

BEST EFFORT

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The eight days of Hanukkah are a set of Holy Days not written in the Torah at Sinai. There were two times in history that the sages of the generation discerned that miraculous events of their day should be set as days of celebration for subsequent generations so that the miracles that they witnessed would be commemorated by future offspring. One was the miracle of Queen Esther's success in saving her people establishing Purim and the other was the victory of the weak, the few and the righteous over the Greeks who sought to assimilate us into their culture that is now Hanukkah.

What is it about Hanukkah that made the Rabbi's feel the lesson should never be forgotten?

After a difficult guerilla war against a mighty foe the Jews were again in control of the Holy Temple - The Bet Hamikdash. They cleaned out all idols and other items that defiled the holiness of the sacred place. They did not, however, have any spiritually pure oil with which to light the Menorah - a daily ritual of our Kohanim. The light represented our Torah and the G-d given wisdom by which our people live and prosper. The people were eager to restore this ritual to its proper - pure - status. Miraculously a pitcher of sealed oil was found that could light for one day. The debate was as to how the Kohanim should treat this new found treasure. Should they wait until new oil could be produced - that would take eight days? Should they divide up the oil and light a little each night not to lose continuity even though the lights would not burn the required time on any of the nights? The decision, however, was to light all of the oil that they found on the first night. We, they reasoned, must do our best with what we have, and tomorrow we will see what transpires. No matter what the circumstances WE MUST DO OUR BEST. The rest is the well known result of their decision. The oil that should have been consumed by the flames in one night lasted eight nights until new oil arrived.

There are two ways that miracles begin. The Zohar explains that a miracle usually starts with -it-a-roota- dilelah- awakening from above. Hashem sees a need for a miracle and he initiates the process. The other way is called it-a-roota diltata - awakening down below. The people do something special that arouses - so to speak - Our Creator and prompts action above on our behalf.

The reason the Greeks were able to dominate us was our weakness and lack of self-sacrifice in our service to Hashem. To awaken us Hashem sent an enemy that did not destroy our Temple and did not want to annihilate our people. He sent a nation that defiled all that we held holy and wanted our people to assimilate to their ways. When we entered into battle - at risk of our lives - with little hope

of success - but with a desire to sanctify the name of G-d - He responded with a military victory that was nothing short of miraculous. But a war can be analyzed and a miracle explained away. So Hashem provided with another opportunity to see the Divine message. Not enough oil- what will you do? We will do ALL that we can to do the mitzvah as best we can with what we have was our response. That dedication to perfect enthusiastic service to Hashem awakened the Heavens on our behalf and the oil lasted miraculously for 8 days.

The message of the Menorah clarified beyond a doubt that the war was also miraculous - not to be explained away by cynical analysts.

That would be a lot but more so we initiated the miracle below by our desire to do the best we could that first night. It is message to all generations. Dedicate yourselves to Torah and mitzvot. Do all that you can as best you can. Self-sacrifice is the buzz word that prompts divine assistance. If we get the lesson clear and act accordingly we could see new miracles that outshine the miracle of the war and the lights speedily and in our days - Amen

Happy Hanukkah

Shabbat Shalom

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