

**Mazel Tov to the Guttman and Fried
Mishpachos on the engagement of their
children, Ari & Elkie, and to the entire
Guttman, Hoffman, Fried & Havlin Families**
יה"ר שיוכו לבנות בית נאמן בישראל לשם ולתפארת

שעוברים עליו למען 'החיות עם רב'.

יתן השם יתברך שנוכה להכין את עצמנו לקראת הימים הבאים עלינו - ימי

לקחי חיים ודברי חזעטרות נסדרו עפ"י פרשיות השבוע

וקבעו שמונת ימי הנוכה אלו להורות ולהלל לשמך

לדוע ומפורסם קו' **מן הבית יוסף** (בסי' תר"ע) "דלמה קבעו שמנה ימים דכיון דשמן שבפך היה בו כדי להדליק לילה אחת ונמצא שלא נעשה הנס אלא בשבעה לילות. ותרין, שחילקו שמן שבפך לשמנה חלקים ובכל לילה היו נותנים במנורה חלק אחד והיה דולק עד הבוקר ונמצא שבכל הלילות נעשה נס. ועוד תרין, שלאחר שנתנו שמן במנורת המנורה כשעור נשאר הפך מלא כבתחלה וניכר הנס אף בלילה הראשונה. ועוד תרין, שבליל ראשון נתנו כל השמן במנורת ודלקו כל הלילה ובבוקר מצאו הנרות מלאים שמן וכן בכל לילה ולילה", עכת"ר.

וקושא זו כבר דשו ביה רבים לת' זה בכה וזה בכה, וע"כ גם אני אענה את חלקי בעזה". הנה, בין כל התידושים שתידעו רבותינו ז"ל, רובם ככולם מיוסד על יסוד אחד, שטרחו להמציא אופנים להוכיח שהיה הנס לח' ימים ולא רק לו' ימים. אך אפשר שפיר לומר, שהגם שלא היה שום נס לח' ימים, רק לו' ימים, מי' איכא סיבה אחרת לקובע הנוכה לח' ימים, כמו שנבאר בעזה"ת.

מפורסם היה דברי **הרמב"ן** (סוף פר' בא): "ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם", עכ"ל. ומבואר מדבריו הק', שתכלית כל נסים גילויים הוא לבא לידי ההכרה, שכל הנסים הנסתרים - רדיינו כל הנהגת הטבע, הוא ממש כמו הנהגת הנס. ואין שום ג"מ כלל וככל ביניהם, רק דנסים הם דברים שאין העין רואה כל שעה וטבע הם דברים שאנו מורגלים לדאות. אבל כולו הם מהנהגת הקב"ה, ומי שאינו מאמין בזה, אין לו חלק בתורת משה רבינו!

ונראה שמשום הכי קבעו חז"ל היות' של חנוכה ח' ימים, אף שהיה הנס רק ו' ימים. דכיון דתכלית כל מעשי נסים הוא, להיות "מודה" גם על עניני הנהגת הטבע, והדי היות' של חנוכה מיוסד ע"ו ממש - על הניסים שנעשו לאבותינו בימים ההם, ראו חז"ל לקבוע יום אחד מיוחד בלבד הו' ימי חנוכה להורות ולהלל לשבח ולפאר את שמו הגדול, להורות, שאנו מודים ומהללים לא רק על הנסים גילויים, אלא גם על כל עניני הטבע שבעולם. וזהו תכלית היות' של חנוכה, להיות מכיר דכל הנהגת העולם הוא כולו הנהגת הקב"ה, ובפרט הנהגת הטבע, דאין האדם בחוש שהקב"ה מנהיגה, דכל עניני טבע כבר רגיל האדם בהם.

והנה כשהאדם בא לידי הכרה דאין שום חילוק בין נס לטבע, ואין שום כח כלל בהנהגת הטבע, רק הכל הוא הנהגת הקב"ה, אז יכול לבוא לדרגה גבוה מעל גבוה של: "אין עוד מלבדו", כמו שמצינו בגמ' (חולין ז', ע"ב): "אין עוד מלבדו -

החנוכה המאירים, ומהם נוכל כל אחד ואחד לקחת השפעות ואור חדש גדול למשך כל השנה להאיר לנו את הדרך ואת המעשה.

