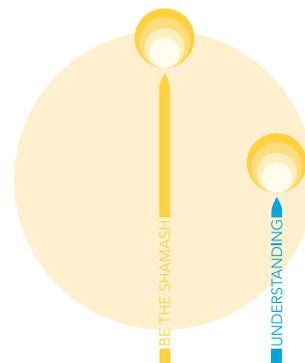




Dana Baruch lives in Austin, TX, where she has been teaching Melton for 17 years, is a Life-Coach and Organizational Consultant, and is the Founder of Austin Jewish Academy.



Make the Light Shine!

 **BE THE SHAMASH - Donate Now**

I love rituals. They help me connect history and meaning. Such is the case when lighting the chanukiyah—a ritual that reminds us of, among other things, the presence of light, even in the darkest moments. On all other nights, when we light candles we use a match. Why on Chanukah do we light candles with another “helper” candle—the *shamash*? The shamash flame is just like that of the other candles—it glows, flickers and emits light. What makes it so special that it lights all the others?

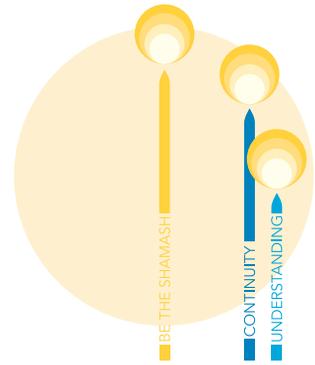
God created Light on the First Day of Creation, but it wasn’t until Day Four that God created the utilizer of Light, the *shemesh* (sun), to serve a declared purpose (to mark time). The *shamash* is like the *shemesh*—it, too, serves a purpose. The Rabbis teach that we are to let the light of the Chanukah candles just be (like Light on the First Day). We are forbidden to do anything by their light, but to just enjoy the light itself. Only by the light of the *shamash* are we permitted to “do”. Its purpose? To enable us to do things while the chanukiyah is lit.

This ritual also serves as a call-to-action reminder: When we utilize the *shamash* to light the other candles, we not only remember “a great miracle that happened there” (history), but we also engage in a deeply meaningful “*hineini* (here-I-am-right-now) moment”—to be positive change-agents who intentionally make light shine, especially in times of darkness.

What will you do to be the shamash and make the light shine whenever and wherever it is needed?



Rabbi Debra Eisenman is an instructor in the Melton School of the Palm Beaches in South Florida.



Oil: Hanukkah's Miraculous Liquid

We all know the famous story from the Babylonian Talmud (*Masekhet Shabbat 21b*) that after the Hasmonean dynasty defeated the Greeks, they entered the Temple and they found one cruse of oil still bearing the seal of the *Kohen Gadol* (high priest). Miraculously the little cruse of oil lasted eight days! In celebration of this long lasting oil, the Hasmoneans established the eight day holiday of Hanukkah. While olive oil was abundant in Israel as early as 4500 BCE, olive oil with the *Kohen Gadol's* special seal was hard to find!

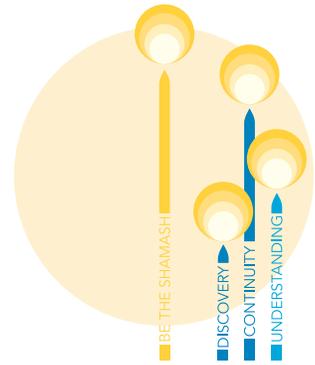
Why is everyday olive oil so sacred to begin with? One Rabbinic answer (*Masekhet Menachot 53b*) is (loosely translated): "Rabbi Yohanan taught, 'Just as olives are special because they do not yield their oil until they are pounded, so too is Israel special because they return to the right (home) only after much suffering!'" After years of war and with true faith, perhaps the Hasmoneans' very act of breaking the seal and using this sacred oil was the miracle that lasted eight days and beyond.

