

# JewishTimes

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THE SAGES ON NATURE

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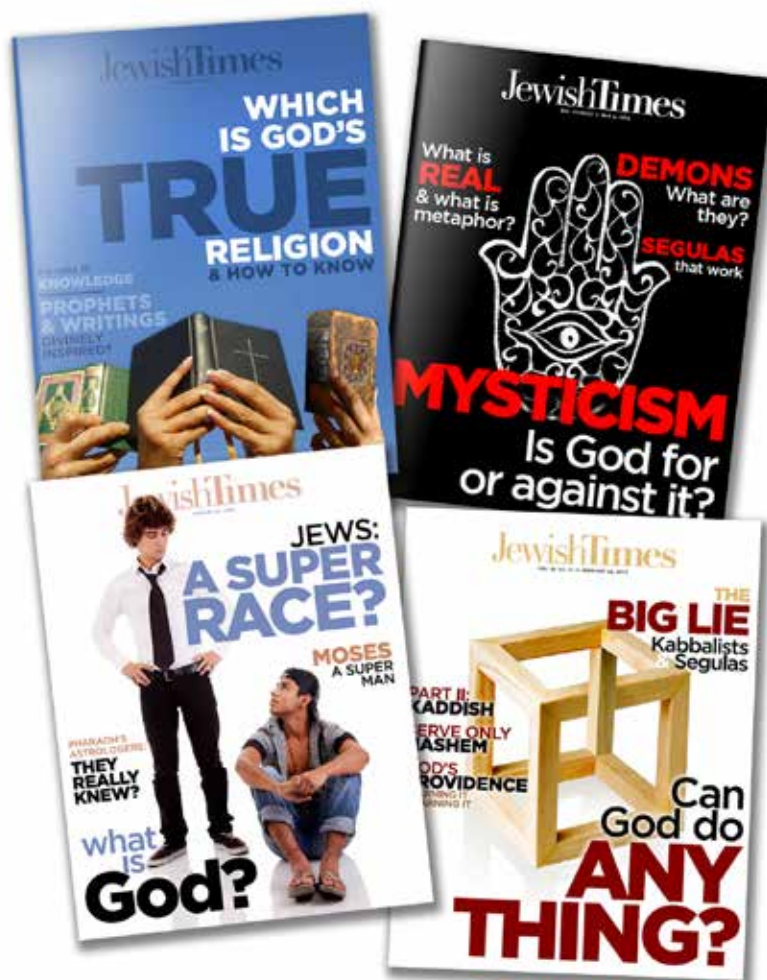
This leaf must fall at 9:01 AM  
(not 9:00), it must fall at  
this angle and land on  
that blade of grass?



This frog must  
catch that fly?

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### PROVIDENCE

RABBI CHAIM OZER CHAIT

Rosh Hayeshiva, Migdal Hatorah – Modiin, Israel

## Dialogue on Individual Providence (Hashgacha Pratis)

**Student:** I found a very interesting idea on Hashgacha Pratis (individual providence) in the Sefer Ha'chinuch in this week's Sedra of Tazria, Mitzva 169.

**Rebbe:** What does it say?

**Student:** It says "There are certain groups of people who think that the watchful care of Hashem is over all species individually, both over humans and over living creatures. And there are groups among them who believe that the watchful care of Hashem is over all things of the world, whether living creatures or any other things. In other words, not one small entity will move in this world except by His desire (blessed is He) and by His degree – to such an extent that they believe that when one leaf falls from a tree, Hashem decreed over it that it should fall, and it is impossible for the time of its fall to be delayed or advanced by even a moment. But this view is VERY REMOVED FROM HUMAN REASON."

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**Rebbe:** O.K. that certainly makes sense.

**Student:** But can you prove it to me, why is it so illogical to say that Hashem has such Hashgacha on every little thing?

**Rebbe:** Of course, Let us begin.

**Student:** O.K.

**Rebbe:** There are only two possibilities, and that is: that either Hashem practices Hashgacha in the animal world, or He does not. Is that correct

**Student:** Yes.

**Rebbe:** And we want to prove that it is illogical for Hashem to practice Hashgacha on the animal world.

**Student:** Correct.

**Rebbe:** And we must also say that Hashem is logical and just.

**Student:** Absolutely.

**Rebbe:** Let us then select the lions as an example of a species in the animal world.

**Student:** A good choice.

**Rebbe:** Do you know what lions eat?

**Student:** Yes, frequently they eat zebras.

**Rebbe:** Correct. Did you ever see a film of a lion on a hunt for a zebra?

**Student:** Yes I have.

**Rebbe:** Can you describe it to me?

**Student:** Of course. The lioness (female) approaches the herd of zebras and then attacks, jumping on one of the zebras, killing it and feasting upon the remains.

**Rebbe:** How true. Now if we say that there is Hashgacha, then we must say that Hashem decided which Zebra should be caught and killed by the lion.

**Student:** Absolutely, this is the meaning of Hashgacha.

**Rebbe:** And it is certainly a gruesome and painful deal for the zebra, is it not?

**Student:** Very.

**Rebbe:** Now why did Hashem choose this particular zebra? Did it do something wrong to deserve such a horrible death?

**Student:** No!

**Rebbe:** Maybe it wasn't nice to the other zebras?

**Student:** Let's not get silly.

**Rebbe:** In other words since zebras have no Bechira (freedom of choice) or Mitzvot, there can be no punishment or reward?

