



# Chanukah

INTRODUCING PEACE TO A FRACTURED WORLD

*How the Torah's G-dly Message Is the True Recipe for World Peace*

# Holiday Overview *Chanukah*

Chanukah—the eight-day festival of light that begins on the eve of the twenty-fifth day of the Jewish month of *Kislev*—celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, of purity over adulteration, and of spirituality over materialism.

More than twenty-one centuries ago, the Holy Land was ruled by the Seleucids (Syrian-Greeks), who sought to forcefully Hellenize the people of Israel. Against all odds, a small band of faithful Jews defeated one of the mightiest armies on earth, drove the Greeks from the land, reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, and rededicated it to the service of G-d.

When they sought to light the Temple’s menorah (the seven-branched candelabrum),

they found only a single cruse of olive oil that had escaped contamination by the Greeks; miraculously, the one-day supply burned for eight days, until new oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

To commemorate and publicize these miracles, the sages instituted the festival of Chanukah. At the heart of the festival is the nightly menorah (candelabrum) lighting: a single flame on the first night, two on the second evening, and so on till the eighth night of Chanukah, when all eight lights are kindled.

On Chanukah, we also add *Hallel* and *Ve'al Hanisim* in our daily prayers to offer praise and thanksgiving to G-d for

“delivering the strong into the hands of the weak,

the many into the hands of the few, . . . the wicked into the hands of the righteous.”

Chanukah customs include eating foods fried in oil—latkes (potato pancakes) and *sufganiyot* (doughnuts), playing with the dreidel (a spinning top on which are inscribed the Hebrew letters nun, *gimel*, *hei*, and shin—an acronym for “*Nes gadol hayah sham*—a great miracle happened there”), and the giving of Chanukah *gelt*—gifts of money—to children.

## QUESTION

We have an inherent sense that life is sacred, and that bloodshed is horrific. But if this is so ingrained in us, why was it not a universal value for most of human history?



# TEXT 1

Maimonides, *Mishneh  
Torah, Hilchot Chanukah*  
4:14

הָיָה לְפָנָיו נֵר בֵּיתוֹ וְנֵר חֲנֻכָּה . . . נֵר בֵּיתוֹ קוֹדֵם מְשׁוּם  
שְׁלוֹם בֵּיתוֹ. שֶׁהָרִי הַשֵּׁם נִמְחָק לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ  
לְאִשְׁתּוֹ.

גְּדוֹל הַשְּׁלוֹם, שֶׁכָּל הַתּוֹרָה נִתְּנָה לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם.  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "דְּרָכֶיךָ דָּרְכֵי נֵעַם וְכָל נְתִיבֹתֶיךָ שְׁלוֹם"  
(מְשָׁלִי ג, יז).

If you have a choice between lighting up your home [in honor of Shabbat] and lighting Chanukah candles, . . . light up the home because this enhances peace. [Peace is the highest priority, as evidenced by the fact that] G-d's own name is erased to create peace between a husband and a wife.

Peace is of primary importance, for the entire Torah was given to introduce peace to the world, as the verse states, "Its ways are pleasant, and all its paths are peaceful" (Proverbs 3:17).

# TEXT 2A

Rashi, Talmud, *Shabbat*  
23B

הַדְּלָקָה נֶר בְּשַׁבָּת שְׂבָנֵי בֵּיתוֹ מְצַטְעָרִין לֵישֵׁב בְּחֹשֶׁךְ.

We light candles on Shabbat because the family would be distressed to sit in the dark.

# TEXT 2B

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, *Shulchan Aruch*  
*HaRav, Orach Chayim*  
263:1

תיקנו חכמים שיהיה לכל אדם גר דולק בשבת בכל  
חדר וחדר שהולך שם בשבת משום שלום בית, שלא  
יפישל בעץ או באבן . . . ועיקר מצנת הדלקת גרות  
הוא גר זה שאוכל אצלו.

It is a rabbinic enactment to light candles  
in every room that we enter on Shabbat to  
ensure peace in the home so that people  
will not stumble on wood or stone. . . .  
The primary mitzvah is to light candles  
near the dinner table.

The primary purpose of lighting Shabbat candles is to light up the house and bring about a feeling of peace.



# TEXT 3

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried,  
*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*  
139:14, 17

כָּל זְמַן מִצְוַתּוֹ, דְּהִינּוּ חֲצֵי שָׁעָה, אָסוּר לְהַנּוֹת מְאוּרָן . . .  
צָרִיךְ שְׂיִתּוּ שֶׁמֶן כְּדֵי שְׂיִדְלְקוּ עַד חֲצֵי שָׁעָה לְאַחַר צְאַת  
הַכּוֹכָבִים.

