

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT MIKKEITZ

DVAR TORAH: CHANUKAH – THE DOOR DECREE

Among the Greeks' anti-Jewish decrees was a strange one: "Any Israelite who makes a bolt or closing to his door will be stabbed by the sword" (Midrash Maaseh Chanukah, Otzar Hamidrashim pp. 189-190).

What were the Greeks trying to accomplish through this?

They made the decree, says the Midrash, "in order that Israel should have neither כבוד – dignity – nor צניעות – privacy. For any house that has no door has no dignity or privacy, and anyone who wants to enter can, whether by day or by night."

Perhaps we find echoes of this Greek decree in the halachot of Chanukah candles. The location of the candles, says the Gemara, should be על פתח ביתו מבחוץ, directly outside the door. This, some suggest, celebrates the annulment of the door decree. Also, the formulation of the basic mitzvah of Chanukah candles is נר איש וביתו – the baseline level of candle lighting requires one candle per family (Shabbat 21b). Chazal chose the family as the unit of obligation for this mitzvah because Chanukah, in part, celebrates the return to normal Jewish family life, temporarily disrupted by the Greek door decree.

There was a cluster of Greek decrees that targeted the sanctity of Jewish family life – they outlawed mikveh and brit milah, and Greek governors violated Jewish brides on their wedding nights. But the door decree added a new dimension: it aimed to remove the "dignity and privacy" that characterized the Jewish home. Those decrees backfired on the Greeks, though. Instead of buckling under and dropping their dignity and sanctity, the Jews held on to them.

The Greek attack on Jewish dignity and privacy, כבוד and צניעות, really attacked our core קדושת ישראל, the sanctity of the People of Israel.

Kavod goes along with kedushah. The centerpiece of our daily Kedushah prayer is:

"קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבקות מלא כל הארץ כבודו" – "Holy, Holy, Holy is Hashem of hosts; the entire world is full of His כבוד, His honor (or dignity, glory)" (Yishayahu 6:3). We relate with honor to people, times, and things that have kedushah: the Kohen Gadol, the Shabbat, and the Beit Hamikdash. Special honor is given to the Kohen Gadol, we are commanded in kavod Shabbat, and the kavod of the Beit Hamikdash requires that Leviim and Kohanim guard it. Modesty also goes along with kedushah. Our holiest place is the Kodesh Kodashim, the most private place in the Jewish world, hidden from all during the entire year, where only the Kohen Gadol would enter on Yom Kippur after elaborate preparations.

When the Chashmonaim were victorious over the Greeks and instituted the mitzvah of Chanukah candles, they incorporated a commemoration of the restoration of Jewish family life, through obligating the family and connecting the mitzvah to the home. They also celebrated the perseverance of kedushah – and even created a rabbinic level of kedushah for the Chanukah candles: הנרות הללו קודש הם.

SOURCE GUIDE: FESTIVE CHANUKAH MEALS

Even though the Shulchan Aruch says that the festive meals we have on Chanukah do not have the status of סעודות מצוה – festive mitzvah meals – the Rema and others differ. Harav Shlomo Fisher, שליט"א, in a drashah on Chanukah in his דרשות בית ישי, explains the special character of the Chanukah meals. The following source guide draws on that drashah.

A. Chanukah Meals

The Shulchan Aruch and Rema differ on the status of the festive Chanukah meals:

<p>1. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 670:2 The additional meals that we add on Chanukah are non-obligatory meals, for they didn't institute the days of Chanukah for feasting and joy (rather, for praise and thanks). Note (the Rema's comment): There are those that say that there is somewhat of a mitzvah in those additional meals, for during those days (of Chanukah) was the dedication of the altar (Mahar" a of Prague); and the custom is to say songs and praises at each of those additional meals, transforming it into a mitzvah feast.</p>	<p>שו"ע אורח חיים תרע"ב: ריבוי הסעודות שמרבים בהם הם סעודות הרשות שלא קבעום למשתה ושמחה. הגה וי"א שיש קצת מצוה ברבוי הסעודות משום דבאותן הימים היה חנוכת המזבח (מהר"א מפראג) ונוהגין לומר זמירות ותשבחות בסעודות שמרבים בהם ואז הוי סעודת מצוה (מנהגים).</p>
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The Mishnah Berurah explains:

