

Foundations of Truth

*On
Chanukah:
Praising the Hand of Hashem*

*Torah Thoughts From
HaRav Shmuel Yaakov
Weinberg zt”l*

Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivas Ner Yisroel



Torah nuggets harvested from Rav Weinberg’s thought-provoking classes given at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel and Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem, that uniquely reveal essential foundations of Torah and Jewish thought. While these essays include some edits for readability, they largely preserve the Rosh HaYeshiva’s unique style and original messages.

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Chanukah: Praising the Hand of Hashem

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A Holiday in Our Heart

We've expressed very often the idea that a *Yom Tov* is not a remembrance. Rather, a *Yom Tov* makes available a new *midah*, a new *ko'ach hanefesh* (spiritual character trait) that was established in the *nishmas Yisrael*, the Jewish soul, and that's renewed every year at each particular *zman* (time).

The *Yomim Tovim* in the Torah, of course, are those that go into the very make up of *nishmas Yisrael*. *Cheirus*, Torah, *simchah*, *yirah*, *kapparah*; all these aspects need to be established within ourselves to attain *shleimus*, completion in life. Without each specific *Yom Tov's ko'ach*, something would be lacking in our very being.

The rabbinic *Yomim Tovim*, on the other hand, are not of the very essence of *nishmas Yisrael* per se. Our make up of what makes us Jews could be *shleim*, complete, even without the rabbinic *Yomim Tovim*. But they are needed in order to make available new *kochos hanefesh*, that will allow *Klal Yisrael* to survive new situations that arose, that we were never supposed to deal with.

We were never supposed to deal with *hester panim*, Hashem's presence being hidden. The essence of *Yisrael* is *gilui panim*, dealing with a world where Hashem's presence is revealed. But *B'avonoseinu harabim*, due to our many sins, with the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdosh*, we were thrust into a new existence. The whole world changed and is now in a state of *hester panim*, something that *nishmas Yisrael* is not naturally prepared to deal with.

Klal Yisrael had to instill within itself and form a new *ko'ach hanefesh* that would allow us to deal with this world of *hester panim*. Although Purim established a *chizuk* (strengthening) within us that allows us to live in this new world, but an additional challenge to *nishmas Yisrael* arose on Chanukah for which we needed a new *ko'ach hanefesh*.

The Chanukah Focus

Chanukah gave us that *ko'ach hanefesh* which allows us to survive to this very day. That which enables us to remain an *Am Yisrael* in our time, is Chanukah. What was the *ko'ach hanefesh* that was established in *nishmas Yisrael* during Chanukah, through which we are able to maintain the continuity of *Am Yisrael* today?

It's not lighting the *Chanukah* candles. It's: *L'hodos U'lihallel* – which is the *avodas ha'yom*, the specific component of our service on Chanukah.

The *din* (law) of *Hallel* on Chanukah is a different *halachah* of *Hallel* than on other *Yomim Tovim* and on *Rosh Chodesh*. On other *Yomim Tovim*, we also say a full *Hallel* but it's not a *din* in that particular *Yom Tov*; it's a *din* for *Yom Tov* in general. It's not a *halacha* about Hilchos Pesach; it's not a *halacha* in Hilchos Shavuot; it's not a *halacha* in Hilchos Sukkos. It's a *halacha* that on *Yom Tov* you say *Hallel* because it's a *Yom Tov*.

However, on Chanukah, we say *Hallel* because that's the *avodas ha'yom* of Chanukah. *Hallel* on Chanukah is like the *lulav* and *esrog* of Sukkos, the *matzah* of Pesach. "v'Kavu shemonas yemei Chanukah eilu, l'hodos u'lihallel l'Shimcha hagadol." The *avodas ha'yom* of Chanukah is *L'hodos*

U'lihallel. The ability to be *modeh* and *mehallel*, to give thanks and praise, is the *ko'ach* by which we maintain our existence *ad hayom hazeh*, until this very day.

