

CHANUKAH

תשפ"ה

We are talking about Yaakov Ovinu, the founding of Klal Yisroel, and Chanukah. Yaakov fought with the maloch of Eisov. Among the traits of the Ovov, Yaakov represents emes and Torah. This struggle between Yaakov and Eisov isn't merely a personal struggle between two brothers. It is an epic struggle of human history about which culture will dominate the world – the culture of Yaakov, of Torah and spirituality? Or will it be the culture of Eisov, of violence and physicality? Yaakov spends 20 years in the household of Lovon building a family. He emerges telling Eisov that he kept all his spiritual values of the Torah and had not absorbed anything from Lovon. He undergoes test after test without compromising one iota of his integrity against a master thief and swindler. He fights with the maloch of Eisov, and although he wins, he is wounded. It wasn't an ordinary fight with an ordinary injury – we keep a reminder of that fight and that injury with us always because we cannot eat the gid hanosheh till this very day, as a result.

Yaakov is justifiably nervous about this confrontation with Eisov. He wins the fight and is called Yisroel by the maloch he defeated:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יִתְאַמֵּר עוֹד שְׂמֹךְ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעַם אֲנָשִׁים וְתוֹכֵל:

Onkelos translates as follows:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יִתְאַמֵּר עוֹד שְׂמֹךְ, אֲלֵהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲרִי רִבְרַבְתָּ קָדָם ד' וְעַם גּוֹבְרֵי וְיִכְלָתָא:

Yaakov wins the fight because he is able to stand 'before Hashem' alone. He is the only audience Yaakov is playing before. But Yaakov emerges limping. Chazal explain that this means the tomchei Torah, the supporters of Torah, will sometimes be weak and faltering. But then Yaakov comes to Shechem and he is healed. Why? It is because he built temporary structures for his flocks and a permanent structure for his Beis Midrash to learn Torah. Despite all Yaakov's involvement in raising his large family, engaged in parnossoh, he always prioritizes his ruchniyus. That is what defines him above all else.

Now we come to Chanukah. The Levush asks an important question: When we look at the two yomim tovim that Chazal instituted, we see that they are radically different from one another. Purim is centered around משתה ושמחה – sending food and having a lavish seudoh with wine is a major focus. But Chanukah has no seudas mitzvah. The only way to make one is by singing and תשבחות. Seudoh is not inherent in the yom tov of Chanukah at all. Why the difference? The Levush answers that we have two very different types of enemies. One type wants to physically annihilate us. We were in great physical danger and we were saved, so we celebrate our physical existence being saved, through physical enjoyment.

But in Chanukah, we met a new kind of enemy. They didn't want to destroy us. Yovon wanted to destroy Torah. It was an ideological battle between two cultures. We need to understand history through the lens of Chazal. The nevuoh of Doniel predicted that the Greeks would conquer the world. Hashem allowed Alexander the Great to achieve a rapid conquest of most of the ancient world. Why? Hashem intended to use Greek culture of philosophy and intellect to dismantle the dominance of avodo zoro in the world. And it succeeded. Hashem wanted to fill that void made by Greek philosophy with the light of Torah. If Klal Yisroel had been able to spread Torah, through the blossoming of Torah Shebaal Peh during Bayis Sheni, the emes of Torah would become clear to all and Moshiach would come. But although there was certainly an explosion of Torah Shebaal Peh during

Bayis Sheni, Klal Yisroel failed to seize the opportunity properly. They became enamored with Greek culture and Greek ideas, which corrupted them.

There is a beautiful poem by Rav Yehudah HaLevi which encapsulates the essence of the problem with Greek philosophy. He writes it is like a flower with no fruit – very beautiful, but there is no nourishment. The Jews became fascinated by it and it led to a deep split in Klal Yisroel. But one small group of 'religious fanatics' decided they weren't going to tolerate it and rose up to get rid of it.

It is so ironic that in modern Israel, the Olympic Games – where Israeli athletes compete and show their physical prowess – are called 'The Maccabiah Games'. But who were the Maccabim? Who were the Chashmonaim who won over the mighty Greek army? We read exactly who they were in 'Al Hanissim'.

