

מעט מן האור

A Little Bit of Light

A Hanukkah Companion
From Hadar's Faculty in Israel

Hanukkah 5785



THE HADAR INSTITUTE

Hadar empowers Jews to create and sustain vibrant, practicing, egalitarian communities of Torah, Avodah, and Hesed. Hadar offers learning opportunities for people from all walks of Jewish life, including online courses, public lectures, week-long immersive experiences, and our online Torah and Tefillah library.

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Hadar Israel | Who we are

Hadar Israel was founded over a decade ago to be the home for vibrant, egalitarian communities in Israel.

Our goal is to offer a vision of Jewish life rooted in rigorous Torah learning, ritual, and social responsibility. Our main programs include a *beit midrash* in Jerusalem, satellite programming in Tel Aviv and Beer Sheva, producing and disseminating Divrei Torah and halakhic rulings, and supporting more than 50 independent prayer communities all across Israel.

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Hadar Israel is committed to sharing our knowledge and resources broadly. We produce a wealth of accessible content, including halakhic rulings, holiday publications, and a virtual *beit midrash* featuring an extensive archive of lectures. Our faculty also engages in teaching and scholarship at institutions across Israel and internationally, contributing to a vibrant Jewish learning community.

This companion showcases the amazing work of Hadar's branch in Israel.





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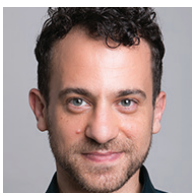
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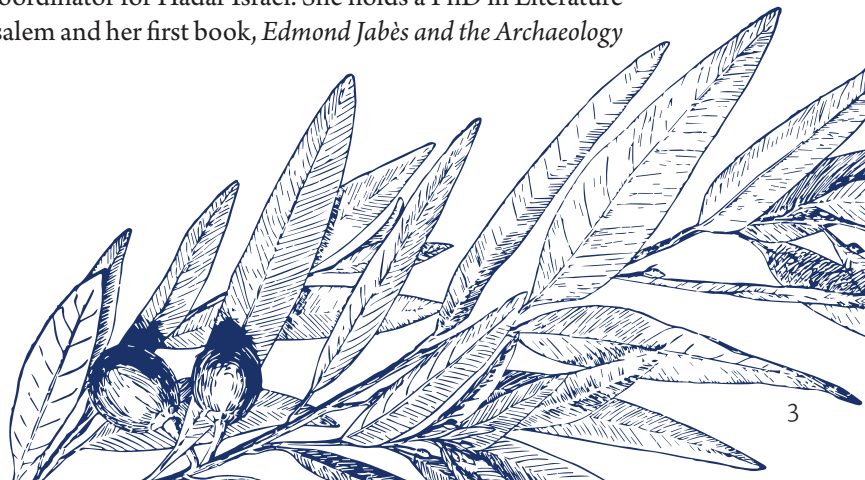
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Introduction

חובות הלבבות,
שער חמישי - שער יחוד המעשה ה:יג
מַעַט מִן הָאֱמֶת יִנְצַח הַרְבֵּה מִן הַשֶּׁקֶר כְּאֲשֹׁר
הַמַּעַט מִן הָאוֹר דּוֹחֵה הַרְבֵּה מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ.

*Duties of the Heart,
Fifth Treatise on Devotion 5:13*

A small amount of truth can overpower a great deal of falsehood, just as a small amount of light can dispel a great deal of darkness.

R. Bahya ibn Pekudah draws a parallel between truth and light. Just as a small amount of light can penetrate and illuminate a vast area shrouded in darkness, so too can truth expose and dispel falsehood, even when it seems deeply entrenched. It encourages us to seek truth and to uphold it, even when it is unpopular or difficult to defend.

Our world often feels like a place shrouded in darkness, filled with conflict, pain, and uncertainty. Living in the shadow of war this past year has only deepened these challenges, testing our resilience and hope. Yet R. Bahya's teaching reminds us that even the smallest spark of light can make a profound difference.

This is the essence of Hanukkah. The Al ha-Nissim prayer so poignantly describes how salvation was achieved by a small and meager group, outnumbered and outmatched. The courage of the Maccabees, the resilience of the Jewish people, and God's miracles in a small jug of oil all remind us that goodness and light are always possible. Each flickering flame of the *hanukkiyah* serves as a beacon of hope, an act of defiance that pushes back against the shadows.

