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ABC's of Chanukah (Hanukkah)

by Rabbi Shruga Simmons

Chanukah (Hanukkah), the Festival of Lights, begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, and lasts for eight days. On the secular calendar, Chanukah generally falls out in December. In 2018, Chanukah will begin Sunday evening December 2nd.

This primer will explore:

- (1) A Bit of History
- (2) Lighting Instructions
- (3) Other Customs

(1) A Bit of History

The Hebrew word Chanukah means "dedication." In the 2nd century BCE, during the time of the Second Holy Temple, the Syrian-Greek regime of Antiochus sought to pull Jews away from Judaism, with the hopes of assimilating them into Greek culture. Antiochus outlawed Jewish observance ? including circumcision, Shabbat, and Torah study ? under penalty of death. As well, many Jews ? called Hellenists ? began to assimilate into Greek culture, taking on Greek names and marrying non-Jews. This began to decay the foundation of Jewish life and practice.

When the Greeks challenged the Jews to sacrifice a pig to a Greek god, a few courageous Jews took to the hills of Judea in open revolt against this threat to Jewish life. Led by Matitiyahu, and later his son Judah the Maccabee, this small band of pious Jews led guerrilla warfare against the Syrian-Greek army.

Antiochus sent thousands of well-armed troops to crush the rebellion, but after three years the Maccabees beat incredible odds and miraculously succeeded in driving the foreigners from their land. The victory was on the scale of Israel defeating the combined super-powers of today.

Jewish fighters entered Jerusalem and found the Holy Temple in shambles and desecrated with idols. The Maccabees cleansed the Temple and re-dedicated it on the 25th of Kislev. When it came time to re-light the Menorah, they searched the entire Temple, but found only one jar of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. The group of believers lit the Menorah anyway and were rewarded with a miracle: That small jar of oil burned for eight days, until a new supply of oil could be brought.

From then on, Jews have observed a holiday for eight days, in honor of this historic victory and the miracle of the oil. To publicize the Chanukah miracle, Jews add the special Hallel praises to the Shacharit service, and light a menorah during the eight nights of Chanukah.

(2) Lighting Instructions

In Ashkenazi tradition, each person lights his own menorah. Sefardi tradition has just one menorah per family.

What Menorah to Light

To publicize which night of Chanukah it is, all eight candles on the menorah should be at the same height ? and preferably in a

straight line. Otherwise, the candles may not be easily distinguishable and may appear like a big torch.

In addition to the eight main lights, the menorah has an extra helper candle called the "Shamash." As we are forbidden to use the Chanukah lights for any purpose other than "viewing," any benefit is as if it's coming from the Shamash.

Since the Shamash does not count as one of the eight regular lights, your menorah should have the Shamash set apart in some way ? either placed higher than the other candles, or off to the side.

What Candles to Light

The most important thing is that that your candles must burn for at least 30 minutes after nightfall. (Those famous colored candles barely qualify!) Many Jewish bookstores sell longer colored candles.

Actually, it is even better to use olive oil, since the miracle of the Maccabees occurred with olive oil. Glass cups containing oil can be placed in the candle holders of any standard menorah. Many Jewish bookstores even sell kits of pre-measured oil in disposable cups.

Where to Light

To best publicize the miracle, the menorah is ideally lit outside the doorway of your house, on the left side when entering. (The mezuzah is on the right side; in this way you are "surrounded by mitzvot.") In Israel, many people light outside in special glass boxes built for a menorah.

If this is not practical, the menorah should be lit in a window facing the public thoroughfare.

Someone who lives on an upper floor should light in a window. If for some reason the menorah cannot be lit by a window, it may be lit inside the house on a table; this at least fulfills the mitzvah of "publicizing the miracle" for the members of the household.

Since the mitzvah occurs at the actual moment of lighting, moving the menorah to a proper place after lighting does not fulfill the mitzvah.

When to Light

The preferable time to light the menorah is at nightfall. It is best to light in the presence of many people, which maximizes the mitzvah of "publicizing the miracle" and adds to the family atmosphere. The menorah can still be lit (with the blessings) late into the night, as long as people are still awake.

