

JewishTimes

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CHANNUKA 5773

Chanuka

A Call to the
Non-observant

The Ancient
Channuka Story:
**Megilas
Antiochos**

**Divine
Dreams**
Letters

**Celebrating the holiday of
God enabling our return to Torah,
while ignoring most of Torah?**

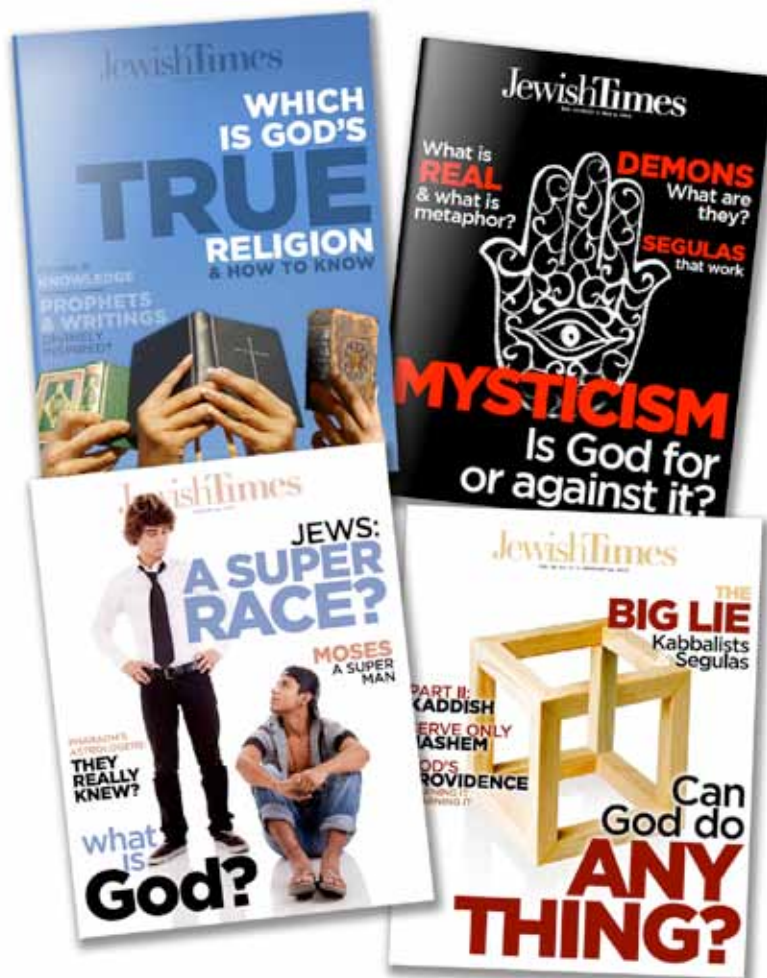
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LETTERS

Idolatry: Permitted by prophets?

Reader: Did Elisha permit Na'aman to worship idols? (Kings II, 5:17-19)

Rabbi: The commentators I saw do not offer any writings on this. But Elisha in no way condoned idol worship to Na'aman. Additionally, Na'aman, upon his skin miraculously reverting from leprous to a youthful nature, confesses there is no other God but the God of the Jews. He says he will be

coerced to bow before the idolatrous location, but in his heart, he is not worshipping the idol. Perhaps, then, for a gentile, a situation of "coercion" before idols is not a violation, explaining why Elisha did not tell Na'aman he must refuse bowing under coercion. Unlike a Jew, the gentile is not commanded in Sanctifying God's name, a positive command of the 613. Maimonides describes Sanctifying God's name is fulfilled by accepting coerced death over idol worship; a command for Jews alone. (Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 5:1) ■

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Questions on GENESIS

Ben: Why is Adam AFRAID of his nakedness after the sin? Interestingly, he is not afraid of God as a result of DISOBEYING Him, and not ASHAMED of his nakedness, rather he is afraid of his nakedness.

Rabbi: Adam did not fear nakedness. He hid, as he feared his disobeying God. Genesis 3:8 describing their hiding is "after" Adam and Eve covered their nakedness, proving their hiding was no longer due to nakedness, but rather, due to God's presence which evoked guilt of their sin. We see they did not hide until after they perceived God's presence.

Ben: The clothing given to Adam and Eve after the sin seems more like a reward than a punishment.

Rabbi: The punishments are enumerated elsewhere. But as God did not kill them, they were not worthy of death at this

moment, so He graciously continued His providence over them.

Ben: How do the punishments of 'toiling' and 'birth-pangs' fit the crime?

Rabbi: Toiling to eat bread corrects the relationship to food that was instantly available, perhaps contributing to Adam and Eve's quickness to eat of the forbidden fruit. Now that they required agricultural skills, they related to food as a gift from God, not to be taken lightly as in their sin of eating the forbidden fruit.

Eve was able to coerce Adam to sin. To correct this flaw in the female personality, she was now made subservient to Adam, in that she was now the dominated party in the relationship. Man clearly dominated woman throughout time. And her pregnancy and childbirth pain will focus her on "life" that she committed to mortality

(they were to live eternally prior to the sin) and perhaps additionally, preoccupying her with children so as not dominating her husband.

Ben: The Snake is clearly a symbol for desire. What does it being "Arom" (naked, just like Adam and Chava) mean to us? After the sin, he now has to 1) crawl on his belly and 2) eat the dust of the earth. What does that mean on an allegorical level (since clearly there is a lesson for us here)?

Rabbi: "Arom" here, means cunning, not naked. Unkelos translates arom in connection with the Snake (Gen. 3:1) as "wise". Rabbi Israel Chait taught that the snake was a real being, possessing speech. For if we suggest the Snake is a metaphor, maybe also Adam is metaphor, and maybe even God is too. This clearly destroys the Torah. So we must understand everything in the Written Law literally, unless it is impossible to do so, as in cases of purposeful exaggerations, like "cities built up to the heavens (Deut. 1:28)."

But as Sforno says the Snake referred to the instincts, we might explain as follows.

1) "moving on its belly" indicates a slower capacity to "move" man towards sin.

