



Chanukka—Harbinger of Messianic Gender Shifts to Come

Inspired by R. Rafael Moshe Luria (Beit Ganzai)¹

“All our holy days will be nullified in messianic times, except for Chanukka and Purim.”

[Ateret Zekaynim on Shulchan Aruch, *siman* 675, citing Maharshai]²

What an odd assertion, since Chanukka and Purim are only of rabbinic origin, whereas Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot etc. are instituted by the Torah itself, which (being of Divine origin) is the ultimate authority. And what does it mean that they’ll be “nullified,” since it is a principle of faith that the Torah (with its 613 mitzvot) is not alterable; its commands apply for all time. It can’t be that we’ll stop observing the mitzvot related to the *chagim*.³

The idea is that the distinguishing feature of messianic times is that we will have attained messianic consciousness, which is the capacity to hold the paradox, in our bones, that all is one yet multiplicity still rocks. The blissful (messianic) lights of oneness cannot enter the world, until we can embrace them without melting down—without losing our selfhood and singularity. As soon as we can manage this feat, mashiach will come. The verse which describes this enlightened time is from Isaiah, the prophet:

כִּי-מִלֵּאָה הָאָרֶץ דָּעָה אֶת-יְיָ כְּמַיִם לֵאמֹר מְכַסִּים

The earth shall be filled with knowledge of G-d as the sea fills the ocean bed. [Isaiah 11:9].

The idea here is that the (metaphoric) water level of ordinary consciousness will rise to a level that is actually beyond what were previously the *peaks* of consciousness available only on holy days. In the messianic era those pinnacles will be submerged by our everyday, roll-out-of-bed awareness. The only tips that will still poke above the surface (says the midrash) are Chanukka and Purim. So while we will continue to mark those biblical events, their impact will be more nostalgic than exhilarating.

But why? What is so exceptional about these rabbinic holidays that they supersede their more venerable elders, ie, the Biblical *chagim* that are

Divinely ordained. R. Luria attributes this to a difference in where they derive their significance. The Torah-level festivals reference backwards, to our birth as a people, to our exodus from Egypt. In the declaration proclaimed at kiddush that marks the start of a Biblical yom tov, we explicitly mention that formative event and assert that one point of our *present* observance is to recall our exodus from Egypt.

Conversely the rabbinic holidays of Chanukka and Purim reference toward the future. True, they mark historic events, but the reason they were not canceled along with the other rabbinic festive days in Megillat Taanit is because they are actually (primarily) pointing toward the future and drawing their significance from there.⁴ And so, regarding Purim, we find the verse that asserts:

...These days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; These days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor should the memorial of them ever perish from their seed. [Megillat Esther 9:28.]

And similarly regarding Chanukka, we find the midrash addressing Aaron’s sense of disgrace when all the tribes brought generous gifts to mark the Tabernacle’s commencement, and he (and his tribe) brought none. HaShem comforts Aaron, “Don’t fret, Aaron, for your contribution is greater than theirs. They have provided korbanot, a service that only applies as long as the Temple stands, whereas the menorah that you daily light will never cease.” Obviously, without the Temple, there are no korbanot, but there also is no menorah, or showbread, or incense, etc. So what is HaShem suggesting here? Ramban explains that HaShem is hinting to the Chanukka menorot that will be lit by Jews for all time, whether the Temple stands or not.⁵

Benei Yissachar goes even further and asserts that “our Chanukka candles are practice and training (*chinukh*) for the final redemption.”⁶ This accords with Baal HaTurim’s radical comment on the verse where HaShem calls Israel “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”^[Ex. 9:6] Baal HaTurim reads this as a promise that “in the future, every one of the Jewish people will become a high priest (*kohen gadol*).”² And since the high priest lit the *menorah*, so Chanukka trains us for the future redemption when our job will then (presumably, in some form) include this holy task.

But what does it mean to “draw significance from the future?” What is different about these rabbinic festivals that connects them to the future? R. Luria explains that they anticipate the shift in gender relations that will characterize the messianic times.

R. Luria draws heavily upon R. Shneur Zalman (RShaZ) of Liadi’s commentary on the last two marriage blessings.⁷ Elaborating upon the Ari’s “seven stages of feminine development” RShaZ interprets the 6th blessing (Blessed...who rejoices the groom *and* the bride) as describing our present (pre-messianic) reality where the masculine has greater spiritual stature and can access lights that the feminine cannot reach on her own. Conversely, the 7th blessing (Blessed...who rejoices the groom *with* the bride) describes the messianic reality where, like a spring compressed and released, the feminine becomes the “crown to her husband,”⁸ meaning that she now assumes the greater stature and pulls down lights that he cannot reach without her aid.

