**Message from the Rosh Yeshiva,**

**Rabbi Yitzchak Sheilat**

ב"ה

Dear alumni and all friends of the Yeshiva, wherever they may be,

May Hashem be with you—

We are still basking under the marvelous impression created by the Yeshiva’s fundraising campaign, which exceeded all expectations by dint of your mobilization and devotion, your love and esteem. We surely know that this success requires us to pledge even more strength to the Torah, to develop the Yeshiva and enable it to grow from the inside, and to further strengthen the connection of all of our alumni and friends, as well as many additional communities, to the Yeshiva’s teachings, ways, and values. We hope and pray that Hashem will help us bring this task, in which your share is large and powerful, to successful fruition.

We are verging on Hanukka, days of struggle between clashing cultures: the culture and Torah of Israel against that of “villainous Greece.” Was the attitude of our rabbis toward the Greek culture really one of absolute dismissal? We learned in the Mishna (Megilla 9b) that it is permissible to translate the Torah into Greek, and the Talmud explains: “Scripture says: ‘May God extend Yefet’s beauty and may it dwell in the tents of Shem’” (Gen. 9:27), to wit: the world of wisdom and science, art and aesthetics, the profane world of ancient Greece—the beauty of Yefet—is worthy of dwelling in the tents of Shem. This is so, however, when it connects with sanctity and the Torah. In contrast, when Yefet’s beauty becomes licentiousness and debauchery, idolatry and impurity, as it did in the days of Antiochus—then it becomes “villainous Greece” that has to be fought and defeated. As for what it means today … let us go out and learn.

With immense gratitude and appreciation,

Yitzchak Sheilat

**National Fraternity
Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinowitz, Rosh Yeshiva**

In Parshat Mi-Ketz, which is read on Hanukka, we learn about two parallel trials and tests:

On the one hand, Joseph is put to the test. When his brothers came to Egypt, “As soon as Joseph saw [them], he recognized them but pretended to be a stranger” (Gen. 42:7). He was only pretending, of course. Had he truly been a stranger, he would have been an assimilated Egyptian, the brothers would have starved to death, and the Jewish people would not have come into being. Joseph faced a difficult trial: “Then Joseph remembered the dreams that he dreamed about them” (Gen. 42:9), their hostility toward him, and his own anguish as he pleaded with them to no avail. But he passed the test and did not allow vengeance to dictate his reply. He did not repudiate his fraternal responsibility; instead, he met their every need.

On the other hand, Joseph put his brothers to the test: “With this will you be tested….” (Gen. 42:15). Joseph intended to create a situation in which his brothers would feel threatened on Benjamin’s account. Thus he would see whether they would abandon Benjamin as they had abandoned him years ago—or not. Would they limit their commitment to the safety of the majority only, or would they now realize that if the minority isn’t safe, neither will be the majority?

It was a very risky plan of action, but Joseph saw clearly that if his brothers failed the test—if they betrayed Benjamin and sacrificed him just to save their own skin—there was no hope for such people to be the builders of an Eternal People.

Before, they failed by abandoning Joseph; if they failed once more—they would never rise again. After all, an essential condition for the nation’s existence is each individual’s responsibility for the well-being of all, without exception. All Jews are each other’s guarantors. Only those fit to meet this condition deserve to be called “Israel.”

So it was in the time of the villainous King Antiochus, when several Hellenizers managed to work their way into the Greek aristocracy. They sneered contemptuously at the primitive Jews who continue to cling to their Torah and their faith, thus endangering the elite that wished to integrate into the region’s Hellenistic culture. They were the first to bring up the idea of a “new Middle East,” in which comprehensive peace would reign if only the Jewish people would disavow the oneness of G-d. It was with their help that the Temple Mount came under Greek control.

