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**LIGHT AGAINST DARKNESS:  
THE MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL OF THE  
HOLIDAY OF CHANNUKA**

**SHAI SECUNDA**

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**DRISHA INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH EDUCATION**  
37 West 65th Street, 5th Floor ▪ New York, NY 10023  
212.595.0307 ▪ [www.Drisha.org](http://www.Drisha.org)

## Light against Darkness: The Miraculous Survival of the Holiday of Channukah

[1] 1 Maccabees 4:37-59

<sup>36</sup>Then Judas and his brothers said, “See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it.” <sup>37</sup>So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. <sup>38</sup>There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. <sup>39</sup>Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes <sup>40</sup>and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

<sup>41</sup>Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel **until he had cleansed the sanctuary**. <sup>42</sup>He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, <sup>43</sup>and **they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place**. <sup>44</sup>They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. <sup>45</sup>And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, <sup>46</sup>and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. <sup>47</sup>Then they took unhewn<sup>[3]</sup> stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. <sup>48</sup>They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. <sup>49</sup>They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. <sup>50</sup>Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. <sup>51</sup>They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

<sup>52</sup>Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year,<sup>53</sup> they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. <sup>54</sup>At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. <sup>55</sup>All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. <sup>56</sup>So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. <sup>57</sup>They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. <sup>58</sup>There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

<sup>59</sup>Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the **days of dedication of the altar** should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

[2] 2 Maccabees 10

<sup>1</sup>Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; <sup>2</sup>they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. <sup>3</sup>They **purified the sanctuary**, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence. <sup>4</sup>When they had done this, they fell prostrate and implored the Lord that they might never again fall into such misfortunes, but that, if they should ever sin, they might be disciplined by him with forbearance and not be handed over to blasphemous and barbarous nations. <sup>5</sup>It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, **the purification of the sanctuary** took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev. <sup>6</sup>'They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. <sup>8</sup>They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

[3] **Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 12:316-325 [7.6-7]**

316 When therefore, the generals of Antiochus' armies had been beaten so often, Judas assembled the people together, and told them, that after these many victories which God had given them, they ought to go up to Jerusalem, and purify the temple, and offer the appointed sacrifices. 317 But as soon as he, with the whole multitude, was come to Jerusalem, and found the temple deserted, and its gates burnt down, and plants growing in the temple of their own accord, on account of its desertion, he and those who were with him began to lament, and were quite confounded at the sight of the temple; 318 so he chose out some of his soldiers, and gave them order to fight against those guards that were in the citadel, until he should have purified the temple. When, therefore, he had carefully purged it, and had brought in new vessels, the lampstand, the table [of showbread], and the altar [of incense], which were made of gold, he hung up the veils at the gates, and added doors to them. He also took down the altar [of burnt offering], and built a new one of stones that he gathered together, and not of such as were hewn with iron tools. 319 **So on the five and twentieth day of the month of Chisleu, which the Macedonians call Apellaios, they lit the lamps that were on the lampstand, and offered incense upon the altar [of incense], and laid the loaves upon the table [of showbread], and offered burnt offerings upon the new altar [of burnt offering].** 320 Now it so happened, that these things were done on the very same day on which their divine worship had stopped, and was reduced to a profane and common use, after three years' time; for so it was, that the temple was made desolate by Antiochus, and so continued for three years...323 Now Judas celebrated **the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple** for eight days; and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon: but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices; and he honoured God, and delighted them by hymns and

psalms. 324 Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs, when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship, that they made it a law for their posterity that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. 325 And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our hopes appeared to us; and that hence was the name given to that festival.

[4] Megillat Ta'anit and Scholion (according to Oxford version in V. Noam's Reconstruction)

בעשרים וחמשה ביה יומי חנוכה דלא למספד

בימים ראשונים חנוכת משה זאת חנוכת מזבח. משלמה ואילך חנוכת משה וחנוכתו, שנ' כי חנוכת המזבח שבעת ימים ושמונה משנטל בית הלבנון. חנוכת בית חשמונאי לדורות. ולמה נהגת לדורות? שעשאו בצאתם מצרה לרותה ואמר הלל והדליקו בה גרות בטהרה...

On the twenty-fifth of it (*i.e.* Kislev) are the days of Channukah on which eulogizing is forbidden.