We are excited to introduce you to the team and the Torah of Hadar Israel. They have prepared texts to study each night of Hanukkah in order to increase the light in our lives and to remind us all that, even in the face of overwhelming darkness, we each have the power to bring light into the world with God's help. May these texts guide you in reflecting on the meaning of Hanukkah, and inspire you to become ever able to find and create more light.



The gradual path to redemption



תלמוד ירושלמי
ברכות א:א, דף ב טור ג

רבי חייא רובא ורבי שמעון בן חלפתא הוו מהלכין בהדא בקעת ארבל בקריעתה וראו אילת השחר שבקע אורה. אמר רבי חייא רבא לרבי שמעון בן חלפתא בירבי כף היא גאלתן של ישראל בתחילה קמאה קמאה כל מה שהיא הולכת היא רבה והולכת. מאי טעמא? "כי אשב בחשך ה' אור לי."

Talmud Yerushalmi
Berakhot 1:1, 2c

R. Hiyya the Great and R. Shimon ben Halafta were walking in the Valley of Arbel at dawn. They saw the light of the morning star as it began to shine. R. Hiyya the Great said to R. Shimon ben Halafta, "Son of Rabbi [Halafta], this is how the redemption of Israel will be. At first, it will come little by little, and as it continues, it will grow and increase. What is the verse? 'Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me' (Micah 7:8)."

- What is R. Hiyya trying to teach about redemption? What kind of hopefulness and reassurance can you find in his words? What is the significance of the setting of this story in a valley at dawn?
- What does the "morning star" symbolize?
- How does R. Hiyya interpret the verse from Micah?
- If one is sitting in darkness, in what way can God be a light? If God is a light, how can it nonetheless still be dark? How does this apply to the redemption of Israel? How might the light of God appear in your own life?
- How is this *midrash* reflected in the lighting of Hanukkah lamps?

The Korban ha-Edah in his commentary on the passage explains: "One who sits in darkness and suddenly looks at a great light, his eyes will be blinded. Rather, one must first open a small light for him, and then add gradually, until he can tolerate the great light."

According to this view, the Yerushalmi teaches that the world cannot suddenly be redeemed without a gradual process of preparation. This process involves increasing light and truth in the world, little by little, until the world is ready for the full light of redemption. It must develop slowly because the world would otherwise be incapable of receiving it. Lasting change must often occur in gradual stages.

The Maharal of Prague (Netzah Yisrael 47:7) contrasts this final, but slow, redemption with the Exodus from Egypt, which transpired with incredible speed: "כי בחפזון יצאת מארץ מצרים - for you left the Land of Egypt in great haste" (Deuteronomy 16:3). He writes that good things that dawn in a flash are also over in a flash. A flare, firework, or an explosion of light will illuminate the skies in an instant, but the darkness returns in the blink of an eye. The Exodus of Egypt was all fireworks. Yet here we remain, over 3,000 years later, in a world still profoundly unredeemed. The final redemption, however, will not follow this trajectory. The final redemption will illuminate the world for all time. To endure, it must be built meticulously, with care, one glimmer of light at a time.

This gradual approach offers tremendous hope. Even when progress seems frustratingly slow or imperceptible—like the earliest pre-dawn hours when the world remains overwhelmingly dark—we can take comfort in knowing that the coming redemption will be as unstoppable as the sunrise. "At first, it will come little by little," but once it is started, it will bear down upon the darkness with the unmovable force of inevitability, and everlasting light will break forth over the valley of darkness.

Publicizing the miracle: From the private to the public

תלמוד בבלי שבת כא.

מִצְוַתָּהּ מִשְׁתַּשְׁקַע הַחֲמָה עַד שֶׁתִּכְלֶה
רִגְלָא מִן הַשּׁוּק... וְעַד כַּמָּה? אָמַר
רַבָּה בַר בַּר חֲנָה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: עַד דְּכָלְיָא רִיגְלָא
דְּתַרְמוּדָאִי.

ר' יצחק מוינה, אור זרוע, חלק ב, שכב, א
"עד דְּכָלְיָא רִגְלָא דְּתַרְמוּדָאִי" - מִלְקָטֵי עֲצִים דְּקִים,
וּמִתְעַבְּבִין בְּשׁוּק עַד שֶׁהוֹלְכִין בְּנֵי הַשּׁוּק לְבִתְיָהּ
מִשְׁחָשְׁקָה וּמִבְעָרִין אֹר בְּבִתְיָהּ, וְכִשְׁצָרִיכִים לְעֲצִים
יִצְאִין וְקוֹנִין.

