

Chanukah 2016

**The question is where does the custom of giving gifts on Chanukah come from?**

a) The Sukas chaim, Rav Lundinsky (page 361) quotes the Emes Lyaakov (on Shulchan Aruch siman 670 footnote 583) who says (An elaboration of this is brought in the sefer called Inside Chanukah pages 150-151) that since the Torah was saved from being forgotten on Chanukah, therefore Chanukah is a time when we increase our emphasis on learning. **It therefore became customary to show appreciation to our Torah educators during this time. Parents would therefore send money to their children's Rabbeim and teachers on Chanukah. They would do this by sending the money with their children, and the children would thus learn to appreciate the value of the Torah and those who teach it. Eventually from this practice it became customary to give the children money as well to demonstrate to them how much their parents valued their Torah learning. This is something the goyim took from us. They are copying us, we are not copying them!** (Additionally, this is not subject to Torah prohibition of "ובחוקתיהם לא תלכו" "do not follow in their traditions." (Vayikra (18, 3)) The shalos ve teshuvos Avnay Yispa (chelek alef siman 129 os beis) quotes the shalos ve teshuvos Maharik (siman 88) (the Rama says this in yora daya siman 178 sif 1 as well), who explains that a קק is a mitzvah that we do without knowing why. When this type of mitzvah is similar to something that the goyim do then it is subject to "do not follow in their traditions." Conversely, a mitzvah that we know why we are performing isn't subject to "do not follow in their traditions." Thus, it is completely permissible to give money to children on Chanukah. The Rambam says this explicitly in hilchos Yom Tov perik vav Halacha 18. The Shulchan Aruch says this in siman 529 sif 2; he writes there that we give the children types of nuts and sweets. Therefore in conclusion, we know why we give the children money on Chanukah; it's in order to make them happy. Since we have a legitimate reason, we do not need to worry that the goyim give gifts as well.)

b) Its written in Kobatz Mevakshe Torah (Chanukah chelek alef page 89) (Also in Berchas Yabetz chalek alef page 158) in the name of Rabbi Dovid Cohen based on the Magen Avraham (beginning of siman 670) who says **the custom is poor people go around on Chanukah to collect money. Based on this Magen Avraham we also give money or gelt to children. We give to all children and not exclusively poor children in order not to embarrass the poor children and the poor people who are collecting money.** Similarly see Inside Purim (page 55), Purim is a day dedicated to giving tzedakah and helping the poor who may be embarrassed to ask for money. When the poor put on disguises so that they cannot be recognized it is easier for them to request and receive tzedakah. (Therefore it became customary for everybody to dress up in order not to be able to distinguish who is poor and who isn't.)

c) Similarly, but with a different twist it is written in the sefer Ohr haganuz (pnini hamoedaim page 127) (Also in Berchas Yabetz chalek alef page 158), the Shulchan Aruch (siman 671) says that **even a poor person must borrow money or sell his clothing in order to purchase oil to light with on Chanukah.** (The same halacha applies to the four cups on Pesach. What is the reason for the discrepancy regarding these two halachos as

opposed to all other mitzvos where the Halacha does not require us to sell our clothing in order to fulfill that particular mitzvah? The Gemara in Berachos (page 6a) and Shabbos (63a) says that if one wanted to perform a certain mitzvah and an extenuating circumstance occurred which rendered it impossible for him to fulfill that mitzvah it is as if he performed it (חשב אדם לעשות מצוה ונאנס ולא עשה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשה). This statement applies to all mitzvos except for Chanukah and the four cups on Pesach. If these mitzvos aren't physically performed, then credit isn't given. The reason for this stringency is פרסומי ניסא (publicizing the miracle). The main purpose of both Chanukah and the four cups on Pesach is to publicize the miracle. This being so one didn't gain anything if the actual mitzvah wasn't performed. **In order not to embarrass poor people who cannot afford oil, it became customary to give money to everyone.** (An elaboration of this is brought in the safer called Inside Chanukah (page 151). The Belzer Rebbe says we give Chanukah gelt to children (and others) on Chanukah is in order to create a blurring of who is receiving money for what purpose. In other words in order to avoid embarrassing the poor, Chanukah gelt is distributed to everyone in order that it will be unclear who is receiving the money as tzedakah.)

