

# THANKS FOR WHAT?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Miketz & Chanukah

### Thanks for What?

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) asks: Why did Chazal see fit to establish a new holiday (Chanukah) to thank Hashem for our being able to light the menorah in the Bet Hamikdash? We can understand making a holiday to thank Hashem for our personal salvation, but why should we thank Hashem for letting us perform mitzvot?

The essence of the war between the Jews and the Greco-Syrians, Maharal explains, was a spiritual battle between Greek wisdom and the Torah. The Greeks sought to establish that their wisdom and their way of life were supreme. The Torah was the competitor to their wisdom, and this required them to try and distance us from the Torah.

Our Sages teach that the world was created on the condition that the Jews receive the Torah. Had the Greeks succeeded in uprooting the Torah, the entire world literally would have come to an end. Thus, the fact that a miracle occurred and the Jews were able to perform a mitzvah signifies the victory of the Torah over Greek wisdom, and therefore signifies that the Jews, and the world, would continue to exist. This, surely, is a reason to thank Hashem.

Alternatively, Chanukah actually commemorates the military victory of the Jews over the Greeks. However, the Jews were not sure whether their victory really was a miracle; after all, sometimes the underdogs win because of circumstances or luck. The miracle of the oil was a sign from Hashem that He had been with the Jews. (Ner Mitzvah)

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

Was Reuven really suggesting that Yaakov kill Reuven's children, who were Yaakov's grandchildren? No, explains R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (see back page) in the name of R' Eliezer Dan Ralbag z"l

(1832-1895), who quoted R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin z"l (1818-1898). Rather, the emphasis is on the word "two." Reuven meant, "Strip me of the birthright, which entitles me to a double share, if I do not bring Binyamin back." (B'tuv Yerushalayim p.50)

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)

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"Then Yehuda said to Yisrael his father, 'Send the lad [Binyamin] with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live and not die, \*we\* as well as \*you\* as well as \*our children\*.'" (43:8)

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (rabbi in Lithuania, Seattle and Toronto; rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn; died 1986) notes that Yehuda's words are consistent with the halachic order of precedence for saving lives: first one must save himself, then his parents, and then his children.

Furthermore, R' Kaminetsky observes, we learn from this verse that even an am ha'aretz / ignoramus should save his own life before he saves a Torah scholar's life [since Yaakov's sons were of a lower stature compared to Yaakov, yet they still had to feed themselves first.] (Emet L'Yaakov)

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"Yisrael their father said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: Take mi'zimrat ha'aretz / of the land's glory in your baggage and bring it down to the man [i.e., Yosef] as a tribute--a bit of balsam, a bit of honey, wax, lotus, pistachios, and almonds'." (43:11)

What is special about this gift, which consists of items that surely could be found in Pharaoh's court? R' Yosef Bechor Shor z"l (France; 12th century) explains: "Mi'zimrat ha'aretz" is a language of "song" or "praise," and it refers to those items because of which people praise the Land. They say, "How good is Eretz Yisrael, which has fruits such as these!"

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) explains further: While the items that the brothers took were already available in Egypt, they were special merely because they were from Eretz Yisrael. This idea is found in the Midrash Esther Rabbah, which comments on the verse (Esther 1:4), "When he displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom," as follows: "He showed them a meal from Eretz Yisrael." The Maharal of Prague z"l explains: Since the Torah says about Eretz Yisrael (Devarim 8:9), "You will lack nothing there," it was Achashveirosh's possession of Eretz Yisrael which enabled him to make a feast that was truly fit for a king.

R' Zuriel continues: We read in Midrash Shir Ha'shirim Rabbah that the prophet Daniel returned to Eretz Yisrael from Babylon, saying: "Better to eat a meal from Eretz Yisrael and recite a blessing over Eretz Yisrael." This teaches, concludes R' Zuriel, that Birkat Hamazon takes on an added dimension when the food that was eaten was grown in Eretz Yisrael. (Drishat Tzion)

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## Chanukah

The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is unique among mitzvot in that a person has three options for how to perform it. One can fulfill the mitzvah in a complete manner by lighting one light per household per night. One who chooses to perform the mitzvah in a more beautiful manner may have each member of his household kindle one light each night. Finally, one who wants to do the mitzvah in the most beautiful manner will add an additional light each night.

Why was the mitzvah "designed" this way? R' Yitzchak Isaac Sher z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva; died 1951) explains: We read in Yeshayah (26:20), "Hide for a brief moment until the wrath has passed." The Chashmonaim could have followed this approach and hidden in caves until the danger had passed. However, like Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah who chose to be thrown into a furnace rather than run away (when Nevuchadnezar ordered them to bow to his statue), the Chashmonaim stood up to resist. Because they went beyond the letter of the law, the mitzvah that resulted gives us options to go beyond the letter of the law. (Lekket Sichot Mussar II p.151)

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## Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (1871-1962; the "Maggid / preacher of Yerushalayim"), describes in his

memoir, B'tuv Yerushalayim, the procedures for hashgachah / supervision over the agricultural commandments. [See Hamaayan for Parashat Vayishlach of this year for the beginning of this description.]

As time passed, the supply of produce from Jewish producers increased, and wagon-loads of fruits and vegetables arrived in Yerushalayim, such that the mashgichim / kashruth supervisors couldn't keep up with [separating terumah and ma'aser / tithes from the produce of] all the dealers.

Therefore, in 5662 [1902], I called a meeting of rabbis to address the matter. The decision was made at this meeting that produce would no longer be tithed in Yerushalayim. Instead, tithes would be separated in every settlement by the shochet there or by a mashgiach who would be appointed for that purpose. Only after those individuals had given the people of the settlement a certificate attesting that tithes were separated in accordance with halachah would their produce be accepted in Yerushalayim.

This decision, with the signatures of the rabbis, was sent to all the settlements. Afterward, I traveled to the settlements to implement the matter. In every place in which I arrived, I called the settlement's council to a meeting, I gave them the rabbis' decision, and I explained the necessity of this step. . . I said that every place that would separate tithes under supervision would become renowned throughout the world and would cause a kiddush Hashem / sanctification of G-d's Name and bring honor to Eretz Yisrael. Praise G-d, my words were accepted willingly in every place I went, and they established a high level of hashgachah in their fields. Copies of their [i.e., the councils'] decisions were even given to me. . .

In Yerushalayim as well, we increased our guard so that no produce would be received except with proper hashgachah. Once, six sacks of almonds reached Yerushalayim with no hechsher, and they were sent back so they could be tithed at their origin and then returned to Yerushalayim--all in order that there be no breach of the protocols.

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