

The Weekly Farbrengens

MERKAZ ANASH
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EDITOR - RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

CHANUKAH

A LUMINOUS TIME

In the household of Reb Dovid of Tolna, *hadlokas haneirois* was a special event. His chassidim would gather excitedly in his house to take part in the lighting of his golden *menora*, which was an elaborate piece of artistic craftsmanship. One year, on the first night of Chanukah, when the *tzaddik* was ready to light it, he turned to one of his chassidim and said, "Your wife is short, isn't she? When you want to speak to her, what do you do? Do you bend over towards her, or does she raise herself up to your height?" Without waiting for an answer, he recited the *berachos* and lit the *menora*. Needless to say, the chossid and all those present were very puzzled.

During this time, Reb Dovid's great nephew, Reb Mordechai Dov of Hornisteipol, was staying at his home, and seeing the confusion of the chassidim, he explained: The *Gemara* says that "The Shechina does not descend lower than ten *tefachim* from the ground." However, there is an exception to this rule, for the Chanuka *menora* is ideally required to be lower than ten *tefachim*, and it brings the Shechina itself here below. Reb Mordechai concluded by quoting from the *AriZal* that this is the deeper meaning of the words of the *Gemara*, 'If your wife is short, you should bend over and whisper to her.'

The following evening, at the time of *hadlokas haneiros*, Reb Dovid again made some puzzling comment to one of his chassidim. Immediately, though he had not been told of the previous night's explanation, he turned to Reb Mordechai and said, "This time, you will not understand as you did yesterday!"

(סיפורי חסידים זיון מועדים ע' 281)

In *Haneiros Halalu* we say that we have no permission to use the lights, only to look at them ("*elo lir'oisn bilvad*"). This can mean that gazing at the lights is actually a benefit, healing any damage the eyes have incurred from seeing improper images, and protects one for the future. In fact many *tzaddikim* would sit and gaze at the *licht* as they burned.

(ש"ת שב יעקב סי' כב, זרע קודש - ראפשיץ)

After kindling the Chanukah *licht*, the Rebbe Rashab would sit near them for half an hour and learn, though at a slight distance, in order not to benefit from its light. He would learn *Gemara*, wherever he was holding in his learning of Shas.

The Rebbe explained that this practice highlights the special connection of Torah to light, and is a lesson for everyone - Chanukah is a time to increase one's learning. Furthermore, since the Yevanim wished to prevent us from studying Torah, we respond by increasing our study.

(רשימות הימון ע' שכג, תר"מ תשמ"ב ח"ב ע' 618)

CONSIDER

Why is it specifically the light of Chanukah that draws the Shechinah below ten *tefachim*?

How do we distinguish between "pure Yiddishe light" and "contaminated *goyishkeit*" when they both incorporate the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos?

The Rebbe explained that Chanukah is an opportune time to increase one's Torah study and *shemiras hamitzvos*, since the *nes* was related to those *ruchniyusdike* matters. One should especially upgrade one's *yiras Shomayim*, for that is the purpose of Torah and *mitzvos*, and that was what the *Yevanim* were particularly opposed to.

This we can learn from the way in which we light an additional candle every night. During Chanukah, one should increase one's contributions to *tzedaka* and study more Torah than usual.

Through the *mitzva* of *neirois* Chanukah, one is granted the light of Torah.

(התועודיות תשמ"ח ח"ב ע' 67, התועודיות תשמ"ד ח"ב ע' 596)

THE WAR OF THE YEVANIM

The goal of the *Yevanim* was "*lehashkicham torasecha*

uleha'aviram meichukei retzonecha" ("to make them forget Your Torah and transgress the decrees of Your will"). As the *Midrash* says, the *Yevanim* demanded the *Yidden* write that they have no part in *HaShem*. This was a war against *HaShem*. "Let them study Torah," said the Greeks. "Let them practice the *mitzvos*, *mishpatim*, and *eiduyos*, but they must not mention that the Torah is *HaShem's* and that the *mitzvos* are the decrees of His will. Torah and *mitzvos* must be severed from *HaShem*."