In former days, the dedication (Channukah) by Moses – “This was the dedication of the altar”; From Solomon onward, the dedication of Moses (was celebrated) and also his (Solomon's) dedication, as is stated: “for (they observed) the dedication of the altar seven days.” And eight (days) when the House of Lebanon was taken (?). The dedication of the Hasmonaans (was to be celebrated) for (all) generations. And why is it celebrated for all generations? For they observed them when they emerged from distress to relief and they recited on it the Hallel and they kindled lights on it in purity.

[5] b. Rosh Hashanah 18b-19a

איתמר רב ורבי חנינא אמרי בטלה מגילת תענית. רבי יוחנן ורבי"ל אמרי לא בטלה מגילת תענית. רב ורבי חנינא אמרי בטלה מגילת תענית' הכי קאמר בזמן שיש שלום יהיו לששון ולשמחה אין שלום צום, והנך נמי כי הני. רבי יוחנן ורבי יהושע בן לוי אמרי לא בטלה מגילת תענית' הני הוא דתלינהו רחמנא בבגין בהמ"ק, אבל הנך כדקיימי קיימי. מתיב רב כהנא מעשה וגזרו תענית בחנוכה בלוד וירד ר"א ורחץ ורבי יהושע וסיפר ואמרו להם צאו והתענו על מה שהתעניתם א"ר יוסף שאני חנוכה דאיכא מצוה א"ל אביי ותיבטיל איהי ותיבטל מצותה אלא אמר רב יוסף שאני חנוכה דמיפרסם ניסא...

It was stated: Rav and Rabbi Hanina say: Megillat Ta'anit has been nullified. Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say: Megillat Ta'anit has not been nullified. “Rav and Rabbi Hanina say: Megillat Ta'anit has been nullified” - This is what the prophet (Zech) is saying: At a time when there is peace in the world, the dates listed will be times of joy and gladness (on which eulogies and fasting are forbidden); when there is no peace, fasting. “Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say that Megillat Ta'anit has not been nullified” – and they say: It was those (fast days mentioned in the Bible) that the Merciful One makes contingent on the building of the Temple, but these festive days listed in Megillat Ta'anit remain as they were. Rav Kahana raised an objection: There was an incident and the Sages decreed a fast on Hanukkah in Lod, and Rabbi Eliezer went down on that day and bathed and Rabbi Yehoshua went down and cut his hair, and these sages said to them: Go out and fast another fast as an act of penitence for what you

have already fasted (as the days of Hanukkah are days of joy, on which fasting is forbidden)! Rav Yosef said: Hanukkah is different, as there is the mitzva. Abaye said to him: Let Hanukkah itself its mitzva be nullified! Rather, Rav Yosef said: Hanukkah is different, as its miracle is well known.

[6] m. Bikkurim 1:6

הקונה שתי אילנות בתוך של חברו. מביא ואינו קורא. רבי מאיר אומר מביא וקורא. יבש המעין. נקצץ האילן. מביא ואינו קורא. רבי יהודה אומר מביא וקורא. מעצרת ועד החג מביא וקורא. **מן החג ועד תנוכה. מביא ואינו קורא.** רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר מביא וקורא

[7] m. Taanit 2:10

אין גוזרין תענית על הצבור **בראש חודש בחנוכה ובפורים.** ואם התחילו אין מפסיקין דברי רבן גמליאל. אמר ר' מאיר אף על פי שאמר רבן גמליאל אין מפסיקין מודה היה שאין משלימין. וכן תשעה באב שחל להיות בערב שבת:

[8] m. Bava Kamma 6:6

גף שיצא מתחת הפטיש והזיק חייב. גמל שהיה טעון פשתן ועבר ברשות הרבים. ונכנס פשתנו לתוך החנות. ודלקו בנרו של חנוני והדליק את הבירה. בעל הגמל חייב. הניח חנוני נרו מבחוץ החנוני חייב. **רבי יהודה אומר בנר חנוכה פטור:**

[9] b. Shabbat 23a

אמר רב הונא חצר שיש לה שני פתחים צריכה שתי נרות. אמר רבא לא אמרן אלא משתי רוחות אבל מרוח אחת לא צריך מאי טעמא אילימא משום חשדא דמאן אילימא חשדא דעלמא אפילו ברוח אחת נמי ליבעי אי חשדא דבני מתא אפילו משתי רוחות נמי לא ליבעי לעולם משום חשדא דבני מתא וזימנין דמחלפי בהאי ולא חלפי בהאי ואמרי כי היכי דבהאי פיתחא לא אדליק בהך פיתחא נמי לא אדליק.