One must fill the candle with enough oil to burn for thirty minutes after nightfall. . . . During these thirty minutes, when the Chanukah lights are obligatory, it is forbidden to benefit from their light.



## QUESTION

Why should we lose out on a mitzvah for the sake of peace? Should we not set our egos aside and opt for the mitzvah?

# TEXT 4

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak  
Schneerson, *Sefer  
HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*  
2, p. 435B

במצוות . . . שישי בהם התפללות בהתאחדות גמורה.  
דאל תהא יושב ושוקל במצוותיה של תורה, אלא קלה  
שבקלות ותמורה שבחמורות מרועה אחד נתנו וקל  
אחד אחרם, וכל מצוה פלולה מכל המצוות.

ולכן העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה, דהכונה בזה היא  
כמו שקיים גם המצוה שהוא פטור ממנו. והוא מפני  
שמצוה זו כוללת גם מצוה האחרת שפטור ממנה.

All *mitzvot* . . . are interconnected in complete oneness. [Our sages taught] that one must never weigh one of the Torah's *mitzvot* against another. The lightest *mitzvah* and the harshest *mitzvah* were given by the same shepherd, namely the one G-d Who spoke them. Therefore, each *mitzvah* is inter-included with all *mitzvot*.

This is why one who is engaged in a *mitzvah* is exempt from other *mitzvot*. The meaning here is that it is considered as if we fulfilled [both *mitzvot*, the *mitzvah* that we performed and] the *mitzvah* from which we were exempt. This is because this *mitzvah* [that we performed] includes the one from which we were exempt.

# TEXT 5

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*  
15, p. 376

וויבאלד אז כל התורה, יעדע מצוה, איז ענגינה לעשות  
שלום בעולם, איז פארשטאנדיק אז בשעת עם קומט צו  
א מצוה וואס איז פארבונדן מיט שלום בפשוטו קען  
מען גיט זאגן אז די מצוה וואס פועלט שלום איז דוקה  
די צנוייטע מצוה. ווייל דורך קיום פון דער מצוה  
וואס ברענגט שלום בפעל ווערט אויסקערט אויף די  
כנות הנתינה והצווי פון דער צנוייטע מצוה — לעשות  
שלום.

If the purpose of the entire Torah, which includes each mitzvah, is to bring peace to the world, it follows that no mitzvah can be said to have been superseded by a mitzvah that brings peace. This is because the mitzvah that brings peace fulfills the very purpose of the other mitzvah too. [Thus, the other mitzvah has been fulfilled, not overruled.]

# TEXT 6

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Megillah and Chanukah, 4:1; 4:3

בְּבֵית שְׁנֵי, פְּשָׁמְלָכֵי יוֹן גָּזְרוּ גְזָרוֹת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבָטְלוּ  
דָתָם, וְלֹא הִנִּיחוּ אוֹתָם לַעֲסֹק בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת. וּפְשָׁטוּ  
יָדָם בְּמִמוֹנָם וּבְכַבּוּדֵיהֶם, וְנִכְנְסוּ לַהִיכָל וּפָרְצוּ בוֹ  
פְּרָצוֹת, וְטָמְאוּ הַטְּהָרוֹת.

וְצָר לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מְאֹד מִפְּנֵיהֶם, וּלְחָצוֹם לַחֵץ גְּדוֹל.  
עַד שֶׁרַחַם עֲלֵיהֶם אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְהוֹשִׁיעָם מִיָּדָם  
וְהִצִּילָם. וְגָבְרוּ בְּנֵי חֲשָׁמוֹנָאֵי הַפְּהֻגִים הַגְּדוֹלִים וְהַרְגוּם,  
וְהוֹשִׁיעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיָּדָם וְהַעֲמִידוּ מֶלֶךְ מִן הַפְּהֻגִים,  
וְחִזְרוּ מַלְכוּת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵתֵר עַל מְאֵתִים שָׁנָה . . . וּמִפְּנֵי  
זֶה הִתְקִינוּ חֻכְמִים שֶׁבְּאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר שֶׁיְהִיוּ שְׂמוֹנֵת הַיָּמִים  
הָאֵלּוּ שֶׁתְּחַלְתֵּן כ"ה בְּכֶסֶלּוֹ יְמֵי שְׂמֻחָה וְהַלֵּל, וּמִדְּלִיקוֹן  
בְּהֵן הַנְּרוֹת בְּעָרֵב עַל פְּתַחֵי הַבָּתִּים בְּכָל לַיְלָה וְלַיְלָה  
מִשְׂמוֹנֵת הַלַּיְלוֹת, לְהַרְאוֹת וּלְגַלוֹת הַנִּס.

In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish people, [attempting to] nullify their faith and forbidding them to observe the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their daughters; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc in it, and made the sacraments impure.