(היום יום ב' טבת)

The Rebbe explained how the goal of the *Yevanim* and the *misyavnim* was to remove the separation that exists between *Yidden* and *goyim*, and to educate children to be similar to the other nations. This is more severe than placing decrees against the observance of Torah and *mitzvos*, because its effect remains even after the decree is over. It begins with something 'small', through 'lighting up' the way for a child with 'oil' that is contaminated with *goyishkeit*, claiming that it produces the same light. When one educates children improperly, drawing 'light' from a source which is not pure, this leads a child to become a *Misyaven R"L*.

The lesson from Chanukah is: when lighting up *Yiddishe* homes, one must use only pure *Yiddishe* light, uncontaminated by any *goyishkeit*. By doing so, with *mesirus nefesh* (not giving in to the majority, who also appear to be stronger), we will be victorious, for *HaShem* is on our side.

(לקו"ש ח"כ ע' 438)

At a children's rally the Rebbe pointed out the war against the *Yevanim* in our times. During the time of Chanukah, the *Chashmona'im* withstood a tremendous challenge, battling a mighty army with *mesirus nefesh*. Today's *nisyonos* are not as formidable, but are of a different nature. The *Yetzer hara* comes to a child and tells him to spend his time playing games like others around him, thus causing him to forget to learn Torah. Or he will try to convince him to eat a candy which others are eating, even though its *kashrus* is uncertain. In such a situation, the child must act strongly, with *mesirus nefesh*, no matter how exciting or enticing the challenge is, and then he will certainly be victorious.

(ז' חנוכה תשל"ה, לקו"ש ח"כ ע' 483)

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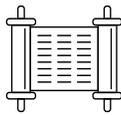
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MENORAH PLACEMENT

Where should yeshiva students light their Chanukah menorah?

In Talmudic times, the menorah was lit outside at the entrance to one's courtyard, and if it was missing, passerby may think he didn't light. The Rosh, therefore, writes that one must light by the home where he sleeps, even if he consistently eats elsewhere with his relatives, since the passerby don't know he eats somewhere else.¹ The Rashba, however, rules that nowadays one should light in the location where he normally eats.²

In Shulchan Aruch, the Mechaber rules that one lights by the room where he sleeps. The Rama writes that today when we light completely indoors, and passerby won't notice whether or not he lit, the custom is to light where one normally eats, and perhaps even the Rosh would agree to this.³

How does this apply to a *bochur* who sleeps in the dormitory and eats in the lunchroom?

Some contemporary *poskim* hold that he should light in the lunchroom, following the simple reading of the Rama.⁴ Others argue that the primary place is the dormitory where he sleeps, as he would prefer to eat there as well if only he could.⁵ Additionally, unlike a personal dining room, the yeshiva's lunchroom is not in use most of the day.⁶

Reb Moshe Feinstein and many others rule to light in the dormitory, especially since a dormitory room is allocated to the *bochur* more specifically.⁷ It is also interesting to note the Rebbe's recommendation that children should light near their bedroom.⁸ However, whenever there is a safety concern, he should light in the lunchroom.⁹

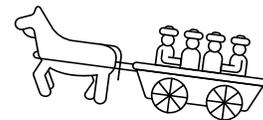
It can be noted that contemporary *batei midrash (zal)*—where one snacks occasionally as well—are also considered the students' "home" and the menorah can be lit there.¹⁰ Moreover, there is more *pirsumei nisa* there than in the lunchroom and it has an advantage in this respect.¹¹

In conclusion, yeshiva students should preferably light in the dormitory if allowed by *hanhala*. If there are safety concerns, they should light in the lunchroom, or better yet, by the *zal*.