2) "Eating dust" means that the "acquired objects" of sin, the actual transgressions the Snake (instincts) compels man to commit, do not "taste" as good as man thought.

In other words, man will no longer 1) be as quick to sin, 2) nor will his sin offer him anything close to the imagined enjoyment.

We do not need to abandon the truth of a literal Snake, even applying Sforno's insights.

Ben: Chava's Name - God calls her Ishah but Adam names her Chava only after the sin and punishment. It seems like an odd time for him to name her. What does this mean?

Rabbi: I have to think about this one. ■

LETTERS

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Letters@Mesora.org

THE CONFLICT

Celebrating the holiday of God enabling our return to Torah, while ignoring most of Torah?

We're responsible for our fellow Jews. And with those whom we share a personal bond, there is more likelihood that we can bring them back to Torah. The greatest loss is one not living as the Creator deemed best for us.

Channuka celebrates our return to Torah. It is an opportunity to respond to our friend's and family's conflicts, sharing with them why Torah is essential, and how deeply it fulfills our lives more than any other lifestyle.

This Sunday Dec. 9th 12:00 noon EST, Mesora is hosting a live, interactive discussion on Channuka and the Fundamentals of Judaism. Please join us below and share with others. Q&A session on any topic following the discussion.

Hosted by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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HOLIDAYS

Channuka

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When studying the sources dealing with Channuka, there are many questions which surface.

I will first outline those questions, and then offer possible answers.

1) The Al HaNissim prayer of thanks included in our daily prayers and Birkat HaMazone primarily discuss the war. And at the end it makes mention of our kindling the lights, but does not mention the miracle of the oil. Does this mean that war is the essence of the day? What was the essential element in Channukah the Rabbis deemed worthy of being instituted as a holiday? Was it the miracle that a few Jews overtook the myriads of Greeks in battle, the duration of the oil, both, or some other factor?

2) What was the purpose in the miracle of oil lasting 8 days? The principle of "ohness rachmana patreh" - one forced by situation is exempt - rendered the priests innocent for not being able to light the menorah. Since they were exempt from the obligation to light the menorah until they pressed new oil and were cleansed from the casualties, why did God create this miracle of the oil's duration?

Can we suggest that the miracle of the oil is to reflect upon the war, that it was won via miracles? If so, why then does Rambam state that we won due to God's salvation, even before discussing the oil? It would seem that Rambam held that the Rabbis understood our military victory to be caused by God. In such a case, the oil would be superfluous for teaching this. Unless we suggest that the military victory - although executed by God - was not an overt miracle, and itself would be no cause for a holiday. It would be no different than wars won by Joshua for example, when conquering Jericho. A day around which, the Rabbis did not create holiday. What then was so

different about the battle of the Macabees or that entire event in general, that God decided to underline that event by the miracle of the oil, showing thereby such significance? There were many battles in which God made us victors. Yet in those many wars, God did not create an overt miracle after the fact, as is the case with Channukah.

Additionally, in his Mishneh Torah, Rambam indicates that until the miracle of the oil, the Rabbis would not have instituted the holiday based on military success alone. According to Rambam, what is it about the oil - or the war upon which it reflects - which demanded that Channukah be established as a holiday?

3) The Megilla - the letter - is read on Purim as our halachik observance. The reasoning is that this specific element was the catalyst for the Jew's salvation, as the Talmud in Megilla 12b states, "had it not been for the first letter, not one remnant or escapee of Jews would have survived". Meaning, since the Persians disqualified King Achashverosh's credibility based on a previous letter, which was foolish in their eyes, they showed little respect for the Kings subsequent decree to destroy the Jews. Following this template for establishing a holiday, if the Rabbis established Channukah based on the success of the war, why is there no mention of the Channukah battle as part of our halachik performance? Lighting oil or candles is divorced from the battle. Why are these lights selected by the Rabbis as the performance of the halacha, and not something germane to the war, like carrying a sword or the like? Purim's laws were organized around elements, which caused our salvation. Why are Channukah laws centered on a miracle subsequent to our salvation?

4) What is the concept of having

"mehadrin" - the concept that there are multiple levels of fulfilling the obligation of Channukah flames, each more preferred than the previous? We do not see this concept in connection with the Megilla. Additionally, why focus on the 8-day element, to the point that 8 days became an essential aspect of our halachik performance, as we light for 8 days, but only read the Megilla on one day? Additionally, why does a single Channukah menorah satisfy an entire household's halachik obligations, whereas this does not work in the case of Lulav? Here, each member must have his own four species?

Although possible to enact a miracle in the war itself, God chose to enact a miracle in the lights to emphasize our adherence to the Torah commands as the essence of that event, not mere bodily rescue. Life alone is not the goal for man. It must be a life of understanding and adherence to God's Torah. Without Torah, our lives are meaningless. Perhaps for this reason the Rabbis understood the oil miracle in this light, and sought to build the laws of Channukah around this reuniting of the Jews to their laws, illustrating thereby that the initial act of Torah adherence - lighting the menorah - was the goal of the victory.

This follows well with Purim, as we state therein, "kimu v'kiblu mah shekiblu kvar", "they (the Jews) rose up and accepted that which they previously accepted", i.e., the Torah. Purim was an event where the Jews saw that a life permeated with wisdom proved to be the source of their salvation, as Mordechai's and Esther's cunning saved the Jews. The statement of "kimu v'kiblu mah shekiblu kvar" displays again that mere victory is not the goal, but rather, the highlight of that military success was the reacceptance of Torah. Channukah is therefore celebrated via lights (the goal of the victory) which was the reestablishment of the Temple.

The Talmud in Shabbat asks, "what was Channukah established upon?" Meaning according to Rashi, "upon which miracle?" This Talmudic question addresses our question: answering, that without a miracle, military success would not qualify as a holiday. Only through the event of the miracle of the oil did the

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Rabbis deem Chanukah worthy of institution as a holiday, and did so via lights, as this was the 'goal' of the victory. The essential miracle was the war, as it was the catalyst for our Torah adherence. So when offering thanks, we thank God for the success of the war, but not the lights. The lights are not that for which we are thankful. The lights are the reestablishment of our Torah. It was the war, which demands thanks. The lights are used to recall the goal of the day through observance generation after generation. We make recourse to lights to pronounce the goal. However, it is the war alone for which we are thankful.