<p>2. Mishnah Berurah Orach Chaim 670:7 ... As it says in the Midrash, that the work of the Mishkan was completed on the 25th of Kislev, but the Holy One, blessed be He, waited to put it up until Nisan, when Yitzchak was born. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I have to compensate Kislev." He compensated through the dedication of the Temple by the Chashmonaim. Also, in the days of Antiochus the Greeks defiled the Temple and Israel dedicated it during these eight days.</p>	<p>משנה ברורה אורח חיים תרע"ז: ... כדאיתא במדרש דמלאכת המשכן נגמר בכ"ה בכסליו אלא שהמתין הקב"ה בהקמה עד ניסן שנולד בו יצחק. ואמר הקב"ה עלי לשלם לכסליו, ושילם לו חנוכת בית חשמונאי. וגם שם בימי אנטיוכוס טמאו ההיכל ועשו חנוכת הבית בשמנה ימים אלו.</p>
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Asks the author of Beit Yishai, how does this counter the point the Shulchan Aruch makes, that Chanukah was only instituted for thanks and praise – הלל והודאה – and not for feasting and joy – משתה ושמחה? If the Chanukah miracle itself is not sufficient to define the festive Chanukah meals as סעודות מצוה – halachically classified mitzvah meals – why was the finishing of the Mishkan or the dedication of the Temple?

He presents two other puzzles to solve:

- The author of מטה משה says that an expression in Parshat Miketz hints at Chanukah: Yosef commands the leader of his household to prepare a meal when the brothers return. He says, "וטבח טבח והכין" – "Slaughter meat and prepare" (Bereishit 43:16). The last five letters of the expression spell חנוכה. But why did Hashem place a hint to Chanukah precisely at that location in the Torah?
- What is behind the following Midrash (quoted by many but whose source is unknown)?

<p>3. Midrash on Shir Hashirim 7:14 "The mandrakes gave forth a fragrance" – these are Reuven's mandrakes; "and at our openings all tasty things" – these are the Chanukah candles.</p>	<p>מדרש על שיר השירים ז:יד "הדודאים נתנו ריח" – אלו דודאי ראובן, "ועל פתחינו כל מגדים" – אלו נרות חנוכה.</p>
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Why is an allusion to Chanukah tied up with an allusion to Reuven?

B. Yosef and Reuven

<p>4. Sanhedrin 103b A meal is great for it brings together those who are distant.</p>	<p>סנהדרין קג: גדולה לגימא ש...מקרבת את הרחוקים.</p>
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When Yosef wanted to renew the connection with his brothers he invited them to join him for a meal. This was the step before revealing himself to them. Meals bring about **unity**. Reuven prevented his brothers from killing Yosef, thereby preserving the potential for **unity** among the tribes of Israel. Reuven's descendant the prophet Hoshea encouraged the nation to repent by focusing on **unity**.

C. Hoshea and the Dedication of the Mishkan

<p>5. Hoshea 14:3 Take up words and return to Hashem: Say to Him lift up all sin and take the good ...</p>	<p>הושע יד:ג קחו עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֵל ה': אָמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי כָל תְּשׂא עֹון וְקַח טוֹב ...</p>
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What is Hoshea suggesting we ask Hashem? What does "lifting up sin and taking the good" mean? The Pesikta (Chapter 45) lauds Hoshea for not only telling Israel to repent like earlier prophets but for also telling them what to say. But what is so great about his formulation?

The core of the Beit Yishai's explanation is an observation about the unity of the People of Israel. Harav Yehudah Muskato, זצ"ל (1530-1593, Italy) speaks of how individual sinners become insignificant in the face of the collective when Israel is united. He suggests we draw an analogy to the halachah of איסורין מבטלין זה את זה – that (even though it is prohibited to do so) one who eats a group of forbidden foods mixed together is not liable for punishment. Each individual food is a minority of the mixture and negated, בטל ברוב. Similarly, even though Israel has individual sinners, each sinner is negated to the majority (even other sinners). It goes further, though:

