



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Walking Between Nigleh and Nistar

The miracle of Chanukah is the only miracle we commemorate that occurred after the closing of Tanach. It unfolded in an age devoid of prophecy, when the prophetic era had already ended.

Because the story of Chanukah isn't recorded in Tanach, many of its details remain obscured. The battles are described in several volumes known as the Book of Maccabim, written by various historians, but these works were never canonized by Chazal.

We also have little clarity about how the dates of Chanukah were first determined. The chagim of the Torah are anchored to specific days designated by Hashem.

Purim—established by Esther and Mordechai and later affirmed by the Anshei Knesset Ha-Gedolah—comes with a clear account of how its date was chosen. The celebration was set for the day after the victory. In Shushan, where the battle continued an extra day, the rejoicing was accordingly delayed. We can therefore trace exactly how Purim entered

the calendar and why it is observed on two distinct days.

By contrast, regarding Chanukah, we do not possess the same depth of information. The choice of the twenty-fifth of Kislev is clear: it was the day the Mikdash was purified and the Mizbei'ach rededicated. What is less obvious is not the date itself, but the length of the chag.

EIGHT DAYS: A THOUSAND ANSWERS

In the sixteenth century, the Beit Yosef posed his famous question: Why was Chanukah established as an eight-day festival when the miracle itself spanned only seven? One day's worth of pure oil had been found—sufficient for the first night—and the Menorah would have burned naturally during those initial hours. Only over the next seven days did the oil continue to burn in a miraculous fashion. If the miracle lasted seven days, why was the Yom Tov set for eight?

This question has famously inspired an extraordinary outpouring of answers. In the nineteenth century, a work entitled *Ner L'Meah* was published, gathering one hundred solutions to the Beit Yosef's question. More recently, an expanded collection has appeared, assembling one thousand proposed answers.

Chanukah helped energize the emerging

**Mazal Tov to
Rabbi Chanoch & Esti Yeres
and family on the marriage
of their son**

world of Torah sheba'al peh, and within that setting the question of an eight-day chag drew considerable attention. The thousand answers that accumulated over time testify to the creative reach of Torah sheba'al peh.

PORTIONS OR REFILLS?

In addressing his own question, the Beit Yosef cites a well-known answer from Rav Aharon HaKohen of Lunel (the thirteenth-century French author of the *Orchot Chayim*). According to his view, the pure oil was divided into eight equal portions, and each night they lit only a small fraction. That small measure burned throughout the entire night. In this scenario, the miracle was experienced on all eight days, as each portion provided light far beyond its natural capacity.

After citing this answer and arguing against it, the Beit Yosef then offers two explanations of his own. In his second approach, he suggests that the oil was entirely consumed each night, and the bays atop the menorah that held the oil were miraculously refilled from above. The miracle was already evident on the first night—once the oil had burned out, they found the container replenished. Since the wonder was revealed immediately, Chazal instituted Chanukah as a full eight-day festival.

IS A “NES” PART OF HALACHA?

This second answer of the Beit Yosef raises an intriguing question. According to the *Orchot Chayim*, the oil had been divided into eight portions. The oil which they lit would have been natural; the miracle would simply be that a small quantity of natural oil burned for an extended time.

But in the Beit Yosef's scenario, the entire supply of pure oil was consumed on the first night, and the bowls were then refilled miraculously with supernatural oil. After

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the first night the entire supply of oil was supernatural. Can such oil be used in the performance of a mitzvah?

This question—whether supernatural materials may be used in the performance of a mitzvah—already surfaces among the Rishonim. Tosafot in Menachot (69b) suggest that miraculous challah could, in theory, be used for the Shte HaLechem offering on Shavuot. Yet others argue that the world of halacha is anchored in the natural order and applies only to objects that arise within that framework. Halacha was given to human beings who inhabit the natural world, and items that emerge through miraculous intervention stand outside its domain.

Evidently, however, the Beit Yosef adopted the view that such materials could be used, for he allowed completely supernatural oil—renewed each night to refill empty bowls—to serve as the basis for fulfilling the mitzvah.

REASON OR REVELATION?

This specific question—whether

 **Mazal Tov to** 

Chanan & Sarah Lehman
and family on the birth of a
great-granddaughter

supernatural materials may be used in the performance of a mitzvah—touches upon a broader discussion: Is halacha shaped by supernatural input?

