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THE LIGHT OF CHANUKAH

December 2014 | Chanukah 5775



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Dear Friends,

Chanukah. As the days grow to their shortest, we relive a moment of great light in our people's history.

More than two millennia ago, a small group of Jews, weak in physical might but strong in spiritual vigor, vanquished a military foe far stronger than nature would have allowed. Indeed, it is precisely in these days of darkness that our latent spiritual strength can be most readily seen.

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At this joyous time of year, we salute our partners – who hail from all corners of the Jewish world – for their steadfast support and vision. This booklet, and everything that we do, is made possible through their generosity.

As we reflect in the light of our menorahs and in the smiles of our friends, let us be mindful of the sacrifice of the Maccabees and of our ancestors throughout the ages. Let us dedicate ourselves to perpetuate their noble legacy.

Wishing you and your family a very happy Chanukah,



Richard Boruch Rabinowitz
Executive Director



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Managing Director

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ABC's of Chanukah

BY RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, and lasts for eight days.

Historical Background

In Israel during the 2nd century BCE, at the time of the Second Holy Temple, the Syrian-Greek regime outlawed Jewish observance (circumcision, Torah study, etc.). Many Jews – called Hellenists – encouraged this approach.

Led by Matitياهو, and later his son Judah the Maccabee, a small band of pious Jews in the Judean hills led guerrilla warfare against the Syrian-Greek army.

The brave Maccabees recaptured the Holy Temple from the Greeks and re-dedicated it on the 25th of Kislev. The Hebrew word Chanukah means “dedication.”

The first thing the Maccabees did was light the golden menorah. They found only one jar of oil, but it burned miraculously for eight days.

Today we light a menorah for eight days to publicize this miracle and to be inspired by its message.

What kind of menorah?

The menorah can be any size, and made of any material. All eight candles (except the Shamash) should be at the same height, and preferably in a straight line.

Who lights?

In Ashkenazi tradition, each person lights his own menorah. Sefardi tradition is one menorah per family.

What to light?

The candles must be big enough to burn for at least 30 minutes. Many use olive oil, to recall the original miracle in the Temple.

How many candles?

One candle is added each of the eight nights – plus the extra helper candle called the “Shamash.”

Where to light?

To publicize the miracle, the menorah should be lit in a place where it is highly visible. Many light their menorah in a window facing the street.

When to light?

The first opportunity to light is at nightfall. Many wait until later, when all the members of the household are present.

How to light?

Light the Shamash, then recite the blessings, then use the Shamash to light the Chanukah candles.

Blessings

Two blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Chanukah candles.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-sav, Vi-tzee-vanu li-had-leek ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Shi-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu, Baya-meem ha-haim baz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

A third blessing is said on the first night only:

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Sheh-he-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu Vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

After lighting, families enjoy sitting in the menorah's glow while singing Maoz Tzur ("Rock of Ages").

To Praise and Give Thanks

On Chanukah we add "Al Ha'nisim" – a paragraph giving thanks for the Chanukah miracle – to the Amidah prayer and to Grace After Meals. Hallel is also said during morning services.

Chanukah is a time to appreciate all we have to be thankful for. By publicizing the Chanukah miracle, we express our "thanks-giving" to God for protecting us and providing for our needs.

Dreidel!

A favorite Chanukah game is spinning the dreidel, a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side: nun, gimmel,

hey, shin – “A Great Miracle Happened There.” Originally spinning the dreidel was done by students illegally studying Torah. When soldiers made a surprise raid, students would whip out a dreidel, pretending to play a gambling game.

Donuts

To commemorate the miracle of the oil, there is a custom to eat “oily” foods like potato latkes and sufganiyot (donuts). Around 17.5 million donuts are eaten in Israel during Chanukah. (Not a good time to start a diet!)

Dedication

The word Chanukah means dedication. That’s what it takes to launch a war against a superpower, and light a single flask of oil that can’t possibly last enough time. With enough dedication and commitment, God creates miracles.

Why 8?

Chanukah is celebrated 8 days even though the miracle of the oil was really only 7 (the first day’s light shouldn’t count – it’s natural) to teach us that everything in the ‘natural’ world is really a miracle. Nothing happens without God willing it.

