



KOL TODA

Gateways to Gratitude: Giving Thanks to Hashem

NATURAL MIRACLES

The month of Kislev reminds us of those special days ahead – days when darkness is illuminated with splendid, awe-inspiring, brightness – the days of Chanuka. During the eight days of this festival, we kindle lights every evening to commemorate our nation's spiritual victory over the Greek empire, and the Miracle of the Oil – one jug of pure oil, with just enough oil to burn for one day, burned in the Menora for eight full days, until pure new oil could be produced.

The Alter of Kelm, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, in his work "*Chochma U'Mussar*" (part II, chapter 61), notes the question posed by the Beis Yosef, Rabbi Yosef Karo, regarding the number of days we celebrate Chanuka: Why was the festival of Chanuka enacted for eight days? Surely the miracle of the oil was a miracle of seven days alone, since there was enough oil to burn naturally for one day?

The Alter of Kelm explains: "Something one is used to ceases to be wondrous to him. One is not amazed by everyday occurrences and does not tend to recognize the Creator behind them. But when one beholds a new phenomenon – such as oil that should "naturally" burn for one day, but burns for eight days – he is immediately awed and recognizes the *Yad Hashem* behind the miracle."

There is a well-known story found in the Gemara (*Taanis* 25a): Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's daughter had prepared her lights for Shabbos and by mistake had filled the lamp with vinegar instead of oil. That Friday evening, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa saw that his daughter was sad. "Why are you sad?" he asked. "I mixed up the oil and the vinegar jugs. Now we will have to eat our Shabbos meal in the dark." Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa calmed her, saying: "He Who made the oil burn can make the vinegar burn." And indeed, that is what happened. The vinegar burned brightly, as if it were oil. It burned all day until the next evening, and they took fire from it to light the *Havdala* candle.

The Alter of Kelm further explains: "[In contemplating] the [open] miracle of the oil that burned in the Menora, one recognizes that 'He Who told the oil to burn will tell the vinegar to burn' – and from here, he clearly recognizes that the oil that burned on the first day was also by the Word of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who told it to burn, and thus was actually by way of a miracle.

"Even though on the first day, the oil burned in the Menora naturally and not by way of an [open] miracle, lighting on the first day of Chanuka was established to correspond with the first day the oil burned in the Menora, to reveal to us this [hidden] miracle – in order to proclaim that everything that occurs 'naturally' is only by *hashgacha Hashem*, Divine Providence, and thus is also in essence a miracle."

This is the reason for celebrating the first day of Chanuka to correspond with the first day the oil burned in the Menora: so we can internalize that **every "natural" occurrence is indeed a miracle – it is a Divinely orchestrated event.** As Rabbi Tarfon stated, oil can burn only because Hashem said it should – and that too, is a miracle.

The Ramban (on *parashas Bo*, *Shemos* 13:16) writes: "And from the great public miracles, man comes to **acknowledge Hashem for the hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah.** A person does not have a portion in the Torah of Moshe Rabbenu until he believes that all our matters and circumstances are miracles, without any connection to nature or to the way of the world, in matters both communal and private."

On Chanuka, we say in the prayer of "*Al HaNissim*," "For the Miracles": "**...v'kavu shemonas yemei Chanuka eilu l'hodos ulhalleil..., and they established these eight days of Chanuka to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.**"

Why did *Chazal* designate specifically on Chanuka that we should praise Hashem in recognition that nature is also part of Divine Providence and thus in essence a miracle for

which we should give thanks to Hashem?

Rabbi Dovid Cohen, *shlit"a*, Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, in his work "*Yemei HaChanuka*," explains the matter based on the Ramban: Since we come to acknowledge *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's hashgacha* of nature by contemplating His open miracles, Chanuka – during which we proclaim the open miracles of Hashem as demonstrated by the jug of oil – is thus the appropriate time to learn to give thanks to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for His *hashgacha* of nature and His hidden miracles.

This message bears great relevance to our everyday lives.

We say every day in our *tefilla* (*Shemoneh Esrei*): "*Modim anachnu Lach...*, We thank You...for Your miracles that are with us every day..." On this, Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Finkel, *ztz"l*, in his work *Nesivos Mussar* (70:28), says that when a person is eating, he should feel as if he is eating the Manna that fell in the Wilderness, and that when he is drinking, that he is drinking the water that sprang from the rock, just as our forefathers did when they walked in the Wilderness. The food that we eat and drink is also a miracle; the natural is also a miracle.

May we always have the clarity to see the constant miracles and wonders that Hashem does for us at all times and every day. May we internalize the feeling that everything that occurs in our lives, day and night, does not occur naturally, rather they are all miracles of Hashem. And may this exalted awareness fill our hearts with song, and inspire us to give more and more praise and thanks to our Creator for all that He did, He does, and will do for us.



Yehoshua Wiseman

A WORD OF GRATITUDE

"A Jew's day begins with *Modeh Ani*, "I gratefully thank You, living and eternal King..." which is recited immediately upon awakening, even before washing, when one's hands are impure, for no impurities in the world can mar a Jewish person's gratitude...." (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

IT'S ALL A GIFT

The violinist ran his bow over the strings and soft music floated through the wedding hall. All the guests were seated at their places, and the parents of the bride and groom were exchanging good wishes with everyone. Chaim was seated at an empty side table. There was nobody sitting next to him. He presumed it was because he had come so early to this wedding, but still he felt lonely sitting there.

