

AN ADULT APPROACH TO HANUKKAH

By Rabbi Robert S. Scriebman

(Hanukah 5769)

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PART THREE

THE HANUKKAH YOU NEVER KNEW

And the word of God came to me to say: You, son of Man, take a piece of wood and write on it... "Yehuda" and another piece of wood and write on it... "Yosef." Bring them together and they will be one in your hand... Say to them: So says God-Behold, I will take Bnai Yisrael from amongst the nations, and I will gather them together... and make them one nation with one king.

Yechezkel 37:15-22

Introduction: The story of Hanukkah is more than a story of bravery in combat, incredible military victories, and the miracle of one jar of oil. The real story is about division of faith, where that division originated and how that division will be repaired. This is alluded to in the above quote from Yechezkel. Attached to this paper are two charts. They show the history of the miracle of Hanukkah from the First Temple through the reign of King Herod. They are wonderful capsules of history and should be studied. However, the focus of this paper will be about the intense Hellenization of the areas surrounding Jerusalem and the rise of the group of people known as "Misyavnim". Yavan is the Hebrew reference to Greece. The term Misyavnim refers to that group of Jews who practiced Hellenism. The story of Hanukkah that we will be focusing on in this

section of the paper attempts to explain how the Misyavnim came about by looking back at our Fathers and Mothers, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah, Leah and Rachel. The story of Hanukkah is also about the conflict between the acceptance of the Written Torah and the rejection of the Oral Torah. The Misyavnim rejected the Oral Torah. Our sages tell us that the emphasis of Hanukkah was the acceptance by the Jewish people of both the written and Oral Torahs.

Greek as a Holy Tongue: Earlier in this paper reference was made to the translation of the Torah into Greek by 72 rabbis in Alexandria. This translation is known as the "Septuagint". At that time, the only language of the Torah was Hebrew. Our sages inform us that the Greek language is considered a holy tongue for Jews. Indeed, the Torah may be written in Greek as well as Hebrew. (Megilah 8b; Sotah 49b)

An Existential Dualism Built into the System: After the conquest of the Holy Land by Alexander the Great, Greek culture was introduced into Jewish society. It caught on in a flash! With this sea change came about one of the major divisions within the Jewish people. For the first time in our history, there arose Jews who denied the validity of 1,000 years of teachings, tradition and understanding, the Oral Law. We call this period in Jewish history, Golus Yavan. Golus means exile. In Jewish history there have been four major exiles: Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman. We are still in the Roman exile.

The Golus Yavan represents a schism between the Jews who accepted both the oral and Written Torahs and the Jews who rejected the oral law within Greek society; the Misyavnim. However, there is a bigger and more fundamental Golus that we must deal with in order to understand what Hanukkah is all about. We must go back to the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ever since God created our known world, there have been divisions. In the process of creation, God separated the waters and separated the land from the waters. Thus, God set into motion a process of separation, an existential dualism, so to speak. The Festival of Hanukkah and the historical events that preceded the revolt by the Maccabees, the reestablishment of the Temple and the rekindling of the menorah were, according to our sages, historically ordained by God. They were part of the process of creation like the great fish that swallowed up Jonah. It was no accident that there arose in Greece Jews who honestly believed that the Oral Law was "unofficial" and had no relevancy. The schism process is embodied in the old joke, "2 Jews, 3 opinions". The celebration of Hanukkah begins a restoration and elimination of the damages done by the schism. It is as though God built the schism into the system and left it for mankind to repair. We call this repair process Ge'ulah. The arrival of the Messiah is the final event in the process of repair. (B'reishis Rabbah 85:1)

In the beginning, the schism was represented by Cain killing Abel. The Torah then tells us of the dualism between Jacob and his brother Esau. This dualism makes it impossible for us to lead lives of harmony (Weinberg, 110).

Joseph and His Brothers: The genesis of the Golus Yavan originated with Joseph and his brothers. It is no accident that the Torah portion every Hanukkah shows us the tension and issues between Joseph and his brothers. Golus Yavan is the direct manifestation of the very root of the schism that is part of the nature of the Jewish people. Golus Yavan was required to rectify the sale of Joseph into slavery. (Megaleh Amukos Vayeshev) In order to understand the insights into Hanukkah, we have to begin with Joseph.

Most of us are aware of the story of Jacob wanting to marry Rachel but instead was tricked into marrying Leah, the older sister. Both Rachel and Leah were rivals for Jacob's love and affection. We know that Leah, in this battle, came out second best. Since God renamed Jacob Yisrael, the schism between the two sisters moved forward in time to impact Klal Yisrael.

