



## EXPERIENCING CHANUKAH

### THE LIGHT OF CHANUKAH: SPIRITUAL OR PHYSICAL?

Let us learn here about Chanukah in a way that is not just about something that we go through, but as something that really can affect us, experientially.

All of the festivals contain ohr, spiritual light, but Chanukah in particular is the epitome of ohr. In the other festivals, the light is purely spiritual, but on Chanukah, although the light is also spiritual, it manifests also as a physical light that we empower, through the eight lights that we light on Chanukah.

The lights of Chanukah seem to be lit through a wick and oil, but the inner way to understand it is that the light revealed during Chanukah is what is lighting the wick. The wicks, the oil and the flame that we see are [merely] the physical ‘garments’ that clothe the spiritual light that is Chanukah. Of course, it looks like we are lighting it.

**But it is really the light [revealed during] Chanukah which is shining through the physical wick.**

This is the depth behind the halachah that it is forbidden to benefit from the light of Chanukah: we may not use spirituality for This World. When we light [the menorah], a spiritual light emerges [from the hidden realm of spiritual light]. Our physical eyes just see a candle, but our soul sees spiritual light in it.

Although our soul sees spirituality in things, one needs to have a revelation of his soul in order for the soul to see spirituality. With our physical eyes, all we

see are just candles burning; therefore we need to actually connect our soul to the spirituality of the hidden light that is revealed on Chanukah.

### SEEING THE LIGHTS FROM OUR SOUL

The neshamah (Jewish soul) is described in the verse, “נר ה' נשמת אדם”, “*The flame of Hashem is the soul of man*”. A ner (flame) is composed of a kli (vessel, or container), oil, and the fire. Our neshamah is called “ner” (flame), and it is also called “ohr” (light), whereas the “kli” (the vessel or container) that holds the neshamah is our physical guf (the body).

The neshamah is called “ner” (flame). Our physical body is created from earth, whereas the soul in us comes from the “breath of Hashem” that was breathed into man by Hashem. Hashem is entirely ohr, so to speak. The earth which our body comes from is a dark material, thus our body is of a “dark” substance, whereas our soul is taken from “light”. Since man is a combined existence of body and soul, his existence is essentially a mixture of light and darkness.

Every person is essentially a light contained within darkness. There is a statement, “*A little light can push away much darkness.*”<sup>1</sup> We see from the physical world that a small light can light up a dark room, and so too, when our soul is concealed from our access, we will feel like we are groping in the dark. When our soul becomes

<sup>1</sup> Chovos HaLevovos: Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh: 5

# EXPERIENCING CHANUKAH

revealed to us, however, there is a great light we experience, which sends away the “darkness” that is the body.

Thus, when a person hasn't yet revealed his soul, he lives in darkness. He will experience life through a dark lens. When a person begins to merit a revelation of his soul, his soul begins to shine, and he experiences a degree of spiritual light.

These are the two kinds of lenses through which we experience life: either we see through a dark lens, or we see life through a lens of light.

In deeper terms, there is *ayin ra*, a “bad eye”, and *ayin tov*, a “good eye.” The perspective of “*ayin ra*” comes from the view of the body, and the perspective of “*ayin tov*” is the view from the soul.

They are different lenses in a person. It is not simply that there are different personalities of either “*ayin ra*” or “*ayin tov*” that some people have positive personalities and some people have negative personalities. Rather, “*ayin tov*” and “*ayin ra*” are perspectives of how we experience life – either we are viewing life from the prism of the body, or the soul. “*Ayin ra*” represents the body's viewpoint, a view from “darkness”, which is a perspective that is darkened by materialism of This World. Thus it does not offer a clear view on life. In contrast, “*ayin tov*” is a view of “light”, which is pleasant and calming.

These are root concepts of the soul. The world we are in is a mix of light and darkness, a mix of good and evil. And it is mostly dark. What is the world looking like right now? What is it calling out? It is calling out darkness. The world is conveying to us a message of unhappiness, pain, and difficulty – a life of darkness. It is not a place that is mostly good, pure, holy and happy.

