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The Universal and the Particular (Miketz 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The story of Joseph is one of those rare narratives in Tanach in which a Jew (Israelite/Hebrew) comes to play a prominent part in a gentile society – the others are, most notably, the books of Esther and Daniel. I want here to explore one facet of that scenario. How does a Jew speak to a non-Jew about God? What is particular, and what is universal, in the religious life? In its approach to this, Judaism is unique. On the one hand, the God of Abraham is, we believe, the God of everyone. We are all – Jew and non-Jew alike – made in God's image and likeness. On the other, the religion of Abraham is not the religion of everyone. It was born in the specific covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. We say of God in our prayers that He "chose us from all the peoples."

How does this work out in practice? When Joseph, son of Jacob, meets Pharaoh, King of Egypt, what concepts do they share, and what remains untranslatable?

The Torah answers this question deftly and subtly. When Joseph is brought from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, both men refer to God, always using the word Elokim. The word appears seven times in the scene,[1] always in biblical narrative a significant number. The first five are spoken by Joseph: "God will give Pharaoh the answer He desires ... God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do ... God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do ... The matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (Gen. 41:16-32).

The last two are uttered by Pharaoh himself, after Joseph has interpreted the dreams, stated the problem (seven years of famine), provided the solution (store up grain in the years of plenty), and advised him to appoint a "wise and discerning man" (Gen. 41:33) to oversee the project:

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, in whom is the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no

one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace..." (Gen. 41:37-39)

This is surprising. The Egypt of the Pharaohs was not a monotheistic culture. It was a place of many gods and goddesses – the sun, the Nile, and so on. To be sure, there was a brief period under Ikhnaton (Amenhotep IV), when the official religion was reformed in the direction of monolatry (worship of one god without disputing the existence of others). But this was short-lived, and certainly not at the time of Joseph. The entire biblical portrayal of Egypt is predicated on their belief in many gods, against whom God "executed judgement" at the time of the plagues. Why then does Joseph take it for granted that Pharaoh will understand his reference to God – an assumption proved correct when Pharaoh twice uses the word himself? What is the significance of the word Elokim?

The Hebrew Bible has two primary ways of referring to God, the four-letter name we allude to as Hashem ("the name" par excellence) and the word Elokim.

The sages understood the difference in terms of the distinction between God-as-justice (Elokim) and God-as-mercy (Hashem). However, the philosopher-poet of the eleventh century, Judah HaLevi, proposed a quite different distinction, based not on ethical attributes but on modes of relationship[2] – a view revived in the twentieth century by Martin Buber in his distinction between I-It and I-Thou.

HaLevi's view was this: the ancients worshipped forces of nature, which they personified as gods. Each was known as El, or Eloah. The word "El" therefore generically means "a force, a power, of nature." The fundamental difference between those cultures and Judaism, was that Judaism believed that the forces of nature were not independent and autonomous. They represented a single totality, one creative will, the Author of being. The Torah therefore speaks of Elokim in the plural, meaning, "the sum of all forces, the totality of all powers." In today's language, we might say that Elokim is God as He is disclosed by science: the Big Bang, the various forces that give the universe its configuration, and the genetic code that shapes life from the simplest bacterium to Homo sapiens.

Hashem is a word of different kind. It is, according to HaLevi, God's proper name. Just as "the first patriarch" (a generic description) was called Abraham (a name), and "the leader who led the Israelites out of Egypt" (another description) was called Moses, so "the Author of being" (Elokim) has a proper name, Hashem.

The difference between proper names and generic descriptions is fundamental. Things have descriptions, but only people have proper names. When we call someone by name we are engaged in a fundamental existential encounter. We are relating to them in their uniqueness and ours. We are opening up ourselves to them and inviting them to open themselves up to us. We are, in Kant's famous distinction, regarding them as ends, not means, as centres of value in themselves, not potential tools to the satisfaction of our desires.

The word Hashem represents a revolution in the religious life of humankind. It means that we relate to the totality of being, not as does a scientist seeing it as something to be understood and controlled, but as does a poet standing before it in reverence and awe, addressing and being addressed by it.

Elokim is God as we encounter Him in nature. Hashem is God as we encounter Him in personal relationships, above all in speech, conversation, dialogue, words. Elokim is God as He is found in creation. Hashem is God as He is disclosed in revelation.

Hence the tension in Judaism between the universal and the particular. God as we encounter Him in creation is universal. God as we hear Him in revelation is particular. This is mirrored in the way the Genesis story develops. It begins with characters and events whose significance is that they are universal archetypes: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the builders of Babel. Their stories are about the human condition as such: obedience and rebellion, faith and fratricide, hubris and nemesis, technology and violence, the order God makes and the chaos we create. Not until the twelfth chapter of Genesis does the Torah turn to the particular, to one family, that of Abraham and Sarah, and the covenant God enters into with them and their descendants.

This duality is why Genesis speaks of two covenants, the first with Noah and all humanity after the Flood, the second with Abraham and his descendants, later given more detailed shape at Mount Sinai in the days of Moses. The Noahide covenant is universal, with its seven basic moral commands. These are the

minimal requirements of humanity as such, the foundations of any decent society. The other is the richly detailed code of 613 commandments that form Israel's unique constitution as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6).

So there are the universals of Judaism – creation, humanity as God's image, and the covenant with Noah. There are also its particularities – revelation, Israel as God's "firstborn child," and the covenants with Abraham and the Jewish people at Sinai. The first represents the face of God accessible to all humankind; the second, that special, intimate and personal relationship He has with the people He holds close, as disclosed in the Torah (revelation) and Jewish history (redemption). The word for the first is Elokim, and for the second, Hashem. We can now understand that Genesis works on the assumption that one aspect of God, Elokim, is intelligible to all human beings, regardless of whether they belong to the family of Abraham or not. So, for example, Elokim comes in a vision to Avimelech, King of Gerar, despite the fact that he is a pagan. The Hittites call Abraham "a prince of God [Elokim] in our midst." Jacob, in his conversations with Laban and later with Esau uses the term Elokim. When he returns to the land of Canaan, the Torah says that "the terror of God [Elokim]" fell on the surrounding towns. All these cases refer to individuals or groups who are outside the Abrahamic covenant. Yet the Torah has no hesitation in ascribing to them the language of Elokim.

That is why Joseph is able to assume that Egyptians will understand the idea of Elokim, even though they are wholly unfamiliar with the idea of Hashem. This is made clear in two pointed contrasts. The first occurs in Genesis 39, Joseph's experience in the house of Potiphar. The chapter consistently and repeatedly uses the word Hashem in relation to Joseph ("Hashem was with Joseph... Hashem gave him success in everything he did" [Gen. 39:2, 5]), but when Joseph speaks to Potiphar's wife, who is attempting to seduce him, he says, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against Elokim" (Gen. 39:9). The second is in the contrast between the Pharaoh who speaks to Joseph and twice uses the word Elokim, and the Pharaoh of Moses' day, who says, "Who is Hashem that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know Hashem and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2). An Egyptian can understand Elokim, the God of nature. He cannot understand Hashem, the God of personal relationship. Judaism was and remains unique in its combination of universalism and particularism. We believe that God is the God of all humanity. He created all. He is accessible to all. He cares for all. He has made a covenant with all. Yet there is also a relationship with God that is unique to the Jewish people. It alone has placed its national life under His direct sovereignty. It alone has risked its very existence on a divine covenant. It testifies in its history to the presence within it of a Presence beyond history.

As we search in the twenty-first century for a way to avoid a "clash of civilisations," humanity can learn much from this ancient and still compelling way of understanding the human condition. We are all "the image and likeness" of God. There are universal principles of human dignity. They are expressed in the Noahide covenant, in human wisdom (hokhma), and in that aspect of the One God we call Elokim. There is a global covenant of human solidarity. But each civilisation is also unique. We do not presume to judge them, except insofar as they succeed or fail in honouring the basic, universal principles of human dignity and justice. We as Jews rest secure in our relationship with God, the God who has revealed Himself to us in the intimacy and particularity of love, whom we call Hashem.

The challenge of an era of conflicting civilisations is best met by following the example of Abraham, Sarah and their children, as exemplified in Joseph's contribution to the economy and politics of Egypt, saving it and the region from famine. To be a Jew is to be true to our faith while being a blessing to others regardless of their faith. That is a formula for peace and graciousness in an age badly in need of both.

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Rav Yissocher Frand – Parshas Miketz Why Couldn't the Magicians Have Figured It Out?

Parshas Miketz begins with the famous story of Pharaoh's dreams. In the first dream, seven fat cows emerge from the Nile, followed by seven scrawny cows.

The seven scrawny cows eat the seven fat cows. What does that mean? Then Pharaoh has a similar dream – but instead of cows, there are stalks of grain. The same scenario plays out – seven thin stalks swallow up seven fat stalks and the stalks remain as thin as they were previously.

The pasuk says "And it was in the morning; and his spirit was agitated; so he sent and summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all of its wise men; Pharaoh related his dream to them, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh." (Bereshis 41:8) Eventually, they brought up Yosef from the dungeon. Yosef came with a recommendation that he is a master dream interpreter. When Pharaoh introduces himself and his situation to Yosef, he says – "I understand you are an interpreter of dreams" to which Yosef responds "That is beyond me; G-d will respond to Pharaoh's welfare." (Bereshis 41:16) Basically Yosef denied having any personal ability to interpret dreams, but did acknowledge that if Hashem would communicate the dream's message to Yosef, he would be able to pass that information on to Pharaoh.