The menorah should remain lit for at least 30 minutes after nightfall, during which time no use should be made of its light.

On Friday afternoon, the menorah should be lit 18 minutes before sundown. And since the menorah needs to burn for 30 minutes into the night, the candles used on Friday need to be bigger than the regular "colored candles" (which typically don't burn longer than a half-hour).

How to Light

On the first night, place one candle at the far right, as you face the menorah. This applies whether the menorah is placed next to a doorway or by a window.

Another candle is placed for the Shamash (taller helper candle) which is used to light the others. It is not counted as one of the candles.

First light the Shamash, then recite the blessings, and then use the Shamash to light the Chanukah candle.

On the second night, place two candles in the two far-right positions ? and use the Shamash to light the left one first.

The third night, place three candles in the three far-right positions ? and use the Shamash to light them in order, from left to right.

Follow this same procedure each night of Chanukah... until all the lights are kindled and glowing brightly!

The Blessings

The first two blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Chanukah candles.

Blessing #1

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-sav, Vi-tzee-vanu li-had-leek ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

Blessing #2

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Shi-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu, Baya-meem ha-haim baz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

Blessing #3

This blessing is said on the first night only.

Baruch ata Ado-noi Elo-heinu melech ha-olam, Sheh-he-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu Vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

The following paragraph is said each night, after the first light has been kindled:

Ha-nerot ha-lalu anach-nu mad-likin Al ha-nissim vi-al hanif-laot Al ha-tshu-ot vi-al ha-milchamot She-asita la'avo-teinu Ba-yamim ha-heim, ba-zman ha-zeh Al ye-dey kohan-echa haki-doshim.

Vi-chol shmonat ye-mey Chanukah Ha-nerot ha-lalu kodesh heim, Ve-ein lanu reshut li-heesh-tamesh ba-hem Ela leer-otam bilvad Kedai le-hodot u-li-hallel li-shimcha Al ni-secha vi-al niflo-techa vi-al yeshua-techa.

(3) Other Customs

After lighting the Chanukah menorah, families enjoy sitting in the glow, singing and recalling the miracles of yesterday and today. The first song traditionally sung after lighting the candles is Maoz Tzur (Rock of Ages). ([click for audio and lyrics](#))

A number of other customs have developed, including:

eating "oily" foods like fried potato latkes (pancakes) and sufganiyot (jelly donuts), in commemoration of the miracle of the oil
giving Chanukah gelt (coins) to children
spinning the dreidel, a four-sided top with a Hebrew letter on each side (sivivon in Hebrew)

What is the origin of the dreidel?

In times of persecution when Torah study was forbidden, Jewish children would learn anyway. When soldiers would investigate, the children would pull out a dreidel and pretend to be playing.

The letters on the dreidel are nun, gimmel, hey, shin ? the first letters of Nes Gadol Haya Sham – "A Great Miracle Happened There." (In Israel, the last letter is a Pey ? "Here.") One way to play dreidel is to see who can keep theirs spinning for the longest time. Or alternatively, to see how many dreidels you can get spinning simultaneously.

Another version of dreidel is where players use pennies, nuts, raisins, or chocolate coins as tokens or chips. Each player puts an equal share into the "pot." The first player takes a turn spinning the dreidel. When the dreidel stops, the letter facing up determines:

Nun – nothing happens; the next player spins the dreidel

Gimmel – the spinner takes the pot

Hey – take half the pot

Shin – add one to the pot

(Alternatively, you can play where everyone spins their own dreidel simultaneously. Anyone who gets Nun takes 2 from the pot; Gimmel takes 1 from the pot; Hey puts 1 into the pot; Shin gives 1 to the person on his/her right.)

On Chanukah we add "Al Ha'nisim" – an extra paragraph which describes the Chanukah miracle – to the Amidah prayer, and also to the Grace After Meals.

Happy Chanukah!



