

Characterizing Chanukah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

There are two reasons for celebrating *Chanukah*. First, the miracle of the oil and secondly, that the Beit Hamikdosh and the altar were rededicated to Hashem's service. The rededication of the altar was only for the year of victory. Yet the following year the Sages established *Chanukah* to be celebrated eternally, anticipating that the light kindled that year would shine forever. Why not name the holiday something like *Orah*/Light or *Menorah*?

While the original altar of the *Mishkan* and the *Beit Hamikdosh* was indeed completed on the 25th of Kislev, Hashem chose to delay the dedication until Nissan. Hashem comforted *Kislev* by the dedication of the new altar on the 25th of *Kislev*, 1172 years later. But in order for this second dedication to compensate, there needs to be some connection between the two inaugurations that would also explain why we read about the offerings of tribal princes brought on the inauguration of the *Mishkan* on *Chanukah*.

Besides for the *chanukat hamizbeach*, the holiday is called *Chanukah* because the Maccabees *chanu*/rested from the war on *chaf-heh*/25th day. Celebrating the end of the war, however, seems a more mundane reason for *Chanukah* than celebrating the dedication of the altar, unless its victorious

outcome had a spiritual core, reasons the *Sifsei Chaim*. In fact, the Maccabees' war was a battle against spiritual oppression. We want *Moshiach* so that we will have freedom to serve Hashem without spiritual challenges. During *Chanukah*, we too should rededicate ourselves to focus on our spiritual lives.

The *Shvilei Pinchas* reads *khaf-heh* as *koh*/thus they rested from the battle alluding to how Hashem spoke to the prophets - "*Koh omar Hashem*." Their prophetic visions were cloaked in concealment often requiring interpretation. So too *Purim* and *Chanukah*, established by our Sages, commemorate salvation that seems to come about through the natural processes of the world. However, it is our mission to see Hashem's hand in both the natural and supernatural. The Maccabees rested, and saw the *koh*- Hashem's miraculous world even when cloaked in nature.

The *Shvilei Pinchas* quoting the *Chasam Sofer* finds allusions to *Chanukah* and *Purim* in the special garment Yaakov gave to Yosef that weighed two *selaim*. This garment was an allusion to the *Torah shebal Peh* referred to in the Zohar as "rabbinical garments." While the brothers studied the written *Torah* and the miraculous holidays depicted therein, they did not understand the miracles of *Purim* and *Chanukah* couched in natural phenomena. We

testify to the miracles by reciting the blessing "...in those days, at this time." While the other holidays changed the order of nature and of time to realize the miracles, only these two holidays worked within natural time to come about. Therefore, even in our days, we are bound to recognize Hashem's hand through all of nature and in every occurrence of life.

How does the establishment of *Chanukah* compensate *Kislev* for the omission of the inaugural celebration of the *Mishkan*? When the *Chashmonaim* demonstrated their dedication to *Torah* and to the sanctity of the *Beit Hamikdosh*, writes *Moda Labinah*, they brought sanctity back to the Beit Hamikdosh and to the *mizbeach* within it. Although there was much missing in this second *Beit Hamikdosh*, the *Menorah* which represents the wisdom hidden in the Oral Torah was still there. This connection keeps Hashem eternally in our midst, as was the purpose of the *Mishkan*.

It is customary to recite Psalm 30, originally composed to be recited at the dedication of the *Beit Hamikdosh* which speaks of hope and faith in Hashem- "For I will rejoice even if I am now depressed and in mourning." *Netivot Shalom* notes, that this is the calling of *Chanukah*, rebuilding our personal *Mikdash*, and rededicating ourselves to Hashem.

The Battle of Chanuka

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah-Heller

Chanuka is a holiday that everybody associates with joy. Why? We celebrate the miracle of the oil and the victory of battle. Why are these two ideas bound together? Why was there a war to begin with and why was the victory so joyous? One of the words for battle is *kerav* which is connected to the word *karov*-near. War by definition is conflict however its influence sometimes draws the other side near. On Chanuka, it was the Jews against the Greeks, but it was also the Jews against the Hellenistic Jews, who saw Judaism as something that had no effect on their life.

The Greek philosopher Socrates, saw the world as a place in which the main goal was finding balance. Plato taught that the way to

find balance is to divide reality between ideals and practica. Aristotle took it further by expounding on the golden mean, the balance within oneself. All of them had one thing in common which was that Hashem was just the great force that brought about physical reality but isn't involved in daily life. These ways of thinking morphed into Roman philosophy which still affects us today. Their philosophy involves hedonism which is living for the moment and doing what feels good; academia which is - if you prove your thesis to be observable, it must be true and by definition also good; and Spartan ethic which maintains that if you struggle and reach your goals, that makes you noble. It doesn't matter if the goal had validity or not. These ways of thinking affect us. It tells us that Hashem has nothing to

do with your life or choices. Listening to Hashem doesn't give you more fun necessarily nor does it mean that you can understand everything. It does mean that you have defined goals that make you a better person and the world a better place.

