We are honored to share with you this Pardes Hanukkah Song Companion for 5786.

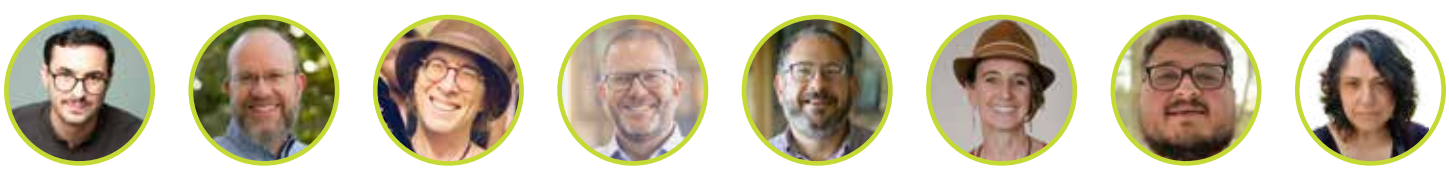
פרדס PARDES
YOUR TORAH. YOUR JOURNEY.

Hanukkah is a time we gather with family and friends to celebrate and publicize the miracles manifested for the Jewish people almost 2,200 years ago in the Land of Israel. Each night, as we light the candles in our homes, we bring more light into the world — both physically and spiritually. Music and song play a central role in this celebration: some are part of our sacred liturgy, while others have become beloved traditions around the holiday table.

In this companion, we've brought together a selection of eight Hanukkah songs, some familiar and some lesser-known. A song for each night of the holiday! True to the Pardes spirit, we invite you to engage deeply — with the words of each song, their textual and historical contexts, and the layers of meaning they hold. You'll also find QR codes linking to lyrics and tunes, so you can sing and learn along.

Wishing you a Hanukkah filled with light, joy, and connection.

The Pardes Team



HaNerot Halalu: Stipulation & Creation

Rabbi Rafael J. Polisuk

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ

הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ אֲנוּ מַדְלִיקִין,
עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַנִּפְלָאוֹת,
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה,
עַל יְדֵי כֹּהֲנֶיךָ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים.
וְכָל שְׁמוֹנַת יְמֵי חֲנֻכָּה,
הַנֵּרוֹת הַלָּלוּ קֹדֶשׁ הֵן,
וְאֵין לָנוּ רְשׁוּת לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶן,
אֶלָּא לִרְאוֹתָן בִּלְבָד,
כְּדֵי לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל
עַל נִסֶּיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ
וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתֶךָ:

HaNeirot Halalu

Ha-neirot ha-lalu anu madlikin,
al ha-nissim v'al ha-nifla'ot,
she'asita la-avoteinu,
ba-yamim ha-heim, ba-z'man ha-zeh,
al y'dei kohanecha ha-kedoshim.
V'chol shmonat y'mei Chanukah,
ha-neirot ha-lalu kodesh hein,
v'ein lanu r'shut l'hishtamesh ba-hen,
ela lirotan bilvad,
k'dei l'hodot u-l'hallel l'shimcha ha-gadol
al nisecha v'al nifl'otecha
v'al y'shuatecha.

We kindle these lights

We kindle these lights [to commemorate]
the saving acts, miracles and wonders
which You have performed for our forefathers,
in those days at this time,
through Your holy priests.
Throughout the eight days of Hanukkah,
these lights are sacred,
and we are not permitted to make use of them,
but only to look at them,
in order to offer thanks and praise to Your great Name
for Your miracles, for Your wonders
and for Your salvations.

This brief yet luminous paragraph originates in *Masechet Soferim*, an Eretz-Israel composition from the geonic era. Yet its literary nature is difficult to define. What is it, precisely? A prayer? A hymn of praise? A legal declaration?

Its addressee appears to be God — "that You have done for our ancestors... in order to thank and praise Your great Name" — but its tone is unexpectedly formal, even juridical. It reads like a halachic proclamation about the status of the lights themselves. Nowhere else do we encounter such language. We do not say: "This lulav that we take up to rejoice before You," nor "This shofar that we sound to bring our remembrance before You." Why does this mitzvah alone require a verbal declaration of its own?

The question deepens when we recall that originally this text was recited between the blessings themselves — between *"Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah"* and *"Who performed miracles."* In other words, *HaNerot Halalu* was not a later hymn, but part of the very act of kindling.

In *Masechet Soferim* itself we may find a hint toward the answer. Chapter 20, halacha 6 (Higger edition) states:

> The one who kindles says: 'Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah.' And he stipulates, saying: 'These lights we are kindling...'.

The term "stipulates" (*matneh*) is crucial. This statement functions as a *tenai* — a halachic condition that defines the act itself. Unlike the lights of Shabbat or Yom Tov, kindled for the sake of enjoyment and illumination, the lights of Hanukkah are defined by their non-utility. Their holiness arises precisely from restriction. They exist only to **proclaim the miracle** — lights that may be seen but not used, objects whose sanctity is expressed through negation. The kindling is thus performed with explicit awareness: these flames are not for light, but for remembrance and gratitude.

What, then, turns an ordinary flame, like those of Shabbat and Yom Tov, into sacred light? Words. Through *speech*, we set them apart. The spoken declaration *creates* the reality, as in

so many halachic domains: vows, oaths, consecrations. In each, a verbal act transforms the status of an object or relation. So too here: the utterance *"HaNerot Halalu"* converts physical lights into vessels of holiness.

This reveals a deeper theological principle: in **Judaism, words create worlds.** Hashem brought the universe into being through speech acts: *"And God said: Let there be light — and there was light."* Humanity, fashioned in the Divine image, is called to continue this creative work: by speaking, we define, sanctify, distinguish, and transform. The light of Hanukkah thus becomes an echo of that first divine utterance — a human response to *"Let there be light"* — not through creation of fire, but through the sanctification of its purpose.

Maoz Tzur: Hanukkah and the Pattern of Jewish History

Rabbi Michael Hattin

מָעוֹז צוּר

מָעוֹז צוּר יְשׁוּעָתִי לְךָ נָאֶה לְשַׁבֵּחַ
תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשָׁם תּוֹדָה נְזַבֵּחַ
לְעֵת תָּכִין מַטְבֵּחַ מִצַּר הַמְנַבֵּחַ
אָז אֶגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ

רָעוֹת שָׂבְעָה נַפְשִׁי בְּיָגוֹן כֹּחִי כָלָה
חַיַּי מֵרְרוּ בְקֹשִׁי בְּשִׁעְבּוּד מַלְכוּת עֶגְלָה
וּבְיָדוֹ הַגְּדוֹלָה הוֹצִיא אֶת הַסְּגֻלָּה
חֵיל פַּרְעֹה וְכָל זַרְעוֹ יָרְדוּ כְּאֶבֶן בִּמְצוּלָה

דְּבִיר קָדְשׁוֹ הֱבִיאַנִי וְגַם שָׁם לֹא שָׁקַטְתִּי
וּבָא נוֹגֵשׂ וְהִגְלַנִי כִּי זָרִים עָבַדְתִּי
וְיֵין רַעַל מָסַכְתִּי כִּמְעַט שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי
קֵץ בָּבֶל זָרַבָּבֶל לְקֵץ שִׁבְעִים נוֹשַׁעְתִּי

כְּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרוֹשׁ בִּקֵּשׁ אֲגָגִי בֶּן הַמְּדָתָא
וְנֶהְיְתָה לוֹ לְפַח וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ וְגַאֲוָתוֹ נִשְׁבָּתָה
רֹאשׁ יְמִינִי נִשֵּׂאתָ וְאוֹיֵב שְׁמוֹ מָחִיתָ
רֹב בָּנָיו וְקִנְיָנָיו עַל הָעֵץ תָּלִיתָ

יְוָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזַי בִּימֵי חַשְׁמַנִּים
וּפָרְצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדָּלַי וְטִמְּאוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמָנִים
וּמִנּוֹתַר קַנְקַנִּים נַעֲשָׂה נֵס לַשּׁוֹשַׁנִּים
בְּנֵי בִינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וּרְנָנִים

חֲשׂוֹף זְרוֹעַ קָדְשֶׁךָ וְקָרֵב קֵץ הַיְשׁוּעָה
נְקֹם נִקְמַת עֲבָדֶיךָ מֵאֻמָּה הָרְשָׁעָה
כִּי אָרְכָה הַשָּׁעָה וְאֵין קֵץ לִימֵי הָרָעָה
דְּחֵה אַדְמוֹן בְּצֵל צַלְמוֹן הָקֵם לָנוּ
רוֹעִים שִׁבְעָה

Ma'oz Tzur

Ma'oz Tzur yeshu'ati, lecha na'eh l'shabe'ach;
Tikon beit tefillati, v'sham todah nezabe'ach.
L'eit takhin matbe'ach, mitzar ha-menabe'ach;
Az egmor b'shir mizmor, Chanukat ha-mizbe'ach.

Ra'ot sava'ah nafshi, b'yagon kochi kalah;
Chayai mereru v'koshi, b'shi'abud malchut eglah.
U'v'yado ha-gedolah, hotzi et ha-segulah;
Cheil Par'o v'chol zar'o, yardu k'even b'metzulah.

D'vir kodsho hevi'ani, v'gam sham lo shakat'ti;
U'va nogeis v'higlani, ki zarim avad'ti.
V'yein ra'al masachti, kim'at she'avarti;
Keitz Bavel Z'rubavel, l'keitz shiv'im nosha'ti.

K'rot komat berosh bikesh Agagi ben Hamdata;
V'nihyata lo l'fach u'lemokesh, v'ga'avato nishbata.
Rosh yemini niseita, v'oyev sh'mo machita;
Rov banav v'kinyanav, al ha'eitz talita.

Y'vanim nikb'tzu alai azai b'ymei Chashmanim;
U'fartzu chomot migdalai, v'tim'u kol ha-shmanim.
U'minotar kankanim, na'asah nes la-shoshanim;
B'nei vinah y'mei shmonah, kav'u shir u-renanim.

Chasof zero'a kodshecha, v'kareiv keitz ha-yeshu'ah;
Nekom nikmat avadecha mei'uma ha-resha'ah.
Ki archah ha-sha'ah, v'ein keitz limei ha-ra'ah;
D'chei Admon b'tzeil Tzalmon, hakeim lanu
ro'im shiv'ah.

Rock of my salvation

Rock of my salvation, to You it is fitting to give praise. Establish the house of my prayer, and there we shall bring offerings of thanksgiving. When You prepare the slaughter of the barking foe. Then will I complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.

My soul was sated with troubles; my strength was spent in grief. My life was embittered through hardship in the bondage of Egypt's rule. With Your great hand You brought forth Your treasured people; Pharaoh's host and all his seed sank like stone into the deep.

He brought me to His holy dwelling—yet even there I found no rest. The oppressor came and exiled me, for I served foreign masters. I drank the poisoned wine, and almost perished; But at the end of Babylon, through Zerubbabel, after seventy years I was saved.

The tall Hamanite, son of Hammedata, sought to fell me like a cedar; But his plot became his own snare, and his arrogance was shattered. You raised the head of my right hand, and blotted out his name; His many sons and possessions You hung upon the tree.

The Greeks gathered against me then, in the days of the Hasmoneans. They breached the walls of my towers and defiled all the oils. But from the last remaining cruse, a miracle was wrought for the lilies. The wise men established eight days for song and rejoicing.

Bare Your holy arm, and hasten the time of salvation. Avenge the blood of Your servants against the wicked nation. For long has been the hour, and there is no end to the days of evil. Cast down the Red One in the shadow of darkness—Raise up for us the seven shepherds of redemption.

One of the most popular Hanukkah songs, especially among Ashkenazi Jews, is *Maoz, Tzur Yeshuati* ("Fortress, Rock of My Salvation"). It is a medieval composition, dating from 12th- or 13th-century Germany. All we know about the author with certainty is that his name was Mordechai, because the first five stanzas of the poem spell this out in the form of an acrostic. Surprisingly, while this hymn is widely sung in celebration of Hanukkah, only the fifth stanza actually addresses the holiday. The remaining stanzas describe other events in Jewish history: the Egyptian oppression and our exodus from bondage, the exile to Babylon and our restoration to Zion, Haman's nefarious plan and our salvation on Purim. The first stanza as well as the final sixth (not extant in early versions) anticipate future redemption, when the enemies of the Jews will be vanquished and the Temple restored in Jerusalem.

Why did the author choose to include so many other events of ancient Jewish history? Surely the story of Hanukkah furnishes more than enough material to sing about, all by itself! Recall the many aspects of the holiday: the tyrannical Syrian-Greeks, who defiled Jerusalem and outlawed Jewish observances and Torah study, were routed by Judah the Maccabee and his outnumbered fighters. After their triumph, they re-entered Jerusalem, cleansed the sanctuary and celebrated a festival of consecration, as the name "Hanukkah" — from the root ח.נ.כ or "dedication" — implies. This consecration, in 165 BCE, included the restoration of the altar, repair of the Temple structure, and the ritual cleansing of its precincts. To all of this, the Talmud (Shabbat 21b) adds the one, undefiled cruse of oil that was miraculously sufficient to kindle the menorah for a full eight days. Why, then, did *Maoz Tzur* not focus on Hanukkah alone?

The answer to this question highlights the unique historical perspective of the early rabbis that was later adopted by our author. The midrash (Genesis Rabbah 44) relates that when God struck a covenant with Avram at *Brit ben HaBetarim* (Genesis 15), promising his descendants a bright future in the land but also a lengthy period of enslavement, the aged patriarch was stricken with fear: "And, behold, dread, a great darkness, fell upon him" (Genesis 15:12). The midrash comments: *"Dread" alludes to Babylon..."Darkness" alludes to Media..."Great" alludes to Greece... "Fell upon him" – this alludes to Edom....* In this midrashic rendering, Avram is informed not only about the enslavement in Egypt but also about many other empires that would oppress the future Israelites, culminating with "Edom" (Rome). Significantly, Edom is also included in *Maoz Tzur* in the final stanza: "Thrust Admon into the darkness...".

Essentially, what the midrash intimates and what *Maoz Tzur* proclaims is that Jewish history does not consist of discrete, separate events unfolding disconnectedly along a timeline but rather of **persistent patterns**. The most obvious of these patterns concerns Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, mighty kingdoms all, which filled the world with sound and fury and then passed on, each one yielding to another empire that took its place. All the while, the Jewish people persevered, now in their land and now exiled from it, weathering the vagaries of history and somehow surviving to fight another day. Empires came and went; the status of Jews under their rule was at times more precarious and at times less. But as a people, we remained what we have always been: few in number but assigned by God to play an outsized role in world history, because the empires invariably take a special interest in our fate.

The art of Jewish survival therefore consists of wisely navigating our tiny boat on the roiling sea of history, tossed by waves that are ruled by much larger and more powerful ships. Our relationship with these regnant empires, whether amicable or belligerent, invariably yields us valuable insights so that we might continue on our amazing journey. As we have seen, the restoration of national sovereignty associated with a reconstituted Jewish state — itself an epic miracle rivaling the triumph of Hanukkah — has not changed this basic truth one iota. How appropriate, then, for *Maoz Tzur* to celebrate not only the ancient story of Hanukkah but also the vital pattern of our past as well our future, until the end of time.