The dispute appearing overtly between Joseph and his brothers was covertly expressed earlier in a breakdown between Jacob and the children of Leah. In Shechem, Shimon and Levi trampled their father's wishes and avenged the rape of their sister Dinah. (Rashi B'reishis 34:25) As a matter of fact, our sages tell us that Jacob cursed Shimon and Levi in Greek (Pirkei d' Rebbi Eliezer 38). Shechem, the city, holds great historical significance in our discussion. In Shechem, the brothers sold Joseph and in Shechem, the kingdom was divided between Judah and Joseph. (Sanhedrin 102a) It is not by accident that things are happening!

The tensions between Rachel and Leah for the affection of Jacob resulted in the breakdown between Joseph and his brothers. Both sides were righteous. Joseph had his point of view as how things should be done and his brothers had an equally righteous point of view on how things should be done; hence another duality or schism. Both points of view could not coexist. Since the brothers outnumbered Joseph, Joseph lost the first battle. The schism began to widen. The larger picture of the schism is related to a concept known as Malchus. Malchus represents the Kingdom of God.

In time, this fundamental schism manifested itself between the observance of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This was the central issue in the Holy Land under Greek domination. The Hellenized Jews (Misyanvim) did not accept the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah is known as Torah she'b'al peh and the Written Torah is known as Torah she'b'chsav". It is this fundamental schism that brought about Golus Yavan.

Hanukkah begins the lengthy process of rebuilding the whole, mending the schism, which led to Golus Yavan and the inevitable loss of Malchus. The end result of all of which will be the arrival of the "Malchus Mashiach". The beginning of this reconciliation was the reuniting of Joseph and his brothers. The introductory quote from the Prophet Yechezkel tells us that Judah and Joseph must be joined into one. Joseph represents the Tzaddik and Judah represents the Melech. (Breishis 44:18)

Joseph is referred to repeatedly as the Tzaddik. His importance to Egypt was enormous. Our sages tell us that Joseph saved Egypt from going under as a world power. Joseph saved the people of Egypt and his own family from starvation. Joseph's role was larger than life. The concept of a Tzaddik to Judaism is expressed in the Talmud:

*For a single tzaddik the world was created...
For a single tzaddik the world is maintained.*

Yoma 38b

Without Joseph, Egypt was directionless, its citizens unable to jointly plan a future, to put into effect policies that were painful for individuals but necessary for the survival of the nation. The actions of Joseph made possible the establishment of the Jewish people as a nation – no Joseph, no exodus, no Sinai. Joseph's death was the end of productivity in Egypt and the beginning of all Jewish exiles. Joseph gave his brothers the basis upon which to join with their father Jacob into a nation. The Talmud tells us, "When Yosef the Tzaddick died, the springs and headwaters dried up, and all the shevatim fell into golus." (Zohar Shmos 156a)

After we recite the Sh'ma out loud, we recite quietly "*Boruch shaym k'vod malchuso l'olom vo-ed*". (*Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom of all eternity*). These words express a prayer for the reuniting of Joseph and Judah as well as the other brothers.

We Jews get together. It's a joyous time and we like to sing. When we sing what appears to be the simple tune of "Hinei Ma Tov", are we actually singing of the reuniting of Joseph and his brothers?

The Importance of Goshen: It was Joseph who finally reunited the brothers and Jacob. The reunion took place in Goshen, the land given by an earlier Pharaoh to our Mother Sarah. Jacob spent the last 17 years of his life in Goshen in the tranquility he had so long desired. There is an importance to the reconciliation in Goshen in the custom of playing with the dreidel on Hanukkah. The traditional dreidel is made of wood. The wood is to remind us of the two

pieces of wood joined in the above quotation of the Prophet. The letters written on the four sides of the dreidel make reference to Goshen.

Hanukkah, the Jewish Thanksgiving Day: In Hebrew, the name Yehuda (Judah) means thanks and praise. In Hebrew, we call this hodayah. The origin of hodayah is Judah's mother Leah. Leah's thankfulness at the birth of Judah introduced hodayah into the world. There are two elements to the avodah of Hanukkah – hodayah and hallel. One stresses the inner perception, the other the intensity of the expression of the feelings aroused by hodayah. According to the S'fas Emes, the two elements, hodayah and hallel, parallel Judah and Joseph.

The Torah makes specific reference to Leah being the mother of hodayah.

...and she said, "This time I will thank [and praise] God." So she called his name 'Yehuda."