Response to Recent Tragedies: 8 Questions for 8 Nights

by Aish.com staff

In our California Jewish community, we are reeling. First the shooting in Pittsburgh, then the one in Thousand Oaks – at what was considered a neighborhood bar for many of my friend’s children. And then the fires, the evacuations, the loss, the fires, the ongoing challenges. We are all scrambling for a response. And there are many possibilities. There is no perfect response or magic response or “right” response. But we have to do something.

Because one of our goals is to learn from our experiences. And if we don’t attach our insights to something concrete, as impossible as it is to believe right now, our experience and ideas will be forgotten. As our sages teach us in Ethics of Our Fathers, “Someone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom won’t last.”

What are these insights? Where do they come from?

In general when we have a painful experience, something that affects us as individuals and as part of the Jewish community, we want to ask ourselves three important questions:

How can I learn and grow from this experience? How can I ensure that the pain does not go to waste?

How can I deepen my connection to the broader Jewish community, to the rest of the Jewish people? How can I solidify my recognition that we are all in this together?

How can I come closer to the Creator? How can I deepen my faith and trust? How can I feel more connected to the Almighty?

In order to solidify our new realizations and make them last, we must attach them to action. It seems that the approaching holiday of Hanukkah may provide the perfect vehicle through which to craft a response. We can start with the question: How can we counter the darkness and bring light to the world?

My friend, Chana Heller, and I created 8 questions, 8 themes for each night of Chanukah that we can use as springboards to make our experience of the holiday more meaningful and to really be engaged in pushing back the darkness. These questions can be used to promote family discussions with everyone participating or even just for individual introspection.

Hopefully these tools and thoughts will lift us, our families, our LA community and the whole Jewish people.

Night One: Kindness: What kindness can we do today that is a little outside our comfort zone?

Night Two: Jewish Pride: What can we do to deepen our children’s sense of Jewish pride today? Or our own?

Night Three: Food: What holiday-themed food can we make today and how can we use it to bring joy to others, family, friends or even strangers?

Night Four: Prayer: What prayer can we say tonight to express gratitude for the miracles in our lives?

Night Five: Charity: Instead of gift getting, how can we make this an evening of giving?

Night Six: Love: Can we take the first step to turn around a difficult relationship?

Night Seven: Fighting for the Jewish People: What can we do today to be a modern-day Maccabee?

Night Eight: Jewish Unity: What can we do today to create greater closeness with other Jews?

May we all find a way to bring light to our world.



Deeper Themes: "Spinning the Dreidel"
by Rabbi Eytan Feiner

On Chanukah and Purim, Jews are fond of spinning objects. It is not just the youngsters who take in hand the dreidel (Chanukah top) and grager (noisemaker). But there is a noticeable difference: During Chanukah we spin while holding the protruding top piece of the dreidel; on Purim, however, we hold the grager from the bottom part and then begin to turn.

This discrepancy is no mere coincidence; it actually conveys a profound lesson.

Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira, author of B'nei Yissaschar, explains the difference as follows: God wishes to constantly bestow only abundant blessing upon His nation, but we must initiate with an "inspiration from below." If we create an opening the size of the "eye of a needle," then God, in turn, will respond by "opening up the gateway to a large banquet hall." (Shir HaShirim Rabba, 5:3)

In other words, if we but take the first step - even a miniscule one -- in performing good deeds, God will reciprocate with an outpouring of supernatural kindness from the heavens above. Through even small amounts of Torah, repentance, and mitzvot, we can open the gates to allow for boundless "inspiration from above" to come our way, often taking even the form of miracles.

PURIM: BOTTOM UP

In the days of Purim, their lives hanging on a delicate thread, the Jewish People united in sincere prayer and repentance to create an inspiration from below worthy of God's promise to reciprocate. Their collective efforts to rescind the harsh decree issued against them were successful in opening up the gates of heaven for many hidden miracles that brought about their salvation. With the tremendous effort of repentance on the part of the Jewish People, Haman was subsequently destroyed. Thus while reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim, we spin the

grager from below upon hearing Haman's name to proudly demonstrate that the Jewish people initiated the overwhelming response from the heavens above; first the bottom part spins, and only then does its upper part follow in kind.

