Characterizing Chanukah
5781

O mighty Rock of my salvation, to praise You is a delight. Restore my House of Prayer and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering. When You will have prepared the slaughter for the blaspheming foe, then I shall complete with a song of hymn the dedication of the Altar.

1.1. Why is Chanukah called "Chanukah"?
1. Since the Chashmonaim rested from battling the Yevanim on the 25th of Kislev (the first day of Chanukah), the holiday is called ננודנ because this word is made up of וְנֵדֶּנָּה meaning "they rested," and וְנַדְּנָה, which has the gematria of 25, implying the 25th of Kislev.
In the following passuk from our parsha, Yosef haatzaddik alludes to the festival of Chanukah (Bereishis 43, 16): "וַיְדַוֵּדֵד יְהוָה אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם, כְּשֶׁה לְבָנוֹת בִּנְיָמִין עַל שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגִ詳ְלָם בִּנְיָמִין לְגִ詳ְלָם שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם"—Yosef saw Binyamin with them, and he said to the one in charge of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and have meat slaughtered and prepared, for with me will these men dine this afternoon."

Now, take note of the two words "סְמֻכָּה תָּנָה". If we take the last letter of the first word—the letter "ש"—and rearrange the letters of the second word, and combine them, we obtain בִּנְיָמִין. In short, we can interpret this passuk as Yosef of Israel commanding to prepare a festive meal in honor of Chanukah. The source for this allusion is found in the Shilleh Gibborim; it is also introduced by the Elyahu Rabbah (O.C. 670, 16) and the Malach Mosheh (Chanukah, 992):

Regarding this tunic, we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 16b): "בָּשָׂר מְשַׁקְּבָּת בִּי סְמוּכָּה כַּהֵן [רַבִּי] מַעֲבָד אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל—wisely referring to the "Amen and Amen"—as a result of this extra gift Yaakov gave to Yosef and not to the other brothers, the matter evolved such that our forefathers descended to Altzrayim. Let us endeavor to understand the matter of the "kesonet passum"—the striped tunic.

Additionally, why did this garment weigh specifically "two solas"? The Chasam Sofer explains that the "two solas" of fine wool that Yosef received in excess of his brothers' correspondence to the festivals of Chanukah and Purim. The other brothers did not comprehend the significance of these two festivals: only Yosef did. Let us present the amazing words of the Chasam Sofer:

In fact, these festivals were truly his portion: he draws from them spiritually. As such, Yaakov gave Yosef two solas of fine woolen cloth above and beyond what he gave the other brothers. For they symbolized two milvov from the Torah she'el'al peh the garment alluded to the tunic worn by the Rabbis. This provoked the brothers' jealousy.

Thus, we have learned a tremendous chiddush. When the Torah states: "וְיִרְשָׁאֵל לְעֹלָם, כְּשֶׁמְבַּד אֵלֶּה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם, כְּשֶׁה לְבָנוֹת בִּנְיָמִין בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעֹלָם"—it is referring to Chanukah and Purim which are revealed to us by our Torah scholars in Torah she'el'al peh. They are referred to as "kesonet passum," because the novel interpretations presented by the scholars of the Torah she'el'al peh are termed by the Zohar hakadosh בְּרֵאשֵׁית יְהוָה יְהוָה נְתַן לְבָנָיו בְּרֵאשֵׁית אֲשֶׁר נַעֲלָה בְּרֵאשֵׁית עַל הָאָרֶץ. The garment consisted specifically of two solas of cloth corresponding to Chanukah and Purim.
The Purpose of the Visible Miracles

Is Recognition of the Concealed Miracles

Continuing along this path, let us proceed to explain why Yaakov revealed these two festivals—Chanukah and Purim—specifically to Yosef. Additionally, we will explain why Yosef haszaddik prepared a meal for his brothers in Mitzrayim celebrating Chanukah and Purim. We will base our explanation on a fundamental idea which the Ramban teaches us toward the end of parshas B'sh (Shemos 13, 16).

The purpose of all the supernatural miracles which HKB"H performed on our behalf during the exodus from Egypt is to allow us to recognize the tremendous miracles performed on our behalf on a daily basis within the realm of nature.

The concealed miracles are the foundation of the entire Torah. Whether the miracle is performed for the general public or for an individual, everything is determined from above; our daily events and miracles are not determined by natural law. A Jew who does not believe in this principle does not have a part in the Torah.

