



# חבורת מהות היהדות

## Weekly Newsletter

Vol. 1, Issue 5

פרשת וישב - שבת חנוכה  
כ"ו כסלו תשפ"ד

**From the Chaburah**  
**By: Adam Friedmann**

### Why did the Rambam Place Hilchot Hallel in Hilchot Chanukah?

In the *Zemanim* volume of *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam records the *halachot* of all the Jewish holidays. The last section is devoted to the laws of Purim and Chanukah. This makes sense, because unlike the other holidays discussed in the volume, these two are rabbinic. What's more confusing is that the Rambam includes the laws of Hallel in *Hilchot Chanukah*. There were ample earlier opportunities in *Zemanim* to discuss Hallel. Why didn't the Rambam place these halachot in the sections on the laws of Pesach or the Yamim Tovim in general? Why wait until discussing Chanukah?

The Mishnah (*Arachin* 10a) records that there are 18 days in the year on which we say the complete Hallel: 8 days of Sukkot, 8 days of Chanukah, the first day of Pesach, and Shavuot. The Gemara (*Arachin* 10a-b) explains the differences between Pesach, Sukkot, and Chanukah. Hallel is required when a holiday meets three conditions: There is *issur melachah*, it is called a *moed* in the Torah, and it has unique *korbanot*. Each day of Sukkot meets these requirements. On Pesach each day has the same *korbanot*. Therefore we say the complete Hallel on each day of Sukkot and only once on Pesach. But, notes the Gemara, Chanukah has none of these qualities. Rather we say Hallel on Chanukah because it commemorates a miracle. The Gemara establishes two distinct reasons for saying Hallel, a unique holiday or a day when a miracle occurred. In placing the laws of Hallel in *Hilchot Chanukah* the Rambam seems to indicate that the second reason is primary. Why?

We can get closer to an answer by first considering a different question about the Gemara in *Arachin*. It was asked by Rabbis Moshe and Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Nefesh HaRav* 192-195). Why should the fact that a holiday meets the three requirements mentioned above, warrant reciting Hallel on that day? They explain that the requirements aren't intrinsically related to Hallel per se. Rather, they indicate that the day has a unique *kedushah*. When we encounter a unique *kedushat hayom*, we respond to it with unique joy and therefore with Hallel.

This observation allows us to understand the Rambam's choice. The essence of Hallel is the phrase *hodu laHashem ki tov, ki le'olam chasdo*. (See *Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Ha-Shirim*, 986) In this phrase we are thanking Hashem for specific good things He's done for us and acknowledging that the limits of His kindness expand far beyond them. (See Radak to *Tehillim* 118 s.v. *Beit Aharon*) If this is the case, we understand why Chanukah's Hallel is superior to that of the Yomim Tovim. On the latter, there is no visceral sense of Hashem's kindness. We know they are days with special *kedushah* because the Torah indicates this. It's not a direct experience. On Chanukah, by contrast, the experience of God's kindness is direct and acute. He enabled us to defeat our enemies, regain sovereignty over the land of Israel, and capped it off with the miracle of the oil. (See *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Megilah Uchanukah* 3:1-2) Chanukah is therefore the time when our Hallel is most directly linked to the experiences that fuel its recital. This may be why the Rambam decided to place the laws of Hallel where he did.

## Marei mekomot for this coming week's chaburah

### זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית

משנה תורה הלכות קריאת שמע א: יא-יג  
 תלמוד בבלי ברכות ט: (משנה) "מאימתי... (גמרא) "דור דורים", י: "ר' יהושע אומר"... "בעונתה עדיף"  
 תלמוד בבלי יומא לו: "הילני אמו עשתה... לשאר עמא דבירושלים"  
 רי"ף ברכות ד: -ה.  
 תוספות ברכות ט: ד"ה לק"ש כותיקין  
 ערוך השלחן, אורח חיים נח: א-ח, כא  
 שולחן ערוך אורח חיים נח: א, ו-ז  
 רא"ש ברכות א: י  
 מאירי על המשנה ב. ד"ה ונשוב לבאר  
 אורחות חיים חלק א, הלכות קריאת שמע, כג

# Mishnah: A Philosophy of Life

By: Dovid Campbell

## Bikkurim 1:6 — Chanukah, the End of Joy

There are surprisingly few references to Chanukah in the Mishnah, and when it is mentioned, it is usually in the context of some other mitzvah. *Bikkurim* 1:6 is a good example. The mishnah tells us that while *bikkurim* may be brought until Chanukah, one may only recite the associated *mikra bikkurim* when he brings them before Sukkot. Rebbe Yehudah ben Beteira disagrees – even *mikra bikkurim* may be recited until Chanukah. Why is this period from Sukkot to Chanukah subject to debate?