CHANUKAH: TOP DOWN

On Chanukah, however, our prayer and repentance were not as sincere. A mere handful of Hasmoneans led the charge, while most of our nation failed to display the requisite inspiration from below to warrant abundant blessing from above. And yet God showered us with miracles regardless. He provided us, mercifully, with inspiration from above, although we were undeserving of His open involvement. The miracles arrived and we emerged the victors; we re-dedicated the grand Temple and lit a miraculously burning oil.

On Chanukah we spin dreidels upon which are inscribed the first letters of the words, "neis gadol ha'yah sham" -- a great miracle happened there. We rejoice with our dreidels, but we spin them specifically from their top part to constantly remind ourselves that Chanukah was a time when miracles came gratis, when God bestowed His infinite compassion upon His people and things began to spin down to us in the form of undeniable miracles.

On Purim the spinning is from below, on Chanukah it begins from above.

PLAYING GAMES

This difference is also seen in how we play with these items. People often "play the dreidel" by spinning it for money. Whether it lands on the "gimmel" and the winner takes the whole pot, or the "shin" and money is lost -- one is at the mercy of a fate totally outside his control. We're also unsure as to how long the spinning will last. If we don't take the initial step in triggering God's promise to reciprocate in disproportionate fashion favorable to us, then we leave ourselves up to simply hoping for the best, wishing for God's undeserved mercy.

Purim time, on the other hand, we can all spin our noisy gragers as a sign we've played a role in bringing about Haman's demise. Just as the cacophony emitted from our gragers is not at all pleasing to the ears, our fasting, crying, and heartfelt repentance might not always look so pretty either. But it gets the job done. When we do our part, we can rest assured that God will do His. And thus, as opposed to the Chanukah top left to spin on its own, the grager's spinning duration is controlled by us.

REFLECTED IN PRAYER

This distinction is fleshed out in the contrasting liturgies of the two holidays as well. In the prayer known as the "Al HaNissim," we find mention in the passage for Chanukah of God having fought their [the Jews] battle, and having avenged their vengeance.

In the blessing recited at the conclusion of the reading of the Scroll of Esther, however, we encounter instead: "You [God] fought our battle, avenged our vengeance." To consider it our battle, our war, and our victory, we must take the all-important initiative. It was specifically on Purim that we, as a unified nation, took collective action in a heartfelt effort to inspire and evoke God's boundless mercy and compassion. We all put in the time with several days of serious and sincere prayer and repentance.

In stark contrast, the miracle on the battlefield against the far superior Greek army was a total gift from God in response to the noble sacrifice of but a few select individuals.

This Chanukah, let's get the inspiration started from below. We must do our utmost to unite as a nation, to work together as individuals and as a People on growing in all areas of spirituality, and hopefully we'll trigger God's mercy and miracles like never before. Let's increase our charity, good deeds, dedication to prayer, and let's start spinning those dreidels upside-down!



Jewish Grit and Hanukkah by Sara Debbie Gutfreund

Many studies show that effort is far more important than our natural abilities in anything that we're trying to accomplish. In her book *Grit*, Dr. Angela Duckworth examines the trait of

persistence. She writes, "Without effort, your talent is nothing more than your unmet potential. Without effort, your skill is nothing more than what you could have done but didn't."

According to Duckworth, grit is the best predictor of success. The grittiest cadets are the ones that graduate from West Point, the most persistent businessmen are the ones who make the most money and the most persistent spellers end up being the winners of the National Spelling Bee.

In fact, a treadmill experiment that was first begun at Harvard University in 1940 tested which students would push themselves to the limit of their physical and mental stamina and remain for the longest time on the treadmill. The researchers then followed up on the study decades later and they found that the students that had stayed on the treadmill the longest were the most successful in every area of their lives throughout adulthood.

"Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare," Duckworth says. That's why many people buy exercise equipment for their homes but don't end up using it. Enthusiasm rarely lasts because most goals end up being more challenging than people expect them to be. "Grit is living life like it's a marathon, not a sprint." In order to persist in any endeavor, what ends up really counting is not the amount of work we put in on any one day but the "consistency over time" efforts that we put in day after day.

