

# HAPPY CHANUKAH



## YadAvNow.com Weekly Audio Series: Chanukah

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Debunking The Myth Of Chanukah

1. *Chanukah*: The 8 day holiday commemorates the victory over the Greek armies & burning of oil with the seal of the High Priest.
2. The vial was sufficient to burn 1 night & burned 8 nights.
3. The last of the revealed miracles of 2nd Temple Period done for the Jewish People was the miracle of the oil.
4. If oil burned another 7 days, the Holiday should be a 7 day commemoration.
5. Meiri: The 1st of the 8 days commemorates the victory & the others are for the miracle of the oil.
6. Al HaNissim is inserted in the Amida to thank G-d for the miracle of *Chanukah*.
7. There is no mention of the miracle of the lights of the *Menorah* in Al Hanissim.
8. *Maharal*: The primary miracle of *Chanukah* is the victory the Greeks as described in Al HaNissim.
9. The miracle of the oil was a revealed miracle not to be understood out of the context of miracle.
10. The victory of the Chashmonaim could be attributed to their physical prowess and strategy in battle.
11. The miracle of the oil was only present to reveal that just as the burning of the oil is the hand of G-d, so is the victory over the Greeks.

### The Machiavellian Approach to Acculturation

1. Al HaNissim: "They attempted to cause the *Torah* to be forgotten & remove them from your statutes of will."
2. The Greeks forbade *Torah* study, circumcision, and sanctification of the new moon.
3. 1st paragraph of *Shema*: the *mitzvah* of loving G-d.
4. Juxtaposed to loving G-d the *Torah* states you must engage in *Torah* study wherever you may be.
5. *Chazal*: How does that bring one to love G-d?
6. A statute is a law that cannot be understood on a rational basis.
7. Laws, i.e stealing, damages, and injury, can be processed within a rational context but are statutes.
8. The *Torah* doesn't offer a rationale for its dictates.
9. Seforno: When one observes a statute it is a display of love for G-d.
10. One doesn't understand its value & adheres to it due to love of G-d.
11. The Greeks intended the *Torah* to be forgotten thus causing the Jews' love for G-d to wane.
12. Consequently they will be removed from the statutes.

# When Personal Initiative BELIES COSMIC INTERVENTION



## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Mikeitz

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### When Personal Initiative Belies Cosmic Intervention

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1. Yosef was imprisoned by *Potiphar* for 10 years.
2. In year 10, 2 ministers of the king were also incarcerated.
3. Yosef was appointed to attend to their needs.
4. One was the wine steward, the other, the baker.
5. They both dreamed the same perturbing dream one night. Yosef offered interpretation.
6. The wine steward would be reinstated in three days and the baker would be hanged.
7. Yosef requested the wine steward remember him, mention his innocence, & how he was sold into slavery.
8. *Midrash*: because of this request, Yosef spent two more years in prison for a lack of faith. Why?
9. When one sees that it is G-d catapulting him to the top, taking initiative is a lack of faith.
10. When Yosef was sold as a slave to *Potiphar*, his level of success was extraordinary.
11. When incarcerated, he rose to unofficial warden.
12. As it was clear beyond doubt that G-d was directing Yosef's life, his initiative was considered a lack of faith.

### Processing Life Through One's Own Prism

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1. Pharaoh dreamt two dreams that were not interpreted to his satisfaction.
2. The wine steward informs Pharaoh there is someone in prison with him who has the ability to interpret dreams.
3. When he describes Yosef to Pharaoh, he depicts him in the most denigrating context to indicate that he has no qualifications other than interpreting dreams.
4. Each depiction was intended to disqualify him from rising to power.
5. *Midrash*: we are able to draw from the wine steward's depiction that when evil people do a good deed they cannot do it appropriately.
6. Yosef asked the wine steward to mention him to Pharaoh when reinstated hoping to be released.
7. The wine steward failed Yosef thus causing him to remain in prison an additional two years.
8. The wine steward believed if Yosef rose to power, he would put him to death as an act of revenge.
9. He therefore depicted him as an unqualified person not fit for royalty or any position of leadership for self preservation.
10. Yosef, as a Tzadik, understood his extended incarceration was only due to his own failings.
11. A Tzadik doesn't look for scapegoats to blame because of his belief and faith.
12. An evil person who doesn't have belief, attributes everything to cause and effect to oneself & others.
13. The wine steward being evil processed Yosef's predicament within his own purview thus concluding what he would do under the same circumstances.