Al HaNissim: For the Miracles

Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash

עַל הַנִּסִּים

עַל הַנִּסִּים וְעַל הַפֻּרְקָן וְעַל הַגְּבוּרוֹת
וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַנִּפְלָאוֹת
וְעַל הַמִּלְחָמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

בִּימֵי מַתִּתְיָהוּ בֶן יוֹחָנָן כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל
חַשְׁמוֹנָאִי (י"ג חַשְׁמוֹנַאי) וּבָנָיו
כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מַלְכוּת יָוָן הָרְשָׁעָה עַל
עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשְׁכִּיחָם תּוֹרָתֶךָ
וּלְהַעֲבִירָם מֵחֻקֵּי רְצוֹנֶךָ.

וְאַתָּה, בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים, עָמַדְתָּ
לָהֶם בְּעֵת צָרָתָם: רַבְתָּ אֶת רִיבָם
דַּנְתָּ אֶת דִּינָם נָקַמְתָּ אֶת נִקְמָתָם.
מָסַרְתָּ גִבּוֹרִים בְּיַד חַלָּשִׁים, וְרַבִּים
בְּיַד מְעַטִּים, וּטְמֵאִים בְּיַד טְהוֹרִים,
וּרְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צַדִּיקִים, וְזֵדִים בְּיַד
עוֹסְקֵי תוֹרָתֶךָ. וּלְךָ עָשִׂיתָ שֵׁם גָּדוֹל
וְקָדוֹשׁ בְּעוֹלָמֶךָ וּלְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשִׂיתָ
תְּשׁוּעָה גְדוֹלָה וּפֻרְקָן כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

וְאַחַר כֵּן, בָּאוּ בָנֶיךָ לִדְבִיר בֵּיתֶךָ
וּפִנּוּ אֶת הֵיכָלֶךָ וְטִהֲרוּ אֶת־מִקְדָּשֶׁךָ
וְהִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחַצְרוֹת קָדְשֶׁךָ וְקָבְעוּ
שְׁמוֹנַת יְמֵי חֲנֻכָּה אֵלּוּ לְהוֹדוֹת
וּלְהַלֵּל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל.

Al HaNissim

Al ha-nissim v'al ha-purkan,
v'al ha-gevurot v'al ha-teshu'ot,
v'al ha-nifla'ot v'al ha-milchamot she'asita la-avoteinu
ba-yamim ha-heim, ba-z'man ha-zeh.

Bi-ymei Matityahu ben Yochanan, Kohen Gadol
Chashmonai, u-vanav —
k'she'amdah malchut Yavan ha-resha'ah al
amcha Yisrael l'hashkicham Toratecha
u-l'ha'aviram me-chukei r'tzonecha —

v'atah, b'rachamecha ha-rabbim, amadata
lahem b'eit tzaratam: ravta et rivam,
danta et dinam, nakamta et nikmatam.
Masarta gibborim b'yad chalashim, v'rabbim
b'yad me'atim, u-teme'im b'yad tehorim,
u-r'sha'im b'yad tzaddikim, u-zeidim b'yad
oskei Toratecha. U'lecha asita shem gadol
v'kadosh b'olamecha, u-l'amcha Yisrael asita
t'shu'ah gedolah u-furkan ka-yom ha-zeh.

V'achar kein, ba'u vanecha l'dvir beitecha,
u-pinu et heichalecha, v'tiharu et mikdashecha,
v'hidliku neirot b'chatzrot kodshecha,
v'kav'u shmonat y'mei Chanukah eilu l'hodot
u-l'hallel l'shimcha ha-gadol.

For the miracles

For the miracles, and for the deliverance, and for the mighty deeds, and for the victories, and for the wonders and the battles which You performed for our ancestors in those days, at this season.

In the days of Mattathias, son of Yohanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons—when the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel, seeking to make them forget Your Torah and to turn them away from the statutes of Your will—

But You, in Your great mercy, stood by them in their time of trouble. You fought their battles, You judged their cause, You took vengeance for them. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of those who study Your Torah.

For Yourself You made a great and holy Name in Your world, and for Your people Israel You wrought a great deliverance and redemption, as it is this very day. Then Your children came into the inner chamber of Your house; they cleared out Your Temple, purified Your sanctuary, and kindled lights in the courtyards of Your holiness. They established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.

Sitting down to write about *Al HaNissim* ("For the Miracles") just two days after the release of 20 living hostages — held in the darkness of captivity for over two years — has been a profound exercise in witnessing how the words of an ancient text can echo across millennia.

Re-reading the prayer's familiar line, *"For the miracles, and for the deliverance, and for the mighty deeds, and for the victories, and for the wonders and the battles which You performed for our ancestors in those days, at this time,"* I feel its power anew. The words speak not only of distant history, but of the miracle we have just witnessed: 20 hostages walking on their own feet out of the inferno of Gaza.

The question of how and when we create liturgy — how we insert new prayers into the familiar thrum of daily worship — has occupied Jewish thinkers since the talmudic period, particularly regarding rabbinically-ordained holidays.

In Tractate Shabbat 24a, the Gemara asks:

> A dilemma was raised before the Sages: What is it to mention Hanukkah in Grace after Meals? Since it is merely an obligation by rabbinic law, do we not mention it? Or perhaps, due to publicity of the miracle, we mention it.

Eventually, out of a deep desire to acknowledge divine protection reflected in the stories of Hanukkah and Purim, the *Al HaNissim* prayer — with the same opening line but variations to suit each holiday — was inserted into both the *Amidah* and *Birkat HaMazon*, immediately following the blessings of gratitude (*Modim* and *Nodeh*, respectively). The text we recite today dates back to the geonic period (around the ninth century) and appears in the *siddurim* of Rabbis Amram and Saadiah Gaon.

As scholar Reuven Hammer observed:

> Each [*Al HaNissim*] commemorates the deliverance of Israel from its enemies under difficult circumstances. The miracles referred to are not supernatural interferences in nature, but rather God working through history. We experience the ability to overcome adversity as a divine act.

It is striking that in the *Al HaNissim* for Hanukkah, the beloved story of the small jar of oil that burned for eight days is absent. The focus instead is on the victory of the few against the many and the weak against the mighty, as well as on the rededication of the Temple — a symbol of our capacity to renew Jewish identity even under pressure to assimilate.

Equally significant is the phrase that closes the opening line: *"in those days, at this time."* It creates a continuum of past, present, and future, inviting us to see the wonders of deliverance not as isolated events but as part of an ongoing story. Through these rabbinic holidays that commemorate moments of peril and survival, we affirm the enduring miracle of Jewish resilience.

This impulse to mark collective deliverance continues in our own time. The rabbinic organization Beit Hillel composed a modern *Al HaNissim* for Israel's Independence Day, reflecting the wonder of the State's creation as part of that same continuum of divine partnership and human courage.

We Jews have a complicated relationship with memory. Remembering can be deeply grounding — or utterly overwhelming. Throughout the Jewish calendar, we are commanded to remember pivotal moments: the Exodus, Sinai, destruction, rededication, redemption. Each remembrance asks us to hold both grief and gratitude, loss and renewal. Perhaps that tension is precisely the point. The oscillation between destruction and redemption, mourning and celebration, draws us into the rhythm of our history while keeping us tethered to hope.

We are called to look back — but not to remain there. Our task is to carry memory forward, to transform it into courage and compassion, into the will to rebuild again and again.