This level of commitment and consistency is the essence of Hanukkah. We don't light eight candles on the first night. Each night we say another blessing and add another light. There is not just one, epic burst of inspiration that brings us closer to the power of miracles in our lives, because the Maccabees' battle was not won in one shot of glory. It was won by years and years of learning and spiritual training before they even knew that they would have to fight. It was won in secret caves with children playing dreidel to distract the enemies, day after day without knowing if they would succeed.

They were not stronger than the Greeks. They did not have better weapons. They did not have as many soldiers. But the story of the victory of the few against the many goes deeper. Because what really powers grit is the faith behind our efforts, the belief that God will take our efforts and turn them into something that we never could have imagined was possible. Jewish grit is built on the belief that our faith is worth fighting for, that we know deep in our hearts that God will help us find a way to succeed even if we don't know how and if we will win.

The light of our Torah and of our nation needs to be kindled not only from generation to generation but every single day. It needs to be kindled not only with the grit of our efforts but with the faith in God and the blessings that actualize that grit into victory. Because a miracle doesn't just rise and flicker and go out. A miracle weaves its way through every part of our lives, and it is a steady, eternal light that reminds us always that anything is possible.

It is what gives us the faith to keep building even when everything is falling apart around us, even when it's hard. Every day we kindle another light and at the end, we will have eight beautiful lights.

In Judaism, eight is the number that symbolizes what is beyond us, what is divine, what is infinite. On Hanukkah, we connect to the miraculous place within us all that whispers: Every day I will protect the precious light of my faith and my nation. I know that anything is possible because I believe in the One who does the impossible every day, the One who gives us grit and shows us how to use it, the One who creates light and shows us how to illuminate the darkness with our own light.

One light at a time.



Recipes: "Potato Latkes!"
by Chef Herschel Arnow

I once read many years ago, the only mitzvah that has increased among all the Jewish people was lighting candles on Chanukah. I'm sure it was because in most Jewish homes, candle lighting is followed by jelly doughnuts or potato pancakes (latkes in Yiddish).

It is customary that we eat foods fried in oil on Chanukah because the oil symbolizes the miraculous burning of a small amount of pure oil in the Menorah for eight days in the Holy Temple until new oil was prepared for its use.

In my home in Schenectady, New York, my mother would grate the potatoes and prepare the batter for latkes every Chanukah. It was a race to fry the potatoes before the mixture turned an ugly green. The other race was to make them fast enough to accumulate enough for a meal while everyone was visiting the kitchen to taste just one to see if they were any good. The latkes are still the high point of Chanukah for my family. It brings the family together and we sing and talk about the miracle. So I guess it is a good starting point.

Here are several good recipes for latkes. We would eat our latkes with maple syrup or salt or sour cream or apple sauce -- any combination, or nothing at all, or all of the above. Enjoy!

And Happy Chanukah! -- Chef Herschel

POTATO LATKES AND ONION

- 6 potatoes
- 1 onion
- 4 eggs
- 3 tbsps. matza meal
- salt & pepper to taste
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder

Grate by hand potatoes and onion. Add eggs and then dry ingredients. Fry in hot oil. Replace 2 of the potatoes with zucchini for lighter pancakes.

LATKES (POTATO PANCAKES)
(from The Flavor of Jerusalem)

A favorite eaten at Chanukah. Each cook has her infallible recipe, but we liked this version, which we found to be especially light.

- 3 large potatoes
- 3 tbsps. milk
- 1 egg
- 1/2 tsp. baking powder

salt and pepper to taste
cooking oil

If the skins of the potatoes are thin and unblemished, do not peel the potatoes but scrub them well. Otherwise, peel them; then grate 1 potato on the large holes of a grater and the other two on the medium holes. Beat in the milk, egg and baking powder. Season with salt and pepper; blend well. If there is a large amount of liquid in the mixture, drain off some of it. Heat a scant ½ inch of oil in a large skillet until it is very hot but not smoking. Drop the batter by large spoonfuls, flatten then slightly. Turn them once. When they are golden brown on the bottom side, cook them several minutes longer and drain them on paper towels. (The latkes will have crisp edges.)