עדותיך אתבונן מאת הרב אברהם דינאל אבשטיין שליט"א מחבר ספר שדה אברהם

הגדול (על הנסים) - בענין "יישוב קושית הבית יוסף"

אמר רבי חנינא: ואפילו כשפים. ההיא איתתא דהות קא מהדרא למישקל עפרא מתותיה כרעיה דרבי חנינא, אמר לה: שקול, לא מסתייעא מילתיך, אין עוד מלבדו כתיב', ע"כ. ופרש"י "אין עוד מלבדו, כלומר שלא מדעתו שאם אין גזירה מלפניו אין מריעין לו לאדם", עכ"ל. ומבואר בדברי הגמ', דר"ח לא היה שום פחד כלל ממה שרצה אותה אשה לעשות לו, דהוא ידע "דאין עוד מלבדו", ואין שום כח בעולם כלל מלבדו - אפילו בכוחות על טבעיים.

ויש להוסיף על זה, דעיקר נצחון של המלחמת החשמנאים עם היונים היה משום שיש להם הר' כח. דהנה, המגן אברהם (סי' רצ"ה) כ' "שכהני חשמונאי אמרו ממוזר יושב בסתר עליון במלחמה ונצחו". והביאר בזה, דממוזר זה הוא "שיר של פגעים", וכל הממוזר אידי' על מי שתולה בטחונו בהקב"ה, שהקב"ה מחסה לו מכל דבר רעה שבעולם. והמלחמה היתה ר"ב בני חשמונאי ואלעזר כנגד כמה רבבות, ועל פי דרך הטבע אין שום צד בעולם לומר דר"ג אנשים ניצח כנגד כמה רבבות. וע"כ עיקר צד לנצח המלחמה לא היתה משום כחם ועוצם ידם, רק הלכו בבטחון גמור בהקב"ה שינצח המלחמה. וכל זה, הוא רק משום שהחשמונאי הבינו דליכא שום כח כלל בדרך הטבע, רק הכל תלוי ברצון של הקב"ה.

ולפי הני'ל, מובן הייטב הסגולה בשם הרמב"ן, לומר אחר הדלקת נרות חנוכה שבע פעמים "יודי נועם וגו'" עם ממוזר "יושב בסתר עליון וגו'", והוא סגולה לשמירה כל ימות השנה. והביאר בזה, דכל הממוזר אידי' במי שתולה בטחונו בהקב"ה, שיציל אותו, הקב"ה הוא מחסה לו, ומגין אותו מכל דבר רעה שבעולם. וא"כ לא די באמידה בעלמא, רק צריך האדם לשום את הפסוקים בלבו, וע"כ לא די באמידה רק פעם אחד, אלא צריך ו' פעמים, דרק ע"י כמה פעמים, הדברים הם קבועים בלבו לכל השנה. וזהו הסגולה של "אין עוד מלבדו", שכתב **הנפש החיים** (שער ג', פרק י"ב) וז"ל, "כשהאדם קובע בלבו לאמר הלא ה' הוא האלקים האמתי ואין עוד מלבדו יתברך שום כח בעולם וכל העולמות כלל והכל מלא רק אחדותו הפשוט ית"ש. ומבטל בלבו ביטול גמור ואינו משגיח כלל על שום כח ורצון בעולם, ומשעבד ומדבק טוהר מחשבתו רק לאדון יחיד ב"ה, כן יספיק הוא יתב' בידו שממילא יתבטלו מעליו כל הכחות והרצונות שבעולם שלא יוכלו לפעול לו שום דבר כלל", עכ"ל. וזהו לימוד נורא מיום טוב של חנוכה, דאין שום כח כלל וכלל לשום כח בהעולם, ואין שום כח כלל בהנהגת הטבע, והכל הוא בהנהגת הקב"ה. ומי שמדבק עצמו ובוטח בהקב"ה, הקב"ה נעשה לו מבטחו, ואין שום רע יכול לשלוט עליו!

