



## CHANUKAH

**"TAKE THE FIRST STEP. I'LL DO THE REST."**

*One Small Step from Man, One Giant Step from G-d*

# PARSHA OVERVIEW

## *Chanukah*

Chanukah—the eight-day Festival of Lights 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.

If G-d intended to save the Jews miraculously, why did He require them to fight and struggle instead of simply intervening?



## RASHI'S RULES

1. Rashi always chooses the simplest explanation supported by a literal reading of the text.
2. Rashi only brings two explanations when something is missing from each.
3. Rashi only cites the source if necessary to help us understand his explanation.
4. If you dig deep into Rashi's words, you will find deep mystical teachings called the “wine” of the Torah.

# TEXT 1A

*Numbers 8:4*

וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנְרָה מִקְנָשָׁה זָהָב, עַד יִרְכָּה עַד  
פִּרְחָהּ מִקְנָשָׁה הִיא, כַּמֵּרְאָה אֲשֶׁר הִרְאָה ה' אֶת  
מֹשֶׁה כִּן עָשָׂה אֶת הַמִּנְרָה.

This is the work of the candelabra hammered from gold; from its base to its flower, it was hammered; according to the image that G-d showed Moses, so did he construct the candelabra.

## TEXT 1B

*Rashi, ad loc.*

מִי שֶׁעָשָׂאָהּ.

וּמִדְּרַשׁ אֲגָדָה, עַל יְדֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
נַעֲשִׂית מֵאֱלֹהֶיהָ.

The one who made it [whomever it may have been].

The Midrash suggests it was made by itself through  
the hands of G-d.

## RASHI'S QUESTION

Who is being referred to in the text 'so did he construct the candelabra'? The text doesn't specify.

## RASHI'S ANSWERS

1. Whoever made the menorah. When the Torah chooses to be brief, it leaves certain details unspecified.
2. G-d made it.

## TEXT 2

*Rashi, Genesis 41:13*

וְכֵן דֶּרֶךְ כָּל מִקְרָאוֹת קְצָרִים . . .  
הֵם סוֹתְמִים אֶת הַדָּבָר.

This is common for all cryptic passages. . . . They leave the matter unspecified.



## QUESTIONS

1. Why does Rashi conclude that G-d made the candelabra if the text does not allude to such a miracle?
2. Why does Rashi offer a second answer?
3. The text seems to compliment the artisan who constructed the candelabra by saying he did so according to the image that G-d showed Moses. But if G-d made the candelabra, why would the Torah bother pointing out that He followed His own instructions?
4. Why does Rashi cite his second source?

# TEXT 3

*Rashi, Numbers 8:2*

וַשָּׁרָא אֶהֱרֹן חֲנֻכַּת הַנְּשִׂאִים חֲלֻשָּׁה אֲזִי דַעְתּוֹ, וְשָׁלֹא  
הָיָה עִמָּהֶם בַּחֲנֻכָּה לֹא הוּא וְלֹא שְׁבִטּוֹ.

אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: חַיִּיךָ, וְשִׁלְךָ גְדוֹלָה מִשְׁלָהֶם,  
וְשִׂאתָ מִדְּלִיק וּמִטִּיב אֶת הַנִּירוֹת.

When Aaron saw the inaugural offerings of the tribal princes, he was distressed over not joining them personally or on behalf of his tribe.

G-d, therefore, said to him, “By your life, your honor is greater than theirs, for you will kindle and prepare the lights.”



The details about lighting the menorah are repeated here to comfort Aaron for missing out on the inauguration of the altar.

The candelabra was superior because it was the only artifact for which G-d produced an image.



## TEXT 4

*Rashi, Exodus 25:40*

שָׁנַתְקִנְשָׁה מִנִּשָּׂה בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּנּוֹרָה, עַד שֶׁהִרְאָה  
לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מִנּוֹרָה שֶׁל אֵשׁ.

Moses had difficulty understanding how to make the candelabra until G-d showed him the candelabra in an image of fire.

# TEXT 5

*Talmud, Shabbat 22b*

וכי לאורה הוא צריך?  
והלא כל ארבעים שנה  
שהלכו בני ישראל במדבר  
לא הלכו אלא לאורו?

אלא עדות היא לבאי עולם  
שהשכינה שורה בישראל.

מאי עדות?

אמר רב: זו נר מערבי.  
שנותן בה שמן כמדת  
חברותיה, וממנה היה  
מדליק ובה היה מסיים.