The Hasmoneans faced a twofold trial. They had not only to wage war against the Greeks but also to bring the Hellenizing Jews back in repentance. Their success was also twofold: The Sages established, in the wording of the “‘Al ha-Nissim” prayer: “You took up their cause, You adjudicated their claim … and You made for Yourself a great and holy name in Your world.” The Maccabis’ triumph over the nation’s external enemy resonated in the world over. Furthermore, “for Your People Israel did You make a great victory and salvation to this day”—a momentous internal reply to the Jewish people, one that has assured our existence ever since.

The great salvation was in their having managed to unite the entire People Israel, both those firmly committed to the Torah and those thirsting for Greece. All returned to their Source; all basked in the luminescence of the Temple.

May it be Hashem’s will that we will be as privileged in our days as they were in theirs.

**The Hasmonean and His Sons**

**Rabbi Haim Sabato, Rosh Yeshiva**

In the “‘Al ha-Nissim prayer,” the Sages established the following wording: “In the days of Mattityahu the son of Yohanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons…” What is the meaning of this peculiar expression, “the Hasmonean and his sons?” Obviously, it reflects the fact that the victory of Hanukka was achieved at the hands of Mattityahu and his valorous male offspring. Why, however, did this have to be emphasized?

The older generation has much life-experience and wisdom but also displays a natural tendency to conservatism. The young generation, in contrast, has youthful passion that leads to rebellion against convention and furious movement toward change and struggle. When the older generation has sole control, moderacy in decision-making and wisdom of life are preserved but the propulsive passion of youth is missing. The victory of youth, in contrast, brings on revolutionism and rebellion; these, however, may spiral out of control and cause all previous values to collapse.

Thus writes the *Meshech Chochma* in his commentary on Leviticus 26:

When Israel rests among the nations, its Torah and its profundity blossom and grow, and its offspring form a mighty mass, separate from their parents, because so one desires: When the latest [generation] establishes something new, it introduces additional courage that the old generation no longer has. This is part of the science of man, which comes from a place where all is human and of experience. With this, the latest [generation] separates itself and grows bolder, as we observe in every generation. Not so is Hashem’s heaven-sent law, which does not trace its origins to the soil of the earth.

Had this been so in Eretz Israel in bygone times, they should have separated in order to repair the nation’s faults, each in accordance with its own generation. Thus the great Bet Din could have struck down its predecessor’s words. And as the exegesis of Thirteen Qualities has taught, even a junior court may publicize what it sees fit …. Furthermore, there was always a spiritual, divine manifestation at hand. In the First Temple, imbued with the [Holy] Spirit, there were prophets and offspring of prophets, and an assembly of those with wisdom and purity that were rendered fit for this…. Even in the Second Temple, however, they said that there the Holy Spirit was drawn in and they were always protected by divine light ….

Such is not the case in exile. There the Torah-learning community and assembly has diminished, for which reason no Bet Din has the authority to make any innovation …. There is neither seer nor prophet, and an iron barrier separates the People Israel from its Father in heaven…. Such a generation cannot add anything, [cannot] break ranks with its forebears!

What does a person who wishes to stand apart and innovate do? He criticizes with false reasoning that which our forefathers bequeathed and conjectures novelties, forgetting what befell his nation as it wandered in the sea of hardships, no matter what. Let a little time pass and he will come back and say “Our fathers inherited a falsehood” and, in general, the Jew will forget his origins and be considered a newly born citizen. He will cease to study his law, learn languages that are not his, appropriate vulgarity and ignore soundness, confuse Berlin for Jerusalem, and embrace the doings of the vulgar among them and not those of the sound among them. “Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not find delight as the nations do” (Hosea 9:1).

For then a tumult and a storm will come. It will tear him away as a branch is torn from its trunk and it will place him among a distant nation whose language he has not learned, and he will know that he is a sojourner. His language is our Holy Tongue; foreign languages are like clothing that one changes. His origin is the body of Israel and his consolations are those given by Hashem’s prophets, who prophesied the Davidic reign in the End of Days. As he is hurtled about, he will forget his Torah and its depth and profundity. There he will have a brief respite and awaken with a holy passion. His offspring will be more courageous than he and his young will become a mighty force in Hashem’s Torah.

