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### **Chanukah: Illuminating the Hollow Chasm**

*Excerpted and translated from Rabbi Ginsburgh's book, Hanerot Hallalu*

What is the secret of the Chanukah lights, which we kindle at nightfall? Is it merely that they illuminate the darkness? After all, the *menorah* in the Temple also burned at night. But while the lights of the *menorah* in the Temple were kindled during the day and continued burning into the night, the starting point of the Chanukah lights is the night, itself - the kingdom of darkness. Chanukah lights from within that dark space.

If darkness symbolizes the world of the wicked, then the light of the *menorah*, which goes out to illuminate the darkness from its starting point at daylight, and the Chanukah lights, which enter the darkness and illuminate there, are actually two different types of positive influence that can rectify two types of negative reality. The light of the *menorah* is direct light, light that descends from above to below, from the world of the righteous to the world of the wicked, paving a straight path for them to return to God. Its light is bright and clear. But because it is not familiar with the darkness from inside, it can only reach those people who are not completely wicked – people on the outskirts of the darkness. The light of the Chanukah candles, by contrast, is “returning light”. It is light that ascends from below to above, from the wicked to the righteous. It does not possess the heavenly purity of the direct light. But it does have an insider familiarity with the darkness and can thus uplift even completely wicked people.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslev helps us to understand the two different types of wicked people and the ways to reach them. He differentiates between two levels of heresy and darkness. One type of heresy is still connected to the illuminating ‘letters’ of holiness, but has simply confused their order. All that is needed is to illuminate the letters in their correct order. The second type of heresy is much deeper and more severe. It is “heresy from the hollow chasm”, in the words of Rebbe Nachman. It is planted in the silent spaces between the letters, in the vacuum underneath the words. A person wallowing in this type of heresy is not at all interested in light and goodness. Instead, he experiences darkness as the only real existence. As a result, there are no simple answers for this heresy. If one attempts to directly shine the good light upon him, the light will be deflected. Not even one drop will penetrate. Not every light can illuminate every darkness, particularly the thick darkness of the hollow chasm.

The light of the *menorah* of the Temple, kindled safely at daytime, effortlessly illuminating the night, is like the light of the *tzaddikim*, the righteous, planted in their righteous world, who do not fathom the secret of the darkness. They can shine a wondrous light and their light will enter the realm of darkness and illuminate it, like the sheath of a lighthouse piercing the darkness, bringing the ships searching for the shore to bay. But their light will not penetrate the thick darkness of the heretics of the hollow chasm, the ships so deep in the sea that they have forgotten the shore. For them, a different light must be employed. Flexible light, smarter and more mirthful, light that is expert at the secrets of the darkness and knows how to sneak into it from unexpected places, illuminating it from within. This is the light of the Chanukah candles, which we kindle after dark. The Chanukah candle's flame is not upright and direct, a flame that spreads its righteous light from the sureness of the Temple.

Instead, it is a light that dances in the wind of the nights, going out to entice those who walk in the dark, until “The nation walking in the darkness saw a great light” (The numerical value of “great light”, or *gadol*, equals *ner*/candle). Rebbe Nachman said that the only thing that can save the heretic of the hollow chasm, after all words have failed, is a melody that touches the root of his soul.

Who has the soul of a Chanukah candle, who knows how to kindle this light, to sing the melody that transforms the darkness to light? There are two possible types of people. The first is the *Ba'al Teshuva*, a person who was far from the fulfillment of Torah and then returned to God. He has first-hand experience with the darkness of night and knows how to navigate its pathways. He was there, he remembers, and after he has clung to the light of the Temple and become empowered with it, he can return to the darkness and illuminate the way for those walking there.

But first-hand knowledge of darkness is not a prerequisite for understanding its dwellers. It is not necessary to be wicked and then a *Ba'al Teshuva* in order to understand the wicked. All that is needed is a ‘sense for darkness’, an understanding of the radicalism that appeals to the wicked in the depths of the dark pit. A *tzaddik* can also acquire this sense, perhaps it is especially a *tzaddik* who can acquire it. Rebbe Pinchas of Kuritz said that an incomplete *tzaddik* can love an incompletely wicked person, while a consummate *tzaddik* can love a consummately wicked person. It is specifically the greater *tzaddik* who can receive the wavelength of the souls of the completely wicked. Perhaps he even identifies them as being from a similar soul root, so that after they are exposed to him, they will be able to be nurtured by him.

While the *ba'al teshuva* and the *tzaddik* may seem to be very distant from each other, the *ba'al teshuva* can actually attain the level of the complete *tzaddik* and even beyond: “In the place that *ba'al teshuvot* stand, even consummate *tzaddikim* do not stand”. The opposite is true, as well. One of the definitions of the consummate *tzaddik* is that he is a *ba'al teshuva* in his essence, even without ever having sinned. He simply is always striving to return to God, to constantly come closer to Him.

When we say the words “You gave the wicked in the hands of the righteous” in the *Al Hanisim* prayer on Chanukah, we are actually praying that we will be like the *ba'al teshuva* and the consummate *tzaddik*, who have received the secret of the wicked and know how to find the paths to their hearts - so much so that the wicked will return to their soul roots and become consummately righteous.