At last, let us recapit and connect all of the loose ends. Yaakov Avinu realized by means of his ruach hakodesh that Yosef was sold to the Egyptians so as to pave the way for all of Yisrael to sanctify themselves in Mitzrayim. As a result, they would merit the supernatural phenomena and miracles that HKB"H would perform during the exodus. Nevertheless, the purpose of such miracles is to install in a person the belief that even nature is controlled by HKB"H. Yisrael's belief that the natural order of things is determined by HKB"H was revealed by means of Chanukah and Purim.

Therefore, Yaakov Avinu wisely revealed the mystery of these two festivals—Chanukah and Purim—specifically to Yosef hazaddik. Comprehending his father's true intent, he acted accordingly. He paved the way for all of Yisrael in Mitzrayim with his sanctity. He became the second in command to the ruler of Mitzrayim. Then he commanded his brothers, the tribes of Yisrael, to bring Binyamin along with them so that all twelve heavenly tribes would be present at his gala event. Once all the pieces were in place, he prepared for them in Mitzrayim a festive meal in honor of Chanukah and Purim. This event prepared the way for the events to follow. The supernatural miracles witnessed in Mitzrayim incalculable in Yisrael the unwavering belief that even mundane daily events are miracles wrought by Hashem within the guise of nature.

How nicely this ties in with a wonderful association we find between Yosef and Torah sheb’al peh. When Yosef was appointed as second in command in Mitzrayim, the Torah states (Bereishis 41, 22): יְרֵאָה תְּרוּנָה אֵֽלֶּֽהּ וְיֶשׁוּבֵּהּ אִישׁ וַאֲשֶׁר יָֽאַכְּלֵֽנִּ֥י עֲמָֽֽי׃ (Revere these matters and they shall be a memorial for me among you.) And Pharaoh removed his ring from upon his hand and put it on Yosef's hand; he then had him dressed in garments of linen ... and he had him ride in his second chariot.

The great Rabbi of Apt, zt”h, finds the following allusions in this passuk (Ibid.):

"דְּגַלְּשֵׁה" ("shelish" means linen but also means skil) alludes to the six midot of kedushah with which HKB"H adorned Yosef; the word "mishneh" alludes to the six orders of the Mishnah—the cornerstone of Torah sheb’al peh.

The miracles conducted within the realm of nature are facilitated by Torah sheb’al peh.

Let us take the high road and explore another incredible source from one of the great luminaries, the Maharal of Prague. In his sofer Ba’er HaGolah (Ba’er Rishon), he explains why HKB"H gave us the Torah in two distinct forms—Torah sheb’al tokhever Torah sheb’al peh. These two aspects of the Torah correspond to the two methods by which HKB"H manages this universe—by means of miracles and by means of nature. When conducting the world by means of miracles, HKB"H does not utilize intermediaries. His presence is not obscured by constellations or heavenly stars that seemingly control nature. When conducting the world according to the laws of nature, on the other hand, the world is still operating under HKB"H’s miraculous supervision; however, he utilizes the forces of nature as intermediaries to accomplish His will.

The Midrash (B.R. 1, 1) teaches us that HKB"H utilized the Torah as a blueprint with which to create the world. It is apparent, therefore, that the Torah is the source for both methods of conducting the world—the supernatural and the natural. So, the Maharal explains that Torah sheb’al peh—which was given by HKB"H Himself directly without Torah scholars as intermediaries—is the source for the management of the world by means of miracles—which also functions without natural intermediaries. Torah sheb’al peh, on the other hand, includes all the aspects of the Torah that were revealed as a result of HKB"H bestowing His wisdom upon Torah scholars so that they could clarify and refine Torah knowledge in each and every generation. It is the source for the management of the world according to the laws of nature—whereby HKB"H utilizes the forces of nature as intermediaries to run the universe. This is the gist of the Maharal’s explanation.

Thus, we can appreciate why HKB"H arranged that the two festivals of Chanukah and Purim be revealed specifically by the scholars of Torah sheb’al peh. Seemingly the miracles associated with these festivals manifested themselves within the guise of nature, it was imperative that they be revealed specifically via Torah sheb’al peh—the source of HKB"H’s management of Yisrael within the guise of nature.
It seems that this is also alluded to in the passuk (ibid. 41, 48):

"And Pharaoh named Joseph Tzaphkin Pahmetach. Rashi provides the following clarification:

"The function of Torah sheb'ol peh is to decipher that which is cryptic, not to expose it."

