

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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CHANUKAH MIRACLES

In the text of *haneiros halolu* said after lighting the menorah there is an interesting change. In the opening phrase we say, “We light these candles ועל הנפלאות ועל הנסים, ועל התשועות, ועל הנפלאות ועל הנסים, ועל התשועות, ועל הנפלאות ועל הנסים, ועל התשועות—for the *deliverances*, *miracles*, and *wonders* You have performed for us in those days at this time.” In the concluding phrase, however, the order of these three terms is changed: “To thank and praise Your great name, ועל ישועותיך, ועל נפלאותיך, ועל נסיםיך, ועל נפלאותיך, ועל נסיםיך, ועל ישועותיך—for your *miracles*, *wonders*, and *deliverances*.”

What is the reason for this change of sequence?

DELIVERANCES, MIRACLES, AND WONDERS

In the first part of the Chanukah story, the Chashmona'im conducted guerrilla warfare against the Greeks. In the scattered clashes that took place, the two sides were generally of equal strength, and there was no need for a *miracle* to win the war. However, it was still necessary to rely on Hashem's *deliverance* to vanquish the enemy.

Later, the Greeks gathered their forces and amassed in huge numbers to combat the miniscule Chashmona'i army. There was no chance of winning the war in the natural order, and hence the victory was *miraculous*.

When the Chashmona'im arrived at the Beis Hamikdash, they searched until they found a single flask of untouched oil. This, too, was not an outright miracle that defied nature, but it was still a *wonder* that the Greeks contaminated every flask and still overlooked this one.

Finally, the oil lasted for eight days, until new oil could be procured. This was indeed a *miracle* as well.

CHANGE OF SEQUENCE

This explains the change in the order these terms are mentioned in *haneiros halolu*.

The first part of *haneiros halolu* is describing the events that took place “*in those days* at this time [of year],” so the terms are listed in chronological order: First there was the initial *deliverance* of subduing the Greeks, then the *miracle* of winning the major battle, and then the *wonder* of finding the flask. This was then

followed by yet a greater miracle, the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days, but the word *miracles* mentioned earlier includes this miracle as well.

The end of *haneiros halolu*, however, is describing our reaction to these occurrences, expressed with our thanks to and praise of Hashem. The events are therefore listed in a different order, based on what will elicit this reaction more easily: When one sees a *miracle* he must certainly thank Hashem; not only that, but even seeing a *wonder* should elicit such a reaction; and even more, even experiencing a (mere) *deliverance* is sufficient reason to praise Hashem's great name.



MECHANICS OF A MIRACLE

What exactly were the mechanics of the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days? The Beis Yosef provides three possibilities:

1. Each night they poured an eighth of the oil in the flask into the menorah. They were sure that the reason they had found the flask was because Hashem wanted to enable them to light the menorah with pure oil, and since they knew it would take eight days until new oil would be prepared, they divided the oil into eight sections. Miraculously, this small amount was enough to burn the entire night.
2. Not wanting to rely on a miracle, they poured all the contents of the flask into the menorah on the first night, and miraculously the flask remained full.
3. They poured all the contents of the flask into the cups of the menorah, and the next morning, the cups miraculously remained full.

Seemingly, the last two ways are essentially the same. While according to the first option the oil itself burned for longer, the last two options both state that the oil remained complete. What's the difference if the oil remained full in the flask or in the cups?

DISPLAY OF AFFECTION

The Rebbe explains that there is a difficulty with each one of the first two explanations.

According to the first explanation, they only poured an eighth of the oil into the menorah each night. This poses a halachic problem, because halacha requires sufficient oil to be poured into the cups that can last the entire night.

We can answer this question by saying that in a challenging scenario such as this one, this requirement can be waived. However, this does not completely clarify the matter. The reason Hashem caused them to find a flask of pure oil—even though impure oil may be used if (most of) the congregation is impure—is because Hashem wanted to display His affection for *Bnei Yisrael*, allowing them to fulfill the mitzvah in the best possible way. This being the case, He surely enabled them to fulfill the mitzvah without any halachic difficulties!

The second explanation, that the flask remained full, is difficult as well. The Torah says that the menorah must be lit with *shemen zayis*, olive oil. According to this explanation, the replenished oil that was poured into the menorah the second night was miracle oil, not olive oil!

Here as well, we can answer that *shemen zayis* isn't limited to oil that comes from olives, but can also include oil that shares the characteristics of olive oil. However, this would mean that they needed to rely on *lomdus*—some Talmudic argument—to validate the lighting of the menorah. Such a miracle falls short of being one that fully displays Hashem's affection for *Bnei Yisrael*.

A MIRACULOUS PARADOX

The third explanation of the Beis Yosef—that the cups remained full—avoids these difficulties. According to this explanation, *all* the oil was poured into the cups, but miraculously the flames did not consume the oil and the cups remained full (similar to the miracle of the burning bush, where the fire did not consume the bush). The oil that remained was thus *natural* oil.

However, this explanation can be questioned as well: The flame must be a result of the *consumption* of the oil, as the *possuk* says that the oil should be *la'maor*—for the sake of lighting. According to this explanation, the flame was not a product of the oil. A miraculous fire descended from Heaven, and it just happened to be held by the oil!

The Rebbe answers that according to this explanation, both phenomena happened at once: on the one hand the fire consumed the oil, and at the same time the oil remained complete. As to the question how both things can work together, this itself was the marvel of the miracle: the fire was a product of the oil, yet the oil did not decrease. (This can be compared to the *aron*, which both occupied space yet did not diminish the measurements of the *Kodesh Hakodoshim*.)

THE LESSON OF CHANUKAH

The Beis Yosef is thus offering three explanations: (1) The fire was a product of the oil, but the amount of oil that would normally last for one day burnt at a slower pace and lasted for eight days. (2) The flask remained full after the oil was poured into the cups of the menorah. However, according to this explanation, the new oil was miraculous and not natural. (3) The

oil did not decrease, and thus remained natural oil, yet at the same time the flames were a product of the oil.

Interestingly, while the third explanation entails the greatest *miracle* of all, it is the one that satisfies the requirement of using completely *natural* oil!

This demonstrates that everything that occurs below is orchestrated from Above.

In certain events Hashem's hand is somewhat concealed (as it is with a *deliverance*), sometimes it is more apparent (as it is with a *wonder*), and at times it is completely felt (as it is with a *miracle*, and especially a miracle such as this one!).

Chanukah thus teaches us that we must thank Hashem for everything we experience, even those events where we don't see his intervention as clearly, because in truth everything transcends nature. This in turn should inspire us to go beyond our nature in the manner we serve Hashem.

For further study, see *Lekutei Sichos*, Vol. 15, pp. 183ff., 366ff.

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