The famous episode of the Tanur shel Achnai (Bava Metzia 59) highlights the distinction between heavenly signs and the halachic process. The Tannaim debated whether a refurbished oven could become tamei. Most held that it could, while R. Eliezer ben Horkenos remained convinced that it could not. Even when he invoked miraculous signs to support his position, Chazal ruled against him, citing the pasuk in Nitzavim, “Lo ba-shamayim hi”—teaching that halacha is determined through human reasoning, not through supernatural intervention.

To be sure, this was not universally adopted. Some Rishonim issued rulings based not only on their own logic but also on encounters with Eliyahu HaNavi (as noted by the Ra’avad, Hilchot Lulav 8:5) or on dream-responsa, such as those recorded in *She’eilos u’Teshuvos Min HaShamayim*, authored by a French Tosafist in the thirteenth century.

Still, our mesorah generally maintained a division between halacha and the realm of the supernatural.

This distinction mirrors a deeper duality within our tradition. Our Masorah has long recognized two realms: the realm of nigleh, shaped by human reasoning as it attempts to decode the divine will, and the realm of nistar, which speaks to dimensions of reality that lie beyond human analysis. These two realms were preserved as distinct, each contributing something essential to our religious experience.

THE MASORAH OF NIGLEH — RATIONALITY

The world of nigleh and halachic reasoning

gives us a pathway to grasp Hashem’s will. Though monotheism teaches that we cannot comprehend Hashem Himself, we can study and analyze His commands. By employing our intellect—one of the great gifts Hashem has given us—we strive to understand His will and draw nearer to Him.

The realm of nigleh not only granted us access to an otherwise incomprehensible God; it also anchored religious life in the rhythms of daily existence. When religion becomes purely supernatural, it risks drifting away from real experience. Rituals stand apart, confined to isolated moments and to a different sphere of experience, without shaping the flow of everyday life. By establishing a vast halachic world that speaks to every dimension of human experience—and does so through rational categories—the Torah ensures that our religious life, and with it our awareness of Hashem, permeates the ordinary moments of each day.

Finally, the rationalist strain shaped our national experience as well. As a people, we were consistently practical, seeking rational and workable responses to the struggles we faced. We did not retreat into prophecy or supernatural expectation; we confronted reality with resolve and looked for practical solutions.

THE MASORAH OF NISTAR — SUPERNATURALISM

Yet just as the world of nigleh formed the foundation of our Masorah, the realm of nistar also shaped our national identity. At key moments in Jewish history, nistar offered insight and direction, becoming especially influential during three pivotal eras of Jewish history.

In the wake of the destruction of the Second Mikdash and the brutal persecution of our people under Rome, R. Shimon bar Yochai’s

Zohar affirmed our unbreakable bond with Hashem. Even as it seemed that Hashem had departed from Yerushalayim and abandoned His people, the Zohar spoke of a mystical union between Hashem and Israel. The rational world felt dark and desolate, but in the hidden world that union remained whole. In that realm, the marriage was unshaken. The Zohar offered hope and resilience during one of the bleakest chapters of Jewish history.

Fast forward thirteen hundred years. Our people had endured four centuries of hardship—pogroms, Crusader massacres, blood libels, and relentless discrimination throughout Western Europe. This culminated in the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth century. The Jewish world was torn apart and scattered across the globe.

In this setting, the Ari HaKadosh articulated central elements of Kabbalah that spoke to a world already broken from the very start of creation. He described a cosmos shaped by *shevirat ha-keilim*, a primordial fracture that set the stage for human experience. He also emphasized that human beings play an active role in repairing this broken reality, and that suffering—tragic as it is—forms part of the process of *tikkun*. This language offered a different way to view a shattered world. It provided meaning and became deeply resonant as our people slowly began to recover from the trauma of three centuries of persecution.

In the eighteenth century, Chassidut drew upon the redemptive elements of Kabbalah and the world of nistar. By then, Jewish exile felt long, dark, and increasingly hopeless. The Jewish world seemed to fray under internal conflict and external pressure, as though we

were drifting farther from redemption rather than moving toward it. Chassidut, by invoking Kabbalah, reminded us that redemption is not measured only by what the eye can discern. Every Jew carries a spark of Hashem within—not merely being created in His image, but bearing His presence. Even those who appeared distant or sinful remained bound to an intimate relationship with Hashem, and that bond enabled them to take part in a hidden yet profoundly redemptive drama.

Our Masorah has always offered both a rational world of nighleh and a non-empirical world of Kabbalah—two distinct lenses through which we view reality. For the most part, the rational lens remained dominant, though different cultures incorporated varying degrees of mystical thought into their religious consciousness. At crucial points in our long exile, the lens of Kabbalah became essential for processing a world that appeared random, irrational, and harshly discriminatory toward our people. ■



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