The famed Professor Theodor Gaster explains that pagans used oil to light wicks during winter solstice to celebrate the "physical regeneration of the sun and this is now transmuted, (by the Jewish People,) into a symbol of revival (and strength) on a spiritual plane." This is all made possible by a little cruse of oil!

- **Why do you think oil is holy in Judaism?**
- **How does Professor Gaster explain the use of the oil?**
- **What do you think is the real miracle of Hanukkah?**



Rabbi Ronnie Figdor OAM, BSc, Grad Dip Ed, Sen Ed, Grad Dip Comp, MACS (Snr), a former medical researcher and IT consultant, is CEO of St Kilda Shule and an educator for 35 years.



Is Chanukah Really About Lighting Candles?

Text: Talmud Bavli Shabbat (21b) “What is Chanukah?...”

Analysis: It appears universally accepted that this festival is called Chanukah – dedication. Strangely, the name speaks of neither of the two main themes/stories associated with the history of this festival:

1. the victory of the Jews in a war against King Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Greek-Assyrian empire;
2. the miracle of a one-day flask of oil lasting eight days.

Perhaps the Rabbis, in calling the holiday Chanukah, alluded to the fact that the festival was not about the above ideas.

Hellenism represented the intellectual – an understanding of the physical world. Whatever could not be measured or observed was rejected. Gods were created merely to represent observable phenomena – Zeus (god of the sky), Poseidon (god of the sea), Demeter (god of agriculture), etc.

In contrast, Judaism places great emphasis on the spiritual. Our use of, and attempts to understand, the physical is simply a means to serve the Divine. The Temple, a mere physical building in the eyes of the Greeks, is described by Solomon in *Song of Songs* (4:4, 7:5) as “neck” (צוואר). According to Rashi’s explanation of the verses, “neck” was the Chamber of Hewn Stone, the seat of the Sanhedrin. According to R’ Shmuel Bornstein, the Sochatchover Rebbe, in *Shem Mishmuel (Vayigash)*, a neck is the conduit between the spiritual “head” and the more physical “body”. The Temple was that conduit through which Man could serve the Divine.

The Maccabees’ victory over the Greeks, was not just a demonstration of physical supremacy but was a triumph of holiness over the mundane. The term Chanukah – dedication - therefore most accurately encapsulates the essence of this holiday.

- **In what ways can you celebrate Chanukah this year to reflect the true theme of ‘rededication’?**
- **Why did the Rabbis require the candle-lighting to be the mitzvah of Chanukah rather than what you proposed in answer to the previous question?**
- **Chanukah is called Chag Ha’Urim – Festival of Lights. When was this name adopted?**



Ronnie Gotkin is a former principal of Herzlia Highlands Jewish primary school, and currently teaches High School Hebrew, as well as Crossroads and other courses at the Cape Town Florence Melton School.



Channukah – Is it all Just About the Oil?

.... You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name. (The Al Hanisim prayer)

Channukah, the story of a divine miracle- yes, but what of those who fought to achieve the “miracle”? We remember and sanctify the memory of the miracle but what of the history which underlies it?

As the author, Berl Katznelson, wrote:

Powerful is the strength of forgetting and choosing to forget, in History ... even the heroism of the Hasmoneans ... has not been deemed worthy to be preserved and treasured in an original Hebrew source, and the memory of their heroism has been ... wrapped up in the miracle of the oil. (Sefer Hagevurah Ha-Ivrit)

And yet, the story of the Maccabees may serve even today as a powerful exemplar of Jewish courage against which each generation may measure itself. The great Hebrew poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, in his powerful poem, “In the City of Slaughter”, contrasts the perceived cowardice of the Jews of his day who suffered in pogroms, with the courage of the Maccabees:

Go see with your own eyes how they hide,
Your brothers, children of your people, descendants of the Maccabees

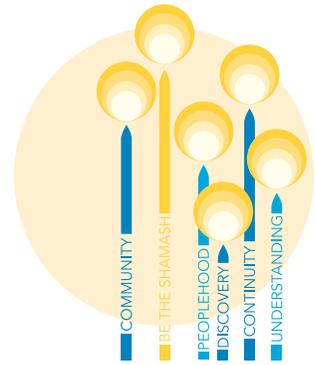
Indeed, for Bialik, celebration of Channukah needs to be reinvigorated by enveloping the story of the Maccabees with that of the modern day chalutzim (pioneers) of his time, who like the ancient Maccabees, strove for the salvation of the Jewish people.