<p>6. Kritot 6b Said Rav Chana bar Bizna quoting Rav Shimon Chasida: Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel is not a fast, for the galbanum has a bad smell and the Torah listed it among the spices of the incense.</p>	<p>כריתות דף ו: א"ר חנא בר בזנא א"ר שמעון חסידא: כל תענית שאין בה מפושעי ישראל אינה תענית, שהרי חלבנה ריחה רע ומנאה הכתוב עם סממני קטרת.</p>
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The Ran explains that three things happen when there is unity: a. the negative aspects of individuals are ignored; b. they pool and all benefit from their positive traits; c. the negative trait of one actually brings out the others' positive traits. Hence the incense is invalid without the bad-smelling חלבנה and a fast day must include the sinners. This was the message of the prophet Hoshea: repent through unity. Hashem will then lift up your sins, for they will be negated, but you will be able to benefit from the good of all of Israel.

Israel was unified at the dedication of the Mishkan. Each of the heads of tribes offered the same sacrifice and twelve individual sacrifices took on a communal character. But their sacrifices included incense and incense is only offered communally. Nadav and Avihu died when they improperly offered incense as individuals. Why did Hashem accept the incense of the heads of the tribes? Apparently their incense was communal.

This explains the Rema's position about the Chanukah meals. The mitzvah behind those meals is that they bring about unity, and that unity recalls the unity of the dedication of the Mishkan that Chanukah celebrates.

ZEMIRAH AND ZEMORAH BY RABBI YISROEL CHOLEVA

Yaakov initially refuses to allow the brothers to take Binyamin down to Egypt like the viceroy of Egypt (really Yosef) demanded. But when Yehudah guarantees his safety, Yaakov acquiesces and the brothers begin their journey back to Egypt. However, Binyamin is not the only thing Yaakov sends with his sons. The Torah writes: "And Yisrael their father said to them, 'If so, you shall take from זמירת הארץ in your vessels and bring down a gift to the man ...'" (Bereishit 43:11). Rashi translates the words זמירת הארץ as the "best of the produce," but one cannot help but notice that the Torah's use of the word זמירה in this verse is a bit peculiar. The word זמירה has two different meanings in Hebrew: 1. a song; and 2. a vine. Looking at how these two meanings are related can help explain why Yaakov referred to the produce of the Land of Israel as זמירת הארץ.

Harav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, זצ"ל, explains that there are three words for "song" in Hebrew: שיר, נגן, זמר, and זמורה. שיר is a poetic song. נגן is instrumental music. זמר, the core of זמירה, refers to the song's melody. A זמורה, as it relates to a plant, is the vine, where the nutrients are managed and transported to the fruit in order to allow it to grow. The vine, the זמורה, is the intermediary which brings the necessary elements from the ground, through the plant, to where they are needed, thus allowing the plant to complete its task of providing fruit.

Rav Hirsch relates the two meanings as follows: "We find this same relation between the melody and the word of a song. Emotions and perceptions that have not yet ripened in the human spirit, have not yet reached full clarity in thought, have not yet been suited for expression in words, are ripened and clarified on the wings of melody, and in the loftiness of inspiration they find the word. Natural man speaks to others and sings to himself ... Melody is a gently winding tendril, and on the threads of its tone it presents its fruit: the impassioned word."

זמירה, melodious song, takes a potential element and translates it into reality. Both with the vine and the song, the זמר is that which allows the final product to materialize. It follows that זמירת הארץ refers to that which allows the land to produce its bounty. When Yaakov spoke to his sons, he did not refer to the fruit itself or to the land, but rather to that which allows the fruit to be produced. It is possible that Yaakov was giving his sons a message about how to look at their current predicament. They will be returning to a hostile land where one of their brothers is being held hostage, while the rest of the family is in desperate need of food. Yet they must realize that they are only the זמר, the intermediary in their mission, like a vine or a melody. It is not up to them whether they will succeed or not; only Hashem will determine that. Rather, they must do their best despite the challenges that lie before them and trust that Hashem will provide the necessary outcome.

This is a message we can carry with us as we face our daily challenges. If we understand that we are just intermediaries and that it is Hashem who will determine whether our efforts will bear fruit or not, it will be easier for us to focus on the task at hand. With G-d's help we will be able to overcome whatever difficulties arise.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Yaakov Yehoshua ben Yitzchak ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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