**Student:** Correct.

**Rebbe:** So to choose one zebra over the other cannot be based on logic.

**Student:** It seems so.

**Rebbe:** And if Hashem made the choice, it is only a whim and not a logical decision.

**Student:** It seems so.

**Rebbe:** But we said that Hashem cannot be illogical!

**Student:** Yes we did say that.

**Rebbe:** Therefore, to say that there is Hashgacha in connection with the lion, i.e. that Hashem decides which lion kills which zebra, seems to be illogical?

**Student:** So it seems.

**Rebbe:** Now, if it is illogical for Hashem to act with Hashgacha over the animal kingdom, then it is only logical to say that there is no Hashgacha on the animal



kingdom. And therefore we must say that as part of the act of creation, Hashem set up the animal world where animals will choose which prey it wishes to kill and eat!

**Student:** I see your point now and this is what the Sefer Hachinch means when he says "This view is very removed from human reason."

**Rebbe:** Absolutely. Furthermore, we may add the following: Which is a better program...one that the programmer must always adjust, or one that runs on its own and only needs adjustment from time to time?

**Student:** One that runs on its own.

**Rebbe:** So greater logic exists in a world that runs on its own whenever possible.

**Student:** Yes

**Rebbe:** And only when there is a special need, such as a human act that requires a change in the general laws of nature or physics, would Hashem have to make a change.

**Student:** Yes indeed. But you have explained this well in the animal kingdom. Can you prove this in the world of plants?

**Rebbe:** Of course. Let us look at a leaf that falls off a tree. Again, there are only two possibilities: that this was the will of Hashem, or it happened by itself. Are there any other possibilities?

**Student:** There doesn't seem to be any.

**Rebbe:** If we can prove that it is illogical for Hashem to cause the leaf to fall off the tree, we must conclude that there is no Hashgacha regarding plants and leaves fall off by the laws of nature, which Hashem created.

**Student:** So it seems.

**Rebbe:** Next...if the falling of the leaf was a direct act of Hashem, that it was intended to fall at a certain time, let us say at exactly 6:00, we would wonder why Hashem chose this time, would we not? It certainly does not seem to make a difference if it fell off at 6:00 or 6:01?

**Student:** Yes.

**Rebbe:** So if it is an act of Hashem and He chose 6:00, He did it without reason! And to act without reason is

illogical, is it not?

**Student:** Yes indeed it is, but maybe we don't understand Hashem's reasoning?

**Rebbe:** Such an approach would present a great deal of difficulties.

**Student:** What do you mean?

**Rebbe:** For example, the Hashememara (Talmud Sota 14a) says, "As he clothes the naked, for it is written, And the Lord Hashem made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them, so do you also clothe the naked. The Holy One blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written, And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, so do you also visit the sick etc." But maybe Hashem is doing these acts for unknown reasons that do not apply to mankind, so why should we try to emulate these gracious acts? Therefore, we must say that when we see an act of Hashem, we must try to understand it in a logical way and we must say they are acts of kindness which we must therefore emulate. Here too, when we see a leaf falling off a tree which is an act of creation, an act of Hashem, we must interpret it in a logical and reasonable way, should we not?

**Student:** Yes we should

**Rebbe:** And is it logical to say that Hashem created a world that runs without interference and constant adjustments.

**Student:** Yes it does.

**Rebbe:** And therefore it is very logical and understandable to say that a leaf falls off a tree when its nutrients are depleted?

**Student:** Yes.

**Rebbe:** And if that takes place at 6:00 or 6:01 it is solely by accident?

**Student:** Yes.

**Rebbe:** And to say that Hashem chose the time for an unknown reason would be "REMOVED FROM HUMAN REASON"?

**Student:** Yes it does, and this is what the sefer Ha'chinch means.

**Rebbe:** Absolutely

**Student:** It does make sense to me now. ■

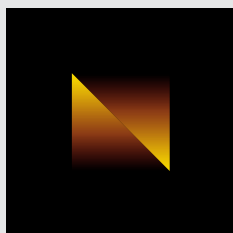
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# Everything Happens for a Reason?

## Analyzing the Popular Belief

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

It is crucial when searching for truth, that we vigilantly use our minds. We must avoid remaining “loyal” to cherished beliefs. For many cherished beliefs are wrong, such as wearing a red string (red bendel) to “protect from an evil eye,” placing notes in the Western Wall (as if God can’t hear your prayers without it), or believing a mezuzah actually possesses protective powers. Tosefta Shabbos chapter 7 refers to red strings this as idolatrous, and no “evil eye” — the power to alter reality — has ever been demonstrated. Such practices are equally invalid and sinful, as any other superstition. As stated in our Shulchan Aruch (Gilyon M’harsha, Yoreh Dayah 289): “If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes.” This means if one believes mezuzah possesses powers, whenever he looks at it, this idolatrous belief will damage him as much as knives in his eyes.

Using our mind means we don’t believe everything; we think critically. God gave each of us intelligence and senses as He wants us to trust what we see, and reject what we do not see. This applies to sound, touch and all senses. What is not detected, God wants man to reject. I see there’s no “elephant in the room,” so that must be a form of speech. Maimonides describes one who believes what is not detected through the senses, or through rational thought, or found in Torah: “Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said, ‘The simple believes everything’ (Prov. 14:15).” Maimonides criticizes a person who ignores his faculties. Reason too must teach a person that God’s design of the human being is perfect. The faculties God gifted us teach this lesson: “Use them.”

