

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

In one of the last transports to arrive in Bergen-Belsen towards the end of World War II, was a Jew by the name of **R’ Shmelke Schnitzler Z”L**. He was a *chasid* and *Torah* scholar, with warm and penetrating eyes. Most amazingly, he maintained a mood of genuine cheerfulness, a rare disposition to find in the inhuman environment of the camp. He worked hard to encourage his fellow inmates at every turn and make their lives a bit brighter. At the end of 1944, though, as winter approached, R’ Shmelke was nagged by a compelling problem, one that was increasing in urgency with each day: how could he possibly obtain oil with which to kindle the lights of *Chanukah*? The holiday was only a few short days away.

He consulted everyone with whom he came into contact, but no one had any oil or even anything that could be substituted for oil. Still, R’ Shmelke did not give in to despair. The *mitzvah* of kindling *Chanukah* lights was much too important to him and besides it would allow him to provide a surge of much-needed encouragement to the desperate Jews in the camp.

On the day before *Chanukah*, R’ Shmelke had to hurry to one of the barracks near the far end of the camp, where someone had died just that day. He was assigned the job of removing the dead bodies of the many who died from starvation. Not far from the fence at the edge of the camp, he stumbled when his foot sunk into a patch of red earth that turned out to be covering a small hole. It was clear that someone had dug this hole on purpose.

He gazed at the shallow depression and saw there was a solid object buried there, now slightly revealed. He knelt down and scooped out some dirt with his hands. It was a small jar, half-filled with congealed liquid! He removed its cover and dipped his finger in gingerly. It was oil! His thoughts immediately flashed to the original *Chanukah* miracle of finding a single flask of oil. How could this be happening? Was he dreaming? Then he noticed that the jar had been concealing other objects beneath it. He dug some more with his hands and uncovered a small package wrapped in a swatch of cloth. In it were eight small cups and eight thin strands of cotton! This was almost too impossible to believe!

Someone had intentionally buried this *Chanukah* stash, thought R’ Shmelke, as he quickly replaced everything back into the hole, filling it with dirt and carefully smoothing the surface. It would be too dangerous to keep the materials in his possession until *Chanukah* began the next evening. Besides, perhaps someone would come back for it.

R’ Shmelke circulated among as many of the inmates as he could during the next day and a half, casually asking if anyone had concealed a quantity of oil in a hiding place. Everyone stared at him as if he were out of his senses.

The next night, R’ Shmelke stealthily recovered the buried items and set up his *menorah*. All the Jews in his barrack crowded around as he lit the first candle. He struck the match, and recited the blessings with great emotion before touching the tiny flame to the thin strands of wick projecting out of the little cups. It was a scene from a storybook in stark contrast to the harsh environment of the concentration camp, a ray of hope that repeated itself for a total of eight nights.

The elderly R’ Shmelke managed to survive the next few months until the conquering Allied forces liberated the camp. His faith and hope had proven victorious. In time, he was able to make the journey to the United States of America, where he once found himself visiting the holy **Satmar Rebbe, R’ Yoel Teitelbaum ZT”L**, who lived then in Brooklyn.

The *Rebbe* welcomed him with great warmth and after conversing for a short while, the *Rebbe* suddenly said, “I hear that you had the honor of lighting *Chanukah* candles in Bergen-Belsen.” R’ Shmelke was surprised! How had the *Rebbe* known?

R’ Yoel bent over and whispered in his astonished visitor’s ear, “I am the one who hid the oil, the cups and the wicks in that hole next to the fence when I was imprisoned in Bergen Belsen the year before you, before my miraculous escape!”

The *Rebbe* smiled. “I knew that *Hashem* would allow the right person to find it at the right time to do the right thing!”

משל' למה הדבר דומה

וישן ויקץ פרעה וגו' (מא-ה,)

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משל: At a convention of neurologists, one of the topics was the phenomenon of people fainting upon getting up from bed. One speaker gave a lengthy speech on this issue.

After years of study and investigation, she came to the conclusion that the fainting is caused by the sharp transfer between laying down and standing up. Since it takes 12 seconds for blood to flow from the feet to the brain, when a person quickly stands upon waking up, blood flows to the brain too quickly and the result is fainting. She suggested that each person, upon waking up should sit on the bed, and

count to 12 to avoid dizziness and fainting.

Then, another professor, an Orthodox Jew, got up to speak. He said: “We have an old Jewish tradition, thousands of years old, to say a prayer of thanks to the Almighty every morning when we wake up. The prayer is said upon waking, while one is still on the bed, sitting down. There are 12 words in this prayer and if one says it slowly with concentration, it takes exactly 12 seconds to say these 12 words.”

He said the prayer slowly in Hebrew: מודה אני לפניך מלך “מודה אני לפניך מלך - חיוקים שהחזרת בי נשמותי בחמלה רבה אמונתך” “*I thank You, O*

חלום חלמתי ופתר אין אתו ואני שמעתי עליך לאמר תשמע חלום לפתור אותו וגו' (מא-טו)

Hashem gave Yosef the great ability to interpret dreams. Interestingly enough, his dreams and his ability to interpret them is both the breaking point in Yosef’s relationship with his brothers as well as the skill that propelled him from Pharaoh’s dungeon to the throne. Thus, dreams became both a blessing and a curse to Yosef. Similarly, the way Yosef dealt with reuniting with his brothers also shows that there are two sides to his story. He was upset for what they did to him, and yet the *Torah* mentions on more than one occasion that Yosef had to leave the room to weep during his encounters with them.