The question needs to be asked: How was it that "all the magicians and wise men of Egypt" were not able to interpret these dreams for Pharaoh? These dreams were not rocket science. You do not need to be a world class genius to figure out what the symbolism might be of scrawny cows swallowing up fat cows.

True, Yosef gave a nice interpretation, but it was not so unique or creative that it makes sense to say nobody else could have figured out the same symbolism. Why, in fact, did these dreams stump the magicians (chartumim) and the wise men of Mitzrayim?

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin writes that they could not figure it out because these were the "chartumei Mitzrayim." We have seen on other occasions that the "Chartumei Mitzrayim" could foretell the future. They were seers. They had clairvoyance. So they looked in their crystal ball and saw that there were going to be seven years of plenty and they were going to be followed by only two years of famine. (This ability to discern the future on the part of the "magicians" was some type of sorcery – through the powers of tumah (impurity) — that existed in Biblical times).

Why were there only two years of famine? Chazal say that when Yaakov came down to Egypt – two years into the period of famine – the famine stopped. Had the magicians seen in their crystal ball seven years of plenty followed by seven lean years, they would have certainly been able to interpret the dream!

However, seven years of plenty followed by only two years of famine did not match the parameters of the dream. Consequently, "No one could interpret them to Pharaoh." They saw the future but it did not make any sense.

Yosef, on the other hand, responds "Elokim will answer the welfare of Pharaoh." The Master of the Universe knows not only what WILL happen in the future, He also knows what COULD HAVE BEEN. The Almighty knew that Yaakov Avinu will come down to Egypt, and in his merit the famine will stop, but what could have been without this special merit of the Patriarch was that the famine would have lasted for seven years. This is why Yosef could interpret the dream, but not the magicians of Pharaoh.

Rav Yehoshua Leib says that with this we can understand a passage in the Hagadah. (Write this down and stick it in your Hagadah for next Pesach or you will not remember it!) The Hagadah says "v'Es Lachatzeinu" (and our oppression) "zu perishus Derech Eretz" (this refers to abstinence). Inasmuch as parents were afraid of bringing more children into the world (particularly after the decree to slaughter male children by throwing them into the Nile), husbands and wives abstained from having relations. This means that potentially there could have been many more Jewish children, but the parents did not allow this to happen.

What textual proof does the author of the Hagadah cite to corroborate this teaching? "As it is written: "And Elokim knew." (She'ne'emar vaYedah Elokim). What is the meaning of vaYedah Elokim? This expression is used because the Almighty knows not only what WILL BE in the future, He also

knows what COULD HAVE BEEN. The Ribono shel Olam saw that if the men and women had lived together, there would have been so many more children. This is the interpretation of “v’Es lachatzeinu zu perishas Derech Eretz; she’ne’emar vaYedah Elokim.”

How Does One Earn the Title “Tzadik”?

I heard the following beautiful thought in the name of the Ba’alei haTosofos. It is short and sweet.

There are two people in Tanach and Chazal who are referred to as “Tzadik” (righteous). The first is Noach (Bereshis 6:9). The other person, as mentioned in the Talmud (Yoma 35b), is Yosef. Chazal never speak of Avraham Avinu haTzadik or Yaakov Avinu haTzadik. The term is not used to describe Moshe Rabbeinu or Dovid haMelech. The Rabbis do, however, speak of Yosef haTzadik.

The Ba’alei haTosofos say the commonality between Noach and Yosef is that both sustained the world. Someone who sustains the world earns the title Tzadik. The proof of the matter is the pasuk “Open Your Hand and satiate all living creatures with favor.” (Tehillim 145:16) What is the next pasuk? “Tzadik Hashem (the L-rd is Righteous) in all His ways and pious in all His Actions.” Someone who opens his hand and provides satiation to all life with favor earns the title Tzadik. Therefore, Noach and Yosef are both referred to as Tzadik because they each had the unbelievable merit of keeping the entire world alive.

Two Thoughts for Chanukah

Chazal say (Avodah Zarah 52b) that the House of the Chashmonaim hid away the Mizbayach (Altar) because the Greeks (Yevanim) defiled it. In other words, the Yevanim ransacked the Bais Hamikdash and not only did they defile the oil and the Menorah – which are central to the story of the Miracle of Chanukah – but they defiled the Mizbayach by using it for idolatrous purposes, as well. The Talmud expounds the pasuk “u’vau vah peritzim ve’chilliluh” (Yechezkel 7:22) as referring to the fact that once they defiled the Mizbayach, they made it Chulin (it lost its sanctity), such that the Chashmonaim had to bury it.

If that is the case, then everything in the Bais Hamikdash had to be re-consecrated – all the keylim (vessels)! And yet, the Miracle of Chanukah occurred specifically with the Menorah and the oil. Why was there not a miracle involving the Mizbayach or the Shulchon (Table) or any other Bais Hamikdash keylim that had to be rededicated? Why is the Nes Chanukah manifested specifically with the Menorah and specifically with the oil? A second question – asked by Rav Asher Weiss – is the following: Why is it that the miracle and the victory came about through the Chashmonaim? As successful and as brave as these warriors were, these individuals were not 100% “clean” regarding a very grave sin. Their sin was that the Chashmonaim, who were Kohanim (from the Tribe of Levi), took over the Kingship of Klal Yisrael.

The pasuk “The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah” (Bereshis 49:10) teaches that Kingship in the Jewish nation belongs in the Tribe of Judah. In fact, the Ramban, in his Chumash commentary, says that the Chashmonaim were punished for this sin and eventually their entire house was wiped out as a punishment for usurping the Jewish monarchy.

Nevertheless, the Chashmonaim were the heroes and the victors that saved the Jewish people at this historical juncture. We need to give credit where credit is due. In general, we say that “Meritorious actions are brought about by meritorious people.” However, it is peculiar that people who do not have a 100% clean record, so to speak, were the heroes of this era. Why did the Miracle of Chanukah take place through the hands of the Chashmonaim? Rav Asher Weiss suggests that the reason it was the Menorah that was the locus and the focus of the miracle, and the reason it was the Chashmonaim who were the heroes of the story is because Chanukah was all about Torah. The Greeks tried to make the Jews “forget the Torah and make them transgress the Laws that You Will.” Not only did the Yevanim wage a physical battle against the Jews but even more so, they waged a spiritual war. It was specifically about learning Torah. They knew that the basis of all Jewish philosophy is the Torah. They wanted to impose Greek philosophy on us. Therefore, they felt, the way to do that is to first eradicate Torah learning from the people of Israel.

In kindergarten, we all heard the story of why we play dreidel on Chanukah – because the Jews were learning Torah secretly. When the Greek monitors approached the classroom, the children stopped their Torah learning and played

with their dreidels. At any rate, the cultural war that took place was all about stopping Torah learning in Jewish society.

This is why the Miracle came about through the Menorah. We have mentioned many times when learning Parshas Terumah that Ner Mitzvah v’Torah Or (a candle represents a mitzvah and Torah represents light). If there is one keyli (vessel) in the Bais Hamikdash that symbolizes Torah study, it is in fact the Menorah. This is what the Gemara (Bava Barsra 25b) means when it states “One who wishes to be wise (l’hachakim); should face south (yadrim) (in his prayers)” because the Menorah was in the southern part of the Bais Hamikdash structure.

Since this was a battle about Torah, the miracle needed to come about in that keyli that was the symbol of Torah learning. Rav Asher Weiss says that this also explains why this victory came at the hands of the Chashmonaim. Who are the protectors of Torah in Klal Yisrael? It is the Tribe of Levi. “They teach Your statues to Yaakov, and Your Torah to Israel” (Devorim 33:10). The Chashmonaim, who were the Kohanim, who were a part of the Tribe of Levi, needed to be the ones who would win the victory for Torah in the nation.

Rav Asher Weiss points out an interesting phenomenon. Rav Tzadok brings a Medrash: Rabbi Akiva stated: From the day Torah was given on Sinai, we had the Torah. However, the glory of Torah and its brilliance, its richness, and its beauty were only evident at the time of the Second Bais Hamikdash. Why did it happen then? It is because that is when there was self-sacrifice (mesiras nefesh) for Torah. As a result of that, there was a renaissance of Torah. It was in the period of the Second Bais Hamikdash that we had the first Tanaaim. When we speak about the “Age of Enlightenment”, when we speak about “The Renaissance”, if there is one period in Jewish history about which we can say there was a “Renaissance of Torah” it was in the time of Bayis Sheni – after the Chanukah miracle. They fought for Torah, they were moser nefesh for Torah, so the Almighty decreed that there would be an explosion of Torah.

The development of Talmud Bavli which is still the focus of our Torah learning today – which is such an integral part of every Jew’s life – occurred in the period of Bayis Sheni after the Nes of Chanukah. As a result of the mesiras nefesh for Torah, Hashem rewarded them with this overwhelming gift of being able to more fully understand the depth and beauty of Torah.

Finally, one more brief thought about Chanukah:

The word Chanukah can be split to mean – Chanu (they encamped) – kaf-hay (on the 25th). They fought the Greeks. They were victorious. On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, they were able to rest from their battles and they re-dedicated the Bais HaMikdash.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld says that there are 42 journeys that the Jewish people traveled during their desert wanderings. Parshas Massai lists these forty-two stations. “From here they went to there; from there they went to here; etc.”

