



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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## Chanukah Light Insight

### *Oils Well that Ends Well*

By Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

It's Chanukah again. The time of year when we gather together to light our little menorahs, eat latkes and jelly donuts dripping with oil and get presents. For most people the first two don't have too much meaning, but getting presents — now that's a religious experience.

And yet I can't help but feel that there must be more of a message for our lives in Chanukah. Don't misunderstand me, I'm not saying you shouldn't get me anything.

The Talmud asks the famous question "What is Chanukah?" It then goes on to explain the miraculous victory of a tenacious band of religious zealots over the

overwhelming force of the Greek empire. The Jews then returned to the Temple and rededicated it, miraculously discovering one small bottle of pure oil with which to light the menorah in the Temple for one day. But the oil burned for eight days. And so, to celebrate the miracle we instituted the eight days of Chanukah. We light the menorah and eat food cooked in oil.

But the question is, what did we have against the Greeks in the first place? They wanted to bring us the light of Greek civilization and culture. Their drama, sports, education and philosophy. So what was so terrible about Plato? Besides the fact that it's almost impossible to get out of the carpet, there's another reason: we Jews have our own philosophy. We aren't a pagan people lucky to get someone to teach us how to throw a discus, we are a holy people reaching for spiritual heights through G-dliness. We want to bring the light of G-d

into a world of darkness, and all the light of Greek civilization can't compete with that.

So we eat a lot of oil. Now some people think that's because we wanted to make sure we don't have great physiques like the Greeks, but actually it's because oil is like us Jews. It rises to the top of everything else. It doesn't mix well. It burns brightly and can bring light into a world of darkness. Maybe the Greeks had a message of Western Civilization that was a step up if you were a pagan Edomite, but for us Jews it was a step down to a world devoid of holiness and true meaning.

So every year we light those little candles and although they might not light up the world yet, they have the power to chase away some of the shadows. We Jews are a people with an outlook that spans thousands of years. Over the centuries the Greeks have faded away, but we Jews are still around bringing a message of transcendental spiritual fulfillment to a world in darkness.

*To our Light Lines Readers  
A Happy and Healthy Chanukah*

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

*Stretch your imagination in order to judge favorably, and you will often be right on the money. In the following story, what seems far-fetched is really just...*

### *The Other Side of the Coin*

Over a hundred years ago at a festive gathering of prestigious rabbis, the Rabbi of Pressburg got up to speak. He announced that he had brought along a rare treasure that he wanted to display. To the amazement of all those gathered, he took out an authentic “*machtzit hashekel*,” the half-shekel coin used in Temple times.

The coin was passed around for each person to see and feel; until finally the Rabbi of Pressburg asked for its return. But it was gone. “Who had it last? Have you seen it?” Everyone looked around his place, but it was nowhere to be found. “Perhaps,” it was suggested, “someone put it in his pocket by mistake; let’s all empty our pockets just to make sure.”

At this suggestion, the elderly Rabbi Yehuda Asad of Hungary got up and said, “I ask that we wait twenty minutes before emptying our pockets.” All were puzzled by his request, but they agreed out of respect for the elderly sage. After 20 minutes, Rabbi Yehuda rose and said, “I have one more request which may seem odd, but please, let us wait just 10 more minutes.” The guests were more puzzled than before, but agreed to wait 10 more minutes.

Suddenly, a waiter emerged from the kitchen shouting, “I found it! I found the *machtzit hashekel!*” Apparently, it had been placed on the table and then accidentally cleared away with the dishes. The mystery was solved.

Now all eyes turned toward Rabbi Yehuda: What was the explanation of his strange request? Rabbi Yehuda explained: “I wanted to keep it a secret, but now I feel I must explain. You see, I too have a *machtzit hashekel*,” he said, and he reached into his pocket and pulled out an ancient coin. “And I, too, brought it along to display. But when I saw the Rabbi of Pressburg’s delight in displaying his coin, I decided to keep mine a secret so as not to diminish his joy in any way.”

*This story shows not only the great sensitivity of the elderly rabbi, but also, it shows how far we must go to judge favorably. Imagine if the Rabbi of Pressburg’s coin had not been found. Would anyone have believed that another person in attendance not only owned a duplicate, but had brought it along as well?*

## Response Line

### Exercise

*Yechezkel Frank wrote:*

*Did our Sages exercise at all? How could the Maccabeans be so strong and know about warfare without practicing and working out? Of course this was one of the miracles which happened on Chanukah, but is there more we can say about this? Are there any sources about rabbis who knew how to exercise? Or sources about the importance of exercising?*

the “strong into the hands of the weak.” Thus it is clear that the Maccabees were “weak.” In fact they had no military training, since the only people who did not go to war were priests, and the Maccabees were all priests.

This is not to say that they weren’t healthy. Maimonides writes: “Having a healthy and complete body is following in the ways of G-d, as it is impossible to understand and to

Dear Yechezkel,

In the Chanukah prayers, we say that G-d delivered

perceive the knowledge of the Creator when one is sick; therefore people must distance themselves from things that are destructive to the body, and conduct themselves in ways that are strengthening and therapeutic.”

Maimonides highly recommends exercise as part of his overall prescription for health. He even ranks it higher than proper diet, saying that, “anyone who exercises and engages in physical activity, doesn’t overeat and maintains regularity, sickness will not come upon him, and his strength will increase, even if he eats unhealthy foods.”