What was present in Chanukah, which surpassed the battle at Jericho for example? Or when God stopped the Sun and Moon in Gibeon and Amek Ayalon respectively? All had miracles! Why then was Chanukah established as a holiday, but not Jericho or other events, which included miracles? The answer could be the following: The miracle of the oil was subsequent to the war when we were already victors. All other wars, which contained miracles, had miracles for the sake of winning the war. The Rabbis may have

perceived the fact that God enacted a miracle unnecessary for salvation as a Divine indication that Chanukah was different, and worthy of institution as a holiday. (A Rabbi once discussed another difference, that during Chanukah, the Greeks sought to strip us of our Judaism, not so in other wars, where the enemy simply was fighting for land.)

The element of a subsequent miracle (not necessary for salvation) compounded with our salvation from religious oppression (not mere military victory) were recognized by the Rabbis as grounds for instituting Chanukah as a holiday. That special quality of God's salvation from oppression, enabling us to follow the Torah also existed during Purim. Therefore we have only two holidays subsequent to the giving of the Torah; Purim recalls our bodily salvation, whereas Chanukah recalls our religious salvation.

While discussing this further with Rabbi Mann, we came to the observation that "holiday" means that which is instituted for generations to observe. This needs explanation, as it would have sufficed to celebrate Chanukah

just that one year. The concept of a perpetual celebration must be adding another point. That is that the future celebrants have what to celebrate, somewhat on par with those who actually experienced the salvation so long ago. What do we - the future celebrants - have in common with the Jews alive at that event? It is that our existence and ability to practice our laws is a direct result from the miracles of Chanukah. As we are direct beneficiaries, we must also show thanks to God for these acts of kindness. This also explains why Passover has two models: "Passover of Egypt", and "Passover for Generations". We see this idea is consistently part of our laws.

The concept of mehadrin - beautification - teaches us that there are levels of fulfilling the obligation of Chanukah. The reason mehadrin exists for few commands is as follows: When a Torah obligation deals with qualitative act, such as donning tefillin, one either dons them or does not. There is nothing more to be added after one has put on tefillin: you cannot wear tefillin more, once they are on. A quantitative increase is impossible, you either wear them or you don't. The same applies to

kosher, either one eats kosher or he doesn't. But an act, which is of a quantitative measure, is different. Such acts as discussing the Exodus, Chanukah lights, and purchasing a finer Esrog, all lend themselves to quantitative increase. One may discuss the Exodus until morning, or buy a better Esrog, or light multiple candles. But there still must be sound reasoning behind such increase.

There is one goal with the lighting of the candles: to publicize the miracle to others. There are two ways in which we can increase this publicity: 1) more individuals spreading the story through multiple menorahs, and 2) increasing the content of the story publicized, which is achieved by increasing the number of lights each night. This teaches a passerby that there were a number of days, which the miracle lasted, thus, teaching a new element. By lighting only one candle each night, all one knows when he sees a menorah, is that there was a miracle of Chanukah. But if he sees five candles on the fifth night, he now learns something new: there were many days to the miracle. This increases the content of the story taught through the lights. ■

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ONE THEME

Temple & Channuka

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There are a few instances in Jewish history concerning the building and rededication of the Temple. They include David's desire to build the first Temple, Zerubabel's rebuilding of the second Temple, and the rededication of the Temple during Chanukah. There is an underlying theme that permeates all three cases. Let us review a previous lesson concerning the first Temple.

Samuel II, 7:1-17

[1] And it was as the king dwelled in his house, and God gave him respite from all around, from all of his enemies. [2] And the king said to Nathan the Prophet, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." [3] And Nathan said to the king, "All that is in your heart do, for God is with you."

[4] And it was on that night, and it was that the word of God was to Nathan saying: [5] "Go and say to David saying, 'So says God: Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?' [6] For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt, and until this day, and I traveled in a tent and a Tabernacle. [7] In all that I traveled, in all the Children of Israel, was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, of whom I commanded (judges) to herd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

[8] And now, so shall you say to my servant David, "So says the Lord of Hosts, I have take you from the shepherds' huts, from following after sheep, to become a ruler over my people Israel. [9] And I was with you with all that you went and I cut off all your enemies from before you and I made for you a great name like the name of the great ones that are in the land. [10] And I shall yet establish a place for My people, for Israel, I shall plant it there and it shall dwell in its place so that it shall be disturbed no more; crooked people shall no longer afflict it as in earlier times. [11] And also from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel, and I shall give you respite from all your enemies; and God informs you that God will make for you a house. [12] When your days will be complete and you will lie with your fathers and I will establish your seed after you that come from your loins and I shall make his kingdom firm. [13] He shall build a house to My name and I will establish his seat of kingdom eternally. [14] I will be to him a father, and he will be to Me a son so when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of men and with afflictions of human beings. [15] But my kindness will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before for all time; your throne will remain firm forever." [17] In accordance with these words and in accord with this vision, so spoke Nathan to David.

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The first thing that strikes us is God's use of a rhetorical question, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?" And again in the next verse, "was the matter ever spoken by Me...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" This is to say that God rejected David's sentiment. God says that He never requested a house of cedar to replace the Tabernacle, making David's sentiment to build a house to God, somehow problematic. When God uses a rhetorical question, He means to indicate that He never requested this Temple, i.e., it is clearly man's wish "and not Mine." However, God says David's son Solomon will build that house. So is it wrong or right to build a house? One may simply answer that it was David who could not build the house – the Temple – but Solomon could. So the idea of Temple per se is acceptable, but it is with the 'builder' that God takes issue. We must understand why.

But God goes on in verses 8 and 9, describing how He made David king, and how He made his name great like those famous in the land. Why does God mention this here? What does God's elevation of David have to do with His disagreement that David builds a Temple? We also must understand why David must die, and only then his son will build a Temple. Additionally, what purpose is there in the relationship God describes that He will be a "father" to Solomon, and Solomon will be as His "son?" Was this relationship absent with regard to David? If so, why?

