

CLASS 23 - CHANUKAH

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

THE MITZVAH OF NER CHANUKAH

Dovid HaMelech sings to Hashem with varied terms of praise. Chazal enumerate the different forms - Ashrei, Shir, Bracha, Mizmor, Niggun, Hallelukah, Nitzuach....

"and the eighth - Hoda'ah, with which Dovid praises 'Hodu L'Hashem'. This is 'Hod', and these are the eight days of Chanukah, after twenty-four days [of Kislev], and they equal 'Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L'Olam Va'ed [totaling twenty-four letters]. Immediately - 'an olive leaf was placed in its mouth' (Breishis 8:11; an allusion to the Chanukah lights). These are the twenty-five letters of the Unity - 'Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad' [totaling twenty-five letters], and this is Chanukah - 'Chanu Chof Heh' [they rested on the twenty-fifth]." (Tikkunei Zohar, cited by Yesod V'Shoresh Ha'Avodah)

The Chanukah miracle is connected to the prayer of Shema Yisrael. The calendar date and the numerical value are merely hints, but the depth of this idea remains to be explained.

1

Man was created on the first of Tishrei, the sixth day of creation. Hence, the first day is the twenty-fifth of Elul, when G-d uttered His first command - "Yehi Ohr". Light originates on that day, and subsequently follows a twelve month cycle, growing and diminishing with the change of seasons.

"Light has four boundaries. One, when the light is at its ultimate strength and the darkness is at a minimum. From that point and onwards, the light begins to wane and the darkness becomes stronger. This is in Tamuz. Another boundary, when light and darkness are equal. From here and onwards, the light begins to diminish while the darkness grows stronger. This is Chodesh Tishrei.....Another boundary, when darkness completely overpowers the light is in Chodesh Teves, afterwards, the light begins to strengthen. And another boundary, when light and dark are equal, and afterwards the light begins to grow, and this is in Chodesh Nisan, at which point, the cycle begins again." (Maharal, Ner Mitzvah)

Our year is divided into four periods of equal duration. The solstice and equinox mark distinctly defined areas of life, each a category of its own. The light of creation originates on the twenty-fifth of Elul, when both light and dark functioned equally. That original light was quickly hidden, spirited

away for the future, and the long night began to take control, reaching its pinnacle precisely three months later, on the twenty-fifth of Kislev.

On that night, we light a little candle. This Chanukah light signifies our faith in the original light of creation, the light we cannot see. Hidden from view, but never extinguished, it is precisely when man begins to lose hope that the Chanukah miracle produces a light of its own.

Let us explain.

2

When Ya'akov Avinu was on his deathbed, he called his twelve sons together, hoping to reveal both the end of time and the secret of redemption. When this vision became blurred, and an end to the exile remained beyond perception, he attributed this loss to a fault among his progeny, fearing that they had become disengaged from the One G-d of Israel.

His children were quick to allay his concern: "Shema Yisrael - just as there is only One in your heart, so too, in our hearts, there is only One. At that moment, Ya'akov first said: 'Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L'Olam Va'ed.'" (Pesachim 56a)

Krias Shema is an expression of the ultimate Unity. Much more than belief in One G-d, it is an awareness that life itself is One, and that all of existence revolves around a central core. The redemption of the Jewish people is a revelation of this idea, and the purpose of creation is then realized, unifying the entirety of history under the banner of the One G-d..

During the glory days of our nation, at a time when G-d spoke openly to man, this Unity was clear to all the world. But when darkness began to take hold, and prophecy became a distant memory, this vision was suddenly hidden, and history begins a new phase.

When the children of Ya'akov proclaim their unwavering loyalty to the G-d of their fathers, Ya'akov recognizes that the Unity of G-d will expand to include a new dimension. More than a revelation of light and illumination, the Unity of existence incorporates darkness and concealment as well. Despite the fact that G-d's word is hidden and evil reigns supreme, the blackness of night will give way to a brighter dawn.

For this reason, while Shema is recited with clarity and fervor, Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso is silently whispered. Shema represents a world of total harmony, and this prophetic vision signifies a forgotten world, one where G-d's Word shone brightly. Since this vision of the future remains hidden to much of mankind, we utter quietly a proclamation of our own: Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso - pledging our allegiance to a secret that remains concealed.

