

THESE WORDS.....

**LEARNING ACTIVITY IN PREPARATION FOR CHANUKAH, INCLUDING
SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS**

These candles 1.

For two thousand years the Jews say eight consecutive times a year - when lighting the Chanukah candles - the following words: The blessing “These candles....” is a point of departure for us to be introduced to Chanukah, about the symbols and the significances of their development over the generations. We are invited to the festival of Chanukah by means of these words - in those days and at this time.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

[First night only] Blessed are You, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

We kindle these lights [to commemorate] the saving acts, miracles and wonders which You have performed for our forefathers, in those days at this time, through Your holy priests. Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make use of them, but only to look at them, in order to offer thanks and praise to Your great Name for Your miracles, for Your wonders and for Your salvations.

O mighty stronghold of my salvation,
to praise You is a delight.
Restore my House of Prayer
and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering.



[In the prayer book there are an additional five verses of this liturgy]

Blessed 2.

As it is the way with blessings, we first bless G-d and then kings (King of the Universe). The blessing is an expression for a combination of emotions: the feeling of our subjugation to G-d, expressing thanks for His grace, praising His power. Of course this combination is not binding and one can express with these words any emotion that one wishes.

DISCUSSION: SHOULD NON-BELIEF IN G-D CANCEL OUT MY WISH TO SAY THIS BLESSING?

We have been blessed with His commandments and His decree 3.

The festival of Chanukah is one of several commemorative dates that Hasmoneans created to note their victories and is the only one that has survived to our time. Although the Jewish tradition does not note the divine order of lighting the candles one can see the Chanukiah as a kind of memorial to the Menorah in the Temple (which had seven cups) whereby the priests in the Temple were ordered to light their candles. The ruling of the Sages of Israel in the generations after the Hasmoneans is to keep and uphold the festival of Chanukah in the lighting of the candles, in their eyes and in the eyes of the generations following them, and has the validity of a divine order.

DISCUSSION: IS IT LEGITIMATE TO DECLARE A CUSTOM OF DIVINE ORDER EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FOR SUCH AS ORDER?

The Chanukah Candle 4.

The House of Shammai says: On the first day, light eight, and from then on decrease. The House of Hillel says: On the first day light one, and from then on increase [Shabbat, 21, 72]. We placed the Chanukiah on the table. This is the table where routinely a dialog breaks out. This is the table for hosting and friendship, and it is full of cups of coffee. This is the table of silence, when the table is an illuminated ship standing in its place because there is no wind.

We light the first candle and the small son runs to turn off the electricity. We sang “Maoz

Tzur” in the room in which each of us has a shadow dancing on the wall behind his back, each face has wrinkles and forgotten depth and gentleness, all the eyes in the light of the candle are alike a successful photograph.

Every great act, every great idea, every great heroism - will be reduced. Every small act, every modest heroism, every small gesture of love - shall be accumulated and will light again the flames (thank the Lord!) over and over again.

The small son asks, and he already knows the answer however wants to hear it as a renewed promise:

And tomorrow?

Tomorrow we will light two -

And after tomorrow?

We will light three.

And after that?

After that it doesn't matter, the light will grow

At this time I thought to myself:

“Is it possible to long for the fire of Shammai, however there is no better way than that of the old man Hillel”

[Gedalia, Kibbutz Mishmar Hanegev, 1971].

**DISCUSSION: ARE THERE ADDITIONAL POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS TO RULE
IN FAVOUR OF THE CUSTOM OF THE HOUSE OF HILLEL?**

Miracles 5.

“The miracle of the jar of oil” relates of course to “the miracle” of the victory of the Hasmoneans and their army. For thousands of years in exile the miracle has been emphasized on account of the human heroism that enabled it. With the the national Zionist resurrection the motif of the heroism was again emphasized, as can be seen in the section from the song by Aharon Zeev [Melody: Mordechai Zeira], the children's poet and the first education officer of the IDF:

“We carry torches
In the dark nights





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Lighting up the paths under our feet - -
A miracle did not happen for us, we did not find a jar of oil
We went to the valley, we ascended the mountain
We discovered the concealed springs of light
We quarried the rock until we bled
Let there be light”

“We carry torches in the dark nights”
Recently I have returned to this song
again and again
And ask the one reciting it in my heart, from the beginning

I always knew that the song spoke the truth
I always said: between myself and I
that it is talking about times that have passed, about my forefathers
the pioneers
Who paved the path before me.