God clearly states that He never requested a house. Simultaneously, He says Solomon will build it. Therefore, the house or Temple is not an evil, but simply something God "never requested." Therefore, we do not understand why God rebukes David. What is the rebuke? And I do not mean rebuke in the sense that David sinned, as the Talmud states David did not sin. I mean rebuke in the sense that David's proposed building cannot take place for good reason, but not that the reason implies sin. So what is this reason that David cannot build the Temple, but Solomon can? Where do we look for the answer? We look right here...God continued with His response to David through Nathan, describing how He made David a king, and made his name great. Think for a moment...what might this have to do with David building the Temple?



THE TEMPLE'S PURPOSE

There is a primary question, which must be asked before answering our other questions: What is the purpose of the Temple? What did David say? He was bothered that God's ark was housed in simple curtains while he dwelled in a cedar wood home. What was his sentiment? His words are, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." David equates his dwelling with God's dwelling. Here is another clue. David meant to say that greater honor was due to God, over himself. He wished to give God's ark greater honor than the simple curtain in which it currently dwelled. But for some reason, God did not approve: David cannot build this Temple. God says, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt." God's response focuses on the concept of "dwelling." With His rhetorical words, "Will you indeed build me a

house that I will dwell?" I believe God is indicating that David's offer contained two errors.

The first error (not sin) is David's attempt to beautify the ark's dwelling. God said, "Was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" Meaning, God never asked for something, so man should not attempt any enhancement. God goes on, reminding David of the real truth, "God does good for man" as he cites how He made David so great. Now, just as God bestowed good on David making him so great, this Temple too is "for man," not for God. This is precisely why God reminds David of all the good He bestowed on David; to call to David's mind the real relationship; that God benefits man, and not the reverse. This is the central idea.

While in other areas, the Torah's injunction "Zeh Aylee v'Anvayhu" ("This is my God and I will adorn Him") allows man to beautify the commands,

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God's message here is that one who attempts "enhancement" in relation to Temple alone, is overstepping the line: he misinterprets Temple.

Temple is the one area in Torah where God must initiate change. Perhaps the reason being, that regarding Temple, man may err, feeling he is "offering to God" somehow. Sacrifice, incense and the like are subject to misinterpretation of this kind. However, the opposite is true: Temple is God's gift to man, not man's glorification of God. When we glorify God in Temple, it is for our good that we concentrate on the proper ideals: we offer God absolutely nothing. However, David's sentiment was that he should not "dwell" in beautiful cedar wood, while the ark dwells in curtains. He felt that he would be improving the idea of Tabernacle with a Temple, when Temple is in fact for man, and not for God. God reiterates this theme by reminding David that He made David who he is today. It is God who benefited David in the past making him great, and it is God who benefits man in Temple. Perhaps David erred in this matter. We also note that at the very beginning David says to Nathan, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." It appears David is unsure about building a Temple, and seeks Nathan's counsel. This may teach that David was not certain of his idea at the very outset.

ALLOWING ERROR TO SURFACE

Perhaps we may go one step further and suggest that this was the precise sentiment God desired to draw out from David into the open, for David to recognize, and come to terms with. Surely Temple is a good, provided God initiates its activities and enhancements, but God refrained from requesting it of man, until after David had this opportunity to express his thought and God could respond. Now that David was corrected, Temple may be built, but by David's son. Why his son? Perhaps, since David had the correct idea that Temple should exist, he would impart this to his son who could build it with the proper ideas. And, there was no longer any need to delay its building.



"STRUCTURE FOR GOD": AN OXYMORON

But there is a more profound error and lesson here. Improving the Tabernacle into a Temple acceptable to God does not occur structurally alone. Rather, the Temple's very definition as a 'good' depends on it being initiated by God, and not man. What is lacking in Temple when man initiates it, or what is added to Temple when God requests it of man?

It is impossible that man should suggest a structure, without expressing the frailties of humans in that structure. Meaning, once David suggested making a Temple from a more 'durable' cedar and not curtains, for God's "dwelling," he was using "human terms" for a building that is exclusively identified with God. This may very well explain why the original Tabernacle had no ceiling, as it is not a "dwelling," but a

location on which to focus on God. This being the case, such a structure would be marred, had it any semblance of a shelter, which a roof indicates by its very definition. God needs no shelter, He needs no roof, and a structure man envisions, even dedicated to God, is inherently flawed. Thus, the original Tabernacle could not possibly have a roof. Now, David suggests creating a more permanent "building" of cedar? This violated the very concept of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was to remind man of ideas about God. If the Tabernacle had a roof, it would convey an incorrect and heretical idea, that God shares the frail, human need for protection from the elements. Of course this was not David's thought, but perhaps other Jews might be misled. Thus, Tabernacle can have no roof. Additionally, if man initiates the idea to create a structure to God, this is equal to suggesting a roof be placed on the Tabernacle. For what difference is there, if I place a roof on the Tabernacle, or create a new structure to God with a roof, now replacing the Tabernacle? There is no difference. Therefore, God refused David's offer to create the Temple. In such a Temple, there would be no way to remove man's identity from it. Thereby, it would eternally reflect man's concept of a "shelter," not the true idea of Temple.

It is contrary to the true ideas of God that a building is made to Him, as "building" carries with it the notion that it is for man's purposes; a building is a human structure. However, if God initiates such a structure, as he did with the Tabernacle, then it is no longer "man's" idea of building. In that case, it may look like a shelter, but it is more akin to a museum which contains prized objects, and does not function as a haven for dwellers. And when God initiates such a structure, man is then building the structure due to a command, without motive traceable to the human frailty that requires shelter. Therefore, Solomon was able to build the Temple, as it was now God's wish, and not David's.

How does this relate to Chanukah and Zerubabel's construction of the Temple, that we read on Shabbos/Chanukah?

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DAVID, ZERUBABEL AND CHANUKAH

The Prophet Zechariah, in the Haftorah of Shabbos/Chanukah, concludes with the words “Not by army, and not by strength, but with My spirit.” This refers to Zerubabel’s Temple construction that it would be accomplished, but not through succeeding over the enemies or by human might. Its construction would be achieved through God’s creation of peace under Darius’ reign, where this Divine backdrop would enable Zerubabel’s successful and easy construction.

