

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Miketz & Chanukah

Darkness and Light

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Sponsored by Martin and Michelle Swartz on the 120th yahrzeit of Martin's great-great-grandfather Jacob Oesterreicher (1826-1892)

The Vogel family on the yahrzeit of mother and grandmother Miriam bat Yehuda Leib a"h (Mary Kalkstein)

Rambam z"l writes: Even if one has no food, he must borrow money or sell his shirt to buy oil for Chanukah lights. R' Vidal di Tolosa z"l (Spain; 14th century; the "Maggid Mishneh") explains: Since halachah requires a person to borrow money or sell his shirt to buy four cups of wine for Pesach, certainly he must borrow money or sell his shirt to buy oil for Chanukah, since Chanukah candles involve *pirsumei nisa* / publicizing the miracle.

Commentaries ask: Don't the four cups of wine on Pesach also serve a *pirsumei nisa* function? If so, in what way is *pirsumei nisa* on Chanukah greater that the Maggid Mishnah would use the word "certainly"?

R' Yaakov Reischer z"l (1661-1733; the "Shevut Yaakov") explains: Halachah does not require a person to borrow money or sell his shirt to buy wine for kiddush on Shabbat. Why not? Doesn't kiddush publicize the greatest miracle of all--that Hashem created everything from nothing and rested, so-to-speak, on the seventh day? Nevertheless, the *pirsumei nisa* which occurs when one recites kiddush on Shabbat in the privacy of his dining room is not as great as the *pirsumei nisa* which occurs when one lights Chanukah candles outside his front door (which is the ideal way to perform the mitzvah).

Likewise, the *pirsumei nisa* which occurs when one drinks four cups of wine on Pesach in the privacy of his dining room is not as great as the *pirsumei nisa* which occurs when one lights Chanukah candles outside his front door . Therefore, if one must borrow money or sell his shirt to buy four cups

of wine for Pesach, certainly he must borrow money or sell his shirt to buy oil for Chanukah, since Chanukah candles involve greater *pirsumei nisa*. (Quoted in *Sde Tzofim: Shabbat 24a*)

"It happened at the end of two years of days--Pharaoh was dreaming . . ." (41:1)

Midrash Rabbah comments, quoting *Iyov* (28:3): "He sets a limit to the darkness." Hashem decreed how many years Yosef would spend in the darkness, i.e., in prison. Once that time was up, Pharaoh was dreaming .

The midrash continues, quoting *Mishlei* (14:23): "In all toil there will be gain, but the talking of the lips brings only loss." Because Yosef said to the wine chamberlain, "Remember me" and "Mention me," G-d added two extra years to Yosef's sentence.

R' Hillel ben Raphael z"l (father-in-law of the Chafetz Chaim z"l; died 1899; his *yahrzeit* is this coming week) asks: How does the midrash know that the two years were "extra"? The Torah never says how long Yosef was in prison in total; perhaps our verse should be read, "At the end of two years" in total that Yosef was in prison?

He explains: The midrash is explaining the Torah's seemingly superfluous use of the words "of days." Why didn't the verse say simply, "It happened at the end of two years"? The answer lies in that fact that "day" and "light" generally refer to redemption, while "night" and "darkness" generally refer to subjugation. From the fact that our verse says, "of days," the midrash learns that these were two years that should have been "days," i.e., years in which Yosef should have been free. But, because he put his faith in the wine chamberlain, these years turned to "darkness," i.e., imprisonment.

R' Hillel continues: Throughout our history, great Torah sages tried to predict when *mashiach* would come. How could they all have been wrong? The answer is that there are multiple times in history that are propitious times for *mashiach* to come, but only if we merit to be redeemed. This is the meaning of the verse quoted by the above midrash. "He sets a limit to the darkness." When that time comes, Hashem examines our deeds to see if we are worthy of redemption. Similarly, after Yosef had spent ten years in prison (according to our Sages), Hashem examined Yosef's deeds to see if he was worthy of redemption. And, because Yosef had put his faith in the wine chamberlain, he was found unworthy. (Bet Hillel: *Drushim*)

"So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon. . ." (41:14)

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah 10b*) records that Yosef was released from prison on *Rosh Hashanah*. Why is it useful for us to know this?