*Mikra bikkurim* needs to be recited with a certain level of *simchah*. While many fruits are still collected until Chanukah, the Chachamim hold that our joy in the yearly harvest ends with Sukkot. But Rebbe Yehudah ben Beteira believes this seasonal joy extends all the way until Chanukah. As long as we are still collecting our produce and enjoying nature's bounty, we possess the necessary feelings of joy for *mikra bikkurim* (*Melech Shlomo*; see Bartenura for an alternative explanation).

In the context of this mishnah, Chanukah is simply a deadline, a way to mark the changing seasons. But this teaching also imbues Chanukah with a special context that is easily missed in modern times. Most of us are not working the fields, and we do not experience the unique joy that a successful harvest brings. But imagine plowing the earth, seeding it, tending it carefully for weeks, and finally seeing the first blooms of spring, followed by the healthy growth of fresh fruits. For weeks, everything is bursting with life. But then the days get noticeably shorter, the air begins to cool, and the explosion of new life ceases. You are alone with whatever you managed to gather, and a long winter awaits.

The time for joy has come to an end, but it is a particular type of joy that you are leaving behind – a seasonal rejoicing that is bound to the regular patterns of nature. Chanukah marks our transition to a different type of joy – a spiritual rejoicing that is bound not to nature, but to nature's transcendence. Chanukah is the first holiday of the year that is grounded entirely in a miracle.

Writer and philosopher Albert Camus once observed, “In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there’s something stronger – something better, pushing right back.”

Camus’ sentiment is inspiring and worth remembering, but it also seems to miss the point. Camus felt *confronted* by his world and sought the internal strength to oppose it. He found nothing encouraging or redeeming about life's harsh winters. On Chanukah, we take an alternative approach. In the midst of winter, in the very absence of the abundance we once knew, we embrace the joyful possibility of the miraculous.

**Eilu v'Eilu**  
**By: Dovid Campbell**

**Yehudah's Departure — Rejection, Repentance, or Something Else?**

“And it was at that time that Yehudah descended from his brothers and turned towards an Adulamite man, whose name was Chirah” (*Bereishit* 38:1).

What caused Yehudah to leave his brothers? Rashi, following a midrash, explains that “at that time” refers to the sale of Yosef. Seeing their father's pain, the brothers held Yehudah responsible. He was their leader, and if he had decided to return Yosef instead of sell him, they would have listened. They therefore caused Yehudah to “descend” from his greatness and rejected him as their leader.

R' Yosef Bechor Shor sees Yehudah's descent somewhat differently. Overwhelmed by the pain he had caused his father, Yehudah chose to leave. He simply couldn't bear his father's tears. Tzror HaMor similarly sees Yehudah's departure as self-imposed, but he ascribes it to his sincere desire for repentance. Yehudah fully acknowledged his transgression and exiled himself in order to find atonement in solitude.

While these *mefarshim* assume that the Torah presents these events chronologically, R' Avraham ibn Ezra claims that this is impossible. Only twenty-two years elapsed between the sale of Yosef and the family's descent to Egypt, and we see that Peretz (Yehudah's son through Tamar) already had two children by that time. This episode must have occurred long before the sale of Yosef. But then why does the Torah choose to present it here? Ibn Ezra and others believe that the intent is to juxtapose Yehudah's pursuit of a prostitute with Yosef's resistance to Potiphar's wife.

These commentaries suggest radically different reasons for Yehudah's departure, and they paint his character in very different lights. Yehudah can be held up as a paradigm of sincere repentance or as a cautionary tale of sexual temptation. What should we take away from the fact that the Torah offers such an ambiguous presentation of this episode? Also, some *mefarshim* argue against ibn Ezra's adjusted timeline by noting that people fathered children at much younger ages in the ancient world. What does this debate suggest about the extent to which our understanding of the Torah is sometimes grounded in assumptions about historical norms?

**Did you enjoy this newsletter? Join our weekly chaburah!**

When: Thursday nights at 8:45 (following Maariv)

Where: Kehillas Shivtei Yeshurun, Nachal Dolev 12, Bet Shemesh

Questions, comments, and concerns: [contact@essenceofjudaism.com](mailto:contact@essenceofjudaism.com)

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