On Chanukah as well, God created the miracle of the oil as a lesson that God orchestrated those entire events. That rededication was not accomplished by the Maccabees, but by God’s intervention on behalf of those five sons of Mattisyahu; “and the many [God handed] into the hands of the few,” “the wicked into the hands of the righteous.”

Rededication and building of the Temple require God’s involvement, in order that man’s fame does not overshadow the true purpose of Temple: “knowledge of God.” God’s fame must be the exclusive identity of Temple, and in all three cases, God insured this to be so. God did not allow David to be credited with Temple; He did not allow Zerubabel to be credited with it; and God insured that Chanukah’s rededication was accomplished only through His miraculous intervention.

We should come away with a deeper appreciation for the precision of Torah. In all three cases, the Torah discloses precise wording that uncovers the underlying messages: messages, which lead to truly happy lives, and truly make sense. If we are discerning, and patient in our studies, “the words will speak to us,” as a wise Rabbi once taught.

This is truly the design of the Torah: its messages and lessons run deep, but are available if we approach each area with

the appreciation that the words are Divinely written. With careful study under wise Rabbis, we too will see these lessons.

God’s Torah “words” must be our focus in Torah study...in contrast to those who seek to startle ignorant Jews with mystical fabrications. God did not seek to teach mankind using mystical, and inexplicable stories. Too many Jews miss out on learning “how” to learn Torah, because too many classes seek large audiences, which they lure with eye-stopping lecture titles, and with fantastic stories which the educators themselves cannot explain. What good is it to render Judaism into a religion like the others, where metaphors are taught as literal fact, and where incomprehensible mysticism overrules sensible thought? The Rabbis spoke against this type of an approach, since such classes teach nothing that engenders any appreciation for God’s wisdom. What these classes do is dupe the attendees into believing that the lecturer is superior to them, since he can quote matters they cannot comprehend. But should not a class leave its attendees with “greater” knowledge? If you attend such classes, cease from doing so, for it is a waste of your time. It matters none if such a teacher is called “Rabbi.” It is the path of reason that we are to follow, not reputations, since this is the only distinction we possess over animals. Believing magical and fantastic stories, is akin to a dog believing his master will feed him...no intelligence is required. God gave us each the Tzelem Elohim, “intellect.” Failure to engage your intellect in Torah, “you fall short in the fulfilment of what you owe your Creator (Rabbi Bachya, Introduction to Duties of the Heart).”

God did not formulate His Torah to astound people with inexplicable and grand stories. God taught us a system that makes sense. His system opens our

eyes and minds to matters that resonate truth within us. And the Talmudic Sages clearly warned in numerous cases not to understand metaphor as literal, and not to even approach such areas, until one has mastered the basics. Can you open a Talmud and explain Tosfos and Rashi? Can you make sense of Talmudic argumentation? Can you explain a series of verses in any area of the Five Books, Prophets, or Writings? If not, then seek a teacher who can train you in the basics. And decades later once you have reached a level of proficiency, seek a Rabbi who can explain the metaphors of King David, King Solomon, Maimonides, and others who held fast to the true path of Torah...the path that makes sense to human minds.

All other religions are based on belief and blind faith. They have no proofs. Judaism offers the indisputable proof of Sinai. Judaism is different, where we do not simply accept anything that anyone teaches. But where our commands are viewed by the other nations as “righteous statutes” as God said in Deuteronomy.

Why is the Torah written so cryptically? Well, if it were not, then our knowledge would end with the concluding pages of each work. But since God’s wisdom is infinite, and He desires man to pursue wisdom from birth through death, He designed the Torah to yield new insights throughout our lives. Weaving the Torah’s words with His wisdom, in a cryptic but rational manner, God did not only give us words, but also the “keys” to unlock far greater wisdom. As we learn truths, we also acquire a unique methodology of God’s instruction; our minds become sharper, and we become more independent in our studies. We can unlock new doors.

Chanukah celebrates God’s salvation and the reestablishment of a Torah culture. This culture is one of intelligence. This should be our path. ■

The Hidden Meaning of Chanuka



RABBI
REUVEN
MANN

Chanuka has emerged as one of the most widely celebrated holidays on the Jewish calendar. It is not too difficult to understand the reason for this phenomenon. Chanuka is a happy time and not very "difficult" to observe. There are no restrictions in terms of "prohibited labor" as there is on Shabbat and other holidays. One can do whatever one pleases. The basic mitzvah is to light the Menorah each night, recite the blessings and sing a few songs. It also has become a time of gift giving and festive gatherings. The "user friendly" ritual requirements make Chanuka rather pleasant and easy to observe. However we should not be content with a superficial observance of this chag but should seek to understand and appreciate its deeper meaning.

Chanuka is devoted to the celebration of miracles. We light the candles to signify the miracle which took place in the Beit Hamikdash, where oil enough to burn for one day lasted for eight days. We are also required to recite the Al Hanissim prayer which recounts the miracles involved in the struggle against the Greek Empire and praises G-d for the victory. This blessing describes in very minute detail all of the aspects of the military victory. It would seem that in expressing gratitude to Hashem more attention is paid to the military triumph than to the miracle of the lights in the Holy Temple. The question arises: why does the battlefield success assume center stage in the special thanksgiving prayers of the Holliday?

The Rambam says that the mitzvah of the Chanuka lights is very beloved and that a poor person should even sell his garment in order to obtain candles for the Menorah. At first glance it is difficult to understand why such a severe demand is placed upon a poor person. What is it about this mitzvah that warrants imposing such an economic hardship on one who lacks means? Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the story of Chanuka which the Menorah symbolizes contains a sanctification of G-d's name and to accomplish that we must even sell our very clothing. I believe we can now have a greater appreciation of the importance of the military victory which is so minutely described in Al Hanisim. In it we thank Hashem who "delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of the students of your Torah. And for Yourself You made a great and holy name in Your world..." The wicked claim that there is no G-d but that human might is all that counts. When the evil triumph G-d's name is "diminished" as people lose faith that there is a Supreme Being who governs the world according to justice. However, when the righteous and the pure who are weak and few in number prevail against the wicked in spite of their overwhelmingly superior physical might, the name of Hashem is exalted. For then people see that human might is an illusion and that Hashem rules the world with kindness and compassion for those who act righteously and fulfill His will. Chanuka is the holiday whose main theme is the sanctification of the name of Hashem in His world. May we enjoy and be uplifted by its message.

