

TODAY'S CHANUKA MIRACLE

by Rabbi David Begoun

Although we generally relate to the holiday Chanuka as being of Rabbinic origin, Chasam Sofer (1) explains that the obligation to establish a festival on the day on which a miracle occurred is, in fact, a Torah requirement. Rabbi Sofer writes, "therefore observing the days of Purim and Chanuka are indeed a Torah obligation and one who fails to do so is nullifying a positive precept in the Torah." It is a long-standing Jewish custom to hold celebratory meals during Chanuka to provide an opportunity to sing and recite praises to G-d for the miracles He performed on our behalf. Doing so, explains Rabbi Sofer, is the fulfillment of a positive Torah commandment.

How does the consumption of a temporal meal express our gratitude for Divine benevolence? Indeed, this custom has its origins in the Torah itself. The general law regarding the Temple peace-offerings is that the one bringing the offering is allowed two days and one night to consume the meat. The exception is one who brings a "thanksgiving offering," for surviving a life-threatening crisis, who is only allotted until midnight of the same day to eat the meat and the forty accompanying loaves. This, Abarbanel (2) explains, serves to publicize the miracle that the individual experienced. As it is impossible for him to consume that volume in such a limited time, he will be forced to invite friends and neighbors to participate in the feast. Throughout the course of the meal the guests are bound to inquire as to the events that warranted this banquet, and the host will inevitably detail the miracles and wonders that G-d performed on his behalf. Had he been allowed two days and a night to consume the offering, as is the case with all other peace-offerings, the miraculous events would likely go unknown. In this sense, holding a festive Chanuka meal becomes a vehicle for broadcasting the awesome events that occurred and, according to Rabbi Sofer, is therefore considered to be the fulfillment of a Torah commandment.

Further, a thanksgiving feast can serve the dual purpose of helping us to recover a fraction of the initial feelings of gratitude that our ancestors felt at the time these events transpired. Medrash Tanchuma relates that when Yosef returned from his father's funeral he passed the pit into which he had been cast years earlier, and stopped to recite the blessing, "Blessed is the One who performed a miracle for me in this place." His brothers, watching this take place, became fearful that Yosef would now seek revenge for having left him to die in the pit. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz(3) points out, however, that there should have been no reason for the brothers to be fearful as Yosef was merely fulfilling his religious obligation to recite the blessing upon seeing a place where one experienced a miracle. Rabbi Shmulevitz explains that the brothers' fear resulted in hearing that Yosef recited this blessing using G-d's name. One is only allowed to do so if he is currently experiencing the same

degree of emotion as when the actual event occurred, otherwise he must omit G-d's name from the blessing. When the brothers heard Yosef including G-d's name in the blessing they realized that Yosef was reliving the events in vivid detail, and they now feared he would seek revenge.

So, too, is our Chanuka celebration today. In discussing and relating the details of the awesome events that transpired we are able to reawaken the original feelings of gratitude and appreciation for G-d's constant protection of His people and deepen our awareness of the reality that He is slowly leading us towards the fulfillment of our ultimate destiny.

Have a Good Shabbos and a Happy Chanuka!

(1) Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg; 1762-1839; acknowledged leader of Hungarian Jewry of the time; in his Responsa, Yoreh De'ah 233

(2) Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel of Lisbon; 1437-1508; Torah scholar, financier, Spanish Royal Minister, Kabbalist and leader of the Spanish Jewish community; in his Responsa, Parshas Tzav 17

(3) Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of the Mir Yeshiva, who led his students from the ashes of the European Holocaust to the glory of Jerusalem

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