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At the beginning of the Torah portion Vayeishev, we are told that, in relating the beginning of his dream to his brothers, Yosef said: "We were binding sheaves in the field." Rashi explains the words "binding sheaves" according to the Targum - that the phrase means "binding bundles, i.e., sheaves of grain." In terms of our spiritual service, the verse and Rashi's comment imply that the spiritual service of "binding sheaves" involves gathering disparate sparks of holiness and uniting them, just as separate stalks of grain are brought together and bound into a bundle.

This manner of service also applies to each individual's soul; he is to gather the disparate elements of his personality and unite them with the Divine. Herein lies the lesson of Yosef's dream: in addition to tying together and elevating the holy sparks found within each of us and uniting them through the service of Torah and mitzvos, we must also "go out in the field" and occupy ourselves in uniting the elements of holiness scattered throughout the world. We do so in order to bring others back to G-d and the observance of Torah and mitzvos, and to the light of Torah - its inner dimension - the "Tree of Life."

Rashi elaborates on this theme when he explains that "tying sheaves" means "binding bundles," i.e., that the purification and elevation of the sparks of holiness is to be done in a way that binds them permanently to their source, similar to something that is tied and bound. This will guarantee that the binder will have a lasting effect on the one who is bound, so much so that all the ill winds in the world will be unable to sever his bond with G-d and Torah.

Rashi then goes on to explain that, in order for this to be accomplished, we must learn a lesson from "sheaves of grain." Just as kernels of grain yield future crops, so too, when one betters another, it is to be done in a manner such that the beneficiary will in turn have a positive impact on others.

Shabbos is connected to the previous days of the week, for "He who toils before Shabbos gets to eat on Shabbos." Similarly, Shabbos is linked to the days that follow it, for "Shabbos is the day from whence all the coming days of the week are blessed." Shabbos is thus a day that unites the days before it with the days that follow it.

During many years (and this year as well), the Shabbos of the portion Vayeishev falls between the festival of the Alter Rebbe's liberation on the 19th of Kislev and the days of Chanukah. Since the Torah portions are related to the time during which they are read, it follows that the above-mentioned lesson applies equally to the festival of the 19th of Kislev and to the festival of Chanukah.

One of the pillars of the Alter Rebbe's service was getting Jews to return to Judaism. In fact, the Alter Rebbe related that, upon hearing a particular Torah message from his teacher the Maggid of Mezritch, he decided that it was incumbent on himself to draw all Jews closer to Judaism. He thereafter spent five years traveling from place to place in order to bring Jews on the "outside" closer to Torah and mitzvos. Moreover, it was after the festival of the 19th of Kislev that there began the service of "spreading the wellsprings outside."

The Chanukah lights are to be lit as well in the entrance of one's home. For they also serve to illuminate and purify the "outside," bringing it back into the domain of holiness. (From: The Chassidic Dimension Part 4, sichosinenglish.org)

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"Go now and see if it is well with your brothers." (37:14) When Jacob sent Joseph to look for his brothers, he enjoined him to see only that which was "well"--the goodness and positive qualities they had. In such a way would the brothers maintain their unity. (Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa)

"Reuven returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit." (37:29) Reuven's absence allowed the other brothers to sell Joseph; had Reuven been present, he would not have permitted them to do it. And where was he? Rashi says Reuven was preoccupied with fasting and perfecting himself. Because he was concerned only with himself, Joseph was sold and the whole series of events was set in motion that would lead to our forefathers' exile in Egypt. An important lesson is learned: One must not be concerned solely with his own perfection to the exclusion of others. We must always have our fellow Jew in mind and truly love him, lest he be ignored in his time of need. (Lubavitcher Rebbe) (www.ascent.co.il)



According to the Talmud, the proper time to light the Chanuka menorah is "when the marketplace is cleared of merchants from the city of Tarmud." But a closer look at this peculiar definition reveals a deeper meaning, one that goes beyond merely indicating the proper hour one should kindle the Chanuka lights. In fact, the Talmud's statement alludes to the very message and purpose of the Chanuka candles themselves.

The task of every Jew is to bring the light of holiness that illuminates the Jewish home to the "doorway" - the place where the Chanuka menorah is kindled - in order to allow it to light up the outside world. Despite the fact that outside the home there are "mordim" (those who rebel against G-d, from the same Hebrew root as the name "Tarmud"), the Jew must endeavor to shine this light upon them as well, until "the marketplace is cleared of merchants from the city of Tarmud" - until all rebellion against G-d has disappeared.

Furthermore, the Talmud's use of the Aramaic term "kalya" ("has ended"), alludes to a state of "kelot hanefesh," longing and yearning for G-d, that this will bring - the exact opposite of rebellion! Thus we see that the Chasidic interpretation of the Talmud's words sheds light on the hidden, inner meaning of the mitzva of Chanuka, and by extension, the aim of all the Torah's mitzvot: the illumination of an entire world that has been darkened by exile, and its preparation for the coming of Moshiach. Happy Chanuka! (L'chaim 5760, #596)

Everything is connected to Moshiach, even playing dreidel! The B'nei Yissachar explains: There are four Hebrew letters written on the dreidel - Nun Gimmel Heh Shin. This is an abbreviation for the words "nes gadol haya sham - a great miracle happened there." When adding up the numerical value of the four letters on the dreidel one comes up with the total of 358. This is also the numerical value of the word "Moshiach"! (Ibid)

Although it commemorates the kindling of the Temple's Menorah which had only seven branches, our Chanukah Menorah has eight lights. The number 'eight' in this context is not just the digit after 'seven.' Symbolically, 'seven' is associated with the natural world, created in six days and completed with G-d's rest on the Seventh, Shabbat.

'Eight,' however, represents the infinite and supernatural, in contrast to the finite and natural. The seven-lamp Menorah illuminated the natural world, but Chanukah goes even beyond. It is a foretaste and reflection of the era of Moshiach, a higher level that is above and beyond our worldly limitations. At the end of the long dark night, right before daybreak; we may be tempted to fall asleep. Chanukah gives us the strength to be awake for and aware of the approach of daylight. (vitalchanukah.com)

FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S TALKS OF ELUL 5635 (1875): THE THREE DAYS BEFORE SHABBAT ARE A PREPARATION FOR SHABBAT. THE ZOHAR SAYS (1) ABOUT SHABBAT THAT "FROM IT ARE ALL DAYS BLESSED." (2) "ALL DAYS" REFERS TO THE SIX DAYS OF THE WEEK ON WHICH G-D CONFERRED A GENERAL BLESSING - "G-D WILL BLESS YOU IN ALL YOU DO." THE BLESSING OF SHABBAT IS FOR THE DAYS PRECEDING IT AND THE DAYS FOLLOWING IT. THE PREPARATIONS FOR SHABBAT BEGIN WEDNESDAY, AND ARE ANNOUNCED BY THE BRIEF L'CHU N'RAN'NA (3) OF THREE VERSES.

FOOTNOTES: (1) ZOHAR II, 63B, 88A. (2) DEVARIM 15:18. (3) SIDDUR (TEHILAT HASHEM) P. 78. FIRST THREE VERSES OF PSALM 95 APPENDED TO WEDNESDAY'S PSALM 94. THE SAME THREE VERSES BEGIN THE FRIDAY NIGHT PRAYERS INAUGURATING SHABBAT (SIDDUR TEHILAT HASHEM (KEHOT) P. 128). (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, KISLEV 23)

Love is a way of talking to G-d. When you look into someone's eyes and love that person, you are transcending the physical world and connecting to G-d. - The Lubavitcher Rebbe