# *(When Personal Initiative* **BELIES COSMIC INTERVENTION**



## **YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Mikeitz**

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**Abundance, Complacency, and Divine Orchestration**

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**Yosef's Initiative & Lack of Faith**

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**Assuming Spiritual Profiles for Choices**

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**Exploring God's Infinity and Our Finite Existence**

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**Maintaining a Pure and Truthful Mouth**

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Mikeitz/Shabbos Chanukah



### Measure for Measure

**Torah:** “It happened at the end (*Mikeitz*) of two years to the day; Pharaoh was dreaming...” Pharaoh was dissatisfied with how his dreams were being interpreted, so he summoned *Yosef* from prison to interpret his dreams. *Yosef* was taken from prison and went on to make his meteoric ascent to the position of Viceroy of Egypt.

**Siforno:** We see that *Hashem*’s salvation “comes about as quickly as a blink of an eye.” *Yosef* was in prison for twelve years, and because Pharaoh had dreams he needed to be interpreted, he was removed from prison and instantly rose to great power. The *Torah* makes a point to say that *Yosef* was taken from prison “at the end of two years (to the day).” Meaning *Yosef* was not to be released from prison until a moment before his additional two-year imprisonment was complete.

**Chazal:** *Yosef* asked the wine steward to “remember” him and “mention” him to Pharaoh to expedite his

release. *Hashem* punished *Yosef* with an additional two years of imprisonment for the two words that he had spoken to the heathen. *Yosef* demonstrated a lack of faith by asking the Egyptian for help rather than relying on *Hashem* directly. However, after these two additional years of imprisonment, *Yosef* was ready to become the Viceroy of Egypt.

**Gemara:** *Hashem* punishes and rewards based on the principle of “measure for measure.” How do we understand the “measure for measure” regarding *Yosef*’s prison sentence? Why was *Yosef* in prison for ten years? Why did he receive an additional two years in prison because of the two words he spoke to the wine steward? Firstly, we need to understand what the punishment of imprisonment means. A prisoner is a person who has no control over his physical condition. The jailer controls the prisoner completely, and his life is limited and defined by the will of the jailer.



*Gemara*: The wife of *Potiphar* tried to seduce *Yosef*, and though he resisted her advances, he lost ten droplets of semen because of this incitement. For each droplet of semen that was lost, *Yosef* spent a year in prison. This, combined with the two additional years for speaking the two words to the wine steward, resulted in a twelve-year prison term for *Yosef*. What is the “measure for measure?”

*Maharal*: The Jews were in Egypt for 209 years before *Moshe* came to lead the people to freedom. In the 210th year, *Moshe* performed a number of miracles in Egypt to establish himself as *Hashem*’s agent, and the Jewish people asserted their belief that “*Moshe* was *Hashem*’s agent!”

*Maharal* citing the *Midrash*: At the moment, the Jews believed their enslavement ended immediately. The Egyptians were no longer able to subject the Jews to bondage. What is the connection between the Jews believing and the halt of their enslavement by the Egyptians? A slave is a person who is completely affected and controlled by his master’s wishes, while in contrast, a spiritual person is unaffected by physical forces. A spiritual person goes against the grain of physical reality and thus is unaffected by outside influences.

From this, we can understand that the moment the Jews proclaimed their belief in *Moshe* as the agent of *Hashem*, they were proclaiming their belief in an all-powerful G-d despite the pagan belief of the Egyptians. Because of their spiritual character, which was unaffected, the Jewish slaves were able to rise above the physical constraints imposed upon them by their masters. Their enslavement ended instantly since the Jews were no longer being influenced by pagan beliefs.

*Torah*: At the time of *Moshe*’s death, his eyesight was perfect, and his physical health was excellent. He was 120 years old yet did not manifest the physical infirmities or deterioration typical of one who was about to die. *Moshe* did not decompose even after he was interred in his grave.

