

# JEWISH WISDOM ON: ACTUALIZING YOUR UNIQUE LIFE POTENTIAL

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## INTRODUCTION

### V'al Hanisim – Chanukah's daily prayer

And [we thank You] for the miracles (V'al Hanisim), for the redemption (V'al Hapurkan), for the mighty deeds (V'al Hagevurot) and for the saving acts (V'al Hateshuot), and for the wars (V'al Hamilchamot), which You have wrought for our ancestors in those days, at this time.

In the days of Matityahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the wicked Hellenic government rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and violate the decrees of Your will.

But You, in Your abounding mercies, stood by them in the time of their distress. You waged their battles, defended their rights, and avenged the wrong done to them. You delivered the mighty 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 wanton sinners into the hands of those who occupy themselves with Your Torah. You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day.

Then Your children entered the shrine of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified Your Sanctuary, kindled lights in Your holy courtyards, and instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.

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## CHANUKAH'S FOUR LESSONS ON LIFE AND LIVING

### 1. V'AL HANISSIM – RECOGNIZING THE MIRACLE THAT YOU ARE

#### Genesis 39:11-12

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his garment (bigdo) saying, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

#### Sefer Hayashar, Genesis 37

Joseph, being taken from Israel to Egypt, was weeping uncontrollably, and the Arabs were whipping him. When they passed Bethlehem, where his mother Rachel was buried nine years earlier, Joseph ran to his mother's grave and threw himself down on it. "Mother, mother," Joseph cried, "why did you abandon me; mother, mother, please rise from your sleep and see my pain."

#### Genesis 45:1-11

Now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourself for having sold me here, for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me ahead of you... **G-d has sent** me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance." **"It is not you**

**who sent me here, but G-d.** He has made me Pharaoh's vizier, master of his entire government and ruler of all.

**Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi - Likkutei Torah, Re'eh**

For the Lord, your God, is testing you ("meNASE"), to know whether you really love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul. But does G-d not know it all before the test?

The word for test, or challenge, in Hebrew is "nisah," nisayon," "menaseh." It comes from the word "nes," which means an elevated banner. "G-d tested Abraham" can also be read as "G-d exalted Abraham." When Moses says "G-d is testing you," it can be translated as: "G-d is exalting you, G-d is elevating you." Why? Because G-d believes in you.

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**2. V'AL HAPURKAN – THE CALL TO REVEAL & UNLEASH OUR MIRACLE (P.O.P.P)**

**Proverbs 3:9**

"Honor the Lord with your possessions."

**Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim 1:221**

It states, "Honor the Lord with your possessions." This means with whatever He has graced you. For example, if you have a beautiful voice, lead the communal prayers.

Chiya, the nephew of Rabbi Elazar Hakapor, had a beautiful voice. Rabbi Elazar used to tell him, "Chiya, my son, rise and honor the Lord with what He has graced you!"

**Esther 4:8-14**

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

**Mishnah, Ethics of our Fathers, 4:1**

Ben Zoma said, "Who is wise? He who learns from every person."

**Pitgamin Kadishin, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**

Each person must clearly recognize that man's travels from place to place are not random, G-d forbid. Rather they are directed by G-d with precision; this person has a specific "portion" to rectify in this place - whether through study of Torah, prayer, or eating, drinking, and sleeping for the sake of heaven... Therefore, when a person comes to a particular place, he must take this to heart and ask himself, "Why am I here? For what purpose did G-d bring me here?"

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**3. V'AL HAGEVUROT V'AL HATESHUOT  
– HEROISM = VITAL DEVOTION TO "MIGHTY DEEDS"**

**Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, the Laws of Ethical Character, 1:1**

[In many instances] it is better to give needy recipients one gold coin on a thousand different occasions than to give them a thousand gold coins all at the same time. Why? Because if a person opens up his hand again and again one thousand times, the trait of giving becomes part of him.”

### **Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 22b**

A person should always do good even for the wrong reasons (i.e. ego, fame, wealth) because by doing good for the wrong reasons, one will eventually come to do them “lishma” for the right reasons.

### **Code of Jewish Law, 671:2**

How many candles should one light [on Chanukah]? On the first night, one, from then on, add one each night, until eight on the eighth night.

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## **3. V'AL HAMILCHAMOT – THE COURAGE TO FIGHT LIFE'S WAR**

### **Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Cahaneman (1886-1969)**

The Chanukah story was a remarkable event in Jewish history. Yet, sadly, the Maccabi's victory didn't last. The dynasty of the Hasmonean family became entrenched in civil war and corruption. 210 years after Hanukah, in 68 CE, the Temple was destroyed, this time by the Romans. Jerusalem was plundered, Israel was decimated and the Jewish people exiled. That is why we reserve our last thank you for the wars. We are expressing gratitude for the fact that we have never given up the fight. We never stop fighting for life, justice, and goodness.

### **Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yomah 53b (Also in HH prayer books)**

The following was the prayer of the Kohen Gadol: May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and G-d of our fathers, that this coming year shall be for us and for all Your people, the House of Israel, wherever they are, rich in rain if it is hot... May Your people, the House of Israel, not be dependent for their livelihood upon one another nor upon any other people. **May it be a year that no woman suffers miscarriage**; and that the trees of the field yield their produce; and may the ruler of the Jewish People always be appointed from among the House of Judah.

### **Midrash, Avot d'Rabbi Natan 6:2:**

One day, at the age of 40, Akiva passed a well. He saw a rock with a hole carved into it. He inquired who shaped the rock, and was told it was caused by the slow but constant dripping of water on top of it. Akiva then reasoned: If a substance soft as water can penetrate a rock with slow, persistent motion, so too the Torah, can penetrate my heart.

### **Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa**

If you lose your money, you lost nothing. Money comes and money goes. If you lose health, you lost half of your life. But if you lose your courage, you lost all!

### **Harry Chapin (1942-1981) - “I wonder what would happen to this world”**

Oh if a man tried – To take his time on Earth – And prove before he died – What one man's life could be worth – I wonder what would happen to this world.