

# LIGHT UP RIGHT

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

...In the days of Mattisyahu, the son of Yochanan, the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons- when the wicked Greek Kingdom rose against Your people Israel, to make them forget Your Torah and compel them to stray from the statutes of Your will- You in Your great mercy stood up for them in the time of their great distress. You took up their grievance, judged their claim, and avenged their wrong. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of Your Torah... (From Al HaNissim)

In "Al HaNissim" we are treated to a precise snapshot of history, but for what purpose? Are we merely celebrating an ancient victory? Might there be some current educational value as the name Chanukah (Chinuch-Education) implies?

Our historical encounter with the intellectualism of Greek culture which is the story of Chanukah, transpired during the times of the 2nd Temple and it is counted as one of the "four exiles". It's a little strange that this clash of civilizations is counted as an "exile" since the entire episode happened while we were in the Land of Israel and with the Holy Temple in our midst. This teaches us that "exile" is not just an issue of physical or geo-political location but rather a problem of spiritual dislocation and alienation. How does an exile occur? How is it cured? What is the purpose of an exile?

I once heard from a great person teaching a group of American boys that an exile is like "stop action, instant replay, on the big screen". He explained that when football teams review on Monday mornings in order to analyze what went right and what went wrong, they go slowly through the game films. If they find a terrible glaring error they may play it over and over on the big screen in ever more vivid detail and with more in-depth commentary and criticism until the lesson is driven home and the deed is shamed out of the system of the offending party. That mistake will certainly never be made again.

Similarly, a friend of mine was caught smoking cigarettes in the basement by his father. The father did not lecture him on the ills of smoking. No! This is how he handled the teachable moment. He told his son, "You like cigarettes?! Let's smoke cigarettes!" He bought a carton of non-filter extra strong smokes and revisited the scene of the crime. He seated his son there in the basement and had him light up a cigarette and inhale and he lit another and another and another until he was coughing and wheezing and regretful that he had ever started. By the time they were through he was so reviled by

the thought of smoking he never did again.

So too, when the Jewish People are sitting in the Land of Israel with everything that anyone could ever hope. They then become temptingly curious about how the Babylonians or the Greeks are having a better time with their permissive albeit clay-footed gods. Many begin subscribing to their magazines, visiting their websites, and speaking admiringly about the virtues of their lifestyle. The Almighty, seeing that we are lost with their lights and their smoke, in His kindness says, as it were, "You like Greek culture?! I'll give you Greek culture!" By the time we are finished with this exercise we have learned a difficult but necessary lesson.

That is the anatomy of an exile on a national and on an individual basis. When one successfully graduates the academy of a given exile experience, the feelings of revulsion and the longing for freedom are forever etched into the psyche of the student. So it is, the eight days of Chanukah are a sort of national strategic team meeting, with a "stop action instant replay on the big screen" device with which to review. We are here now to identify what went so terribly wrong and what set things right in the end so it should not happen again and to the extent that is already happening to gain the requisite tools to remedy the situation.

When even a few clear minded and dedicated souls began to strongly reject those that would wantonly extinguish the light of Torah, did we get the Heavenly help to purify the Temple and **light up right**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).