But first let's understand who the Yevonim were. What was the goal of the Yevonim? It was to culturally conquer the world. They were "רשעים" who wanted "להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי רצונך". They were the opposite culture of Klal Yisroel and Torah. Beauty, art, statues, sports, glorifying the human body. They wanted to make us forget Torah and all it stands for.

Hashem didn't simply come in and save us. He first made sure that those who were fighting the Greeks were dedicated to fight l'shem shomayim – not just to throw out a foreign occupying power. They had to care enough about Hashem and the purity of the Torah and the continuity of the chochmas haTorah for a miracle to be performed for them. Hashem gave success to the "עוסקי תורתך" who were also the "מעטים וחלשים". We have a small group of weak tzaddikim v'tehorim who decided they were going to stand up to the entire Greek army.

Why were they confident they would succeed? How was it not a suicide mission? The Ramban in his work on emunoh and bitochon says that when you are sincerely acting l'shem shomayim to further your avodas Hashem, and you put in the maximum effort possible, Hashem will guarantee your success. בטח בה' ועשה טוב. I have seen this play out in the real-world, time and time again. Anyone who is sincere in his avodas Hashem and dedicates all his resources to achieve it, Hashem will make sure he succeeds.

It was only the עוסקי תורתך who realized what the struggle with the Greeks was really all about, why it mattered so much – and that it was worth fighting and dying for. And they were the only ones who believed that if they fought Hashem's battles, Hashem has guaranteed their ultimate victory in preserving the purity of Torah.

We read in the end of Parshas Vayelech that Klal Yisroel will come to have hard times at the end of history, but Torah will always survive. It is a guarantee by Hashem that Torah will not be corrupted and lose its integrity – no matter what kind of golus we go through. The purity of Torah has been challenged many times over the years, each time in a different form. There are different types of enemies we have – some physical and some spiritual. But even the physical enemies of Klal Yisroel are motivated to destroy us by an ideological resistance to the spiritual message of Klal Yisroel.

Chanukah is very different than Purim. They represent two different aspects of avodas Hashem.

The Rambam in his short review of the mitzvos at the beginning of

Mishnah Torah says that Purim represents the power of tefillah. Esther told Klal Yisroel to make three days of intense taanis and tefillah, and that is the only way she can go in to Achashveirosh to bring about Klal Yisroel's redemption. From this we see that no matter how dire our situation is physically, tefillah and teshuvoh will turn around the gezeirah. Hashem is closer to us than to any other nation and He hears our tefillos.

Chanukah does not show the power of tefillah, but the power of Torah. It shows how we have to stand up and resist a culture that is antithetical to Torah. We will rise up and go to war to destroy anyone who tries to separate us from living a life of Torah and mitzvos in kedushoh and taharoh. We will make sure that Torah will survive.

The only people who appreciated the necessity to preserve the purity of Torah against corruption were those "מעטים, חלשים, צדיקים, עוסקי תורתך טהורים". In every generation we rely on that small group of people to stand up and resist the influence of foreign cultures which threaten to corrupt the Torah. There are times when Torah seems to be fading beyond the point of recognition. In Europe between the wars, the universities were filled with Jews. There was Polish culture, Russian culture. The numbers who went to yeshiva were dwarfed by those who went to university. But Torah survives. When Jews came to the United States, it made absolutely no sense to keep Torah and Mitzvos. But a small group of people built yeshivos and Torah survives.

There are two ways we fight for Torah. One is by building and learning despite all the difficulties, and sometimes, like by Chanukah, we fight a physical battle to preserve the Torah. The only way to get rid of the Greeks was to wage a physical battle. But if that is what it takes for Torah to survive, we will always win against all odds. Hashem guarantees it.

In addition, an amazing thing happened for the Chashmonaim – an open miracle. Really there were two miracles of Chanukah – the military victory, and the nes of the Menorah. But which one do we celebrate with a yom tov? Only the miracle of oil. Certainly, we give gratitude for the miracle of the military victory in Al Hanissim. But the central mitzvah of Chanukah is the neiros. From Sefer Mishlei, we know that the Menorah symbolizes the chochmah of the Torah.

