The Festival of Lights and Memory

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, celebrates a miracle that appears through nature. On this festival, we light candles for eight days to publicize the miracle of one day's quantity of oil that remained lit for eight days in the seven-branched Temple menorah.

In Jewish tradition, the number 7 represents a state of natural perfection (for example, Shabbat is the seventh day of the week), while the number 8 represents a state of supernatural perfection (for example, circumcision is performed on the eighth day after birth). Thus, these numbers, in particular, allude to uniting the supernatural with the natural, and the infinite with the finite. The Maccabean war against the Hellenists demonstrates a similar phenomenon of a supernatural victory achieved through natural means. As we say in our prayers on Chanukah, “When the evil Greek empire rose up over Your people, Israel, to cause them to forget Your Torah…You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, etc.”

The Ba’al Shem Tov possessed a special love and affinity for Chanukah. This is because the Chanukah candles represent the innate gift of the Jewish soul to spread light and illuminate the entire world. This involves spreading the message that God creates nature anew at every moment while simultaneously permeating it with supernatural power. Because of its ability to unite the natural with the supernatural, the light of the Chanukah candles will eventually bring about the true and complete redemption.

Chanukah is a time of the year when we thank God and praise Him for His miracles and loving-kindness to us. Thanking God is the manifestation of our connection to the sefirah of Crown in the soul. Praising God is the result of a sudden lightning flash of inspiration that sparks in our consciousness. This union between super-conscious inspiration and the conscious mind is the secret of memory: the ability to draw Divine influx down into our consciousness from the hidden wisdom of the unconscious mind. This reflects the Jewish power to overcome Hellenistic wisdom, which has no such connecting force between the unconscious and the conscious minds.

Simply put, on Chanukah we “remember” that the world is re-created ex nihilo at this very moment, something that the Hellenist culture denied. Lighting the Chanukah candles is an analogy for connecting the natural world to its supernal memories.