3

The Greeks are renowned for visions of their own. Cognizant only of what the eye can discern, they

worship a world of wisdom and beauty. To this very day, their many intellectual and physical innovations form the backbone of the modern world.

The Greeks invaded the Bais HaMikdash, sullyng the purity of thought and deed that had always characterized the Jewish people. Taking control of the Heichal - the sanctuary that contained within its boundaries the inner sanctum, the Aron HaKodesh, and the Luchos, they conceal holiness itself behind a physical veil.

[Yavan B'Gimatriya equals sixty-six while the Heichal totals sixty-five. The Divine Name Ado-nai also equals sixty-five, for it too contains a deeper truth, the essential and ineffable Name that defines G-d's indeterminable essence - Yavan can have a hold of the external vessels, but they cannot touch true sanctity]

Certainly, the apostasy of the Greeks was not because they denied the existence of G-d. Rather, they were true believers, but their faith was in a different sort of revelation.

Meaning to say: there are two methods of relating to G-d's presence.

The prophets understood the spiritual realm through direct communication, hearing the word of G-d without intermediaries. They perceived all of existence as eternal and one-dimensional, and for them, the physical world was a mere distraction. All of life was grasped by an inner consciousness, and they attached this finite existence to the essence of all being.

But the Greeks understood life differently. Proficient in the secular wisdom that defines the physical world, they saw Olam HaZeh as a separate entity, one where inner truths hold no value. Though they wish to partake of G-d's blessing, they have severed the connection between this world and the next, and their perception is limited by the measured terms of a finite existence.

All the wisdom of the Greeks will never suffice for man to penetrate the world's inner sanctum, and for this reason, the Kodesh HaKodashim remained beyond their reach. One small flask of pure oil, sealed by the Kohen Gadol is found by those who reclaim the Bais HaMikdash, and this oil is forever pure, untouched by human hands.

[The Greeks are defeated 'B'Yimei Shmonah' by 'B'nei Binah'. The natural world functions in cycles of seven, while eight reflects a level above and beyond nature. Hence, the miracle of Shemen - oil, which always rises to the top, related to Shemonah, and Shamen [fatty], a little more than Sheva - Savea, beyond satisfied and satiated. Binah too, signifies a deeper level of understanding, and it totals sixty-seven, sufficient to defeat the sixty-six of Yavan]

Shimon HaTzaddik, Mattisyahu HaKohen, and their descendants are victorious. The Kohen Gadol, the man who enters a dimension that mortal men cannot reach, pronounces the ineffable Name, and all of Klal Yisrael respond - "Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L'Olam Va'ed" [from the Avodah of Yom Kippur]

4

Greek wisdom is the precursor of heresy. An intellectual approach that perceives the world on its own terms is destined to lead man towards self-worship, endowing him with an egocentric view of existence. Though mindful of G-d's blessing, a bounty that is self-contained ultimately becomes a multitude of gods, for the unifying center of existence has been hastily discarded.

Ya'akov Avinu, on the other hand, sees that his own children have overcome this test, and they testify to the Unity of G-d amidst a world where His Word remains hidden. Despite the darkness, the original illumination still remains, and his children remain connected to the eternal chain - 'Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad'. And throughout history, in the darkest moments of despair, Jews have valiantly given their lives with this acknowledgment on their lips - bearing witness that misfortune too is an integral part of the Divine plan.

On Chanukah long ago, Klal Yisrael, led by the Kohanim who understand the meaning of inner truth, sacrifice their lives to reach the level of twenty-four. 'Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso' expresses that even earthly dynasties are a measure of a deeper dimension. And on the twenty-fourth of Kislev, after darkness reaches its heights, and after intruders have extended their clutches across the Holy Temple, evil finally reaches its own end. All of existence becomes a victim of its own calculations and measures. But, unlike their protagonists, Klal Yisrael attaches inner meaning to even the finite limitations of this world. It is this realization that allows Klal Yisrael to celebrate twenty-five, and on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, we achieve our place of rest - Chanu Chof Heh.

Together we light one little candle, a light to suffice for all time.

Have a happy Chanukah!

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