Not the Jewish Christmas

There is no significance to giving gifts during the holiday. But there is a tradition to give gelt (money) to give kids an incentive to learn Torah (Chanukah also comes from the Hebrew word “hinuch,” education).

8 Family Ideas for Hanukkah

BY JUDY GRUEN

Hanukkah arrives at the darkest time of the year, when daylight is in short supply, but the miracles that God performed for us thousands of years ago light our path to a festive, meaningful celebration. Hanukkah is a fun, delicious (fattening!) yet deeply spiritual holiday that is easy to share with friends and family.

Here are some ideas to light up your celebration during the eight nights of Hanukkah:

1. Give each child his or her own menorah.

Children are especially proud of lighting menorahs they make themselves, and they can be made simply and creatively.

During one of the last nights, when the room is bright with Hanukkah lights, take a family photograph.

This custom can become a treasured chronicle of how your family grows over the years.

2. Be here now.

Take plenty of time after lighting candles to enjoy being with family. Sing Hanukkah songs: Ma Ozur, Haneiros Halalu, and any others you enjoy.

Stay “unplugged” from your smart phones while the candles are burning. Savor this special time together.

When you’ve sung everything you feel like singing, bring on the gifts and dig into those hot latkes and sufganiot!

3. Talk up the miracles.

Hanukkah means both “dedication” and “education,” so retell the story of the great Hanukkah miracles, both hidden and open.

Buy a Hanukkah or Judaica-themed book for your children each year – you will build a nice holiday book collection, and reserving them for the holidays makes them seem new again for the children.

For older children and adults, set a challenge for everyone to find a new Hanukkah insight to share. Every year there are new things to learn!

4. Let Mom rest.

Part of the Hanukkah victory is credited to Yehudit, a daughter of Yochanan the High Priest and father of the Hasmonean family.

During the time of the Maccabean revolt, Yehudit bravely and cleverly earned the trust of a Syrian-Greek general named Holofernes, convincing him that she would bring him valuable information that would help him defeat the Jewish uprising.

Instead, like the heroine Yael who slew Cicera, Yehudit fed Holfernes wine and cheese until he fell into a deep slumber. She then unsheathed his sword and killed him, saving untold numbers of Jews.

In deference to the heroism of Yehudit, it is a custom for women not to work while the candles are burning.

This is a challenge for many women who are not used to sitting still, so it's up to other family members to ensure that their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers actually just sit and enjoy!

5. Let the games begin!

Along with the traditional dreidel game, make up your own: Hanukkah-themed word searches, Bingo, quizzes, and other games are a fun way to involve all family members, as well as guests at your Hanukkah party.

Did you know that the dreidel traces its lineage all the way back to the time of the Syrian-Greek rule over Israel?

Since Torah study had become a crime punishable by death, Jewish children hid in caves in order to study. When Greeks would approach to see what they were up to, out came the spinning tops, which the children pretended they were engrossed in playing.

6. Jingle gelt, Jingle gelt.

No child is likely to let parents forget the custom of giving Hanukkah gelt, and not just the chocolate coins, either. In some communities a little gelt is given each night.

Why money as gifts?

One answer is that the Greeks did not destroy the oil from the Temple; they defiled it – a statement of their intent to infuse Greek ideas and ideals into Jewish life and Jewish possessions.

Giving Hanukkah gelt reminds us of our freedom and obligation to use our material wealth for noble and spiritual ends.

Underscoring this message, children are taught to give away some of their gelt to tzedakah.

7. Give thanks, modern-day Maccabees.

Many families have the custom of taking one night and having everyone express what they feel grateful for, spiritually and materially.

Feeling gratitude and expressing it are defining Jewish qualities, and what better time to do so than on the holiday that means “dedication”?

Here’s another angle to this theme: Since Hanukkah celebrates the Jewish affirmation of our spiritual values, and a refusal to buckle to even harsh pressure to assimilate, discuss ways that you have found to stand up for Jewish values when they have been challenged.

8. Check out the neighborhood.

If you live in a Jewish neighborhood and it’s not utterly freezing, take a walk and enjoy the sight of the dozens, if not hundreds, of menorahs spreading their beautiful, flickering lights in windows up and down your streets.