Another vital consideration is that all opinions cannot be correct; certainly if 2 views are in direct opposition. This is obvious, but apparently

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not to many people. The very fact that our great Rabbis argued on each other, teaches that they did not subscribe to today's "disease of the mind" where 2 contradictory views are equally accepted as truths. Many people say, "Who am I to decide, if the 2 views are authored by great Rabbis like Nachmanides and Maimonides?" The reply is, "You have no choice." For by accepting a contradiction, your mind is not functioning.

So, how do we determine who is correct? Nope, that's the wrong phrasing. For God alone knows what is absolute truth regarding which opinion is "correct." As humans, we do not possess absolute knowledge, and the best we can do is "decide." So the proper question is, "How do we decide between 2 conflicting views?" There's only one answer: we must use our senses and our reason. This is all we have...and they must be reliable tools, since God designed them.

Let us now analyze the popular belief that "everything happens for a reason." This means that there is a "will" guiding all events, for

all people, plants, elements and animals, and at all times. The contrary view is that all that occurs follows natural laws, without God's intervention or guidance. Jewish teachers that are divided on this. Maimonides, Sforno and the Chinuch agree: individual members of soulless existences like the elements, animals and plants are not guided in their existences. God created laws that govern these species. God is not willing a particular leaf to fall from a tree at a precise moment, angle, speed; He does not will "this" frog to catch "that" fly, and so on.

Now think about this. God created man with autonomy; man has free will. Now, as God created man, and granted him the ability to govern his decisions and action, what is so difficult about accepting that God also created other autonomous things that govern, like natural laws? Furthermore, is it not a greater perfection that God does not need to attend to each leaf, but that He created many natural systems that work harmoniously? Is not the watchmaker viewed as a genius, when he does not have to move each gear every second, but creates a mechanism of hundreds of parts that does so automatically? So too, God's systems of weather, gravity, and all natural laws work in tandem to create and sustain all He

created. This is far more impressive than suggesting God guides every atom of all existences at each second. And regarding the Talmudic statement, "All is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven," this means that God is the Author of all natural laws. Except man's free will, God set all in motion long ago. Pirkei Avos (5:6) too says all miracles were set in motion during Creation. God need not wait until a moment in time to enact a miracle, since He has foreknowledge of the precise moment that miracle is needed. He planned it to occur during Creation. Additionally, God created time, and is above it, so He need not "wait."

Why do watchmakers toil with such delicate and exact precision? Do we believe that placing a bunch of pebbles in a watch will equally create a timepiece? Or, are there laws of physics that determine how things function?



Additionally, is God fooling us? Meaning, as intelligent men such as Plato, Newton and Einstein attribute the working of the universe to laws — not God's second-by-second intervention — did God fool them? No. God gave these great minds — and us all — the sense that fire has a "property" of heat, water has a "property" of moisture, and all other

natural properties. We don't say fire is not hot, and water is not moist, but that God is making each flame hot every second, and not due to the fire itself. It is foolish to suggest water is not moist, but that God is making all water droplets moist each second. No human being would say this.

This teaches that God wants man to arrive at the opinion that all existences possess internal properties, and not that God is supplying all properties at each moment. The opinion of the Rabbis that "each angel can only perform one mission," means to say that each agent (natural law) has a limited property and cannot function outside its sphere of natural law. This is the same idea, and our Rabbis agreed to it.

God does not want man to believe the thing in question doesn't have the property itself. His design of our minds leads us to the firm conviction that the natural world operates according to laws. When sand gets in my eye and scratches my cornea, my vision is impaired for a few weeks. But the fool will say it is God who is making my vision blurry every second for 2 weeks, and it was not the sand grain. It is clear: God does not want man to reject his senses.

And if we go further with this foolish view, we reject the

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No sooner had Eliezer prayed for a woman who would ask to water he and his camels, did Rebecca arrive and utter those very words. For righteous people, God perfectly organizes events. This is a primary lesson of the Torah's accounts of the prophets.



Torah. For God commands man not to sin. But, if God does all, then what is the purpose of God commanding? So much about the natural law...but mankind is different...

Maimonides[1], Sforno[2] and the Chinuch[3] agree that unlike soulless existences, man can receive Divine Providence, but this is limited, and in proportion to man's perfection. This is the entire lesson of God's prophecies and guidance to only a few members of mankind throughout time, as the Torah (Bible) records. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all other righteous people are not simply histories. These Biblical accounts contain as much wisdom and depth as the universe, also created by God. This explains why the Torah student never comes close to exhausting the Torah's lessons. Each

year as we repeat our Torah readings, new insights emerge that astonish us. We must appreciate that God's Torah words offer immense insights. And one such insight is that His providence over man has many considerations, which we can derive by studying when, where and to whom God intervened, and what He did and said.

