

מעשה אבות... סימן לבנים

הנרות הללו אנו מוליכין על הניסים ועל הנפלאות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו ... (על הניסים)

The year was 1777. The month was December. The American Continental Army under General George Washington was awaiting the battle at Valley Forge. The future president was deeply concerned about the welfare of his troops. The bitter cold and the poor provisions with which his revolutionary army soldiers had been provided did not bode well for the outcome of the critical battle that awaited them. Wrapped in his officer’s cape and wearing his three-cornered hat, Washington went outside to see firsthand how his men were faring. As he went from tent to tent, he saw men dressed in rags, huddling around small fires, trying to keep warm with a hot meal of any sort. He continued to walk about when suddenly he encountered a single soldier bent over a small metal apparatus in which he had lit a few small tallow candles.

Intrigued, General Washington walked over to the young private for a better look. Startled, the man jumped to his feet and saluted. The general said, “Explain to me why you are lighting those little candles here, in the middle of nowhere.”

The soldier was, of course, Jewish. He began to relate the age-old tale of foreign Greeks who, upon conquering the Land of Israel, had entered the Jews’ holy Temple and placed their idols in the most sacred place of worship. He told how the valiant Maccabees, no longer able to bear the evil decrees forbidding the performance of Jewish ritual and the study of *Torah*, rose up against the evil Greeks even though they were greatly outnumbered and poorly armed. “Just like here, only more so,” the private interspersed. “Nevertheless, through the grace of Heaven, they succeeded in removing the Greeks from their land.”

The soldier then explained how the Maccabees purified the sanctuary and finding only one undefiled container of oil, used it to light the *Menorah*. Miraculously that one small container of oil, which should have been enough for one day, instead lasted for eight full days - until new oil could be made. In commemoration, he was lighting those little lights.

General Washington stood enthralled. He looked at the little flames, and at the face of the Jew. Then, he laid a firm hand on the man’s shoulder. “You are a Jew,” he exclaimed, “from a nation of prophets! I treat what you just said as a prophetic message from the Almighty Himself! With your little lights and your inspiring story, you have struck new courage in my troubled heart.” The General shook the young soldier’s hand, saluted, then turned to continue on his rounds.

What happened after that is history: It took a number of weeks but General Washington’s forces outlasted the British and thus scored a decisive victory at Valley Forge, the beginning of an overall pattern of success in battle. Eventually it led to independence from Great Britain for the fledgling colonies who were soon to become the United States of America.

One evening, some two years after that fateful December night, the young Jewish soldier, who had since returned from the war to his home on Broome Street in New York City, was sitting with his family around the dinner table. It was *Chanukah* and the family had just lit their *Menorah* in the window for all to see.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. The soldier opened the door and was shocked: General, President, George Washington, was standing in the doorway, in all his glory. “Behold the wonderful candles. The candles of hope of the Jewish people,” he proclaimed joyously as he gazed admiringly at the *Chanukah* candles in the window.

The General walked into the brightly lit home and surveyed his surroundings approvingly. Then, he placed his hand upon the soldier’s shoulder and said, “The candlelight and your beautiful words lit a flame in my heart that night. Surely, you and your comrades will receive due recognition for all of your valor at Valley Forge. But this night, accept from me, this medallion.” He proceeded to hang a medallion of gold upon the soldier’s chest and shook his hand. Tears came to the younger man’s eyes; he couldn’t say a word. The General saw his emotion, shook his hand once again and left the house.

The soldier stirred as if coming to from a memorable dream. He then looked down at the medallion and saw a beautiful engraving of a *Chanukah Menorah* with the first candle lit. Below was written, “As an expression of gratitude for the candle of your *Menorah*.” This medallion is part of the permanent collection in the Jewish Museum in New York.

משל למת הדבר דומה

מאי הנוכח? דתנו רבנן (שבת כא:)

משל: As Chief Rabbi of the city of Tzefas and a proficient *Mohel*, **R’ Shmuel Heller ZT”L** was constantly in demand to perform circumcisions on the baby boys born in his city. However, he always begged off attending the festive meal afterwards claiming that he had many important needs to attend to. In truth, R’ Shmuel just wanted to get back to his learning, for every second of *Torah* study was precious to him.

He was once a *mohel* at a *bris* during *Chanukah*, and as soon as the ceremony was over, he packed up his stuff and began to leave. Someone asked him why he didn’t say. After

all, it was a *Yom Tov* and there is a *mitzvah* to eat a *seudah* on *Chanukah*, as well as by a *Bris Milah*.

R’ Shmuel smiled and replied that he really was following the dictum of our Sages on *Chanukah*. “The *gemara* (שבת כא:) asks the famous question: 'מאי הנוכח?' - what is *Chanukah*? What is the purpose and meaning behind this festive holiday.”

As he turned to leave, R’ Shmuel concluded, “And what is the answer given by *Chazal*? - דתנו רבנן' - for the Rabbis learned - in other words, the purpose of *Chanukah* is to learn *Torah*!”

צמשל: Indeed, our sages tell us as much, that the focus of the

הנה שמעתי כי יש שבר במצרים רדו שמה ... וירדו אחי יוסף עשרה לשבר בר ממצרים (מכ-ג.ג.)

