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In one of the most iconic images of Pre-War Europe is a picture of a Menorah on the 8th night of Chanukah while the Nazi symbol stands in the background. ¹The story behind this picture speaks volumes not only of the courage of the family but of spiritual resistance throughout the Shoah. It was the eighth night of Chanukah in Kiel, Germany, a small town with a Jewish population of 500. That year, 1931, the last night Chanukah fell on Friday evening, and Rabbi Akiva Boruch Posner, spiritual leader of the town was hurrying to light the Menorah before Shabbos began. Directly across the Posner's home stood the Nazi headquarters in Kiel, displaying the dreaded Nazi Party flag in the cold

December night. With the eight lights of the Menorah glowing brightly in her window, Rabbi Posner's wife, Rachel, snapped a photo of the Menorah and captured the Nazi building and flag in the background. She wrote a few lines in German on the back of the photo. "*Chanukah, 5692. 'Judea dies', thus says the banner. 'Judea will live forever', thus respond the lights.*"

One of the beautiful aspects of חנוכה is the role of פירסומי ניסא of publicizing the miracle. Many of the miracles of חנוכה are centred around the importance of פירסומי ניסא, For example, the Gemara (שבת כא) records that the opportune time to light the Menorah is when people are outside, when there are still those passing by who can see and admire the lights of the Menorah. Furthermore, it is almost a universal custom to light the מנורה at the window so that it can be shown to all those who pass by one's home.

In discussing the role of Pirsumei Nisa the Rambam employs a unique language: מצות נר חנוכה **מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד** וצריך אדם להזהר בה כדי להודיע הנס ולהוסיף בשבח האל והודיה לו על הנסים שעשה לנו, אפילו אין לו מה יאכל אלא מן הצדקה שואל או מוכר כסותו ולוקח שמן ונרות ומדליק. "*The precept of lighting the Hanukkah lamp is exceedingly precious, and one should carefully observe it in order to acclaim the miracle, ever praising and thanking God for the miracles which he has performed for us. Even if one has nothing to eat except what he gets from charity, he should borrow, or sell his garment, to buy oil and lamps and light them.*" The power of the Mitzvah of Chanukah is clearly demonstrated in this Halacha: Not only does one have to sell his very clothes to buy oil for the Menora² but the language of "חביבה היא עד מאד" expresses a special dimension to the Mitzvah of Chanukah³. Other Mitzvos, such as מגילה and ד' כוסות incorporate the aspect of פירסומי ניסא but the רמב"ם does not describe those as **חביבה היא עד מאד**. What then is this special quality?

One possibility is that the goal of פירסומי ניסא is to publicize the great miracles that Hashem did for the Jewish people. Whether celebrating the miracle of war, that a small group of fighters defeated the much more powerful enemy or the פך שמן that lasted for 8 days, the role of פירסומי ניסא is prominent. However, there is another, perhaps deeper level to the role of פירסומי ניסא.

¹ <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/menorah-defies-nazi-flag/> and <http://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/hanukkah-1932>

² See the Maggid Mishneh who writes that the source for this Halacha is based on a similar Halacha about the כוסות for Pesach

³ This is the only time in the משנה תורה that the language of **חביבה היא עד מאד** is used

The story of Chanukah has many layers. It is a story of survival, a story of bravery, courage and of never giving up hope. Chanukah is also a story of renewal which was expressed not only in the physical rededication of the בית המקדש but in the spiritual relationship and bond between Hashem and the Jewish people. The struggle between the Greeks and the Jews, between the Hellenism and Judaism, went beyond culture. The goal of Hellenism was to demonstrate that the Torah wasn't needed and that the protective qualities of the Torah and a Torah way of life was only useful to combat inferior and pagan nations. Now, however, with Hellenism and a more refined approach to life, the argument was that the Torah no longer served a purpose. As Rav Moshe Lichtenstein writes: "All this was valid when Israel was faced with the alternatives of the Torah or Canaanite culture, before the people of Israel came into contact with Greek wisdom and advanced Hellenistic civilization. When, however, Hellenistic influence began to penetrate the country, and Israel was exposed to Greek culture and philosophy, there was no longer any need for the Torah and its connection to the God of Israel. Thus, there arose a group of Hellenizers who challenged the covenant and saw it as null and void following Israel's encounter with general wisdom. It was in this context that Matityahu and his sons arose, as did Mordechai and Esther in their day, to renew and reestablish the covenant of Sinai and to reaffirm its significance in the new cultural circumstances⁴."

