

# EVERYDAY MIRACLES

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

There is a peculiar contrast between the Talmud's relation of the miracle of Chanuka and that which we emphasize in the "Al HaNissim" addition to the Amidah (prayer of 19 blessings, central to our thrice daily services) and Birkas HaMazon (Grace after Meals). When the Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 21b) relates the essence of Chanuka, it skips the entire story of the war against the Greeks and presents the miracle of the lone jug of oil found intact in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem) which contained one day's oil but burned for eight, until new oil could be produced. In our prayers, however, we thank G-d for delivering the mighty into the hands of the weak and focus on the miraculous military victory, but do not mention the miracle of the Menora. We do declare that in the aftermath of the triumph, "Your children came to the Holy of Holies of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified the site of Your Holiness and kindled the lights in the Courtyard of Your Sanctuary; and they established these eight days of Chanuka to express thanks and praise to Your great Name." We reference the candles and the holiday, but do not tie the two together via the miracle of the lights. The sole Rabbinic mitzvah (command) of this festival is the candle lighting to remember the eight day miracle. How can our prayers ignore that? Furthermore the miracle was not eight days, it was seven - the oil found was one day's worth, so that first day involved no miracle. Why is it, too, commemorated?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century) notes that when we contemplate the miracle of one day's oil burning for eight - that a miracle is G-d's decision to depart from His ordinary standard, known as "nature" - we start to realize the concept that "nature" is really the category of miracles to which we are privy on a regular, daily basis, and that the very flammability of oil is no less miraculous. In fact, the very concept of G-d's creation and the "nature" that comes with it is **more** miraculous than the rare departures from the norm. The Talmudic paradigm of appreciation of all of creation being truly miraculous was exhibited by Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa (Tractate Ta'anis 25a) who, late Friday afternoon consoled his daughter who accidentally bought vinegar instead of oil for the Shabbos lamps. "He who commanded oil to burn will command vinegar to burn," and it did, throughout the entire Shabbos. One is not allowed to derive personal benefit from a miracle - and Rabbi Chanina derived pleasure from the Shabbos lamps - but for Rabbi Chanina, the burning of oil was no less wondrous, so this was not, by his standards, a miracle. For most of humanity, though, they are all miracles: the burning of vinegar, one day's oil burning for eight...and, indeed, the very fact that oil

burns at all.

In reality, all eight days the oil burned were miraculous. Thus, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, our prayers need only mention the lighting of the candles. If the liturgy mentioned the miracle of the extended burning of the oil, the miracle of the very flammability is negated. By simply declaring that the Menora was kindled, we give testimony to the miracle of all creation.

The "Al HaNissim" addition is inserted into the "Modim" (We are thankful) blessing of the Amidah, which includes our gratitude for "your wonders and favors at all time" - reflexive breathing, a beating heart, five functioning senses, arms and legs that are ready and waiting for my brain's command, just to name a few. The miracles of Chanuka themselves remind us of just how ordinary they really are by compelling us to appreciate the greater miracles from which we derive benefit every moment of every day.

Have a Good Shabbos and a Happy Chanuka!

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