Does G-d require the light of the candelabra? Was it not G-d who lit the path for the Jews for forty years as they traveled [at night] across the desert?

Rather, the lights of the candelabra testify to the entire world that the Divine Presence dwells among the Jews.

What is the nature of this testimony?

Rav explained, “It is the westernmost lamp. It was filled with the same measure of oil as the other lamps, yet the other lamps were kindled from its light, and it was the last to be kindled.”



Moses was struggling to understand how a mortal human could construct a miraculous artifact that conveys the Divine Presence.

# TEXT 6A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 38, p. 36*

ולכן מפרש רש"י, "כן עשה  
את המנורה - מי שעשאה".

היינו שבדיוק ובכוונה לא  
פירש הכתוב מיהו העושה, כי  
אין כוונת הכתוב לספר  
בשבחו של האדם העושה,  
אלא לבאר מעלת המנורה  
(ללא נפקא מינה מיהו  
העושה), שעשיית המנורה . .  
. היתה "כמראה אשר הראה  
ה' את משה".

Rashi's [first] explanation is, "The one who made it [whomever it may have been]."

The Torah deliberately conceals the constructor's identity because the Torah's intention is not to praise the artisan who constructed it [for not deviating from G-d's instructions]. The Torah intends to demonstrate the importance of the candelabra regardless of who made it. It is important because it was made according to an image shown by G-d to Moses.



The artisan's name isn't mentioned because the Torah was placing emphasis on the greatness of the menorah.



### ANSWER 3

The Torah is not complimenting the one who made the candelabra. That is not the focus here. The main point is the greatness of the menorah itself and the honor Aaron received by being chosen to dedicate it.

## TEXT 6B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, ibid.,  
pp. 36–37*

על פי זה מתיישב היטב הטעם שלא  
הסתפק רש"י בפירוש הא' אלא  
הביא גם פירוש ה"מדרש אגדה"  
ש"על ידי הקדוש ברוך הוא נעשית  
מאליה".

כי לפירוש זה מבוארת עוד יותר  
מעלתה של המנורה מכל כלי  
המשכן, שלא רק שנעשית על פי  
ה"מראה אשר הראה ה' את משה",  
אלא עוד זאת, שגם עשייתה בפועל  
היתה על ידי הקדוש ברוך הוא.

ונמצא, שאהרן זכה לחנך כלי שהיה  
מעשה ידי הקדוש ברוך הוא.

This explains why Rashi was not content with his first explanation and added the Midrashic explanation that the candelabra was made by itself through the hands of G-d.

This Midrash further underscores the uniqueness of the candelabra among the Tabernacle's artifacts. It was not only made according to an image that G-d showed Moses, but moreover, it was constructed by G-d's hands.

Aaron had the greatest privilege of all: to inaugurate an artifact constructed by G-d.

## ANSWERS 1 & 2

Rashi offers the second explanation—that G-d made the candelabra—to further emphasize the importance of the candelabra, making it a worthy consolation prize for Aaron. Not only was it constructed according to an image shown by G-d, but it was also the only artifact made by G-d Himself.

#### ANSWER 4

Rashi cites his second source, the Midrash, acknowledging that this explanation goes beyond the straightforward meaning of the text.

# TEXT 7A

*Rabbi Yehudah  
Loew, Gur Aryeh,  
Numbers 8:4*

דודאי אי אפשר לומר שהיתה המנורה  
נעשית לגמרי מאליה, שהרי המנורה  
מצוה על ישראל לעשות . . . "ועשית  
מנורת זהב" (שמות כה, לא), שתראה  
מזה שהיתה המצוה על ישראל לעשות  
המנורה. ואין לומר כלל שיהיו ישראל  
חסרים מצוה אחת.

אלא כך הפירוש, כי השליך הככר  
לאור, והיתה נעשה המנורה באש  
כשהיה משה מכה בפטיש עליה,  
ונעשה הכל. ואם לא היה יודע משה  
רבינו צורת המנורה, איך יעשה. אבל  
ידע באיזה מקום הגביעים  
והכפתורים והפרחים, ושם היה מכה  
ונעשה מאליה.

It is impossible to suggest that the  
candelabra was made entirely by itself if  
G-d said, . . . “And you should make a  
candelabra of gold” (Exodus 25:31). G-d  
instructed that it be constructed by the  
Israelites, and we cannot suggest that the  
Jews failed to obey one of G-d’s  
commandments.