*Maharal*: Why is it important for us to know about *Moshe*’s physical condition at the time of his death? How do we understand the fact that *Moshe*’s body retained its freshness even in the grave? Aging and decay are manifestations of being influenced by the physical world and normal physical life. *Moshe*,

however, was at such a spiritual level that the physical world did not have any effect or influence on him. He was, therefore, not subject to the limitations of aging and decay. *Moshe* was a being that was completely uninfluenced by the physical world. Therefore, we can understand why he was like a young man in perfect physical health at the time of his death at 120 years old.

*Yosef* was a spiritual being with the dimension of his father *Yaakov* (*Yisroel*) as the spiritual heir to lead the Jewish people. Even though *Yosef* did not succumb to *Potiphar*’s wife’s seduction, he was affected to the degree of losing ten droplets of semen. Because *Yosef* was subjugated physically (demonstrated by the loss of ten droplets of semen), *Hashem* punished him with ten years of subjugation in prison. This is the measure for measure.

Since *Yosef* was influenced by his physical existence to the degree of ten droplets, he was affected by ten years of imprisonment. After spending ten years in jail atoning for his failing with *Potiphar*’s wife, *Yosef* would have been released. However, he made another mistake. *Yosef* allowed himself to be affected by his physical surroundings and, as a result, asked the wine steward to help him out of jail by “remembering” him and “mentioning” him to Pharaoh. These two words demonstrated the degree to which *Yosef* was affected by his physical condition.

As the spiritual being that he was, *Yosef* should have asked *Hashem* for help, yet he asked the heathen, which was considered a lack of faith. For this, *Hashem* decreed that *Yosef* should remain under physical enslavement for two more years. It was only at the end of these two years that *Yosef* could transcend the physical and regain his status as an unaffected spiritual being. After regaining that level of spirituality, he was no longer bound by the limitations of the physical world and was able to become the Viceroy of Egypt at the speed of a “blink of an eye.” He was able to control existence and become the sustainer of the world.

## Speaking Negatively About Others

Pharaoh needed someone to interpret his dreams. The wine steward informed Pharaoh that *Yosef* could interpret dreams since he had interpreted his and the baker’s dreams correctly while they were together in

prison. "My transgressions do I mention today... We dreamt a dream on the same night, I and he; each according to the interpretation of his dream did we dream. And there with us was a youth, a Hebrew, a slave of the chamberlain of the butchers; we related it to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us... and it was that just as he interpreted for us, so did it happen..." When the wine steward told Pharaoh about Yosef, he did not refer to Yosef by name. Instead, he provided Pharaoh a rather lengthy description – "a youth, a Hebrew, a slave of the chamberlain of the butchers."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "Cursed are the wicked, for their good deeds are incomplete." The wine steward mentions Yosef in demeaning terms, was "a youth," by this, the wine steward meant that Yosef was a fool and not fit for a position of greatness. "A Hebrew" meant that Yosef was not even familiar with the Egyptian language. And "slave" as it is written in "... the protocols of Egypt that a slave may not rule and may not even wear princely garments."

The wine steward tried to disqualify Yosef at every level. He claimed that Yosef was a fool, ignorant of their language, and a slave unfit to ever reach greatness in Egypt. The fact is that Yosef performed a good deed for the wine steward – Yosef interpreted his dream. However, when the wine steward ultimately mentioned Yosef to Pharaoh (as requested), it was highly diminutive. Why did the wine behave in this manner?

*Rashi*: "Cursed are the wicked, for their good deeds are incomplete." The wicked person is so evil that even when he can do good deeds, he performs them in a disgraceful and limited manner. The wine steward was a minister in the court of Pharaoh, and he understood that if Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's dreams correctly, he would find favor in his eyes – thus causing Yosef to rise to power. If this were the case, Yosef may exact revenge on the wine steward for his evil actions. Therefore, the wine steward referred to Yosef in the most degrading manner possible in order to negatively taint Pharaoh's impression of him.