The Jews suffered greatly under them, for they oppressed them greatly until the G-d of our ancestors had mercy upon them, delivered them from their hand, and saved them. The sons of the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, overcame [them], slew them, and saved the Jews from their hand. They appointed a king from the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than two hundred years. . Accordingly, the sages of that generation ordained that these eight days, which begin from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, should be commemorated as days of happiness and praise of G-d. Candles should be lit in the evening at the entrance to the houses on each of these eight nights to publicize and reveal the miracle.

When you choose to light Shabbat candles to bring peace to the house, you are directly in line with the entire purpose of Chanukah.



# TEXT 7

Rashi, Genesis 2:2

מָה הָיָה הָעוֹלָם חָסֵר? מְנוּחָה. בָּאת שַׁבָּת בָּאת מְנוּחָה,  
כִּלְתָּהּ וְנִגְמְרָה הַמְּלָאכָה.

What was the world lacking? Rest. When Shabbat arrived, rest arrived. Thus, the work was completed and finished.

# TEXT 8

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*  
15, p. 379

און דערײַבער, ןוען עס קומט די שאלה פון גר ביתו וְגַר  
חֲנֻכָּה . . . זאגט הלכות חֲנֻכָּה אז גר ביתו קודם, היות  
אז גר ביתו איז פֿעלֿתו וואס ער איז מאיר און פֿועלֿט  
דעם ענגין פון שְׁלוֹם ביתו בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת. איז פון דעם מוֹכֵן  
אז עס ווערט דורך אים אויפֿגעטאן דער תִּכּוֹן וְעִנְיָן פון  
שְׁלוֹם מְעַר ווי דורך גר חֲנֻכָּה. קומט בְּמִילָא אויס אז  
מצד דעם הִלְכָה פון חֲנֻכָּה גופא, איז גר ביתו קודם  
מִשׁוּם שְׁלוֹם בֵּיתוֹ.

For all these reasons, when it comes to the question of whether to light Shabbat or Chanukah candles, . . . the Chanukah laws themselves instruct us to light Shabbat candles. Lighting up the home brings peace into the home. This means that, in this instance, the Shabbat candles accomplish the purpose and the concept of peace [the focus of Chanukah] more than the Chanukah candles. The natural conclusion is, therefore, to light the Shabbat candles.

## ANSWER

The answer is that peace doesn't trump a mitzvah, peace is the mitzvah. Especially the mitzvah of Chanukah.



# TEXT 9

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Ibid., p. 375

א רְאִיָּה פּוֹן דְּעַם נוֹאֵס הַשֵּׁם נִמְחָק לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין  
אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ. שְׁלוֹם אִיז נִיט נָאֵר אַזוּי גְּרוּיִס אַז צוֹלִיב  
דְּעַם אִיז מְעַן דּוֹחָה דְּעַם הָאֶרְבֵּן אֲסוּר פּוֹן מְחִיקַת הַשֵּׁם,  
נָאֵר מִ'שְׁרִיִּבֵט לְכַתְּחֵלָה דְּעַם שֵׁם כְּדִי צוּ מוֹחֵק זַיִן  
עִם, בְּכַדִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ.

מִצְוַת כְּתִיבַת הַשֵּׁם בְּקִדְשׁוֹ וְתִקְפוֹ אִיז פּוֹעֵל וְנִתְגַּלָּה  
דּוֹרָךְ דְּעַם נוֹאֵס עֵר נוֹעֲרֵט נִמְחָק, וּויבֹאֵלֵד אַז דָּאָס  
בְּרַעֲנָגֵט שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ.

[We present as] proof the fact that G-d's name is blotted out to restore peace between a husband and wife. Peace is not just important enough to justify blotting out G-d's name. It is so important that we write G-d's name in the first place only to blot it out and thus restore peace between husband and wife.

This means that the mitzvah of writing G-d's name, with all its inherent sanctity and intensity, is only realized and manifested when it is blotted out to restore peace.

# TEXT 10

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, *Tanya, Likutei  
Amarim*, ch. 36

עולם הזה הגשמי והחומרי ממש, והוא התחתון  
במדרגה, שאין תחתון למטה ממנו בענין הסתר אורו  
יתברך וחשך כפול ומכופל, עד שהוא מלא קליפות  
וסטרא אקרא שהן נגד ה' ממש, לומר: "אני ואפסי  
עוד".

This brute physical world is the lowest:  
There is none lower in terms of  
concealment of the Divine light and in  
terms of its doubled and redoubled  
[spiritual] darkness. So much so, that it is  
filled with unholy and unclean forces that  
are absolutely opposed to G-d, saying, “I  
am, and there is nothing besides me”  
(Isaiah 47:8).