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 21a

*The ideal [timing of a Hanukkah lamp] is from sunset until
traffic ceases from the high street. ... Until when [is that]?
Rabbah bar bar Hanah said R. Yohanan said: Until the traffic of
the tarmoda'ei ceases.*

R. Yitzhak of Vienna, Or Zarua, Part 2, 246:1

*"Until the traffic of the tarmoda'ei ceases"—wood gatherers who
linger in the high street until the people of the high street go to their
homes at nightfall and light fires in their homes. And when they need
wood, they go out and buy it.*

- What is the connection between the “wood gatherers” and lighting the Hanukkah lamps?
- In a modern, urban reality, can you think of an equivalent example for what the Or Zarua describes?
- What was so unclear about “until traffic ceases from the high street” that R. Yohanan felt the need to clarify it was about “wood gatherers”? What might be the purpose of his clarification?

A tradition in the Talmud sets the latest permissible time for lighting Hanukkah lights as “until traffic ceases from the high street.” This seemingly mundane detail reveals a profound connection between the private and the public: as long as the marketplace bustles with activity, even as darkness descends, the act of lighting at home becomes a shared experience. The house door, a threshold between the domestic and the social (and where Hanukkah lamps were traditionally placed), becomes a stage for the miracle’s message. However, once the high street empties, the act loses its public dimension. The light displayed becomes personal, lacking the element of “publicizing the miracle” that defines this *mitzvah*.

The emptying of the high street at night, however, isn’t just a practical concern for lighting Hanukkah lamps. It reflects a shift in both public and private spaces. As trade ceases and the city becomes dark “outside,” homes require fuel to become beacons of warmth with which the Hanukkah miracle can be publicized outside. This transformation hinges, according to the Or Zarua, on the wood gatherers. By staying late, they ensure everyone has the means for light and heat. In their seemingly mundane work, they bridge the public and private, the fading daylight and the emerging glow from every window.

The Talmud’s abstract reference to “traffic” (literally: “leg”) in the high street takes on a human face in the commentary of R. Yohanan. He names the *tarmoda’ei*, the wood gatherers who remain long after others have retreated to the shelter and comfort of their homes. This shift in focus is not accidental. It invites us to understand the *mitzvah* of publicizing the miracle as more than just a religious obligation incumbent on the person lighting the lamps. It becomes a social responsibility, an acknowledgment of those who, due to the needs of the community (both material and spiritual) are compelled to stay last in the high street.

When we consider our own urban reality, the constant presence of these *tarmoda’ei* becomes impossible to ignore. They are the ones who occupy the deserted and even perhaps frightening public space after dark. Yet, their seemingly prosaic and invisible work plays a crucial role. By ensuring everyone has the means for light and warmth, they prepare the space of the house as a haven of celebration and hope. Their presence reminds us that the miracle of Hanukkah extends beyond the walls of our homes, radiating outwards as a testament to the enduring spirit of community.

Who are the “mighty,” and who are the “weak”?



על הנסים

וְאַתָּה בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים עָמַדְתָּ לָהֶם בְּעֵת
צָרָתָם וּרְבַת אֶת־יָדְכֶם דִּנְתָּ אֶת־דֵּינָם נִקְמָתָ
אֶת־נִקְמָתָם מִסֶּרַת גְּבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים וְרַבִּים
בְּיַד מַעֲטִים וְטָמְאִים בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים וְרָשָׁעִים
בְּיַד צַדִּיקִים וְזָדִים בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תוֹרָתְךָ.

Al ha-Nissim

You, in Your abundant mercy, stood up for them in their time of distress, You defended their cause, You judged their grievance, You avenged their wrong. You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the insolent into the hands of those engaged with Your Torah.

- What is the relationship between human initiative and divine intervention? What role, if any, do the “weak” and “righteous” (and so on) play in the victories being described?
- What conception of divine justice does the passage reflect?
- In what ways are the Greeks “mighty” (*gibborim*) and the Jews “weak” (*halashim*)? Is there a values proposition being implied here? If so, what? Is there a way in which it would be good for Jews to be mighty rather than weak? What important questions would that raise?

The Al ha-Nissim prayer presents a series of pairs of oppositional adjectives describing two adversaries. The prayer describes God having delivered “the many into the hands of the few.” The Greeks are the impure, the wicked, the enemy. And God delivered them into the hands of those who were studying Torah, the righteous, and the pure: the Hasmoneans, the Jews, us.

