

not in a storm and at night. You can leave and try your luck. And I am telling you, if you get through the forest and the other terrible conditions safely, unharmed by the ferocious wild beasts or anything else, then I will break up my gang and reform my ways.

“If you actually reach the outskirts of the city, then throw your handkerchief into the ditch next to the road, behind the signpost there. One of my men will be waiting, and that is how I will know that you made it.

“I then became terrified all over again. The hardships I had already endured were seared into my soul, and now even more frightening nightmares awaited me. But when I thought about how wonderful it is to be with the Rebbe at the menorah lighting, I shook off all my apprehensions and resolved not to delay another moment. My horse was returned to me and I set off on my way.

“There was total darkness all around. I could hear the cries of the forest animals, and they sounded close. I feared that I was surrounded by a pack of vicious wolves.

“I crouched down over my horse’s neck and spurred him on. He refused to move in the pitch blackness. I lashed him. He didn’t budge.

“I had no idea what to do. At that moment, a small light flickered in front of the carriage. The horse stepped eagerly towards it. The light advanced. The horse followed. All along the way, the wild animals fled from us, as if the tiny dancing flame was driving them away.

“We followed that flame all the way here. I kept my end of the bargain and threw my handkerchief at the designated place. Who knows? Perhaps those cruel bandits will change their ways, all in the merit of that little light.”

It was only then that the *Chasidim* noticed the Rebbe’s Chanukah candle had returned! There it was, burning in the elaborate menorah, its flame as strongly and pure as if it had just been lit.

With the conclusion of their comrade’s story, the *Chasidim* were finally able to understand the mysterious disappearance of the Chanukah light of the Rebbe Reb Boruch.

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Dear Friend:

Chanukah is upon us. Aside from its charm and its warm feeling, the holiday contains much depth and beauty; a treasure chest of lessons and inspiration. Indeed, it is a holiday centered on light. As we increase one candle each night, we are reminded that when it comes to light, the light of virtue and morality, the light of Torah and Mitzvot, there is only one direction - forward.

The name Chanukah is in recognition of the fact that the Temple was dedicated (chinuch) and prepared for service. The Greeks had defiled the Temple, the courtyard and all of the holy vessels. When the Chashmonaim prevailed, they purified the Temple and held a dedication, just as Moshe R’ did when he first inaugurated the Tabernacle and its vessels for service.

The lights of the Menorah tell of the struggle of the Jewish nation through thick and thin, throughout the generations, many amongst the few, and still we live and exist to tell the tale.

Our sages say “The Chanuka Lights will never be extinguished”, even in the era of Moshiach.

May we merit to light the Menorah in the Temple very soon in the land of Israel, in peace and tranquility, with the coming of Moshiach.

*Happy Chanukah!*

Sincerely,



**Rochel Kaplan**

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### Lesson 3 Chanukah

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#### Chanukah: Jewish Culture vs. Jewish Faith

“Abraham and Sarah have grown old, coming on in days,” Bereishis 18:11. They are childless. They seem to be destined to die without a future.

This is the story of Jewish history. Throughout our long journey in exile, many have predicted that Judaism will die childless, like Abraham and Sarah. They claimed that Judaism is primitive, outdated, and archaic.

And even after the birth of Isaac, there are those who insist that Isaac is not the child of Abraham and Sarah.

This was the philosophy hugely popular in the nineteenth and twentieth century: to disconnect Isaac, the Jewish future, from Abraham and Sarah, the Jewish past. In the ghetto and shtetl, in the ancient primitive world-the argument went-Judaism and Jewish life could survive. But in the modern age, it was irrelevant. The new Jewish child, the future of the Jewish people, does not belong to Abraham and Sarah, but rather to the “marketplace” of Western thought and culture.

This outlook effected millions of Jews capturing the minds and hearts of Jewish enlightened youth from East to West. Rates of conversion and assimilation in the last two centuries were astounding. It seemed that Judaism, would die childless.

Whether it was the Holocaust or the miraculous return to our ancient homeland, Eretz Yisroel, a new and promising tide began to sweep across the Jewish landscape.

Jews at some point began to realize that Jewish culture did indeed have contemporary value, the “Sarah” of Jewish life, its spirit and vitality, should be celebrated. The culture of Fiddler on the Roof has some charm after all.

“Sarah” was re-introduced onto the Jewish map. The mainstream American Jewish community recognized the value of culture and ritual. The inimitable Yiddishe stories, strong family values, delightful music, language, food, rituals and literary masterpieces of Judaism were “good for the Jews”.

I love latkes, kugel and matzah-ball soup. I enjoy klezmer and a Saul Bellow novel, chavurah and Israeli dancing.

Sarah was resurrected, but Abraham was still missing. In other words, the poetry and music of Judaism, its warmth and beauty, could nurture the modern Jew; but the Halachic structure-practical mitzvot like wrapping Tefillin, Shabbat, Kashrut, Mikvah, Mezuzah-that’s too ancient for the mainstream integrated modern Jew. Our father, our bedrock, our lifestyle is other worldly.

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But, can Isaac be born from Sarah without an Abraham?