A person sees from the place in himself that he is

at now. Therefore, if he has a dark lens on life, if he is living a materialistic kind of life where his body dominates and his soul is unrevealed in his life, then he will see a dark life in front of him. If you view life through dirty glasses, everything will look dirty, even if you are looking at something clean. For this reason, when a person sees others, he usually doesn't see people as souls whom he can have a connection to. He usually just sees the thick materialism of others, he relates to their superficial shell, and as such, he relates to others as physical bodies, and he does not see them as souls in front of him.

But when a person reveals his soul, he will see others through a clear lens. Then he will see the joy, purity, and cleanliness in front of him. This does not mean that he will be naïve and that he's not aware of reality. He is well aware of reality on this world, but he has gained a view of others that is pristine, clear, and clean.

For example, when he speaks with others, like when asking someone for directions, he will understand that he is speaking with a soul, and not with a body. When he asks questions to others, he is aware that he is asking it from his soul. And when a person speaks from his soul, the soul of the other picks up on it, because the soul is receptive to the sound of another soul. Where you speak from is what the other person will hear; if you speak from your body, the other person hears your gruff body talking, and when you speak from your soul, the other's soul hears words coming from your soul.

The world today doesn't have that much speech coming from the soul. When a person meets another and greets him, does he really mean it that the other should have a good day? “Good morning” has become more like a mannerism. Contrast this with what was said about the Alter of Slobodka, who would practice

# EXPERIENCING CHANUKAH

saying “Good Morning” to himself, because he held that it was giving a beracha (blessing) to others.

This is different view on life - totally.

## SPEAKING AND ACTING FROM WITHIN YOURSELF

When a person is talking, where is he speaking from in himself? A person can talk either from the most external part of himself, or from the most innermost part of himself that he identifies with.

Most natural speech flows from the external part of the soul. The more inner a person’s speech is, the more it reflects the statement “*words from the heart enter the heart.*” This should not just be limited to when a person is conveying a deep emotion such as “I love you”, or “I feel your pain”. It is referring to how a person speaks all the time. All of the time, we really need to speak from our innermost place that we currently identify with.

Most people live from their body and speak from their body, and the person hearing him hears the words from his body. But when a person speaks from his soul, it can go into another’s soul, and the other person will hear it from his soul, because his soul will pick up on it.

Chanukah is a time of “light”, but it is not just a time to light. The light of Chanukah specifically reminds us that the physical is a container for the spiritual – that our body contains a soul. The other festivals are also a spiritual light, but they don’t take on physical form. The light of Chanukah takes on a physical form, showing us that spirituality can be clothed by physicality.

These are not mere intellectual definitions, but a practical view of life to have every day of your life.

We do many actions throughout the day. A person washes his hands, for example. How does he do it? We understand that this is allowed through the brain, which sends messages to the body and enables it to function. But when a person tells “Good Morning” to his children, does he do so with at least a little bit of feeling, at least a little more than when he washes his hands? Certainly, he puts some feeling into it. But how many times a day, or a week, or a month, or a year, though do we act from an inner place in ourselves? Are we speaking from a deeper place in ourselves on a more regular basis?

Most people do not access the depth that is contained in themselves. A person who is living inwardly is someone who lives with his depth, all the time, on a regular basis. He lives always with the deepest place in himself. Just like we all use the sink many times a day, a person who lives life in an inner way is using the deepest place he knows of in himself - all the time.

A person usually accesses his inner depth only when there are extreme emotions, of either intense joy or grief. A person usually cannot take that depth that he has reached and bring it more into his daily life. He may remember the pain he felt from his sadness or the joy that he felt when he rejoiced, but he will not remember the depth of the emotions that he reached.

The depth that we do recognize in ourselves, though – how much are we in touch with it on a daily basis?

## RECOGNITION OF OURSELVES

We must recognize who we are. Of course, the purpose of everything is to recognize Hashem. But if we do not recognize ourselves, we can’t recognize Hashem. Skipping self-recognition prevents recognition of Hashem. From recognizing ourselves, we can come to recognize Hashem<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Raavad (Rabbi Avraham ben David, 10th century scholar); based

# EXPERIENCING CHANUKAH

Surely, the deepest thing possible is to connect to Hashem, but before we get to that stage, one has to know himself well and identify the deepest place in himself.