Victory is attained only when the intellectual strength and the wisdom of old age combine with the fervor of youth. Only such a blend can make sure that the elders’ sagacity will not induce paralysis due to conservatism while keeping the fire of youth from bringing about far-reaching changes that would topple the entire edifice brick by brick.

This blend was indeed achieved at Hanukka; it is this that assured the victory—the perfect combination of Mattityahu the elder, who strictly upheld the tradition of the Patriarchs, and the revolutionary passion of the young, who could not tolerate the rulers’ tyranny.

**Answering the Hellenizers—Then and Now**

**Rabbi Elisha Aviner, Head of the Kollel**

Hanukka is undergirded by the Divine miracle of the triumph of the Hasmoneans, the few and the weak, over the great and powerful Greek empire. The Hasmoneans hoisted the banner of the uprising and trounced the Greeks on the battlefield. The Greek occupation, however, began not with the travels of Antiochus Epiphanes but 150 years earlier, with the conquests of Alexander the Great. The essence of his conquest was cultural. Hellenization spread in all corners of Eretz Israel. A Greek gymnasium was established in Jerusalem and Greek ways of life rose to dominance on the country’s Jewish scene.

How did the Jewish Sages respond to the phenomenon of Hellenization? Was the Hasmoneans’ difficult military struggle against the Greeks enough for them? Is military struggle an effective response to a cultural influence?

One cannot categorically rule out such a possibility. Instead of investing vast resources in stanching the dire effects of the evil, it may be better to banish its foci altogether, as in “Purge the evil from amongst you” (Deut. 17: 7). When spiritual poison is being spread, we need to act at two levels: (a) give the nation spiritual reinforcement in order to inure it to the toxin, and (b) move vigorously to eliminate the source of the poison. That’s how a modern society behaves in its war on drugs: it disseminates information in order to forestall drug use and, concurrently, uses law enforcement to resist the importation of drugs and attempts to destroy the crops from which the addictive substances are produced.

So should one understand the Hasmonean war. It contributed not only at the political and military levels but also at the cultural one. The Hasmoneans’ victory damaged the infrastructure of Hellenization in Eretz Israel, which relied on the Greeks’ physical presence in the country.

But we ask again: Is this enough? Did the Sages of the Hasmoneans’ generation content themselves with military war against the foreign occupier, or did they also act on the level of information and education? To answer this question, first we must determine who the sages active at that time were.

One midrash (*Bereshet Rabbah*, Toledot 65) recounts Yakim of Tserurot, who leads his uncle. Yose the son of Yoezer of Tsereda, to crucifixion (the accepted method of execution in Greek and Roman days). On the way, Yakim mocks his uncle and preens about the class differences that exist between them: He rides a dignified steed while his uncle rides a horse that is leading him to execution. Some believe that Yakim of Tserurot is none other than Alkimos, an important Hellenizer. The Books of the Maccabis report that Alkimos acted hand-in-hand with the Seleucids, fought against Judah Maccabi, and executed dozens of pious Jews. By implication, Yose the son of Yoezer of Tsereda, who was executed by his nephew, Alkimos, and his friend Yose the son of Yohanan of Jerusalem belonged to the Hasmoneans’ generation.

It is not a wild conjecture to say that the dicta of Yose the son of Yoezer and Yose the son of Yohanan in Pirkei Avot 1:4–5 reflect something of the spirit of that time. They offer an educational response to the spiritual crisis that the spread of Hellenization brought upon Jewish society. What did they say?

Yose the son of Yoezer of Tsreda said: Let your home be a meeting place for the wise; grovel in the soil of their feet, and drink thirstily of their words.

Yose the son of Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your home be wide open, let the poor be members of your household, and do not engage in excessive conversation with a woman.

What the two statements have in common is that both concern themselves with the home: “Let your home be….” Why is this so? It is because evil winds, Greek winds, were blowing outside the home. By coping with them, one can return to one’s home and rehabilitate it—and only then head out and boldly and courageously. Before one copes with the evil spirits outside that aspire to conquer the social space, one needs to invest in the spiritual rehabilitation of the interior, the home. Home is the cornerstone, the point of departure, the basic building block.