The prayer portrays Jews as weak yet victorious. To Israelis today, the State of Israel seems both strong and yet also vulnerable. Are these categories clear-cut? Can we be both weak and mighty? Should we?

The list of black-and-white dichotomies in this prayer challenges us to account for when we are overcomplicating or oversimplifying our understanding of our world. We are left questioning: what are the appropriate adjectives to describe ourselves and the State of Israel today? And what are the words that describe what we’d like for our future? What possibilities have we not even imagined yet?

These binary dichotomies might have applied cleanly to Jewish struggles in the past, and they can still help support the development of complex thinking, but if we try to apply them to our modern reality, they may not be adequate all on their own, even in the shadow of war.

Let us pray to push ourselves to think beyond the present, to imagine what other realities could be possible, and to come up with good adjectives that might accurately describe who we are, and what actions these adjectives might lead to.



NIGHT

4

A beacon of light

מדרש תנחומא פרשת תצוה ו

אמר רבי אבין הלוי ברבי: את מוציא
כל מי שמבקש לעשות לו חלונות,
עושה אותן רחבות מבפנים וצרות
מבחוץ, למה? שיהיו שואבות האור
אבל חלונות שבמקדש לא היו כך,
אלא רחבות מבחוץ וצרות מבפנים. למה? שיהא
האור יוצא מן בית המקדש ומאיר לעולם. והוא
צריך לנרות. אלא לזכותנו בנרות. אמר דוד: "אור
זרע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה" (תהלים צו, יא).

Midrash Tanhuma Tetzaveh 6

Said R. Abin ha-Levi bar R. [Abin¹]: You find that when someone seeks to make windows, they build them wide on the inside and narrow on the outside. Why? So that they may draw the light [into the house]. The windows in the Temple, however, were wide on the outside and narrow within. Why? So that the light might go forth from the Temple and illuminate the world. Does God require lamps?! Rather, it is for our merit through the lamps. David said: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:11).

The windows in the Temple are designed not for the sake of illuminating the interior, but to let God's light shine out into the world. Similarly, on Hanukkah, we light the *hanukkiyah* and let the lights in our windows shine out and be seen by the world, sharing the miracle publicly.

The declaration recited while lighting the lamps makes this point explicitly:

מסכת סופרים כ

הנרות הללו שאנו מדליקין... הנרות הללו קדש הם
ואין לנו רשות להשתמש בהם, אלא לראותם בלבד.

Tractate Soferim 20

These lamps we light... these lamps are holy, and we are not permitted to make use of them; rather, we may only see them.

The Hanukkah lights may not be used to illuminate some other object. The lights are not a means to another end; they are the end in themselves. We do not light them to see something around us better in the dark. We light them simply so that the world can see the lights.

- What is the difference between using a light to see something else and appreciating the light in and of itself? In what way is the latter a description of what it means to be "holy"?
- According to the *midrash*, what kind of "merit" is it to be able to light the Menorah or *hanukkiyah*? How is that merit expressed in the verse from Psalms?
- What light would you like to send out into the world tonight? What light do you want or need to receive from the world?
- What small action on your part may bring illumination and have a significant impact on others?
- In the absence of a Temple that shines its holy light outward, where can you go to find this light?

The Temple's windows and the Hanukkah lamps convey a shared message: God's holiness and light are not meant to be contained or hoarded, but rather to radiate outward. By positioning the *hanukkiyah* to be visible from outside our homes, and by reminding ourselves that the Hanukkah lights are forbidden to use for personal benefit, we emulate the purpose of the Temple's light and project divine illumination to a world often shrouded in darkness.

1 The honorific "*beribbi*" ("bar Rabbi") is used when the person's father is also a rabbi, especially when they both share the same name. See Shamma Friedman's discussion of the term in *Mehkerei Lashon u-Minu'ah be-Sifrut ha-Talmudit* (2014). Based on this, it is likely that "*beribbi*" here indicates that R. Abin ha-Levi's father was also called R. Abin. See Aharon Hyman, *Toldot Tannaim ve-Amoraim*, pp. 93, 96.