How can it be that a person is not in touch with the deepest part of himself? We can memorize many phone numbers. How can it be that we don't recognize our own self?

If we really want to live a true life, we need to know what our deepest point is in ourselves, which can take a long time to know. After that, one needs to ask himself if his depth has deepened from before. The way we identify ourselves has to mature as the years go on.

We can say in general how deep the soul is, but you on your own need to uncover the depth of your own soul, and then you need to know how to live with it all the time. At least once a day, make sure that you are using it. That is what Chanukah is all about.

## THE DEEPEST POINT IN YOURSELF

I will try here to explain what the deepest point of the soul is, but it will be hard to understand it, both intellectually as well as emotionally, because each person is at a different point.

The deepest part of the soul, the deepest experience your soul can know of is to experience your very existence (havayah). (There is really a higher experience, which is to experience the reality of the Creator, which is reached through emunah and d'veykus with Hashem. That is an experience above the "I", however. Here we are describing the experience that is within the "I".)

One's very existence is his deepest experience. It is not the will of a person, it is not aspiration, it is not giving, it is not enduring suffering, and it is not joy. Those are all deep experiences, but the deepest experience is to experience one's existence.

A person needs to be able to remove all the external layers covering the soul, and then he can experience himself. It is not a place of any desires, because it is above all desires.

When a person purifies himself through doing the *mitzvos*, through attaining a state of purity, and through correcting his middos, then he calms the soul.<sup>3</sup> He can then experience the soul. When he experiences his own soul, he can feel his existence then and be able to live it on a daily basis.

All day, people are running around, and this causes people not to be in touch with the soul. This refers to internal running as well, in which people are running all the time with their desires. They are not calm inside, and they never reach their soul. Therefore, people wonder what the deepest experience is. But the deepest experience is: to experience your own self!

