

# WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED / WHO IS CALLED A TZADIK? / CHANUKAH

*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: #1056 – Oops! I Made a Bracha On the Shammash. Good Shabbos!

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## Why Couldn't the Magicians Have Figured It Out?

Parshas Miketz begins with the famous story of Pharaoh's dreams. In the first dream, seven fat cows emerge from the Nile, followed by seven scrawny cows. The seven scrawny cows eat the seven fat cows. What does that mean? Then Pharaoh has a similar dream – but instead of cows, there are stalks of grain. The same scenario plays out – seven thin stalks swallow up seven fat stalks and the stalks remain as thin as they were previously.

The *pasuk* says "And it was in the morning; and his spirit was agitated; so he sent and summoned all the magicians of Egypt and all of its wise men; Pharaoh related his dream to them, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh." (Bereishis 41:8) Eventually, they brought up Yosef from the dungeon. Yosef came with a recommendation that he is a master dream interpreter. When Pharaoh introduces himself and his situation to Yosef, he says – "I understand you are an interpreter of dreams" to which Yosef responds "That is beyond me; G-d will respond to Pharaoh's welfare." (Bereishis 41:16) Basically Yosef denied having any personal ability to interpret dreams, but did acknowledge that if Hashem would communicate the dream's message to Yosef, he would be able to pass that information on to Pharaoh.

The question needs to be asked: How was it that "all the magicians and wise men of Egypt" were not able to interpret these dreams for Pharaoh? These dreams were not rocket science. You do not need to be a world class genius to figure out what the symbolism might be of scrawny cows swallowing up fat cows.

True, Yosef gave a nice interpretation, but it was not so unique or creative that it makes sense to say nobody else could have figured out the same symbolism. Why, in fact, did these dreams stump the magicians (*chartumim*) and the wise men of Mitzrayim?

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin writes that they could not figure it out because these were the "*chartumei Mitzrayim*." We have seen on other occasions that the "*Chartumei Mitzrayim*" could foretell the future. They were seers. They had clairvoyance. So they looked in their crystal ball and saw that there were going to be seven years of plenty and they were going to be followed by only two years of famine. (This ability to discern the future on the part of the "magicians" was some type of sorcery – through the powers of *tumah* (impurity) -- that existed in Biblical times).

Why were there only two years of famine? Chazal say that when *Yaakov* came down to Egypt – two years into the period of famine – the famine stopped. Had the magicians seen in their crystal ball seven years of plenty followed by seven lean years, they would have certainly been able to interpret the dream! However, seven years of plenty followed by only two years of famine did not match the parameters of the dream. Consequently, "No one could interpret them to Pharaoh." They saw the future but it did not make any sense.

Yosef, on the other hand, responds "*Elokim* will answer the welfare of Pharaoh." The Master of the Universe knows not only what WILL happen in the future, He also knows what COULD HAVE BEEN. The Almighty knew that *Yaakov Avinu* will come down to Egypt, and in his merit the famine will stop, but what could have been without this special merit of the Patriarch was that the famine would have lasted for seven years. This is why Yosef could interpret the dream, but not the magicians of Pharaoh.

Rav Yehoshua Leib says that with this we can understand a passage in the *Hagadah*. (Write this down and stick it in your *Hagadah* for next Pesach or you will not remember it!) The *Hagadah* says "*v'Es Lachatzeinu*" (and our oppression) "*zu perishus Derech Eretz*" (this refers to abstinence). Inasmuch as parents were afraid of bringing more children into the world (particularly after the decree to slaughter male children by throwing them into the Nile), husbands and wives abstained from having relations. This means that potentially there could have been many more Jewish children, but the parents did not allow this to happen.

What textual proof does the author of the *Hagadah* cite to corroborate this teaching? "As it is written: "And *Elokim* knew." (*She'ne'emar vaYedah Elokim*). What is the meaning of *vaYedah Elokim*? This expression is used because the Almighty knows not only what WILL BE in the future, He also knows what COULD HAVE BEEN. The *Ribono shel Olam* saw that if the men and women had lived together, there would have been so many more children. This is the interpretation of "*v'Es lachatzeinu zu perishas Derech Eretz; she'ne'emar vaYedah Elokim*."

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## How Does One Earn the Title "Tzadik"?

I heard the following beautiful thought in the name of the Ba'alei haTosofos. It is short and sweet.