The words *"in those days, at this time"* remind us that the story of our people has never truly ended. Each generation adds its own chapter of pain and of redemption. The 20 faces that emerged into the light from Gaza are part of that same story — fragile, miraculous, defiant proof that even in the deepest night, deliverance is possible.

May we never grow numb to the miracles that unfold before us, nor forget the faith and perseverance that sustain them. May our prayers — ancient and new — continue to give language to our gratitude, our grief, and our hope. And may we, like our ancestors, find the strength to sing *Al HaNissim* not only for what was, but for what, by God's grace and human courage, still can be.

Mizmor Shir: A Psalm for Hanukkah

Rabbi Leon Morris

מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר

מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר־חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד׃
אֲרוֹמִמְךָ ה׳ כִּי דִלִּיתָנִי
וְלֹא־שִׂמַּחְתָּ אֹיְבַי לִי׃
ה׳ אֱלֹהָי שִׁוַּעְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי׃
ה׳ הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי חִיִּיתַנִי
מיורדי־[מִיָּרְדִי־] בוֹר׃
זַמְּרוּ לַה׳ חֲסִידָיו וְהוֹדוּ לְזֵכֶר קָדְשׁוֹ׃
כִּי רֶגַע בְּאַפּוֹ חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ בָּעֶרֶב יָלִין
בֶּכִי וְלַבֹּקֶר רִנָּה׃
וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְשַׁלְוִי בַּל־אֶמּוֹט לְעוֹלָם׃
ה׳ בִּרְצוֹנְךָ הֶעֱמַדְתָּה לְהַרְרִי עֹז
הִסְתַּרְתָּ פָנֶיךָ הָיִיתִי נִבְהָל׃
אֵלֶיךָ ה׳ אֶקְרָא וְאֶל־אֲדֹנָי אֶתְחַנָּן׃
מַה־בֶּצַע בְּדָמִי בְּרִדְתִּי אֶל־שָׁחַת
הֲיוֹדְךָ עָפָר הֲיַגִּיד אֲמִתֶּךָ׃
שְׁמַע־ה׳ וְחָנֵּנִי ה׳ הֱיֵה־עֹזֵר לִי׃
הָפַכְתָּ מִסְפְּדִי לְמָחוֹל לִי פִּתַּחְתָּ שַׂקִּי
וַתְּאַזְּרֵנִי שִׂמְחָה׃
לְמַעַן יְזַמֶּרְךָ כָבוֹד וְלֹא יִדֹּם ה׳
אֱלֹהַי לְעוֹלָם אוֹדֶךָּ׃

Mizmor Shir

Mizmor shir chanukat ha-bayit l'David.
Aromimcha, A-donai, ki dilitani,
v'lo simachta oyvai li.
A-donai Elohai, shivati eilecha, va-tirpa'eini.
A-donai, he'eilita min She'ol nafshi, chiyyitani
mi-yordei vor.
Zamru l'A-donai chasidav, v'hodu l'zecher kodsho.
Ki rega b'apo, chayyim birtzono; ba-erev yalin
bechi, v'la-boker rinah.
Va'ani amarti v'shalvi, bal emot l'olam.
A-donai, birtzoncha he'emadta l'harri oz;
histar'ta panecha, hayiti nivhal.
Eilecha, A-donai, ekra, v'el A-donai etchanan.
Mah betza b'dami, b'ridti el shachat?
Hayodcha afar, hayagid amitecha?
Sh'ma, A-donai, v'chaneini; A-donai, heyeh ozer li.
Hafachta mispedi l'machol li, pitachta sakki
va-te'azreini simchah.
L'ma'an yezamercha kavod v'lo yidom; A-donai
Elohai, l'olam odeka.

A psalm, a song

A psalm, a song for the dedication of the House of David. I will exalt You, A-donai, for You have raised me up, and did not let my enemies rejoice over me. A-donai my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me. A-donai, You brought my soul up from Sheol; You gave me life from among those who go down to the pit. Sing to A-donai, you faithful ones, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger lasts but a moment, while His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning. When I felt secure, I said, "I shall never be shaken." A-donai, by Your favor You made my mountain stand strong; when You hid Your face, I was terrified. To You, A-donai, I called; to the Lord I pleaded for mercy: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it proclaim Your faithfulness?"
Hear, A-donai, and be gracious to me; A-donai, be my help. You turned my mourning into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and girded me with joy— so that my soul might sing praise to You and not be silent. A-donai my God, I will thank You forever.

At a time when Jewish life is again tested by uncertainty, it is worth recalling that Hanukkah has always been about more than oil and miracles. It is about rededication — about taking what has been broken or desecrated and making it whole again. In this sense, the festival's liturgical oddity — the recitation of Psalm 30 — carries a message as urgent today as it was in antiquity.

Across Jewish communities, Psalm 30 is recited in different ways over the eight days of Hanukkah. Some sing it each evening after lighting the menorah and chanting *HaNerot Halalu*. Others include it in the morning service. The earliest record of the custom appears in *Masechet Soferim*, one of the post-talmudic tractates:

Tractate Soferim 18:2

On Hanukkah [the psalm is] *I will exalt You, O Eternal [Ps. 30:2].*

מסכת סופרים י״ח:ב׳

בחנוכה (שם ל) ארוממך ה׳.

Interestingly, the psalm's only connection to Hanukkah lies in its superscription:

Psalms 30:1

A psalm, a song for the **dedication** of the House of David.

תהלים ל:א

מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר **חֲנֻכַּת** הַבַּיִת לְדָוִד.

The words *hanukkat habayit* — dedication of the House — presumably relate to the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. Like the Torah readings each day of Hanukkah which create a parallel between the dedication of the *Mishkan*, the portable sanctuary constructed in the wilderness, and Hanukkah, the recitation of this psalm attempts to create a parallel between the dedication of the Jerusalem Temple and its later rededication in the Hasmonean era (circa 165 BCE).

Yet that phrase "House of David" raises interpretive questions. David never built the Temple; his son Solomon did. Some commentators argue that David composed the psalm for Solomon's future dedication, while others suggest it referred to David's own private house, the royal palace. The rabbis bridged the gap through midrash. Midrash Tanhuma teaches that although Solomon built and dedicated the Temple, David's longing gave him equal claim to it:

Midrash Tanchuma (Buber, Nasso 20:1)

Solomon built the Temple... but because David devoted his soul to its building, the Holy One did not withhold his reward. Instead, the dedication was ascribed to him, as it is said: *A psalm, a song for the dedication of the House of David.*

מדרש תנחומא (בובר, נשא כ׳:א׳)

שלמה בנה בית המקדש... ובשביל שנתן דוד נפשו על בית המקדש שיבנה... לא קיפח הקב״ה את שכרו, אלא הכתיבו על שמו, שנאמר: *מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד.*

Here, dedication is not only about bricks and mortar but rather about yearning, about the heart's resolve to create space for God.

Masechet Soferim makes the link explicit:

Tractate Soferim 18:1

Whoever recites a biblical verse at its proper time is regarded as if he had built a new altar and offered a sacrifice upon it.

מסכת סופרים י״ח:א׳

שכל המזכיר פסוק בעונתו מעלה עליו כאילו בונה מזבח חדש ומקריב עליו קרבן.

To recite Psalm 30 on Hanukkah is thus to rededicate the Temple in our own generation. Each verse becomes an act of rebuilding, a way of bringing sacred presence back into the world.

The psalm itself speaks not of stones and altars, however, but of healing and mercy:

Psalms 30:3

O Lord my God, I cried out to You,
and You healed me.

