

Chanukah, 5781  
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Few emotions impact our lives more than fear. Fear of catastrophe fuels our anxiety. Fear of not being able to live with the wrong choice underlies our difficulty making decisions. Fear of others' disapproval engenders our tendency to say yes when we really mean no. And to some extent, this makes sense. The world is full of unpredictable turns, and the more we experience life, the more we realize how precious little we actually control. While people might tell us to think positively and anticipate the best, the reality is that in a G-dless world, it is often hard for many to truly believe that these actions should matter. What difference does it make if one thinks positively or not, if our fate is subject to the cruel indifference of chance?

Chanukah is the Yom Tov that celebrates our ability to overcome fear through the constant realization that G-d accompanies us in all that we do -- even when things do not seem hopeful. It is the spirit of Matityahu and his sons taking on a behemoth Greek army, knowing full well that the odds were stacked against them, but that G-d would be with them at every step. Indeed, while the origin and etymology of the name "Macabee" are unclear, there is a tradition that this name stands for the words from the Song at the Sea, "מי כמוך באלים ה'" -- *who is like You among the powers, Hashem?*, and that these words were emblazoned upon the shields of the Hashmonaean warriors. Regardless of the historical accuracy or lack thereof, this idea rings true. Like Matityahu and his sons, we travel through the battles of our own lives, through all the uncertainty and all the difficulty, with the shield of *מי כמוך באלים ה'*. Whatever happens, I fear no evil, for You are with me, in this world and the next.

This sentiment is reflected in the placement of the Menorah itself. The Halacha encourages us to do whatever we can to increase the visibility of the Menorah. Rather than timidly lighting a Menorah in the privacy of our home, fearing the mockery of others, we proudly light it on display for all to see. Moreover, the Halacha encourages positioning the Menorah beneath a height of ten tefachim (handbreadths) from the ground when possible. The Talmud teaches (Sukkah 5a) that the Divine Presence "does not descend beneath ten tefachim." That is, on a symbolic level, the airspace between the ground and ten tefachim above the ground represents space in which G-d's presence is somehow less apparent. Some have suggested that it is for this reason that the Halacha requires a Sukkah to be at least ten tefachim high: so that the Divine Presence should be able to rest upon the S'chach (Sukkah 9a), endowing it with sanctity. On Chanukah,

however, we go further. We confidently proclaim that even *beneath* ten tefachim, in the most hopeless of spaces where we thought we could not find G-d...even there, G-d's light illuminates our world. This is a powerful intention to have in mind as one gazes deeply into the lights of the Menorah.

Fear, to some degree, is inevitable. But our choice in life is *what* to fear. The more that we fear G-d -- not simply a fear of punishment, but a fear of reverence and awe for His omnipotence -- the less we will fear the vicissitudes of life. The more that we forget G-d, the more we put down our shield, the more we submit to the mundane fears of life. Chanukah is a special time to rekindle our belief in G-d, and by natural extension, our belief in ourselves. May we be blessed with the strength and courage of our ancestors בימים ההם בזמן הזה.