There are two people in *Tanach* and *Chazal* who are referred to as "*Tzadik*" (righteous). The first is Noach (Bereishis 6:9). The other person, as mentioned in the Talmud (Yoma 35b), is Yosef. Chazal never speak of *Avraham Avinu haTzadik* or *Yaakov Avinu haTzadik*. The term is not used to describe *Moshe Rabbeinu* or *Dovid haMelech*. The Rabbis do, however, speak of *Yosef haTzadik*.

The Ba'alei haTosfos say the commonality between Noach and Yosef is that both sustained the world. Someone who sustains the world earns the title *Tzadik*. The proof of the matter is the *pasuk* "Open Your Hand and satiate all living creatures with favor." (Tehillim 145:16) What is the next *pasuk*? "*Tzadik Hashem* (the L-rd is Righteous) in all His ways and pious in all His Actions."

Someone who opens his hand and provides satiation to all life with favor earns the title *Tzadik*. Therefore, Noach and Yosef are both referred to as *Tzadik* because they each had the unbelievable merit of keeping the entire world alive.

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## Two Thoughts for Chanukah

Chazal say (Avodah Zarah 52b) that the House of the *Chashmonaim* hid away the *Mizbayach* (Altar) because the Greeks (*Yevanim*) defiled it. In other words, the *Yevanim* ransacked the *Bais Hamikdash* and not only did they defile the oil and the Menorah – which are central to the story of the Miracle of Chanukah – but they defiled the *Mizbayach* by using it for idolatrous purposes, as well. The Talmud expounds the *pasuk* "*u'vau vah peritzim ve'chilliluhah*" (Yechezkel 7:22) as referring to the fact that once they defiled the *Mizbayach*, they made it *Chulin* (it lost its sanctity), such that the *Chashmonaim* had to bury it.

If that is the case, then everything in the *Bais Hamikdash* had to be re-consecrated – all the keylim (vessels)! And yet, the Miracle of Chanukah occurred specifically with the Menorah and the oil. Why was there not a miracle involving the *Mizbayach* or the *Shulchon* (Table) or any other *Bais Hamikdash* keylim that had to be rededicated? Why is the *Nes Chanukah* manifested specifically with the Menorah and specifically with the oil?

A second question – asked by Rav Asher Weiss – is the following: Why is it that the miracle and the victory came about through the *Chashmonaim*? As successful and as brave as these warriors were, these individuals were not 100% "clean" regarding a very grave sin. Their sin was that the *Chashmonaim*, who were Kohanim (from the Tribe of Levi), took over the Kingship of *Klal Yisrael*. The *pasuk* "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah" (Bereishis 49:10) teaches that Kingship in the Jewish nation belongs in the Tribe of Judah. In fact, the Ramban, in his Chumash commentary, says that the *Chashmonaim* were punished for this sin and eventually their entire house was wiped out as a punishment for usurping the Jewish monarchy.

Nevertheless, the *Chashmonaim* were the heroes and the victors that saved the Jewish people at

this historical juncture. We need to give credit where credit is due. In general, we say that "Meritorious actions are brought about by meritorious people." However, it is peculiar that people who do not have a 100% clean record, so to speak, were the heroes of this era. Why did the Miracle of Chanukah take place through the hands of the *Chashmonaim*?

Rav Asher Weiss suggests that the reason it was the Menorah that was the locus and the focus of the miracle, and the reason it was the *Chashmonaim* who were the heroes of the story is because Chanukah was all about Torah. The Greeks tried to make the Jews "forget the Torah and make them transgress the Laws that You Will." Not only did the *Yevanim* wage a physical battle against the Jews but even more so, they waged a spiritual war. It was specifically about learning Torah. They knew that the basis of all Jewish philosophy is the Torah. They wanted to impose Greek philosophy on us. Therefore, they felt, the way to do that is to first eradicate Torah learning from the people of Israel.

In kindergarten, we all heard the story of why we play dreidel on Chanukah – because the Jews were learning Torah secretly. When the Greek monitors approached the classroom, the children stopped their Torah learning and played with their dreidels. At any rate, the cultural war that took place was all about stopping Torah learning in Jewish society.

This is why the Miracle came about through the Menorah. We have mentioned many times when learning Parshas Terumah that *Ner Mitzvah v'Torah Or* (a candle represents a mitzvah and Torah represents light). If there is one *keyli* (vessel) in the *Bais Hamikdash* that symbolizes Torah study, it is in fact the Menorah. This is what the Gemara (Bava Barsra 25b) means when it states "One who wishes to be wise (*l'hachakim*); should face south (*yadrim*) (in his prayers)" because the Menorah was in the southern part of the *Bais Hamikdash* structure.