תהלים ל:ג

ה׳ אֱלֹהַי, שִׁוַּעְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ
וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי

Perhaps this too ties Psalm 30 to Hanukkah. The holiday is not just about recovering a building but **about recovering purpose**. The psalm's linchpin — **הפכת מספדי למחול לי** *("You turned my mourning into dancing,"* Psalms 30:12) — mirrors the Jewish people's own story of despair and renewal in the second century BCE, and in our own day. What Hanukkah celebrates is not only survival but transformation. That is why Psalm 30 matters now. In its words, we hear not only David, Solomon, and the Maccabees, but also ourselves — our own need to turn despair into gratitude, our own responsibility to keep Jewish life alive and vital. When we recite it by the menorah's light or in the rhythm of morning prayer, we affirm that rededication is not a single historical event. It is the enduring work of every generation.

Sevivon: A Tale of Two Dreidels

Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy

סביבון סב סב סב	S'vivon Sov Sov Sov	Dreidel, spin, spin, spin
סְבִיבוֹן - סֹב סֹב סֹב, חֲנֻכָּה הוּא חַג טוֹב. חֲנֻכָּה הוּא חַג טוֹב, סְבִיבוֹן - סֹב סֹב סֹב. סֹב נָא, סֹב כֹּה וָכֹה, נֵס גָּדוֹל הָיָה פֹּה. נֵס גָּדוֹל הָיָה פֹּה, סֹב נָא, סֹב כֹּה וָכֹה.	*S'vivon — sov, sov, sov,* *Chanukah hu chag tov.* *Chanukah hu chag tov,* *S'vivon — sov, sov, sov.* *Sov na, sov koh va-choh,* *Nes gadol hayah poh.* *Nes gadol hayah poh,* *Sov na, sov koh va-choh.*	Dreidel, spin, spin, spin, Chanukah is a joyful time. Chanukah is a joyful time— Dreidel, spin, spin, spin. Spin now, spin here and there, A great miracle happened here. A great miracle happened here— Spin now, spin here and there.

More than latkes or jelly doughnuts, the humble dreidel (*sevivon*) embodies the twin peaks of fun and family that make Hanukkah such a beloved holiday. Not surprisingly, the dreidel stars in dozens of Hanukkah songs from a range of times, places, and languages. But like its many sides, the dreidel also teaches us several important aspects about the deeper meaning of Hanukkah.

Faith under Persecution

One way of looking at Hanukkah is that, at its core, it is a festival of spiritual resistance. The Book of Maccabees records the decrees of the Seleucid Greeks that outlawed circumcision, Shabbat observance, and Temple worship. Furthermore, when Greek officials demanded public pagan sacrifice, the priest Mattityahu cried out, *"God-fearers, follow me!"* (I Maccabees 2:28). His cry sparked not only a political uprising but an overall rebellion of conscience and refusal to surrender Jewish faith to Hellenistic culture.

The rabbis continued this theme. In the *Al HaNissim* prayer added to the *Amidah* and Grace after Meals, we recall that the Greeks sought *"lehashkicham Toratecha u-leha'aviram mechukei retzonecha* — to make us forget Your Torah and transgress Your laws." Hanukkah, then, is not merely about oil that burned miraculously for eight days, but about the endurance of Torah itself. Seen this way, the light of the menorah embodies the actions of a people who risked everything to keep the light of Torah alive.

The Dreidel of Defiance

In this spirit, the dreidel becomes more than a toy. According to a beloved legend first recorded in the late-nineteenth-century *Minhagei Yeshurun* (Avraham E. Hershovitz, c. 1890), Jewish children in the time of the Greeks would gather secretly to study Torah. When soldiers approached, they would pull out spinning tops and pretend to be playing. Like the menorah, the dreidel symbolizes both persecution and perseverance: beneath a game lay an act of courage.

Interestingly, this story emerged long after the Maccabean period, yet the legend endures because it expresses a deep truth. Sometimes Torah survives not through open confrontation but through faith, creative adaptation, and ferocious fidelity.

Between Particularism and Universalism: The Dreidel of Accomodation

But there is another way of looking at the dreidel, and more generally, at Hanukkah. The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 8a) associates the winter solstice with the very first human being. When Adam saw days growing shorter, he feared the world was returning to chaos. When he realized the days were lengthening again, he rejoiced and established an eight-day festival of light. In other words, the instinct to kindle light in darkness is as old as humanity itself.

Across the world, many cultures share mid-winter festivals of illumination, such as Christmas, Yule, and Kwanzaa. Our Hanukkah participates in that universal rhythm even as it remains rooted in Jewish memory.

Yet the impulse towards universalism carries its own set of dangers and challenges. Based on hints in the Books of Maccabees and especially Josephus, many modern historians understand the rebellion as primarily reflecting a struggle **within** the Jewish community over how far to integrate into the broader world. Some Jerusalemites wished to turn the Temple into a Greek-style gymnasium and to erase the marks of circumcision, reflecting an overall push towards universalism and assimilation. Antiochus simply sided with these urban assimilationists.

There are echoes of the tension between particularism and assimilation in the dreidel's medieval European origin. In the 16th–17th centuries, German and English versions of a popular gambling game called *teetotum* were played with a four-sided spinning top marked with Latin letters representing instructions: *T* (take all), *H* (half), *P* (put in), and *N* (nothing). Jews in northern Europe adopted the game and replaced the letters with Hebrew ones: נ, ג, ה, ש — and interpreted them as an acronym for *Nes Gadol Haya Sham*, "A great miracle happened there." And then in modern Israel, the final letter became פ, for *Po* — "here."

Thus, Jews adapted surrounding culture and added a twist of divine providence.

Spinning Truth

So what are we to make of these two dreidel tales of secret Torah study and cultural adaptation? Only one may be historically accurate, but both are spiritually true. Jewish history has always required both instincts: steadfast loyalty to Torah and openness to the world's wisdom. Balancing them is never easy.

In our own time, many Jews, especially young adults on campuses and beyond, have been pressured to choose between their Jewish identity and acceptance in the broader community. Many current Pardes students have come seeking Torah and fellowship after facing isolation and antisemitism for standing with Israel and the Jewish people, even as they affirmed values of human rights and non-violence. Their courage is its own *nes katan*, a small miracle. They are, in a sense, spinning both dreidels at once — refusing to hide their Jewish light, yet believing that light can illuminate the whole world. This Hanukkah, may we all be inspired to bring our unique flame into the shared darkness, until all creation shines with divine light.

Mi Yimalel:

Spiritual Inspiration in the Secular-Zionist Approach to Hanukkah

Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield

At its inception, Secular Zionism was more than a political movement. It sought to create a new, secular Jewish identity built around a self-sufficient Jewish people united by land, language, history, and culture. Some early Zionist thinkers believed that a God-centered, halakhic Judaism would hinder the human effort and self-reliance needed to create a new, independent Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

The secular-Zionist approach to the celebration of Hanukkah offers a rich example of this attempt to re-shape Jewish values and identity. "*Mi Yimalel*: Who Can Recount the Powerful Deeds of Israel?" — a song composed in Eretz Israel by Menashe Ravina in the 1930s for Hanukkah — serves as a powerful example of this conscious shift:

מי ימלל גבורות ישראל

מִי יְמַלֵּל גְּבוּרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל,
אוֹתָן מִי יִמְנֶה?
הֵן בְּכָל דּוֹר יָקוּם הַגִּבּוֹר
גּוֹאֵל הָעָם.
שְׁמַע!
בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בַּזְּמַן הַזֶּה
מַכַּבִּי מוֹשִׁיעַ וּפוֹדֶה,
וּבְיָמֵינוּ כָּל עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִתְאַחֵד, יָקוּם וְיִגְאַל.