The menorah is meant to be lit at the entryway of your home, visible to the street, to help publicize the miracle. Yet there have been times when it was dangerous for Jews to do so.

We who live in lands of freedom can appreciate our ability to light our menorahs with pride and without fear, and to delight in the sight of endless Hanukkah lights spreading their special glow.

Why Driedel?

BY RABBI EPHRAIM NISENBAUM

There are many different customs associated with the Jewish holidays.

The meaning behind some of the customs is readily apparent. Eating latkes and doughnuts fried in oil on Chanukah (Hanukkah), for example, recalls the miracle of the flask of oil that lasted eight days.

The significance of the dreidel, the four-sided top with Hebrew letters on each side, however, is not as clear. Some suggest that the dreidel was invented at the time of the Syrian-Greek decrees against the Jewish people. One of the prohibitions was the study of Torah. Fearlessly, the Jews continued teaching and studying Torah in secret. Should a Greek soldier appear, they would hide their books, pull out tops and play with the children.

Let us explore a deeper interpretation of the dreidel.

During the Second Temple era, a small band of Jews fought valiantly against the great Greek armies, miraculously overcame them and regained religious freedom. Although the war did not end for several years, on the 25th day of Kislev the Jews resumed kindling the Menorah in the Temple. All the flasks of oil had been contaminated by the Greeks, yet one little sealed flask was miraculously found, containing enough oil to burn for one night. Another miracle occurred and the oil burned for eight days, until they could procure new oil.

The name "Chanukah" is a contraction of the words chanu kaf-heh, "they camped [and rested from war] on the 25th day of Kislev." It seems strange that the name of the holiday recalls the lull in the fighting instead of the final victory itself.

Why celebrate the job before it is completed?

Let us understand the role of miracles in general and the Chanukah miracle in particular.

The Sages teach that there is no real difference between nature and miracles; God's hand guides everything in the world. However, we sometimes are so distracted by our routine that we fail to see God's hand around us. "Nature" is really nothing more than the breathtaking beauty and symmetry of God's Creation becoming routine.

The purpose of a miracle, a break from the routine, is to draw our attention to God's control over all areas of life – even the natural.

That is why the holiday was named Chanukah, reflecting the lull in the war. It was only then the Jews had a chance to stop and consider the Divine assistance rendered during their lopsided battles – something they had not appreciated in the midst of war.

This may help us understand another question often asked about Chanukah. The little flask contained enough oil to last for one day, so the miracle was really only for seven days and not eight.

Then why is Chanukah celebrated for eight days?

The answer lies in the same principle.

We take it for granted that oil can fuel a flame, whereas apple juice cannot. But why should that be so? Why does the juice of one fruit fuel a fire, while that of another actually extinguishes it?

We have become so accustomed to the routine that we fail to see the fascination in the mundane.

The extra day of celebration awakens us to see God's hand in the natural as much as in the miraculous.

Which brings us back to the dreidel. Written on the sides of the dreidel are the letters nun, gimmel, heh, and shin, representing the words nes gadol haya sham, "A great miracle happened there."

While the dreidel spins, the letters disappear in a blur and are visible only when coming to a stop.

The dreidel represents how we – immersed in the dizzying hustle-bustle of daily routine – cannot see the miracles regularly happening all around. Only when we stop to reflect are our eyes opened to the miracles that were there the whole time.

Chanukah, 1942

BY CAROLA SCHIFF

My father, Reb Meir Shlomo Sommer, Monsieur Sommer as he was called in France, was a man of uncompromising faith, conviction and courage.

He was the principal of a Jewish Day school in Hamburg/Altona, Germany until Kristallnacht, when the Nazis closed the school.

In July 1939, my father and mother were able to flee to France on a two week tourist visa to escape the Nazi reign of terror. In France both my parents were interned, separately, in various detention and labor camps.

By Divine miracle, they were both released and reunited in October 1940.

Since they were Jewish refugees from Germany, they were considered a threat to France and were forced to go into hiding in the outskirts of Perigueux, a small town in southwestern France.

