

**BADERECH****RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASC
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Chanukah: With Eyes to See

The *heilige* Ribnitzer Rebbe, Reb Chaim Zanzvil Abramowitz, zy'a, was an extraordinary *tzadik* and a legendary *baal avodah*, renown for his sacrifice for Yidishkeit, personal holiness and powerful blessings. Describing the Ribnitzer's righteousness, Reb Shlomo Freifeld, zt'l, Rosh Yeshivah of Shor Yoshuv, said meeting him was like meeting a *tzadik* from the days of the Baal Shem Tov.

A young couple once gave birth to a child with severe medical complications, including a progressive and irreversible loss of eyesight. With every passing month the darkness closed in further, and the doctors warned that complete blindness was inevitable. Shattered and desperate, the father, Reb Nachum, decided before Chanukah to travel to Monsey and bring the little boy to the Ribnitzer. He hoped that somehow the days of miracles might shine for them as well.

When he arrived for the Rebbe's *hadlakas neiros*, the room was jammed wall-to-wall with chassidim straining to see the *tzadik* kindle the holy flames. Unable to get anywhere near the front, Reb Nachum stood

at the back, clutching his child. As the Ribnitzer cried out the *brachos* in a voice that shook the walls, something within the father moved him. He suddenly lifted his son high into the air, facing the Rebbe's direction, in the line of vision of the Chanukah candles, as if to place the child into the embrace of those sacred lights.

The Ribnitzer was known to sit motionless after lighting, lost in deep *dveykus* for long stretches. But this time, something utterly uncharacteristic happened. The Rebbe paused. He turned. Rising from his place, from across the crowded room, his eyes locked onto the child being held aloft. Seeing this, Reb Nachum kept holding his son high, trembling, as the Ribnitzer shifted his intense gaze back and forth, from the flames...to the child...to the flames...to the child, again and again, as if drawing light from the menorah and sending it toward the little boy.

Only after several long moments did the Ribnitzer return fully to the glowing candles, sinking back into his holy silence. And then the miracle revealed itself.

Within minutes, Reb Nachum saw what no doctor had ever allowed him to hope for. His son began responding to light — first subtly, then unmistakably. Over the coming days, the darkness lifted entirely. Against every medical prediction, the child regained full

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eyesight.

A Chanukah *neis*, hidden in the crowd, was carried by the gaze of a tzadik and the light of the menorah.

Hilchos Chanukah of the Rambam opens in a strikingly unusual way. Before presenting a single halachic detail, there are three full *halachos* dedicated to recounting the historical background. These cover the harsh decrees of the Greeks, the desecration of the Mikdash, and ultimately the miraculous victory of the Chashmonaim and the restoration of Jewish autonomy in Eretz Yisrael for more than two hundred years, until the destruction of Bayis Sheini. (*Hilchos Megillah v'Chanukah*, 3:1-3).

The Hasmonean dynasty, glorious in its origins, ultimately descended into corruption, internal strife, and even open violations of Torah and *halachah*. Hardly the ideal *malchus* rooted in holiness, it is striking that the Rambam chose to emphasize the political background as part of our celebration of this beloved *moed*.

Rav Yehuda Amital, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, uncovers a profound insight within the Rambam's framing. He explains that the obligation of *hallel v'hodaah*, expressing praise and gratitude for Hashem on Chanukah, is not dependent on achieving the final, perfect Geulah with the arrival of Mashiach; it is not all-or-nothing. Rather, whenever the Jewish People merit even a partial return, even imperfect sovereignty — even a life in Eretz Yisrael where Jews can live as Jews — that itself demands gratitude and song.

To illustrate this, Rav Amital points to the prophetic description of Geulah in

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Zecharyah (8:4-5):

כה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת, עוֹד יִשְׁבוּ זָקְנִים וְזָקֵנֹת בְּרִחוּבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם... וּרְחוּבוֹת הָעִיר יִמְלְאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת, מִשְׁחָקִים בְּרִחוּבֶיהָ.

“Thus says Hashem Tzevakos: Elderly men and elderly women shall yet again dwell in the streets of Yerushalayim... And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in Her streets.”

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Children playing outside and elderly men and women relaxing on benches hardly seems like a grand vision of redemption and the fulfilment of two thousand years of Messianic dreams. This, however, explains Rav Amital, is exactly the point: *geulah* is not only in open miracles or political perfection. It is also to be seen in normal Jewish life returning to Yerushalayim, a reality in which children and their grandparents can stroll and enjoy without fear, where the streets are filled with laughter.

A *geulah* of this description is one that we have, in fact, begun to experience. It is real and within reach. This simple presence, Jewish life lived naturally in the Land, is itself an aspect of redemption. Although it is not the *Complete* *Geulah* which we continue to daven for each day, it is nonetheless a meaningful level, for which we are obligated in *hallel v'hodaah*.

This perhaps is why the Rambam, with such care and precision, opens Hilchos Chanukah with a historical excursus that reads more like *Sefer Maccabim* than *Mishneh Torah*. He is showing us that the miracle of Chanukah is not only the spiritual light of the menorah, it is the gift of even partial sovereignty, the ability to live as Jews in our Land. We must acknowledge this, and we

must give thanks.

We have actually become accustomed to considering God's Hand to be revealed through a miraculous process unfolding within the confines of nature and the 'rules' of this world, including political processes, and military and economic successes.

Chanukah reminds us that while there is reason to celebrate such natural events that move us toward salvation, we can also hope and pray for miracles that are beyond nature. A flask of oil can last eight days, a band of brothers untrained in warfare can defeat an entire empire, blindness can be cured, we can become unstuck, saved, and completely redeemed.

As we bask in the illuminating days of Chanukah, may we have eyes to see and give thanks for the small miracles and signs of redemption multiplying around us. May it be that the greatest and most awesome miracles, healings and lights are yet to come. May all those who are injured in body or soul, or lack for any material or spiritual good become whole, and may we see, with our own eyes, complete victory, revealed good, open miracles and the *אולה השלימה* והאמיתית! ■



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