But now I know
That it was written about us
Now I want to say! From the beginning
In this language, the language of now

Now, today, we
Carry the torches
And our hearts are hungry for light
Because they are not glowing under our feet
We are still paving our way
We are groping about in the fog that is covering us
And the miracle is not expected apart from the confiscation.

We are still going to the valley



Macon Ha'Chagim
www.chagim.org.il



Jewish Holidays site
www.buja.org.il



We have still not ascended the mountain
We are still quarrying the rock
We are bequeathing to our sons, third and fourth generations
The axe.

The way is very hard we said
The way is very long we said
And sometimes it seems that the paths are deceiving us

But we also know that the way that is long
The winding road
Will reach the plain
One day it will have to reach the plain
Because at the end of the road the light is waiting
Let there be light

Mirik Garzi, Chanukah 5761
Three months after the Second Intifada

**DISCUSSION: WHAT IS “HEROISM”? WHAT IS “A MIRACLE”? DOES HEROISM
HAVE A DIMENSION OF A MIRACLE?**

In those days in this time 6.

“Those” days means the days of the Hasmoneans. “This” time could be the calendar date (the month of Kislev) or the historical time (the generation in which we are living)

**DISCUSSION: WHAT INTERPRETATION OF “THIS TIME” SEEMS MOST
CORRECT TO US?**



Shehehyanu 7.

The Shehehyanu blessing is said, as a rule, as an expression of our joy when we perform a Jewish ceremony whereby a whole year has passed since it was last said. We give thanks that we have been enabled to experience again the ceremony that we experienced in the past year.

Therefore we say this blessing only when lighting the first candle.

8. Your holy priests

The Book of the Hasmoneans 1 (there are four) was written by a Jew who lived during the time of the revolt of the Maccabees. Matityahu and his sons were priests, which enabled them to engage in the renewal of the divine work in the Temple. This book was written originally in Hebrew however the Sages did not safeguard it and it remained only in its Greek translation and was not part of the Jewish book repository in the nineteenth century. So it was again translated back into the original language, Hebrew:

“Then Yehuda and his brothers said: Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to purify the Temple and rededicate it. So the whole army assembled, and went up to Mount Zion..... He chose blameless [pure] priests, devoted to the Torah and they purified the Temple.... They made new holy utensils and brought the Menorah, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. Then they burned incense on the altar and lighted the lamps on the Menorah.....And on the twenty fifth day of the ninth month, that is, the month of Kislev, it was dedicated with songs, harps, lyres, and cymbals..... For eight days they celebrated the dedication of the altar..... Yehuda and his brothers and the entire assembly of Israel decreed to celebrate the festival of dedication of the altar.

Every year for eight days, from the twenty fifth day of the month Kislev, a festival with joy and gladness.

{Hasmoneans 1, Chapter 4}

The eight days of Chanukah 9.

In the Bavli Talmud, the writing of which was concluded in Babylon some six hundred years



after the Hasmonean era, cites the ancient text (the Taanit Tractate):

“On the twenty fifth of Kislev the days of Chanukah are eight, and it is prohibited to eulogize
(the dead) on them or to suffer (to fast).

The Bavli Talmud explains as follows:

“When the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oils in the Temple. When the kingdom of the House of Hasmoneans triumphed, they checked and found only one jar of oil which had the seal of the High priest, and was sufficient to light for only one day. A miracle occurred and they used it to light for eight days. After this they determined festival days with
praise and confession.

[Shabbat, 21, 72]

DISCUSSION: WHY DOES THE TALMUD BAVLI EMPHASIZE THE MIRACLE OF THE JAR OF OIL AND NOT “THE TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HOUSE OF HASMONEANS”.

And we are not permitted to use them 10.