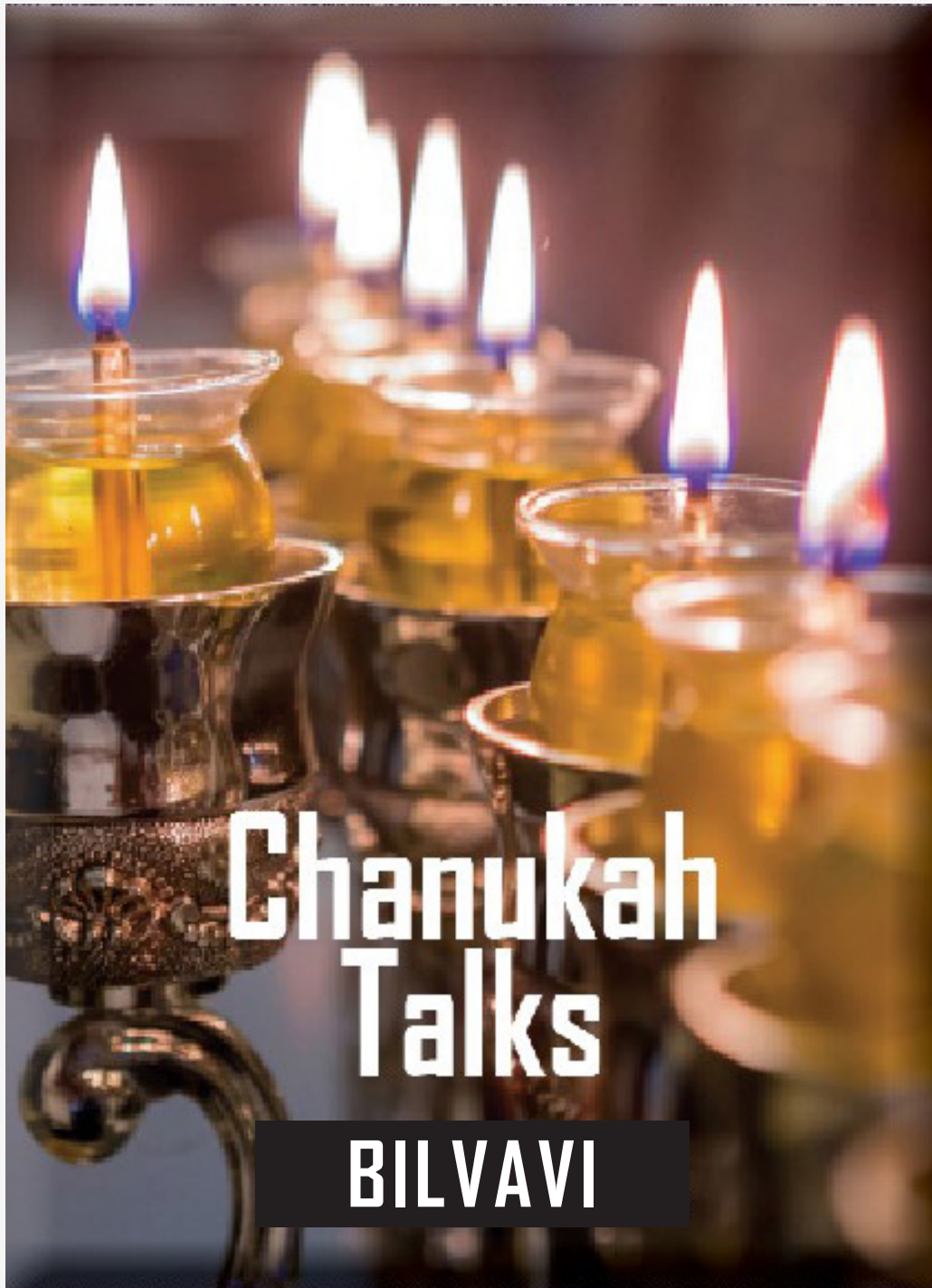
You can't live from your depth if you haven't accessed it yet. When you do access it, you need to then live with it all the time – sensibly, of course. This will reveal more and more depth to you as time goes on. In order to get to your own depth, you first need to live daily with the deepest point in yourself – you can think about it and can feel it throughout the day.

These are not ideas or opinions – it is about life. May we merit from Hashem to know our souls and to realize our depths, our existence, and from there, to reach *d'veykus* with Hashem.

חנוכה 017 האור בעומק הנפש תשע"ב

on the verse, "From my flesh, I see G-d."

<sup>3</sup> See the series of *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus*



PDF - 103 PAGES OF DROSHOS  
13 droshas on Chanukah  
Q&A Avodah of Women  
3 droshas Chodesh Kislev

## 1b) Recognizing Our Positive & Negative Aspects

In the examples we gave above (analyzing how we understand the emotions of love and desire), we can notice that there were both positive and negative aspects to each of these faculties. Understanding our soul means recognizing all of its aspects, positive and negative.

It is recommended for most people that we should not begin to work with our negative aspects when we begin with any kind of inner work.<sup>1</sup> There is a great need to begin recognizing our soul in a positive way, both because we need to view our inner work as a positive endeavor to be engaged in, and also because being focused on our positive aspects will increase our willpower to be more invested in this process of inner work – and, finally, because we are more likely to succeed with a positive view of ourselves.

It is usually not beneficial to begin our inner work with analyzing our shortcomings.

People are anyhow dealing with negative feelings, and if a person will begin inner work by analyzing his negative aspects, it will only increase his negative feelings further – an increasing low self-worth, an increased lack of self-confidence, and other negative feelings. The negative aspects that one discovers in himself (at the start of his inner work) will only awaken his negative feelings further, because “a species finds another of its own species, and is awakened”,<sup>2</sup> and instead of building the process of recognizing one’s soul, one would only be destroying his self-worth.

That is why for most people, the beginning of inner work is to focus on their positive abilities, and only later should they begin to work on both their positive and negative aspects. In the first steps of self-recognition, we should focus only on our positive aspects and not on our negative aspects<sup>3</sup> – so that we can begin to receive some

vitality and joy from our positive aspects (which we need). Only after that, can we begin to recognize our negative aspects and begin fixing them. And, even when we start working on our faults, we should never be entirely focused on these shortcomings. Rather, we need to be utilizing our positive aspects along with working to fix our negative aspects.