Which was station number twenty-five in this journey? Chashmonah! (Bamidbar 33:29)

Chanu Kaf-Hay: They rested on the 25th. Where is that? It is the station of Chashmonah. A hint from the Torah that the “resting” of the Chashmonaim will occur on the twenty-fifth of Kislev! A Happy Chanukah to all!

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Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

Being Aware of Hellenism Today

The holiday of Hanukah marks the struggle between the Hellenistic view of the world and of life and that of traditional Judaism and the values that it represented and continues to represent. The Hellenistic world was a superstitious world. It was a world where human beings were represented as gods, and a world of paganism, where idols, icons and statues were all glorified and worshiped, many times even at the expense of human life.

But it was a dominant culture, a culture that predated every aspect of human life. And, as all cultures, it had an attractive side. If it had been all bad no one would have followed it. But its positive elements, music, drama, art and architecture, its philosophy and new ideas, and the system of government that

would eventually develop into what today we call democracy were all part of the Hellenistic world.

And since it touched on so many areas of human life, it brought with it the negative parts of the Hellenistic culture as well, its paganism and violence, its immorality and depravity, and its wars and constant struggles for power and dominion. This happened in the Jewish world as well. Paganism was rampant during the time of the second temple and the Greek language and culture was dominant in many areas of Jewish life.

Even in religious Jewish life and in the language of the Mishnah and Talmud itself, we find many Greek words and ideas as well. But the success of the rabbis in combating Hellenism lay in their ability to defeat the dark side of it....not to accept its ideas and values, even if they begrudgingly acknowledged its language.

In the emerging world of the fourth and fifth centuries, paganism began to wane, as did Hellenism as well. Christianity became the dominant force in the western world and soon conquered all of Europe. Christianity adopted much of Hellenism. It had statues and icons in its religious services and had a great deal of pagan superstition built into its structure.

The Jews, a persecuted minority, attempted to combat all of this by denial of the basic beliefs and value system of the time. Judaism always represented a lonely road, but it always was the road to survival and to eternity. That is the message of Hanukah and of the lights of Hanukah which should long ago have been extinguished, but which burned ever more brightly, even in our day.

Christianity also has begun to wane. It no longer is the force that it once was in the world, and a new brand of Hellenism has invaded human society. This new form of Hellenism is a combination of atheism, agnosticism, immorality, and to a certain extent, the acceptance of violence as not only necessary but acceptable in human society. Because of this, again the Jewish world is challenged by the ideas of Hellenism. It faces the same challenges that it did many, many centuries, in fact, millennia ago.

It no longer can ignore the fact that Hellenism has invaded every corner of Jewish life and threatens us with moral, if not even physical destruction.

Hanukah comes to remind us that the struggle is unceasing. The rejection of Hellenism, of its ideas, of the fact that it leads to not only a dead end but a hellish end, should be remembered and should serve as a warning to all of us. This is the entire message of Hanukah as reflected in the flickering lights that always seemed to warm and inspire us and give us a vision of a better and stronger future.

Shabbat Shalom.

Happy Hanukah.

Berel Wein

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Parsha Miketz

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's Torah reading, we read of the dreams of the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Torah does not identify who this Pharaoh was. We know nothing about him, we know nothing as to how he became the Pharaoh. He is a complete mystery, yet he is the catalyst for everything that will happen. He will be the one who has Joseph released from prison. He is the one that will make Joseph the viceroy of Egypt. In that regard, and because of the dreams that he had, the famine comes to the entire area of the middle east and Joseph and his brothers enact the final drama of their relationship and of the building of the people of Israel.

It is interesting to note that throughout the Bible there are characters who are central to the story but who are basically anonymous. We do not know who they are and why they act as they do. We do not know if they are aware of the central role that they are playing in the history of civilization and of the Jewish people. From everything that we can read and understand, it seems that they are oblivious as to their role. They are behaving as ordinary human beings in what

they think are ordinary circumstances and are unaware that somehow cosmic events are occurring because of them.

The Pharaoh simply wants to have a bad dream interpreted. He is not interested and may not even know, regarding the house of Jacob in the land of Israel, nor of the fact that there is a young Hebrew that is a prisoner in one of his dungeons. All he wants is to have his anxieties relieved by having some sort of interpretation of his frightening dream. Here we have a glimpse into how Heaven, so to speak, interferes and guides - without notice - the events of human beings and of civilization.

This is the nature of human life. We always concentrate on the trees and most of the time we're not even aware that there is a forest. What looks to us to be small and insignificant choices are really magnified because of their effect upon others and upon history. The Pharaoh of Egypt does not realize that he is the center of a drama that will remain cogent and important for thirty-seven hundred years. He is not aware as to what his true role in the matter is. So, he just acts as a normal human being. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to see how quickly he raises Joseph. He could just have said, "Well, thank you for the interpretation of the dream." He could have just, if he wanted to be magnanimous, freed Joseph from jail.

But here, he elevates him. He makes him second in command of the Egyptian empire. He believes that Joseph is so talented and that the dream is so real that he must act in order to implement it. This, already, is the hand of Heaven. This points out to us how the divine will, so to speak, pushes human beings into behavior that is not quite logical, but that, in retrospect, is important, eventful, and meaningful. And that is really an important lesson that all of us should take to heart because there are no inconsequential actions of human beings.

Everything that we do, everything that we say, counts and is recorded for good or for better.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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The Single Light of Chanukah

Rav Kook Torah

Before lighting the Chanukah lights, we recite the blessing, "Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light."

Why does the blessing refer to a single light - "the Chanukah light"? We light several candles each night; why not say "the Chanukah lights"?

Chanukah and Chinuch

The word "Chanukah" means "dedication," referring to the re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration by the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV. "Chanukah" shares the same Hebrew root as chinuch - "education." But chinuch is the masculine form of the word while chanukah is the feminine form. Why?

Rav Kook explained that the goal of education is to nurture the student to grow and develop by inculcating good habits and proper conduct. Education develops their innate talents and natural integrity, and has a positive influence over the years to come. Therefore the word chinuch is in the masculine form, as it indicates a process of striving and developing inner potential. I

The dedication of the Temple, however, was a greatly different situation. From when it was first established, the Temple already encompassed all of its greatness and holiness. Future times will merely reveal the holiness that it always contained. Thus the Temple's dedication is called chanukah. The feminine form of the word is used, denoting a state of intrinsic holiness and completeness.

The Lights of Israel

The lights of Chanukah are a metaphor for the blessings of enlightenment that the Jewish people bestow to the world. All of the nation's potential spiritual gifts are included in the dedication of Chanukah: Torah and wisdom, prophecy and morality, justice and compassion, and so on. Like the Temple, these are qualities inherent in the people of Israel - so the word chanukah is appropriate.

Sometimes these 'lights' emphasize their distinct nature in order to make their full contribution, even at the expense of other ideals. Such divisions, however,

can lead to internal strife. Those who stress one particular ideal may look upon those who promote other ideals as detracting from a more important value. In truth, when each individual advances that light that corresponds to the inner makeup of his soul, the entire people of Israel is enriched. But these conflicts will not exist forever. As long as there is strife and dissension, holiness cannot be properly established. In the future it will become clear that all of the different lights share a common root, and are really one single light. Therefore, the blessing of Chanukah, which also encompasses the future potential, speaks of a single "Chanukah light."

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim
From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva
Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Collecting Brass Casings of Bullets in the Army

Q: Is it permissible for me to collect the brass casings of bullets which remain on the army's shooting range, after they have cleaned it?

A: Brass is very expensive. The army recycles it. It is possible that what was not collected in not considered abandoned (Hefker) since they will collect it the next time. You should therefore refrain from taking any or ask permission from the army.

Dirt on Rav's Shirt

Q: Is it permissible to point out to one's Rav that he has dirt on his clothing?

A: Yes. With humility.

Wiping Off Sweat with Tzitzit

Q: It is permissible to wipe off sweat with one's Tzitzit?

A: No. It is forbidden to use them in a manner which disgraces them. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 21:1-2. The same applies to drying one's hands or cleaning one's glasses with them. See a long list of such forbidden uses in Piskei Teshuvot 21:1.

Water of Eretz Yisrael

Q: Is it preferable to drink water of Eretz Yisrael than water from outside of Israel, i.e. from Turkey?

A: Yes.. The holiness of the Land. See Bach, Orach Chaim #208 (Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu was once giving a talk outside of Israel and they brought him a bottle of water and a plastic cup. He spoke for 45 minutes and did not drink anything. Someone came and poured him the cup of water but he still did not drink. At the end of the talk, Rav Eliyahu asked his assistant for a cup of water. Someone asked him why he didn't drink the water which was given to him. He said: I only drink water from Eretz Yisrael. After all, water is life and one only receives true life in Eretz Yisrael. In the book "Avihem Shel Yisrael" Volume 2, pp. 95-96).

Blessing of Guest in Hotel or Restaurant

Q: Does a guest in a hotel or someone eating in a restaurant recite the Birkat Orach (Blessing of a Guest) in the Birkat Ha-Mazon?

A: No. He is not a guest but rather a paying customer.

Torah Scholar Riding on Bike

Q: Is it permissible for a Torah scholar to ride on a bike or does it disrespect his position?