In 1942, at the height of the Nazi reign of terror, there were constant "Raffles" – Jews would be summarily rounded up and sent to horrible detention camps and from there to the infamous death camps of Eastern Europe. Curfew times were enforced and no one was allowed on the streets at night. It was a constant struggle to find hiding places to evade the Nazis and their French collaborators. "From a population of about 330,000 at the end of 1940, nearly 80,000 Jews had been deported or murdered in France. They represented more than 24 percent of the Jewish community." (The Holocaust, The French, and the Jews, Susan Zuccoti p.207).

During their internment and in hiding, my parents clung to

their faith with tenacity. Against all odds, my father maintained his strong Torah principles, never compromising on Kashrus, Shabbos or Jewish holidays. He was a man of strength and kindness. He was filled with love for his fellow Jew, and always tried to help others in need. He would regularly ignore the war-imposed curfew, and at the risk of his life, braved the terror of the Nazis in order to teach Torah to Jewish children in hiding.

After the war, my father was the spiritual leader in Vichy, France. Shortly after his untimely death in 1956, we received the following condolence card highlighting how my father managed to spread the light of Chanukah during the darkest time in Nazi-occupied France:

Chanukah 1942

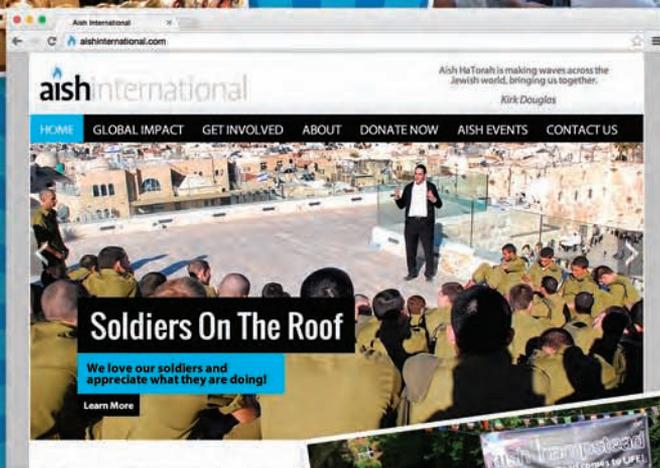
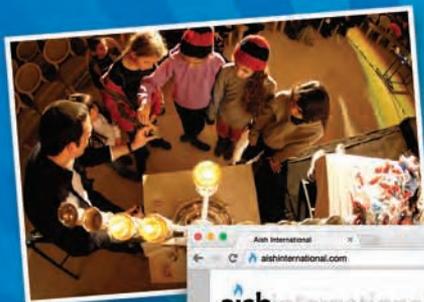
1942 in Perigueux, France, a few men hurried into a rundown wooden barrack. Each opened the door carefully looking around to make sure they weren't being followed. They then went into a hidden backroom. This room served as the makeshift Shul for those brave enough to venture out. The "shul" barely scraped together a minyan of men to pray.

They davened Maariv quickly, their hearts rapidly beating with the knowledge that at any moment the Nazis could storm in and arrest everyone. One man lit the menorah as the others ran to grab their coats and get home as fast as possible.

Suddenly, a man in the back of the room stood up and in a deep, warm voice started to sing "Maoz Tzur." The men were frightened and aghast. Someone might hear; it was too dangerous! Soon another man joined in singing, then another and another, until everyone was tearfully and courageously singing with joy. For the moment, gone were the fears of the Nazis. For a few moments, Chanukah was there in all its glory, as in days of Judah the Maccabbe, a few brave men stood proud, their faith prevailing over the evil surrounding them.

The man who stood to sing was my father, Reb Meir Shlomo Sommer known to all as Monsieur Sommer, of blessed memory. My father had never told anyone of us his Chanukah victory during those dark time, yet even after his death, this story continues to inspire light.

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8 Surprising Lessons from the Laws of Chanukah

BY RABBI YISRAEL RUTMAN

The festival of Chanukah is one of the best loved and most widely observed events in the Jewish calendar.

The powerful images of the miracles of the Jewish victory over the Selucid Greeks in the 2nd century BCE and the miracle of the one-day supply of oil burning eight days in the re-dedication of the Temple are an annual inspiration to Jews everywhere.

Like every mitzvah, Chanukah has its special laws and customs.

A closer examination of the laws and customs of Chanukah yields some surprising insights.

