

CHANAUKAH LIGHTS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Miketz & Chanukah

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Today's Learning:
Demai 2:1-2
O.C. 307:11-13
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Tamid 29
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kiddushin 48

The gemara (Shabbat 23b) teaches: "Rav Huna said: 'If one is meticulously careful in lighting candles, he will merit to have sons who are Torah scholars.'" Rashi explains: "This is based on the verse (Mishlei 6:23), 'For a mitzvah is a candle and Torah is light' - through the mitzvah of Shabbat and Chanukah candles comes the light of Torah."

So many people light Shabbat and Chanukah candles, observed R' Kalman Winter shlita (rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation in Silver Spring, Md.), yet there are relatively few Torah scholars! Why? Because Rav Huna's promise is addressed only to those parents who want their children to be Torah scholars.

Not so long ago, R' Winter added, the concept of studying Torah "lishmah" / as an end in itself was relatively unknown in America. If a young man announced that he wanted to remain in yeshiva and study Torah, his relatives would ask, "But what will you do with it? Do you plan to become a rabbi?" Rav Huna's teaching, which relates the mitzvah of Chanukah candles to the study of Torah, shows us

that this attitude is wrong. Halachah states that one may derive no pleasure from the Chanukah lights. One may look at them, but nothing more. Similarly, there is a concept of studying Torah lishmah, studying Torah without any practical goal in mind. This is the type of Torah study which creates real Torah scholars. (Heard from R' Winter, 23 Kislev 5762)

All of us, sons of one man are we; we are truthful people; your servants have never been spies."

"He [Yosef] said to them, 'No! But the land's nakedness have you come to see'." (42:11-12)

What was the meaning of this exchange? Seemingly Yosef is just accusing his brothers again in verse 12 of the same thing that they just denied in verse 11!

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (1690-1764; rabbi in Germany and prolific author) explains: Yosef's brothers argued that they could not be spies, for they are the sons of one man. Why can't brothers be spies? Their argument was two-fold: First, "Our father is an 'Ish' / an important man." Spies are not drawn from the noble class but from a lower class, for the lower classes are more willing to risk their lives to earn money.

Moreover, they argued, we, "your servants, have never been spies." Spying is dangerous work, and we have no experience doing it. A father might send all of his sons to spy, but what father would risk all of his sons at one time on something so dangerous at which they are inexperienced?

Yosef replied, "I don't doubt that you are not hired spies. Nevertheless, you have come to see the worst of Egypt ('the land's nakedness') for your own reasons."

(Tiferet Yehonatan)

"Then Reuven told his father, saying, 'You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him [Binyamin] back to you. Put him in my care and I will return him to you'." (42:37)

The Midrash records that Yaakov answered Reuven: "You fool! Are your sons not my sons?"

What was Reuven thinking? R' Eliezer Papo z"l (1785-1827; author of the classic mussar work, Pele Yoetz) writes that he will defend Reuven. He explains: Reuven meant, "I am so committed to bringing Binyamin back to you that, if it were conceivable that you would kill my two sons, I would be willing to take the risk." Alternatively, Reuven meant, "I recognize that your pain upon losing Binyamin would be equal to my pain if I lost my two sons and I would deserve to lose them if I caused you such pain; therefore, I will protect Binyamin with great care."

R' Papo adds that one of the verses of Hallel can be explained in a vein similar to the first explanation

above. We recite in Hallel (Tehilim 115:1), "Not for our sake, Hashem, not for our sake, but for Your Name's sake give glory, for Your kindness and Your truth." In fact, when Hashem brings us salvation, He does so in a way that brings glory to us. [For example, Hashem caused the Maccabees to defeat the Greeks in battle, even though Hashem could have defeated them on his own as He had done to the Egyptians and some of the Canaanite nations.] We know that Hashem wants the Jewish People to be glorified in the eyes of the world. Nevertheless, we say, "Even if it were conceivable that You would save us only for Your own glory, please save us."

(Elef Ha'maggen)

"Anyone among your servants with whom it [Yosef's goblet] is found shall die, and we also will become slaves to my lord."

"He replied, 'What you say now is also correct. The one with whom it is found shall be my slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated'." (44:9-10)

How could Yosef's servant say to Yosef's brothers, "What you say now is also correct," and then go on to contradict them? R' Noach Rabinowitz z"l (late 1800s) explains:

In a close case, a judge may consider evidence of the accused's character to help him decide whether to convict or acquit. In contrast, when the police are investigating a crime, they are interested solely in the evidence. The police do not refrain from following a lead just because it leads to a person who has an impeccable reputation.

Yosef's brothers argued that they should not be investigated on suspicion of stealing Yosef's goblet. After all, they said in the immediately preceding verse, "The money that we found in the mouth of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we have stolen from your master's house any silver or gold?" They were not suggesting that the one who had the goblet should die and the others should become slaves; they were expressing their fear that that would be the result. Therefore they asked to be excluded from the investigation on the basis of their proven honesty.

Yosef's servant said, "What you say is correct!" Your good character will be taken into account when you are judged and your sentences will be reduced or commuted. "The one with whom it is found shall be my slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated." However, you must still be investigated.

(Toldot Noach)

Chanukah

"Al h'anissim / For the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and for the victories, and for the battles . . ."

It is understandable that we thank Hashem for miracles, salvation, etc., but why do we thank Him for the battles? R' Baruch Mordechai Eizrachi shlita (a rosh yeshiva in Israel) explains:

Part of Hashem's kindness to us is that He not only takes care of us, He does so in a way that makes us feel accomplished. Hashem could have rained stones from the heavens on the Greeks just as He did to the Canaanites, but He wanted us to feel as if we had defeated the Greeks. This what we acknowledge when we thank him for "the battles." [See the related thought above regarding Hallel.]

(Birkat Mordechai p.191)

Letters from Our Sages

This week we continue a letter written by R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (then Chief Rabbi of Yaffo) on 10 Sivan 5665 (1905). It is printed in Igrot Ha're'iyah No. 20. In the beginning of the letter, presented last week, R' Kook explained that there is room for freedom of thought in Judaism, but within limits. He continues:

When it comes to emunah / faith, the Jewish people are unique [in the following respect]. If there would be any nation in the world whose entire existence as a nation was dependent on an idea, then it would be proper, and indeed obligatory, that no freedom of thought be permitted vis-a-vis that idea. Freedom of thought regarding that idea is not "freedom." It is neglecting one's own preservation. . . .

There is no other nation in the world whose reason for existence is to proclaim G-d's existence, to proclaim that He is the ultimate Power in the world, who keeps His promise and practices kindness. . . . Necessarily, anyone whose thoughts, and certainly his deeds, cause a weakening of this idea, which gives life to the nation, is a sinner against the nation, and forgiving him is a mistake. . . .

In practice, although it is a terrible disease if one's mind harbors doubts in matters of faith, such a person is not an apikorus / heretic in the eyes of the law. An apikorus is one who reaches a firm conclusion that our emunah is wrong. [Very few people can qualify as such.] Only a person who is thoroughly evil and who blatantly tells lies can be considered to be someone who has reached a firm conclusion that is considered heretical. [R' Kook explains that an honest person can have doubts in matters of faith, but only a person who is lying to himself and others can claim to have "proof." A person who would lie to himself and others in such a manner is obviously wicked.]

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