Why do people accept that God is guiding every single event, or that everything has a meaning, like chance meetings? One reason is because man has an ego, and it is pleasing to believe that God is guiding every event in my life. This makes man feel quite important. It is man's ego that forces him to believe this unproved doctrine. But as this doctrine is without basis, the intelligent man should reject this opinion. Primarily, these great minds cited above do not accept that God

is guiding every event, for this is based on the teachings of the Torah. God recorded His intervention with only certain perfected men and women to teach that this is precisely how God relates man. And it is perfectly reasonable that God operates this way. For why would God intervene and guide a person who does not wish to follow Him? Such an act would be futile, and we know that God does not perform futile acts. God knows the future and as He knows an imperfect person will not wish to follow His moral instruction, God never attempts to guide the person who would reject such guidance. This is the meaning behind King Solomon's words, "God rebukes those whom He loves (Proverbs 3:12)." It is only the righteous people whom God directs, as He knows they will heed His direction to draw even closer to him.

One other reason people believe God

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guides everything is that they are insecure, and need to feel that “all will work out fine.” So their insecurities fabricate a reality that comforts them, but it's a lie. The serious problem with such a view is that one does not take responsibility for their actions. And as they believe God is guiding everything, they sit back, but sadly, they then repeat their errors. Their problems will never end, as they failed to view their fate as self-inflicted. Had they understood their own poor actions caused their misfortunes, they could have changed their behaviors, and finally escaped their sad situations.

Unless one is on a high level, one must not attribute chance meetings to Divine plans. For each person has the free choice to travel where he or she wishes. It was their choice to be at the same place I decided to arrive at with my free choice. And what possible meaning could there be if a leaf fell from a tree at 9:00 and not at 9:01? What significance could there be by which angle the leaf falls, or upon which blade of grass it lands? Trying to find meaning in the meaningless will ruin one's mind, and his view of God's perfection. Even the Talmud's discussion of who marries who (Sota 2a) is enlightening. One's first marriage is based on genetics and psychological leanings (bas kol) decided 40 days before birth, when the genetics and psyche are forming. That is, young people marry based on love. But one's second marriage is based on one's middos – character — for after a failed first marriage, one has learned lessons and does not follow blind love anymore. He employs his character to select a new wife. And a failed first marriage must teach us that this was not Divinely ordained, as typically understood. For why would God plan a marriage destined to failure?

In conclusion, both opinions cannot be correct, as they are diametrically opposed to one another: God either wills the events of every atom, element, animal, plant and man at all moments, or He created remarkable systems. Why does the man who eats moldy food get sick, and one who eats fresh produce enjoy health? Is God willing sickness and health each moment, or do foods of various states of freshness possess varying properties which affect health?

We are bound by our design as intelligent and sensual beings to use both, our intelligence and our senses as God designed us to operate. If you use your mind and your senses, you will arrive at truths. But if you remain loyal to what your emotions cherish and you do not engage your mind, you will conclude foolish notions. ■

[1] Guide to the Perplexed, book III chap. 17, 18

[2] Leviticus 13:47

[3] Mitzvah 169, the Chinuch calls the view that every event is Divinely guided, “an opinion that is far from intelligence.”



# Vayeshev

## A People Restored

*Human action and  
Divine Providence*

RABBI REUVEN MANN

### PARSHA

**T**his week's parsha, Vayeshev, initiates the stirring saga of Yosef and his brothers, the most dramatic episode recorded in Scripture. In general, the Torah reveals little, if anything, about the personal proclivities of its heroes.

Here, however, we have a unique view of the family dynamics and interactions among the siblings who were destined to be the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. Things did not proceed as we would imagine in a group of lofty people. Perhaps we have a naive expectation of how superior individuals should behave.

The Torah is committed to absolute honesty. It does not gloss over the flaws of even the greatest humans. No one is righteous

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from birth. Every one of us must contend with the “Satan,” otherwise known as the irrational component of human nature that constantly resists reason and truth.

The family turmoil revolved around the personality of Yosef. He was destined for greatness but, at the age of 17, he displayed a certain vanity and sense of superiority.

It was not his fault that he was his father’s favorite, nor that Yaakov was mistaken in displaying his love by favoring him with a special coat. A situation of great danger was unfolding. The brothers hated Yosef, but neither he nor Yaakov was aware of its lethal potential.

Yosef erred by revealing his dreams of domination to his brothers. He appeared oblivious to the envy and hatred so engendered. Yaakov, also, seemed to be insufficiently cognizant about the storm that was brewing.

He did rebuke Yosef in front of the brothers after he had revealed his second dream. However, that proved to be too little, too late to reverse the mounting calamity.

While Yaakov and Yosef were aware of the brothers’ animosity, they substantially underestimated its destructive potential. Why else would Yaakov send Yosef on the fateful journey to look in on his brothers and see how they were doing? And why would Yosef accept the mission? One is not obligated to obey one’s parent if doing so puts his life in jeopardy.

The brothers’ actions against Yosef had devastating consequences, tearing the family asunder. No one suffered more than Yaakov, who refused to be comforted and said that he would go down to his grave in mourning.

All hopes that this shattered group would somehow develop into the

Chosen People were, now, utterly dashed. By every reckoning, they should have disappeared from the stage of history. Yet, as we all know, the impossible did happen. The family was miraculously reunited and restored and went on to become the founders of the Jewish nation. How did this happen? What is the lesson of this inexplicable miracle?

The story of Yosef and his brothers illustrates the unique nature of the Jewish People and the secret of its history. After Yosef was sold into slavery, and Yaakov was smitten with depression, the dynamic forward movement and national development of the 12 tribes was effectively terminated.

