The Strongest Hanukkah Articles



Four articles from the lessons of Rabbi Yitzchak Lasry · Hanukkah 5787

THE MESSAGE IN SHORT

Hanukkah is the holiday of light inside darkness. Four articles by the Rabbi: how to keep searching when everything looks closed, how to say thank you even when it is hard, why the oil shines only after it is crushed, and how the few can prevail over what looks impossible.



Rabbi Yitzchak Lasry

HOW TO READ THIS BULLETIN

The articles are drawn from the Rabbi's lessons, shortened and lightly edited. You can read one each evening by the candles. At the end of each article: one idea to take with us.

LIVE CLASSES

Classes are held every Tuesday at 8:00 PM

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> “God says: try again. And again. And again. Find me in the darkness.”



Why Did They Search for Pure Oil, and How Do We Keep Searching?

Keep trying, believe one hundred percent, and give thanks before it happens

You tried many times. Many jobs, many meetings, many doctors. Each time another door closed, and a voice in the heart said, "Enough, it will not happen." The Rabbi asks: what if the Kohanim in the Temple had given up exactly there?

Why search at all?

The Rabbi asks what can be asked about the Hanukkah story. The Temple was ruined, the oil was defiled. He says there is a halacha that if there is no pure oil, one may light with impure oil, at least for the public. So why search for one jar bearing the High Priest's seal? They could have pressed more olives.

The Rabbi gives one answer: the place where pure oil was made was far, four days each way. Then he adds an answer he stresses himself: they were searching for the miracle. They searched in the middle of the darkness, when nothing around them made sense, and kept believing they would find it.

Effort and faith, both

The Rabbi says that whoever looks for a miracle without making an effort will not receive it. You must make the effort, and at the same time believe one hundred percent, in the subconscious and in the heart.

Then he says a sentence worth carrying through the week: "God says: try again. And again. And again. Find me in the darkness." Even when you have tried everything. Even when you have no friends, no money, no support.

Belief is not enough, you have to feel it

Here the Rabbi adds a step. We always follow the voices telling us why not to believe. He says believing is not enough, we must also feel that it is already happening. Someone looking for a match, a job or a home closes their eyes for five minutes a day and says, "Thank you, God, for this match, this job, the home I dreamed of," as if it already happened. He stresses that after the thank-you one can also ask, but first one feels.

A STORY FROM THE LESSON

Two personal stories

The Rabbi tells that even the lawyer told him there was no chance of getting a green card. He put the request in front of his eyes and said every day, "Thank you, God, for the green card." After seven years of waiting, he says, he received it one Erev Hanukkah.

He also recalls that already in 2016 he pictured the community: the name, the people, how it looks. Back then he had no money, no people, no support. Today he says every minyan, every class and every participant is a miracle.

To take with us

- **Pick one door that closed:** and ask what I have not yet tried, even if I tried a lot.
- **Five minutes with eyes closed:** say "thank you" for what I am waiting for, as if I already received it.
- **Put it in front of your eyes:** write the goal in one sentence and hang it where you see it daily.



Does “Thank You” Work Even When It Is Hard?

The difference between saying thank you and feeling thank you, and why we start from the bottom

It is easy to say "thank you" when everything is good. The Rabbi asks what happens when life is hard, and who wants to hear that we must give thanks precisely now.

A STORY FROM THE LESSON

A child in a hospital

The Rabbi tells of a child who had to go through surgery. He cried, kicked, and did not let his mother into the room, so they could not begin. Suddenly they saw the child smiling. When they looked up at the window they saw his mother looking in: "I am still here." The child calmed, lay down, and let them operate.

The Rabbi explains that this is how we are. We do not know the big picture or what God wants, but we can know that He loves us and that He stands there, behind the window.

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A STORY FROM THE LESSON

Nachum Ish Gam Zu

The Rabbi tells of Nachum Ish Gam Zu, sent with a box of diamonds as a gift to the king. During the night someone replaced the diamonds with sand. When the king opened it, he was angry. Nachum said "this too is for the good," and then told the king that this sand was from Abraham our father, and when thrown at enemies it turns into arrows. The king tried it, and it worked.

What is the lesson? Here the Rabbi stresses that there are two levels of faith, following the Maharsha on Berachot, in the story of Rabbi Akiva (Berachot 60b, "everything the Merciful One does is for the good"). **The first level:** a person knows that everything is for the good, and truly believes it, but does not feel it. The heart still hurts. **The second level:** a person feels it. He is happy even inside the difficulty, in the very moment of it. The Rabbi stresses that this is the higher level, and that the way there starts from the first level: first we know, and then, with time and practice, we also feel.

We start from the bottom

Here the Rabbi says something surprising: to give thanks we must recognize that we do not deserve. Someone who starts from the bottom sees a roof, a bank account, a spouse, children who call him Dad. He says that if we wrote a list of everything we have, it would be endless.

