



Parshat Mikeitz: Yosef and Chanukah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The *midrash* says that the *pasuk*, “*Ashrei hagever asher sam Hashem mivtacho*, Praised is the person who puts his trust in Hashem,” refers to Yosef. It then says because Yosef asked Paroh’s butler to mention him to Paroh, he was punished with an extra two years in prison. This *midrash* seems paradoxical. If Yosef was the epitome of *bitachon* why was he criticized for trying to free himself?

The Jewish nation went through four exiles, Bavel, Paras, Yavan, and Edom. Because *Galut Edom* is so long and difficult it is considered to be a combination of the first three exiles. Each exile attacked the Jews at a specific level. *Bavel* hurt us at the *nefesh* – physical level. *Paras* attacked us at the *ruach* – emotional level. *Yavan* battled with us at the *neshama* – intellectual

level.

Yavan decreed that all Jews should inscribe the words, “*Ein li chelek b’Elokai Yisrael*, I have no part in Hashem,” on the horns of their oxen. Ancient Greece insisted that all men were equal and that the Jews must denounce their special relationship with Hashem. Yet they considered themselves superior to the Jews. The Torah preaches that Jewish chosen-ness does not imply superiority, but extra responsibility. Our mission is to make the world a better place. This is the antithesis of Greek humanistic superiority.

The Shem Mishmuel writes that our forefathers laid the foundation for Jewish survival through all the exiles. The physical challenge of Bavel was countered by the strength of Yitzchak. The fortitude of

Avraham stood against the emotional temptation of Persia. Yaakov’s confidence in his identity during his struggles with Lavan and Eisav held off the strength of Greek culture. Yosef, who faced every possible challenge in Egypt, encompassed all three powers. He was a paragon of true faith and righteousness. This is why he was punished for asking the butler to intercede. Hashem held him to a higher standard.

The Maccabees had the faith of Yosef. Yosef discerned Hashem’s light in the darkness of Egypt; we light the Chanukah candles at night – to show the world that Hashem’s light can be found even in the utter darkness. May the story of Chanukah give us the strength, trust, and joy to be truly Jewish on all three levels of our personalities.

Chanukah: The Holiness of The Lights

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

The Rambam in *Hilchot Chanukah* writes that the *mitzva* of candle lighting was established in order to reveal the great miracles that occurred on Chanukah. The Ran and the Baal Hamaor disagree and maintain that the *mitzva* was given to commemorate the menorah that was lit in the *Beit Hamikdash*. What is the nature of lighting Chanukah candles?

Rav Soloveitchik notes that the Gemara speaks about one particular light in the *Beit Hamikdash*, the *ner maravi*. This western light was lit first, yet continued to burn even after the other lights burned out. Even though it contained a small amount of oil, it miraculously stayed lit. The *ner maravi* testified to the world that Hashem’s

presence dwelt among the Jewish nation and that He had a special relationship with them.

The same is true for Chanukah. The miracles of Chanukah took place during a dark era for the Jewish people. It was a time when the Jews were under foreign rule and many had drifted from Torah. However, Hashem continued to protect His people. The miracles of Chanukah testified that Hashem was still with His people.

The Chanukah candles are lit not so much as a sign of what happened but as a reminder of what they represent. The Rambam writes that the purpose of the Chanukah lights is *l’harot ul’galot*, to show and to uncover our relationship with

Hashem. Chanukah is a time when we can experience a palpable connection with Hashem.

There is a custom for women not to do any work for half an hour after the candles are lit. We can seize these precious moments to sit a few minutes next to the Chanukah lights and feel the link to our tradition stretching thousands of years back.

The Shulchan Aruch writes that in contrast to Purim where there are many *mitzvot* throughout the day, there are no obligations on Chanukah to outwardly manifest *simcha*. To feel the holiness of this Yom Tov, we need to ponder. That is the essence of *hadlakot nerot* – to sense Hashem’s loving presence constantly in our midst.



Chanukah-Greek Fragmentation and Jewish Unity

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Grecian exile was not a physical exile but rather *galut hadaat* – an estrangement from our own ability to draw conclusions. The only way to get out of spiritual exile is to change the way we think. During the Second Temple period the Jews were separated from each other and from Hashem. Additionally, the Greek way of thinking began making inroads into Jewish society.

Greek philosophy allows for some transcendence because humans are spiritual, but a Jew lives life completely centered around Hashem. Hashem lives with us moment by moment. Our choice was to rise above self or to worship self. The more resistance there

was against “Greek think,” the more the Greeks tried to suppress “Jew think.” They outlawed *Shabbat*, *Rosh Chodesh*, and *Brit Milah*. Why these *mitzvot*?

Shabbat is a time of unification. It is the day when we see that Hashem’s light is everything and that all human creativity is a projection of that light. The Greeks believed in the supremacy of man, without a living, divine spark.

Milah means seeing the body as holy, a vessel to express Hashem’s Divine will. Greek thinking considered the body as something to be displayed, because the physical body itself was primary.

Rosh Chodesh signifies that the Jews define time in terms of *kedusha*. The Greeks felt that spirituality had no relation to time.

Greek thinking would have said, “Use whatever oil you find, Hashem will understand.” Jewish thinking said, “We don’t need this candelabra for light. We must do Hashem’s will. We will only use oil sealed by the *Kohen Gadol*.” The Maccabees did not approach war believing they would win. Their motto was, “I am in this world to make choices that are true. The results are up to Hashem.” And that is why they ultimately emerged victorious.

Rebbetzin’s Perspective

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller’s Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

I am childless, happily married, about to turn 50, and quite honestly, am feeling very 'lost' since I got laid off from my job almost a year ago. I can see the story of *Lech Lecha* and feel Hashem has said to me, pick up and go... But where? What is my mission? Why am I here? If a woman’s primary function is to be a mother, what is the purpose of a woman who will never be one?

Answer:

“*Lech Lecha*” means go to yourself. Hashem sometimes presents us with situations that force us to figure ourselves out and move beyond who we were before. A person can do this on several levels. “*Artzecha*,” your land, the part of

you that’s earth-like: lazy, depressed, or tied down to external order. Hashem has forced you into this by taking your job away. You can no longer submerge yourself in routine material efforts.

“*Moladetcha*,” your inborn traits. Hashem made you infertile and thereby moved you beyond the biological destiny of most women. “*Mibeit avicha*,” your father’s home. A father provides a child’s form – the ideas and principles that shape his life. You need to step beyond this and discover new vistas. In order to find yourself you have to know your abilities and what is accessible and needed in your particular area. Think about what you’re good at and what you like to do. That may be where your destiny is.

You may argue that you need a job that

pays, and that doing what you like isn’t going to be all that lucrative. You still need to make room for it. It may mean combining it with a regular job, but begin to walk in that direction. In addition, work on developing *birur*. The idea of *birur* means finding the element of divinity in a situation and letting that become primary, even when it isn’t primary in terms of substance or time. For example, if you are a real estate broker, you can focus on concerning yourself with people’s needs and taking pleasure in helping them. Obviously this is not a broker’s key motive, but if you succeed in making *birur* a part of your life, you can transform ordinary work into something eternal.