R. Huna said: If a courtyard has two doors, it requires two [Hanukkah] lamps. Said Rava, 'That was said only [if they are situated] at two [different] sides; but [if] on the same side, it is unnecessary. What is the reason? Shall we say, because of suspicion? Whose suspicion? Shall we say, that of strangers: then let it be necessary even on the same side? While if the suspicion of townspeople, then even [if] on two different sides it is still unnecessary? — After all, it is on account of the suspicion of the townspeople, yet lest they may pass one [door] and not the other, and say, 'just as it [the lamp] has not been lit at this door, so has it not been lit at the other.'

[10] b. Shabbat 21b

תנו רבנן: מצות חנוכה נר איש וביתו. והמהדרין – נר לכל אחד ואחד. והמהדרין מן המהדרין, בית שמאי אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק שמנה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך; ובית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך... אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: **שני זקנים היו בציזון**, אחד עשה כבית שמאי ואחד עשה כדברי בית הלל, זה גותן טעם לדבריו – כנגד פרי החג, וזה גותן טעם לדבריו – דמעלין בקדש ואין מורידין. ת"ר נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ אם היה דר בעלייה מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לר"ר ובשעת הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו ודיו.

Our Rabbis taught: The precept of Hanukkah [demands] one light for a man and his household; the zealous [kindle] a light for each member [of the household]; and the extremely zealous, — Beth Shammai maintain: On the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced; but Beth Hillel say: On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased...Rabbah b. Bar Hana said that R. Yohanan said: There were two old men in Sidon: one did as Beth Shammai and the other as Beth Hillel: the former gave the reason of his action that it should correspond to the bullocks of the Festival, while the latter stated his reason because we promote in [matters of] sanctity but do not reduce.

[11] b. Shabbat 21b

מצותה משתשקע החמה עד שתכלה רגל מן השוק...ועד כמה? - אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: עד דכליא ריגלא  
**דתרמודאי.**

Its observance is from sunset until there is no wayfarer in the street...Until there is no wayfarer in the street. Until when [is that]? — Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in R. Yohanan's name: Until the Palmyreans have departed.

[12] b. Yevamot 15a

רבי יוחנן וסביא דאמרי תרוייהו: אין מקבלים גרים מן התרמודאים.

R. Yohanan and the elders both say: We do not accept converts from the Palmyreans.

[13] b. Shabbat 45a

בעו מיניה דרב מהו לטלטולי שרגא דחנוכתא מקמי חברי בשבתא ואמר להו שפיר דמי.

They asked Rav: Can we carry the menorah from before the magi on the Sabbath? He said to them, it is fine.

[14] b. Yevamot 63b

"בגוי נבל אנכעיסם"...רבי יוחנן אמר: אלו חברים. אמרו ליה לר' יוחנן: אתו חברי לבבל! שגא נפל. אמרו ליה: מקבלי שוחדא, תריץ יתיב. גזרו על ג' מפני ג': גזרו על הבשר - מפני המתנות, גזרו על המרחצאות - מפני הטבילה, קא מחטטי שכבי - מפני ששמחים ביום אידם, שנאמר: והיתה יד ה' בכם ובאבותיכם.

"With a foolish (*naval*) nation I will anger them" (Deuteronomy 32:21)... R. Yohanan said: "These are the Zoroastrian priests." They said to R. Yohanan: "The Zoroastrian priests have come to Babylonia." He leaned over and fell. They said to him: "They accept bribes." He sat up straight. They decreed regarding three [things] for three [sins]: They decreed regarding meat because of [negligence in tithing] the priestly gifts; they decreed regarding the bathhouses because of [negligence in] immersion; they dig up corpses because [the Jews] are happy on the day of their festivals.

[15] b. Shabbat 21a

ת"ר נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ אם היה דר בעלייה מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרה"ר ובשעת הסכנה מניחה על שלחנו ודיו.