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTSON THE MIDDOS OF ... אור הגנוז

Many kinds of people pray at the *Kosel Hamaaravi* - the Western Wall, not only Jews. One morning, while *minyanim* for *Shacharis* were ongoing, a mother and her young son stood by the Wall. They were quite obviously secular American Jews and the woman was trying to explain to her son where he is. She told him that this is the holiest place in the world, and that one can ask G-d for anything at all here. She showed him all the *kvitlach* in the wall and asked him if he wanted to write a request to G-d and stick it into the wall.

He was very excited and she handed him a piece of paper that she ripped out of a small pad, and a pencil. He bent down on the floor and put the paper on a chair so that

8th Night - *Zos Chanukah*. This night is *mesugal*, an auspicious time to pray for barren women. The number 8 is above nature, and it is a powerful day to pray for *Hashem* to effect salvation above and beyond the natural order.

The **Kedushas Levi** adds that if you are planning to start something new, start it on *Chanukah* and it will be blessed.

מחשבת הלב

FROM THE FAMILY OF R' CHAIM YOSEF KOFMAN ZT"l

וישלה פרעה ויקרא את יוסף וירצינו מן הבור ויגלה ויחלף שמלתיו ויבא אל פרעה (מא-יד)

The *posuk* says that as soon as the time arrived for *Yosef HaTzaddik* to be redeemed, he was summarily rushed from the jail, cleaned up and presented before Pharaoh. *Chazal* say the same will be true when *Moshiach* arrives. It will take place "*K'heref Ayin*" - in the blink of an eye.

In *Parshas Vayeshev*, we learned that Yosef performed an act of kindness which served as the catalyst for his redemption. We, too, have an opportunity to help bring about our ultimate *geula*, which I will *bez"H* get to shortly.

Yosef was falsely accused and thrown in jail. The *posuk* says that Yosef saw that Pharaoh's imprisoned servants were depressed. He asked them if all was well. They proceeded to recount their dreams to him which led to his own salvation. But what, exactly, was the root cause of this *yeshua*?

The answer is that Yosef saw another human being looking troubled, and though he too was in prison and facing his own crisis, he made the Herculean effort to empathize with him. That is a trigger for *geula*!

PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE SIFREI TANACH

תורת הצבי על הפטרות

AND THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH R' ITZVI HIRSCH HOFFMAN SHL

One of the major themes of the prophecies of *Zechariah HaNavi* was to encourage *Malchus Yehudah* to rebuild the *Bais HaMikdash* that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. In the *Haftorah* for *Shabbos Chanukah*, *Zechariah* was shown a rather peculiar vision. The venerable *Yehoshua Kohen Gadol* was seen sitting bedecked in "dirty clothes" which *Chazal* explain was a reference to the fact that he hadn't fully admonished his children who were straying from the proper path. Then *Zechariah* saw a seven-branched *menorah*, above which was a large oil container with seven pipes feeding olive oil to each of the seven lamps of the *menorah*. The hovering angel explained that this *menorah* was a direct message from *Hashem* to Zerubavel (who was deeply involved in the rebuilding of the second Temple) that "*not by strength or by might, (will it be built) but only with My spirit.*"

Although it is quite fascinating and intriguing to hear about these two visions of Zechariah, for what purpose did *Chazal* feel it was necessary to combine these two (seemingly unconnected) visions, and have them read together on *Shabbos Chanukah*?

R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv זT"l explains that unlike other

that G-d will surely answer his prayer.

The *Medrash* tells us that the first words in the *Torah* allude to all the future exiles and suffering of our people at the hands of our enemies. This is also the secret to our survival. It says, “*Breishis bara Elokim es Hashomayim v’es Haaretz. V’haaretz haysa sohu vavohu v’choshech al pnei tehom...*” *Tohu* is *Bavel*, *Vavohu* is *Madai*, *V’choshech* is *Yavan*, *Al Pnei Tehom* is *Edom*. These are the four *galuyos* that span our history and describe our people’s affliction.