In those days and at this time



ר' צדוק הכהן מלובלין,
פרי צדיק, פרשת מקץ

והברכה "שעשה נסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה" מורה שאנחנו מבקשים שיעשה לנו גם עכשו נסים כאלה כמו שעשה לאבותינו בימים ההם. ועל נסים בשנוי סדרי בראשית אין אדם רשאי להתפלל... ולכן אין אנו מברכים בפסח "שעשה נסים", שיהיה נראה שאנו חפצים שיעשה לנו גם עכשו נסים כאלה, ועל זה אין לבקש. אמנם בחנכה ופורים היו הנסים מלבשים בטבע ובלא שנוי סדרי בראשית...

בחנכה לא היה נראה כל כך השתנות סדרי בראשית, כי היה התחלת הנס על ידי מלחמה... אף שנפלו גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים, יוכל להיות מצד שישאל הלוכו במסירות נפשם... והיונים לא מסרו נפשם, ולכן גברו החשמונאים. וכדומה ענינים שיוכל להיות במלחמה לפעמים, שיתגבר החלש על הגבור... ולכן אנחנו מברכים "שעשה נסים" בחנכה ובפורים שיתעורר נסים כאלה גם עכשו כמו שמזכירין שעשה נסים לאבותינו בזמן הזה.

R. Zadok ha-Kohen of Lublin,
Peri Tzadik on Parashat Mikeitz

The blessing "Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time" indicates that we are asking God to perform similar wonders for us now, just as God did for our ancestors in those days. However, one is not permitted to pray for miracles that involve a change in the order of nature... Therefore, we do not bless on Pesah, "Who performed miracles," as it might appear that we desire God to perform similar wonders for us now, which is something that should not be requested. However, on Hanukkah and Purim, the miracles were cloaked in nature and did not involve a change in the order of nature...

On Hanukkah, it did not seem like a change in the order of nature, as the miracle began with a war... Although the mighty fell at the hands of the weak and many at the hands of the few, it could be attributed to the fact that Israel fought with self-sacrifice... while the Greeks did not risk their lives, and therefore the Hasmoneans prevailed. Similarly, there are situations in war where the weak can sometimes overcome the strong. Therefore, we bless "Who performed miracles" on Hanukkah and Purim, hoping that similar miracles will occur now, just as we recall that God performed wonders for our ancestors at this time.

- R. Zadok ha-Kohen distinguishes between miracles that change the natural order and those that work within it. What makes hidden or "natural" miracles special? Why is it ok to pray for those kinds of miracles? How does it impact your understanding and appreciation of Hanukkah to think it represents these more hidden kinds of miracles?
- In what way can a "natural" miracle be considered a miracle at all? How does this impact your relationship to the natural realm altogether?
- How does remembering past miracles, like those of Hanukkah and Purim, affect our prayers for the present?
- What does it mean that we should not pray for nature-defying miracles? Why not? What does this mean about our prayers in general, and what our expectations of God can or ought to be?

It's curious that the prayer of "Who performs miracles" is recited specifically during holidays when the miracles seem less obvious. After all, Pesah celebrates a series of overt, awe-inspiring, nature-bending miracles that God enacted for the Israelites. Why wouldn't we explicitly mention and express gratitude for those wonders by reciting this prayer?

The answer lies in the distinct purposes of this blessing and of Hallel. While we recite Hallel on both Pesah and Hanukkah in order to express gratitude for God's past interventions, the "Who performs miracles" blessing serves a different function: it acts as a bridge between remembering past miracles and expressing hope for future ones. As R.

Zadok reminds us, prayer for miracles shouldn't hinge on the expectation of a grand, overt display of divine power. This focus on future miracles is why the blessing is absent from Pesah and present in Hanukkah.

The events that precipitated the Hanukkah celebration, though challenging, possess a certain relatability. It's a story we can connect to. Unlike the epic liberation of Pesah or the profound spiritual revelation of Shavuot, the Hanukkah story feels closer to home. Every evening, as we gather by the hanukkiyah, we recite the blessing, acknowledging the wonders God performed for our ancestors "in those days," while simultaneously expressing our hope for similar miracles "at this time."



My light is yours, and your light is Mine



פסיקתא דרב כהנא כא

"על פן בָּאֵרִים בְּבָדוּ ה'" וג' (ישעיה כד, טו). בְּמָה מְכַבְּדִין אוֹתוֹ, בְּאֵלּוֹ פְּנִיָּא.