B'reishis 29:35

The Importance of Numbers **(Nothing Happens By Accident)**

25th Day of Kislev: The Mishkan was completed on the 25th day of Kislev and came full circle to its rededication on that same day when Judah Maccabee rededicated the Temple on the 25th day of Kislev, eleven hundred years later. The dove brought the olive branch back to Noah on the 25th day of Kislev. There are 25 letters of unity in the Sh'ma. Our sages tell us that the word Hanukkah is composed of two words: *chayn* and the letters *khof hey*, which equal 25. (Tikunei Zohar 13)

Perhaps another religion picked the 25th day of December to be the birth date of its savior. Who knows?

The Number 36: If you don't count the shamus candle, there are 36 candles burned for the 8 days of Hanukkah. The number 36 is connected to the concept of light in the Torah. Thirty-six times "light" is mentioned in the Torah – the very number of hours the primordial Light served the world.

"Thirty-six hours the Light served...and Adam haRishon saw with it from one end of the world to the other."

Yerushalmi Berachos 8:5

According to B'nai Yisas'char, the thirty-six candles of Hanukkah are for the thirty-six mesechtos completed with Talmud Bavli.

Rachel, the mother of Joseph, died early – at the age of 36.

Rabbi Berel Wein teaches that our world is allowed to exist because of the collective merits of 36 righteous people (tzaddikim). This is also taught in the Talmud at Succah 45b. Rabbi Wein goes on to admonish us by stating that if anyone listening to his lectures or reading this paper thinks that he or she is one of these individuals, he or she is mistaken!

The Importance of 8 Days: Did you know that you can get light out of an olive? When properly processed, the oil contained in an olive lit the holy menorah. Some say that the reason why the one jar of oil burned for 8 days was because it took 8 days, pursuant to the instructions in the Torah, to create kosher oil. However, the Zohar has a different point of view. Eight has an entirely different significance. It relates to milah. Milah is the symbol of the Tzaddik and his light, and of the centrality of man in the universe. It is the covenant which places the works of man firmly at the center of all things, which provides the purpose for creation. No wonder the Greeks attempted to vigorously to suppress milah, for milah is symbolic of all that Hanukkah fought to restore:

"Hod is the eighth attribute, the eight days of milah followed by the bris which is the Tzaddik, Foundation of the world...it is the Hod of the eight days of Hanukkah."

Tikunei Zohar 13

Some of our sages believe that the jar of oil found by Judah Maccabee was none other than the everlasting oil sealed and hidden during the time of the First Temple. That oil was never diminished though it was used for sacrifices and consecrations.

The Significance of the Rededicated Holy Menorah

Hanukkah perpetuates the light of the menorah of the Mishkan. As bright as this light was is as dark as the man-centered universe of Yavan (Greece). The light comes to tell us that every Jew can dream of being a tzaddik. The Talmud tells us that each individual must say, "The world was created for me". (Sanhedrin 37a) The menorah is the symbol of the relationship of God and man which is the entire meaning of Shechina.

The menorah is the symbol of what is known as *chayn* (child-like fascination; awesomeness). It is the glow and presence of the Shechina we read about in the Haftorah on Hanukkah. The light of the menorah is proof that the Bais HaMikdash lives, that the Shechina is present, that God is aware of us –

"testimony to all the world that the Shechina dwells in Yisrael." (Rabbi Matis Weinberg)

The glow of the candles of the menorah represents the light of the Shechina that shines from the menorah; the Shechina that returned on that very first Hanukkah and that returns to the Jewish people each year *"in this time."*

In the words of Yalkut Shimoni Yeshyahu 499:

"Oil is put into a lamp and they give light together. So too does the Holy One say to Yisrael, "Because My Light is your light, and your light is My light, I and you will together light the Light of Tziyon, as it says:

"Arise, shine! Your Light has come." (Yeshayahu 60:1)

Conclusion

Hanukkah is that special moment in time of the menorah (mo'ed in time). It is the time for *chayn* (the child-like fascination). Hanukkah gives us the tool for renewing our dedication to our Judaism and its values.

The survival of Israel depends on reaffirming again the light of Hanukkah, remembering the meaning of dedication and tasting the life it permeates. The survival of Israel requires that we be willing to look inside with a light that penetrates within, that magic spark within each Jew. In the tiny precious lights of the menorah, Israel finds that real significance lies in simple things of great personal nobility and undying individual glory: "not in power and not in strength, but in my spirit." (Zechariah 4:4) To God and the Jewish people, these lights are more precious than all else in creation. They are the lights of our souls, the memory of all our dreams, the dedication to all we hold precious, and the key to our innermost selves. (Rabbi Matis Weinberg 321)

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