When G-d made Isaac look exactly like his father Abraham, He was not responding to ludicrous cynics who were scoffing at this aged couple, but rather, to the intelligent argument that Sarah without Abraham cannot mother a Jewish future. G-d was teaching us the most important lesson of Jewish continuity: If you want an Isaac, he must look exactly like Abraham. Culture does not possess the power of eternity; only Torah does.

This is the challenge of our generation, to realize that an Isaac is created only through Sarah and Abraham. We enjoy the cuisine and we love the culture, but we need the Torah and mitzvot. It is only Abraham and Sarah together who can inspire and guarantee our Jewish future.

### *A story*

A young Chassidic boy and girl from Krakow were engaged and deeply in love when the transports to Auschwitz began. Their entire families were decimated and they both assumed that their life's partner-to-be was also dead.

One night, close to the end of the war, the groom saw his bride standing on the women's side of the fence. When the Russians came and liberated them, they met, and went for a stroll. They entered a vacant home, where they spent, for the first time in years, a few moments together.

Suddenly, the young woman came upon a mirror and saw herself. A dazzling beauty had turned into a skeleton and scarecrow. She had no hair, her face was full of scars, her teeth were knocked out and she was a hideous sight to behold.

She cried out to him, "Woe, what has become of me? I look like the Angel of Death himself! Would you still marry such an ugly person?"

"You never looked more beautiful to me than right at this moment," was his response.

The Chanukah lights tell the tale of internal, sacred, and deep beauty emerging from human dignity and courage, from a spirit that faced the devil and still chose to live and love. When Almighty G-d sees a physical human being, filled with struggle and anxiety, stretching out one's hand to help another or engaging in a mitzvah, G-d turns to the billions of angels filling the heavens, and says: "Have you ever seen anything more beautiful than that?"

This lesson was culled from JLI Torah Studies taught throughout the year at Aleph Learning Institute

### *The Disappearing Candle*

It was the first night of Chanukah. Outside a snowstorm raged, but inside it was tranquil and warm. The **Rebbe Reb Boruch of Mezhibuz**, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, stood in front of the menorah, surrounded by a crowd of his *chasidim*. He recited the blessing with great devotion, lit the single mitzvah candle, set the *shammus* candle in its designated place, and began to sing "*HaNairos Halalu*." His face radiated holiness and joy; the awed *chasidim* stared intently at him.

The flame of the candle was burning strongly. Rebbe and chasidim sat nearby and sang "*Maoz Tsur*" and other Chanukah songs. All of a sudden, the candle began to flicker and leap wildly, even though there wasn't the slightest breeze in the house. It was as if it were dancing or struggling. And then, it disappeared!

It didn't blow out—there was no smoke — it just was not there anymore. It was as if it flew off somewhere else. The Rebbe himself seemed lost in thought. His attendant went over to re-light the wick, but the Rebbe waved him off.

He motioned to the *chasidim* to continue singing. Several times, between tunes, The Rebbe spoke inspiring words of Torah. The evening passed delightfully, and the *chasidim* present had all but forgotten the disappearing Chanukah candle.

It was nearly midnight when the harsh screech of carriage wheels grating on the snow and ice exploded the tranquility. The door burst open and in came a *chasid* who hailed from a distant village. His appearance was shocking. His clothes were ripped and filthy, and his face was puffy and bleeding. And yet, in stark contrast to his physical state, his eyes were sparkling and his features shone with great joy.

He sat down at the table, and with all eyes upon him, began to speak excitedly. "This isn't the first time I came to Mezhibuz by the forest route, and I know the way very well. But there was a terrible snow storm this week, which greatly slowed my progress. I began to worry that I wouldn't get here to be with the Rebbe for the first night of Chanukah. The thought disturbed me so much, I decided not to wait out the storm, but to plod ahead and travel day and night, in the hope that I could reach my destination on time.

"That was a foolish idea, I must admit, but I didn't realize that until too late. Last night, I ran into a gang of bandits, who were quite pleased to encounter me. They figured if I was out in this weather, at night, alone, I must be a wealthy merchant whose business could not be delayed. They demanded I surrender to them all of my money.

"I endeavored to explain, I pleaded with them, but they absolutely refused to believe I had no money. They seized the reins of my horses, and leapt on my wagon. They sat themselves on either side of me to keep me under close surveillance, and then drove me and my wagon off to meet their chief to decide my fate.

"While they waited for their leader to arrive, they questioned and cross-examined me in great detail, searched me and the wagon, and beat me, trying to elicit the secret of where I had hidden my money. I had nothing to tell them except the truth, and that, they weren't prepared to accept.

"After hours of this torture, they bound me and threw me, injured and exhausted, into a dark cellar. I was bleeding from the wounds they inflicted, and my whole body ached in pain. I lay there until the evening, when the gang leader came to speak with me.

"I tried to the best of my ability to describe to him the great joy of being in the Rebbe's presence, and how it was so important to me to get to the Rebbe by the start of the holiday that it was worth it to endanger myself by traveling at night.

"It seems that my words made an impression in him, or else he was persuaded by my adamancy even under torture. But whichever it was, thank G-d he released me from the handcuffs, saying:

"I sense that your faith in G-d is strong and your longing to be with your Rebbe is genuine and intense. Now we shall see if this is the truth. I shall let you go, but you should know that the way is extremely dangerous. Even the most rugged people never venture into the heart of the forest alone, only in groups, and especially

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