The celebration of Chanukah was not just a celebration of victory but of a powerful reminder that the covenant with Hashem was not broken and won't ever be broken, even as the Hellenists attempted to convince us otherwise. In fact, if one looks at the song of מעוז צור it is this idea of renewal is woven through the stanzas. The various verses in מעוז צור reflect the ups and down in Jewish history from Egypt to Persia to Greece and Rome, moments when perhaps we thought our covenant was finished. No matter what and no matter where, the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people remains firm and everlasting as we note in the last verse הַרְעָה לַיָּמִי הַרְעָה לַיָּמִי For deliverance has too long been delayed; And the evil days are endless. Yet, eventually שָׁבַע רֹעִים לָנוּ רוּעִים בְּצֵל צֶלְמוֹן בְּצֵל צֶלְמוֹן thrust the enemy into the shadows of death, and set up for us the seven shepherds⁵.

We can now understand our original question about the role of Pirsumei Nisa. Why is it חַבִּיבָה הִיא עַד מְאֹד? The answer is to publicize this specific aspect of חֲנוּכָה. Commenting on a Halacha of the Rambam (Chanukah 3:3) where the Rambam writes that the goal of Chanukah is to "להראות ולגלות את הנס" Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that the uniqueness of Pirsumei Nisa on Chanukah "attests that our connection and relationship to the Chanukah Candle is similar to our connection and relationship to the Shechinah. The Divine Presence turns to the Jewish people by way of the Chanukah Candle, and the Chanukah candle attests that the Shechinah rests among us"⁶. Unique to Chanukah is the celebration of the renewal of the covenant with Hashem when we thought it was lost. It is this that we want to publicize. We are reminding

⁴ <http://li1533-205.members.linode.com/en/chanuka-holiday-renewing-covenant-part-ii>

⁵ R'Moshe Lichtenstein takes this point further showing that is the theme of Purim as well and making a fascinating connection to Yom Ha'atzmaut. [See here](#)

⁶ Moadei Harav, Public Lectures on the Festivals, Rabbi Dr. Shomo Pick

ourselves and the world that no matter bleak it may seem, the covenant with Hashem was never severed⁷.

There is one more aspect of the famous מנורה picture with the Nazi symbol displayed in the background. Yehudah Mansbuch, the grandson of the family who took the photo, remembers:

“It was on a Friday afternoon right before Shabbat that this photo was taken. My grandmother realized that this was a historic photo, and she wrote on the back of the photo that ‘their flag wishes to see the death of Judah, but Judah will always survive, and our light will outlast their flag.’ My grandfather, the rabbi of the Kiel community, was making many speeches, both to Jews and Germans. To the Germans he warned that the road they were embarking on was not good for Jews or Germans, and to the Jews he warned that something terrible was brewing, and they would do well to leave Germany. My grandfather fled Germany in 1933, and moved to Israel. His community came to the train station to see him off, and before departed he urged his people to flee Germany while there’s still time.”

What greater Pirsumei Nisa than the family who witnessed so much horror being able to use that same Menorah, shining brightly for all to see that our relationship with God was not extinguished and our covenant is stronger than ever. May this Chanukah be a time when we proudly display our candles and let the world see the covenant that we behold as a true, unbreakable connection. In turn, let that help inspire us to greater connection and devotion in our own relationship with Hashem.

⁷See Rabbi Soloveitchik in הררי קדם who notes the פירוטומי ניסא functions differently for פורים and חנוכה. Since חנוכה is our way of displaying our covenant with Hashem, we want to show the world so we do the Mitzvah in a very public way. There is even an aspect of קידוש השם involved. On פורים, we are celebrating that we were physically saved and that is more of an internal celebration so that publicizing is less outward and more inward.