1) A Mitzvah of Sharing

If a person has only enough oil and wicks for himself for the eight days of Chanukah, whereas his impoverished neighbor has none, he should share with him, even though he will not have enough left over for all eight candles at the end of the festival.

This is because the idea of adding on a candle each night until we reach eight is what is known as hiddur, a beautification of the mitzvah; the essential mitzvah is just one candle per night per household. Better to share your oil and enable another Jew to fulfill the essential mitzvah along with you, than to beautify your own while he has nothing.

2) Time of Assimilation

The candle lighting was originally intended to be performed outside in the doorway or courtyard at sunset. This, in order that people coming home from work would see the festival lights.

Chanukah is unique in this respect. We have no other commandment in Judaism which requires such public display.

This is because during the era of the Hasmoneans, there was rampant assimilation among the Jewish people in Israel due to the influence of Greek culture. The Sages instituted the candle lighting for outdoors to publicize the miracles that God had done for His people.

It was not just a celebration for the Hasmonean priests, within the confines of the Temple, but a way of inspiring all of the Jewish people to return to their tradition.

3) Unique Blessing

Most of us are familiar with the blessings said by the person lighting the candles. What is less well known, though, is that there is also a blessing for one who is not lighting.

Upon seeing the Chanukah candles burning, he makes a blessing "on the miracles that were done for our fathers."

It is unique to the festival of Chanukah that someone not performing the mitzvah (and no one is doing it for him) makes a blessing just on seeing a mitzvah done by others.

This, too, may be explained by the special concern that the Sages felt for all Jews, including the non-observant. The candles were made a public display for their sake.

Therefore, when a Jew who, upon seeing the lights burning, is aroused by them to take a renewed interest in his Jewish identity, that special dimension of the mitzvah has been fulfilled, and a blessing of thanks to God is in order. (Sukkat Dovid)

4) Priorities

The Talmud raises the question regarding a person who has only enough oil for either Shabbat or Chanukah candles, but not both. (Each year, Shabbat and Chanukah coincide at least once during the eight-day festival.)

Which takes precedence?

The Talmud determines that Shabbat takes precedence because of Shalom Bayit, family harmony. The Chanukah candles (that were then placed in the doorway) publicize the miracle of the oil, but the Shabbat candles illuminate the home. It is deemed more important that there be light in the home for the enjoyment of the Shabbat meal.

The story is told of the Chafetz Chaim, the spiritual leader of European Jewry before World War Two:

The time for lighting the Chanukah candles had arrived, and his guest was looking forward eagerly to sharing this moment with the great rabbi. But the Chafetz Chaim did not rise to light the candles.

This, to the puzzlement of his guest, since the Chafetz Chaim's meticulousness in observing the mitzvot was well known. A considerable amount of time passed, and, inexplicably, he still did not light.

Finally, long after the proper time for lighting had passed, the door opened and the Chafetz Chaim's wife entered. Without saying a word, he immediately rose and, with his wife and guest at his side, lit the Chanukah candles.

Afterwards, the Chafetz Chaim, sensing his guest's curiosity, explained that he had delayed lighting out of consideration for his wife, whom he knew took great pleasure in being present at the lighting. Had she missed it, after returning from a trip, she would have been disappointed.

Lighting the Chanukah candles is a great mitzvah and should be performed with alacrity, but since the Sages teach that Shalom Bayit takes precedence over Chanukah, it was certainly warranted to delay the lighting out of consideration for his wife's feelings.

5) God's Business

The candle should contain sufficient oil (or wax) at the time of lighting to burn until at least 30 minutes after the stars come out. In the event that the light is extinguished before the prescribed time, it is proper to re-light (without a new blessing).

However, one is not obligated to re-light; he has fulfilled the mitzvah with the original lighting.

This is an application of the principle that "the lighting makes the mitzvah." This symbolizes the Jewish view that in life generally our responsibility is to make our decisions and act to carry them out; but if, in the end, the bright dream of success is extinguished, it does not mean we have failed.

Our job is to decide and to act. Success or failure is God's business.

6) Jewish Ambition

In spiritual matters, there is the principle of ma'alim b'kedushah, ascending in holiness. This is exemplified by the way in which we light Chanukah candles.

We light one candle on the first night, two on the second, and so on, until we conclude the festival with eight candles burning.

