

Parashat Miketz - Shabbat Chanukah 5772, 2011:

“Hashem Hu HaElokim!” (“Hashem is the one and only G-d!”)

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, my sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, and Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

Chanukah is an amazing time. The victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian-Greeks enabled us to have the rededicated *Beit HaMikdash* in our control for a period of approximately 200 years. *Chazal*, in the well-known *baraita* “*Mai Chanukah,*” (*Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 21b*), focus almost entirely upon the spiritual victory of the Maccabean revolt (the miracle of the ritually pure oil), and barely mention the military-political victory that was won by the heroic gesture of the Maccabees on the field of battle. *Chazal*’s message is very clear: It is complete faith in the words of the prophet Zechariah (4:6): “*Lo b’chail, v’lo b’koach ki im b’ruchi amar Hashem Tzivakot*” (“Not through an army nor through strength, but through My spirit said Hashem Tzivakot”), rather than any fleeting victory, that must always remain our point of focus.

Chanukah is, beyond question, the most “successful” of the festivals that appear on the Jewish calendar, since nearly anyone who has any connection whatsoever to Judaism lights a menorah. Somehow, and for some probably mystical reason, Chanukah has maintained a permanent grip upon the Jewish psyche. Since this is the case, it is not surprising that even the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) in *Hilchot Chanukah*, IV:12, waxes rhapsodic in his presentation of the singular importance of the Chanukah lights:

The commandment of *Ner Chanukah* is an extremely beloved commandment. A

person must be very careful regarding it in order to publicize the miracle and to add to the praise of G-d and to give thanks to Him for the miracles that He did for us.

The Rambam, however, does not stop with these stirring words. He continues and proclaims the obligatory character of *Ner Chanukah* for even the poorest members of Jewish society: “Even if one has nothing to eat other than that which is provided to him from charity, he must borrow [money] or sell his clothing and purchase oil and wicks and light.” The obligation for a poor person to sell his clothing in order to fulfill this *mitzvah* is unparalleled in the rest of Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*. Indeed, one would have thought that he would have stated a similar obligation by the four cups of wine that are drunk at the Seder, since they, too, represent *parsumai nisa* (publicizing of the miracle). Yet, one searches in vain for them and merely finds: “Even the poor person who survives upon charity should not have less than four cups [of wine.] (*Hilchot Chametz u’Matzah*, 7:7) Glaringly absent are the words “sell his clothing.” The question, of course, is: “Why is the commandment of *Ner Chanukah* different from all other commandments?” In a word: “Why, according to the Rambam, are we duty bound, if need be, to sell the clothes off our backs in order to fulfill this commandment, when no other *mitzvah* makes such a claim upon us?”

The question is probably better than any answer that might be suggested. None-the-less, perhaps the following insight of Rav Eliahu ben Shlomo Zalman, the Vilna Gaon, *zatzal* (1720-1797) gives us a glimpse into the inimitable character of Chanukah. A very careful reading of the first three verses of the Torah reveals that the 25th word of the Torah is “*Or*” (light). Chanukah begins on the 25th day of Kislev! There are no coincidences in the Torah. Therefore, according to the Vilna Gaon, the light of Chanukah was foreshadowed

and, so to speak, “pre-ordained” at the time of the creation of the world! This then, may very well be part of the reason why Chanukah demands “even the clothes off our backs.” By lighting the menorah we are bearing testimony that Hashem is the one and only “*borei haolom*” (Creator of the World). Just as He created the world, it is He and no other that rules the world. Chanukah, therefore, ultimately carries the message that we proclaim seven times at the close of Yom Kippur: “*Hashem Hu HaElokim!*” (“Hashem is the one and only G-d!”) In my view, this is the essence of what we declare when we light the menorah. Thus, when we have no other choice, the proclamation of such a message is surely worth even the clothes off our backs!

May it be G-d’s will and our desire, that this Chanukah we will emulate the Maccabees, and rededicate ourselves to His holy service. May we, too, bring His light into the world for all to see, and encourage all of mankind to join us in declaring, “*Hashem Hu HaElokim!*” *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *Chanukah Sameach!*

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