R. Luria connects these two modalities to the sequential messianic stages (and personages): Mashiach ben Yosef accords with the arrangement expressed by the 6th blessing and Mashiach ben David to the 7th.

Mashiach ben Yosef is more of a process than a person—it’s the inner work and outer work, inner wars and outer wars that eradicate evil so the more fragile sprout of Mashiach ben David can safely emerge. In every generation there are individuals that embody this mission more visibly than others thereby serving as the Mashiach ben Yosef at that stage of the process.

Mashiach ben David is also an era but is equally a person (or, more likely, a couple). It is the collective enlightenment that characterizes our long-awaited golden age, *and* it is the individual[s] who will mastermind its global project of harmonizing creation into a higher order unity whose ecosystems, life forms, and human cultures function like a single organism. It is this *second* Mashiach that is what folks generally mean by the term, mashiach, and yet, even without the person, its future lights are still seeping into the present, so that each new moment is always a little more mashiach-like than the moment before.

Since Chanukka and Purim reference toward the future, R. Luria associates them with Mashiach ben David, and the 7th marriage blessing when “the woman of valor becomes the crown to her husband.” R. Luria brings fascinating evidence of the gender shifts that weave through the messianic lineage and narrative. (I have included a link to his full teaching in pdf format).⁹ To name but one, he shows (using proofs of varied sorts) that when Yehuda and Tamar founded the Davidic lineage, it required Yehuda’s inner feminine, and Tamar’s inner masculine, to animate that conception. Furthermore, notes R. Luria, it was Tamar (the woman) who initiated their union.

Yet how does this messianic “rising of the feminine” express itself though our Chanukka observance. The Ari explains that the inner essence of a holiday is the deepened union between the transcendent and immanent (masculine and feminine) aspects of HaShem (called Holy *One* and Shekhina) occurring on that day. On Biblical holidays this union transpires on the *Holy One’s* transcendent (masculine) turf. On Chanukka and Purim the opposite is true. *He* comes down into *Her* nitty-gritty, earthly realm and they meet in consummate union, “face to face and completely equal.”¹⁰ On Chanukka (says the Ari) the Shekhina and Holy *One* share a profound moment of reciprocal intimacy, “seeing and being seen, knowing and being known” that doesn’t happen on any other day of the year.

This is symbolically enacted on Chanukka in several ways:

- 1) The yom tov of Chanukka inserts itself into the workaday week. There is no cessation of *melacha*. The transcendent Holy *One* comes

down into the earthly, secular realm (which is the Shekhina's stomping ground). We don't get dressed up. We don't leave *this* world and its mundane concerns behind.

- 2) The ideal fulfillment of Chanukka's candlelighting is where every person kindles their own menorah, there is no hierarchy or leader.
- 3) The menorah is, ideally, placed three tefachim from the ground so that we must bend down to light it.
- 4) The priority is for the candles to shine *out* into the marketplace or worldly realm—which is the Shekhina's constituency.
- 5) The menorah is placed to the left of the entrance and, in kabbalistic symbology left associates with the feminine and the Shekhina.

And yet, this shift of orientation is so hidden, we can't hardly sense it, except that it pokes through just a bit, as the candles themselves that are peepholes into the inner layer of things. Just as eyes are windows to the soul, so the Chanukka lights are windows into the soul of the *chag*, and the profound union of Shekhina and Holy *One* that happens in these days, down here below, behind the scenes. Hence the custom is to meditate on our candles for half an hour after lighting them.

A Relevant Teaching Tale by R. Usher Freund

There was a special individual that everyone was waiting for, but he never came. It was an amazing thing and great wonder...how could it be that everyone is waiting for this person and even still, he hasn't come? People asked each other, sought advice, and consulted great sages who answered that "you just need to wait, and for sure, any minute, he will surely come." And still, he didn't come. People were so perplexed, shocked even. And then one person stood up and said, "For sure, this is why he hasn't come. Because, in truth, he needs us to hope and pray and wait for him, and that is what will bring him. But the one who needs to come, he is someone altogether different from the one that the world is waiting for. And so in that case, how can he come?"

[אשר שם הזהב—סיפור ר' אשר פריינד זצ"ל #16]

Let it be, Hashem, that as our Chanukka candles shine out into the world, and in to the depths of our soul, that they correct our yearnings so that the things we hope and pray for are precisely the things that must (and will) come through—the things that really do comprise our personal and collective redemptions.