# TEXT 11A

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*  
15, p. 379

די אמתית און שְלמות פון שְלום איז נישט נאר אז עס  
נוערט בְטל די התנגדות פון צווייטען און ס'נוערט  
שְלום, נאר עס נוערט א מצב ווען עס איז איבערהויפט  
ניטא און עס איז נישט שׂיך קיין מציאות פון א מנגד.  
דאס הייסט אז עס נוערט נתגלה אז דעם צווייטענס  
מציאות איז נישט מנגד, ובשְלמות יותר נישט אנדערש,  
פון ניין מציאות.

The true and complete meaning of peace is not just that conflict ceases and peace emerges. Rather, it is the creation of an environment in which the very notion of opposition is simply impossible. This means that it becomes clear to us that another's existence doesn't oppose, and is not even apart from, my existence.

# TEXT 11B

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Ibid.*, p. 380

און דאס איז דער פּנִימיוֹת'דיקער פּרוּש אין דעם נוּאס  
"הַתּוֹרָה נִתְּנָה לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם" (מְשֻׁנָּה תּוֹרָה, הַלְכוֹת  
חֲנֻכָּה ד, יד): אז די אָמְת'ע מְצִיאוֹת פּוֹן נוֹעֲלֵט אִיז תּוֹרָה  
— אַלּוֹקוֹת . . .

עוֹלָם מְצַד עֲצָמוֹ אִיז מְעֵלִים אוּיפֿן אור אַלְקִי, עַר זַעַט זִיךְ  
נִיט בְּגָלוּי אִין נוֹעֲלֵט. וְאַדְרַבָּה, נוֹעֲלֵט זַעַט זִיךְ אָן ווי א  
מְצִיאוֹת פֿאַר זִיךְ. בְּאַפֿן אז מ'קֶען מִיִּינְען נִיט נָאַר אז אִיר  
מְצִיאוֹת אִיז נִיט אַלּוֹקוֹת, נָאַר אז זי דאַרף אוּיף נִיט  
אַנְקוֹמֶען חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם צוּם דְּבַר ה' לַהֲחִיּוּתָהּ וּלְקִיּוּמָהּ. אז  
נוֹעֲלֵט אִיז חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם אָפֿגְעֵרִיסֿן פּוֹן אַלּוֹקוֹת "בִּיָּרָה זֹו בְּלֹא  
מְנַהִיג" (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה לט, א) חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם.

און צוֹלִיב דַעַם אִיז גֶענוֹען נְתִינַת הַתּוֹרָה לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם  
בְּעוֹלָם, מֵאַכֿן שְׁלוֹם צְנוּיִשֿן דַעַם עוֹלָם מִיט, כְּבִיכּוֹל, דַעַם  
אוּיבְעֵרְשֿטן. עַס זַאל זִיין נְכָר וְנִרְגָשׁ נִיט נָאַר אז די  
מְצִיאוֹת פּוֹן נוֹעֲלֵט אִיז נִיט קִיין מְנַגֵּד און סְתִירָה חֵס  
וְשְׁלוֹם צוּ אַלּוֹקוֹת, און יְתֵרָה מְזֵה, דאַרף שְׁטַענְדִיק  
אַנְקוֹמֶען צוּם אוּיבְעֵרְשֿטן, נָאַר אז כָּל מְצִיאוֹתוֹ פּוֹן נוֹעֲלֵט  
גוּפֵא אִיז יֵשׁ הָאֱמִתִּי.

This is the deeper meaning of the saying, “The Torah was given to bring peace to the world” (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Chanukah 4:14): [to reveal that] the world [and all therein] is really the Torah—an inherent part of G-d. . . .

It is the world’s nature to conceal its Divine light; G-dliness is not openly visible on earth. On the contrary, the world appears to be separate from G-d to the extent that it is possible to assume not only that the world is not [an extension of] G-d, but that it doesn’t depend on G-d for its existence. It is possible to assume that “this palace has no master” (Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 39:1), G-d forbid.

That G-d gave us the Torah to bring peace to the world means that the Torah makes peace between the world and G-d, as it were. [The Torah enables us] to recognize and intuit that the universe is not in conflict with G-d, nor does it conceal G-dliness — that the universe depends constantly on G-d for its existence. Most importantly, that creation is merely an extension of the Creator.

## KEY POINTS

1. The purpose of Shabbat candles is to enhance peace in the home. The purpose of Chanukah candles is to proclaim that we can, and therefore must, overcome darkness and strife.
2. Strife is only possible when we lose sight of the fact that we are all extensions of One G-d.
3. The purpose of the entire Torah is to teach us about G-d. Thus, the purpose of the Torah is peace.
4. It follows that if we only own one candle on Friday night of the Chanukah, we should use it as a Shabbat candle because it directly enhances peace.
5. By enhancing peace, we fulfill both *mitzvot* and serve the purpose of the entire Torah.

