



Chanukah 5775: The Sweetness of the Light

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There is something beautifully special and unique about the luminescent glow of the Chanukah candles. Whether you use multi-colored candles or pure olive oil the flame of Chanukah illuminates the soul and opens the heart.

Our celebration and commemoration is rooted in two amazing miracles. The *Pach Shemen*, the little cruse of oil that lasted for eight days and the stunning military victory over the Syrian Greeks. Yet in the observance of this holiday it is the miracle of the oil that takes center stage and the military victory is simply mentioned in an insertion in *Shmona Esrei* and *Birkas Hamazon* (grace after meals).

Why does the *Pach Shemen*, miracle of the oil become the dominant point of focus during these eight sacred days?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt'l the Rosh Yeshiva of the famed Mirrer Yeshiva explains this dynamic. There are two types of miracles. There are miracles that are necessary to remedy an immediate need. For example, when the Jewish people left Egypt and found themselves stuck between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian Army, they needed an immediate salvation to escape the clutches of the Egyptian oppressor. God split the sea in order to save His nation. The miracle was necessary and needed. However, there is another non-utilitarian type of miracle. This second type of miracle is not performed to address or remedy an immediate need, but rather to send a message. An example of this second type of miracle can be found in last week's Parsha. Yosef, ambushed by his brothers was stripped of his clothing, dignity and pride, discarded in a well and left to die. The brothers then decided to sell Yosef to a passing Ishmaelite caravan. The Torah states that the caravan was transporting sweet-smelling, aromatic herbs and spices. Why does the text include this seemingly extraneous fact? The Talmud explains that generally, these types of caravans carried foul-smelling hides and oils. This was a miraculous event orchestrated by God for the benefit of Yosef. God did not want Yosef to suffer the suffocating stench of these noxious items and therefore provided him with a caravan transporting aromatic items. *"This teaches us of the incredible reward given to the righteous."* Are we to understand that because Yosef was surrounded by some sweet smelling herbs suddenly his suffering and anxiety melted away? Could the aromatic scent take away the pain, heartbreak and humiliation he was experiencing? What type of reward was Yosef receiving? It is true; the sweet smell would not mend Yosef's broken heart. The departure from the norm, the sweet scent was to remind Yosef that he was not alone. The fragrant smell was a message from God to Yosef, *"My beloved child, I am here with you. I know you are hurt, I know you are broken but I am by your side now and forever."* The pleasing aroma was a Divine kiss (*Neshika*); a kiss of reassurance, love and companionship. Sometimes, the miracles God performs for us do not remedy the current crisis or remove the pain. They simply allow us to feel a Divine embrace, a heavenly kiss from above.

This is the essence of the *Pach Shemen* (cruse of oil) miracle. God did not need to do it. It was not "necessary." We could have easily gotten by without it. If the oil would have run out after a day – so be it. We would have managed just fine. But this is exactly what makes this miracle so special. It was a "kiss" from God to us. It was a kiss that reflected God's pride and admiration for the sacrifices we were willing to make. It was a kiss that reminded us that even when life is dark and difficult, we are never alone. It was a kiss that gave us the strength to weather the difficulties and vicissitudes of life.

Now we can understand why this miracle takes center stage on Chanukah. The *Pach Shemen* is much more than a jug of oil – it is the kiss that has held us through the centuries, it is the kiss that dispels the darkness, it is the kiss that gives us the strength to get back up when life has knocked us down. The kiss of the *Pach Shemen* is the kiss that opens our eyes, and provides the illumination to see all of the other Divine "kisses" we experience throughout life.

As we bask in the glow of the Menorah, let us remember the kisses of the past, appreciate the kisses of the present and eagerly anticipate the sweet Divine kisses in the near future.