However, the strangest and most unlikely series of events ensued. Yosef experienced a meteoric rise to power and became the functional ruler of Egypt. Yehuda regained his leadership stature by acknowledging Tamar’s righteousness. Famine forced the brothers to travel to Egypt, where they were subjected to Yosef’s painful maneuvers. The entire charade came to an end when Yehuda rose to greatness and offered to take Binyamin’s place as Yosef’s slave to keep the promise he had made to his father.

Yosef made peace with and forgave his brothers. The broken family was restored and reunited. Yaakov came to Egypt and spent his remaining years with his beloved son and the rest of his children. The 12 tribes’ forward progress resumed, and Jewish history proceeded to its next stage.

Why did Yaakov’s family survive and overcome its initial dissolution? Was this phenomenal comeback simply a product of the great deeds of unique individuals like Yosef and Yehuda?

That is certainly a major part of the story. But who saw to it that Yosef

would be acquired by Potiphar? And that he would be imprisoned with Pharaoh’s chief baker and butler, whose dreams he would successfully elucidate? Who caused Pharaoh to have dreams that none but Yosef could interpret? And who arranged a famine that forced Yaakov to send his sons to procure sustenance in Egypt?

The Creator, who crafted the circumstances and opportunities that made reconciliation possible, reunited the torn family. It is true that very great people rose to the occasion and acted heroically. But without Divine intervention, which provided the opportunities where the protagonists’ deeds would be efficacious, nothing could have happened. This story poignantly illustrates the interface between human action and Divine Providence.

The Jewish people are Hashem’s special creation. They are certainly not immune to setbacks and failures, but they cannot be permanently defeated. Hashem will always be there to lift them up from the depths of despair to a position of great prominence. When the Maccabees arose to perform great deeds to restore Torah observance, Hashem empowered them to defeat the mighty Greek superpower.

As we express our gratitude and praise to Hashem on the holiday of Chanukah, let us strive to emulate the dedication to Torah and heroic action of this small band of men, who drove out the Greeks and purified the Holy Temple.

Shabbat shalom and Chanukah sameach. ■

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# The Verdict of History

Rabbi Bernie Fox



*During the second Temple when the Hellenists ruled, they made decrees against Israel and suppressed their religion. They did not allow them to study Torah and perform the mitzvot. They seized their wealth and their daughters. They entered the Sanctuary, made many breaches in it and defiled that which was sanctified. Israel was greatly afflicted by them and they terribly oppressed them (the Jews). But then the G-d of our fathers had compassion for them and rescued them from their hands and He saved them. The members of the Chashmonai family – high priests – overcame them. They killed them and rescued Israel from their hands. They established a king from among the priests and sovereignty was restored to Israel for more than two hundred years – until the destruction of the second Temple. (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Chanukah 3:1)*

## 1. An historical prologue to the laws of Chanukah

In the opening paragraph of his discussion of the laws of Chanukah, Maimonides provides an account of the historical background of the festival. He describes the oppression of the Jews by the Hellenist rulers of the Land of Israel. He explains that Hashem rescued His people through the leadership of the Chashmonai family priests. The Hellenists were defeated. Jewish sover-

eignty was restored for over two hundred years.

These introductory remarks are unusual. Maimonides composed his Mishne Torah as a code of law. He deals with every area of Torah practice with thoroughness and precision. He does not digress into discussion of our history. Why does he introduce his treatment of the laws of Chanukah with an overview of the festival's history?

*For that reason the Sages of that generation prescribed that these eight days that begin from the night of the twenty-fifth of Kislev should be days of celebration and Hallel. We should kindle on them candles in the evening at the doors of the homes – each night of the eight nights. (This is in order) to demonstrate and reveal the miracle. These days are called Chanukah..... (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Chanukah 3:3)*

## 2. Recalling and pronouncing the events of Chanukah

Chanukah is primarily observed through two practices. We recite Hallel daily. Each night we kindle the Chanukah lights. Maimonides explains that we kindle the lights in order to recall and draw attention to the miracles that the festival commemorates. In other words, the mitzvah of kindling the lights is performed in its entirety when it stimulates us to recall the miracles of Chanukah.

## 3. Reciting HaNerot Halalu

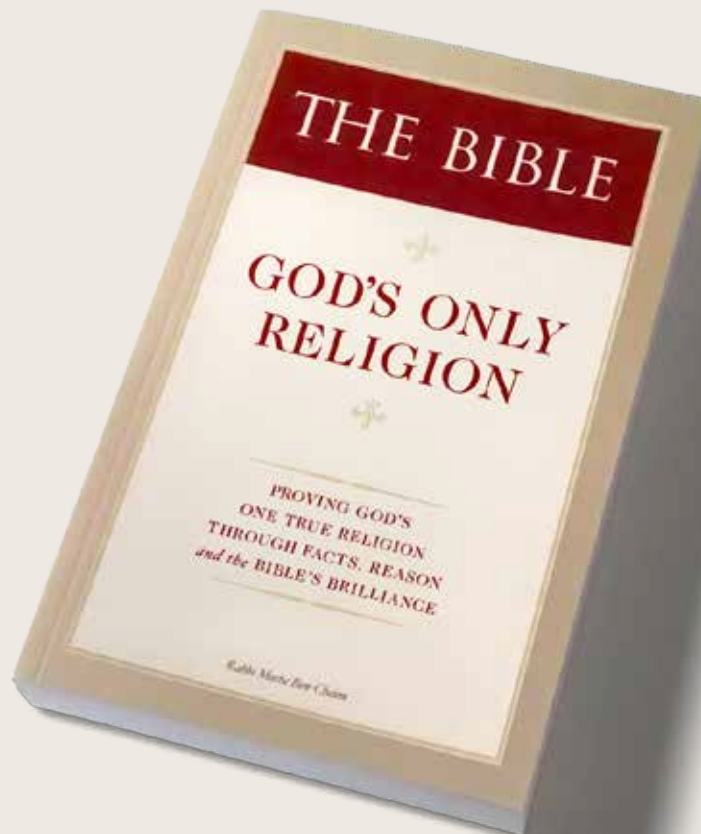
This explains our practice of reciting HaNerot Halalu after kindling the lights. This short paragraph's origins can be traced to the immediate post-Talmud period.<sup>1</sup> It includes a brief historical explanation for the practice of kindling the lights. We proclaim that we are kindling the lights in order to recall the miracles commemorated by the festival. The very nature of our practice of kindling the lights explains the inclusion of this paragraph in the procedure for the mitzvah. The mitzvah is fulfilled in its entirety only when the lights evoke our memory of the miracles that the festival commemorates. With this paragraph, we give verbal expression to our recollection of