ר' אָבָהוּ א' בְּשֵׁנֵי מְאֻרוֹת, "וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹקִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים" (בְּרֵאשִׁית א, טז), הָא כִּיצַד, חֲמֶה זֹרַחַת וּמְבָרְכִין עָלֶיהָ, לְבִנָּה זֹרַחַת וּמְבָרְכִין עָלֶיהָ.

וּרְבִנִין אוֹמְרִים, אָמַר הַקֵּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנֵי הוֹאִיל וְאוֹרֵי הוּא אוֹרֵיכֶם וְאוֹרְכֶם הוּא אוֹרִי, אָנִי וְאַתֶּם גִּלְדִּי וְנֶאֱיִר לְצִיּוֹן, "קוֹמִי אוֹרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרְךָ" (ישעיה ס, א).

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 21

"Therefore, honor God with lights" (Isaiah 24:15). How do they honor God? With these lamps.

R. Abahu said: With the two celestial lights, "And God made the two great celestial lights" (Genesis 1:16). How so? The sun shines, and they bless over it; the moon shines, and they bless over it.

But the rabbis say: The Holy Blessed One, said to Israel, "My children, since My light is your light and your light is My light, I and you will go and illuminate Zion, 'Arise, shine, for your light has come' (Isaiah 60:1)."

- What might it mean to "honor God with lights"?
- Which blessings over the sun and the moon do you think this text is referring to? Is that related to "honoring God with lights"?
- How does the passage describe the connection between God's light and the light of the people of Israel? What does it mean for God to say "My light is your light and your light is My light"? What does this imply about the relationship between God and the Jewish people?
- Isaiah 60:1 speaks of a future where Zion is illuminated by divine light. How does this vision align with the message of the *midrash*? What is God asking of us?

Isaiah 24:15 calls upon us to "honor God with lights"—but how? The first opinion understands this verse to be about the *menorah* in the Temple. R. Abahu, however, interprets this as referring to the two great celestial lights created by God, over which the people recite blessings. The majority of rabbis present a third opinion, suggesting a connection between God's light and the light of the Jewish people, which is not defined except insofar as it's something shared in common with God. This link is symbolized by the shared designation of "light" for both God and Israel. Together, they illuminate Zion.

It's possible to see this remarkable evolution of the Jewish people's relationship to light—from lighting actual lamps, to reciting blessings over illuminating bodies, to having some spiritual inner quality shared with God—might seem on the surface like a diminution of light. According to the first opinion, the people proactively create light by kindling lamps. According to the second opinion, they simply recognize the lights that already exist. According to the third, it's very unclear; it seems they share something with God, but it's abstract and undefined. It's not obvious what this light is at all, and one wonders whether, like God, it is perhaps completely unseen.

And yet, it's this third light that has the power to illuminate Zion.

The verse quoted from Isaiah is from one of the seven *haftarot* of consolation read between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah. The chapter from which it comes offers comfort and solace during times of despair.

Perhaps the *midrash* is trying to teach us that we must sometimes look for light in less than obvious places, or that it's often the lights which are hardest to see that most exhibit divine qualities and that are most capable of bringing redemption.

NIGHT

7

The enduring light

שפת אמת, בראשית,
לחנוכה תרל"א מאמר א

הַרְוֹאָה נֶר חֲנֻכָּה צְרִיף לְבָרֵךְ. כִּי נִשְׁאַר
הָאֶרֶץ הַנִּסִּים בְּהִנָּרוֹת. וְאִזּוֹר זֶה הַרְוִיחוּ בנ"י
אַחֵר חֲשָׁכוֹת שֶׁל מַלְכוּת יוֹן הַרְשָׁעָה כַּמ"ש
וְיִתְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן הַחֲשֶׁךְ כֹּ' (קֹהֶלֶת ב, יג)
מִכָּלֵל שֶׁ"י הַחֲשֶׁךְ יֵשׁ יִתְרוֹן אוֹר אַח"כ
כְּשֶׁנִּגְאָלִין מִמֶּנּוּ וְכַמ"ש "בְּכֹל עֶצֶב יִהְיֶה
מוֹתֵר" (מְשָׁלִי יד, כג).

*Sefat Emet, Bereishit,
for Hanukkah 1870, Essay 1*

One who sees a Hanukkah lamp must recite a blessing, because a trace of the illumination of the miracles remains in the lamps. This light was achieved by the Children of Israel after the darkness of the wicked kingdom of Greece, as it is written, "There is more light than darkness" (Ecclesiastes 2:13), implying that through the darkness there is more light which comes afterwards when they are redeemed from it, as it is written, "In all sorrow there will be something better" (Proverbs 14:23).