A: It depends on the custom in one's area. There were Torah scholars who rode on horses, donkeys and camels (In the book "Penini Rabbenu Ha-Kehilot Yaakov" [p. 128], it is written in the name of the Steipler Gaon that a Torah scholar should not ride on a bike. But in the book "Asaf Ha-Mazkir" [p. 10], Ha-Rav Meir Mazuz brings various Torah scholars who would ride on bikes. Rav Aviner rides a bike in Beit El where he is the Rav. Once someone came to see the community with the thought of moving there. Rav Aviner rode by and someone pointed out that this was the Rav. The person said: If so, this is where I want to live!).

Conversion of Pregnant Woman

Q: If a woman who is pregnant converts, what is the status of the baby when he/she is born?

A: He/she has the status of a convert (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 268:6).

Kissing Grave

Q: What is the source of kissing a grave?

A: There are those who do so in a respectful manner when they leave (Nitei Gavriel – Avelut 67:21).

Mitzvah of Tzitzit Every Moment

Q: Is the Mitzvah of wearing Tzitzit one continuous Mitzvah or a new Mitzvah every single moment?

A: One fulfills the Mitzvah each and every moment he is wearing them (Shut Maharach Or Zarua #1. Shut Terumat Ha-Deshen #44).

The website RabbiKaganoff.com contains many articles on various halachic questions about lighting the menorah, about kashrus issues related to olive oil, and questions about donuts. Here we present...

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Mikeitz - Chanukah

For the week ending 8 December 2018 / 30 Kislev 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Scharfer!

"Now let Pharaoh seek out a wise and discerning man..." (41:33)

Yerushalmis are noted for being scharfers, meaning that they have quick and incisive minds.

Last Erev Rosh Hashana I was leaving the mikveh through the turnstile, and just as soon as I got to the other side I realized that I had left my tzitzit in the changing room and to get back inside was going to cost me another twenty shekels. While I was thinking about what to do, a skinny Yerushalmi was just about to enter the turnstile. I explained to him what had happened and asked if I could squeeze through together with him. "Sure!" he replied. As we were going round the turnstile I said to him, "It's lucky you're thin." He said, "No, it's because you don't have your tzizis on!"

"Now let Pharaoh seek out a wise and discerning man..."

Seeing as Yosef had been brought to Pharaoh to interpret his dream, why was Yosef giving Pharaoh advice on how to run the country?

The Mishna says that "On Pesach the world is judged regarding the produce of the field." Pharaoh's dream happened on the night of Rosh Hashana, as it says, "On Rosh Hashana, Yosef got out of prison."

Ostensibly we could ask: If G-d wanted to reveal to Pharaoh that years of famine were approaching, why wasn't his dream on the first night of Pesach, the time of judgment for the produce of the land?

"Now let Pharaoh seek out a wise and discerning man..."

This is the subtext of this verse: If you ask why should Pharaoh have a dream "Now" about good and bad sheaves of wheat, a subject relevant to Pesach, the answer is: "Let Pharaoh seek out a wise and discerning man and set him over the land of Egypt." This is because Rosh Hashana is certainly the time for dreams about the fate of man, as taught in Mishna Rosh Hashana: "On Rosh Hashana all those who come to the world pass before Him like sheep."

Scharf!

Source Kehilas Moshe in Mayana shel Torah

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter - Chanukah
Preserving Orthodoxy, Then and Now

In the Al Hanisim prayer which we recite on Chanukah, we thank Hakodosh Boruch Hu for delivering the "many in the hands of the few". This refers to the fact that the Chanukah battle was between the small Orthodox minority and the Misyavnim (Hellenist Jews). The Chumash tells us (Devarim 7:7-8) that the Jewish people were chosen as the Am Hanivchar not because we are great in number; on the contrary, we are a very small nation - Jews make up much less than one percent of the world population.

The possuk towards the end of Doniel speaks of the fact that over the many years of galus Jews will be influenced by outside society and the number of Orthodox Jews will shrink one generation after another. While it is true that there are so many kiruv success stories and so many wonderful prominent ba'alei teshuva, there are still too many who are leaving the ranks of Orthodoxy. However, we mustn't despair over this reality - the prophecies which foretell the eventual victory and ascendance of those who cling to Hakodosh Boruch Hu and keep His Torah are every bit as true and reliable as that prophecy of Doniel. We certainly should try to do whatever we can to help and encourage every Jew to remain or become Orthodox. In halachah we have a principle that sha'as ha'dchak k'dieved domi, i.e. that in difficult situations we are permitted to act l'chatchila in a fashion that under normal circumstances would only be acceptable b'dieved. Many of the leniencies of hogaon v'ha'tzaddik Rav Moshe Feinstein were based on this principle that b'shas ha'dchak we allow l'chatchila what under normal circumstances would only be acceptable b'dieved. Even so, even in a sha'as ha'dchak situation we cannot do something which is not acceptable even b'dieved!

Over the centuries there have always been some Jewish leaders who had noble intentions to save and conserve the Jewish people but, under the stress of a sha'as ha'dchak, made the mistake of taking positions that were so out of line as to not even be acceptable b'dieved. The Conservative movement started years ago with the noble intention of saving and conserving the Jewish people, but unfortunately we all read in the Pew report what has become of their movement. At one of the Yeshiva's chagai ha'smicha, Rav Soloveitchik gave the charge to the young musmachim that they should be careful not to develop a "messiah complex", i.e. they should not convince themselves that they are "saving the whole world" and therefore are allowed to cut corners[1]. We have to be careful even b'shas ha'dchak not to cross the Torah's red lines - there are rules and regulations for sha'as ha'dchak as well! History repeats itself, and time and time again we see well-meaning Jewish leaders who are out to "save" the Jewish world, and because of their youth (i.e. they were just "born yesterday", so to speak) they don't understand that their ideas and courses of action have already been discussed and rejected in the past by our greatest leaders.

Guidelines have been developed over the generations regarding conversions and regarding easing the plight of agunos, and these guidelines have gained a consensus among qualified poskim. In davening we have the phrase "osei chadoshos, ba'al milchomos". The Chasam Sofer points out that very often one who considers himself somehow more qualified than others will not be concerned about gaining a consensus and will simply be "oseh chadoshos", i.e. introduce and/or act on his original ideas. This, of course, will rightfully evoke "ba'al milchomos", i.e. cause a reaction from talmidei chachomim. Instead of accomplishing the intended goal of "saving" Judaism, the ideas and milchomos will bring about the weakening of Judaism.

The Jewish people was always a tiny minority - "ki atem ha'miat mi'kol ha'amim" - and the Chasmonoim were a tiny minority among the Jews of their time, but it was their unwavering and complete commitment to unadulterated Torah observance that preserved Orthodoxy and proved to be much more powerful than the superior numbers of those who compromised and/or assimilated. Our focus must be on accurately and truthfully teaching and observing Torah, and we must be careful not to water down Orthodoxy or misrepresent it in an attempt to gain or retain numbers.

[1] See The Messiah Complex for more discussion from Rav Schachter on this point -Ed. Copyright © 2014 by The TorahWeb Foundation.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Mikeitz

פרשת מקץ תשע"ט

וידי מקץ שנתים ימים

It happened at the end of two years to the day. (41:1)

So begins the salvation of Yosef *HaTzaddik*, which would have commenced two years earlier had Yosef not shown a deficiency in his *bitachon*, trust in Hashem. After all has been said and done, Yosef truly suffered as a slave and a prisoner. He spent a good portion of his formative adult life away from family, alone in a pagan, immoral world. How did he do it? How was he able to maintain his extraordinary fidelity to Hashem amidst the multitude of *tzaros*, troubles, that accompanied him for thirteen years. This was followed by nine more years during which he was viceroy of Egypt, but had still not been reunited with his father. Twenty-two years of separation leave a scar. Apparently, Yosef weathered his travail incredibly well. What was his secret?

What is the distinction between joy and happiness? Happiness is a description of life as a whole. Joy means celebrating the moment. Every time a challenge arises, one should experience joy. How? When one delights in the knowledge that he is here by the grace of Hashem, that every minute of his existence is powered by the Almighty, he becomes joyous. One needs neither wealth nor power in order to feel joy. He experiences it via the realization that this moment is "sponsored" by Hashem; that He cares; that the pain is Heaven-sent for a designated purpose. When we live the "moment" and experience Hashem's Presence within this moment, we attach ourselves to eternity. Can there be a greater reason for joy? This is how Yosef lived. This is how we should live - every moment, every breath, every experience: if we experience Hashem, we feel joy.

אתה תהיה על ביתי ועל פיך ישק כל עמי

You shall be in charge of my palace, and by your command shall all my people be sustained. (41:40)

In *Parashas Shemos* (1:8), the Torah writes, *Vayakam melech chadash al Mitzrayim*, "A new king arose over Egypt." *Chazal* debate the meaning of "a new king." Was he actually a new king? Or was he the same Pharaoh that had coroneted Yosef as a viceroy over Egypt? He suffered from "memory loss," quickly forgetting the benefits he had accrued as a result of Yosef's wise counsel. *Horav David Povarsky, zl*, asks that if he was indeed the same Pharaoh who was so impressed with Yosef, why was it that the miracles and wonders of Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* did not impress him? The "first" Pharaoh not only acquiesced to Yosef's advice, he practically gave him free rein over the country. Now this "same" Pharaoh listened to Moshe and Aharon - and ignored them. How do we reconcile these conflicting reactions? How are the circumstances different?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the circumstances are as different as night is from day. When Yosef stood before Pharaoh, interpreting his dreams and advising him about how to move forward, Pharaoh had nothing to lose. His position would not change. He would now have a viceroy who would run the country for him. He would permit a holy, spiritual man - who happened to be extremely wise and a brilliant organizer - to manage his country. On the contrary, Yosef was making Pharaoh look good.

