

INVASION OF THE CRANE FLY

by Osher Chaim Levene

People just don't like creepy-crawlies. You only have to observe the instinctive recoiling in horror engendered by people while in the company of insects. To put it mildly, I was less than thrilled as a large, uninvited crane fly unleashed itself invading my room. No sooner had I opened the front door than the intruder flew straight into the room with its over-arching, outstretched long thin legs and narrowly missing my face, landing upon the wall.

But before I could put my reflexes into action, the lanky crane fly was on the move again. This larger-version of a mosquito acrobatically soared upwards, gravitating vertically up towards the powerful electric light bulb in the hallway! Smashing into the burning filament and feeling the full heat of the light, the long legged creature reeled back and spiralled downwards. I watched my 'guest' recover its balance and leap up for another attempt. It had fallen under the dazzling, magical spell of the light. With a seemingly magnetic force exerting a formidable pull, the intruder seemed to be inextricably attracted upwards towards the glowing light source.

It is hard to deny the allurements of the Chanukah candles. Their source of attraction is most real and potent, striking a deep resonance within the Jewish soul. Warmth radiating out into the early winter night and darkness, while puncturing the emptiness with meaning. It is the light of Torah alone that ignites the flame of the Jewish soul; this alone should be his source of attraction while not mistakenly gravitating towards the enticing wiles of foreign culture. While there is the attracting light of Torah, there simultaneously lies the counter pseudo-light of culture that similarly offers 'enlightenment' and an attraction of its own. The battle of Chanukah exactly revolved around these conflicting beacons of light.

Rav Gedalya Schorr explains that Syrian-Greeks were after the 'culture' of the Jewish people. The Hellenists had no qualms about leaving the Jews intact and flourishing within their own state. Nor did they object at the existence of the Beis Hamikdash - so long as it was to be assigned to the category of a 'cultural' monument and centre. The Greeks utterly rejected the notion of treating Torah, the Jewish nation and the centre of spirituality as unique. They refused to consider this as belonging to its distinct grouping. The Hellenists were, instead, adamant to regulate everything Jewish to everyday mundane terms. This entailed trying to wrench away the crown of Torah and to nullify the inner flame of kedusha and of divinity involved in Judaism. The Greeks' attempts to translate the Torah into Greek and to disseminate it further, anxiously sought to make the Jewish nation into 'just another people' by universalising the Torah. They sought to extinguish the unique character and nature of the holy, chosen nation.

Chanukah celebrates the eternity of the Jewish people and the retention of their holy nature. Only the heroic efforts of the Chashmonim resisted the secular attempts to Hellenise the Jewish people, ensuring the survival of Torah and mitzvos for future generations, the preservation of the unique Jewish character through the defeat of human culture.

Culture is of human origin, and is therefore unable to produce neither refined nor spiritual human beings. For culture is but an appreciation and pursuit of humanly rather than the G-dly elements of beauty. It is therefore wantonly lacking connection to the inner quality of kedusha, to ruchnius. Music, literature, philosophy and the arts do not leave their imprint upon the human being. Theirs is an attractive, enlightened but false flame. Rav Moshe Meiselman, Rosh Yeshiva of Toras Moshe, notes how "Judaism is an eternal counterculture, which at times takes outer garb of sister cultures, but can never dare assimilate their values and mores. Judaism does not assimilate contemporary values, for to do so would be to implicitly reject the divine imperative as the source of all value."

The notion that human culture, music, literature and the arts create refined human beings was exposed by the perpetrators of the unspeakable evil of the Holocausts, the Nazis who emanated from Germany, the most acclaimed cultural

nation of the time. It recently came to light how the heinous Dr. Menegle had a deep love for classical music. He ordered a Jewish concentration camp inmate, who was a talented pianist, to play for him regularly. But he trained his Alsatian dogs to attack her if she got so much as one note wrong!

The beauty of Yavan (the name of their ancestor Yefes meaning beauty) it is an external, human beauty, but which does not generate any internal or eternal light -unless and until it becomes subsumed to within the inner tents of Shem (Bereishis 9:27) - with the light of G-dliness and Torah. Until that time, Greek culture and beauty is characterised by the Midrash as darkness (Bereishis Rabbah 2:5).

The miraculous Chanukah lights were kindled with pure olive oil - undiscerning from the outside, but of kedusha, of inner purity and spirituality. The kindling at the Chanukah lights hints at the Jewish nation's attempt to ensure that the soul remains pure. This commemorates the Greeks' attempts to corrupt the Jewish nation with their Hellenistic philosophies and the contamination of all the pure olive oil. The light of Torah banishes Greek darkness, now and then.

The flickering candle always jumps upwards towards Heaven. The Maharal observes the non-corporeality of fire whose essence differs to other physical phenomena (Tiferes Yisrael Ch.20). It is almost as if the flame hears a 'higher spiritual calling' attracting it to transcend the physical world towards what resides Above. Torah and the soul are both termed a candle. The purity of them both genuinely aspires to make contact with the upper worlds.

Chanukah is the beacon that spells the eternity of the Jewish people. The ever-lasting fire, the brenn of the Jewish soul and the tireless toil of Torah, continues to illuminate the Jewish nation's path. In the darkness of our exile, the lights of Torah illuminate offering solace, hope and warmth generated from our connection to Torah and to Hashem. It is through observing these flickering, Chanukah lights of Torah shining outwards, that we shun human notions of enlightenment and culture, and instead, to truly

discover our own inner flame, longing to be drawn and attracted towards the light. Torah is our guiding light. It and it alone is the arbitrator for human behaviour and action-and not culture. Torah is the magnetic light, which holds Torah Jews under its spell. And then, like the crane fly and the flickering and heavenward-bound flame of the Chanukah lights, we too will relentlessly gravitate ascend higher and higher to consciously draw towards Hashem's Infinite Light.