## Step 2: Skimming Through The Notebook

---

*everything, and when they sit down to do some personal reflection and begin understanding themselves, all of their negativity floats to the surface and they become focused with their negative aspects, their various shortcomings and faults. This kind of person really needs to learn how to separate the good from the bad that he finds in himself, and to become focused on his good aspects. If a person has particular faults that are very much dominant, his work then is to focus on the good even within that fault. Even in something bad, we can find something good (even if it’s only a little bit). How? There is an inner method to see good in everything: by seeing the root of a matter. Every single thing, even something bad, has a good root where it comes from.*

*If a person is still having difficulty applying any of these methods, he can try making a list of all negative traits he finds in himself, so that he ‘calms’ the need somewhat to engage in his faults. After that, he should identify his smallest fault and try to find something positive in it (even if it’s only minimally good). He can begin working with this small positive point.*

*Others are stronger on their inside, and they can begin working on their negative aspects even when they begin inner work. But very few are able to do this. Rashbi said, “I have seen those who ascend, but they are few.” So a person has to suspect himself that he’s probably not from the few people in the world who are immediately capable of high levels of growth. (If a person thinks that he is from the few, then he should consult with someone who can guide him further.)*

*Yet, if a person finds that he is often dealing with a certain fault of his and he can do so in a way that’s positive and healthy, he can write down notes on it in his notebook. But if he cannot deal with a fault right now, then he should leave it aside and return to dealing with it later, after he has learned how to connect to his strongest and most positive aspect (as will be explained in chapters 12-13).*

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 12 and chapter 1, section 2

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Bavli Eruvin 9a

<sup>3</sup> Some people by nature are very drawn to seeing the negative in

The second step is- after some time of writing these notes in our personal notebook – to skim through it, every so often. In order to continue the process of continuous note-taking, we need to be looking over, every so often, all that we have written down. This continues our writing from where we left off.

Firstly, we should set aside time to skim through our notebook.<sup>4</sup> This should be done at a considerably later

*4 Important Note: Since this is the first time where we are discussing this step, we shall elaborate upon it here, but the words here apply as well to each of the coming steps.*

*The more that we are progressing through the steps of self-recognition, the more complicating our inner work becomes – with regards to the amount of time needed to implement it. Whenever we add on another stage, we are not simply abandoning the previous stages. Rather, we are continuing them and adding on another step. Some of the inner work will be on a consistent basis (i.e. once a day) and some of it will only be periodically (i.e. once a month). There will certainly be a number of stages overlapping each other. However, we cannot do several steps in one day, because this will just place too much work on us, which can only make us stressed, confused, and unfocused. We can't succeed at any step if we are also trying to get to a different step. So it is necessary to temporarily take a break from the previous steps (from some of them or all of them) and just focus on the current step we are working at. After some time, we can return to working on the previous steps, one after the other, each in their appropriate time. But we should try not to overextend these breaks, so that we don't lose our inner connection that we have so far made with the entire process we have started.*

*Similarly, it is also recommended that every so often, we should see how much time is needed to implement each step, as well as how much time we are actually capable of setting aside for it. This is because with as we progress, it takes less time to implement any of the stages. For example, at the start, there can be a stage of inner work that takes an hour in order to implement, but as we get used to it, it can take only a few minutes [to 'get into the zone']*

*In any case, after we have been implementing all of the stages several times, the stages will become (with Hashem's help) more natural to us. Much of the external factors getting in the way will dissipate, and it will become much easier for us to implement a number of steps, one after the other, with just a small very break in*

time than when we started the note-taking. For example, if one was doing the writing once a day, he should skim through the notes at about a month or two later. After that, whenever he gets an opportunity to look over his notes again, he should skim through the notebook from beginning to end.