When Pharaoh met with Moshe and Aharon, the scenario had changed. The two Jewish representatives wanted Pharaoh to free the Jews. Pharaoh was not benefitting from their visit. He was about to lose millions of slaves. This would affect him personally, striking him where it hurt him the most - his wallet. Now, the decision to be impressed by the miracles would be mitigated by Pharaoh's vested interests. It becomes increasingly difficult to see with clarity when one is personally affected. The same Pharaoh who was inspired by Yosef's extraordinary demonstration of Hashem's power was not moved by Moshe. The reason was simple: Now Pharaoh had something to lose.

ויקרא פרעה שם יוסף צפנת פענח ויתן לו את אסנת בת פוטיפרע כהן און לאשה ויצא יוסף על ארץ מצרים

Pharaoh called Yosef's name Tzafnas-Paneach and he gave him Osnas bas Potiphara, chief of On, as a wife. Thus, Yosef emerged in charge of the land of Egypt. (41:45)

Pharaoh was confronted with a major policy decision. A brilliant young man stood before him, who had the ability not only to save the country, but also to fill Pharaoh's coffers with enormous wealth. The problem was that not only was he a slave – he was also a Hebrew. This would not sit well with his pagan populace. While they thought little of their slave population – they reviled Jews! What was Pharaoh to do? How was he to concoct an extreme makeover of Yosef and transform him into an “acceptable” Egyptian?

The Torah gives us the answer when it juxtaposes Pharaoh's “naming” Yosef Tzafnas-Paneach upon his marriage to Osnas. (Pharaoh gave her to him.) For all intents and purposes, Yosef was now Tzafnas. His wife was the daughter of the distinguished pagan priest of On. Yosef was no longer a Jew. He was now a member of Egyptian aristocracy! Pharaoh could not take a chance that the people might balk at his choice for viceroy. True, he was good for the country. They needed him. However, *sinaah mekalkeles es ha'shurah*, “hatred distorts a straight line.” Animosity blinds, perverts, and causes one to lose the clarity of his perspective. The Egyptians could never tolerate a Jew as ruler over them. It was necessary to change his identity.

Two and a half centuries ago, our secular brethren decided that they, too, must compromise their Jewish identities. They changed their names from Hebrew to German. They discarded their traditional garb together with their *tznius*, chaste dress code. Once they looked and talked like *goyim*, it was easier to act like *goyim*, to adopt their lifestyle and culture. Thus, they could completely reject their traditional upbringing and centuries of commitment to the Torah. *Baruch Hashem*, their dream of acceptance by the gentiles was never realized. The *goyim*'s hatred of the Jew was stronger than the Jew's external alteration of self. To the *goy* we were, and will always be, Jews.

אבל אשמים אנחנו על אחינו אשר ראינו צרת נפשו בהתחננו אלינו ולא שמענו
Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us, and we paid no heed. (42:21)

Twenty-two years had passed from that fateful day on which the brothers had sold Yosef as a slave. During this period, they no doubt saw their father constantly in a state of mourning over the loss of his son, lamenting over what had probably happened to him. What was worse, he did not know whether/how he had died. Yaakov *Avinu* could not get closure to the tragedy of his son's disappearance. The brothers saw this daily – for twenty-one years, but they were not moved. Never once did they even question the veracity of their deed. Had they done the right thing? Had they acted appropriately? Nothing. Never once did they question themselves. Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who sought to deprive them of their rightful share in *Olam Habba*, World-to-Come.

Furthermore, from the time of the *mechiras Yosef*, sale of Yosef, twenty-two *Yom Kippurs* had passed. Clearly, the brothers had confessed whatever wrongdoing for which they felt guilt. The sale of Yosef was not one of the subjects of their confession. At no time during the past twenty-two years, had the brothers experienced pangs of guilt. Yet now, standing in front of the Egyptian viceroy, they manifested a complete transformation. After being suspected of spying and being publicly ridiculed and maligned, their attitude began to change. Now, they faced the *tzaros*, troubles, which they understood to be punishment for their behavior twenty-two years earlier. What happened? Why did they make an about face?

Now, they were suffering. Now, they were the ones who were feeling the pain. The tables had turned, and they began to ask themselves – “Why is this happening?” The brothers were holy men who followed a strict *halachic* script. They had decided, based upon *halachic* dialectic and analysis, that Yosef was a *rodef*; as such, his punishment should be final. They believed in what they were doing. It was not petty jealousy, as one who is uninitiated might contend. Absolutely not. They were certain in their application of *Halachah* – until they began to feel the pain. Knowing that nothing happens in a vacuum, they questioned themselves, “Could we have been wrong – in some minute way?” Why, all of a sudden, now, after twenty-two years? Now it hurt them. They were feeling pain. It must be a Divine message that in some way they were off the mark.

ויקח מתאם את שמעון ויאסר אותו לעיניהם

He took Shimon from them and imprisoned him before their eyes. (42:24)

Chazal (*Midrash Tanchuma*, 4) teach that after Yosef said that one of the group would be held hostage until Binyamin was brought to Egypt, he

selected Shimon to be that family “representative.” The reason for this choice was twofold. First, it was Shimon who had initiated the process of the sale of Yosef, when he called out, “Look, that dreamer is coming!” Later, it was Shimon who threw Yosef into the pit. An alternative explanation is that Yosef was acutely aware that Shimon and Levi did not comprise a good *shidduch*, match. He feared that the two would conspire to kill him. Their companionship had led to the attack on Shechem, which had decimated an entire city. Yosef was not taking any chances. It was best that they be separated from one another.

The *Midrash* continues that Shimon reacted bitterly to his selection. Shimon turned to his brothers, who apparently agreed to “allow” him to remain in Egypt until they returned. He addressed them, “You are doing to me what you did to Yosef.” They replied, “What should we do – allow our families to starve?” In other words, they knew someone had to remain hostage while they returned with the provisions they had purchased. Shimon suspected them of turning on him as they had (all) turned on Yosef. (When the tables are turned, people view things from a different perspective.) Shimon apparently had some difficulty with this arrangement. They described their predicament as being between a “rock and a hard place.” Someone had to remain, or all of their families would suffer. Unfortunately, it had to be Shimon.

How did their response allay Shimon? He was about to be incarcerated in an Egyptian prison, while his brothers left to go home to their families. What made Shimon acquiesce? *Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl*, explains that it was not what the brothers replied, but how they replied, that calmed Shimon. He could sense their sincerity. They spoke from their hearts with great empathy for his dismal situation, but what were they to do? They could not neglect their wives and children, allowing them to starve to death. Their families were innocent of any wrongdoing. They meant him no harm. Shimon believed his brothers because they were sincere, and it came through. When words emanate from the heart, they will enter into the hearts of the people to whom one is speaking.

Likewise, *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah* 93:9) teach that when Yehudah came forward to plead the brothers' case before Yosef, his words were accepted in the manner in which they were rendered – with sincerity. “Yehudah appeased Yosef, he appeased his brothers, and he appeased Binyamin.” Yosef saw that Yehudah was risking his life for Binyamin, the other son of Rachel *Imeinu* (Yosef's mother). His brothers saw that he was standing up for them. Binyamin saw that just as Yehudah was willing to fight for him, he must have done the same earlier for Yosef, his brother. The question is obvious: How did the brothers know that Yehudah was doing all of this for them? Perhaps he just did not want to be excommunicated from “both worlds”: this World; and the World-to-Come? He promised Yaakov *Avinu*, “I guarantee Binyamin's safe return, or else I will be a sinner to you all my days,” which is interpreted to mean in “both worlds.”

Ostensibly, the brothers had the opportunity to recognize that Yehudah was “for real,” that he spoke sincerely from his heart. Everything that he was doing was purely for the sake of Binyamin. He was Leah *Imeinu*'s son; yet, he fought for Rachel's son. This left a concrete, moving impression.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that sincerity is the key to successful communication. We have a great and dire need for knowledgeable, G-d-fearing, unpretentious educators to reach out to the multitudes of Jews who – due to gross ignorance and apathy – have assimilated into the world society, which is tainted with moral profligacy and ethical perversion. We have a moral and religious imperative to reach out and bring them back to a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. If the teacher/*rebbe*/outreach professional lacks sincerity – ie, has chosen this vocation because it gives him a feeling of superiority, benevolence, righteousness, etc. which are all due to a personal lack of security – whatever success he achieves will be short-lived. People respond to ingenuousness. They are able to distinguish one who is sincere from one who is pretentious. One should feel that he is on a mission for Hashem, sent to bring his children home.