The battle on Chanuka was really whether there is a moral basis for life or not. The defeat was supernatural and that's what made it relevant. The prayer of Al Hanisim mainly mentions the war. It says, "Many fell in the hands of the few, the strong fell into the hands of the weak..." The only way we can begin to understand about how the Jews emerged victorious, is if we're willing to readmit Hashem into the picture.

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The word *nes* means a flagpole whose function is to hang the flag - an emblem or symbol. The word Maccabee stands for "*Mi Komecha B'eilim Hashem* -Who is like you among the forces." They waved the flag of Hashem's presence against those who saw everything as natural. The war marked the defeat of Greek think, of the question - Is Hashem relevant or not? Will it make a difference in what I do or not? A Jew wants

Hashem to affect his life. If you only believe in natural forces there's no room for this. Hashem is irrelevant. The defeat of the Greeks proved that Hashem is more than *teva*.

What is nature? People will say it's the correlation of laws that are consistent. Why did Hashem make it so that He is concealed? For something to be yours, it has to change you.

The only way you can become something is

through your own choices. Hashem gave us a world which seemingly runs on natural laws to enable us to choose meaningfully. He wanted us to use the physical realities of life to elevate ourselves and become greater. Winning the war of life is not about power, intellectual prowess or meeting goals. It's about finding Hashem and becoming a divine like person through *Torah* and *mitzvot*.

Chanuka: Learning About Our Own Struggles with Evil

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Chanuka is about our victory over the Greeks. If we want to understand what *Chanuka* is about, we have to understand who the Greeks were, in what way they challenged the Jewish people, and what it means for us today.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi writes that the wisdom of the Greeks is compared to flowers that don't yield fruit. It's external, temporal, beauty lacking substance and continuity. Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin further adds that Greek philosophy as propounded by Aristotle and Alexander Mokdon (Alexander the Great), was only peripheral wisdom which never penetrated the heart or affected action.

Let's explore this further by examining several interactions between the Greeks and other people as discussed in Chazal. The first story is brought in Gemara Yerushalmi and it's about Alexander Mukdan who was a philosopher and a powerful conqueror. He came to the country of Katsya and observed an interesting court case. One person sold a field to another. The buyer found a treasure in the field and wanted to return it to the seller. Both argued that the treasure didn't belong to them. The king of Katsya ruled that they make a *shidduch* between their children and give the treasure to the young couple. When Alexander Mukdan heard this, he began to laugh and said, "I would've killed both of them and taken the treasure for myself." The King of Katsya then said, "The sun rises in your country in the merit of your animals, not in your merit."

The King of Katsya wanted the genes of these two special people to multiply so that more light and righteousness would come into this world. In contrast, Alexander Mukdon felt threatened by such moral behavior. This story by definition was the conflict between the Greek philosophy and Jewish way of thinking. Our very existence threatened them.

The Greeks espoused survival only of the fittest because it was all about externals. The soul didn't exist. They prohibited, *Shabbat*, *milah*, and *Rosh Chodesh* because these *mitzvot* indicate that our focal point in life is our relationship with Hashem and with it comes a code of behavior that the Greeks would not accept. It challenged their very lifestyle and who they were.

Chazal tell another interesting story with Alexander Mokdon. As he approached the land of Israel, hoping to conquer it and destroy the *Beit Hamikdash*, Shimon Hatzadik came out to greet him. Alexander got off his horse, blessed him, and said this was the man he saw in his dreams in whose merit he had been victorious in battle. This was Hashem's way of preparing the ground for the Jewish people. At the very start of the exile, He showed them clearly that at the end the Greeks would succumb and the Torah and Jewish way of life would prevail.

The *mitzva* of *parah adumah* (red heifer) is the quintessential *chok* (cannot be understood logically). The person who is sprinkled with its waters becomes pure and the person who sprinkles becomes impure. Still, we fulfill it recognizing that our greatness is a result of the

fact that we have a relationship with Hashem and that He dwells inside us. We are not just flesh and blood but contain within us something divine which is unlimited. The birth of a red heifer was a rare occurrence. But we find that in the time of Shimon Hatzadik and Yochanan *Kohen Gadol*, three were born. This indicates that Hashem is with us in the process of trying to be holy and maintaining who we are.

Matisyahu and his children felt that there was no point to their existence if they couldn't actualize their purpose. Their self sacrifice made them worthy of Hashem's miraculous salvation. *Chanuka* always falls out during the *Parshiot* about Yosef. Yosef, a young 17 year old boy, who had spent in his formative years in the righteous home of Yaakov, was thrust into the pit of immorality and idol worship. Why? By sending him to Egypt prior to the Jewish people, they already had something to connect to. Yosef overcame his challenges and as our forefather implanted the same strength within us. We can do it too. And if a person believes in his ability, he really can.

Chanuka is about holiness and maintaining who we are. Technology is a real test today. It's not easy to overcome and the "Greek" philosophy is, if you don't accept it how it is, you're living in the dark ages. We can transcend that. It's about believing in our capabilities and dedicating ourselves to live with truth.