Since this was a battle about Torah, the miracle needed to come about in that *keyli* that was the symbol of Torah learning. Rav Asher Weiss says that this also explains why this victory came at the hands of the *Chashmonaim*. Who are the protectors of Torah in Klal Yisrael? It is the Tribe of Levi. "They teach Your statutes to *Yaakov*, and Your Torah to Israel" (Devorim 33:10). The *Chashmonaim*, who were the *Kohanim*, who were a part of the Tribe of Levi, needed to be the ones who would win the victory for Torah in the nation.

Rav Asher Weiss points out an interesting phenomenon. Rav Tzadok brings a Medrash: Rabbi Akiva stated: From the day Torah was given on Sinai, we had the Torah. However, the glory of Torah and its brilliance, its richness, and its beauty were only evident at the time of the Second *Bais Hamikdash*. Why did it happen then? It is because that is when there was self-sacrifice (*mesiras nefesh*) for Torah. As a result of that, there was a renaissance of Torah. It was in the period of the Second *Bais Hamikdash* that we had the first *Tanaim*. When we speak about the "Age of Enlightenment", when we speak about "The Renaissance", if there is one period in Jewish history about which we can say there was a "Renaissance of Torah" it was in the time of *Bayis Sheri* – after

the Chanukah miracle. They fought for Torah, they were *moser nefesh* for Torah, so the Almighty decreed that there would be an explosion of Torah.

The development of Talmud Bavli which is still the focus of our Torah learning today – which is such an integral part of every Jew's life – occurred in the period of *Bayis Sheni* after the *Nes* of Chanukah. As a result of the *mesiras nefesh* for Torah, *Hashem* rewarded them with this overwhelming gift of being able to more fully understand the depth and beauty of Torah.

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Finally, one more brief thought about Chanukah:

The word Chanukah can be split to mean – *Chanu* (they encamped) – *kaf-hay* (on the 25<sup>th</sup>). They fought the Greeks. They were victorious. On the twenty-fifth of *Kislev*, they were able to rest from their battles and they re-dedicated the *Bais HaMikdash*.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld says that there are 42 journeys that the Jewish people traveled during their desert wanderings. *Parshas Massai* lists these forty-two stations. "From here they went to there; from there they went to here; etc." Which was station number twenty-five in this journey? *Chashmonah!* (Bamidbar 33:29)

*Chanu Kaf-Hay*: They rested on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Where is that? It is the station of *Chashmonah*. A hint from the Torah that the "resting" of the *Chashmonaim* will occur on the twenty-fifth of *Kislev*! A Happy Chanukah to all!

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Miketz is provided below:

- # 035 - Chanukah Issues
- # 077 - Prohibitions During Times of Crises
- # 126 - Dreams in Halacha and Hashkafa
- # 173 - Dreams in Halacha II
- # 219 - Chanukah Issues II
- # 263 - Women and Chanukah Candle Lighting
- # 309 - "Lo Sechanaim" Giving Gifts to Non-Jews
- # 353 - Chanukah and Hidur Mitzvah

- # 397 - Lighting Neiros in Shul; Other Chanukah Issues
- # 441 - Taanis Chalom
- # 485 - Miracle Products and Other Chanukah Issues
- # 529 - Ner Chanukah: Where, When, and Other Issues
- # 573 - The Silver Menorah and Other Chanukah Issues
- # 617 - The Bad Dream
- # 661 - Davening for the Welfare of the Government
- # 705 - Chanukah Candles, Hotels and Chashunas
- # 749 - Solomonic Wisdom
- # 793 - Oops! 3 Candles on the 2nd Night
- # 837 - Hairbrushes on Shabbos - Permitted or Not Permitted
- # 881 - The T'reifa Chicken Scandal
- # 925 - Kavod Malchus - How Far Can You Go?
- # 968 - The Minyan: Must Everyone Be In The Same Room?
- #1012 - Preparing for Shabbos - Thursday or Friday? And other Issues
- #1056 - Oops! I Made A Bracha On The Shammash
- #1099 - Havdalah or Ner Chanukah - Which Comes First? And Other Issues
- #1142 - Must I Give Up My Hiddur Mitzvah For Your Kiyum Mitzvah?
- #1273 - Chanukah Lights Motzei Shabbos: How Early? Havdala Before or After Chanukah Lights?

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