How are we expected to survive under the oppression and torture of all our enemies? The *Torah* tells us, “*Vayomer Elokim...Yehi OHR*” - And *Hashem* said, “Let there be light.” LIGHT. This is the antidote for all of our problems. This is the *Refuah* before the *Makah*. This great light will sustain our people until the end of days.

If you count starting from the first word in the *Torah*, the word OHR is number 25. This is alluding to *Chanukah*, the 25th day of *Kislev* This special holy light that was created at this time lasted for 36 hours until *Hashem* decided that it was too great and powerful for this world so He hid it away for *tzaddikim* for future times. There are 36 hidden *tzaddikim* upon whom the world stands, and there are 36 times in the *Torah* that it says the word OHR. On *Chanukah* we light a total of 36 candles alluding to the light of *Chanukah* that comes down to the world through our little *lichtalach* that contain in them the *Ohr Haganuz*, that special holy light that *Hashem* put away for the *tzaddikim*.

Once a year, for 8 straight days, we have a chance to tap into that awesome light. As we sit by our candles, we are supposed to *daven*. We are told that if we stare at those flickering flames it will make us wise. It is the power of the light. This holy light can be caught and applied to our lives as Jews. We speak about the light of *Shabbos*, the light of *Torah*, the light of *Yerushalayim* and the light of *Moshiach*.

משל למח הדבר דומה

ואת בנימין אחי יוסף לא שלח יעקב את אחיו כי אמר פן יקראנו אסון (מב-ד)

משל: It was well known that one of the things that **Maran R’ Elazar Menachem Mann Shach זט”ל** was very *makpid* about was that a *chosson* should have a “*shomer*” a protective guard accompanying him wherever he went, from at least after he received his *aliya*, the *Shabbos* before his wedding. He explained the reason why he was so stringent on this practice.

R’ Shach recalled that when he was a *bochur* learning in Lithuania, he was once a guest at a wedding. In the middle of the wedding *seudah*, the *chosson* stepped outside for a moment in order to use the restroom (there was an out-house as the hall did not have indoor plumbing). Some time went by and people realized that the *chosson* hadn’t returned. A few went outside to look for the *chosson*, and they found him lying in a deep ditch, groaning incoherently in pain. Apparently he had fallen into the pit sight unseen and hit his head quite significantly that he could not even recall how he got there.

The father of the *kallah* came running outside and rather than feel sorry for the groom who was injured and in pain, he began screaming that there is something wrong with the boy and had his daughter known about this, she never would have gone through with the marriage. Obviously, said the worked-up father of the bride, there is some sort of “bad *mazel*” here and this is grounds for a divorce. He insisted that his daughter must be allowed to break off the marriage.

An urgent query was sent to **R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzensky זט”ל**, the *Posek Hador*, about the state of this marriage. R’ Chaim Ozer answered immediately, “There is no ‘bad *mazel*’ here or any sort of negative ‘*siman*.’ *Chazal* tell us: (ברכות נד:.) that three people need protection (שימור): a sick person, a *chosson* and a *kallah*. If the *chosson* wasn’t being watched, then

We use light synonymously with *ruchniyus*. Anything that is connected to spirituality has sparks of *kedusha*. And anything that takes us away from *Hashem* is filled with darkness.

This world is called an *olam hafuch*, an upside down world, because unfortunately so many are drowning in darkness, thinking that they are in the limelight. The glittering lights of Times Square, the “lights, camera, action” of Hollywood, and the glamour and glitter of a secular life where the greatest aspiration of young and old alike is, “G-d make me rich” is steeped in complete darkness, devoid of true meaning, purpose and connection to *Hashem*.

The ladies in *Meah Shearim* with the black *tichels*, and the men with the black hats, black beards, black coats and black shoes, who are running to learn *Torah* in the *Beis Medrash* are radiating true light. These people actually light up the world with their *Torah* and *mitzvos*.