The candles are a symbol. The role of the symbol is to express content and significance and not to use it as a practical instrument.

In the past, when candles were the only source of light in the home, they saw fit to emphasize the uniqueness of the Chanukah candles as symbols and not as instruments.

DISCUSSION: WHICH OTHER JEWISH SYMBOLS ARE THERE TO EXPRESS CONTENT AND SIGNIFICANCE?

Maoz Tzur Yeshuati 11.

“Maoz Tzur” was written in the 13th century in Germany by a Jew whose first name was Mordechai. Since then and to date many Jews sing it at the conclusion of the blessings over the candles. The term “Maoz” for G-d originates from the bible, such as in Psalms, 27:1: “G-d is





my light and my salvation whom shall I fear?

G-d is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid?

Or in Jeremiah 16:19 “...O G-d, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the time of
sorrow...”

The tune of “Moaz Tzur” which is a typical tune in recent years for the national-religious
festival of freedom, is a tune that was based on a German folk song from the Middle Ages.

From the destruction of the enemy alike a barking dog 12.

This song, which was composed during the Crusades based on the mass murders of Jews by
Christians, expresses a desire to defeat the murderers. The enemy is similar to a barking dog,
that G-d will cause its destruction.

**DISCUSSION: IS IT JUSTIFIED TO BE HAPPY AT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE
ENEMY, OR IS IT APPROPRIATE TO BE SORRY ABOUT ANY VIOLENCE, EVEN
WHEN THERE IS NO CHOICE BUT TO USE IT?**

Dedication of the altar 13.

On all the days of Chanukah we read in synagogue in the Torah in the Portion “Nasa”
(Numbers, 7-8) in which it is told about the dedication of the Temple that the Children of Israel
built in the desert. The altar that the Hasmoneans rebuilt is a symbol that connects between the
various resurrections in the lives of the Jewish people.

DISCUSSION: CAN THE SYMBOL OF THE ALTAR BE SIGNIFICANT FOR ME?

Feminism in the stories of Chanukah 14.

The study of the Talmud deals with the question of who is not obligated to light the Chanukah
candle saying: “A woman certainly should light it, says Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levy: women are
obligated to light the Chanukah candle because they were present at that same miracle”.

[The Shabbat Tractate, Page 23: 71]



Three stories of women are related to Chanukah and they have undergone many incarnations and versions:

- The story of “the mother of the sons” (known later as “Hannah and her seven sons”)
- The story of Judith - which appears in the Book of Judith, one of the external books (not included in the bible)
- The story of the daughter of Matityahu

Here is one of the versions (one of many) of each of the stories of these women:

Main questions raised by the stories:

1. Which ways or methods do the women choose to be involved in a national-cultural combat dispute, when there is no place for them in political, military or spiritual/artistic involvement in the public arena? Which various methods do they use with their femininity/sexuality for this purpose? (It is possible to open the discussion on this subject by introducing stories and names of women involved in a cultural national struggle throughout history and the patterns of involvement customary, as well as patterns of involvement which are not expressed in these stories such as direct involvement in the peace process, or war as part of an official army).
2. Do they serve the interests of women, is their status as women improved following this? How is it improved and what is harmed?
3. Are women some sort of “other” in society, are they part of the national identity which is enhanced in the context of war, or do they still represent “others” also within the collective self which is consolidated against the enemy?
4. Which of these act do you admire more and why?
5. Do women need to take part in wars - when they are not part of the decision making echelon and in determination of policy leading to these wars?

It is possible to find the stories in adapted and readable versions in the file “From Israel Sources” edited by M.Y. Bardichevsky and in “The Book of Fables” by Bilakik and Ravnitzky.



The story of the “Mother and the Sons” - Miriam the daughter of Tanhum according to The Great
Lamentations, Part 1

Miriam the daughter of Tanhum who is imprisoned together with her seven sons, what did the regime do to her: each of them was imprisoned in his own right. They brought out the first son and said to him: bow down to the idol as your brother bowed down

He said to him: heaven forbid my brother did not bow down, and I will also not bow down to it.