Mi Yimalel G'vurot Yisrael

Mi yimalel g'vurot Yisrael,
otam mi yimneh?
Hen b'chol dor yakum ha-gibor,
go'el ha-am.
Shema!
Ba-yamim ha-heim, ba-z'man ha-zeh,
Maccabi moshia u'fodeh,
u-vi-yameinu kol am Yisrael
yit'ached, yakum v'yiga'el.

Who can recount the powerful deeds of Israel?

Who can recount the powerful deeds of Israel?
Who can count them?
In every age, a hero will rise up
And redeem the nation.
Listen!
In those days at this time
A Maccabee rescued and redeemed
In our days the entire people of Israel
Will unite, will rise up and redeem.

One cannot help but read this song as a type of midrash or polemic against the message found in Psalm 106, which asks "Who can describe the powerful deeds of **God**?" and which describes **God as the Redeemer and Savior of the Jewish people**. For Ravina and most secular Zionists, Hanukkah is not about the miracle of oil or about affirming God's miraculous intervention on behalf of the Jewish people. For them, Hanukkah celebrates the bravery and strength of the Maccabees who succeeded in defeating the Greeks and restoring Jewish independence. The *Shma* (Listen!) that we need to recite is not about the Oneness of God or about accepting God's kingship; **it is about pronouncing our faith in the ability of the Jewish people to redeem themselves**. The deliberate, updated use of religious language and the application of religious themes like redemption and savior to human agency transformed Hanukkah from an affirmation of Divine intervention into a symbol of Jewish self-reliance and a statement about our capacity to determine our future for ourselves.

Now, must the traditional believer choose between the religious and secular Hanukkahs, or can the secular-Zionist approach add another layer to the traditional message without cancelling it out? I believe that Maimonides' positions on exile, politics, and Divine Providence offer a path of integration of these two different viewpoints, and generate an interpretation of Hanukkah that *includes* the secular approach.

As a student of Aristotle, Maimonides believed that humans are political animals, and that

political structure is about more than just authority. Rather, he said, values, behavioral norms, and virtues are all profoundly influenced by the political structure of society. Thus, he felt that the Jewish people living as minorities under the rule of others had a profoundly negative effect on Judaism and on the spiritual and cultural values of Jews.

In the Guide to the Perplexed (1:71 and 2:11), he wrote that living in exile as an oppressed minority stripped us of our tradition of philosophical wisdom, and denied us the opportunity to create the ideal societal conditions for perfecting our character, instilling our values, and fulfilling our ultimate purpose by pursuing knowledge of God. Our dispersion also resulted in a weakening of halachic tradition and of shared practice across diverse Jewish communities.

Additionally, Maimonides' understanding of Divine Providence was not about God constantly changing the laws of nature and intervening in human affairs. For him, Divine Providence works when humans exercise their abilities to achieve the highest levels of wisdom God gives them access to, and use this wisdom to make good choices.

It is no surprise, then, that when introducing the Laws of Hanukkah in the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides first affirmed the more than 200 years of sovereignty the Hasmoneans brought the Jewish people. He was no doubt aware that many of those kings were not loyal to the covenant! Even so, Maimonides believed that Jewish sovereignty opened up the possibility for the Jewish people to create a society that pushes us as individuals and as a people to reach our highest human potential. He did not deny the miracle of oil (he described it in the second paragraph of the Laws of Hanukkah), but chose to mention the Hasmoneans' initiative and courage first. In his worldview, they created an opportunity for complete redemption.

I cannot claim to know how Maimonides would have reacted to Secular Zionism if he were alive today. I do believe that he would have valued their understanding that the ethical and spiritual goals of the Jewish people require a societal platform: one which Jews can shape and for which they can take responsibility. I believe he would have recited **both** Psalm 106 **and** Ravina's "Who can Recount." I think that on Hanukkah, he would have been filled with gratitude toward God for endowing us with the wisdom, vision, and capacity for seeking redemption, and toward the Jewish people for trying to bring it about.

Shnei Zeitim:
And When We Should Not Be Like the Maccabees

Isaac Gantwerk Mayer (PEP cohort 22)

שני זיתים

ר׳ שלמה אבן גבירול

שְׁנֵי זֵיתִים נִכְרָתִים בְּגַן נָעוּל יַצְהִירוּ
לְרֹאשׁ קְהָתִי וְאֶפְרָתִי שְׁתֵּי עֲטָרוֹת יַכְתִּירוּ
מוּל מְנוֹרָה הַטְּהוֹרָה כְּמוֹ נֵרוֹת יַזְהִירוּ
הֵן בְּמַשְׂאֵת כָּל אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ יַעֲזֹרוּ
הֵן בְּמַחֲנֶה אֶל מוּל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יָאִירוּ

לְבֶן פֹּרָת וְצִיץ יִקְרַת אֲשֶׁר הָיָה כְּצִיץ נוֹבֵל
וְלַנִּמְשָׁח אֲשֶׁר הוּשַׁח כְּמוֹ אָנִיָּה בְּלִי חוֹבֵל
זְכֹר מַרְאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאָה זְכַרְיָהוּ בְּעִיר בָּבֶל
כְּמוֹ זְכַרְתָּם וְהוֹשַׁעְתָּם אָזַי עַל יַד זְרֻבָּבֶל
זְכֹר זַרְעָם לְהוֹשִׁיעָם בְּעֵת תִּקְרָא שְׁנַת יוֹבֵל
וְשִׂים אוֹתָם מְקוֹם אֲבוֹתָם הֱיוֹת מוֹשְׁלִים בְּכָל תֵּבֵל
וּמֵעַל יַד אִישׁ צַיָּד טַבַּעְתָּם יָסִירוּ
הֵן בְּמַחֲנֶה אֶל מוּל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יָאִירוּ

מַמְלָכָה מְמֻשָּׁכָה לְעִיר צִיּוֹן תְּשִׁיבֶנָּה
וּבַת כְּבוּדָּה בְּרֹב עֲבָדָה לְבֵית אִמָּהּ תְּבִיאֶנָּה
וְהַגְּבִירָה וְהַצְּפִירָה לְרֹאשׁ דּוֹדָהּ תְּקִימֶנָּה
וּמִצְנֶפֶת מְעֻלֶּפֶת לְרֹאשׁ אַהֲרֹן תְּשִׂימֶנָּה
וְהַתָּמִיד אָזַי תַּעֲמִיד וְהַמִּנְחָה תְּרִימֶנָּה
וְהַמֶּרְקָח אֲשֶׁר לֻקַּח וְלֹא רְאִיתִיו עַד הֵנָּה
וְהַקְּטֹרֶת מְקֻטֶּרֶת לְאַהֲרֹן יַקְטִירֶנָּה
וְהַנֵּרוֹת בִּמְנוֹרוֹת בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן יַבְעִירוּ
הֵן בְּמַחֲנֶה אֶל מוּל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יָאִירוּ

הַנְּכֵאָה וְהַצְּמֵאָה אֲשֶׁר תָּמִיד לְךָ תֵּילִיל,
סְמוֹךְ יָדָהּ בְּבֶן דּוֹדָהּ אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ חַכְלִיל
וְהַכְנִיסֵם לְגַן בֹּשֶׂם וְחָפָתָם בְּהוֹד תַּכְלִיל
וְהוֹלִיכֵם וְהַמְלִיכֵם בְּהַר צִיּוֹן וְהַגָּלִיל
וְחֹק יָשָׁר אָזַי יוּשַׁר עֲלֵי נֵבֶל וְגַם חָלִיל
זְעֹם עֹזְבֵי שִׁמְךָ וְאֹהֲבֵי חֲזוֹן שֶׁקֶר וְשָׁוְא וֶאֱלִיל
וְעַם פְּרוּכִים יִהְיוּ בְרוּכִים כָּל רֹאֵיהֶם יַכִּירוּ
הֵן בְּמַחֲנֶה אֶל מוּל פְּנֵי הַמְּנוֹרָה יָאִירוּ

Shnei Zeitim

Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol

Shnei zeitim nikhratim b'gan na'ul yatzhiru,
l'rosh Kehati v'Efrati shtei atarot yaktiru.
Mul menorah ha-t'horah k'mo neirot yazhiru,
hen b'mas'et kol ish et re'eihu ya'azoru,
hen b'machaneh el mul p'nei ha-menorah ya'iru.