Being ENLIGHTENED means living with the true Source of Light which is *Hashem*. The Greeks tried to darken our lives, not by killing us physically, but by making us live without light, without *Torah* and *mitzvos*, devoid of all spirituality. *Chanukah* is when we celebrate the victory of *ruchniyus* over *gashmiyus*. That tiny flask of oil lasted for eight days. It was supernatural. It was the light of *Chanukah*, the *Ohr Haganuz* that comes into this world on this special holiday to remind us what we are *living* for.

Let us grab onto this light, *daven* by the *Chanukah licht*, cry, and beg *Hashem* to help us navigate through this long and tortuous exile. To send us this light that was created in the very beginning of time to shine the way through this dark and materialistic world. This light of *Chanukah* is *Hashem’s* gift to us so that we could remain strong and true to our spiritual selves. May we all learn to tap into this great *Chanukah* light and may we all be *zoche* soon to the light of *Moshiach tzidkeinu, bimhaira biyameinu amen*.

cascading down the pavement, and the little boy heaving as he sat hunched over the broken shards of glass.

“I bent down to the boy and said, ‘Come, I will buy you a new jug of oil. Don’t worry, your father will not be upset at you.’ I took him by the hand and we walked into the nearest store where I purchased the largest jug of pure olive oil and handed it to the gratified and smiling boy. He couldn’t believe his good fortune, thanking me again and again, and he ran home, taking extra precaution not to make the same mistake again.

“As I watched the boy run off, a shudder passed through me. Tonight is *Chanukah!* I hadn’t even known it was *Chanukah!* How removed I had become from religion that I didn’t even know the Jewish calendar and when the holidays were! I broke out in a cold sweat as I repeated the little boy’s words over and over in my mind: ‘What will I tell my father?’ Indeed, what will I tell my Father in Heaven? What happened to me all these years that I so completely lost my way that I had no idea it was *Chanukah*? How low had I fallen? What type of Jew was I? What will I say to my Father when He will ask me what has become of me?

“With a heavy heart, I walked back to the street corner where I had seen the little boy and found the shards of glass just as I had left them. Gingerly, I picked them up and brought them back to my palatial mansion, but all I could think about was one thing: Tonight is *Chanukah!* Tonight I must light the *Chanukah menorah!*

“With my speechless wife and children looking on, I found a *menorah* and lit a candle. I even remembered the *beracha* to make. The next seven nights, I continued to add a candle each night and I lit the entire *Chanukah menorah* with a mixture of joy tinged with regret, as well as pride in my newfound Jewishness. That little flame ignited the fire in my heart and I am happy to say, today, my entire family is fully observant in *mitzvos*.

“All thanks to a few broken shards of glass

בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו שיר ורננים

ויהי מקץ שנתיים ימים ופרקה חולם והנה עמד על הדרך ... (מא-א)

Parshas Mikeitz begins with the dreams of Pharaoh, which neither he nor his astrologers could interpret satisfactorily. It is interesting that they disturbed Pharaoh so intensely that “*his spirit was troubled*.” Why should he have been troubled by the antics of cows and ears of corn?

R’ Moshe Weinberger *shlit’a* (Sparks from the Fire) explains that the Egyptian empire based its supremacy on physical might, material resources and intellectual superiority. The strong ruled over the weak, the rich over the poor and their knowledge of sorcery enabled them to overwhelm those un-versed in the occult. Those dreams, however, told a different story. In this vision, he was shown the exact opposite - strong, fat cows being swallowed by physically inferior ones, well-nourished corn falling prey to thin, feeble ones. For Pharaoh this presented a new and disturbing concept. It appeared to indicate that a kingdom based on brute force and material ascendancy is not secure. It can be vanquished and even obliterated by frailer opponents who are able to draw upon a mysterious source of strength as yet unknown to Pharaoh, and it was a shattering thought. His wise men were just as puzzled because they shared his secular outlook.