We know that first impressions have the greatest impact on a person. Since the wine steward described Yosef as incompetent, ignorant of the Egyptian language, and a slave, before Pharaoh met Yosef, he would have already formulated a negative impression of him. Even if Yosef had interpreted Pharaoh's dreams correctly, the wine steward knew that his image was

already sufficiently diminished, so Yosef could not be appreciated for who he actually was.

We see from this that when one is asked about another person, we should be especially careful not to relay negative information about that person. The way we describe another person will greatly impact his image. In fact, if we relay negative information about someone, he may never be able to recover from that negative depiction. We must understand the consequences of the way we speak about others and know that it may cause irreparable damage.

## The Torah Sustains Judaism

Every day during *Chanukah* in *Al Haneesim*: "When the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people, Israel, to make them forget Your *Torah* and compel them to stray from the statutes of Your Will." The order of the prayer mentions that first, the Greeks wanted the Jews to forget the *Torah* and, secondly, to stray from *Hashem's* statutes. The Greeks understood exactly how to undermine Judaism and expedite assimilation. How was this done?

*Gemara* in *Hureous*: A father has an obligation to teach his son *Torah* from the moment he is old enough to speak. The first *pasuk* of *Torah* that a father teaches his child is, "*Moshe* commanded us with the *Torah*, and this is the heritage of the congregation of *Yaakov*." The second *pasuk* a father is obligated to teach his child is the *Shema* – "Hear, O Israel: *Hashem* is our G-d, *Hashem*, the One and Only." This asserts our belief in the unity of G-d. One would think that since monotheism is the most fundamental aspect of Judaism, the *Shema* would be the first *pasuk* a father teaches his child, followed by the *pasuk*, which states how *Moshe* commanded us with the *Torah*. Yet the *Gemara* says the opposite.

*Rambam* in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (*The Laws of Learning Torah*): A father is obligated to teach his child the *psukim* in the order explained in the *Gemara*. Why are the *pesukim* in this order?

The *Shema* states the fact of reality that *Hashem* is One. *Chukim* (*Torah* Statutes), such as the prohibitions of wearing a combination of wool and linen or eating milk with meat, are facts that cannot be deduced from rational thinking. The combination of wool and linen or eating meat and milk have a negative effect

on a Jew's spirituality and are *Mizvos* that we cannot even begin to comprehend. These are among the various Statutes in the *Torah* that Jews follow without having any intellectual rationale. How can one relate to these Statutes?

If we appreciate that *Hashem* is the One G-d and He commanded us to follow His Statutes, then we would simply obey Him without question. However, since we do not comprehend and appreciate who *Hashem* is, we could easily argue about the reasonability of His Laws. How can we become more familiar with *Hashem* and grow to appreciate His ways? How can we understand *Hashem's* "mind" (so to speak)?

If we are able to understand G-d, perhaps we will begin to appreciate His Statutes. The only way to achieve this understanding is through the study of the *Torah*. If one studies the *Torah* and is able to internalize the concepts and grow spiritually, then one can have a better sense of *Hashem*. If one has a sense of *Hashem*, then he will realize that Statutes do not need to be rational in our thinking. *Hashem* is the King of all kings! The person who learns the *Torah* gains a spiritual orientation, which enables him to be in awe of G-d.

Therefore, we can understand why the *Gemara* states that a father is obligated to first teach his child the *pasuk*, "*Moshe* commanded us with the *Torah*..." because it is only through the study of the *Torah* that we can appreciate the unity and greatness of *Hashem*, which is asserted in the *Shema*. With this, we can understand the *Al Haneesim* we insert in the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The Greeks understood how to undermine Judaism and ultimately eradicate it. They tried to make the Jews forget the *Torah* by prohibiting its study. If the Jews, G-d forbid, were to forget the *Torah*, then they would lose their spiritual sensitivity to appreciating G-d. Jews would no longer risk their lives to observe *Shabbos* or to become circumcised. The Jew would no longer die for the sanctification of the month. However, if a Jew lives and breathes the *Torah*, then a Jew would die for the *Torah*. The Greeks understood this, and if it were not for the uprising of the Chashmonayim, who were steadfast in their study of the *Torah*, then the Greeks would have achieved their goal.