Regardless of one's personal spiritual eminence, if there is an ethical, moral deficiency in his attitude – even if it is only subconscious – it will affect his ability to communicate effectively and to successfully inspire his subjects. The *Rosh Yeshivah* substantiates this observation from what happened to Zechariah ben Yehoyadah, who was a *Navi*, prophet, *Kohen*, son-in-law of the

king. When he gave *mussar*, was compelled to rebuke the people for their clinging to idols, however, he was killed. What did he do wrong? Where did he go wrong? The *Navi (Divrei Hayamim II, 24:20)* writes, *Vayaamad meial l'am*, "And he stood above the nation." The *Midrash Rabbah (Kohel 10:4)* explains that he felt superior to the people, due to his lineage and spiritual stature. So? How did they know? Is this a reason to murder him? It is one thing not to accept rebuke, it is totally another to kill the messenger who is conveying Hashem's word.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the people sensed a minute tinge of personal arrogance. In their eyes, his rebuke lacked full sincerity. As a result, they viewed his rebuke as being superciliously indulgent, condescending to the people in a manner that came across to them as if it were inappropriate for someone as dignified as he was to speak to them. While this was categorically false, it was a perception that festered in the guilty minds of the people. Hence, their brutal reaction. People can feel when one speaks from the heart. They can sense the truth, and they respond in turn.

הם יצאו את העיר לא הרחיקו ויוסף אמר לאשר על ביתו... ואמרת אלהם למה שלמתם רעה תחת טובה

They had left the city, they had not gone far, and Yosef said to the one in charge of his house... "You shall say to them, 'Why do you repay evil for good?'" (44:4)

Of all of the messages of rebuke that Yosef could have sent to his brothers, "Why did you repay evil for good?" is the last one you would expect. The most pressing question to be asked was, "Why did you steal my cup?" Instead, Yosef seems to be delivering a *mussar shmuess*, ethical discourse, to his brothers, concerning their jealousy and their turning against him. The *Zera Shimshon* explains that Yosef was implying, "You were so jealous of me, because our father made me a multicolored coat – jealous enough to sell me as a slave! Is this what I deserve? Have you forgotten what my mother, Rachel (*Imeinu*) did for her sister, your mother Leah (*Imeinu*)? It was the antithesis of what you did to me. My mother gave the *simanim*, predesignated signs, that our father, Yaakov (*Avinu*) shared with her, to your mother, to spare her humiliation. Yet, you quickly forgot the debt of gratitude you owe." Thus, when Yosef demanded, "Why do you repay evil for good?" it was a reference to the good Rachel had done for Leah.

Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 84:18) use the expression, "You sold the son of Rachel" a number of times, rather than the simple, "You sold Yosef" or "You sold your brother." The *Zera Shimshon* explains that they are underscoring the fact that in addition to the wrong of selling Yosef, there was a grievance against them for their lack of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, for what Yosef's mother had done for their mother.

The importance of *hakoras hatov* cannot be overstated. It is an essential *middah*, character trait, that defines a person. One who is not a *makriv* is simply not a *mentch*, decent human being. We derive from the above an added caveat: *hakoras hatov* applies even if one had not personally/directly benefited from the person. The brothers had not directly benefited from Rachel's act of kindness. It was their mother who was spared humiliation. Yet, since their aunt reached out to their mother, they owed her son – Yosef.

Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, *zl*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Torah Vodaath, was informed that a certain *bachur*, student, was not attending the morning *Shacharis minyan* – despite numerous punishments and threats. Nothing seemed to help. The administration felt that the time had come to mete out a stronger punishment – ejection from the dormitory. They could not permit a student to avail himself of the services provided by the dormitory if he was blatantly ignoring the *Yeshivah's* rules that *Shacharis minyan* attendance was mandatory. Rav Yaakov listened – agreed – but asked to see the student. When the student heard that the *Rosh Yeshivah* wanted to see him, he became nervous. "Now I am really in trouble," he figured. Students were not commonly "invited" to meet with the *Rosh Yeshivah*.

He appeared before the *Rosh Yeshivah*, who informed him of the administration's decision to relieve him of his dormitory privileges. The *bachur* listened and accepted his fate. It was not as if he were surprised. He had been ignoring this rule for some time. He had trouble getting up in the morning, probably because he had trouble going to sleep on time at night. Regardless of the reason, he was out. The *Rosh Yeshivah* asked him whether he had alternate

arrangements for sleeping. He said, "No." Rav Yaakov told him, "I want you to sleep in my house." The *bachur* was floored. First, he was kicked out of the dorm, and, now, the *Rosh Yeshivah* invited him to sleep in his house. This was too much. He articulated his bewilderment.

Rav Yaakov explained, "Your grandfather was a supporter of the Kovno *Kollel* where I learned in Europe. Since I was a beneficiary of your grandfather's kindheartedness, I owe *you* a favor which I am now able to repay. Veritably, I cannot permit you to return to the dormitory, because that would breach the *Yeshivah's* rules, but there is no reason that you cannot stay at my house."

A similar story is told concerning Horav Moshe Feinstein, *zl*, who attended a wedding. Prior to leaving, he handed the *chosson*, groom, an envelope containing his wedding gift. Later on, when the *chosson* and *kallah*, bride, were opening their gifts, they were shocked to see a check for 500 dollars from the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Rav Moshe Feinstein. This was, in those days, an enormous amount of money (especially for a wedding present). The *chosson* shared his feelings with his father, who agreed that Rav Moshe must have erred and written an extra zero on the check. The next day, the father, together with the *chosson* and *kallah*, presented themselves at Rav Moshe's apartment: to thank him for the gift; and to return the check, which surely had been a mistake (that is what they thought, but Rav Moshe did not make mistakes.) Rav Moshe's response is a classic, "If I could give you 5,000 dollars, I would. Your grandfather was Horav Pesach Pruskin, with whom I studied. I felt such gratitude to your *zaide* that I wanted to give you a large present. This is the most that I can afford."

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**www.israelnationalnews.com
Rabbi Avraham Shapira zts"l
(First time in English)**

Third of the late Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira's essays on Hanukkah: "It was inevitable that the translation of the Torah into Greek diminished the uniqueness of the Jewish people.

The Greeks' main battle was in the spiritual realm: "To cause the Jewish people to forget Hashem's Torah and to transgress its laws." The decrees began slowly, with typical Greek cunning and craftiness, by having the Torah translated into Greek. This translation was a seemingly positive act, for it would make the Torah accessible to more people, and it even says that Moshe Rabbeinu interpreted the Torah into 70 languages. Megillat Taanit, however, writes that, "On the 8th of Tevet, the Torah was translated into Greek, in the days of King Talmi, and a darkness covered the world for three days." Therefore, it is brought down in halakha, that this day would be henceforth be commemorated as a fast day.

The Gemara brings a similar episode regarding the translation of Yonatan ben Uzziel, which "caused the Land of Israel to tremble 400 parsah by 400 parsah."

The translation of the Torah negatively affects the uniqueness of the Jewish people in several ways. First, because the Jewish people were unified in Lashon Hakodesh – the holy language of the Torah – and the severing of the holy language from the holy Torah and the holy nation is in itself a cause of darkness. Second, the translation enables the passing of the Oral Torah to the non-Jews. The translation is, in fact, an interpretation of the Oral Torah, which explains the meaning of the Torah, and its transmission to the non-Jews takes away from the distinctiveness of the Jewish people.

The Jewish people were unified through the Oral Torah, as it says in the Gemara, "Hashem made a covenant with the Jewish people solely for the Oral Torah, as it says 'for it is based on these words that I have made a covenant with you and with the Jewish people.'" Previously, there had been testimony, but now, a covenant was made regarding the Oral Torah specifically with the Jewish people, not with the other nations.

Regarding the non-Jews, the Gemara says, "Even a non-Jew who learns Torah, is similar to the Kohen Gadol." This seems like a great compliment, and yet, in truth, it hints to a lacking on the part of the non-Jew, that he is like the Kohen Gadol, who spends a short amount of time in the Kodesh Kodashim – inner sanctuary, and then leaves. On the other hand, regarding the Jewish people, the Gemara says, "More precious than pearls" – they are more precious than the Kohen Gadol who enters the Kodesh Kodashim." The non-Jew is compared to the Kohen Gadol who enters the Beit Hamikdash for a short amount of time, and then leaves, while for the Jewish people, the Torah is more precious than the Kohen Gadol, for they have a constant connection

with it. This is included in the covenant made specifically with the Jewish people, and not with the non-Jews.

In translating the Torah into Greek, the aim was to mar the uniqueness of the Oral Torah, which belongs only to the Jewish people. This is the meaning of the phrase, “to cause them to forget Your Torah.” The language of forgetting applies specifically to the Oral Torah, as it says in the Gemara, “In order for Torah learning to become a part of you, Divine assistance is necessary,” and Rashi explains, “so that you should not forget it.” Indeed, in the time of the Chashmonaim, there was special Divine assistance which brought about the revelation of many Chiddushim from the Oral Torah.

The Tosfot bring the Midrash on the passuk in Sefer Hoshea “I write for them the great things of My Law; like a strange thing they are considered.” The Midrash says that the Oral Torah was not written down, in order that it would not be copied by the non-Jews. Another great chiddush similar to this is brought by the Shu”t Sha’ar Ephraim, that the Selichot said in the month of Elul and times of Rachamim were also written in a very complicated language, for the same reason that the Oral Torah was not written down – in order that they would not be copied by the non-Jews. The uniqueness of the Jewish people vs. the nations of the world is exemplified in Torah and Tefillah, as it says in Sefer Devarim, Ki mi goy gadol asher lo Elokim k’rovim eilav... u’mi goy gadol asher chukim u’mishpatim tzaddikim k’chol haTorah hazot – “For what great nation is there that has G-d so near to it... and which great nation is it that has just statutes and ordinances, as this entire Torah?”