It was left, therefore, to *Yosef HaTzaddik* to disclose this hidden source. There exists a Divine authority, Creator of the world, who directs the destiny of mankind, and even the strongest are powerless to oppose His will.

Invariably, *Chanukah* falls during the week of *Mikeitz* and it testifies to the same fact. When Jews faced the mighty Greeks, the numerous were defeated by the few and the strong were overcome by the weak. When *Hashem* sees fit, matter crumbles before spirit and normal laws of nature give

way to the supernatural force of the Creator (*Kochvei Asher*).

What is true on a national level is equally valid for every individual. It is not paradoxical to assert that the real strength of a *Yid* lies in the knowledge of his weakness! The more we recognize our human frailty and the need to depend on *Hashem* for literally everything, the more we will prosper. This belief is the cornerstone of *Yiddishkeit*, and those who deny it do so at their peril.

ובל שמונת ימי חנוכה הנרות הללו קודש הם (סדר הדלקה)

The **Kedushas Levi, R’ Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev זט”ל** says that each night of *Chanukah* is *mesugal*, an auspicious time, for various things to *daven* for: **1st Night** - Not to be lonely or depressed. A bitter, unhappy *Yid* once came to the **Apta Rov זט”ל**, and complained that he was suffering from severe depression. The *Rebbe* told him to stare at the *Chanukah licht* while they are burning. The *Yid* obeyed, and was cured.

2nd Night - *Shidduchim, Shalom Bayis*, to find your marriage partner and marital peace.

3rd Night - Good children, happy and healthy children. (The **Chasam Sofer זט”ל** says when you cry for your children in front of the candles you can be sure your *tefillos* are answered.)

4th Night - The four *Imahos* - Matriarchs. Have in mind to be a healthy and wholesome woman/mother in the four walls of your home, of true essence

5th Night - *Chamisha Chumshei Torah*. The Five books of *Torah*. One should *daven* for *Torah* knowledge and that your husband should be a *Talmid Chacham*, as well as your children. By the 5th night, more of the *menorah* is lit up than not. Pray for more light in your life, for clarity.

Osin thought it over and promptly the confiscated *menorah* appeared from his desk. He summoned Gavriiliuk, who was on duty in the office, to bring in a large candle. “I need eight candles,” I said. (In fact I needed nine, but when it came to Jewish rituals I was still a novice.) Gavriiliuk took out a knife and began to cut the candle into several smaller ones. But apparently the knife was too dull. So Osin himself took out a handsome inlaid pocketknife and deftly cut me eight candles.

“During the prayer you must stand with your head covered and at the end say ‘*Amen*.’” He put on his major’s hat and stood.

I lit the candles and recited my own prayer in Hebrew, which went something like this: “Blessed are You, G-d, for allowing me to rejoice on this day of *Chanukah*, the holiday of our liberation, the holiday of our return to the way of our fathers. Blessed are You, G-d, for allowing me to light these candles. May you allow me to light the *Chanukah* candles many times in your city, Jerusalem, with my wife, Avital, and my family and friends.”

This time, however, inspired by the sight of Osin standing meekly at attention, I added in Hebrew: “And may the day come when all our enemies, who today are planning our destruction, will stand before us and hear our prayers and say ‘*Amen*.’”

“*Amen*,” Osin echoed back. He sighed with relief, sat down and removed his hat. For some time we looked silently at the burning candles. They quickly melted, and the hot wax was spread pleasantly over the glass surface of the table. It was a surreal moment and then, Osin caught himself, summoned Gavriiliuk, and brusquely ordered him to clean it up. I returned to the barracks in a state of elation, and our *kibbutz* made tea and merrily celebrated the end of *Chanukah*. Naturally, I told them about Osin’s “conversion,” and it soon became the talk of the camp. I realized that revenge was inevitable, but I also knew they had plenty of other reasons to punish me. **(Excerpted from Anatoli Sharansky’s book, Fear No Evil)**