Shabbat Shalom and a Freilichen Chanuka. ■

Yosef's Talents

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

When analyzing the avos, the great men who were the founders and leaders of Judaism, we are sometimes faced with reconciling difficult challenges regarding perceived behaviors. On the one hand, we know them to be tzadikim and chachamim of the highest caliber. On the other hand, we are faced on occasion with Midrashic interpretations that paint them in a terrible light. One such example can be found in the beginning of Parshas Vayeshev.

Our introduction to Yosef in Parshas Vayeshev, begins on a very auspicious note:

"These are the generations of Jacob: when Joseph was seventeen years old, being a shepherd, he was with his brothers with the flocks, and he was a lad, [and was] with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought evil tales about them to their father."

Immediately, we see the young Yosef as something of a troublemaker. Furthermore, it would seem "dibasam ra'ah" has a very negative connotation.

Rashi comments on this entire verse, offering a Midrash that, while well known, is extremely problematic:

"Any evil he saw in his brothers, the sons of Leah, he would tell his father: 1) that they ate limbs from living animals, 2) that they demeaned the sons of the handmaids by calling them slaves, and 3) that they were suspected of illicit sexual

relationships. For these three [tales] he was punished: For [the report that his brothers ate] limbs from living animals, "they slaughtered a kid" (Gen. 37:31) when they sold him, and did not eat it alive. For the report that he told about them that they called their brothers slaves, "Joseph was sold as a slave" (Ps. 105:17), and concerning the illicit sexual relationships that he told about them, "his master's wife lifted her eyes, etc." (Gen. 39:7)"

He adds as well:

"Every expression of "dibbah" denotes parlediz in Old French, gossip, slander. Whatever evil he could tell about them he told. "Dibbah" is an expression of making the lips of the sleeping speak"

Ultimately, Yosef is making some very harsh accusations regarding the sons of Leah - this point cannot be emphasized enough. Ever min hachai? And what was Yosef implying in the glances of these great men towards the women of the land? Again, these are supposed to be the greatest of the great, men of the highest caliber, dedicated to the perpetuation of yehadus. How do we understand these indictments?

There is of course the flip side to this line of questioning. If there was indeed credibility to Yosef's accusations, we are left with some moral and philosophical challenges regarding our perception of the sons of Yaakov. If we say there is no reality whatsoever to the claims made by Yosef, then what are we to make of him? We see Yosef was

punished for his accusations, which lends even more weight to the questionable assumption that his accusations had no merit whatsoever.

Immediately after this verse, we are told that Yaakov loved Yosef more than his other sons, making for him the famed coat. Was this a reaction to Yosef's slander of his brothers??? Onkelos offers the famous interpretation of the source of Yaakov's love – the fact that Yosef, "ben zekunim", was in fact "bar chakim", meaning he was a brilliant mind, differentiated from his brothers. Is the same Yosef who is the source of bad mouthing his brothers? And if these accusations were completely unjustified, Yaakov's love was certainly misplaced.

Let's slip in one other minor question. There is a debate as to what specifically were the allegations made by Yosef – how do we understand the difference of opinion?

As mentioned above, it might seem as if we are faced with an irreconcilable contradiction. How do we begin to approach this problem?

In this case, knowing Yosef's evolution from young phenom to future leader of his brothers is of supreme importance. When Yosef is thrown in prison, or when he faces Pharaoh, we see a unique trait of Yosef exposed. Yosef had a keen sense of psychology, able to note the minute details, what might seem insignificant to almost everyone, and use them as a means to see into the deep recesses of a person's psyche. There were two parts to this "talent". The first was a radar of sorts, the ability to isolate the subtleties. The second was the use of the information to gain the greater and deeper insights. Without question, Yosef exhibited this at a young age. Combine this with a high level of intelligence, and we can start to see how Yosef stood apart from his brothers. It was not that his brothers were just average compared to Yosef. Yosef shared the attachment to knowledge and ideas his brothers had. However, he had additional traits that were not evident in his brothers. Yosef's knowledge of the psyche could be the feature that appealed so greatly to Yaakov. Yaakov could chalk up

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Joseph sharing his dreams with his brothers

whatever flaw Yosef might be exhibiting (as we will explain) to age. He saw a potential in him, through this feature, which would culminate in being the future leader of the brothers. Thus, even in the face of the “dibasam raah”, Yaakov was able to separate the future actualization from the present seemingly misguided accusations.

Taking Yosef's unique ability at face value makes the contradiction asked above that much more difficult to resolve. Our first step is simple – when faced with such a contradiction, we must assume there is some “truth” in each side of the very contradiction. As we mentioned, there were two parts to Yosef's trait. Yosef, when with his brothers, was much attuned to their psyches, observing and learning from them. One could therefore assume that Yosef gained more insights into them. This is where his flaw emerged, and was the justification for his punishments. Being attuned to the tiny details would mean, inevitably, seeing something that did not quite seem right. No doubt, there was some reality to the details –

we should not think Yosef was just making blind accusations. Yosef saw in these potential personality defects. Those unconscious emotions would, in Yosef's mind, eventually manifest themselves. His observations were correct, but his conclusions were way off. Furthermore, we see in two of the three that he in fact did not witness an action – they were merely suspicions. This could very well be the reason why the information delivered to Yaakov is labeled “dibasam raah”, echoes of lashon hara in this description. One of the critical flaws when one engages in lashon hara is to take a trait or feature of a person and define them essentially by said trait. The individual boils down to one characteristic, being defined as inherently flawed.

The sin of lashon hara stems from a misguided sense of self-importance. In this case, Yosef to a degree suffered from this. He understood his talent, but he allowed its uniqueness to affect his judgment. If he perceived a flaw, it must be a flaw no questions asked. It is for this reason that he is punished.