It is therefore inevitable that the translation of the Torah into Greek diminishes the uniqueness of the Jewish people.

Spiritual Distraction

The Tosfot Harid brings the chiddush that the harm in the translation is that it causes the Jewish people to forget the Torah. He writes, “Because the Torah was translated, there was no longer mesirus nefesh – self-sacrifice to study it in its original format [before the translation].” The translation diminishes the involvement and toil in learning Torah, which causes it to become forgotten. This was the intention of the Greeks’ decree. Indeed, we find that in this time period, the Torah’s completeness declined. The Gemara says that, “All the ‘Eshkolost – people of Torah, yirat shamayim, and acts of kindness – who arose in Israel from the days of Moshe Rabbeinu until the death of Yosef ben Yoezer of Zereda were free from all flaw. From that time onward, some amount of flaw was found in them.” The Gemara continues, “Rav Yosef said: [The word dofi here means] dispute, [e.g., the dispute] relating to ‘laying on of hands.’” Then the Gemara asks, “But does not Yosef ben Yoezer himself differ with reference to the law of laying on of hands?” The Gemara answers, “When he differed it was in his last years, when his mental powers declined.”

There were always machlokot – disputes in halakha – as is the way of Torah. But when the side of the majority was revealed, everyone, even the disagreeing minority, would see that their way was true, and come to agree with them. From the time that Rabbi Yosef ben Yoezer passed away, however, even when the majority opinion would be accepted, the minority would still cling to their original opinion. This is the meaning of the Gemara’s saying, liba d’im’it – that our understanding of Torah was diminished.

The Gr”a explains that from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu until Yosef ben Yoezer, if the majority had a certain opinion, the minority would come to agree with them. The intellectual involvement in Torah was so clear, that after the accounting of all opinions, the minority would see that the majority was correct. The Gemara describes the Torah learning in the previous time period as, “they learned Torah like Moshe Rabbeinu.” The explanation of this seems to be according to what is written elsewhere in the Gemara, “Moshe would say Yikov hadin et hahar – ‘Let the [acuity of] halakha cut through the mountain,’ but Aharon loved peace, chased after peace, and brought peace amongst man and his fellow.” Moshe’s Torah was so powerful and clear, that after hearing his halakhic verdict, both the prosecutor and defendant would immediately see it as unequivocal truth, to such an extent that Moshe would not have a need for Aharon’s method, for making peace between sides. Aharon, on the other hand, had not reached Moshe’s level. The scholars would learn like Moshe Rabbeinu, and when the verdict was decided, everyone recognized it as the truth.

In the time period of Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer, when the Greeks’ decrees began, the power of Torah decreased. Their decrees caused the heart to become diminished, and people became less great. As a result, the Torah also became diminished, which in turn brought about spiritual distraction. The spiritual deterioration of liba d’im’it was a result of the opposition to the Greeks and to the misyavnim – the [Hellenist] Jews who had fully adopted the Greek culture, who tried with all their might to obliterate the Oral Torah. The ability to cause damage to the heart, the inner strength, was due to the fact that in this exile, as opposed to other exiles, the enemy came from within – the misyavnim from among the nation, causing the deepest injury.

This damage is referred to among the curses in Sefer Vayikra, “Your enemies will rule over you.” Chazal expound upon this, saying, “I will place a ruler upon you from among you.” This damages the heart of the Jewish people, and so the Gemara says, liba d’im’it, the heart of the Jewish people became diminished, which is the essence of exile: To cause us to forget the Torah, to diminish the Torah and to diminish the heart.

The Midrash writes, “Yaakov sat... We learn that he gathered himself and he gathered his sons, and this saved him from the hand of Eisav.” It is understandable that gathering his sons would lead to Yaakov’s salvation, and yet, the phrase “he gathered himself,” seems unclear. Furthermore, how would such a thing contribute to his salvation? The answer is, in order for a person to succeed, he must “gather in” all of his strengths, to consolidate and focus them to his advantage. Just as there is a state of “ingathering of the exiles” of the Jewish people from around the world, there is also a need for every person to gather together and focus his strengths, so as to prevent himself from entering a state of spiritual or emotional distraction.

The Greeks fought against this exact concept. They did not exile the Jewish people from their land; they aimed to create a state of exile within the land itself. A person can remain in his own home, and still be in a state of exile: the state of spiritual distraction, which occurs when the Torah is forgotten. Forgetting the Torah causes considerable spiritual distraction, as well as considerable arguments, which cause controversy. This is the exile the Greeks wanted to invoke. They wanted to sever the Jewish people from their Torah, “to cause them to forget Your Torah and to transgress Your laws.”

Shabbos, Brit Milah, and Sanctifying the New Month

L’ha’aviram mechukei retzonecha – “To cause them to transgress Your laws.” The Greeks struggled to remove the status of the mitzvos as absolute laws, as Hashem’s absolute will. The passuk in Sefer Vayikra says, “I will not despise [the Jewish people] nor will I reject them,” and Chazal expound, “‘I will not despise them’ – in the time of the Greeks.” The Greeks’ decrees were meant to cause the Jewish people to despise the mitzvos as absolute laws, as it says elsewhere in Sefer Vayikra, “and if you despise my statutes.” As such, Chazal tell us that we received special Divine assistance in order to prevent us from reaching this degree of being despised.

In order to contend with the mitzvos, the Greeks forbade the performance of three mitzvos: Brit Milah, sanctifying the new month, and Shabbos, the three mitzvos that are the root of the entire Torah. The Maharal explains in numerous places that the first time a concept appears, we can learn its essence and purpose. So it is regarding the Torah as well. The Torah first appeared with these three mitzvos, which were given over even before Matan Torah on Mount Sinai. The mitzvah of Brit Milah was given to Avraham Avinu; the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month was given to the Jewish people in Egypt, as it says in Sefer Shmot, “This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year,” and the mitzvah of Shabbos was given in the desert, in a place called Marah, right after the splitting of the sea. These three mitzvos embody the essence of the Torah and its entire purpose. The Greeks wished to prevent the Jewish people from keeping these mitzvos, and as such, to sever their connection to the Torah, for without proper introduction and preparation for Torah, there is no way to access it.

These three mitzvos contain the essence and purpose of all other mitzvos: through the mitzvah of Brit Milah, the individual forms a covenant with Hashem; sanctifying the new month enables the Jewish people to determine the dates of the Jewish festivals, which testify to the fact that Hashem chose the Jewish people as His special nation; and Shabbos is testimony to the creation and renewal of the world.

The Greeks were cunning: they did not destroy the Heichal, they brought in a statue; they did not throw away the oil, they made it impure. Their intention was not to cause the Jewish people to forget the Torah, but “to make them forget Your Torah” – that this is Hashem’s Will.

The Greeks did not want to murder and obliterate the entire Jewish people. They wished to destroy the uniqueness of the Jewish people. As such, they did not destroy the Heichal of the Beit Hamikdash; they only broke into it and left it desecrated. Despite this, however, the Midrash explains the passuk, ‘and the darkness’ as:

“The Greek exile, in which the eyes of the Jewish people became darkened from their decrees. The Greeks would order the Jewish people to ‘inscribe on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the G-d of Israel.’”

Regarding the passuk in Sefer Breishit, “and behold, a fright, a great darkness was falling upon him,” the Midrash reiterates that the Greeks fought against the Torah, and wanted to sever the connection between the Torah and the Jewish people, by nullifying the three mitzvos that had been commanded even before the Torah was given, as preparation for keeping the Torah. These mitzvos indeed testify to the singularity of the Jewish people, as a nation holy to Hashem that He crowned with mitzvos.

The Greeks were cunning: they did not destroy the Heichal, they brought in a statue; they did not throw away the oil, they made it impure. Their intention was not to cause the Jewish people to forget the Torah, but “to make them forget Your Torah” – they wanted to sever the connection between the Jewish people and Hashem. The Greeks were fine with the existence of the Heichal, but only if it would serve for Avodah Zara, not holiness. They allowed the oil, but not pure oil acceptable for the holy service. With regard to the Torah, as well, they tolerated Torah, but not Hashem’s Torah. Their objective was, “to cause them to transgress Your laws,” not to transgress the actual mitzvah, but to disregard the fact that it is Hashem’s will. There are mitzvos which the Greeks did not care if they were performed or not. They only wanted to damage and sever our faith that the mitzvos are Hashem’s will.

We learn in the Gemara, “Rabi Tanchum teaches, and according to others, Rabi Asi: This shows that the Megillah must be written on ruled lines, like the true essence of the Torah.” What does the phrase, “the true essence of Torah” mean? It sounds like there is Torah and then there is the “true essence” of Torah. The answer is that all of Torah is true, but there is the essence of the truth. Rabbeinu Tam says that the “true essence of Torah” refers to the Mezuzah, in which the most fundamental points comprising the “true essence of Torah” are written. It contains the concepts of accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Torah, such as the underlying principles of the Torah and its magnitude; faith in Hashem and in His oneness; as well as accepting upon ourselves the yoke of the mitzvos, and that they are Divinely ordained. The Greeks fought to uproot this very concept – the centrality of faith in Hashem and in accepting the yoke of His mitzvos. “May Hashem Bless His Army and Favorably Accept the Work of His Hands”

The Maccabees’ victory was, in a sense, the victory of Torah, and as such, the holiday of Hanukkah was established. The holiday of Hanukkah is a holiday for those who study Torah, a concept referred to in two different places. First, it is hinted to in Moshe Rabbeinu’s bracha to the tribe of Levi, “May Hashem bless his army and favorably accept the work of his hands; strike the loins of those who rise up against him and his enemies, so that they will not recover.” Rashi explains this passuk, saying,

“From here you can see that in the future, the Hashmonaim will battle against the Greeks, and here, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for them, for there were few Hashmonaim – twelve sons of the Hashmonai and Elazar, against tens of thousands of Greeks, and so the passuk says ‘may Hashem bless his army and favorably accept the work of his hands.’”