Why then did the rabbis choose to downplay this story by, for example, excluding the Books of the Maccabees from the canon and ascribing the victory purely to divine causality? There are many explanations but one possibility is that the rabbis wished to emphasise the spiritual rather than the militaristic dimensions of the struggle. Perhaps for us, the time has come to give honour to both- this year, let us light our Channukah candles not only in remembrance of divine miracles but also in acknowledgement of human courage and of Jewish national and religious pride: the pride of the Maccabees!

- **Why do you think the rabbis downplayed the role of the Maccabees in this narrative?**
- **Do you agree that the Festival of Channukah should also equally highlight and celebrate the brave deeds of the Maccabees who fought for freedom?**
- **Are there modern day Maccabees and are the Maccabees good role models for us today?**



Sandra Lilienthal is an adult Jewish educator in South Florida with great enthusiasm for teaching Judaism as a living religion, and infusing true passion for it among those who study with her.



Where are the Miracles Today?

Chanukah – we celebrate the miracle of the oil. We celebrate the miracle of the victory of the few against the many. We include the “miracle prayer” – the Al HaNissim - in our Amidah and Birkat HaMazon. Yet, we also ask ourselves why we do not see open miracles like those our ancestors did.

I want to suggest one possible answer: our Biblical ancestors needed those very loud, visible, miracles in order to be able to connect to God. We have the ability to connect ingrained in our DNA. We are descendants of many generations of those who saw the “big” miracles. But we are also descendants of generations who experienced the silent miracles. We are still surrounded by miracles. But, as the Baal Shem Tov said, we take our little hand and cover our eyes and see nothing. Miracles envelop us daily: it’s the sun that rises and sets, the medical breakthroughs, the birth of a child, our waking up every day, the people who come into our lives seemingly for no reason.

Every day, each of us has a choice: to move through life as if there are no miracles, or to find the miraculous in our every-day life. This year, why not make the effort to find one miracle in your life every day? For each of the days the oil lasted, as you light your chanukiah, think of something miraculous that happened in the last 24 hours. Remember: just because Science can explain something, does not make it less miraculous!

- **What makes something a miracle?**
- **How can seeing/noticing miracles help us become more appreciative of our life?**



Sara Lynn Newberger, Director of Hineni – Adult Jewish Learning and Contemplative Practices-Talmud Torah of St. Paul, Melton Director and best of all, a Rhythms and Purposes teacher.



Bringing the Light

At the Talmud Torah of St. Paul Day School, one Hanukkah song rose to the level of cult classic – Banu Choshech Legaresh.

*We have come to chase away the darkness
In our hands are light and fire
Each of us a small light
And together a mighty light
Go away, darkness. Flee, blackness,
Go away in the face of the light*

(Google it for many YouTube renderings.)

Maybe it was because the version our music teacher played was upbeat and electric; or because she'd created a cool dance to go with it; or just maybe it was because we all knew that it was a quintessential Chanukah song, and maybe one of the quintessential Jewish songs.