Let's take a closer look at the different accusations made by Yosef. The second accusation is the easiest one to understand. He sensed there was a superiority complex housed in the psyches of the sons of Leah, as they were from the “purer” strain. The concept of an inherent superiority of one set of brothers over the other, not based on perfection but on genetics, would prevent any possibility of a cohesive nation emerging. The more difficult ones are the first and third. The first one dealt with a concern that the brothers were eating meat from an animal prior to its death, while the last insinuated an issue of sexual impropriety. There are two fundamental issues that each of these deals with when concerning the instinctual world. Understanding that a person is tempted by the world of the instincts, that part of his energies are being directed towards that arena, is one idea. This is what Yosef saw when he sensed the “attraction” towards the women. However, there is another more subtle but equally important concept. There is an approach one has towards the instinctual world, where he is searching for immediate gratification. The case of eating the animal before its death is a prime example of this concept. The person is hungry, and once that instinctual drive pops up, it must be satisfied now. An animal behaves in this manner, thus the separation between the world of the animalistic and that of man. Yosef could have sensed this as well, seeing a small flaw that indicated a veer towards that path.

Does this mean that the brothers were now terrible people??? No, far from it. They were human beings, replete with psyches. Through growth and maturity, and a dedication to the ideas propagated by Yaakov, they would evolve into the great men they became. Yosef needed this as well. He saw the amazing power his trait had; however, due to the flaw of ego gratification, he was not yet ready to use this to perfect himself and others. He is punished; the specific punishments all shared the feature of demonstrating to him the flaw he had, aiding him in overcoming it. Eventually, as we see, Yosef does indeed succeed in this and becomes the great tzadik and leader of the Jewish people. ■

*Megilas Antiochos was
found in an old edition of
a siddur printed in
Solonika, Greece.*

*Otzar HaTfilos refers to it
as a “precious letter.”*



MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

INTRODUCTION & TRANSLATION BY RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

SHARE WITH OTHERS: WWW.MESORA.ORG/CHANNUKA



Introduction

Facing religious persecution, the five sons of Mattisyahu displayed much courage, although greatly outnumbered. They were inspired to battle against those who wished to strip the Jewish nation of its laws and identity. The Greeks were intent on preventing Torah observance and coercing idolatrous practice. However, Mattisyahu's sons displayed unwavering devotion to what their minds knew as true. We read in verse 39, "We remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai." They were convinced of the truth of God's revelation, His existence, and His commanding us in His Torah at Sinai. No enemy could erase history, or the truths contained in our Torah. Without Torah observance, one's life is meaningless in God's eyes. Mattisyahu's sons took it upon themselves to fight to preserve Torah, at all costs.

We must take this lesson to heart, as this is the sole reason for our celebration of Chanuka: to proclaim God's performance of miracles and intervention when we adhere to His word. Devotion to a Jewish life – God's words – earned the Jews of Chanuka miraculous salvation. Many leaders have not learned from history, and keep Israel under the sword. As long as God's word is absent from national interests, God may not assist us. This is the dichotomy: most Jews today celebrate Chanuka, recalling God's intervention when Torah was defended, while much of the other Torah laws are ignored. Lighting the menorah with our families, we testify to God's providence; saving those Jews who followed Him, risking their lives to preserve Judaism for all. Therefore, God stepped in. Until the Jews demonstrated their devotion, there was no divine intervention. Once these few brave souls declared the essentiality of Torah adherence through action, God protected them, and gave "the many into the hands of the few, the wicked, into the hands of the righteous."

Today we perish by the hands of those like Antiochos. Children of Israel, IDF, and leaders of our people are wise to heed Chanuka's lesson. Is this not why we celebrate? God enabled five brothers to defeat the armies of our enemies. God is not sleeping, God is not weak. He sees our travail at this time too. God's word and history attest to the fact that He saves those who follow him. Until we follow His Torah, until we see with clear conviction that, not based on political and military strategies alone will we be saved, but also with Torah as our guide...we may continue to suffer. We must include the Torah's direction when determining our course of action in all national matters.

Let us recall Abraham defeating tremendous forces with just a few men. Jacob's salvation from his twin Esav. Recall the Ten Plagues, the Manna in the desert, and the splitting of the Red Sea, where every Egyptian soldier perished. And recall this: our claim to Israel is from no other source than God's Torah – His promise to Abraham. These Torah accounts are "lessons". But many Jews resist, and without cause.

We do not rely on miracles; this is against Judaism. Living by Torah ideals is the best life, and we do not uphold Torah to avoid pain. But as the Torah is absolute truth, we must be concerned by

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God's promise to abandon us if we abandon Him. He says this in the Shema Yisrael. But God also promises His great providence when we live according to His word. In line with this promise, we may seek His assistance. God's word is absolute truth, which enables our existence. When living in line with God's word, He has many vehicles to protect us. This is the message of so many Torah stories. But as the Shema says, He certainly will not shield us when we abandon His word. Of course it is preferred that we attach ourselves to the truth of Torah when prompted by its perfect and pleasing laws, not only for salvation's sake. But many times God removes His protection to instruct us to return to Him. Maimonides teaches that national catastrophe must not be viewed as "natural", but as God's instruction that we return to Jewish life. And if we dismiss such catastrophes as mere chance, we will make matters worse and He will hide from us. For God did not create man so as to ignore His gift of intelligence, and ignore God and His Torah. This earns us none of His providence.

Remember the Chanuka Story. Its celebrates God, who protects those who follow Him. Proclaim its message not just with your menorah, but with your daily actions all year. We all wish happiness, health and success for our people. As Mattisyahu's sons lived and were saved through Jewish values, with God's help, we too can triumph over our enemies. If however, we solely engage political and military considerations, denying these Torah truths, Jewish history, and God's abilities...we ignore Chanuka's primary message.