ומנותר קנקנים נעשה נם לשושנים בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו שיר ורגנים (מקו צור)
A *Gabbai Tzedakah* was traveling through Europe collecting money for various *Tzedakah* functions. In Italy, he made arrangements to sleep at the home of a rich patron who always contributed generously to his causes. He had never seen the man’s home before and the moment he entered the palatial estate, he was struck by the opulence that surrounded him. Inside the home he walked from room to room gazing at the elegant furniture, regal furnishings and the sheer size of the rooms. Suddenly, he looked at the silver display closet and stopped. There on an ornate lucite shelf, perched next to a number of elaborate silver *menorahs*, was a few shards of broken glass. Before he could even ask, the wealthy patron smiled and said, “You must be wondering why I have pieces of glass in my Vitrina (Italian for showcase). Well, to tell you the truth, I owe my entire existence to that glass!”

This *Gabbai* got around and knew a good story coming when he heard one. The Italian magnate gazed wistfully at the showcase and began his story. “I grew up in Holland and my family sent me to a local *yeshivah* there until I was eighteen years old. I never knew anything else and I thought that my life would never extend past the boundaries of the Netherlands. But then, a letter arrived from my Grandpa in Italy. He owned and ran a store and as he was getting older, he needed some help. He asked if I can come and work in the store and help him out. I jumped at the chance to get out and I lived by my Grandparents and worked day and night in the store. We were religious Jews and I made an effort to *daven* with a *minyan* three times a day and learn some *Torah*.

“Right from the start, I found my passion in selling products. I didn’t just help my Grandpa, I increased the revenue and profits immeasurably. Soon, I was looking to open another branch of the store, and after that, even more branches. Business wasn’t good - it was great - and we did very well. And that’s when the problems began

“The *Yetzer Hara* is very smart, and also very patient. He knew how to get me to decline my religious observance. At first, I missed a *Maariv* in *shul* because I couldn’t leave the store. Then, I gave up *Maariv* altogether as I was too busy at that time. *Shacharis* and *Mincha* soon followed, *Shabbos* came next, and my learning was a thing of the past too. It wasn’t long before I really wasn’t keeping any *mitzvos* at all. I got married and started a family, but we were not the slightest bit religious. And yet, at the same time, I was becoming richer and richer! Life was good, or so I thought!

“Things might have stayed this way if not for the ‘event’ that changed my life.
“One afternoon in December, I was walking down the street when I heard a commotion up ahead. As I got closer, I saw a group of children, they looked like Jewish kids, standing over one boy who was crying uncontrollably. The boy kept moaning, ‘*Oiy*, I am in such trouble! What will I tell my father?’

“I asked the little boy on the ground what had happened but he was too distraught to talk to me. He just kept repeating, ‘What will I tell my father?’ over and over again. I turned to another boy who explained to me that this child was from a poor family and his father had given him just enough money to go to the store and buy special olive oil in order to light the *Chanukah menorah*. His father had warned him to be careful as this was all they had and he should come straight home with the oil jar. But kids are kids and as he was carrying the glass jug, he stopped to play for a minute with his friends and suddenly, he dropped the oil and it smashed into pieces all over the street! I looked down and saw a golden stream of oil

of course, something bad could happen. This terrible fall that occurred to the *chosson* has nothing to do with bad *mazel* or *simanim* - it is a result of not following the words of *Chazal*. This tragedy could have been avoided if they had simply followed the words of the *Gemara*, and kept better watch over the *chosson*!”

נַמְסֵר: *Yaakov Avinu* was afraid to send his youngest son Binyamin with the rest of his brothers down to Egypt, for he feared that perhaps misfortune will occur. Rashi asks: “And at home misfortune cannot occur? Rather *Yaakov* was concerned that bad things can happen while one is traveling. As Rav Elazar ben *Yaakov* says, from here we see that the *Satan* is looking to prosecute (cause harm) during dangerous times (like when one is traveling).” A person must be on guard lest bad things happen to him, and especially when our Sages tell us that certain people and certain places and certain times are considered “dangerous,” we must listen and protect ourselves to the best of our ability. Not doing so is not a result of bad luck, but rather a result of not heeding the words of the Sages and the *dinim* of the *Torah*.

