PONDER THIS...

The Rambam, in Hilchot Megila v'Chanuka, devotes chapters 3 and 4 to Chanuka. In the first 'halacha' of Perek Gimel, he writes:

During (the time of) the second Beit HaMikdash, when Greece ruled (over Eretz Yisrael), they decreed (harsh) decrees upon Israel (the Jewish People), (attempted to) nullify their relig- ion, they did not allow them to study Torah or practice Mitzvot, they plundered their possessions and their daughters, and entered the Mikdash - caused damage, defiled the pure, and pained Israel greatly and put tremendous pressure on them - until the G-d of their fathers took pity on them and saved them, and strengthened the sons of Chashmonai the Kohanim, and restored kingship to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Beit HaMik- dash.

But that's not the whole story. Read on...

(The following is based on Binizri's Seder HaDorot HaKatzar)

The Chanuka miracles occurred in 3622 (138BCE).

For a period of 26 years from then, no foreign nation ruled in Israel, how- ever, the battles of the Maccabees against the Greeks continued.

After these 26 years, the Romans gradually increased their control over Eretz Yisrael. This gradual increase in Roman power continued for 180 years, until Churban Bayit Sheini.

Yehuda HaMakabi ruled for six years, until he was killed - after having killed 15,000 Greek soldiers.

Yehonatan ruled for six further years.

Then Shimon ruled for 8 years. He and his wife were killed by their son-in- law Ptolemy, Macedonian ruler of Egypt. Two of their sons were taken captive - one was killed and the other escaped...

Yochanan Hyrcanus Yanai ruled after his father Shimon... killed many of the elders of Israel...

So what are we pondering?

The second Beit HaMikdash was a pale shadow of the first one - spiritually. The Jewish population in Eretz Yisrael at the time was, sadly, a small minority of the greater Jewish population.

And, as you have just read, the victory of the Chashmona'im was nowhere near the "and they lived happily ever after" ending that the kindergarten version of the story of Chanuka implies.

Not even 200 years. Not even a smooth 26 years. A totally rocky

period that got progressively worse and worse.

And yet...

B'NEI VINA (as we sing in Ma'oz Tzur) - men of deep understanding, saw fit to establish a joyous 8-day holiday with full Hallel and more, to thank HKB"H for what we got - a renewed dedication to Torah and Mitzvot and the chance to continue to grow spiritually. They taught us to be thankful, even if the glass is not full yet.

What's a Chanuka presentation from PhiloTorah without Gimatriya Matches?

The culmination of the confronta- tion between Eliyahu HaNavi and the false prophets of Baal was an open miracle wherein the sacrifice to G-d offered by Eliyahu was consumed by divine fire, even though it and the altar had been doused and saturated with water. The people's reaction was a clear declaration of commitment to G-d:

HASHEM HU HA-ELOKIM, HASHEM HU HA-ELOKIM.

These stirring words share a gimatriya (258) with **NEIS GADOL HAYA PO**. This Gimatriya Match serves as a numeric pointer to the concept of B'CHOL DOR VADOR... In every generation (miracles save us)...

More Chanuka GMs

Still working with the letters of the S'vivon (a.k.a. Dreidel), looking for another nice Chanuka gimatriya match, we already found a nice GM.

So I went for the MILUI(vv) gimatriya of NEIS GADOL HAYA PO. That's spelling each letter and using its total gimatriya. It came to 948 (spelling VAV as VAV-VAV rather than VAV-ALEF-VAV). It totalled 948.

And it matched beautifully the words we find twice in the Torah reading for Chanuka -

וְאֵת ׀ וְזֶכֶת הַמְּזֻבָּזוֹ...

Using the more traditional spelling of the letter VAV, the MILUI gimatriya of NEIS GADOL HAYA PO comes to 949. That's now one-off from ZOT CHANUKAT HAMIZBEI'ACH. Not a problem, as there is a concept in gimatriya counting called IM HAKOLEL, adding one for the whole phrase. So ZOT CHANUKAT HAMIZBEI'ACH is 949 IM HAKOLEL - still a nice GM.

Here are some MAOZ TZUR GMs:

MA'OZ TZUR's first line:

מָעוֹז צוּר יְשׁוּעָתִי לְךָ נָאֶה לְשַׁבֵּחַ

The gimatriya of this opening line of Maoz Tzur is 1661. That is the gimatriya of five p'sukim in Tanach, including Mal-achi 3:23 -

הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לָכֶם אֵת אֵלִיָּה הַנָּבִיא
לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:

Lo, I will send you Eliyah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of HaShem.