Try this:

*We, by our actions, can chase away the darkness of ignorance and oppression.
In our hands are wisdom/tradition/learning and the tools¹ to use it.
Each of our souls shines with Divine light.²
Yet only when we gather in community, can we accomplish what we were put on earth to do.³
Working together, with awareness of our Divine souls and gifts, we dispel darkness and bring light!*

- **What light do you bring to illuminate our world?**
- **With whom can you shine in order to make the light more effective?**

1 Said Rabbi Levi: At [the end of the first Shabbat] God presented Adam with two flints. [Adam] struck them together and a fire burst forth. He blessed them saying: "the creator of fire." - Yerushalmi, Brachot 8:5

2 After Proverbs 20:27

3 Based on R. S. R Hirsch comment on Barchu.



Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein is the Director of Jewish Community and the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at the 92Y in New York City and is also the Rabbi Emeritus of Central Synagogue, a Reform congregation affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism where he served as the Senior Rabbi for 23 years.



Hellenism: Was it Evil or a Key to our Existence?

There has never been a single stream of Jewish life. In fact, our history is a tableau of myriad approaches to Jewish law and piety, manifold interpretations of what it means to be Jewish, and countless doors into the Jewish community.

And that is what the story of Chanukah is about.

It begins with the invasion of Alexander the Great into Judea. Though rarely touted as a positive pivotal figure in Jewish history, Alexander the Great's tactic of conquest preferring cultural synthesis to wholesale destruction sowed the seeds for Judaism as we know it today. When his soldiers began to settle in Judea in the fourth century BCE Hellenism arose as the synthesis of Greek thought and Jewish practice embodied in the acculturation of Jewish life to Greek styles.

Throughout history, whether planned or not, but often to survive and flourish Jews have fortunately adapted to the social forms of our ambient culture.

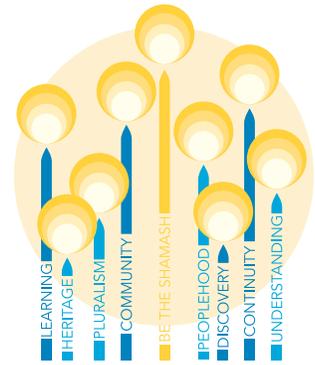
In fact, the evidence of Hellenistic influence is completely manifest in the names of the central institutions of Jewish life. Consider that the word *Synagogue*, derives from the Greek word for "assembly". Also, the *minyan*, representing the core citizenry of Jewish life, mirrored the *polis*, which was the core citizenry of the Greek city. Finally, the institution of the rabbinate replaced leadership dependent on genealogy (the *Cohanim*) with a democratic leadership deriving authority from learning and merit.

Our contemporary Jewish institutions flowered from Greek roots. In important ways *Hellenism* birthed us.

- **How does this historical analysis challenge your concepts and beliefs about Chanukah and Hellenism? Can these ideas augment your appreciation of the holiday?**
- **What's the difference between "acculturation" and "assimilation"?**



Rabbi Adam Starr is rabbi and spiritual leader of the Young Israel of Toco Hills in Atlanta.



Rededicating to Jewish Life

Why is the holiday of Chanukah given the name “Chanukah”? The word Chanukah means a dedication as we are celebrating the historic rededication of the Temple during second Temple times. The Temple in Jerusalem had been defiled by the Syrian Greeks for foreign worship, until the Hasmonean Jews recaptured it, restoring the Temple and rededicating that space to the service of God as symbolized by the lighting of the Temple Menorah.

Happy ending, right? Not exactly... The Temple ended up being destroyed only 200 years later and it remains in that state of destruction until this day. So why are we celebrating the rededication of our Temple that ended up getting destroyed shortly after anyway? That Temple that we are celebrating does not exist in our lives!

The post Temple rabbis who shaped the holiday of Chanukah were well aware of this fact so they shifted the holiday’s observance from a Temple-based celebration to a home-centered observance. That is why the primary mitzvah of Chanukah is to light candles placed on a Menorah in our home as a substitute for the candles lit in the Holy Temple.

This shift in focus to the home teaches us that Chanukah is now a time to rededicate our homes to spaces that permeate with Jewish observances and values.

As you light the Chanukah candles, reflect upon how you can further dedicate your home as a mini temple dedicated to Jewish life that permeates light to the world.