Rather, this is how the candelabra came to  
be. Moses threw a slab of gold into the  
flame, and as he hammered at it, the  
candelabra made itself. Moses knew the  
design; otherwise, he would not know where  
and how to hammer. So, he hammered in  
the appropriate spots for the cups, buttons,  
and flowers, and the candelabra emerged by  
itself [through the hands of G-d].





Moses followed the steps to construct the menorah, and it then emerged from the fire as if on its own by G-d's hand.

But couldn't G-d have done that by himself? Did He really need help from a mortal being?

# TEXT 7B

*Rabbi Yehudah  
Loew, ibid.*

וכך הוא כל מעשה שפועל ה', הכל  
צריך פועל למטה. וה' יתברך גומר  
על ידו.

שהרי קריעת ים סוף, שהקדוש  
ברוך הוא עשה. ואפילו הכי הוצרך  
משה לעשות פעל למטה, כדכתיב:  
(שמות יד, טז) "ואתה הרם ירך  
ובקעהו". שה' יתברך גומר על ידי  
אדם, ודבר זה ברור.

ולפיכך היה צריך משה לדעת כל  
מעשה המנורה, והיה פועל כפי מה  
שהיה יכול, והקדוש ברוך הוא  
גומר על ידו.

Every miraculous intervention is initiated  
by mortal effort. We begin the effort,  
and G-d intervenes to conclude it.

Take, for example, the Splitting of the  
Sea of Reeds: It was a Divine miracle,  
but with an effort by Moses, as the  
passage states, "And you raise your arm  
and split it" (Exodus 14:16). It is clear  
that G-d only completes what we  
mortals initiate.

This is why Moses needed to master the  
complex design of the candelabra and  
construct as much as he could. Only  
then would G-d complete what Moses  
began.



G-d wants us to put in some effort. We must initiate by doing our small part, and G-d will take care of the rest.



# TEXT 8

*Talmud, Sotah 37a*

קפץ נחשון בן עמינדב וירד לים תחילה  
. . . ועליו מפרש בקבלה: "הושיעני

אלקים כי באו מים עד נפש, טבעתי  
ביון מצולה ואין מעמד וגו'" (תהלים  
סט, ב). "אל תשטפני שכולת מים ואל  
תבלעני מצולה וגו'" (תהלים סט, טז).

באותה שעה היה משה מאריך בתפלה.  
אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: ידידי  
טובעים בים, ואתה מאריך בתפלה  
לפני?

אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, ומה בידי  
לעשות?

אמר לו: "דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו,  
ואתה הרם את מטך ונטה את ידך וגו'"  
(שמות יד, טו-טז).

Nahshon the son of Amminadab was the first to jump and descend into the sea. . . . It was with regard to Nahshon that the psalmist wrote, "Save me, G-d, for the waters threaten my life; I have sunk in muddy depths, and there is no place to stand" (Psalms 69:2–3) and "May the currents not sweep me away, nor the deep swallow me" (Psalms 69:16).

At that moment, Moses was deeply immersed in prayer. G-d said to him, "My loved ones are drowning in the sea, and you stand before Me immersed in prayer?"

Moses replied, "Master of the universe, what can I possibly do?"

G-d replied, "Tell the Children of Israel to journey forth. And you raise your staff and stretch your hand over the sea" (Exodus 14:15–16).



Just like Nahshon, we must do as much as we can. Once we reach our limit, G-d takes over.

Fully investing ourselves into the miracle changes us as people.

G-d and Moses worked together to build the candelabra. Moses began by doing his small part, and G-d completed the rest.





The Maccabees had to go to war, find oil, and light the candelabra—even though these tasks required miraculous help from G-d—because G-d wanted the Jews to initiate the miracles, making it a joint effort.

## KEY POINTS

1. Aaron was disappointed to have been left out of the offerings that inaugurated the altar. G-d offered something better: to inaugurate the candelabra.
2. Rashi suggests two reasons the candelabra was better than the altar: (1) it was the only artifact made according to an image that G-d showed Moses, and (2) it was made by G-d.
3. The purpose of the candelabra was not to light up the Temple but to spread G-d's light to the world.

## KEY POINTS

4. Moses struggled to construct a material artifact channeling G-d's light. So G-d made it instead.
5. Nevertheless, G-d told Moses to make as much of the candelabra as a mortal could, and G-d would do the rest. G-d wants His miracles to be a partnership. We initiate the effort, and He takes over and completes the task. When we invest in the miracle, it has an indelible impact on us.