Suddenly, his eyes spotted one of the most venerated rabbis the generation had known, Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Revikov, ztz"l, known by all as "HaSandlar", "The Shoemaker." How had the *ba'alei simcha* merited to have him join in their *simcha*? His blessings, his *yiras Shamayim*, and his Torah genius were renowned.

Chaim's awe mounted as he watched this great rabbi make his way over to Chaim's own table. Was he really going to sit next to him, simple Chaim?! How? What deed could he have possibly done to merit having this great *tzaddik* sit next to him?

This was an amazing opportunity he could not miss. He would take advantage of every moment while sitting alongside the *tzaddik*.

"Please, Rabbi," he said, inching over to where the rabbi was seated, "please tell me something, a Torah thought, some encouragement that will go along with me always. I am going through a difficult time at home just now, and I really could use some strengthening words to revive my spirit."

Rabbi Moshe Yaakov lifted his eyes to look at Chaim. He held his intense gaze for two minutes and then said what seemed to be

slightly accusing, "Encouragement? Is that what you want? Did you know that in my hometown there was a Jew who was willing to pay thousands of rubles just to see me; and you, is that nothing for you?"

Chaim was sure his ears were playing tricks on him. Or was it the music that made the words sound warbled? He could not have heard correctly.

"Perhaps the rabbi can repeat what he just said," he whispered, and Rabbi Moshe Yaakov repeated his words in a loud, clear voice. "Yes, yes. I said that a Jew in my hometown was willing to pay thousands of rubles just to see me; and you, for you it is nothing?"

Chaim was perplexed. HaSandlar was known by all to be exceedingly humble and simple. He was known for his exemplary *middos*. What was he saying? What did he mean?

"Do you hear?" the rabbi went on, oblivious to Chaim's puzzlement. "Thousands of rubles this Jew was willing to pay, for he was blind. He would pay any price to see me and any other person, to be able to see something. And you, my dear friend, does Hashem's gift mean nothing to you? Did you thank Hashem today for the amazing camera that you have in your eyes? Did you sing and dance in gratitude for what you have? You should know," he lowered his voice, as if about to tell a secret, "if you wish to live a life of joy and happiness, remember to always thank Hashem for the seemingly simple gifts that He gives you – your life, health, and countless other blessings. After such expressions of gratitude, you will feel calm, happy, and joyful and have the energy to deal with life's hurdles."

Rabbi Moshe Yaakov shook Chaim's hand warmly. He walked out of the wedding hall in his usual simplicity, leaving Chaim smiling in his seat, raising his eyes heavenward gratefully, and whispering, "Thank You!"

We are all armed with our multiple requests, ready and waiting to beg the *Ribbono Shel Olam* to fulfill them. Let us not forget, before beginning with our tears and pleading, to leave time for thanking Hashem. Let us thank Hashem for the year that went by, for the gift of life. Let us close our eyes and remember all the prayers that He answered over and beyond our expectations. Let us thank Hashem for the wonderful deeds we are able to do, and our words of gratitude will soar up to Hashem and give Him *nachas ruach*.

"BUT THE RIGHTEOUS WILL GIVE THANKS TO YOUR NAME..." (TEHILLIM 140:14)

The holy Rabbi Yosef Yozl Horowitz, ztz"l, the founder of the Novardok method in *mussar* study, built for himself a little room in the forest near his home, as his way was to spend the long nights in seclusion immersed in Torah, *tefilla*, and *teshuva*. One night, he was sitting and studying in his little candle-lit room. The long shadows flit across the uneven walls of his tiny room as he swayed over the large tomes and filled the room with the singing of ages. Suddenly the song ended. A draft had blown out the candle. The room was shrouded in black inky darkness but Rabbi Yosef Yozl had no matches with which to re-light the candle. Placing his trust in Hashem, Rabbi Yosef Yozl decided to wait for Hashem's deliverance. He walked out of his little room into the black forest, waiting to see how Hashem would assist him.

Rabbi Yosef Yozl was standing there, wondering what would happen next, when a man seemingly stepped out from between the trees, handed him a lit candle, and then disappeared. With the miracle of that light, Rabbi Yosef Yozl went back to his learning. The following morning, Rabbi Yosef Yozl placed the remains of that miraculous candle in his safe, to remind him how Hashem always helps people in their time of distress, even in the most miraculous ways. This stub of wax was especially precious to him and he guarded it like one would watch over a precious jewel.

Years later, a fire broke out in his town and among others, Rabbi Yosef Yozl's house was burned to the ground. The precious stub of wax was gone. His family was afraid he would be upset by the loss, but Rabbi Yosef Yozl was tremendously happy since he understood it as a message from Hashem, to stop being amazed only by supernatural events. He understood that one needs to arouse himself to also be happy over every small thing and for every kindness that is found within nature, because in truth, they too are miracles – nature is simply a disguise for the same wonders and miracles. Every seemingly natural event is a reason to be thankful, a time to notice Hashem's great kindness and to appreciate the simple gift in the mundane.

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