The pasuk in Mal-achi, which happens to be the penultimate pasuk in Mal-achi and all of the N'vi'im section of Tanach, is speaking of Eliyahu being the harbinger of the Complete Redemption. But we, the People of Israel, did not jump out of Egypt into the Messianic Era. It has been a long journey so far, with many ups and downs. And we have to acknowledge and thank HaShem for every 'up' we have experienced. And that is demonstrated by Ma'oz Tzur.

And this:

בְּנֵי בִינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וּרְנָנִים.

Here's a line from Maoz Tzur, that declares that Men of Deep Understanding established the 8-day holiday of Chanuka, to sing G-d's praise.

Gimatriya of the line is 1634. That's a Gimatriya Match of Mishlei 12:7 -

הָפוֹךְ רְשָׁעִים וְאֵינָם
וּבֵית צַדִּיקִים יַעֲמוֹד:

The wicked will be overthrown and they are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.

Sounds like the pasuk is referring to Chanuka - no?

And then there is this line, MA'OZ TZUR's first line of the Chanuka stanza:

יְוָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזַי בִּימֵי חַשְׁמַנִּים,

The AL-BAM gimatriya of this line from Ma'OZ TZUR is 2608. The regular gimatriya of Sh'mot 15:11 in the SHIRA in B'shalach (and in our davening) is 2608 -

מִי־כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם יְהוָה מִי כָמֹכָה נֶאְדָּר
בַּקֹּדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלֹּת עֹשֵׂה פֶלֶא:

And we now have a numeric connection between "Greeks gathered against me", and those who fought them - MAKABI - the acronym of MI KAMOCHA BA-EILIM HASHEM.

AL-BAM gimatriya lines up the two halves of the Alef-Bet:

א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ
ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת

and exchanges their numeric values:

ALEF=30 and LAMED=1, BET=40 and MEM=2 ... KAF=400 and TAV=20.



Here are some AL HANISIM words to pay attention to:

chash-mo-NAI (totally silent ALEF)

k'she-a-M'DA (not am-da)

a-M'CHA (not am-cha)

a-MAD-ta (not a-ma-d'ta)

RAV-ta, DAN-ta, na-KAM-ta, ma-SAR-ta - all mil'eil accent

o-S'KEI (not os-kei)

lid-VIR (not l'd'vir even though the word without the prefixed LAMED is D'VIR, here the LAMED takes the DALET to it making the first syllable LID and the second syllable VIR gets the accent)

v'ka-V'U (not v'kav-u)

ul-ha-LEIL (not u-l'ha-leil)

Paying more attention to these words will slow down our AL HANISIM but will give us a chance to better thank G-d for all of the miracles and victories He has wrought.

And since the whole AMIDA is full of similar words to pay attention to, the result can be a slower, better pronounced and better understood davening.

In brachot #2 and #3 for the Chanuka candles:

ba-Z'MAN (not baz-man)

la-Z'MAN (not laz-man)

Towards Knowing Our Calendar

The first 5 days of Chanuka each can fall on any of 6 days of the week.

The 25th of Kislev cannot fall on a Tuesday; the 26th cannot fall on a Wednesday, the 27th cannot fall on a Thursday, the 28th cannot fall on a Friday, and the 29th cannot fall on a Shabbat.

The 30th of Kislev can fall on 4 different days of the week. 30 Kislev is LO ADU, but not linked to the 295 calendar dates that are in the LO ADU ROSH pattern.

The last days of Chanuka (and all of Tevet and Sh'vat) can fall on 5 days. First day of Tevet cannot be Thursday or Shabbat. The 2nd of Tevet cannot be Friday or Sunday. And 3rd of Tevet (which is sometimes Zot Chanuka, but not this year) cannot be Shabbat or Monday. Happy Birthday Tal Yadid!

The 6th day of Chanuka is ALWAYS Rosh Chodesh. The seventh is sometimes (like this year) but not always.

In a SHALEIM year-type (when Marcheshvan has 30 days), the first day of Chanuka is on the same day of the week as the first day of Rosh HaShana. Like this year. In K'SEDER or CHASEIR year-types (Marcheshvan has 29 days), the first day of Chanuka is the day before the day of the week that the first day of Rosh HaShana.