Moshe Rabbeinu’s blessing to the tribe of Levi is conferred not only upon the tribe of Levi, but upon all those who study Torah as their livelihood. The Rambam writes in a similar vein, Why didn’t the tribe of Levi merit a portion of the Land of Israel and of its assets, along with the other tribes? For the tribe of Levi is set apart to serve Hashem and teach His just ways and moral laws to the nation... They are the soldiers of Hashem, as it says ‘May Hashem bless his army’... This does not include only the tribe of Levi, but also any individual whose heart urges him to volunteer to differentiate himself and stand before Hashem in His holy service.

At first glance, it seems that the Rambam and Rashi disagree: Rashi learns from this passuk about the future war of the Maccabees – the Kohanim from the tribe of Levi, while the Rambam learns that the tribe of Levi does not go out to war. Yet, in essence, there is no contradiction. For anytime the struggle is one of Torah values and chinuch, who will lead the way if not for the tribe of Levi? This is part of their nature, as it says in Moshe’s blessing to them, “They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov, and your Torah to Israel.” In all spiritual matters, they are assigned to the forefront, and the war against the Greeks was a battle against the Torah, as we say in Al Hanissim regarding the victory, that it brought Zeidim b’yad oskei Torasecha – the intentional sinners into the hands of those who learn Torah.

Moshe’s bracha continues, as he says that Hashem should “favorably accept the work of his hands,” that the war against the Greeks should be accepted for generations. The Gemara adds, “in a different year, they established these days [of Hanukkah] as a holiday of praise and thanks.” The question arises, why did they wait for a different year in order to establish the holiday, instead of doing so right away? The answer is, that they were in doubt as to whether the miracle was relevant to that specific time period only, or if it had significance for generations. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed that Hashem should “favorably accept the work of his hands,” that the miracle of the war’s victory would be accepted and established for generations. Yet, the question still remains, why was there a need to wait an entire year in order to decide if the victory was worthy of being established as a miracle for generations, and to establish it as a holiday? Indeed, the war was a spiritual one, with the purpose of eradicating all traces of Greek culture, and it is known that for a full twelve months thereafter, those who had been drawn to Avodah Zarah were no longer involved in it. The Gemara describes a similar situation, in which: A person who takes a slave from among idol worshippers, even if the slave undergoes both Brit Milah and the ritual immersion, [if he touches wine] he will still render it Yein Nesech, until the Avodah Zarah vanishes from his mouth. How long is this? Twelve months. Therefore, only the next year, twelve months later, after it became clear that the misyavnim had fully disengaged from Avodah Zarah, were they able to establish the holiday. This was what Moshe had prayed for – that their actions would be accepted and that they would succeed in the spiritual battle.

An Extremely Beloved Mitzvah

Hanukkah is the holiday celebrating the Oral Torah, which is hinted at in the Gemara, “A person who lights candles regularly will merit having righteous children.” Rashi explains, “As it says ‘a candle is a mitzvah and the Torah is light.’ The light of Torah comes through the performance of the mitzvos of Shabbos and Hanukkah.”

This Gemara is the basis for the Rambam’s statement, “The mitzvah of lighting Hanukkah candles is an extremely beloved mitzvah, and a person must be very careful [to fulfill it properly].” It is unclear why the Rambam specifically emphasizes the mitzvah of Hanukkah, for it doesn’t seem to be different than any other mitzvah. The Maggid Mishnah explains that the basis for the Rambam’s statement is in this Gemara, and each mitzvah contains the source and preparation for absorbing the light of Torah. The Rambam writes,

Please save us from groping in the darkness, kindle for us a candle to straighten the stumbling blocks, and light a light to guide us in the path of righteousness, as it says, “Your words are a candle to my step, and light for my path.”

What makes the Shabbos and Hanukkah candles special is that through their light, the unique quality of these days becomes apparent, i.e. the ability to truly attain Torah. It was on Hanukkah that the decrees of the Greeks were nullified, as they tried to prevent the Jewish people from learning Torah and from performing the three essential mitzvos, of Shabbos, Bris Milah, and sanctifying the new month. Therefore, the most praiseworthy way to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting Hanukkah candles is to be fully aware of and connected to the holiness of Torah, which brings a person to treasure everything connected to learning Torah.

Cherishing the mitzvos of Shabbos and Hanukkah candles contains the virtue of loving Torah, and as such, the reward for these mitzvos is to have children who are Talmidei Chachamim. As it says in the Gemara, “Rava said, that a person who loves Talmidei Chachamim, will have children who are Talmidei Chachamim as well.” From this we can understand the words of the Maggid Mishnah brought earlier, that a person who values the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles will certainly cherish all of the Torah, and so the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles encompasses a degree of extra special

appreciation for Torah learning above all other mitzvos. Therefore, it is indeed “an extremely beloved mitzvah.” appreciation for Torah learning above all other mitzvos. Therefore, it is indeed “an extremely beloved mitzvah.”

Here, the Gemara teaches that the reward for the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles is given right away, as opposed to other mitzvos, whose rewards are given in the World to Come. If a person is careful in keeping the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles, and his children study Torah, they will become Talmidei Chachamim. The Gemara continues, and tells us that:

A person who is careful in performing the mitzvah of Mezuzah, will merit to have a nice house; a person who is careful in performing the mitzvah of Tzitzis will merit to have a nice Tallis; a person who is careful in performing the mitzvah of Kiddush will merit to fill wine casks.

The question arises regarding Hanukkah candles, why does a person careful in this mitzvah not merit something connected to Hanukkah candles, such as a nice Menorah, just as “a person who is careful in performing the mitzvah of Tzitzis will merit to have a nice Tallis” because Tzitzis is connected to clothing, and “a person who is careful in performing the mitzvah of Mezuzah, will merit to have a nice house” because the Mezuzah is connected to the house?

Why does a person careful in the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles merit Torah as a reward? It seems as if this reward is not connected to the mitzvah. Yet, we can understand this according to the Gemara which teaches that when lighting the Hanukkah candles, we say in the bracha, V’tzivanu – “That you have commanded us.” The Gemara asks, what exactly is the source of this commandment? For the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles is not from the Written Torah. Rav Avia says that this commandment is based on the passuk, Lo sassur – “You shall not turn away [from the word they tell you, either right or left].” Rav Nechemia says that we are commanded this from the passuk, She’al avicha v’yagedcha, z’keinecha v’yomru lach – “Ask your father and he will tell you, [ask] the Chachamim and they will inform you...”

Because the entire mitzvah of Hanukkah candles comes from the Oral Torah, a person who is careful in lighting Hanukkah candles merits Torah as a reward.

Indeed it seems as if the Gemara asks, “from where are we commanded” regarding the mitzvah of Hanukkah candles specifically, as opposed to other Rabbinnically-ordained mitzvos, because here, the entire purpose is to emphasize the power of the Chachamim and the power of the Oral Torah, the root of our war against the Greeks.

Another mitzvah in which candles are central is bedikat chametz, which the Gemara teaches must be done by the light of a candle. We learn this from the connection to the word “candle” in the passuk, Ner Hashem nishmat adam, chofes kol chadrei baten – “Man’s soul is Hashem’s candle, which searches out all the innermost parts.” From here we see that “candle” indicates searching and revealing. This concept applies to the Shabbos and Hanukkah candles as well, whose purpose is to reveal and kindle the light of Torah. So it is that “a person who is careful to light Hanukkah candles will merit having righteous children.”

The Rambam writes further that the Gemara above specifically discusses the mitzvos of Tzitzit, Mezuzah, and Kiddush, for these are mitzvos that a person can technically become exempt from performing. If he does not wear a garment with four corners, for example, he is exempt from Tzitzit; if he does not live in a house, he is exempt from Mezuzah, and he can make Kiddush on bread instead of on wine. Therefore, if he does perform these mitzvos properly, he deserves reward, for he could have chosen to exempt himself from them.

Hanukkah candles, however, have an additional value above these mitzvos, related to the love of Torah. We have mentioned previously that that Greeks wished to cause the Jewish people to B’chukosai tim’asu – “despise My statutes” in place of, B’chukosai telechu – “follow My statutes.” “Follow My statutes” – you should toil in Torah learning.” Toiling in Torah learning stems from a love of Torah, and this is the way to overcome the Greeks who wanted L’hashkicham Torasecha – to cause the Jewish people to forget Hashem’s Torah.

May it be the will of Hashem that in the merit of the love of Torah and toiling in Torah, we will merit to truly acquire the Torah in its entirety

Rav Avraham Elkana Cahana Shapira (20.5.1914, – 27.9.2007) was the head of the Rabbinical court of Jerusalem, and both member and head of the Supreme Rabbinic Court. He served as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1983 to 1993 and was the rosh yeshiva of Mercaz HaRav in Jerusalem from 1982.