- The Sefat Emet asserts that "a trace of the illumination of the miracles remains in the lamps." What does this mean? How does lighting the *hanukkiyah* connect us to the past miracles of Hanukkah?
- What would it mean if light, once achieved, never goes away?
- What kind of "something better" might come from a period of darkness or sorrow?

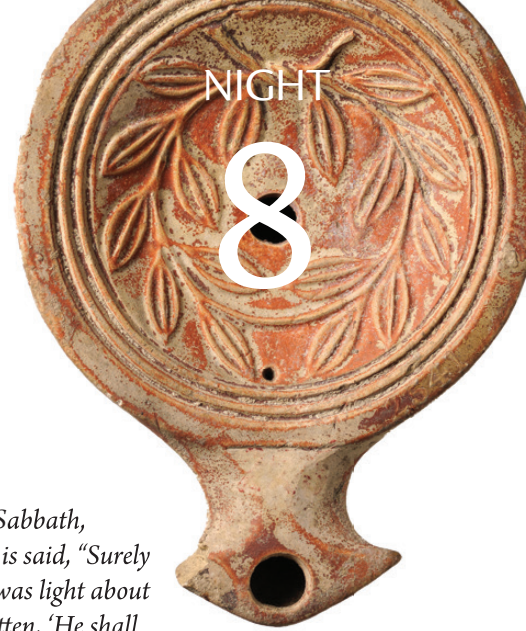
Mishnah Berakhot chapter 9 teaches us to recite the blessing, "Who performed miracles for our ancestors in this place," upon encountering a location where a miracle occurred. This raises a question: the *hanukkiyah* commemorates miracles that happened in a specific historical period and location. Why then, do we recite the blessing, "Who has made miracles for us," over the Hanukkah lamps, lit in our present homes, rather than at the original site of the miracle?

The Sefat Emet explains that the light of the Hanukkah lamps transcends the limitations of time and space. It represents the enduring illumination of the miracles that transpired during the Hanukkah story. When we light the *hanukkiyot* in our homes, we are somehow tapping into those same miracles, and we are enjoying that very enlightenment.

Perhaps this is part of what it means to publicize the miracle through lighting Hanukkah candles. On some level, we are reminding ourselves and the world that those miracles and that light are never really gone from the world. By lighting our candles in darkened windows we are keeping that very miracle of faith, courage, and hope alive in our hearts and homes.

When you light the Hanukkah candles this year, do it as an act of miracle-working. And after the lights have long burned out, consider whether it's the darkness or the illumination that remains.

Adam's descent and ascent: Finding light in darkness



בראשית רבה יא:ב

כִּינּוֹן שֶׁשָּׁקַעָה הַחֲמָה בְּמוֹצָאֵי שַׁבָּת הַתְּחִיל
הַחֲשֹׁךְ מִמִּשְׁמֶשֶׁשׁ וּבָא וְנִתְיָרָא אָדָם הָרָאשׁוֹן,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְאָמַר אֶף חֲשֹׁךְ יִשְׁוּפְנִי וְלִלְלָהּ אֹר
בְּעֵדְנִי" (תהלים קלט, יא), אוֹתוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב
בוֹ "הוּא יִשְׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁוּפֶנּוּ עֵקֶב"
(בראשית ג, טו) בָּא לְהַזְדוּג לִי, מָה עָשָׂה
הַקֵּב"ה זְמַן לֹא שָׁנִי רַעְפִּים, וְהַקִּישׁוֹן זֶה לָזֶה
וְיִצְא מִהֶן אֹר וּבִרְךָ עָלֶיהָ, הֵ"ד "וְלִלְלָהּ אֹר
בְּעֵדְנִי", מָה בִּרְךָ עָלֶיהָ בּוֹרָא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Bereisheit Rabbah 11:2

When the sun sank at the termination of the first Sabbath, darkness began to set in. Adam was terrified, as it is said, "Surely indeed the darkness shall bruise me but the night was light about me" (Psalm 139:11): "Shall he of whom it was written, 'He shall bruise your head and you will bruise him with your heel' (Genesis 3:15) [i.e., the snake], now come to attack me?!" What did the Holy Blessed One do for him? God arranged for him two flints which he struck against each other; light came forth and he uttered a blessing over it. Hence it is written, "But the night was light about me (ba'adani)" (Psalm 139:11) [i.e., repointing "about me" as "in my Eden" (be'edni)]. What did he bless over it? "[Blessed are You...] Who creates the illuminations of the fire."