(CONT. ON PAGE 15)

# Religions conflict; they all can't be God's word. How do we choose which is God's true religion?

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THE CHANUKAH BATTLE



those events.<sup>2</sup>

We can now begin to understand Maimonides' motivation for including, in his presentation of the laws of Chanukah, a review of the festival's historical background. This information does not merely provide the reason for the Sages' creation of the festival and its observances. It is actually a fundamental element of one of the observances. The kindling of the lights must evoke our memory of the miracles commemorated by the festival and proclaim them to observers of the lights. In other words, in this instance, the history is not only relevant to the halachic practice, it is part of that practice.

#### 4. The shared character of Chanukah and Purim

A problem remains. Purim and Chanukah are very similar in their objectives. Both are designed to recall occasions of miraculous salvation. On Purim, we recall our salvation through Hashem from the hands of Haman who sought to destroy the Jewish people. On Chanukah, our observances are designed to recall and proclaim

the miracle of our salvation. On Purim, our practices are intended to serve the same purpose.

However, Maimonides does not include in his discussion of the laws of Purim an historical prologue. This background is fundamental to the halachic observance of Purim just as it is to the observance of Chanukah. Yet, Maimonides does not find it necessary to include in his treatment of the laws of Purim a discussion of its historical background!

#### 5. A fundamental difference between Chanukah and Purim

The answer to this question may be obvious. The central observances of Purim and Chanukah are designed to recall and proclaim salvations and miracles. However, the practices employed to achieve this objective are fundamentally different. On Purim we read the Megilah. The Megilah tells the story of Purim. One only needs to perform the festival's central commandment to accomplish its aim. In performing the mitzvah of reading the Megilah the festival's historic background is recalled

and proclaimed. On Chanukah we kindle the lights. This practice only evokes a memory of the events the festival commemorates if one is aware of these events. Therefore, Maimonides' must make us aware of these events if we are to fully fulfill the festival's central commandment.

#### 6. The comprehensive nature of Maimonides's Mishne Torah

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l suggested another explanation for Maimonides' special treatment of the historic background of Chanukah. Rav Soloveitchik – The Rav – bases his explanation on Maimonides' own comments in his introduction to his code of law – Mishne Torah. Maimonides explains that his code is a comprehensive compilation of the laws of the Torah. He explains that his work, when combined with the books of TaNaCh, provides a complete presentation of the Written and Oral Laws. He adds that one who masters these works has mastered the entirety of the Torah without need to make reference to any other work.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

The historical background of Purim is included in TaNaCh. It is the subject of Megilat Esther. TaNaCh does not include an account of the events commemorated by Chanukah. Because it is not included in TaNaCh, Maimonides includes this material in his Mishne Torah. This inclusion is consistent with his objective of creating a comprehensive presentation of the entire Torah. All of the essential elements must be included in either TaNaCh or his Mishne Torah. Whatever is not found in TaNaCh and is essential, must be incorporated into Mishne Torah.<sup>3</sup>

## 7. Two centuries of sovereignty

Now that we understand Maimonides' considerations in including an historical prologue to his treatment of the laws of Chanukah, let us more carefully consider the content of this presentation. One aspect of his presentation seems out of place or superfluous. Maimonides' intention is to describe the oppression of the Jewish people by the Hellenists and their liberation from oppression. However, in addition to his description of these events, he adds that the Chashmonai family – who were priests – appointed a king from their family and restored sovereignty to the Jewish people for more than two hundred years. Why is this information relevant to Maimonides' presentation?

## 8. The Chashmonai family controversy

In order to respond to this question another issue must be considered. Maimonides seems to consider the establishment of the Chashmonai family dynasty of kings as a positive development. Nachmanides disputes this position. He comments that the Chashmonai family did not have the right to elevate itself to the position of kings. He explains that once Hashem chose David as king, the institution of kingship was awarded to him and his descendants in perpetuity. In assuming the kingship, the Chashmonai family was a usurper. Nachmanides argues that they were severely punished for this trespass.<sup>4</sup> Maimonides apparently maintains that the Chashmonai family kings did not usurp the role of the house of David. Kingship will ultimately return to the family of David, but it is not inappropriate to appoint a king from another family or

shevet, if necessary. The Torah instructs us only that the kingship cannot be permanently transferred to another family.<sup>5</sup> In short, according to Maimonides, the Chashmonai family did not violate the Torah's laws through their ascension to the throne. According to Nachmanides, they were not entitled to serve as rulers. Only the descendants of David may rule the Jewish people.