He said to him: Why?

He said to him: Because it is written in the Torah I am the Lord your G-d (Exodus 20:2). He ordered him to be killed.

He brought out the second, and said to him: Bow down to the idol as your brother bowed down.

He said to him: Heaven forbid my brother did not bow down, and I will also not bow down to it.

He said to him: Why?

Because it is written in the Torah that you shall have no other god before me (*Ibid, ibid, 3*)

He immediately ordered him to be killed.

He brought out the third, and said to him: Bow down to the idol as your brother bowed down.

He said to him: Heaven forbid my brother did not bow down, and I will also not bow down to it.

He said to him: Why?

Because it is written in the Torah: You shall sacrifice only to G-d (*Ibid, 22:19*) and he ordered him to be killed.

He brought out the fourth, and said to him: Bow down to the idol as your brother bowed down.

He said to him: Heaven forbid my brother did not bow down, and I will also not bow down to it.

He said to him: Why?

Because it is written in the Torah: You shall not bow to them and you shall not worship them (*Ibid, 20:5*) and he ordered him to be killed.

He brought out the sixth and said to him: Bow down to the idol as your brother bowed down.

He said to him: Heaven forbid my brother did not bow down, and I will also not bow down to it.

He said to him: Why?

Because it is written in the Torah: Hear O Israel the Lord is G-d and the Lord is one (Deuteronomy, 6:4)



He brought out the seventh, and he was the youngest of them.

He said to him: Bow down to the idol as [your brother] bowed down

He said to him: heaven forbid my brother did not bow down to the idol, and I will not bow down.

He said to him: Why?

Because we have already sworn to G-d that we shall not exchange Him for another, saying G-d declared this today (Deuteronomy 27:17) and as we swore to him, so he swore to us, not to exchange us for another nation and G-d has declared this today (*Ibid, Ibid, 18*)

He said to him: If so I shall throw this ring before the idol and you go and bring it to me so that they will see and say that you have fulfilled the commandment of Caesar.

He said to him: Woe to you Caesar, shall I fear you who are of flesh and blood, and not fear the King of Kings blessed be He who is the G-d of the universe.

He said to him: And is there a G-d of the universe?

He said to him: Woe to you Caesar and have you seen a universe of abandonment?

He said to him: And what is there here of your G-d?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have mouths but cannot speak but about our G-d it is written: by the word of the Lord the heavens were made (*Ibid, 33:6*).

He said to him: And does your G-d have eyes?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have ears but they hear not (Psalms 115:6) but about our G-d it is written: for the eyes of G-d are always on you (Deuteronomy: 11:12).

He said to him: Does your G-d have ears?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have ears but they hear not (Psalms 115:6) but about our G-d it is written: And G-d shall listen and hear (Malachi 3:16).

He said to him: Does your G-d have a nose?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have a nose but they cannot smell (Psalms 115:6) but about our G-d it is written: And G-d smelled the pleasing aroma (Genesis 8:21).

He said to him: Does your G-d have hands?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have hands but cannot feel (Psalms 115:7) but about our G-d it is written: My own hand laid the foundations of the earth (Isaiah 48: 13).

He said to him: And does your G-d have feet?



He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: they have feet but cannot walk (Psalms 115:7) but about our G-d it is written: On that day his feet shall stand (Zachariah 14: 4) and He treads on the height of the earth (Micah 1:3).

He said to him: And does your G-d have a throat?

He said to him: About your idol worshipping it is written: They cannot utter a sound with their throats (Psalms 115:7) but about our G-d it is written: His mouth is sweetness and He is altogether precious (Song of Songs 5: 16).

He said to him: If He has all those attributes, why did He not save you as He saved Hanania, Mishal and Azaria.

He said to him: Hanania Mishal and Azaria were innocent and they were felled by an innocent king, but we were guilty and we were felled by the hand of a guilty cruel king, so that they would demand our blood, because many bears and many tigers that the blessed be He has to harm us, and we did not deliver to the blessed be He only by your hand on the path that he shall demand our blood from your hand, and he immediately ordered him to be killed.

