



## Chanukah - 042 Mesirus Nefesh For Torah

In Chanukah, we find two important concepts, which are really intertwined.

Chanukah was a time in which the Jewish people showed *mesirus nefesh*; they went to go to war even though they were outnumbered. They were willing to get killed by going out to war. Their efforts resulted in the lighting of the Menorah, which represents the Torah.

It is clear that the way they fought the war, and the results of this war they fought, were interconnected. Their war was fought with *mesirus nefesh*; the results of the war, which revealed the light of Torah. Each of these revealed different aspects.

The Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash had seven branches, while the Menorah we light on Chanukah has eight lights. This really means that their *mesirus nefesh* revealed an even greater light than the actual Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash had when it was in its full purity. The light of their *mesirus nefesh* revealed a light of Torah, the level of "eight", which is above seven.

What is the connection between *mesirus nefesh* and Torah? Why did their *mesirus nefesh* result in a revelation of the light of Torah?

The depth of the war with the Greeks was that it was a few fighting the majority. But in terms of the soul, it involved fighting a power that is beyond human strength. That is the power in the soul called *mesirus nefesh*. Each person has abilities in his soul, but all of these abilities are limited. *Mesirus nefesh*, though, enables a person to go beyond the limits of his own soul. With true *mesirus nefesh*, he touches the unlimited; he touches upon his Root and connects to it.

"Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world", and "the Jewish people were the first thoughts of Hashem" to be created. The Jewish people are the "first" of Creation; we were the first to be formed from the Torah. When a Jew serves Hashem according to his various abilities of his soul, he is epitomizing the "first" Creation. But when a person goes beyond his limits, through using *mesirus nefesh*, he is attaching himself to the very Source that he was hewn from. From that place, comes true understanding in Torah.

It is written, "*Wisdom, from where is it found?*" Chazal say that when one makes himself into "*ayin*" (nothing), meaning, when he nullifies himself to the Source that he comes from, he receives the true wisdom of Torah. Understanding in Torah doesn't come from oneself.

There is a concept of one who learns Torah from within himself, but there is also a source of Torah which comes from higher than the self: from the Source of the self. This is accessed through *mesirus nefesh*.

Our soul has a Source. When a person wants Torah, there are two sources he can get it from. One source is Shavuot, to accept the Torah; and another source is Chanukah, which is to acquire *mesirus nefesh* in order to understand the Torah, to understand that *mesirus nefesh* is a source of Torah.

When a person penetrates with his soul to the place that is above his actual understanding [through *mesirus nefesh*], he reaches the light of Chanukah which enables him to understand Torah. Understanding Torah can only come from effort – it requires one to exert himself beyond his normal capabilities.

If a person only acts according to his capabilities his whole life – or if he doesn't try as much as he can (which is usually the case), he won't be able to see true success in Torah learning. But if someone uncovers his ability of *mesirus nefesh*, he can go above his own abilities, and from there, he can connect to the Source which Torah is derived from.

“The way of the wise is to always think”, as the Ramchal writes. How can a person think all day in learning? Most people – what do they think all day about? People think about themselves all day. That's human nature. But when a person uncovers his ability of *mesirus nefesh*, he can go above his nature, and he acquires for himself a new nature, and now he can think all the time about Torah. This is the true kind of connection to one's Torah learning.

It doesn't mean to force oneself to think in learning; forcing oneself to think in learning is perhaps a way to get started, and it needs to be done sensibly.

But when one uncovers his *mesirus nefesh*, he is connected to the source of the Torah, and he will get his understanding from there. Whereas most people are naturally thinking about themselves all day – or about things that are interesting to them – so can a person who uncovers his power of *mesirus nefesh* have a natural ability to think all day about the Torah he's learning. On a deeper level, he can think all the time about HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

As long as one isn't naturally thinking about his learning all day, he hasn't reached his *mesirus nefesh*. Our Rabbis wrote that those who reached true understanding in Torah merited that their initial thoughts came from Ruach HaKodesh. How? It was because their thoughts naturally thought about the Torah they were learning. Just as the average person naturally thinks about himself all the time, so does a person who reaches *mesirus nefesh* naturally think about Torah (and on a more subtle note, Hashem).

This is the deep place in the soul which one needs to connect to in order to get the light of the Torah. It is called “killing oneself in the tents of Torah” – one has to kill his own essence, his own abilities, by going above them.

If one never learns how to go above his “I”, then all of his Torah learning is being experienced through his simple “I” [the ego], and then all of his understanding in Torah will be limited to his human comprehension. And since most people are sullied from sin, some more and some less, as well as bad middos that inhabit the soul – the understanding in one's Torah learning are negatively affected by these factors. But when one penetrates deep into himself and he uncovers his power of *mesirus nefesh*, he goes above his own soul, and his understanding in Torah will come from a higher source; it will be the kind of Torah that is endless.

The oil which lasted for eight days represented the spiritual light that is above the limits of human wisdom; that is why the oil was not bound to nature. The oil was not bound to the limits of nature. The fact that the oil stopped burning after eight days was actually a novelty, because the fact that the oil lasted for eight days was no novelty! After eight days, the endlessness of the spiritual light was taken away and clothed by this current limited reality.

If a person connects to Torah only from within his limited abilities, his understanding in Torah will be limited to what he can comprehend, and human comprehension is very limited. Woe to the person

whose entire understanding in Torah is limited to his human mind. But when a person is in touch with his power of *mesirus nefesh* and uses it to learn Torah – when he goes above his normal abilities in order to learn Torah – it's not an issue of how much time one learns, but it is rather about how one dedicates his entire being to the Torah.

Just as Avraham tied Yitzchok to the altar, so do all of us have the power of *mesirus nefesh* in our own souls; we can all give up our whole being to the Torah.

Imagine if you were given a choice if you would die, or if the Torah will cease instead of you. What would you choose?

This is not a question a person can answer in one second. But a person can reach the point where he is prepared to completely give himself up for Hashem.

There is a concept of *mesirus nefesh* in which one gives up his body for the Torah; but this is not the *mesirus nefesh* that was revealed on Chanukah. It is rather the light of Olam HaBa, in which we divested of our body. The *mesirus nefesh* revealed on Chanukah is: to give up our very essence, in order to understand Torah.

If a person decides that he is ready each day to completely give himself up for the Torah, and that is how he approaches his learning, he will be guided to understand the Torah through the light of *mesirus nefesh*, and his connection to his learning will be endless, because he won't be able to ever part from the Torah; he has become nullified to the Torah and integrated with it, because he is ready to be *moiser nefesh* for it.

The words here are subtle and deep; they are far from anyone who doesn't think about these things, but they are much closer to someone who seeks the light of truth. If one reflects about this and he really wants it, and he decides that he is ready all the time to have *mesirus nefesh* – meaning, that each day before he goes to learn, he decides that he is willing to have complete *mesirus nefesh* for the Torah – he will truly merit the light of Torah.

May we merit from the Creator that our bond with the Torah come from the deepest place in our soul – to go above our own soul and become connected to the Source of all the Torah we learn, from which Torah comes from. And though this, may all of us together with the entire Jewish people merit the revelation of “Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

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**Source:** <https://bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-042-mesirus-nefesh-torah>