Opposition

What happened on Chanukah? That same thing which we face today. The entire world accepted an existence of values and outlooks that is antithetical to the very being of *Am Yisrael*.

Kaviyochol, they pushed the *Ribono Shel Olam* out of His world and said: "We don't need Him!"

"You don't need Him to explain the existence of the world. You don't need Him to maintain the world. You need don't Him to understand man in all his grandness and magnificence."

The *chochmah*, the knowledge, which man uses to delve, to seek, explore, and explain. In his perception of beauty, in his ability to create beauty. In man's iron *guf* (body), that he can run and lift, that's expressed, of course, magnificently and to the greatest degree in sports. Therefore, sports is as important to *Yavan* as any university and any philosophy and certainly the Torah.

That's Greece, that's *Yavan* - which is the same situation we face in the entire world today. Science, individuality, the individual value of "every man unto himself"; man finds the meaning of life in himself.

They don't need G-d, they don't need a *Borei* (a Creator) they don't need a *Manhig* (a Leader). Man is the center of all existence, with the power of his mind, with the power of his perception. With his creativity, his ability to organize, to direct, and to rule. He's sufficient unto himself.

If the Torah (*Devarim 8:17*) has identified the source of all *dichui pnei ha'Sehchinah*, pushing away of the Divine presence, as *kochi v'otzem yadi* (viewing one's own might and abilities as an independent force), then the ultimate *kochi v'otzem yadi* is *Yavan*, to this day. The whole world, literally, is a world of *kochi v'otzem yadi*.

Our technology, our mastery of nature, our ability to explain, and to see. And if there are still some mysteries, we know that the mind of man will solve them all. It may take some more time, some questions may have come up, but at the end of the day we'll figure it out - man is the measure of the universe. Man is the explanation of the universe, the justification of the universe. We don't need more.

A World of Connection

In actuality, the *Ribono Shel Olam* is the *metzius*, the reality, of existence and all existence derives from Him. All existence is His. He is the *Manhig Ha'olam*, the one who leads the world. But even more, He's the *mekayem ha'olam*, the One who gives the world existence. Whatever we have in human assessment, in human understanding, in human accomplishment, it's entirely a gift from *Hashem*.

Therefore, *L'hodos U'lihallel* is an acknowledgment that He is the *makor* (source) of all being. The *makor* of all blessing, and the One we have to seek in order to have a purpose, in order to have a direction - in order to be.

L'hodos U'lihallel is the *yesod ha'yesodos*, our underlying foundation, which we can use to stand up to *Yavan*. (1) Number one, we have to be *modeh*, we have to give thanks to Him for what we have, and recognize that without Him we're nothing and that everything is from Him. (2) And number two: *L'hallel*,

to praise Him and that the entire world is His. His creations, His *chochmah*, His might; everything is His. *L'hodos Ul'hallel*.

Really, the first aspect of Chanukah should be *l'hispallel*, to pray. *Tefillah* is our first and primary way to acknowledge that everything is His. But since prayer has always been one of the *kochos hanefesh* of *Yisrael*, *Chazal* didn't have to establish it anew for Chanukah. But *L'hodos U'lihallel* is of the essence of the *avodas ha'yom* and the *ko'ach hanefesh* of *Yisrael*. To recognize and accept that we are totally dependent on the *Ribono Shel Olam* and that we have nothing without Him.

This is *Yisrael's* opposition to *Yavan* and what we face every single day, Every single hour within every single day, we face the onslaught of science and technology. sports and beauty. *Yavan's* core is an onslaught that we face, literally, continuously always!

The ultimate *L'hodos U'lihallel*, is *Torah She Ba'al Peh*, the Oral Torah, and is the specific *chov* (obligation) of Chanukah; which is a separate discussion as to why. But the *ko'ach* that Chanukah gave us is to be able to continue the *Torah She Ba'al Peh*.