L'ven porat v'tzitz yikrat asher hayah k'tzitz novel,
v'la-nimshach asher hushach k'mo oniyah bli chovel.
Z'chor mar'eh asher ra'ah Zekharyahu b'ir Bavel,
k'mo z'chartam v'hoshatam azai al yad Z'rubavel.
Z'chor zar'am l'hoshi'am b'eit tikra sh'nat yovel,
v'sim otam m'kom avotam heyot moshlim b'chol tevel,
u-me'al yad ish tzayad tab'atam yasiru,
hen b'machaneh el mul p'nei ha-menorah ya'iru.

Mamlachah m'mushachah l'ir Tziyon t'shivenah,
u-vat kevudah b'rav avodah l'veit imah t'vienah.
V'ha-gevirah v'ha-tzefirah l'rosh dodah takimennah,
u-mitznefet me'ulefet l'rosh Aharon tasimennah.
V'ha-tamid azai ta'amid, v'ha-minchah t'rimennah,
v'ha-merkach asher lukkach v'lo r'itihu ad hennah,
v'ha-ketoret m'kutéret l'Aharon yak'tirennah,
v'ha-neirot b'menorot b'nei Aharon yav'iru,
hen b'machaneh el mul p'nei ha-menorah ya'iru.

Ha-n'che'ah v'ha-tzme'ah asher tamid lecha teilil,
smokh yada b'ven dodah asher nikra sh'mo Chakhlil.
V'ha-khnisem l'gan bosem v'chupatam b'hod takhlil,
v'ho'lichem v'hamlicham b'har Tziyon v'ha-Galil.
V'chok yashar azai yushar alai nevel v'gam chalil,
z'om ozvei sh'mecha v'ohavei chazon sheker v'shav v'elil.
V'am pruchim yihyu bruchim, kol ro'ehem yakiru,
hen b'machaneh el mul p'nei ha-menorah ya'iru.

Two Olives Trees

Two olive trees, cut and set in a locked garden, shall shine forth, crowning with twin diadems the heads of the Kohathite and the Ephrathite. Opposite the pure menorah they gleam like lights; each one bears his fellow's burden, together they stand, illumining the camp before the face of the menorah.

For the noble son, the blossom once withered, and for the anointed one, cast adrift like a rudderless ship— remember the vision that Zechariah beheld in Babylon, as you remembered them and saved them then by the hand of Zerubbabel. Remember their seed to redeem them at the time you proclaim the jubilee year. Restore them to their fathers' place, to rule again over all the earth, and remove the hunter's snare from their hands— for they shall shine before the menorah once more.

A kingdom long delayed you will return to the city of Zion. The honored daughter, with great devotion, will bring her offering to her mother's house. The noble lady and the crowned one shall rise before her beloved; a turban, adorned in splendor, will you place upon Aaron's head. The continual offering shall again be offered, the meal offering shall be lifted up, the sacred anointing oil prepared as of old, and the incense shall be burned for aaron. The lamps in their menorahs shall the sons of Aaron rekindle— for they shall shine before the menorah once more.

The stricken and the thirsty one, who ever yearns for you—sustain her hand in that of her kinsman called chakhlil (radiant one). Bring them into the garden of fragrance, beneath a canopy of beauty and joy. Lead them, and crown them, upon Mount Zion and the Galilee. Then shall the righteous decree be restored with harp and flute resounding. Pour out wrath on those who forsake your name, who love false visions, vanity, and idols; but the scattered people shall be blessed— all who see them shall recognize them. For they shall shine before the menorah once more.

What, specifically, do we celebrate on Hanukkah? That's a hard question to answer. The rabbis say (in Shabbat 21b) that we celebrate the miracle of the oil. The holiday's name itself suggests that we celebrate the rededication of the Temple. Some midrashim suggest we are even celebrating the days getting longer again after the winter solstice. But *who* do we celebrate on Hanukkah? That seems like a much easier question to answer. Ask any preschooler and they'll tell you — the heroes of the Hanukkah story are the Maccabees! These brave heroes, the sons of Matityahu the priest, fought against the Greek oppressors and saved the Jewish people from destruction at the hands of the mad king Antiochus. Of course we're celebrating their zeal and bravery on this holiday!

But what, in Judaism, is ever quite that simple? A *piyyut* recited as a *meorah* (incorporated into the end of the first blessing of the Shema liturgy) for the Shabbat of Hanukkah in some Ashkenazi customs exemplifies the complexity of the Maccabees and their Hasmonean dynasty. This *piyyut*, called *Shnei Zeitim*, was written by the great Spanish *paytan* and philosopher Shlomo ibn Gabirol.

One of the first things you may notice when looking at the text of *Shnei Zeitim* is that it does not mention Hanukkah directly at all. It is a poetic and allegorical interpretation of the vision of the menorah found in the *haftarah* of Shabbat Hanukkah (Zechariah 2:14-4:7).

> And he [the angel] said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I saw, and look, a menorah all of gold, and its bowl atop it, and seven lights on it, and seven pipes for the lamps that are atop it. And two olive branches are on it, one to the right of the bowl and one to its left." (Zechariah 4:2–3)

Now, anything with as many specific details as Zechariah's menorah is like catnip to the masters of allegory, a category to which Shlomo ibn Gabirol certainly belongs. Following Zechariah's explanation of the two olive branches — the source of the name of the *piyyut* — as referring to "the two anointed ones" (Zechariah 4:14), ibn Gabirol uses them to represent the priestly Aaronide and royal Davidide lines:

> Two olive trees, cut and set in a locked garden, shall shine forth, crowning with twin diadems: the heads of the Kohathite and the Ephrathite.
>
> Opposite the pure Menorah they gleam like lights; each one bears his fellow's burden, together they stand, illumining the camp before the face of the Menorah.

The Kohathites, the children of Kehat, are the division of the Levites to which Aaron and his descendants belong. Meanwhile, the term "Ephrathites" refers to multiple noble groups, among which is the Davidic line. This is in keeping with the entire *haftarah*, which alternates between discussions of the high priest Joshua and the Davidide prince Zerubbavel. Both, Zechariah suggests, are necessary for the rededication — Joshua will be given the seven-eyed foundation stone (Zechariah 3:9) and Zerubbavel will place it (Zechariah 4:7, 10).

So where do the Maccabee-Hasmoneans come in?

In 2021, writing for The Lehrhaus, R. Yitzhak Szyf pointed out a fascinatingly subversive aspect of *Shnei Zeitim* as a Hanukkah *piyyut*. The cardinal sin of the Hasmoneans, according to the rabbis, was that they were a priestly family that seized the kingship for themselves. The Ramban writes in his commentary on Genesis 49:10:

> This was the punishment of the Hasmoneans, who ruled in the Second Temple era. Though they were exceedingly righteous, and if it were not for them the Torah and commandments would have been forgotten from Israel, despite all this they were punished with a great punishment, for the four righteous sons of the first Hasmonean reigned one after the other… The whole line of Matityahu the righteous Hasmonean

only perished since they reigned as kings, although they were not of the line of Judah or the house of David.