In Chanukah, it is meant to convey the specific message of the increase of the miracle, as the one-day supply of oil continued to burn and burn for eight days.

In a general sense, though, it expresses the Jewish concept of ambition: that we should always strive to attain greater and greater appreciation of the miracles that God does for us, and to reach for ever higher levels of spirituality.

7) Great and Small

On Chanukah there is “Hallel” and Hoda’ah.

“Hallel” is a song of praise of God for the miracles He does for the Jewish people.

Hoda’ah is an acknowledgement of the fact that we are undeserving of the great things He does for us.

A Jew must go through life with this dual recognition: of the greatness of God, on the one hand; and of the smallness of His creatures, on the other. (Sfas Emet)

8) Souls on Fire

Wicks and oils that are not fit for burning as Shabbat candles – because they don’t burn so well – are nevertheless usable on Chanukah.

Each letter of the Hebrew word for soul – nefesh – stands for a component of the candle: Ner(flame), P’tilah (wick) and Shemen (oil).

Those Jewish souls that don’t burn so well – that are not aligned well with their Jewish identity – all during the year on Shabbat, are, due to the special power of the lights, able to burn brightly on Chanukah. For on Chanukah, perhaps more than any other time of year, one is able to get in touch with his Jewish identity. (Sfas Emet)

Chanukah and Burnout

BY RABBI BENJAMIN BLECH

Every miracle has a special message.

And since God can do anything, the particular way He chooses to make Himself known always has a deeper meaning.

That's why the miracle of Chanukah always intrigued me.

Here were the Jews who had just succeeded in achieving an incredible military victory. They overcame the Syrian Greeks and were once again in control of the holy Temple. Now they could worship God as they had in the past. They were ready to light the menorah but, as we all know, they didn't have enough oil on hand to last the necessary eight days until they could prepare the amount they needed.

They found a small cruse with oil, sealed with the stamp of the high priest to attest to its purity - but it was only sufficient to last for one day. They lit it nonetheless, in the hope that God would at least be pleased with their effort. Lo and behold they were rewarded with the miracle that put its stamp on the holiday; the little cruse that natural law would have dictated could burn only for one day miraculously continued to give its light for eight.

God solved their problem. Natural law took a backseat to divine intervention. On this one occasion, oil assumed physical properties that scientific rules would have deemed impossible.

But why didn't God handle this matter in a far simpler manner?

He could have easily furnished a large eight-day supply container from His heavenly storehouse, without necessitating a violation of natural law.

For some reason, an important part of the miracle was precisely the fact that the oil they found was divinely decreed to burn far longer than its innate capacity.

And that's what makes the Chanukah miracle an almost exact replica of the miracle God chose to demonstrate to Moses when He appointed him to become the leader of the Jewish people.

And It Was Not Consumed

We know the scene all too well. Moses was tending his sheep in the desert when he was struck by a vision that clearly transcended the laws of nature. A bush was burning and yet it was not consumed. It continued to burn simply because God commanded it to do so.

Yes, part of the purpose was to demonstrate Divine power, to let Moses know that he was being addressed by a supernatural being who had it within His power to perform a miraculous deed. But there were so many other ways in which God could have made clear His omnipotence. Surely, keeping the flame of a bush burning beyond its expected expiration time is not the most magical act the Almighty has available to Him in his infinite repertoire.

Why was the most relevant thing God could convey to Moses at their first meeting symbolized by a bush that was burning and yet was not consumed?

Perhaps we can best understand it by way of a common metaphor. Moses was about to begin a journey of leadership that would last many years and demand of him a tremendous amount of dedication, hard work and commitment. It would certainly not be easy.

The greatest difficulty facing someone with a task that over time may well become overwhelming and unbearable is the challenge of burnout.

Day after day, year after year, to be forced to confront the interminable tests to his role as rabbi, teacher and ruler over the Jewish people is an undertaking that defies the imagination.

It would appear to be beyond human endurance. Moses could have been consumed by his mission.

This is the remarkable truth God revealed to Moses with the sign of the burning bush. There is no burnout in the realm of the saintly. When the bush fulfills the will of God, it is not consumed. In the realm of the holy, natural law no longer applies.