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

ברוך אתה ה' אט"ה אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של חנוכה (סדר הדלקת נרות)

Natan (Anatoli) Sharansky was arrested in 1977 for his activism, his insistence on the right of Russian Jews to make *aliyah* to Israel. However he was accused of the much more serious crime of treason, for spying for the United States. He sat in prison from 1977 to 1986 including eight years in a Soviet prison camp in Siberia. After continuous public protest in the West, spear-headed by his wife Avital, Natan Sharansky was released in a spy exchange between the US and the USSR in 1986. After making *aliyah* and establishing a Russian immigrant party in 1996, he became Israeli Minister of Industry and Trade and later of the Interior. His memoirs of the Soviet period are filled with sparkling anecdotes about the power of the few against the many, the power that derives from “fearing no evil” and laughing in the face of oppression. The phrase, “fear no evil,” is taken from the little *Sefer Tehillim*, which he carried with him through his long imprisonment.

The holiday of *Chanukah* was approaching. At the time, I was the only Jew in the prison zone, but when I explained that *Chanukah* was a holiday of national freedom, of returning to one’s own culture in the face of forced assimilation, my friends in our “kibbutz” decided to celebrate it with me. They even made me a wooden *menorah*, decorated it, and found some candles. In the evening, I lit the first candle and recited a prayer that I had composed for this occasion. Tea was poured, and I began to describe the heroic struggle of the Maccabees to save their people from slavery. For each zek (a prisoner in the Soviet Gulag) who was listening, this story had its own personal meaning. At one point the duty officer appeared in the barracks. He made a list of all those present, but did not interfere.

On each of the subsequent evenings of *Chanukah* I took out my *menorah*, lit the candles, and recited the appropriate blessing. Then I blew out the candles, as I didn’t have any extras. Gavriiliuk, the collaborator whose bunk was across from mine, watched and occasionally grumbled, “Look at him, he made himself a synagogue. And what if there’s a fire?”

On the sixth night of *Chanukah* the authorities suddenly confiscated my *menorah* with all my candles. I ran to the duty officer to find out what had happened. “The candlesticks were made from state materials; this is illegal. You could be punished for this alone and the other prisoners are complaining. They’re afraid you’ll start a fire.”

I began to insist. “In two days, I’ll return this ‘state property’ to you. Now, however, this looks like an attempt to deny me the opportunity of celebrating my holiday.” The duty officer began hesitating. Then he phoned his superior and got his answer: “A camp is not a synagogue. We won’t permit Sharansky to pray here.”

I was surprised by the bluntness of that remark, and immediately declared a hunger strike. In a statement to the procurator general I protested against the violation of my national and religious rights, and against KGB interference in my personal life.

When you begin an unlimited hunger strike, you never know when or how it will end. Are the authorities interested at that moment in putting a swift end to it, or do they not even care? In a few weeks a commission from Moscow was due to arrive in the camp. I didn’t know this at the time, but the authorities, presumably, were very aware of it, which probably explains why I was summoned to Major Osin’s office two days later, in the evening.

Osin pulled a benevolent smile over his face as he tried to talk me out of my hunger strike. Osin promised to see to it personally that in the future nobody would hinder me from praying, and that this should not be a concern of the KGB.

“Then what’s the problem?” I said. “Give me back the *menorah*, as tonight is the last evening of *Chanukah*. Let me celebrate it now, and taking into account your assurances for the future, I shall end the hunger strike.”

But a protocol for its confiscation had already been drawn up, and Osin couldn’t back down now. As I looked at this predator, sitting at an elegant polished table and wearing a benevolent smile, I was seized by an amusing idea. “Listen,” I said, “I’m sure you have the *menorah* somewhere. It’s very important to me to celebrate the last night of *Chanukah*. Why not let me do it here and now, together with you? You’ll give me the *menorah*, I’ll light the candles and say the prayer, and if all goes well I’ll end the hunger strike.”