Serve hot with sour cream or applesauce.

Makes 3-4 servings.

NANA'S LATKES (from the New York Times)

2 lbs. Idaho potatoes
2 lbs. Yukon potatoes
5 eggs, beaten
1 cup flour
salt
vegetable oil for frying
sour cream
apple sauce

Peel potatoes, and keep in cold water until you are ready to grate them.

Grate the potatoes coarsely by hand (or with a Cuisinart using first the shredding blade then the blending blade). The mixture should be slightly lumpy and not too blended. Add the beaten eggs. Mix in up to 1 cup of flour. Add a little salt. The batter should be fairly liquid and not too thick.

Heat about a half-inch of vegetable oil in a frying pan. When the oil is very hot, use a soup spoon as a measure to put in small amounts of batter in the oil. Frying the pancakes on one side, then the other, until they have turned brown on both sides and are crispy around the edges.

Drain the pancakes on paper towels that have been placed on a platter atop a saucepan of simmering hot water or keep warm in the oven.

Makes about 80 3-inch latkes.

(The following 3 recipes are taken from: The Settlement Cookbook)

SOUR CREAM POTATO PANCAKES

4 large potatoes or 2 cups raw, grated potatoes
1/2 cup sour cream or 1/2 cup hot milk
1/2 tsp. salt
2 eggs, separated

Grate the potatoes, place in a colander, set over a bowl and drain. When the starch has settled in the bottom of the bowl, discard top liquid. Place drained potatoes in a mixing bowl, add starch, cream or hot milk, and salt. Beat yolks well; add to potato mixture; fold in the stiffly beaten whites. Drop by spoonfuls on a hot, well-greased skillet. Brown slowly on both sides. Serve with apple sauce.

Makes 4 servings.

POTATO PANCAKES

4 large potatoes or 2 cups raw grated potatoes
2 eggs
1/8 tsp. baking powder
1 1/2 tsps. salt
1 tbsp. flour, bread crumbs or matza meal
dash of pepper

Peel potatoes, grate, drain. Beat eggs well and mix with the rest of the ingredients. Drop by spoonfuls on a hot, well-greased skillet. Brown on both sides. Serve with applesauce.

Makes 4 servings.

BAKED POTATO PANCAKES

Mix as above. Heat a generous amount of fat in a skillet, add potato batter; bake in a hot oven, 400°F, for 25 minutes.