Because Moses was about to begin his career on behalf of the Almighty, his first vision assured him that the despondency and depression of burnout would never be his fate; having a holy purpose for his existence would guarantee his dreams remain fresh and vibrant, continuously alive.

In my own life I have seen many cases of professional and personal burnout - but invariably they revolved around secular rather than sacred commitments.

Those whose careers centered around making more money often became tired of the grind, depressed by the unchanging scenario of daily living. They lost focus and burnt out, consumed and withered.

But those who I've known who identified their lives with purpose seem to be invigorated every day by their pursuit of the holy, bringing light to their lives and the lives of others far beyond what might be considered natural.

I have seen many couples who began married life with great hope for the future, only to suffer from marital burnout. Their unions began with great fire and passion. But if their love lacked the spark of shared values and commitment to spiritual goals, burnout tragically followed.

My parents showed me how love rooted in holy lives replaced burnout with ever greater and more passionate commitment. It is a characteristic of marriage I strive strongly to emulate.

Chanukah and Purpose

Chanukah is the story of the first major Jewish encounter with secularism. The Syrian Greeks sought to seduce the Jewish people with a culture that stressed the holiness of beauty. Jews needed to reaffirm the doctrine that made them unique in the world by teaching the beauty of holiness.

The part of the Chanukah story that we don't like to discuss is the tragedy of the Jews who assimilated. Hellenists chose to reject Torah for the glitter and glow of a flame that seemed to shine more brightly than their own beautiful traditions. The trade-off gave them a fire that consumed; the profane could never prevent burnout.

How beautiful then that the symbol we choose to commemorate the holiday revolves around the miracle that God selected to perform for those who remained true to the teachings of Moses.

The light of the menorah burning far longer than natural law would allow serves as an everlasting reminder that by infusing every area of life with purpose and holiness we will never burnout.

Chanukah: Quick and Kosher

BY JAMIE GELLER

Sufganiot (Jelly Doughnuts)

Prep Time: 8 minutes

Cook Time: 10 minutes

Rest Time: 20 minutes

Yield: 14 doughnuts

2 1/2 cups self-rising flour
2 (8-ounce) cartons vanilla low-fat yogurt
2 tablespoons vanilla sugar
2 eggs
6 cups canola oil
3/4 cup confectioners' sugar
1 cup seedless strawberry jelly

1. In a large bowl, place flour, yogurt, vanilla sugar and eggs.
2. Knead until all ingredients are combined and a sticky, doughy batter is formed. Cover with a kitchen towel and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes.
3. Heat 6 cups canola oil in a 6-quart stockpot, covered, over medium heat.
4. When dough is ready, uncover oil and raise heat to high.
5. Scoop out a tablespoonful of batter and drop in oil. Don't make the doughnuts too big, so they can cook through.
6. You should be able to fry about 7 doughnuts at a time. Using a slotted spoon, turn doughnuts when halfway browned, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Fry for another 2 to 3 minutes or until entire doughnut is deep golden brown and cooked through.

7. Remove doughnuts and let cool on paper towel-lined plates. Repeat previous two steps with remaining batter.

8. Fill a squeeze bottle with jelly and inject a little into each doughnut.

9. Roll each doughnut in confectioners' sugar. Or shake 3 doughnuts at a time in a paper bag filled with confectioners' sugar.

Side Story:

My sister-in-law Carly and I attempted this recipe one Chanukah night when the whole family came over for candle-lighting. Everyone got involved. Some of us were on deep-fry duty, some of us powdered and the rest "quality control" tasted. We all had a blast. There was flour and confectioners' sugar everywhere.

Latkes (Potato Pancakes)

Prep Time: 12 minutes

Cook Time: 18 to 24 minutes

Chill Time: none

Yield: 8 servings

4 medium Idaho potatoes
6 tablespoons canola oil or olive oil
3 eggs, beaten
2 tablespoons matzoh meal
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon coarse black pepper
Applesauce or sour cream (optional)

1. Prepare a large bowl filled with cold water

2. Peel potatoes, and as you finish each, place in cold water to prevent browning.
3. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
4. Cut potatoes lengthwise into halves or quarters so they fit into food processor feed tube. Process potatoes using the blade that creates thin, shoestring-like strips and transfer to a large bowl.
5. Add eggs, matzoh meal, salt and pepper and mix well.
6. Drop 6 to 8 spoonfuls of mixture into hot oil. Using the back of a spoon, pat down each latke to flatten it. Put as many as you can in the skillet without crowding. Putting them too close together will make them soggy.
7. Fry 3 to 4 minutes on each side, until golden and crisp around the edges; repeat procedure until finished with all the batter.
8. Blot excess oil with paper towels.
9. Serve warm with applesauce or sour cream, if desired

Tip:

Corn meal is a great substitute for matzoh meal and will also make your latkes nice and crispy.