Our Rabbis taught: It is incumbent to place the Hanukkah lamp by the door of one's house on the outside; if one dwells in an upper chamber, he places it at the window nearest the street. But in times of danger it is sufficient to place it on the table.

[16] Tosefta B. M. 2:18 (cf. b. B.M. 28b // y. B. M. 2:17)

בראשונה היו מכריזין עליה ג' רגלים ואחר הרגל האחרון ז' ימים ומשחרב בית המקדש התקינו שיהו מכריזין עליה ל' יום ומן הסכנה ואילך התקינו שיהא מודיע לשכניו ולקרוביו ולמיוזעיו ולאנשי עירו ודיו.

[17] b. Shabbat 21a

מאי תנוכה דתנו רבון בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון כשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאום ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

What is Hanukkah? For our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [commence] the days of Hanukkah, which are eight on which a lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed against and defeated them, they made search and found only one cruse of oil which lay with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained sufficient for one day's lighting only; yet a miracle was wrought therein and they lit [the lamp] therewith for eight days. The following year these [days] were appointed a Festival with [the recital of] Hallel and thanksgiving.

[18] 2 Maccabees 1:10-2:18

10 The people of Jerusalem and of Judea and the senate and Judas, To Aristobulus, who is of the family of the anointed priests, teacher of King Ptolemy, and to the Jews in Egypt, Greetings and good health...18 Since on the twenty-fifth day of Chislew we shall celebrate the purification of the temple, we thought it necessary to notify you, in order that you also may celebrate the festival of booths and the festival of the fire given when Nehemiah, who built the temple and the altar, offered sacrifices. 19 For when our ancestors were being led captive to Persia, the pious priests of that time took some of the fire of the altar and secretly hid it in the hollow of a dry cistern, where they took such precautions that the place was unknown to anyone. 20 But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but only a thick liquid, he ordered them to dip it out and bring it. 21 When the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and on the things laid upon it. 22 When this had been done and some time had passed, and when the sun, which had been clouded over, shone out, a great fire blazed up, so that all marveled. 23 And while the sacrifice was being consumed, the priests offered prayer-- the priests and everyone. Jonathan led, and the rest responded, as did Nehemiah. 24 The prayer was to this effect: "O Lord, Lord God, Creator of all things, you

are awe-inspiring and strong and just and merciful, you alone are king and are kind, 25 you alone are bountiful, you alone are just and almighty and eternal. You rescue Israel from every evil; you chose the ancestors and consecrated them. 26 Accept this sacrifice on behalf of all your people Israel and preserve your portion and make it holy. 27 Gather together our scattered people, set free those who are slaves among the Gentiles, look on those who are rejected and despised, and let the Gentiles know that you are our God. 28 Punish those who oppress and are insolent with pride. 29 Plant your people in your holy place, as Moses promised." 30 Then the priests sang the hymns. 31 After the materials of the sacrifice had been consumed, Nehemiah ordered that the liquid that was left should be poured on large stones. 32 When this was done, a flame blazed up; but when the light from the altar shone back, it went out. 33 When this matter became known, and it was reported to the king of the Persians that, in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire, the liquid had appeared with which Nehemiah and his associates had burned the materials of the sacrifice, 34 the king investigated the matter, and enclosed the place and made it sacred. 35 And with those persons whom the king favored he exchanged many excellent gifts. 36 Nehemiah and his associates called this "nephthar," which means purification, but by most people it is called naphtha. 2:1 One finds in the records that the prophet Jeremiah ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been mentioned...9 It was also made clear that being possessed of wisdom Solomon offered sacrifice for the dedication and completion of the temple. 10 Just as Moses prayed to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, so also Solomon prayed, and the fire came down and consumed the whole burnt offerings. 11 And Moses said, "They were consumed because the sin offering had not been eaten." 12 Likewise Solomon also kept the eight days. 13 The same things are reported in the records and are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings. 14 In the same way Judas also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. 15 So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you. 16 **Since, therefore, we are about to celebrate the purification, we write to you. Will you therefore please keep the days?** 17 It is God who has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, and the kingship and the priesthood and the consecration, 18 as he promised through the law. We have hope in God that he will soon have mercy on us and will gather us from everywhere under heaven into his holy place, for he has rescued us from great evils and has purified the place.