The catastrophe of assimilation in our own time is because the vast majority of Jews are not studying

the *Torah*. Even though *Hashem* promised that the Jewish people would never forget the *Torah*, the question is, how many Jews are involved? Most Jews are disconnected, and it is only a matter of time before they will fade out of existence because the *Torah* is not present in their lives. The Greeks understood how to eliminate the Jews – through the elimination of the *Torah*. As we celebrate *Chanukah* and remember how we were able to defeat the Greeks, we should reflect on how we need to continue to defeat the influences that would have the Jews forget the *Torah*.

## No Good Can Come From Evil

We read in the *parsha* that Pharaoh's wine steward depicted *Yosef* in the most negative terms. We explained that it was in order to taint him in the eyes of Pharaoh and discourage Pharaoh from being impressed with *Yosef*, thus promoting him to a position in which he could take revenge against the wine steward.

*Rashi*: "Cursed are the wicked, for their good deeds are not complete." The question to ask is why the wine steward was wicked. He was only trying to defend himself against the potential revenge from *Yosef*, and his life was in jeopardy. Why does *Chazal* depict him in such a negative way? How are we to understand this?

There is a negative commandment in the *Torah* that prohibits a Jew from taking revenge. The *Gemara* gives the example of revenge: If a person were to ask for a loan and was turned down by the potential lender and that lender was to later ask that same person for a loan, he is not permitted to deny him based on not receiving the originally requested loan. The saying is, "If you do not do for me, I will not do for you." Even if a person may be undeserving because he does not help anyone but himself, the law is that one must not reject helping him on the basis of his behavior if he is in need. Why is this the case?

*Chinuch*: The reason why a person is denied help from another person has nothing to do with him. It has to do with *Hashem* not wanting the requester to benefit. That is why the person did not help.

*Gemara*: G-d has many agents to carry out his dictates. Moreover, if *Hashem* wishes to send help to someone, it can come from a variety of sources and



is not dependent on a single individual. When Yosef was not released from prison after ten years and remained for an additional two, it had nothing to do with the wine steward not helping him as requested. Yosef was not released after ten years because of his own spiritual failing and breach of faith in *Hashem* by asking the wine steward to “mention” and “remember” him when speaking with Pharaoh.

This understanding of Yosef’s situation is only evident to a person who has relevance to spirituality. A wicked person (a *rasha*) could not evaluate Yosef’s situation in this spiritual manner because he can only process information through his own corrupted value system and evil mindset. If the wine steward had been able to understand Yosef’s situation through a spiritual context, he would have understood that he was not responsible for Yosef’s imprisonment. He would have understood that it was through Yosef’s own breach of faith that he remained in prison.

If the wine steward understood this, he would not have needed to describe Yosef in pejorative terms to Pharaoh because he would have known that there was no revenge to fear. However, since he was a *rasha*, the wine steward processed the information in a manner consistent with a *rasha*. If an evil person had been in Yosef’s position, he would have taken revenge upon release from prison. Therefore, the wine steward believed he needed to protect himself. Everything a *Rasha* does is tainted by his evil mindset and value system.

*Gemara: Bilaam* wanted to curse the Jews, and then he wanted to bless the Jews. *Hashem* told him to neither curse nor bless the Jewish people.

*Chazal*: Just as one says to a bee, *Hashem* said to *Bilaam*, “not your sting and not your honey!” But if *Bilaam* wanted to bless the Jews, why did *Hashem* stop him? The reason is that, for whatever reason, *Bilaam* wanted to bless the Jews, it must have emanated from his evil because an evil person can only function within his own evil system. *Hashem* told *Lavan*, who was the epitome of evil that He did not want him to speak to *Yaakov*, “not good words and not bad words.” This is because only evil could emanate from an evil person. We can now understand why the *Chazal* referred to the wine steward as, “Cursed are the wicked, for their good deeds are incomplete.” A *rasha*’s actions can never be complete because all of

their actions are based on their own evil agenda and their own corrupt perspective of reality.