- What is Adam's first reaction to darkness and how does God respond to Adam's fear?
- Who produces the fire? What role do we each have in responding to darkness or danger? What role might God play?

According to other sources, Adam sinned and faced the consequence of his expulsion from the Garden of Eden on the very same day of his creation. This may add additional context to his feelings as he experiences the darkening world.

This story of Adam and fire bears a striking resemblance to the famous Greek myth of Prometheus. Both narratives are creation myths, explaining how humanity acquired the transformative tool of fire. However, the Rabbinic legend diverges from the Greek myth in fascinating ways.

First, the act of receiving fire is imbued with compassion. God doesn't withhold fire as a jealous god, but offers it as a partnership in humanity's earthly journey. There is no conflict between God and Adam in this *midrash*; instead, God stands beside Adam in a time of need.

Second, the gift itself is not a finished product. By providing two flints, God empowers Adam to create fire himself. This act encourages human agency: Adam must take initiative to overcome the existential threat of darkness. He is not a passive recipient, but an active participant in his own well-being.

Taking a broader view of the story, we witness a fascinating transformation in Adam. Initially gripped by fear and paralysis in the face of darkness, he becomes someone capable of action. The act of creating fire becomes a symbol of his newfound independence and ability to cope with challenges. Finally, the blessing "Blessed are You, God, Who creates the illuminations of the fire," expresses his gratitude for the divine spark that ignited his resourcefulness and allowed him to confront the darkness on his own terms.

Here is another text about Adam encountering a world going dark. As you read this passage, notice the similarities and differences between these two stories.

תלמוד בבלי עבודה זרה ח.

לפי שראא אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט והולך
אמר אי לי שמא בשביל שפרחתי עולם חשוך
בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה
עלי מן השמים. עמד וישב שמונה ימים בתענית
[ובתפלה]. כיון שראא תקופת טבת וראא יום
שמאריך והולך אמר מנהגו של עולם הוא. הלך
ועשה שמונה ימים טובים. לשנה האחרת עשאן
לאילו ולאילו ימים טובים.

Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 8a

When Adam saw the day becoming shorter and shorter, he said:
“Woe is me! Perhaps because I sinned, the world is becoming dark
around me and returning to chaos and void, and this is the death that
was sentenced upon me from Heaven?” He stood up and fasted [and
prayed] for eight days. When he saw the winter solstice, and saw the
day becoming longer and longer, he said: “This is the way of the world!”
He went and celebrated for eight days. For the next year, he made both
these and those days of celebration.

- Why does Adam immediately attribute the diminishing light to sin? What does this teach us about how we sometimes relate to the darkness in our lives?
- What does Adam discover by the end of the text?
- What are the different reactions that Adam has to the diminishing light each day?
- Why does he decide to turn the days of fasting and prayer into days of celebration in the following year as well?

Confronted with the shortening days, Adam grapples with anxiety. He interprets the diminishing light as a consequence of his sin, fearing the impending end of his world. In this story, Adam responds by turning to fasting and prayer, desperately seeking to reconnect with God and avert this perceived catastrophe.

In Bereishit Rabbah, God is not only present, but plays an active role. Yet here, Adam’s renewed connection with the Divine brings no solace. God offers neither forewarning about the changing seasons nor explanation afterward. Left to his own devices, Adam perseveres. Through his steadfast observation, he witnesses the darkness eventually give way to returning light, a testament to the world’s natural cycle. This realization brings him a sense of comfort: the world operates according to an established order, independent of his actions.

Yet, a question lingers: why does Adam designate the days before and after the solstice as festivals in the following year? Celebrating the return of light is clear, but why mark the period of deepening darkness? This act reveals a profound transformation within Adam.

Despite the expulsion from Eden, Adam understands that life requires confronting challenges. He celebrates his newfound ability to observe the world and learn from experience, gaining wisdom about himself and the world’s inherent rhythms. Adam’s experiences serve as a profound reminder that our greatest strengths often emerge during our darkest hours. He teaches us that it is in the face of adversity, when hope seems dim, that we must tap into our inner courage and resilience. This internal spark, once ignited, has the potential to grow into a beacon of light, guiding us through life’s challenges and illuminating our path forward.

