

LIVING LESSONS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Rav Moshe Isserless, in the Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chayim 670:2) writes: Even though this holiday (Chanukah) was not established to be a holiday of feasting and happiness, there is still, however, a small Mitzvah to increase one's festive meals, because on these days, the Altar was dedicated, and we have a custom to sing songs and praises at these meals. The Mishna Berura adds to this that the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, was completed on the 25th day of Kislev (Chanukah), and the Temple, in the days of Antiochus, was rededicated at this time as well.

From the above, there are evidently two distinct sets of events being celebrated on Chanukah. We say the prayer of Hallel, praises of G-d, and light the Menorah to recall the miracle the Chashmonaim experienced with their victory over the Greeks and the oil lasting eight days instead of one. However, the celebratory nature of the holiday, with its requirement to engage in feasting, is because of the dedication of the Altar. The name of the holiday reflects this aspect as well. The word Chanukah, simply interpreted, means "dedication" or "inauguration," alluding to "Chanukas HaMizbayach," the dedication of the Altar.

The Talmud (Sukkah 56b) relates an incident involving the Altar that had broad-reaching implications. The Talmud states "Our Rabbis taught, It happened that Miriam the daughter of Bilgah (who was a Levi, and served in the Temple) apostatized and married an officer of the Greek kings. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary (at the time of the story of Chanukah), she stamped with her sandal upon the altar, crying out, Lukos! Lukos! How long will you consume Israel's money! And yet you do not stand by them in the time of oppression!' And when the Sages heard of the incident, they made her ring immovable and blocked up her alcove (meaning her entire family was no longer permitted to serve in the Temple)." . . .According to him who stated that it was Miriam the daughter of Bilgah who apostatized, do we penalize even a father on account of his daughter? Yes, replied Abaye, as the proverb has it, The talk of the child in the marketplace, is that either of his father or of his mother."

Miriam was from a distinguished family, a family that had the great privilege to perform the service in the Temple in Jerusalem. However, Miriam never gained an appreciation for how great an honor it was for her family to serve. She showed the greatest disrespect to the Altar, by stomping on it and cursing it. For this action, her entire family was punished. Why was the whole family punished? Why could her entire family no longer perform the holy service in the Temple? Because, Abaye says, the contempt she displayed toward the Temple did not just emerge from a vacuum. She learned this

disrespect, or lack of appreciation, for the Temple and the Altar from her parents.

Children formulate opinions and adhere to beliefs based on their education. This education by no means is just from formal schooling. This education comes from how the child sees his or her parents act and interact. When a child sees a parent value an ideal, person, or item, this creates an impression on the child. When a child sees a parent despise and deride an ideal, person, or item, this creates an impression as well. These lessons, the ones acted out before a child's eyes on a daily basis, are often the ones that are ingrained in a child's memory for years. These lessons are the ones that last. The lesson that sacrifices on the Altar were a waste was the lesson that Miriam learned from her parents. Because her family showed disdain toward the Temple, Miriam carried this attitude with her, and displayed it in a most vivid fashion. Therefore, Miriam's whole family was punished, and could no longer serve in the Temple.

The Tur Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chayim 670) contains the words of the commentator, the Bach. The Bach writes that by Chanukah, the decrees and troubles that befell the nation of Israel stemmed from the fact that the people became lazy in their service of G-d. Therefore, they were punished by having the Greeks issue an edict that prohibited them from serving G-d at all. The above incident with Miriam is just one illustration of the disrespect some people had for the Temple and the service of G-d conducted therein.

Chanukah is a time when celebrate the fact that we were freed from Greek persecution and allowed to serve G-d freely. As mentioned above, on Chanukah, we also celebrate the dedication of the Altar. These two aspects of Chanukah are clearly connected. If it were not for the fact that the nation of Israel did not show proper respect to the Altar, the persecutions and battles that climaxed with the miracles of Chanukah would have never occurred. If the nation had not been lax in their service of G-d, and not treated His Temple with a casual attitude, they would have been allowed to serve G-d without any foreign interference. The negative attitude toward G-d was so pervasive that children learned this attitude from their parents, and it spread into the younger generation. On Chanukah, we should remember that we need to be strong in our service of G- d. We need to act with zeal, zest, and fervor so our dedication is evident. Our children learn from our behavior, and the best lesson we can give them in how to serve G- d is by serving G-d properly ourselves.

We sing the song Ma'oz Tzur on Chanukah. The first stanza of this song sets the theme for the holiday: O mighty Rock of my salvation, to praise you is a delight. Restore my House of Prayer, and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering. When you will have prepared the slaughter for the blaspheming foe, then I shall complete, with a song of hymn, the dedication of the Altar.

May we all merit to live this song. A happy Chanukah to all!

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