Thus, it is no wonder that the underlying halakhic definition of the commandment of Hanukka has to do with the home:

The rabbis said: The commandment of Hanukka is [to light] one candle for a man and his home (Shabbat 21b).

The commandment of candle-lighting belongs to the home, and for good reason: To attain a spiritual victory, one must converge into one’s home and rehabilitate it. As long as the wind is gusting mightily, endangering anyone who steps outside, “Place it on the table and this suffices” (ibid.). After we amass enough power, we are told, “Place it at the entrance of your home, on the outside” (ibid.)

How does one purify and sanctify one’s home? Yose the son of Yoezer and Yose the son of Yohanan point in two different directions. The first Yose stresses Torah study and adherence to Torah scholars. The second emphasizes kindness and modesty. These are the fundamentals of the Jewish home.

They have not changed since then. When they are absent, the foundations of the home are undermined and the breeze outside may sweep away anyone who steps out. Some of the problems that afflict youth today originate in the weakness of the home. The modern home is an economic empire—spacious, expensively maintained, and equipped with every technological innovation that might enhance its tenants’ well-being. Lacking, however, are solid spiritual foundations: Torah study, acts of kindness, and modesty (the very fundamentals of the home that Yose the son of Yoezer and Yose the son of Yohanan mention). Paucity of Torah, dearth of acts of kindness, and a large measure of immodesty (chiefly due to the poverty and vulgarity of the communication media) leave their imprints on the young and make them susceptible to foreign breezes.

By additional study of the Mishna, we find that the three basic guidelines mentioned in it form a direct response to Hellenization: (a) study the Torah’s wisdom extensively as a counterweight to the spread of the idolatrous and philosophical wisdom of Greece; (b) do acts of kindness for everyone and strive to abolish class divisions on economic grounds: “Let the poor be members of your household.” Do not indulge in class discrimination; instead, reach out to everyone and allow no economic distinctions to affect your social relations—countervailing the extreme class disparities that were rife in Greek society and among the Hellenizers, who crudely condescended to the lower class, exploited it, and impoverished it (as in the example of Yosef the son of Tuvia the tax farmer, who taxed the poor heavily and enriched himself at their expense in order to buy public positions for himself and his family members), and (c) demand modesty in response to the Greeks’ licentiousness and permissiveness—the antithesis of the “Greek salon.”

Let us answer this call today, too. May we strengthen our homes and fill them with Torah, acts of kindness, and modesty. Only then will we be entitled to place our Hanukka light at the entrance to our home so that its radiance may shine outside, projecting onto our surroundings. Only then will our sons and daughters be able to circulate safely in the realms of society and life.

**The Strictest of the Strict**

**Rabbi Amichai Sacher, head of the Overseas Program**

Hanukka is special in that its commandment can be observed at various levels—the simple letter of the law, the strict, and the strictest of the strict. In regard to the last-mentioned, we encounter a dispute between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel (Shabbat 21b):

As for the strictest of the strict, Bet Shammai says: On the first day he lights eight lights and from then on he subtracts, and Bet Hillel says: On the first day he lights one light and from then onward he adds.

Both agree that the strictest of the strict light a different number of candles each day, unlike the “merely” strict who light one each day. However, they disagree about how many candles to light each night. The Talmud presents two perspectives that underlie their dispute. The first: “Bet Shammai’s reasoning—corresponding to the days yet to come; and Bet Hillel’s reasoning—corresponding to the days already gone.” According to the second perspective, “Bet Shammai’s reasoning—corresponding to the festival bullocks [those offered at the Temple during Sukkot], and Bet Hillel’s reasoning—one ascends in holiness and does not descend.” Below I try to elaborate on the dispute from each of these perspectives and investigate the relationship between them.

**First perspective**

Bet Shammai’s reasoning—corresponding to the days yet to come; and Bet Hillel’s reasoning—corresponding to the days already gone.