d) An additional answer is brought by Rabbi Aryeh Pinchas Strickoff in his Inside Chanukah (pages 151-152). Money represents potential. For example, by giving a few coins to a hardware dealer in exchange for a hammer, you have turned the money into a hammer. But before you went to the store you did not have a hammer. **When Yaakov was preparing to meet Eisav on his way back to Canaan he moved his family to the other side of the river for protection. He then went back across the river on his own to retrieve a few small jars that he had left behind.** (See Bereishis 34, 24) Regarding this incident the Gemara in Chullin (91a) tells us that Yaakov's return for those small jars indicates that tzaddikim consider their possessions dearer than their own bodies. (See footnote 135, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon explains a tzaddik knows that every penny he earns is a gift from Hashem and understands that his money and possessions are only there to help facilitate his service of Hashem.) Additionally, the Midrash Tzeidah LaDerech states that Hashem said to Yaakov 'For endangering yourself for a small container, I myself will repay your children with a small container (of oil) to the Chashmonaim (at that time of Chanukah).' (See footnote 136, the pesukim describing this event hint to Chanukah "And he (Yaakov) took them (his family) and crossed them over the river (נהל) and he sent over his possessions." The word נהל is an acronym for להדליק נר הנוכה.) From this incident we see the lasting effect of Yaakov's seemingly small act of caring for the gifts that Hashem gave him. This teaches the tremendous potential that each of us has to cause great and lasting effects with our actions. **If Yaakov's simple act of caring for his possessions had the potential to effect the Chanukah miracle, who knows what a simple act that we perform l'sheim shamayim (for the sake of heaven) could accomplish. By giving Chanukah gelt, something that has great potential in that it can be transformed into anything, we recall that the miracle of Chanukah that was facilitated through Yaakov's actions with his gelt and thus teach our children and ourselves to reflect on the infinite potential of their efforts and our own when done l'sheim shamayim.** (Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, in his article 'Got Gelt'.)

e) Another answer: the Sifsei chaim (modern chelek beis page 134) quotes the Ponovzhir Rav who says that **the decree of the Greeks was that the Jews are not allowed to learn. When the Jews were victorious, the children still didn't want to learn. In order to get the children to learn they bribed them by giving them money! The Gra says that it's better for them to learn not for the sake of heaven then not to learn at all. This is as explicate Gemara in Pesachim (50b). The Gemara says that one should learn and perform mitzvos not leshma (for the sake of heaven), because he will eventually end up performing mitzvos and learning leshma. ( אמר רב יהודה אמר רב לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה (ובמצות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה. **To commemorate this we still give children money!****

An elaboration of this is brought in the safer called Inside Chanukah (page 150). On Chanukah, Yavan almost succeeded in tearing the Torah away from us. The Kedushas HaLevi (Al HaTorah, Derushim L'Chanukah) says that since Hashem saved us from that fate, it is most appropriate to celebrate this time with increased diligence and focus on learning. We therefore not only redouble our learning efforts on Chanukah but also increase the honor of Torah by encouraging our children to learn as well. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 10, 5) teaches that the way we begin teaching children to love and fear Hashem and to love Torah is to initially train them to do so for a reward. Eventually the children will learn to love and fear Hashem and the Torah for His and its own sake. At the beginning, when they are young, the teacher should say to them read (a little) and I will buy you nice shoes or precious clothing... (And when they are a bit older) the Rebbe should tell them learn this parsha or that chapter and I will give you a dinar or two. (Rambam peirush HaMishnayos) We therefore give money to our children on Chanukah, in order that they will be encouraged to learn and love Torah. Eventually the Chanukah gelt giving practice expanded to include other types of gifts as well. (Rabbi Shmuel Pinchas Gelbard)

-The custom of giving Chanukah gelt to children was observed by many amongst the gedolei Yisrael. A few examples: **The Lubavitcher Rebbes would give Chanukah gelt to their children, even after their children were married.** The Emes Lyaakov (on Shulchan Aruch footnote 583) quotes that Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky would only give money on the fifth day of Chanukah. The Stiepler had this practice as well. (Orchos Rabbeinu chelek gimmel amud alef os gimmel, Derech Sicha parshas Mikeitz page 187.) The explanation of this practice is as follows; the fifth day never falls out on Shabbos! This practice was also followed by the Vizhnitzer Rebbe (the Imrei Chaim) and the Kaliver Rebbe. **The Chasan Sofer was known to give Chanukah gelt even to his students.** (The Neti Gavreyal (Chanukah perek 51 footnote 7) explains this was done in order to publicize the miracle.)

-Does one need to give masar money from the Chanukah gifts one receives? Rabbi Yisroel Harfenes (shilos veteshuvos Mekadesh Yisroel Chanukah siman 7) says **one needs to give masar from the money received on Chanukah, even a Yeshiva bachor. There is a machloces if one obligation to give maasar for gifts he received. The custom is to be lenient.**

That's why we give gifts on Chanukah!