God commanded Torah observance for our benefit, and it is pleasing and sweet to all who took the time to investigate and appreciate it's perfect sensibilities, and beauty of all its laws. God knows what is best for His creation, for mankind. We have free will to succumb to laziness and the desire to be "free of restriction." But with minor effort, we each can appreciate the purpose of every law, and we will truthfully view our previous non-observant lives as empty, feeling fortunate we finally made the first step towards observance. We will no longer view Torah laws as restrictive, but as a great fortune, as we come to understand how each law benefits us is in the most profound manner.

Following His laws, even the few will be victorious over the many.

Happy Chanuka to all!



MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

(Arbitrary paragraph breaks have been added every 10 verses for ease of reading. These breaks do not exist in the original.)

"1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the sea shore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple, he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?" 10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaugh-

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Project: Develop name, font selection, complete GUI, icon set, and branding for a new music player including desktop and mobile versions. "TRAX" was developed in one week, including all screen transitions and user interaction.



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tered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the God of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have come to come before Nikanor." 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, "Let him surely enter." 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?" 19. And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, "I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do." 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king's clothing and ride of the king's horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be."

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, "My master, I fear from the children of Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known." Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his God and he said, "My God and the God of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say "My god has given him to my hand." 24. At that moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the God of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, "My God, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified (area), now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and Jerusalem." 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28. On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it "Maccabee Killed the Mighty". 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nikanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that mislead his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, "Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?"



31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them (by) their God, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, "To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our children's children, it will not be removed." 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, "These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, "Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do." 39. And the children of Israel answered, "These to these, "we remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai, 'Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest'. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day." 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaugh-

MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

tered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the sea because they trusted in the God of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king Antiochos, "You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are more swift, and from bears they are more quick. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them." 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, "This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand". But the God of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before God of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, "Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his God and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, "Why have you returned?" And they answered and they said, "On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us." 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, "I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother." 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And God of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the

sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword, and from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to there, they mocked him and called him "the runaway". 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And God of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal God of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their God.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them, that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally."

Other prayer books add these verses:

"And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The God that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen." ■

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VAYESHEV

DIVINE DREAMS & THEIR LESSONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke would be in awe of how with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing to his. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph; eventually selling him instead. It was his father who rejected the dream's apparent interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph; the eleven stars being his eleven brothers, and the

sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, thirteen years later, astonishingly, Joseph interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All four dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was Divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in unraveling each dream solely through wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain; having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph was permanently psychologically crippled from long ago.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph would use the Divine license provided by these dreams to

subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma: would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin; a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to him – physical dominance – was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon bowing to him. The first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them in regards to their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers, but perhaps much earlier. The Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers,

to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

We must now ask this: when did Joseph become such a great interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret his dreams, the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, and Pharaoh's dreams with such precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "Ben Zekunim" or as Onkelos translates, "a wise son." Jacob taught Joseph all the knowledge he attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed, if not caused, Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities.

GOD'S DREAMS: ALTERING HISTORY / ENABLING HUMAN PERFECTION

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph's nature not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrongdoings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a

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perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams given to Joseph also had many ramifications.

The wise Rabbi I mentioned taught that the dreams also provided perfection for the brothers, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph's plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was preoccupied "reciting the Shema." Of course the Shema (Torah phrases) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph's plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done.

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin; and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel, now displaced onto her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing.

DREAM INSTRUCTION

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his two dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison

for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Avraham, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state, pondering his own repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

PHARAOH AND HIS STEWARDS

Ten years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine steward and baker troubled by their dreams, and he invited them to recount them to him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. Two more years go by, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision; they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

TWO DIVINE SIGNS: DREAMER & DUPLICATION

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." I believe God

gave Joseph two dreams for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. Besides the 'content' of the dreams, Prophetic dreams also have a 'style': the chosen dream recipient, and dream duplication.

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received "two" dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of his dreams in one single dream state (Ramban, Gen. 41:32). However, Pharaoh woke up and dreamt similar content again as it was Divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph also had two separate dreams with similar content (Gen. 37:9). In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: "[Divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies."

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams while still at home. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: "God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you (Gen. 45:7)."

What did Joseph determine were indicative of Divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the "recipient" also indicates Divine intent. These two elements were contained in the stewards' dreams, and in Pharaoh's dreams. The stewards' dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two dreams, and of additional significance, it was "Pharaoh" – the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine – who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication, and as I learned from a wise Rabbi, a strategic dream 'recipient', are two indications of Divine dreams. So convinced was Joseph of their Divine origin that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, "What God plans He has told to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:25)." Joseph meant to say, "Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its Divine nature." And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards' interpretations, and rising to viceroy through applying his wisdom to Pharaoh's dreams.

AMAZING!

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob's household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation...the very matter essential for carving out Jewish history. The design of Joseph's dreams contained the blueprint for determining the Divine nature of the other dreams he would confront. In other words: his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) God placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his

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excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation. We appreciate God's wisdom: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

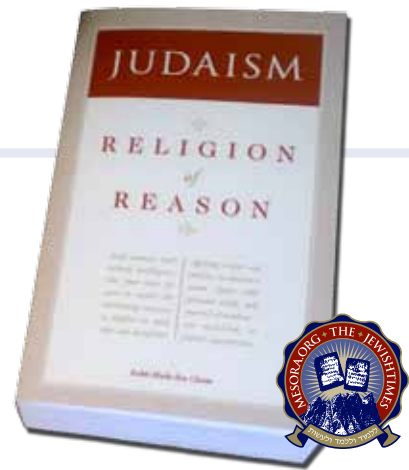
A FIFTH MESSAGE

Additionally, dreams are, by definition, a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His Prophets in dreams (Numbers 12:6), it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. God's selected mode of communicating with His Prophets via dreams underscores the principle that God's words too must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

A LIFE OF WISDOM

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family, all of Egypt and surrounding peoples using wisdom alone. Since wisdom guided his actions, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach. We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Responding to our misfortunes with "religious" beliefs that "it's all for the good," man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals that we will terminate our need to falsely pacify ourselves with "it's all for the good." Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis teamed with internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention. The Torah contains all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address our concerns. God says we require wisdom and personal perfection. "For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem (Jeremiah 9:23)." ■



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