¹ R. Rafael Moshe Luria (Beit Ganzai). d. 2009.

² עטרת זקנים תרעה

להדליק כו' עיין מ"ש מו"ח ריש סי' זה בשם רש"י וכ' הוא על דברי רש"י שמי"כ בשם אבי זקנו הגאון מהר"ר לוב רופא זצ"ל מק"ק וינא שכ' בבי"י ואולי סמך מהרש"י על דרשת חז"ל **כל המועדות יהיו בטלים חוץ מחנוכה ופורים** לרמז זה אנו מברכין להדליק נר של חנוכה -ש-מורה גם על העתיד כמו שדרשו רז"ל על מזמור שיר ליום השבת לע"ל ליום שכולו שבת עכ"ל

מחבר: [Menachem Mendel Auerbach](#) **מנחם מנדל אוירבך** :נצח/נערך ב (1620 - 1680 לספירה בקירוב). פירוש לשולחן ערוך, שרק החלק על אורח חיים יצא לאור ומופיע ברוב המהדורות הנדפסות של השולחן ערוך

the festivals of Purim and Hanukkah will not be annulled (J.Talmud,Ta'anit 2:12).

מובא בכמה ספרים (ומהם בספר מגיד מישרים שכתב מרן רבינו יוסף קארו), דרשת חז"ל, ספר מגיד מישרים - פרשת ויקהל וכן המועדות לא יצטרכו אז לעשות ככל הנעשה היום דהא איסור חמץ ואכילת מצה היא לאכפאה סיטרא מסאבא, וכן בשאר המועדים, ובהווא זימנא לא איצטרך לאכפאה לה, דהא בטל הוא, ולא יעבדון במועדיה אלא דימרון בהו חלל וזמרון ושירין ותחטבון לקב"ה ותו לא מיד, והיינו דאמור רבנן *חנוכה* *פורים* אינם *בטילים* לעולם כלומר דהא *חנוכה* *פורים* לית בהו אלא סיפור נסים דקב"ה בלחוד, וכן מאי דיעבדון במועדיה הוי דוגמת חנוכה ופורים דהיינו סיפור נסים דקב"ה משוי"ה לא יבטלו, ואתה שלום: "כל המועדים יהיו בטלים, חוץ מחנוכה ופורים

³ Maimonides Thirteen Principles of Faith, principle #9.

⁴ In addition to R. Luria's assertion of this point, see R. Hershel Schachter, "THE GLORY OF THIS LAST HOUSE: Purim and Chanukkah as Harbingers of Redemption." Jewish Thought—A Journal of Torah Scholarship, vol 4, #1 5755/6. P.47-58.

[The rabbis designated certain days as *special* and *celebratory* because they marked significant moments/events in the Temple's rebuilding/construction or inauguration.] When the Temple was destroyed [in 70 CE,] these special days were canceled, except for Purim and Chanukka, which were not annulled.

תנאי היא. דתניא: הימים האלו הכתובין במגילת תענית, בין בזמן שבית המקדש קיים, בין בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים - אסורין, דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יוסי אומר: בזמן שבית המקדש קיים - אסורין, מפני ששמחה היא להם. אין בית המקדש קיים - מותרין, מפני שאבל הוא להם. והלכתא: בטלו, והלכתא: לא בטלו. קשיא הלכתא אהלכתא - לא קשיא כאן - בחנוכה ופורים, כאן - בשאר יומי

⁵ [Ramban, Num. 8:2]

[שע"כ קראו לימים האלה חנוכה שהוא חינוך. #12. B'nei Yissachar, Kislev-Tevet, והרגל לאולה העתידה ב"ב.]

Benei Yissachar interprets this phrase to mean that we are expressing our hope that the third Beit HaMikdash will be initiated (chanukhat habayit) at this time, i.e. in Kislev (which is the promise). He himself does not connect this phrase to Baal HaTurim and does not elaborate what he means by practice and training for redemption.

⁷ R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tefilot Lekhol HaShana*, pp 138-139. Translated and elaborated in *Kabbalistic Writings on the Nature of Masculine and Feminine*, by this author, Sarah Yehudit Schneider, 2001 and 2007. Still Small Voice Press.

⁸ Proverbs 12:4.

⁹ [Chanukka.2019_RRMLuria_full.text.pdf](#)

¹⁰ R. Isaac Luria, Pri Aytz Chaim, Shaar Chanukka, perek 4; Aytz Chaim, Heichal Nukba, Shaar Miyut Hayareach, Chapter 1.