

BONDING TIME

by Rabbi Dovid Green

The holiday of Chanukah is celebrated partly in commemoration of a military victory against the oppressive Syrian Greek kingdom which was dominating the Jews in Israel. When the war was decisively won, the Jews entered the ransacked Holy Temple and searched for oil which was still sealed in ritual purity by the High Priest. One such container was found, enough for one day, and when used it miraculously burned for eight days until more of the same oil could be obtained.

There is a very famous question which is asked regarding our observance of Chanukah. If the container of oil which was found contained enough for one day's lighting, then the miracle was really only seven days, and not eight as is commonly held. Why then do we make a holiday eight days long? There are many answers given for this question. The Sefer HaTodaah enumerates several answers which are offered.

- 1) The first day is not a celebration of the oil miraculously burning, but rather a celebration of being victorious in the war.
- 2) The cups of the menorah (candelabra) miraculously remained full with oil even after burning overnight. Hence, the miracle took place even on the first day.
- 3) The dominating oppressors decreed against the observance of three commandments given in the Torah: Sabbath Observance, Circumcision, and the establishment of the Jewish Calendar according to the new moon. This of course, was an effort to abolish all Jewish Holidays which are scheduled throughout the year on given days in the Lunar calendar.

As a celebration that we fought for these commandments and won, we observe Chanukah for eight days just like circumcision which takes place on the eighth day of a baby's life. In addition, somewhere in a period of eight days a Sabbath day will come out - sometimes even twice. Lastly, Chanukah begins on the 25th of the month of Kislev. The beginning of the new month of Teves also falls within the eight days of Chanukah. Consequently, the eight-day observance of Chanukah which contains all of the commandments which the oppressors decreed against, serves to nullify the decrees themselves.

- 4) The Greeks told the Jews to write on the horns of their bulls the words "we have no portion in the G-d of Israel". Repeatedly seeing this, the Greeks correctly reasoned, while working behind their bulls, would make its impression on the Jews. The Greeks wanted the Jews to embrace the notion

that everything is a function of "nature"; that there is no G-d.

In response to this G-d gave a miracle to the Jews who fought and remained loyal to Him. The oil burned in a supernatural manner - for eight days. G-d's message to them was that the fact that oil burns at all is miraculous. G-d is behind nature. Everything is a miracle. The fact that some of G-d's miracles are consistent and predictable such as any oil burning, does not detract from their being a miracle. "Nature" is a word which disguises the truth which is that there is "Someone" behind nature.

5) Lastly, the Jews used their only container of oil on the first day they had the chance to do so. They knew they had nothing left for tomorrow, and they knew that the Torah prescribes lighting the Menorah daily, but they did not despair of lighting with it immediately. They reasoned "in whatever way we can fulfill G-d's word now, we will do so." This is the miracle which has truly sustained us throughout the generations. We place our trust in G-d, and we try our best to fulfill His word against all odds. G-d has not disappointed us, for although we have suffered, we and our Torah are still flourishing, and our oppressors have been humbled, or have disappeared entirely. Kein Yirbu!

Chanukah is a time to remind ourselves that we have an eternal bond with the Creator of the universe. He takes interest in each and every one of us, and He loves us more than we can imagine. We come from very great and elevated people whose actions found favor with G-d, and we have the potential to follow in their footsteps. The path to doing so is through prayer, Torah learning, and effort in following the commandments. G-d will surely reward our efforts and we will merit to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Good Shabbos and Happy Chanukah!

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