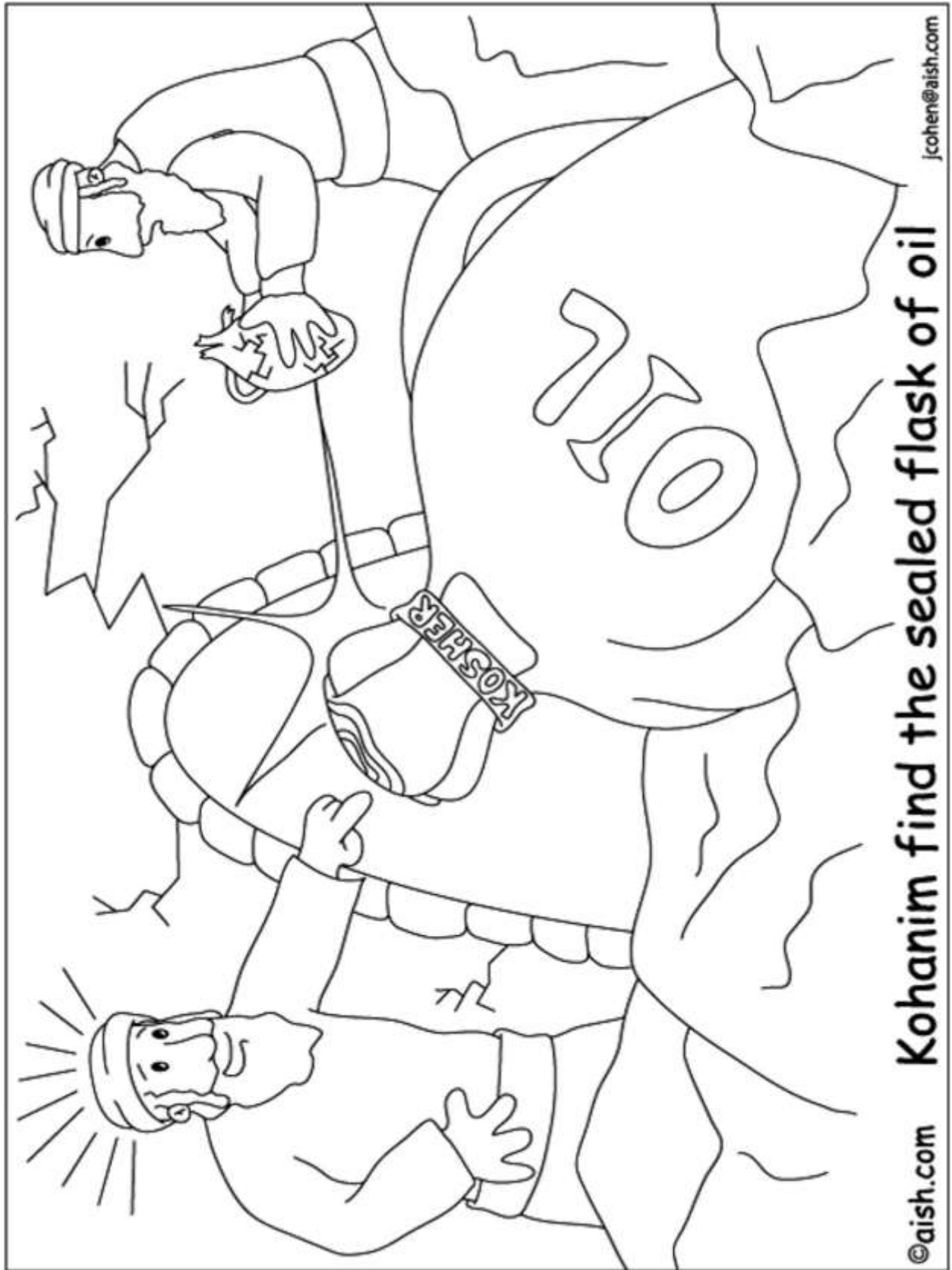


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Kohanim find the sealed flask of oil

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Chanukah Candle-Lighting

The first two blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Chanukah candles.

BLESSING #1

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Baruch ata Adonoy Eloheinu melech ha-olam
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו	asher kid'shanu be'mitzvo'sav
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.	ve-tzivanu lehadlik ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, God, King of the Universe, Who made us holy with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.

BLESSING #2

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Baruch ata Adonoy Eloheinu melech ha-olam
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ	Shi-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu,
בְּיָמֵינוּ הַיָּמִים הַהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.	Baya-meem ha-haim baz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, God, King of the Universe, Who made miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this season.

BLESSING #3

This blessing is said on the first night only.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם	Baruch ata Adonoy Eloheinu melech ha-olam
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ	Sheh-he-che-yanu vi-kee-yimanu
וְהַגִּיעֵנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה.	Vi-hee-gee-yanu laz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

This paragraph is said each night, after the first light has been kindled.

הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ אֲנַחְנוּ מַדְלִיקִים עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל
הַמִּלְחָמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמֵינוּ הַיָּמִים הַהֵם בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה עַל יְדֵי כַהֲנֵיךְ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים.
וְכָל שְׂמוֹנֵת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה הַנְּרוֹת הַלְלוּ קִדְּשׁ הֵם וְאִין לָנוּ רְשׁוֹת לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם אֶלָּא
לְרְאוֹתָם בְּלִבְךָ כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל עַל נִסֶּיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתְךָ.

We kindle these lights for the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles which You performed for our forefathers in those days at this season through Your holy priests. During all eight days of Chanukah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make ordinary use of them, but only to look at them – in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name, for your miracles, Your wonders, and Your salvations.