1. טור או"ח סי' תרע"ז בשם אביו הרא"ש.
 2. שו"ת הרשב"א ח"א סי' תקמ"א-ב.
 3. שו"ע או"ח שם ס"א.
 4. ראה ס' מצות נר איש וביתו סי' ה' ס"ט אות כ"ד.
 5. ראה שו"ת ישיח יצחק סי' שנ"א.
 6. שו"ת בדי הארון או"ח סי' כ"ז ע"פ ט"ז סי' תרע"ז סק"ב.
 7. אג"מ או"ח ח"ד סי' ע'. וכן פסק מקראי קודש חנוכה הע' צ"ח (בשם הגר"מ אליהו ע"ה ומו"ז ח"ו סי' ח').
 8. תו"מ תשמ"ח ע' 64.
 9. ראה ס' באהלה של תורה ח"ב סי' ק"א (וכן מובא בהליכות שלמה מועדים ח"א ע' רע"ג).
 10. ראה שו"ת שבה"ל ח"ג סי' פ"ג.
 11. מקראי קודש חנוכה ע' ק'.

לע"נ מרת ציפא אסתר בת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה

Our Heroes



R. VELVEL VILENKER

R. Zev Volf (Velvel) Vilenker (c. 5535-c. 5621) was originally from Vilna, and became a chasid of the Alter Rebbe under the influence of his older brother, R. Moshe Vilenker. The Friediker Rebbe described R. Velvel as possessing "a brilliant mind, a warm heart, and an *oved Hashem* with complete *bitul*." He lived in Vitebsk where he was a wealthy businessman, helping many of Anash to earn a living. The famous chossid R. Avraham Abba Person was married to R. Zev's granddaughter and heard many stories from him, which he related to the Friediker Rebbe.

Having been drawn to Chassidus by his brother R. Moshe who was 21 years his senior, R. Velvel once said to him, "You always share with me Torah that you heard from the Alter Rebbe. Tell me once of a miracle that the Rebbe performed."

R. Moshe replied, "I'm giving you from the 'cream of oil' and you want the toenails?!"

(סה"מ אידיש ע' 310)

R. Velvel shared how he once walked by as the Alter Rebbe was learning in his room, and at that moment he felt clearly that "*ein od milvado*," there is nothing besides Hashem. A trace of this belief remained with him for the rest of his life.

(למען ידעו ע' 270)

R. Velvel dealt in brokering contracts and, to this end, he would travel across Russia. During his travels, he would often encounter opponents of Chassidus.

At a gathering, R. Velvel shared, "The backbone of chassidim is the feeling and preciousness for a chassidic story, a chassidic niggun and a closed-eyed *dveikus* dance." The Rebbe Rashab praised this *vort*.

(סה"מ תש"ט ע' 555)

R. Velvel once shared about himself, "The Rebbe's look impacted me that I shouldn't speak a word without thinking first." Whenever he could suffice with motioning, he would not speak. His words were calculated, and he used them only for necessary matters.

(אג"ק ריי"צ ח"א ע' 314)

A Moment with The Rebbe



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At the *kabalas panim* of Dr. Avrohom Aba Zeligson, on the 5th night of Chanukah 5712 (1951), the Rebbe spoke at length on the concept of *mesiras nefesh*.

"In the story of Chanukah, since the *kedusha* of *Klal Yisroel* was in peril, the *Yidden* simply transcended all calculations to save the future generations. Likewise, today, when one builds a home, the future of *Klal Yisroel* lies in his hands.

"And just as then," the Rebbe concluded, "it was a woman that saved the day, so too in the home, it is the woman who leads the home."

A non-chassidic *rov* who was seated at the table was very impressed with the Rebbe's words. This was at the beginning of the *nesius*, and the broader public was just getting to know the Rebbe. After the *sicha*, he struck up a conversation with the Rebbe, and thanked him for his clear delivery of Chassidus concepts.

As the conversation progressed, the Rebbe said to him, "The idea of *mesiras nefesh* must be discussed, particularly in America!"

(*Toras Menachem*, Vol. 4, p. 236)

☎ PHONE 347.471.1770
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