

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה להבין ענין נרות חנוכה תשכ"ו מוגה

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MAKING THE DARKNESS SHINE

LET US UNDERSTAND THE CHANUKAH LIGHTS. ALTHOUGH THE CHANUKA LIGHTS were instituted by the Sages in memory of a miracle which took place with the Menorah in the Temple, there are several differences between the Chanuka lamp and the Menorah.

The Temple Menorah had seven lights, while the Chanuka lamp has eight. The Menorah was inside the sacred enclosed area of the Temple, the Heichal, while the Chanuka lamp is towards the outside. Inside the Heichal, the Menorah was on the south side, which is termed the right, while the Chanuka lamp in one's home is on the left². The Menorah was lit some time before sunset, while the Chanuka lamp is lit after sunset or at night.

The main point is that the idea of the Chanuka lights is to illuminate the darkness. The battle of the Greeks, trying to make the Jewish people forget G-d's Torah and transgress His Commands, and then entering the Temple and defiling the oil, expressed the force of an impure darkness. When the Hasmoneans conquered the Greeks, the Chanuka lights were established so as to illuminate the darkness. That is why they are lit after sunset, and they are placed towards the outside, the public domain, which relates to the 'left side' which spiritually represents the realm of negativity and unholiness. Hence too the Chanuka lights are on the left.

בברכת רפואה שלמה וקרובה בשביל האשה העניא בת ברכה דבורה לאה תחי'
Praying for a Refuah Shelemah for Henya bas Brochah Devorah Leah תחי'

¹ Extract from Maamer Lehavin Inyan Nerot Chanuka 5726 (1965). It was printed as Kuntres Chanuka 5752 and republished in Dvar Malchus Vayeshev 5777.

² The Chabad custom is to put the Chanuka lamp in a doorway on the opposite side to the Mezuzah. The Mezuzah is on the right hand doorpost, which means the Chanuka lamp is on the left hand side.

This also explains why the lights of Chanuka, and the days of the festival, are eight in number. Because in order to illuminate the darkness Chanuka has to draw from an exalted high level, beyond the downchaining of the spiritual worlds. That realm of downchaining is typified by the number seven; the level beyond, by the number eight³.

Now this radiance which is above the downchaining of the worlds, which shines during the days of Chanuka and especially through the Chanuka lights, was drawn from the Mesirut Nefesh (dedicated self-sacrifice) of Mattityahu and his sons. Because of the great darkness of the time, their inner power of self-sacrifice was aroused, which is beyond the 'downchaining', the rational structure of a person. This reached upwards to the Essence of the Infinite. This was all a movement from below to above. Then from the Essence of the Infinite there flowed a radiance, from above to below, the radiance of Chanuka which has the power to transform the darkness. This explains why there is an emphasis on the Chanuka lamp being (or shining towards) the 'outside'.

This exalted revelation of the Divine transforms reality. At this level one feels that all is an expression of the inwardness of the Divine.

This can be contrasted with a slightly lower sense of Divine revelation. King Solomon was very holy and had an effect on the surrounding regions to the extent that the Queen of Sheba was inspired to come to visit Jerusalem. The 'sparks of holiness' in the surrounding realms were drawn to him in order to be transformed. But this would only happen if they came to Jerusalem.

By contrast in the Future to Come the true inner existence of everything will be revealed. That inner existence is the Divine. Hence then all nations will serve G-d together with the Jewish people.

This is also the nature of the illumination of Chanukah. It draws a radiance from an exalted level where there is no distinction between higher and lower. The effect of the Chanukah lights permeates everywhere equally. They are placed 'outside' not because without being there they could not affect the outside, because they affect everywhere. They are placed 'outside' to emphasise that the darkness itself shines.

This also explains a passage in the Talmud which tells us the time for lighting the Chanuka lights is 'until the feet of the Tarmodians cease'⁴. The word

³ Seven represents the realm of the cycle of Nature, like the seven days of Creation and of the week; eight signifies that which is beyond.

⁴ Shabbat 21b. The Tarmodeans were a merchant nation which would sell tinder and other small goods, being available for this in the market-place till late in the evening. One could light the Chanuka lamp till they ceased their activity and left the market-place.

Tarmod is an anagram of *moredet*, rebellious one. The word for 'cease' *kalya* relates to the word 'yearn', *kilayon*. The radiance of Chanuka transforms this spiritual aspect of negativity so that instead of it signifying being 'rebellious' it expresses yearning for the Divine.

This too is the nature of the 'spreading of the Wellsprings', which the Baal Shem Tov was told by Moshiach is the way to bring the Redemption. The Wellsprings also flow from a very exalted aspect of the Divine. Their power is to transform the darkness, so that it too radiates the Essence of the Divine, which is revealed with the wellsprings of the inwardness of Torah. And through this all Jewish people and all non-Jews will ultimately serve G-d together.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care