At first, skimming through the notebook won't take that much time because you haven't yet filled it up, but as time continues and you fill up your notebook more and more, it will take more time to skim through it. When you have just started your notebook recently, it may take only a few minutes to skim through it, but after some time when your notebook is bigger, it can take a few days for you to peruse it again. Review it calmly, so that you can gain the most of it.

The goal of all this is so that (a) You will become clearer about your soul-faculties. (a) You will deepen your ability to analyze. (c) You will deepen your emotional clarity on something. (d) You will gain an idea of the process that your soul is going through.

Now we shall explain more about each of these goals.

## 2a) Becoming Clearer About Your Soul-Faculties

If a person is involved for some time with learning about and accessing a certain soul-faculty, and at a certain point he forges ahead learning about a different ability, he cannot make any progress in this way. Many times, he can even lose whatever he gained from learning about a particular ability. He might also make the mistake of thinking that nothing has changed since he has learned to identify and feel a particular soul-faculty, and then he will think that he has gained nothing.

---

*between the steps (and this can even be done all within one day). Not only that, but when we gain value for this process, and we are getting energy and joy from it, we will find that we have much more time for this than we thought. Remember this rule throughout each of the coming stages.*

However, if a person is skimming through his notebook every so often, and he keeps clarifying his abilities – both intellectually and emotionally – not only won't he lose the information, but he will also become clearer about it.

Before we move on to the next topic, let us state that recognizing our soul is a process of entering into the layers of our soul – which has layer within layer to it. The key to each layer is: When we are joining together both our brain (intellectual analysis) and heart (emotions). In each step, we need to be working with both our intellect and heart, deepening our intellectual understanding and emotional understanding more and more. To the degree that we will do this, we will attain deeper self-recognition and enter more deeply into our internal world.

## 2b) Deepening Our Intellectual Analysis

Every time you skim through your notebook, think well about the definitions which you wrote down, and see if you still agree to that definition or not. You may have changed your understanding of a certain concept.

How? There are several possibilities. You might realize that you had a mistaken definition of something, and now you found a more proper definition of it. Or, there was a partial misunderstanding, and now you realized how there was a particular aspect which you were mistaken about. Or, you may have gotten it right the first time, but now your understanding of it is much sharper. It is also possible that that you found an additional way to define something, and that your first definition is still correct. Also, your definition may be correct when it comes to a certain aspect of the soul, but it is not true when it comes to a different aspect of the soul.

Your definition of something may have either changed entirely, or only partially. Or, you haven't changed your definition at all [we shall discuss that soon]. In any case, whenever you skim through your notebook, think: "What did I think about this in the past, and how do I think of it today?"

Try to identify any changes that you have made in how you define a certain concept.

There is no need to deliberately change your definitions. Yet, if considerable time has passed and you don't notice any changes in how you define something, and you always remain with the same definitions every time you skim through the topics in your notebook, then it is a sign that you are not doing the work properly.

There can be several reasons for this. (1) Perhaps you are excited to get to the next stage and are impatient to get there already, so you are not thinking enough or you aren't paying attention to any changes in how you understand things. (2) You may be skimming through the notebook when you aren't calm and serene. (3) You may be simply going through it superficially as if it's a routine and not really thinking into it. (4) You might be simply relying on your past knowledge and you aren't willing to try thinking about it anew, because you reason that if you understood it properly until now, there is nothing else for you to clarify and no need for you to deepen your understanding.<sup>5</sup>

All of these can be possible reasons, and there may be additional reasons as well, for remaining stagnant in this area.<sup>6</sup>

If you realize over time that your understanding of a concept hasn't deepened at all – for whatever reason – then you need to begin writing about it again, as if it's the first time you are starting to learn about it. Write down how you define a certain concept, as if you have never thought about it in the past. Then compare it with your previous notes, and try to identify if you have changed your definition from the past.

<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, it is also possible for a person to reach a "fundamental" or definition of a concept, which is an understanding that is coming from his unique "soul root". However, this is very rare, and usually a person should not assume that this is the reason [for his unchanging view about something].

<sup>6</sup> "The heart knows the bitterness of his soul" (Mishlei 14:10).