

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTHS OF MARCHESHVAN / KISLEV

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A holy light burns in the lights of Chanuka. A light as old as the world itself. We may not use the Chanuka lights to illuminate our homes. Their radiance may not be used for any practical purpose at all. We may only look into the light itself. We may only gaze into its depths.

But why can't we use the lights of Chanuka for some other sacred purpose? Why can't we use their glow to read words of Torah, for example? What sets aside the Chanuka lights from every other worldly light? Why may we only gaze into the light itself — and what are we supposed to see there?

SEEING THE LIGHT

Darkness. You turn on a light. You can look at light in two ways. Firstly, your surroundings are illuminated. You can see what's around you. Second, you can see the light itself, the source of illumination. And when you look into the light — into the source — the world that surrounds you recedes from view.

When we look at our surroundings, our perception of the light is second-hand, reflected. It's "en-lightenment" — but it's not the light itself. When we look at the light itself, we see the source. We perceive the light, not as a reflection, but the thing itself. We know of the light's existence because we see the light. We don't need it's reflection to give us evidence of its existence.

There are two words in Hebrew that are spelled identically. They have different vowels, but their letters are the same. One is the word for "proof" (*rye-ah*) and the other is the word for "sight" (*ree-ah*). These two words express

LIGHT AND ENLIGHTENMENT

these two aspects of light: *Rye-ah*, proof, is the reflection of the light, the verification that the light exists by its illumination of our surroundings. *Ree-ah*, sight, is seeing the source. When you look at the source, you don't need proof. You don't need "en-lightenment." You are looking at the light itself.



INTO THE LIGHT

In the Psalms, King David writes "For with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light." (Tehilim 36) Because the Creator is the source of life, His light cannot be perceived by reflection. Only in His "light do we see light." Not in His reflection. If we want to see His reflection in this world, if we want a proof of the existence of the light — a *rye-ah* — we could look at the way His light illuminates this world. We will find evidence of His Hand. Of His light. We will find evidence in the outrageous improbability of a "cosmic soup" which just happens to spawn Life. We will find evidence of His light in the highly unhistorical history of the Jewish People. We will find

direct evidence of His light in an unbroken chain back to Sinai. Yes, we will find evidence of the light. We will find proof of its existence, a *rye-ah*. But we will not see the light itself.

A LIGHT WHICH IS HIDDEN

At the beginning of time, there shone a unique light called the *Ohr Haganuz* — the Hidden Light. With this light you could see from one end of the Creation to the other. Even though the Creator hid away the *Ohr Haganuz* after the first thirty-six hours of Creation,

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there are times when you can still catch glimpses of its hidden glow...

On the first night of Chanuka, we light one candle; on the second night two. Thus after two nights, we have lit three candles. If you continue this calculation, you will find that the total number of candles that we light on Chanuka is thirty-six. The thirty-six lights of Chanuka correspond to the thirty-six hours during which the *Ohr Haganuz* shone.

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

“**F**or with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light.” We may not use the lights of Chanuka for any purpose, however holy, for “...with You is the source of life.” When we look into the lights of Chanuka we are looking to the Source of life itself. For “In Your light do we see light.” We connect to the Source of life, not through its reflected light, not through evidence and proof, not through *rye-ah*, but rather through *ree-ah*, through gazing directly into the light. And when we do that, this world of reflection vanishes from our sight.

THE LIGHT IN EXILE

Chanuka, the festival of light, represents the freedom from an exile. The Exile of ancient Greece. Unique among the exiles which the Jewish People have suffered, the Exile of Greece was the only exile in which the Jewish People never left their land. And yet an exile it still was. It was the exile of the Light. The wisdom of the Torah was exiled by Greek philosophy.

To the ancient Greeks, what is beyond the mind of man does not exist. The Greek view of the world is a world of evidence, of *rye-ah*, of proof. It is a world of reflected light alone. A world of en-lightenment. The Greek eye is blind to a source that is brighter than the eye of man can bear.

Thus it grasps the reflection as being the source. What I can see, exists. Beyond that, beyond concrete evidence, in that place where the human eye cannot penetrate, there can exist nothing. The Greeks engaged the Sages of the Talmud over and over again, challenging them to give incontrovertible evidence for the efficacy of the Torah. Prove to us, they said that *brit mila* causes some empirical improvement in a person; that keeping Shabbat changes someone, something. The Sages could not give these proofs. Not because of any lacking in the Torah, but because the Greeks misunderstood the nature of the Torah itself.

If we wanted to prove the efficacy of an antibiotic, we could go to a laboratory, take a blood sample and analyze it empirically. We could evaluate how many white blood cells there were, how many red. We could take finite measurements which would lead to empirical conclusions. There is, however, no empirical measurement for a *mitzva*. The Torah is lacking in empirical proofs because it is not a description of that which already exists. It is the source of that which is to be. It depicts an existence which has yet to be. It is the source, not the outcome. It is the light, not its reflection.

The Torah doesn't conform to Greek thought. It doesn't observe the world. It is the source of the world. It is not a reflection of the light. It is the light itself.

When you look into the light all you can see is the light. When you look into the light itself, into the Source of life, the empirical realities of this world, the reflections of the light, pale and fade, for we are gazing far above and beyond to the hidden Source of life itself.

“For with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light.”

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

Eyes that define the world
Blind the world
With dark circles spun
in narrow corridors.

Darkly
they squint at other eyes
lifted to the Light,
to the hills
following the footsteps
of angels.

Sources: Tehillim 36; Rashi on Bereshet 1:4; Pachad Yitzchak, Essays on Chanuka, Essay 9/7

In Memory of Ephraim Fishel ben Yitzchak Silverberg z'l

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