Side Story:

Just like they used to do it in the old country! These latkes are not loaded with potato starch, flour, baking powder or other non-essential ingredients. My grandfather shared this recipe with me when I told him that I thought his were the crunchiest, lightest and most perfect potato latkes I've ever eaten.

Broccoli and Mushroom Pie

Prep Time: 6 minutes

Cook Time: 1 hour to 1 hour, 15 minutes

Chill Time: none

Yield: 8 servings

1 (10-ounce) box frozen chopped broccoli cuts, thawed and drained

1 (8-ounce) carton fresh sliced mushrooms

1 (9-inch) frozen deep dish prepared piecrust

1 medium onion, diced

4 eggs

1 cup liquid non-dairy creamer

2 tablespoons flour

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Arrange broccoli and mushrooms in piecrust.
3. In a bowl, place onion, eggs, non-dairy creamer, flour, salt and pepper. Mix to combine. Pour over vegetables.
4. Bake at 375° for 1 hour to 1 and 15 minutes, until mixture is set.
5. Use a pie server to cut into wedge-shaped pieces; serve warm.

Tip

Loosely cover with aluminum foil if center is not yet set but crust is browning too fast.

Hash Brown Potato Latkes

BY SHARON MATTEN

Hash brown potatoes are basically shredded potatoes that can be found in the refrigerated or freezer section of your grocery store. These were so popular last year that a representative from one of the brands that I recommended, Simply Potatoes, called me to thank me because sales in our area had gone up!

Note: These are great for the GFE (Gluten Free Eater) too! Simply substitute 1/3 cup of potato starch for the 1/3 cup flour in the recipe.

Original Classic Hash Brown Potato Latkes (Pareve)

1 lb Hash Browns (defrosted if frozen)
1 medium onion, finely diced
2 large eggs
1/3 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon black pepper (to taste)
1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)
Canola Oil for frying

In a large bowl mix all ingredients until thoroughly combined. In a large skillet, heat oil. Drop large spoonfuls of potato mixture into the oil and fry until golden brown on both sides. Serve warm with apple sauce or sour cream.

Variations

Prepare the original recipe with the following add-ins:

#1: Kishke and Pastrami “Shabbat” Latkes

This recipe is great for Shabbat Chanuka!! The guys in the family will LOVE it – really!!!

1 pound kishke defrosted (I used the A&B pareve kishke)
4 ounces chuck pastrami, chopped

#2: Spinach Quinoa Latkes

8 ounces frozen chopped spinach, defrosted, liquid squeezed out

1 cup cooked quinoa, cooled

#3: Spinach Quinoa Latkes with Kosher Imitation Bacon Bits

8 ounces frozen chopped spinach, defrosted, liquid squeezed out

1 cup cooked quinoa, cooled

½ cup Kosher imitation bacon bits

#4: Southwest Black Bean Latke

Substitute 1 one pound package Southwest Style hash browns for traditional style in the Original Classic Hash Brown Potato Latke recipe

Add one 15.5 ounce can black beans, drained.

#5: Chili Latkes

1 15.5 ounce can black beans, drained

1 1.25 ounce reduced sodium chili seasoning

1 8 ounce package shredded cheddar cheese

#6: Potato Apple Cinnamon Raisin Latkes

2 McIntosh apples, peeled and finely diced

1 tablespoon lemon juice

¼ cup sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ cup raisins

Omit the pepper from the **Original Classic Hash Brown Potato Latke recipe**.

Toss the apples with the lemon juice, sugar and cinnamon, then add the mixture and the raisins to the **Original Classic Hash Brown Potato Latke recipe**. Prepare as directed above.

About Aish



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