## The Miracle of Illumination

We say every day during *Chanukah* in the *Shemoneh Esrei* the *Al Haneesim* (on the miracles), which recounts how the Jews were able to defeat the Greeks even though the Jews were few in number. We mention how *Hashem* delivered the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of the *Torah*, the strong into the hands of the weak, etc.

*Maharal* of Prague: Why do we not mention the miracle of the lights of *Chanukah*? The fact that the Jews had found undefiled oil that was only enough to burn one day and it burned for eight days is not mentioned. Why? The essence of the *Chanukah* miracle was the victory over the Greeks. The miracle of *Chanukah* is how the Jews were able to defeat the mighty Greeks even though they were greatly outnumbered. In order for us to appreciate the miracle of our victory and not misinterpret it as a natural event (such as attributing it to guerrilla warfare), *Hashem* needed to bring about a revealed miracle that was the miracle of the oil, which could not be misunderstood as anything but a miracle outside of nature.

Through the miracle of the lights, *Hashem* marked that all of the events that had transpired were miraculous and that He brought about the victory of the Jews. The lights of *Chanukah* provide us with the clarity to be able to understand the incident of *Chanukah* correctly. The essence of the Holiday is that the Jews were able to vanquish their enemies and reestablish Judaism. This is why we do not mention the miracle of the lights in the *Al Haneesim*. The question is, why did the revelation of the victory over the Greeks need to be manifested through the lights?

*Hashem* could have easily created any number of revealed miracles in order to make known his involvement – why the miracle of lights? *Hashem* could have simply made the Greeks vanish! We learn that at Sinai, *Hashem* held a mountain over the heads of the Jewish people and gave them an ultimatum—either you observe the *Torah* or you will be buried under the mountain.

*Midrash Tanchuma*: Why did *Hashem* need to give the Jews an ultimatum? They had already said, *Naaseh*



V'nishma – we shall do and we shall listen – a level of dedication that even astounded the angels. The Jews were willing to accept *Hashem's* laws without even knowing the extent of the obligation. So why did *Hashem* have to give them seemingly an unnecessary ultimatum?

*Midrash Tanchuma: Naaseh V'nishma* was referring to the Written Law. This did not include the Oral Law. The Written Law is limited without the Oral Law. Commandments prohibiting murder, theft, etc., are tantamount to living as a civilized human being and seemingly easy to follow; however, the commentaries and explanations contained in the Oral Law lead to a lifelong pursuit of understanding and observance. By dedicating one's life to this pursuit, he is sacrificing his entire life for the Oral Law.

The Jews at Sinai were not willing to invest their entire lives in the understanding and observance of the Oral Law. *Hashem* put a mountain over the Jews and gave them an ultimatum because He demanded that level of sacrifice. If the Jews were not willing to devote their lives to the Oral Law, then the world would have come to an end.

*Gemara*: The *Menorah* in the Temple represents the Oral Law. The Holy Ark, which contained the tablets and the *Torah* (the Written Law), was located in the

Holy of Holies in the Temple. On the other side of the curtain in the Temple, the *Menorah* was placed to illuminate the area. Similarly, the Oral Law is needed to elucidate the Written Law.

The miracle of *Chanukah* was revealed through the lighting of the *Menorah*. And as we said earlier, the *Menorah* represents the Oral Law, which is synonymous with self-sacrifice. The lighting of the *Menorah* represents the *Mesiras Nefesh* (self-sacrifice) needed to understand and uphold the Oral Law, which illuminates the Written Law. Without this self-sacrifice, people cannot develop themselves spiritually.

Spirituality only comes through sacrifice. Since we are physical beings, we need to suppress the physical in order to bring about the spiritual, which in itself is a sacrifice. It is true that the Jews were victorious over the Greeks and were able to defeat the many with only a few, but why did we merit this miracle? It is only because there was a handful of *Chashmonayim* who were willing to die if they could not live as Jews. This was the self-sacrifice, and this was the reason for the victory. How do we know that the *Mesiras Nefesh* was what brought about the miracle of *Chanukah*? The answer is the *Menorah*. *Hashem* chose to reveal the miracle of *Chanukah* through the lighting of the *Menorah* and not through any other revealed miracle.



**Yad Avraham Institute**