From Nachmanides' perspective the events commemorated by Chanukah are not completely positive. The Jewish people were saved from their oppressors. The Temple was restored. But the political outcome of the conflict was that the throne of Israel was seized by a usurper. The Chashmonai family presumed to be rulers of the Jewish people. We celebrate our salvation and deliverance from oppression. But these same events led to the emergence of an unfortunate political reality. A king who was not a descendant of David seized the throne.

Maimonides regards the ascension of the Chashmonai family to kingship as positive. He does not regard them as usurpers. They merely served as regents in the absence of an appropriate king from the descendants of David. Why does Maimonides note that sovereignty was restored to Israel for more than two centuries? He apparently maintains that these two centuries of sovereignty somehow confirm his position! How does an extended period of sovereignty support his view?

## 9. History as a teacher

The Rav suggests that sometimes the unfolding of subsequent events indicate whether a decision was proper and correct. His underlying assumption seems to be that the response of providence communicates to us whether we or our ancestors acted properly. Proper and appropriate decisions are rewarded by positive outcomes. Poor or inappropriate decisions are not rewarded with success. Based on this theory, the Rav contends that we can determine whether an issue was properly decided by discerning the response of providence. If a controversial decision proves to be effective, then history is indicating that the decision was proper.

The Rav's view seems to be reflected in the comments of Maimonides. Maimonides fully recognizes that the decision of the Chashmonai family to serve as kings is subject to criticism. He understands that

other authorities will contest his position that the Chashmonai family acted properly. In response to critics, he notes that these kings initiated over two centuries of sovereignty. He is indicating that history seems to support his position. In other words, the success that resulted from the ascension of the Chashmonai family to kingship communicates that Hashem approved their decision. ■

## FOOTNOTES

1. Meschet Sofrim 20:6.

2. According to Rav Soloveitchik, we recite the blessing of She'asah nisim before kindling the Chanukah lights for this same reason.

3. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Harerai Kedem vol 1 p 271.

4. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:10.

5. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 1:7-9.



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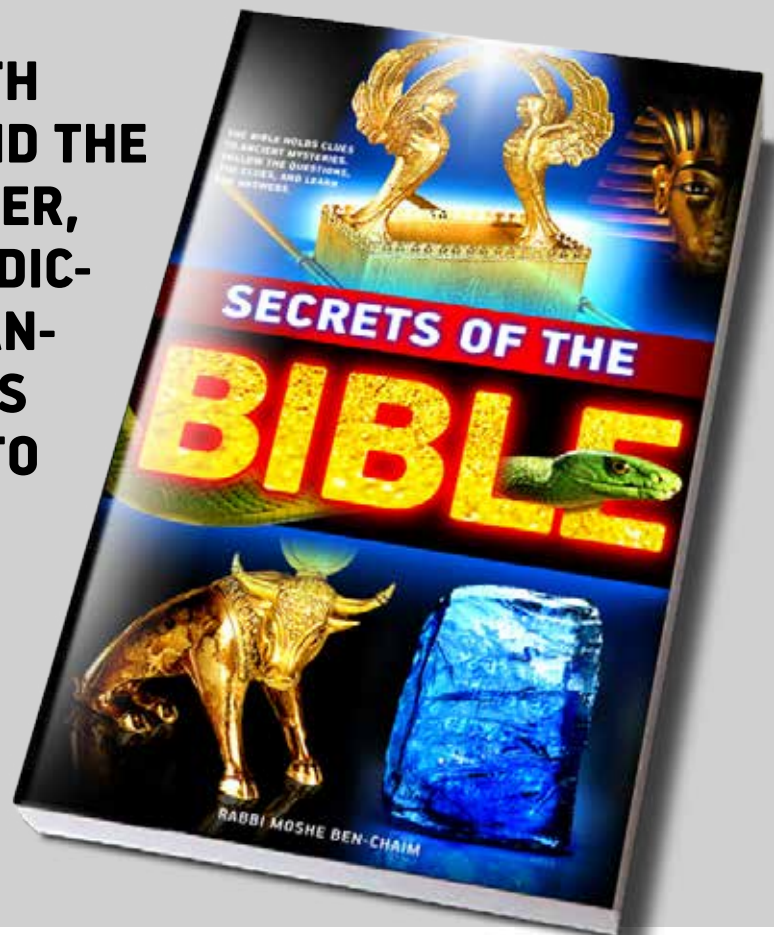
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## CHANUKAH

# Megilas Antiochos

## The Chanukah Story

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Megilas Antiochos was found in an old edition of a siddur printed in Solonika, Greece. Otzar HaTfilos refers to it as a "precious letter."

Following the introduction is an English translation of the ancient Hebrew text.

### INTRODUCTION

Facing religious persecution, the five sons of Mattisyahu displayed much courage, although greatly outnumbered. They were inspired to battle against those who wished to strip the Jewish nation of its laws and identity. The Greeks were intent on preventing Torah observance and coercing idolatrous practice. However, Mattisyahu's sons displayed unwavering devotion to what their minds knew as true. We read in verse 39, "We remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai." They were convinced of the truth of God's revelation, His existence, and His commanding us in His Torah at Sinai. No enemy could erase history, or the truths contained in our Torah. Without Torah observance, one's life is meaningless in God's eyes. Mattisyahu's sons took it upon themselves to fight to preserve Torah, at all costs.