So by reciting this *piyyut*, this interpretation suggests, we are, subtextually, criticizing the Hasmoneans themselves!

Currently, in both of the nations of which I am a citizen — the United States and Israel — separation of political powers is a pressing issue. Political leaders across the spectrum have tried to stretch the bonds of their power, taking up authorities not vested to them and ruling as single executives rather than as part of a whole. This sort of unified rule can be quite appealing when the different branches of government seem constantly at odds with each other. But I fear that that way lies abuse of power, corruption, and downfall.

In the end, a brutal civil war between two brothers, both who wanted the sole position of priest-king, led to the ultimate snuffing out of the Hasmonean line. For our people to be happy, healthy, and safe, we must avoid the same fate. Instead, may we take inspiration from the imagery of *Shnei Zeitim*, the twin olive branches, rooted separately, not entangled as one, yet still working together, each relying on each other to keep the flame of continuity lit.

Oyfn Pripetchik:
Isn't a Hanukkah Song. But It Could Be.

Aviva Lauer

אויפֿן פריפּעטשיק

אויפן פריפעטשיק ברענט א פייערל
און אין שטוב איז הייס,
און דער רבי לערנט קליינע קינדערלעך
דעם אלף־בית.

זעט זשע, קינדערלעך, געדענקט זשע טייערע,
וואס איר לערנט דא;
זאגט זשע נאך א מאל, און טאקע נאך א מאל:
קמץ־אלף: אָ!

לערנט, קינדער, מיט גרויס חשק,
אזוי זאג איך אייך אן;
ווער ס'וועט גיכער פון אייך קענען עברי,
דער באקומט א פאן.

לערנט, קינדער, האט נישט מורא,
יעדער אנהייב איז שווער;
גליקלעך דער וואס האט געלערנט תורה,
צי דארף א מענטש נאך מער?

איר וועט, קינדער, עלטער ווערן,
וועט איר אליין פארשטיין,
וויפל אין די אותיות ליגן טרערן
און וויפל געוויין.

אז איר וועט, קינדער, דעם גלות שלעפן,
אויסגעמוטשעט זיין,
זאלט איר פון די אותיות כוח שעפן,
קוקט אין זיי אריין.

Oyfn Pripetshik

Oyfn pripetshik brent a fayerl,
un in shtub iz heys.
Un der rebe lernt kleyne kinderlekh
dem alef-beys.

Zet zhe, kinderlekh, gedenkt zhe, tayere,
vos ir lernt do.
Zogt zhe nokh a mol, un take nokh a mol:
Komets-alef — a!

Lernt, kinder, mit groys kheshek,
azoy zog ikh aykh on;
ver s'vet gikher fun aykh kenen ivri,
der bakumt a fan.

Lernt, kinder, hot nisht moyre,
Yeder onheyb iz shver;
Gliklekh der vos hot gelernt toyre,
Tsi darf der mentsh nokh mer?

Ir vet, kinder, elter vern,
vet ir aleyn farshteyn,
vifl in di oysyes lign trern,
un vifl geveyn.

Az ir vet, kinder, dem golus shlepn,
oysgemutshet zayn,
zolt ir fun di oysyes koyekh shepn —
kukt in zey arayn!

On the hearth a little fire burns

On the hearth a little fire burns,
and in the room it's warm.
And the teacher teaches the little children
their alef-beys.

See, dear children, remember well
what you learn here.
Say it once again, and truly yet again:
Komets-alef — ah!

Learn, children, with great enthusiasm.
So I instruct you;
He among you who learns Hebrew pronunciation
faster -He will receive a flag.

Study, children,
Do not be afraid,
Every beginning is hard.
Happy is one who learns Torah,
Does a person need anything more than that?

Children, when you will grow older
you will understand
how many tears are contained in these letters,
and how much weeping.

Children, when you bear the burden of exile
and are completely worn out,
may you draw strength from these letters.
Look to them!

In Eastern Europe, at Hanukkah time, it is very cold outside. Or so I'm told. The image of the *melamed* teaching his little students the *aleph-bet*, warmed by the hearth fire, is cozy and comforting — it makes me want to be there with them, snug and safe, listening to the *kinderlach* repeating their letters over and over until they get them just right.

So *Oyfn Pripetchik*, while not technically a Hanukkah song, evokes a strong Hanukkah vibe. Warmth vanquishing cold at the coldest time of the year. Light vanquishing darkness during the darkest time of the year. Jewish learning vanquishing assimilation at all times of the year.

Perhaps, though, one might draw an even stronger connection between Hanukkah and this popular song, written by Mark M. Warshawsky in the late 19th century, and published with the help of Sholom Aleichem in 1901 in a collection of Warshawsky's songs called *Yiddishe Folkslider*. Perhaps the letters of the Hebrew alphabet depicted in the song might be understood as more than just letters.

If you've ever seen the family-friendly animated film "Lights" from 1984, you'll immediately

identify the trope of Hebrew letters as metaphor for Jewish learning and daily living, which the invasive Hellenist alphabet seeks to destroy and replace. Our letters are lights that dance and shine and illuminate Jewish life, while the Greek letters are heavy, materialistic, metallic clunkers that come to extinguish our unique Jewish identity.

And indeed, this metaphor is not a new one: the Bible itself tells us in Proverbs 6:23 that a *"mitzvah is a candle; the Torah is light."*

The film and its allegorical rendering echo the Hanukkah story as Maimonides tells it in his Mishneh Torah, Laws of Megillah and Hanukkah 3:1:

> During the period of the second Temple, when the Greek kings were in power, they proclaimed decrees against the Jewish people, canceling their religion and forbidding them to study the Torah or to perform the mitzvot.

What we faced at that time was nothing less than religious and spiritual annihilation. Torah was canceled. Mitzvot were canceled. Jewish identity — our way of being and understanding who we are — was canceled by the invading empire.

So when the Talmud (Shabbat 21b) explains the miracle of the oil — that one undefiled container of oil was found and kept the Temple menorah burning for eight days — **perhaps we might also hear that narrative as metaphor**.

What if the oil's light and warmth represent Torah and mitzvot themselves — miraculously preserved, passed on, and rekindled when all seemed lost? What if each year, for more than 2,100 years now, Jews around the world light Hanukkah candles not literally to remember a military victory or a miracle of oil, but to celebrate the survival of our learning, our practices, our very identity?

With the help of the Maccabees, God ensured that Torah and mitzvot were not extinguished. The letters and lights of Jewish life rose again, illuminating the long darkness of exile and sustaining generations to come. Perhaps that is the deepest miracle of Hanukkah: that our true, unique Jewish selfhood endured.

And this, too, is the message of *Oyfn Pripetchik*. Its lyrics remind us:

"Study, children, Do not be afraid,
Every beginning is hard.
Happy is one who learns Torah,
Does a person need anything more than that?

Children, when you will grow older
you will understand
how many tears are contained in these letters,
and how much weeping.

Children, when you bear the burden of exile
and are completely worn out,
may you draw strength from these letters.
Look to them!"

So on this year's Hanukkah, as you kindle your hanukkiah's lights, consider what makes you uniquely Jewish: What rituals do you love to do? What mitzvot do you feel bound to? What Jewish value concepts do you hold dear? What makes you happy to be Jewish and what gives you a sense of responsibility? What events in Jewish history make you weep, either tears of joy or tears of pain? Which letter of the *aleph-bet* is your special letter, and what will you do with it with your time on this earth?