The midrash mentioned by the Ramban in Parshas Behaalos'choh asks, why does Hashem need a Menorah in the Mishkon? Does Hashem need the light? Rather it is to reflect the light of chochmas haTorah. Light is how one is able to see the world. We see the world through the light of Torah. It is specifically this vessel of the Beis Hamikdosh which the miracle of Chanukah surrounds. And a major part of this miracle was that they were able to use oil that was tahor until new oil was produced, and they did not have to use oil that was contaminated by the Greeks. This is symbolic of the fact that the Chashmonaim made sure that the Torah we learn today and pass down to the next generation isn't corrupted by chochmas yevonis. That pure mesorah will survive.

Sometimes the battle to preserve Torah is financial, sometimes it is political, and sometimes it is an actual physical battle. But the battle against the Greeks had an additional element which made it a yom tov. There was a miracle that absolutely broke the laws of nature. It wasn't just a military victory. And this supernatural miracle, which broke natural law, occurred around the Menorah and the oil which represents the

purity of chochmas haTorah, uncontaminated by chochmas yevonis – whose whole philosophy was the immutability of natural law.

People get confused by what Chanukah is about. It's actually very simple. It is an ideological battle between Torah and all other ideologies. Sometimes Hashem does us the chessed of showing us the utter bankruptcy of all the other ideologies. And sometimes we have to understand it for ourselves. At yetzias Mitzrayim, the night of makkas bechoros was one of those times where Hashem destroyed all the avodo zoros in Egypt. He left one avodo zoro standing, Baal Tzefone, the god of money – which is always the last avodo zoro to go. It was taken care of at Yam Suf seven days later.

We live in a strange world where the absolute moral bankruptcy in academic circles and the intellectual elite is so open and exposed before us. There was a recent murder of a chief executive of a major health insurance company. He was shot coming out of his hotel in the middle of central Manhattan in broad daylight. A brazen, cold-blooded murder. But the cheering and sympathy for the murderer from the intellectual left was the most shocking thing about this incident. It has nothing to do with Yiddishkeit. You saw leftists overjoyed by his murder because, to them, he was a symbol of capitalism. It is a twisted, morally corrupt world out there.

In the 1930's, who were the first people to adopt Hitler and his ideology in Germany? It was the academics in the universities. The major professor of ethics and all the faculty jumped on the bandwagon. All the vicious anti-Semitism today – out in the open with no disguises – is coming from the universities and the intellectual elite. The incoming president in the United States made an earth-shattering announcement – there are males and females and nothing else and they are not interchangeable. And the liberals went crazy, like the world was coming to an end.

Hashem has been showing us for the past year how empty and hollow the secular world of Greek culture is. Sometimes you can understand it yourself by absorbing the lessons of the Torah, and sometimes, if you aren't bright enough to get it from the Torah, Hashem will show it to us directly.

We come to Chanukah. Yaakov Ovinu fought with Eisov, and Yaakov wins. When he comes to Shechem and he builds temporary Sukkos for his flock, and builds a permanent Beis Midrash for his Torah, Yaakov is declaring what he is. He recuperates from his injury inflicted by the Sar of Eisov against the tomchei Torah.

In this country, a very serious political battle is being waged for Torah. The עוסקי תורתך are adamant and uncompromising. They know we have to preserve the purity of Torah and the centrality of Torah at all costs. The vicious anti-Semitism coming out is showing everyone that the more elite you are, the more twisted and insane you are, and the more you hate Jews. It all goes together. Hashem is opening our eyes to the empty, hollow culture of chochmas yevonis expressed in our times by the intellectual elite. It is exactly what Rav Yehudah HaLevi said – it may be a beautiful abstract structure, but there is no fruit, no sustenance, no nutrition. We have to integrate these lessons of Chanukah to adjust how we view the world around us and how we live our lives.