Egypt, Yaakov Ish U'Beiso...each with his household! The Jewish household is the primary survival unit in exile. Every family survives with a slice of the Menorah which represents Torah scholarship and wisdom.
5. Similarly, ten of Rebbe Nachman's students split up the Rebbe's ornate chair as W/WII was about to bludgeon European Jewry. They pledged to reunite in Jerusalem and reconstitute the chair of the Rebbe. Miraculously, they each survived and with their piece of chair and they were able to reassemble the chair. So too, we are reminded by the Menorah of where it is we broke up from 2000 years ago and to where we are all heading soon to reconnect the lights of all the generations!
6. Torah is light as we mentioned earlier. Light continues to expel darkness at 186,000 miles per second forever. It never tires. Light is forever! So too the Torah we have learned is a ray of eternity

that never ceases. (Maharal)

7. In the Talmud's account of Chanukah it is recorded that the Greeks contaminated all the oil in the sanctuary. After the victory of the holy Jewish army it says that they searched and only found one jar of oil that still had the seal of Kohen Gadol. If they contaminated all the oil then how did they find a jar? There is an indestructible jar in the heart of our people that can never be sullied or compromised. >From that point of purity everyone and everything can be rebuilt. It requires, however an honest search to find it. (Sefas Emes)

8. Eight is not just another single step after seven. Seven is the stuff of this world which was completed in seven days. It's no mistake the letters for the word - Shemona - 8 is the same as the letters for Neshama-soul which has the same letters for Mishne - which is the building block of the Oral Torah. The eight floats like oil over nature - Teva (literally - sink). The word oil, Shemen uses these letters too. Eight is beyond. Once we hit eight we keep on "going up in holiness and not going down" (Shabbos 21B) Chanuka never ends! It only begins! On Chanukah we all strive for the world of **8 - the symbol of infinity!**

The Survival of the Pure

"And [we thank You] for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, for the saving acts, and for the wonders which You have wrought for our ancestors in those days, at this time —

In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will. But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and affected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day. Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name."

Here is the Chanuka story as recorded in our daily prayers of Al HaNissim. The Chanuka story is a paradigm, a model of many a great struggle and miraculous victory in Jewish history. The curious detail and the core of the event is contained in these words, "You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah." How do the few beat the many? How do the weak defeat the strong? The answer is in the companion statements!

Here's a Chanuka story I was treated to just a few weeks ago on Shabbos. A certain Rabbi Neuberger, who would end up launching many important Torah projects, was living in Eretz Yisrael in the 1950's. He was at the very beginning of his life of achievement benefitting the community at large, and was looking to start a Yeshiva. The biggest stumbling block came when the secularist government assumed the right to design and approve of the curriculum of the school. He was stuck. He knew he could not satisfy nor did he wish to fulfill their educational designs. Who would end up dictating the values of the school? Would it be the ministry of education or the Gedolim with the local Rebbeim and the Torah observant families of the children? A battle was brewing.

In desperation he went to seek out the sainted Chazon Ish. After hearing his dilemma the Chazon Ish quoted a few words from the Talmud employed in rare cases when too little evidence exists to decide a dispute. "Kol D'Alim Gavar"- "Whoever is stronger will prevail!" (Bava Basra 34B) That's all he said. Rabbi Neuberger walked out deeply disappointed and discouraged. How was he going to fight the government, with all their resources? His cause was lost. "Maybe it would not be worthwhile to open the Yeshiva after all!" he thought. However, before having gone too far he returned to the Chazon Ish for some clarification. Certainly the great Rabbi did not mean to dissuade him from starting a Yeshiva! The Chazon again, briefly but pointedly, explained that the statement, "Whoever is stronger will prevail does not refer to physical might alone but rather it means whoever is more determined and dedicated to his cause."

Rabbi Neuberger took those words as a powerful vote of confidence and a sign that he should persevere. If his idealism of spreading the light of Torah would be greater than the opposition's determination to extinguish that lamp, then he could be successful even if they had superior strength and numbers. In the end not only did this Yeshiva open but also many other worthy Torah institutions! Ultimately it's not the "survival of the fittest", but **the survival of the pure!**