



## Chanukah – Discovering the Oil

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*What is Hanukkah? The Sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them. What is the reason? When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary. And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest, undisturbed by the Greeks. And there was sufficient oil there to light the Menorah candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the Menorah from it eight days (Tractate Shabbos 21b).*

We have heard this story since our youth. The one cruse of oil which miraculously remained lit for eight days. This little miracle gave us the Yom Tov of Chanukah. Yet, we know this was not the only miracle. There was a stunning military upset. The small band of soldiers from the Hasmonean family led a revolt against the formidable Syrian-Greek army. They were outnumbered and at a clear disadvantage in every way. Yet, they fought and won. Interestingly this miracle goes relatively unnoticed. It is true, we refer to it in the supplemental paragraph in the *Amidah* (*Al HaNissim, Bimey Matisyahu*), but the clear focus of Chanukah is the miracle of the oil. If we put these two miracles, the miracle of the oil and the miracle of the military victory side by side – which one is greater? I think we would all agree that the military victory is overwhelmingly more significant. The miracle of the oil is incredible, but a rag-tag Jewish army defeating the strong and well-trained regional army is truly miraculous. Why all the emphasis on the oil miracle?

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) provides a beautiful explanation. The miracle of the *pach shemen*, the cruse of oil contains a much deeper message. The Greeks defiled the Temple. They took that which was holy and made it impure. They took our sacred space and profaned it. Each of us is a personal *Beis Hamikdash*, a Temple. Just as the Temple was a physical structure which housed the presence of God, we have a physical body which houses the presence of God in the form of our soul. Just as our national *Beis Hamikdash* was desecrated and defiled, sometimes because of the bad decisions we make or negative behaviors in which we engage, we defile our personal Temple. There are times in life when we look in the mirror and can barely see the spark of God inside of us. We see the physical shell but can't see the light which was once there. We see the structure, but we can't see the holiness. When the Maccabim came into the Temple and saw the physical and spiritual debris, they thought all was lost. But then they found the little jug of unsullied oil, the little jug of intact holiness and with this tiny jug, they rekindled the light of the Temple; they reignited the spark of national holiness. On the Yom Tov of Chanukah, we look within ourselves. As we begin to survey our lives, we may find layers of debris, the fallout of poor decisions and lost opportunities. It may look like everything is lost. We are condemned to the darkness. But then something amazing happens. We find the jug of oil. Inside each of us is a little, pure cruse of untainted, unspoiled spiritual holiness. No matter how badly I falter in life, there is still a beautiful holiness inside of me. I must have the courage to look for it and once I find it, the strength to ignite it.

This is the deeper message of the oil miracle and the reason it is the centerpiece of the Chanukah experience. Each of us is a Temple in a state of disrepair (the extent of disrepair differs from person to person), and it is on this Yom Tov that we follow in the footsteps of our ancestors. We sift through the life debris and find our jug of pure, holy, and luminescent spiritual potential. We bask in the light of our ancestors, and may future generations bask in ours. (From 5779)