When "thank you" does not work

The Rabbi tells of a man who called him after being stopped by a policeman. He said "Thank you, God, that I was stopped," and received a 95 dollar ticket, and asked, "It did not work." The Rabbi answered: you do not truly believe, you say thank you so that it will work. "Thank you" works only when we truly feel that it could have been worse: an accident instead of a ticket.

To take with us

- **A list of ten:** each evening write ten things I am grateful for, even the small ones.
- **Start from the bottom:** choose one thing I do not deserve, and thank for it.
- **Thank for what is hard, at least in thought:** "it could have been worse."



Why Does the Oil Shine Only After It Is Crushed?

Olive oil, Joseph in the pit, and the question: for whom do I shine

Nobody likes pressure. But the Rabbi points to something we see in the Hanukkah candle every year: its light comes from oil that was crushed.

Why olive oil specifically?

In the lesson on Joseph and Hanukkah the Rabbi says: "An olive that is to give oil must be crushed." In his words, pure olive oil is the candle that shines best. He adds an image he returns to: even when you are crushed, the oil floats to the top. "Know how to float above everyone."

He says it is the same in life: you never see a successful person to whom everything came easily. What comes easily, he says, goes easily. What comes from self-sacrifice, remains. That is why, he says, Hanukkah remained for generations, and so did Purim.

> **"Know how to float above everyone."**

What did Joseph do in the pit?

The Rabbi returns to Joseph. A seventeen-year-old, thrown into a pit, sold, and later sitting in prison. What kept him going? The Rabbi says Joseph did not let circumstances decide who he is. He told himself: I am above. I have strength, I have a goal, I will have a home and a family of my own. He looked at the light even when there was darkness around him.

Life is not only about me

The Rabbi adds a point that is easy to miss. When Joseph sat in prison, he noticed the chief cupbearer and the chief baker: "Why are your faces sad today?" The Rabbi brings the Midrash that he asked about their welfare every day, wanting to help and support them. The Rabbi says Joseph decided that "life is not only about me, it is about we." If God put me here, there is someone I need to be there for.

And he adds: when a person focuses on others, his own problems somehow get sorted out. When a person focuses only on himself, every problem is big.

And the pressure I am going through?

The Rabbi does not say the pressure is pleasant. He says there is a difference between pain and suffering: pain is part of life, and suffering is a choice. And we may ask what this crushing brings out of me. In his view, the Creator chooses who goes through what and for how long, usually so that we learn that we are not alone and nothing is without God.

To take with us

- **Ask one question:** what does this pressure bring out of me: strength, patience or giving?
- **Choose one person:** I can ask how they are today, like Joseph.
- **Remember one light:** one thing I can light even when it is hard.



The Weak Against the Mighty: What Looks Impossible

When you have no education, support or money, and you begin anyway

There are moments when we look at the starting point and say, "I have no chance." No education, no money, no connections, no one to help. The Rabbi says this is exactly the moment to think about Hanukkah.

The picture

In his lesson on the holiday he tells that the Greeks were an empire that ruled the world. Facing them stood a small group: Judah the Maccabee and the Hasmoneans. He stresses that these were not trained soldiers, and all the odds were against them.

He ties this to the "Al HaNissim" text: "You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure." In his view, everything that happened there was above nature.

What we can take from it

The Rabbi speaks about someone with no education, support, credit or money. He reminds us that many successful people in the world did not start with everything. They started with nothing, but they had one thing: the ability to believe, to keep going and to run against the odds. He links this to the words we say on Hanukkah, "against all odds."

He adds a calming point: "Do not despair. Even when we are in the dark, and at the moment we lost hope, God is with us." He says this is where we strengthen the power: not in quantity, but in the quality of faith.

> **"Do not despair. Even when we are in the dark, and at the moment we lost hope, God is with us."**

Candle after candle

The Rabbi recalls that on Hanukkah we light one more candle each day. In his words, it is a picture of someone who each day takes a candle and lights it again, so there will be light in life, and believes again and again. He says: want something? Put it in front of your eyes, for example in front of the fridge, and thank every day for what you are waiting for. That is how he acted himself, as he told it.

To take with us

- **Choose one small step:** something I would postpone because "I do not have enough," and give it five minutes.
- **Change one sentence:** from "I have no chance" to "I do not have more yet, and I begin with what I have."
- **Find a partner:** one person who believes in me, and tell them my goal.

One question from each article, for the lighting evening

1. **Which door did I close because I got tired of believing?**
2. **What hard thing right now am I willing to check might be "the child at the window"?**
3. **What pressure am I under now, and what might it bring out of me?**
4. **What am I postponing because I think I do not have enough?**

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