R’ Yoel Pinchasi Shlit’a sees from here a tremendous “life-lesson.” *Yosef Hatzaddik* was given a talent - but not simply as a way to amuse himself, but rather as a way to find himself. His destiny was caught up in the meandering vagaries of dreams, and wherever those night visions took him, that was where he ended up. In whatever situation he found himself due to those dreams, that was what he was meant to deal with. Thus, Yosef’s gift of interpreting dreams made him rich and powerful, but it was in fact his dreams that alienated him from his family.

Often we find ourselves saddled with our “*peckel*” - our own unique and custom-tailored circumstance that tends to alternate between honorable success and/or disastrous collapse. How we deal with each individual situation is what we are put here on this world to accomplish. If we simply break down under pressure when things don’t go as we think they should, we are not only admitting defeat and failure, but we are actively opposing the very tool that *Hashem* has given us to turn ourselves around. Just like Yosef, *Hashem* has given us all “dreams” - our own personal make-it or break-it tool. Success is ours for the taking!

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS
ON THE WEEKLY MIDDAH OF ...

חסד תפוקת

It is interesting that the root of the word “שמן” - “*oil*” is the same as the word “שמונה” - “*eight*.” Is it a coincidence, then, that we celebrate eight days of *Chanukah* due to the little oil that lasted eight days? Of course not! The number 8 has a much greater significance. It is considered “למעלה מן הטבע” - higher than the normal physical world, supernatural if you will. Seven symbolizes nature - the world was created in 7 days; Eight is greater, more spiritual, elevated above nature.

A baby boy receives his *Bris* on the eighth day because he becomes more than a typical physical human, he becomes a holy and lofty Jew! The שמן כף was much more than a simple container of oil. It was a container of hope, a tiny spark of *Kedusha*, meant to reignite the pure spirituality of *Klal Yisroel*, in order to overcome the dark, impure and defiled world that the Greeks imposed. When the Jews found one little container of pure oil, they saw that there was still hope for *Ruchnius*, for *Kedusha*. But when the oil lasted for eight full days, they heard the message loud and clear: Even with one tiny spark of *Kedusha*, *Yiddishkeit* will thrive! All one needs is a spark to rebuild and replace all that was lost!

In “*Al Hanissim*” we say: “רבים ביד מעטים” - “*The many (given into) the hands of the few*.” The “*many*” refers to the mentality of Greece. More and more materialism, non-stop pleasure, a life full of endless amusement and immorality. On *Chanukah*, this was conquered by the “*few*”; the *Torah* mentality of being “מסתפק במועט” - “*Satisfied with less*.” We, too, must focus less on our *Gashmius*, and more on our *Neshamos*, our *Ruchnius* - on becoming “*heiligen*” spiritual Jews!

TORAH GEMS

בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של הכהן גדול וכו' (שבת כא:)

The main source of our historical account of the miracle of *Chanukah* comes from the *gemara* (שבת כא:): “*When the kingdom of the House of the Chashmonaim overpowered and defeated the Greeks, they searched and found one flask of oil that was set aside and sealed with the (private) seal of the Kohen Gadol*.” Many *Meforshim* comment on the enigma of the “seal of the Kohen Gadol” since nowhere do we find that the *Kohen Gadol* maintained a private seal.

The **Bobover Rov, R’ Ben Zion Halberstam Shlit’a**, quotes from the **Sefer Bas Ayin** who surmises that the seal of the *Kohen Gadol* was actually a reference to his unique station as the one who wears many articles of clothing (מרובה בגדים) - eight in all. Thus, his seal was the letter “ח” which equals the number eight. For this reason, as well, *Chazal* established the *Yom Tov of Chanukah* for eight days, to commemorate the letter “ח” on the flask of oil.

But even more than that, the letter “ח” accurately portrayed the role of the *Kohen Gadol*. His purpose was to unify the people in the service of the Almighty. The letter “ח” when written by a scribe in the *Sefer Torah*, is a combination of the letter “ו” and the letter “א”. A tiny bridge connects the two letters (חי) which amount to thirteen, the same as the *gematria* of the word “אחד” - the symbol of unity.

When the Greek Hellenists entered the *Bais Hamikdosh*, they performed 13 desecrations (פרצות) which tore apart the nation. Matisyahu, the *Kohen Gadol*, and his sons, fought and defeated the evil invaders and by doing so, they unified the people under one banner. *Hashem* chose to reveal one hidden flask of oil with the symbolic seal of the *Kohen Gadol* - the unifying letter “ח” which totals 13 - to demonstrate that the miracle of *Chanukah* was much more than a war victory - it forged the *Achdus* of *Klal Yisroel*!

דרגה יתירה

מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים וטמאים ביד טהורים וכו' (עלהגניסים)

FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF
R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHILOMO