

THE MANY INTO THE HANDS OF THE FEW

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: # 353, Chanukah And Hiddur Mitzvah. Good Shabbos!

Chanukah Theme One: The Many Into The Hands of the Few

"At the end of two years, and behold Pharaoh dreamt that he was standing by the Nile" [Bereshis 41:1]. Pharaoh is very disturbed by a dream wherein seven lean cows eat seven fat cows. None of the wise men of Egypt can interpret the dream for him, and this troubles him even more.

Even if we assume that the Egyptian Pharaohs were much more superstitious than modern man, it seems rather odd that a head of state should get so upset about a crazy dream. What is so upsetting about seven lean cows swallowing seven fat cows?

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) provides an insight into this question. Pharaoh's whole dominion, like that of any dictator, was based on the premise that the mighty will dominate the weak. "I have the troops. I have the force. Therefore I can impose my will, because no one can do anything against me."

Pharaoh was so bothered by this dream because it portrayed a situation wherein the weak dominated the powerful. It was the seven lean cows that swallowed the seven fat cows. He understood that as not just a silly dream, but as a terrible omen from heaven. He saw this as a Divine message that his dominion was not secure despite his power. This message shook him to the core, for it undermined the premise of his whole monarchy.

Rab Schwab further points out that Parshas Miketz always coincides with Chanukah. This is a constant of the Jewish calendar. It is not just a coincidence. One of the major themes of Chanukah is the idea that "the mighty fell into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few", as we say in the Al HaNissim prayer.

Chanukah Theme Two: Renewal

We recite two blessings prior to lighting the Chanukah candles: "...who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Chanukah candles," and "...who has done miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time of year". The 'miracle' referred to in the second blessing is the miracle of the jug of oil. It was only through Divine Providence that they even found a jug of pure oil and then this small jug miraculously continued to burn for 8 days.

Rav Pam (1913-2001) observed as follows: In the Bais HaMikdash [Temple], miracles occurred every single day. The Mishneh [Avot 5:5] lists the miracles that occurred: The Lechem HaPanim [Show Bread] never became stale, flies never descended upon the sacrifices, etc. If so, asks Rav Pam, why don't we recite the blessing "...who has done miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time of year" every single day of the year? What was so special about the miracle of Chanukah that only that miracle is commemorated with a special blessing?

Rav Pam answers this question by citing a famous comment of the Pnei Yehoshua in Tractate Shabbos. Many of the commentaries ask why the miracle of the jug of pure oil was necessary at all, based on the halachik principle that "Tumah hutra (or dechuya) b'Tzibur" [when the majority of the people are impure, the Bais HaMikdash Service may be carried out even in a state of impurity]. Had no miracle occurred, they could have lit the Menorah with impure oil. The Pnei Yehoshua answers this question by conceding the point and stating that halachically the whole miracle of the oil on Chanukah was unnecessary. The reason, he suggests, that G-d created the miracle was only to demonstrate "an added amount of endearment" (chibah yeseirah) to the Jewish people.

What does the Pnei Yehoshua mean by this term "chibah yeseirah?"

"Chibah yeseirah" can be understood based on a comment of the Bac"h in the Tur at the beginning of the Laws of Chanukah (Chapter 670). The Bac"h points out that if the Jewish people were subjected to the decrees of the Greeks and if the Jewish people were subjected to the punishment of having their Bais HaMikdash desecrated by the pagans, then they must have done something terrible to deserve such a punishment. He suggests that their sin was becoming negligent and lazy in their Service of G-d. They performed the Bais HaMikdash service by rote without proper intent and enthusiasm.

G-d punishes 'measure for measure'. "If you take the Bais HaMikdash Service for granted, I will now deprive you of that Bais HaMikdash Service".

The sons of Matisyahu rededicated themselves. They went to war over the Bais HaMikdash Service. There were renewed dedications and enthusiasm. The Jewish people picked themselves off the floor, so to speak. Yes, they were distant; yes they had been lazy; but they came back with a new strength and a new enthusiastic attitude for the Divine Service. They "returned the crown to its former glory."

The meaning of the Pnei Yehoshua, when he says that G-d wished to show them 'chibah yeseirah' can be understood as follows: A husband and wife had a terrible fight and then made up. However,

the question lingered -- was their current love and relationship the same as it once was? Sometimes it is difficult to get back to the way it once was. G-d wanted to show the Jewish people that after they did Teshuvah [repentance], the relationship He now has with them is just as good as it 'once was'. There was no lingering complaint on G-d's part. From His perspective -- after Teshuvah -- the relationship was fully restored. True, impure oil would have worked under those circumstances (of general impurity), but G-d wanted to show that the relationship was fully equivalent to what it had been "in the old days" -- and was prepared to miraculously change nature to demonstrate that fact.

Yes, certainly the Bais HaMikdash was full of miracles. But this particular miracle was special. This was the miracle that showed that G-d will allow us to come back and that He will not hold grudges against us -- if we sincerely return to Him with complete Teshuva.

The Bnei Yissaschar comments that Chanukah is unique among the Jewish holidays in that it is the only holiday that spans two months (Kislev and Teves). This means that Chanukah always contains a 'Rosh Chodesh' [First day of the Month] within it. Why is that?

We can perhaps suggest that the same idea applies to Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Chodesh implies renewal (of the moon and of the month). This is the theme of Chanukah -- the renewal of the spirit of the Jews and the renewal of the Service in the Bais HaMikdash.

The Jewish people are compared to the moon -- sometimes their fate seems to darken and fade away but we are always confident that it will be renewed in the future. This too is a pattern that sometimes reflects our relationship with the Almighty. There are ups and downs. There are peaks and valleys. It waxes and it wanes. Rosh Chodesh demonstrates that there can be renewal. There can be a new moon. The moon returns. It can get bigger.

This is why Chanukah is connected with Rosh Chodesh. The whole theme of Chanukah is that the Jewish people's relationship with G-d slackened; but then they came back and the relationship was fully renewed its previous level.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Mikeitz are provided below:

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