We must take this lesson to heart, as this is the sole reason for our celebration of Chanuka: to proclaim God's performance of miracles and intervention when we adhere to His word. Devotion to a Jewish life – God's words – earned the Jews of Chanuka miracu-

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lous salvation. Many leaders have not learned from history, and keep Israel under the sword. As long as God's word is absent from national interests, God may not assist us. This is the dichotomy: most Jews today celebrate Chanuka, recalling God's intervention when Torah was defended, while much of the other Torah laws are ignored. Lighting the menorah with our families, we testify to God's providence; saving those Jews who followed Him, risking their lives to preserve Judaism for all. Therefore, God stepped in. Until the Jews demonstrated their devotion, there was no divine intervention. Once these few brave souls declared the essentiality of Torah adherence through action, God protected them, and gave "the many into the hands of the few, the wicked, into the hands of the righteous."

Today we perish by the hands of those like Antiochos. Children of Israel, IDF, and leaders of our people are wise to heed Chanuka's lesson. Is this not why we celebrate? God enabled five brothers to defeat the armies of our enemies. God is not sleeping. God is not weak. He sees our travail at this time too. God's word and history attest to the fact that He saves those who follow him. Until we follow His Torah, until we see with clear conviction that, not based on political and military strategies alone will we be saved, but also with Torah as our guide...we may continue to suffer. We must include the Torah's direction when determining our course of action in all national matters.

Let us recall Abraham defeating tremendous forces with just a few men. Jacob's salvation from his twin Esav. Recall the Ten Plagues, the Manna in the desert, and the splitting of the Red Sea, where every Egyptian soldier perished. And recall this: our claim to Israel is from no other source than God's Torah – His promise to Abraham. These Torah accounts are "lessons". But many Jews resist, and without cause.

We do not rely on miracles; this is against Judaism. Living by Torah ideals is the best life, and we do not uphold Torah to avoid pain. But as the Torah is absolute truth, we must be concerned by God's promise to abandon us if we abandon Him. He says this in the Shema Yisrael. But God also promises His great providence when we live according to His word. In line with this promise, we may seek His assistance. God's word is absolute truth, which enables our existence. When living in line with God's word, He has many vehicles to protect us. This is the message of so many Torah stories. But as the Shema says, He certainly will not shield us when we abandon His word. Of course it is preferred that we attach ourselves to the truth of Torah when prompted by its perfect and pleasing laws, not only for salvation's sake. But many times God removes His protection to instruct us to return to Him. Maimonides teaches that national catastrophe must not be viewed as "natural", but as God's instruction that we return to Jewish life. And if we dismiss such catastrophes as mere chance, we will make matters worse and He will hide from us. For God did not create man so as to ignore His gift of intelligence,

and ignore God and His Torah. This earns us none of His providence.

Remember the Chanuka Story. It celebrates God, who protects those who follow Him. Proclaim its message not just with your menorah, but with your daily actions all year. We all wish happiness, health and success for our people. As Mattisyahu's sons lived and were saved through Jewish values, with God's help, we too can triumph over our enemies. If however, we solely engage political and military considerations, denying these Torah truths, Jewish history, and God's abilities...we ignore Chanuka's primary message.

God commanded Torah observance for our benefit, and it is pleasing and sweet to all who took the time to investigate and appreciate its perfect sensibilities, and beauty of all its laws. God knows what is best for His creation, for mankind. We have free will to succumb to laziness and the desire to be "free of restriction." But with minor effort, we each can appreciate the purpose of every law, and we will truthfully view our previous non-observant lives as empty, feeling fortunate we finally made the first step towards observance. We will no longer view Torah laws as restrictive, but as a great fortune, as we come to understand how each law benefits us in the most profound manner.

Following His laws, even the few will be victorious over the many. Happy Chanuka to all! ■

—Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

## MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

### A NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION

[Arbitrary paragraph breaks have been added every 10 verses for ease of reading. These breaks do not exist in the original.]

"1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the sea shore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple, he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the

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seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?" 10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaughtered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the God of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have come to come before Nikanor." 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, "Let him surely enter." 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?" 19. And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, "I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do." 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king's clothing and ride of the king's horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be."

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, "My master, I fear from the children of Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known." Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his God and he said, "My God and the God of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say "My god has given him to my hand." 24. At that moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the God of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, "My God, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified [area], now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and

Jerusalem." 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28. On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it "Maccabee Killed the Mighty". 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nikanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that misled his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, "Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?"

31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them [by] their God, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, "To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our children's children, it will not be removed." 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, "These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, "Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do." 39. And the children of Israel answered, "These to these, "we remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai, 'Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest'. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day." 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaughtered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the sea because they trusted in the God of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king

Antiochos, "You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are more swift, and from bears they are more quick. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them." 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, "This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand". But the God of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before God of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, "Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his God and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, "Why have you returned?" And they answered and they said, "On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us." 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, "I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother." 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And God of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people

to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword, and from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to there, they mocked him and called him "the runaway". 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And God of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal God of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their God.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them, that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally."

Other prayer books add these verses:

"And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The God that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen." ■

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