

# **Finding the Hidden Light**

## **The thirty-six candles of Chanukah and the mysterious first light of creation**

### **Genesis 1: 3-5**

God said “Let there be light”; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness was called night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

### **Genesis 1: 14-19**

God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times- the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, to dominate the day and the nights and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

### **Genesis Rabbah 11:2**

The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, Adam could see with it from one end of the universe to the other. But when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion, whose actions were corrupt, He arose, hid it, and prepared it for the righteous in the emergent future.

That light served humanity for thirty-six hours, twelve on the eve of Shabbat i.e. Friday, twelve during the night of Shabbat, and twelve on Shabbat day. When the sun sank at the end of Shabbat, darkness began to set in and Adam was terrified.

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do for him? He made him find two flints, which he struck against each other. Light came forth and he said a blessing over it.

### **Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 30b**

Rabbi Simlai taught: What does a foetus resemble when it is in the womb of its mother? Folded writing tablets.

Its hands rest on its two temples, its two elbows on its two legs and its two heels against its buttocks.

Its head lies between its knees, its mouth is closed and its navel is open, and it eats what its mother eats and drinks what its mother drinks.

A light is lit for it above its head, and it looks and sees from one end of the universe to the other.

And a foetus is taught the entire Torah while in the womb.

And once the baby emerges into the airspace of the world, an angel comes and touches it on its mouth, causing it to forget the entire Torah.

### **A teaching of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms c.1200, The Rokeach. Presented here by Rabbi Elimelech Spira of Dinov c.1800 in Bnei Yissascher on Kislev and Tevet 1:6**

The light of the Menorah of this month is an aspect of the hidden light, which is hidden in Torah: the thirty-six candles were established corresponding to the thirty-six lights mentioned in the Torah, which is a hint to the hidden light, which served for thirty-six hours for Adam, and afterwards was hidden and concealed in the Torah.

The name of the month is Kislev, for in this month shines an illumination from the hidden light which is hidden in Torah. 'Kis' means hiding or covering, and 'Lev' is the numerical equivalent of thirty-six, for the thirty-six lights in the Torah which are revealed in this month's illumination. And Tevet is connected to this light, as it says, "God saw that the Light was good (*Tov*)".

**Note:** The thirty-six candles we light on Hannukah parallel the thirty-six hours for which the original light of creation shone for Adam, before it was hidden away.

**Meaning of Chanukah** *chanukat mizbeach* dedication of the altar

(חנוכת המזבח)

**chinuch** (חנך/חנוך)

Dedication/initiation

### **Bnei Yissascher on Kislev and Tevet 2:8**

These days are called Chanukah, meaning dedication/initiation for the future perfected world when the hidden light will be completely revealed to us.

As is written: "No longer shall you need the sun for light by day, nor the shining of the moon for radiance by night; for the Eternal shall be your light everlasting".

For by this light, a person can see from one end of the universe to the other, therefore the candle of Chanukah is called the candle of dedication/initiation to the infinite light of the future perfection of the world.

## **Numbers Rabbah 15:8**

A king had a beloved friend and told him, "I'm coming to your home for dinner, go and make preparations for me."

His friend went and prepared a simple bed and a simple table and a simple lamp.

When the king came, with him came his surrounding entourage and a golden lamp in front of him borne by a servant.

When his friend saw all the honor of the king he became embarrassed and hid all that he had prepared, for it was so ordinary.

The king said, "Didn't I tell you I'm coming for dinner, why haven't you prepared anything for me?"

His friend said, "I saw all the honor that surrounds you and I became embarrassed and I hid everything I'd prepared for you, for it was so ordinary."

The king replied, "By your life, I reject everything that I brought. Because of my love for you, I only want to use your things."

So too, the blessed Holy One is all light...yet He tells Israel to prepare a Menorah and candles! And as soon as they light the Menorah, the Shechinah (the Divine Presence) arrives.

## **Sfat Emet (Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur, Poland c.1900) on Genesis, Chanukah section 29:**

It appears that each Hanukkah candle draws from the *Or HaGanuz*, the hidden light of creation, and gives light in great darkness, as our Sages hinted with their description of the *Or HaGanuz* (the hidden light) as a light which shone from one end of the world to the other.

There is no hiddenness or obscurity before this light. The original light of creation shone through all these layers of concealment and it was hidden away for the righteous; on this it is written "A light shines for the upright in the darkness".

## **Arthur Green's commentary on Sfat Emet**

The Hanukkah candles are interpreted as a spiritual symbol. They are the light of the *mitzvot*... We are looking for the hidden divine light within ourselves.