Questions:

- Miriam asks to nurse her son, which methods does she use to cope with the difficult decree, how does she use her maternity?
- In which way does she express her commitment to culture and religion?
- What is Miriam's position vis-à-vis Abraham, as a woman?
- Is this statement ironic?

(The dialog between the sons and the regime is carried out by the verses (religion-culture))

It is possible to compare the legend with a series of legends about the place of Sarah in the binding of Isaac - Tanhuma, the Torah portion Vayireh.

The story of the daughter of Matityahu from "the Midrash" edited by Yelink (according to the Chanukah midrash.

They stood and decreed: “Every person whose wife goes to the mikveh will be pierced by the sword! And the one who sees her will have her for a wife! And her sons as slaves.”

When Israel heard this they refrained from using their beds and when the Greeks heard this they said: we succeeded. the people of Israel are not using their beds. And their beds shall become ours.

When Israel saw this they returned to their wives although they had not gone to the Mikveh against their will. They said: Master of the Universe. We have no choice - it is not for our good - a woman does not want to live with her husband without her pleasure.

The blessed be He said to them: As you did this without intention I shall purify you. And G-d opened for each of them a spring inside his home, and the wives could immerse themselves inside their homes and the verse was fulfilled for them: “You will draw water with joy from the waters of the redemption” (Isaiah 12:3). When G-d washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion (*Ibid*, 4L4).

When the Greeks saw that Israel was not affected by their decrees, they stood and decreed upon them a bitter and ugly decree, that a bride shall not go on her wedding night to her husband, but rather to the governor in that place.

When Israel heard this their hands became weak and their energy left them and they refrained from marriages. And the daughters of Israel would grow old as virgins and the verse was fulfilled for them: The maidens are unhappy and and Jerusalem is bitter (Lamentations 1:4) and the Greeks abuse the virgins of Israel.

This continued for three years and eight months, until the marriage of the daughter of the High Priest Matityahu to the Hasmonean called Elazar.



On their wedding day she was seated on a palanquin. During the feast all the great men of Israel gathered in honour of Matityahu and the Hasmonean who were the greatest men of their generation. And when they all sat to eat, Hannah, the daughter of Matityahu stood up from the palanquin and clapped her hands together and tore off her royal garment before all of Israel and stood revealed before her father, her mother and her groom.

When her brothers saw this they were embarrassed and they put their faces in the ground and rent their clothes and stood to kill her.

She said: Listen my brothers and uncles. What if I stand naked before you righteous men without any transgression and you are all angry. And you are not angry at sending me into the hands of an uncircumcised man who will abuse me. You should learn from Shimon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, who were just two men who were vengeful on behalf of their sister and they murdered a walled city such as Samaria and gave up their souls for the sake of G-d. And G-d helped them and they were not destroyed. And you are five brothers - Yehuda, Yohanan, Yonatan, Shimon and Elazar and you the flowers of the priesthood are more than two hundred. Put your faith in the Lord and he will help you and as it is said: Nothing shall stop the Lord from saviour (Samuel I 14:6). And she opened her mouth and wailed saying: Master of the Universe. If you do not have mercy on us, have mercy on your great name that is called on us and avenge us.

At that time her brothers became angered saying: Come let us have counsel and decide what to do. They took counsel from one another and said: let us take our sister and will go to the great king saying: Our sister is the daughter of a high priest. There is no one greater in Israel than our father and we saw that our sister should not sleep with the governor but rather with a king who is as great as we are. Then we shall enter and kill him and we shall depart and then we shall begin with his servants and with his officers and G-d shall help us and give us strength.



They took this counsel and the blessed be He made them great salvation and they heard a heavenly voice from inside of the Holy of Holies: All Israel have been victorious over Antiochus. So too will the Lord bring salvation in these days.

- Is there any doubt here regarding the loyalty of the women “that no woman wants.....”?
- What is the significance of such doubt?
- In which way does Hannah use her femininity here?
- What is the connection to the story of Dina?
- What is the significance of the fact that Hannah is the one who recalls and quotes the sources?

[The story of Judith]