The basic question to ask is what the disagreement is about. On what point to the schools agree and on which do they diverge? And what are the implications of the dispute? What is the merit of the “days yet to come” and of the “days already gone”? The *Pene Yehoshua* explains that the dispute is over the crux of the lighting: Is it the *menorah* (candelabrum) itself or the flask of oil? Bet Shammai emphasizes the flask; therefore, the candles that we light symbolize the flask, the contents of which dwindle as the festival continues. For Bet Hillel, in contrast, the candles are symbolic of the lit menorah, which continues to spread its light each day.

The Maharal, in his *Hiddushe Aggadot,* explains that all sides accept the first as the holiest “because the first marks the beginning of every thing; therefore, it is higher.” Since the first is holier, in Bet Shammai’s view one starts at the top, from which one only descends. Bet Hillel, however, emphasizes the individual, as the Maharal writes in *Ner Mitzva:*

For those who say [one lights] in correspondence with the days already gone, we should begin with the small and end with the large because one ascends in holiness and does not descend. This is because holiness is a supreme virtue. This uppermost level is not attained at first; rather, one ascends to it step-by-step until one takes the last step, ultimately attaining the greatest sanctity. Accordingly, for one who receives the miracle, it is a small thing at first but it ascends more and more, adding on the last day from the first.

Objectively, the first is the holiest. Bet Hillel, however, says that Hanukka is an educational (Heb. *hinukhi*, cf. *hanukka*) festival; therefore, the lighting of candles is relative to the person and not to objective holiness in reality. The underlying rule is that, in terms of the individual, one ascends in holiness and does not descend; therefore, one begins with a single small candle and advances to eight candles and to the highest level of holiness.

Both explanations appear to have same point in mind. Bet Shammai emphasizes what cannot be seen. According to the *Pene Yehoshua,* the emphasis is on the flask of oil, which has contents that no one can see and in a quantity that no one knows. Bet Hillel, in contrast, stresses things that are plainly visible: the menorah and the flame. Thus, according to the Maharal, the emphasis, in Bet Shammai’s view, is on objective holiness and not on the subjective way in which the individual experiences it.

One may suggest that both sides agree about why we light Hanukka candles: to advertise the miracle. The question, however, is what should be advertised and how. Bet Shammai “bets the farm” and emphasizes holiness at its purest, specifically in its concealed form. Bet Hillel, in contrast, discusses the issue relative to people and propose that to educate them one must speak in their language. Thus we light Hanukka candles in correspondence to the visible reality of the menorah, which symbolizes the way a person approaches holiness.

**Second perspective**

Bet Shammai’s reasoning—corresponding to the festival bullocks, and Bet Hillel’s reasoning—one ascends in holiness and does not descend.

Let us begin with Bet Shammai’s reasoning: What have the festival offerings got to do with Hanukka? First, we need to dwell on the idea of the bullocks that are offered on Sukkot. The Sages associated the total number of bullocks sacrificed on Sukkot with the number of nations in the world: seventy. What matters to Bet Shammai, however, is not the number of bullocks offered but the steady decline in their number. The *Pesiqta* explains: “Just as the number of Sukkot sacrifices dwindles steadily, so do the Canaanites perish and the Jews do not.” The Sukkot offerings symbolize the nations; thus, their declining numbers symbolize the nations’ demise in contrast to the survival of the People Israel, whom “Hashem alone leads” (Deut. 32:12).

If so, the dwindling Hanukka candles also symbolize the dwindling of the nations. The miracle of Hanukka is Israel’s first miracle vis-à-vis the nations and, according to Bet Shammai, it is emblematic of the onset of a process that will consume Israel’s enemies. The physical and spiritual independence that the People Israel won in the days of Hanukka is the first stage toward the obliteration of the evildoers.