The Ultimate Thanksgiving

The *avodah* of Chanukah is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement, an acceptance that in truth, I owe you something. That without you I wouldn't have it. That You *Hashem*, are the Giver to whom I have to come. I'm a dependent, I need Him - without Him I have nothing.

Klal Yisrael was able to instill this *ko'ach* in their *neshamos*, through the victory of Chanukah and the *yeshuah* (salvation) of Chanukah. This was their *avodah* - to know that their victory, with their army, with their enormous strategy, and their bravery, was the *Ribono Shel Olam's* salvation.

How were they saved? Through their work. Who went and fought? Who was *moser nefesh* for fighting mightily? The army!

What would Greece have done after such a victory? March and show how great we are. But *Am Yisrael* said "This is the *Ribono Shel Olam's* victory." The *Ribono Shel Olam* established this through a miracle of lighting the *menorah*. It was a recognition that this magnificent victory, the might of the *Chashmona'im* (*Maccabees*), was totally from *Hashem*.

But see what the *yetzer hara* did with it. He turned it into the heroism of the *Maccabees*! The might of the *Chashmona'im*, instead of seeing what they saw in this, the salvation from *Hashem*. As we say in the *Shemoneh Esrei*: "*masarta giborim b'yad chalashim*"- "*You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak*". They saw the *Ribono Shel Olam's* victory.

You made a *yeshuah gedolah* for *Am Yisrael*, that was completed when they came "*b'chatzros kodshecha*", in Your holy Sanctuary. The recognition that our victory, our might, our stubbornness, was all a miracle from the *Ribono Shel Olam*. That if we win a '48 war and a '67 war, a war in Lebanon and a Yom Kippur War, it's all from *Hashem* – it's from Him that the *yeshuah* comes.

This is the *nafka minah*, where it makes a difference.

Is it Us or Him?

Is it "our mighty army, our *giborim*" or is it the *Ribono Shel Olam's*? To see the *yad Hashem* in

it, guiding and saving us. To see in it the *Ribono Shel Olam's hatavah*, bestowing goodness, and to be able to say *hoda'ah*, thanksgiving, to Him - this is the distinction between *Yisrael* and *Yavan*. This is what enables *Klal Yisrael* to exist and learn, to accomplish and grow in the midst of the *tumah* of *Yavan*. That is the *ko'ach hachiyus*, the life-force, that we have today in a world of *Yavan* that would deny the *Ribono Shel Olam* a role in it at all.

This *ko'ach* gives us the ability to recognize the *Ribono Shel Olam* as the *makor*, as the source of all that is and all that we have. The source of our wealth, of our knowledge, our accomplishments - that it's all the *Ribono Shel Olam*, in spite of the entire world screaming the opposite and showing what appears to be the opposite.

Science seems to show it. You see what it's grown, what it's accomplished, what it has done. But to recognize and say: "No, it's totally from *Hashem!*" This is the *ko'ach* that Chanukah established, and out of which we live and can continue to exist until today.

Using Prayer

We can strengthen ourselves in this, certainly by what we spoke about, through *tefillah*. Without *davening*, it's not possible to maintain this recognition. If we don't understand that we need Him for all the things that make up our existence: for *da'as*, for *teshuvah*, for *selichah*, for *refuah*, for *parnasah*, and for *yeshuah*; then we can't begin. This has to be the beginning. How can we survive without it?

If we start with *tefillah*, a heartfelt prayer to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, then the possibility exists that we can come to *hoda'ah* and *hallel*.

With this, we can be *zocheh* to a *yeshuah*, we can merit to *Hashem* saving us, and that the truth of Torah over the falsehood of *Yavan*, should shine forth and be revealed to the entire world. So that He will be "*melech al kol ha'aretz*" (*King over the entire earth*) and that the entire world should say "*Hashem echad u'Shemo echad*", *Hashem is One and His name is One*.