

WHAT MIRACLE?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

In the prayer "Al HaNisim" [for the miracles] that we add during Chanukah, we read that G-d's miraculous deliverance included "the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the provokers into the hands of those who involve themselves with Your Torah." We understand the miracle of "the strong into the hands of the weak" and "the many into the hands of the few" -- but why do we emphasize "the impure into the hands of the pure?" Is this necessarily miraculous?

Rabbi Shlomo Brevda shlit"a, one of the current leaders in the promotion of Jewish ethics, offers an explanation by Rabbi Yechezkel Levinstein zt"l (of blessed memory) of the progression from pure, to righteous, to involved with Torah. This teaches us an important lesson: the entire battle was spiritual. It may have looked like a war, but the battle was supernatural, and depended upon spiritual levels rather than physical strength. Thus each level of evil, as embodied in a Greek soldier, could only be overcome by a Jewish fighter with a corresponding level of holiness.

The average soldier was not truly evil, but was merely dominated by the impure practices and beliefs of the Greek oppressors. To rebuff him, a Jew merely needed to avoid these impurities -- and thus the battle brought "the impure into the hands of the pure."

There were other Greeks who were indeed evil (who helped to set up idols in the Temple and force Jews to abandon their faith). Such soldiers could only be beaten by those who were not merely free of Hellenist beliefs, but had dedicated themselves to observe Mitzvos even when self-sacrifice was involved - meaning it had to be "the wicked into the hands of the righteous."

Finally, there were those Greeks who were "great in their wickedness," those who enacted the decrees to separate the Jews from G-d and Torah. These individuals could only be countered by those great Jews who were totally involved with the study of our Holy Torah -- and thus "the provokers" could only fall "into the hands of those who involve themselves with Your Torah."

History often repeats itself, and we find ourselves today looking at a moral decline which might have surprised even the Greeks. Several years ago, Rabbi Frand quoted a study of the top ten problems in the public schools then versus forty years earlier -- and the comparison was mind-boggling: forty years before, gum-chewing in the halls was a problem; when he spoke, kids and teachers were watching out for knives. And since then, we've added school shootings to the national agenda in the United States. Any person of conscience must wonder, what can I do to reverse this? How can I

make an impact?

Rabbi Levinstein provides us with one answer, one route out of the pit. The Torah and its commentaries are repositories of ethical teachings and works of spiritual improvement. The more Torah that a person knows, the greater the "soldier" in society's spiritual battles. And the use of the various techniques and advice can indeed bring a person to a higher ethical and spiritual level.

The battle begins at home, or more accurately within oneself. One needn't be a great scholar, or even totally righteous - one merely needs to be free of a particular ill to be able to combat it. But the greater the person, the more a person has immersed him- or herself in Jewish ethics and moral development, the greater impact he or she can have!