Bet Hillel agrees with Bet Shammai that the Hanukka candles are associated with the Temple. After all, the aphorism “One ascends in holiness and does not descend” is based on the laws of the Temple. (See Mishna Sheqalim 6:4 concerning the Shewbread.) However, in their opinion, the number of candles should not be associated with the nations but with holiness itself.

Seemingly, Bet Hillel’s remarks explain why Bet Shammai’s reasoning should not be followed. However, they offer no active explanation for the daily increase in the number of candles lit. But if we glance at the Talmudic passage that goes to the source of this law, we will see that it has two parts (Menahot 99a):

Where do we find that one does not subtract? Rabbi said, it is said in Scripture: “When Moses erected the tabernacle, he put the bases in place, set up the frames, inserted the crossbars, and installed the posts” (Exodus 40:18).

And where do we find that one adds? Rabbi Aha b. Yaakov said, it is said in Scripture: “The censers of those who sinned at the cost of their lives; hammer the censers into sheets to overlay the altar, for they were presented before Hashem and have become holy. Let them be a sign unto the Israelites” )Numbers 16:38).

Thus, the rule has two sections. First, do not subtract gradually, and second, aspire to ascend in holiness.

If so, Bet Shammai places the emphasis on the victory over the nations and the nations’ diminishing number. Bet Hillel, however, stresses the People Israel, which ascends in holiness. Hanukka marks the beginning of something, and the candles teach us that we need to fan that spark and not only keep it from ebbing.

In view of this idea, one may explain a Talmudic passage in Yuma 29a:

R. Assi said: Why is [Queen] Esther likened to the dawn? To tell you that just as the dawn is the end of the whole night, so is the story of Esther the end of all the miracles. But is there not Hanukka?—We refer to those included in Scripture.

Then consider, for example, what Rabbi Zadok Hacohen of Lublin has to say (*Peri Tsaddik,* Hanukka):

What is not [included]?—Indeed, the miracle of Hanukka, which belongs to the Oral Law in a sense. It is likened to dew, as we said: “[Let] my words descend like dew” [Deut. 32:2]. The falling of dew is imperceptible from above; people realize only when they see the ground damp that dew has fallen…. So it is with the miracle of Hanukka, which came about by war. In truth, however, it is from Blessed G-d, which placed courage and strength in their hearts to stand up with such scanty forces against a multitudinous nation. In any event, the awakening came from them and afterwards [Hashem] gave them strength and placed the heroes in the hands of the weak and the many in the hands of few. No matter what, however, the miracle was not explicit and plain visible. In particular, the miracle of the oil, which was definitely concealed and could not be written down, was Oral Law in a sense. And the miracle of Hanukka is truly the end of all the miracles.

According to Rabbi Zadok, Hanukka is the end of all the miracles. He does not mean, however, that there will be no further miracles; instead, the beginning of something new has occurred. In the miracle of Hanukka, the nation takes on a new characteristic: one that fights in G-d’s name for spiritual and physical independence. By implication, henceforth one should not rely solely on G-d to do everything for us; instead, we need to fan our inner flame and take action on our own to bring on the miracle—for which Hashem will come to our aid.

We approach this task with faith—
Faith in the strengths that the Yeshiva had and still has
Faith in our need to climb one level higher
Faith that the spirit of our Bet Midrash is meaningful and important to the People Israel
Faith that the path cleared for us by our yeshiva’s deans and rabbis is straightforward
And immense faith that many share these beliefs.

And … “We were like dreamers”—
The alumni, students, and friends of the Yeshiva mobilized thrillingly
As did the public in its response.

We watched as the alumni of the Yeshiva enlisted whole-heartedly, motivated by love of the Yeshiva, a sense of belonging, and immense delight to have the opportunity to take part. We saw, rejoiced, and were elated; we felt like one large family.

Then we wanted to say “thank you”—
Thank you for your trust and faith
Thank you for your loving encouragement
Thank you for donating and mobilizing;
Thank you for being with us today and tomorrow.

We see you as partners not only in substance but also in spirit, partners in a journey, and together, with momentum and with Hashem’s help, we will take that step, one level higher!