When the *shevatim* went down to Egypt, the *Torah* refers to them as “Yosef’s brothers” rather than “Yaakov’s sons.” Rashi explains that they regretted selling Yosef; their brotherly feelings had finally reawakened, and the *Torah* emphasizes this by calling them Yosef’s brothers. What happened all of a sudden to make them regret their actions? Why had they not had regret until now? Furthermore, when the brothers sold Yosef originally, they formed a *beis din* and found him guilty of being a *rodef* (pursuer) to which they were legally permitted to kill him. They mitigated his punishment and sold him as a slave rather than put him to death. So how could they revoke their judgment now?

R’ Dovid Kviat ZT”L (Succas Dovid) answers that when Yaakov told his sons to go down to Egypt for food, they heard him say something unusual. He said, “*Behold, I have heard that there is food (שבר) in Egypt.*” Rashi explains that what he was really saying (and this is how the brothers understood it) was that there was “hope” in Egypt (the word “שבר” can also mean hope). Rashi explains that Yaakov did not have a clear-cut prophecy or he would have known that Yosef was there. Rather, he had what might be described as Divine intuition and thus he felt that there was hope in Egypt. When the brothers heard this, they realized something their father did not: this “hope” was none other than the expectation that Yosef might be alive in Egypt. Once they saw that *Hashem* had hinted to their father that he had hope in Egypt, they realized the time was right for them to go and redeem Yosef. Since the brothers felt they had sinned by selling him, they were glad to atone for this sin by redeeming him even for very great sums of money.

Hence the *Torah* says, “*And Yosef’s brothers went down.*” At that moment, they were only Yosef’s brothers. Their brotherly feelings were reawakened and they wanted to work on feeling fraternal love towards him again.

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON THE WEEKLY MIDDAH OF ... שמן

Isn’t it interesting that the word “שמן” (oil), has the same root as the word “שמונה” - the number 8! In truth, the root of both words is “שמן” - which means fat! The obvious connection between the three is that if one eats a lot of שמן, i.e. *latkes*, *sufganiyot*, etc. for the שמונה (8) days of *Chanukah*, he will definitely gain weight and become “שמן” - FAT! But, of course, there is a deeper meaning behind this connection! There is a reason why the little flask of oil burned specifically for eight days.

We know that the number 8 symbolizes “למעלה מן הטבע” - above nature. The number eight takes us beyond the physical world to something higher and completely spiritual. For this reason, a baby boy has a *bris* on the 8th day, because he is transforming from a physical being into a Jew who is filled with *ruchniyus*. The Greeks tried desperately to destroy us. Not our physical bodies; our soul was what they wanted. They did not want to kill us. They wanted us to live - but to live as gentiles.

When the Jews found one pure flask of olive oil with which to light the *menorah*, they were ecstatic. It meant there was still hope for purity and holiness. But when they lit the *menorah* and it lasted for 8 days, they understood that even one tiny spark of pure *kedusha* can rebuild *Yiddishkeit* and shine away all the dark, materialistic and meaningless influences of the Greeks. The message of the oil that burned for eight days is that every *Yiddishe neshama*, no matter how tiny or far flung it may be, has the power to rise “למעלה מן הטבע” - above and beyond the physical materialistic world. And if you don’t believe me, just do as they did in the times of *Chanukah*: Ignite the flame inside your Jewish soul and watch it shine far beyond your wildest imagination!

TORAH GEMS

נם גרדול דויה שם (אותיות על צדי הדריידעל)

On *Chanukah*, every child is taught to “spin the *dreidle*,” the timeless Jewish pastime that is wholly associated with this most wonderful holiday. It appears to be a seemingly innocent child’s game, however, we find throughout history that even our greatest *Torah* leaders in all generations would involve themselves with the *dreidle* game. There have been variations, but the basic rules are the same: the *dreidle* has four Hebrew letters on its four sides - נ' ג' ה' ש' - (ח"ל in נ"ג ה' ש' - A person spins the *dreidle* and if it lands on "ש" (שקטל) he puts some coins in the pot. If it lands on "ה" (האלב) he gets half of the take. But if it lands on "ג" (גאץ) he wins the game and takes the whole prize.

The game of *dreidle* is also an allusion to the “game” of life. There are four types of sojourns that a person may experience on this earth. There are those who know only of the negative, the sorrow and the pain; whatever they touch turns to dust, and they are unsuccessful at every turn ("נ"). Then, there are those who have lost a lot in their lives, but they haven’t given up; they continue to look ahead, to make sacrifices until they see the light at the end of the tunnel ("ש"). The next type is the one who is moderately successful; he has just enough to sustain him and his family ("ה"), although he has never quite reached the highest level - that of the person who has "כל טוב" - all the blessings of Heaven, both in material wealth and in spiritual riches. He has reached the pinnacle of what a person can achieve in this world ("ג").

The four letters are also an allusion found in the *posuk*: "לחורות לפני גשנה" (בראשית מו-כח) - which refers to when Yehudah was sent down to the Land of Goshen by *Yaakov Avinu*, to set up houses of prayer and *Torah* study, for the soon-to-be-arriving *Bnei Yisroel*. When a person merits the "ג" (from the *dreidle*) and achieves Heavenly blessings, he must use them to lead the other aspects of his life, both good and bad, by making *Torah* and *Tefillah* his first priority in life.

FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

שמן זית וך כתיב למאור להעלות נר תמיד (שמות כז-ב)