R' Yitzchak Meir Alter z"l (1798-1866; first Gerrer Rebbe, known as the "Chiddushei Ha'Rim") explains

that Yosef represents that Jewish spark that is within even those Jews who are prisoners of their desires. On Rosh Hashanah, our Sages are teaching, that spark can break free. This, adds the Chiddushei Ha'Rim, is why the month in which Rosh Hashanah falls is called "Tishrei," which contains the word "sharei" / "to release." (Quoted in his grandson's Likkutei Yehuda)

"They then said to one another, 'Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us.'" (42:21)

R' Yitzchak ben Yosef de Piera z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: Yosef's brothers recognized that the treatment they were receiving at the hands of the Egyptian viceroy was no coincidence, and they immediately examined their own deeds in search of a sin to which to attribute their suffering. Their greatness is demonstrated, in particular, by the fact that they had committed no other sins to which to attribute their own anguish. They searched for past sins, and they found none except for ignoring Yosef's anguish. (Peirush R' Yitzchak ben R' Yosef Al Ha'Torah)

Chanukah

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev z"l (1740-1809; early chassidic rebbe) notes that our commemoration of the Chanukah miracle is different from that of any other miracle on any other festival. On Pesach, for example, we only talk about the miracles that occurred, but we do nothing to imitate the miracles of the Exodus. Why don't we do something with water on the seventh day of Pesach to commemorate the splitting of the Yam Suf on that day? On Purim, we read about the miracle of Haman's downfall, but, again, we do nothing to relive the miracle. Why don't we do something with wood to commemorate the gallows? Only on Chanukah do we light a menorah to commemorate the miracle that occurred with the Temple menorah.

Why is Chanukah celebrated in this unique way? R' Levi Yitzchak explains: The Pesach and Purim miracles were necessary for our survival. G-d had to do them, so-to-speak. In contrast, the miracle of the oil burning for eight days was not necessary. Rather, it was an expression of Hashem's love for us and for the mitzvot we do. To acknowledge this love, we mark the festival by imitating the miracle as best we can. (Kedushat Levi: Kedushah Chamishit)

Based on this, suggested Mr. Eliezer Katz she'yichyeh (this writer's son; yeshiva student and sofer in Yerushalayim), we can answer the famous question of R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; author of the Shulchan Aruch): If there was enough oil to last for one day and the menorah burned for eight days, then the actual miracle was for seven days! Why, then, does Chanukah have eight days?

Mr. Katz explained: We have one other holiday whose sole purpose is to demonstrate Hashem's love for us, i.e., Shemini Atzeret. Why is there a holiday of Shemini Atzeret? The midrash teaches that after we have spent the seven days of Sukkot at the Bet Hamikdash in Yerushalayim, Hashem says, so-to-speak, "Don't leave just yet! Stay one more day!" This is an expression of His love for us. Thus, concludes Mr. Katz, just as Shemini Atzeret is the eighth day of Sukkot, so Chanukah has an eighth day.

(Regarding R' Levi Yitzchak's basic premise, Mr. Katz added, Sukkot seems, at first glance, to be more like Chanukah. However, halachah adopts the Talmudic opinion that our sukkot commemorate the Clouds of Glory, not the huts in which Bnei Yisrael lived. Thus, on Sukkot, too, our observance does not imitate the miracle.) (Heard from Mr. Eliezer Katz, 28 Kislev 5773)

Letters from Our Sages

This undated letter was written by R' Eliezer Zusia Portugal z"l (1898-1982), the Skulener Rebbe in Romania (until 1960) and then in New York. The Rebbe was renowned for his efforts to assist the victims of Communism by providing both their spiritual and material needs, activities which landed him in jail in Romania.

Much peace and blessing to his honor, my beloved, the friend of my soul, the young man ("bachur") who has chosen ("bachar") good--the only good is Torah--who is marvelous and prominent in Torah and fear of Heaven, may his light shine!

I read your words with love, the love of Torah, and I give you my blessing as a layman on the occasion of your birthday. May Hashem lengthen your days and years and enlighten your eyes with His holy Torah and attach your heart to His mitzvot, as we pray every day, "Unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name."

May it be His will that you will continue to grow in Torah and holy fear of Hashem. May your parents merit to see from you, and from all their descendants amongst the rest of Klal Yisrael, pleasure and nachas based on holiness. May we all merit together the light of mashiach soon in our days, amen selah.

From your friend who loves you with a powerful love.

P.S. Take note that a birthday is not only the day on which you were born years ago. For a G-d-fearing person who loves Torah, every day should be a birthday. Surely you remember what I said in the name of the Sefer Noam Megadim about the verse (Bereishit 6:9), "These are the offspring of Noach- Noach . . ." The Torah is hinting that Noach's first child was Noach himself, for he made himself into a perfect tzaddik. . .

Hashem created man and creates him anew at each moment. . . However, when it comes to spiritual matters, a person must give birth to himself every day so as to be one who rises in matters of holiness, strengthening himself in Torah and good deeds, with pure fear of Hashem and love of the Creator.

So may it be Hashem's Will that you will merit to strengthen yourself every day. Be strong regarding Torah and courageous regarding mitzvot!

I close with my blessing. (Noam Eliezer)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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