As we have learned, Joseph paved the way for Israel to merit the miracles that were performed beyond the remit of nature. Yet, the true goal is to believe and recognize that HKB"H performs all the miracles on our behalf constantly within the realm of nature. Consequently, Joseph merited becoming the charot and representative of Torah sheb'ol peh. We have also learned that all of the miracles performed within the realm of nature emanate from Torah sheb'ol peh. Hence, in this mitzvah, we are able to pave the way for all of Yisrael to believe in these miracles performed on our behalf within the realm of nature. It was for this reason that he arranged for all twelve heavenly tribes to join him in a Chanukah and Purim saudah.
לא ניתן прочитать текст с изображения.
When the Chasmonaim entered the Beis HaMikdash on the 25th of Kislev, they had to dismantle the Mizbeach (Altar), because the Yevanim had defiled it. Once it was taken apart, they hid its stones in the northeast chamber of the Beis HaMikdash (see Yoma 16a; Avodah Zarah 52b), rebuilt the Mizbeach in purity with new stones, and resumed bringing offerings upon it. The word Chanukah literally means dedication, and the holiday was given this name as a reference to the dedication of the new Mizbeach in the Beis HaMikdash, which took place on that day by the Chasmonaim.

(Maharsha, Shabbos 21b)

Because the Yevanim defiled, stole, or destroyed all of the klei shareis (the ministering vessels of the Beis HaMikdash), the Chasmonaim had to fashion all the vessels anew, and therefore, the name Chanukah, “dedication,” refers to the dedication of all the new klei shareis.
The Bach comments in the beginning of Hilchos Chanukah that the Jewish people's flaw, the fault that made them vulnerable to the decrees of Antiochus, was a deficiency in the area of avodah—in their sacrifices and the prayer service in the Temple. This weakness left them vulnerable to the cessation and desecration of this service by the Greek decrees.

What is the significance of this aspect of Torah life? The prophet admonished the people because the Torah was observed "team bemidbar...—a command here, a command there; a line here, a line there, a little here, a little there" (Yoash 28:10). G-d does not want from us 613 disjunctive and independent acts, but rather "achas biber elokim—G-d spoke one" (Berachos 61:2); G-d gave us one unified word. He gave us one unified lifestyle of holiness and purity. We must become, individually and collectively, G-d's Mikdash, where His presence will be presented to the entire world, by a nation of holy Kohanim. However, "shenayim zu shemaiti—I heard two" (ibid.). We human beings living in a world consisting of many manifold objects cannot relate directly to the unified will of G-d, without breaking it down into smaller components.

Jews' life and lifestyle from different perspectives. One who views the mitzvos as separate disjunctive commands, even though he is "shome'a tavd kol Hashem" (Shemos 15:26)—even though he hears the external commands of Hashem and obeys them—they nonetheless he remains an aveid, a slave, who relates to commands alone. On the other hand, one who is "shome'a b'tavd kol Hashem" (Devarim 30:8)—one who hears into those commands, what their implications are, how they shed light on the all-encompassing will of Hashem for his entire life, personality, lifestyle, goals, and values, is he like a son who anticipates and consents himself with the will of his parents and the lifestyle and personality that the parents wish to engender in him through the directives they give him.

In this respect, "Ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr—A commandment is a candle and the Torah is light" (Midchos 61:23). The mitzvos are a receptacle for the oil that forms the light disseminated by the Torah, which generates a Torah personality and lifestyle. The avodah of prayer and sacrifice, and the environment of the Mikdash, put the various mitzvos into the perspective of a relationship with Hashem and encompassed all of life and its components.

During the period preceding Chanukah, Jews were weak in this avodah. Torah observance became mere external compliance to the commands. The implication of the lifestyle to be created by those commands, the creation of a nation of holy Kohanim who would become the actual Mikdash of G-d's presence, was ignored. Shabbos was observed but did not impart a lifestyle that strove for the spiritual world represented by Shabbos. Rather, those shomer Shabbos spent their six workdays expanding their materialistic goals, and that's what formed their life's ambition and influenced all their decisions and conduct, not the Torah, not Shabbos. They observed the letter of the law but failed to imbued with the holiness and purity that those laws imply. The Yiddishkeit was dark and external, and the preciousness of the chosen nation was diminished.

This very shallow appreciation of a true Torah lifestyle induced some to be totally influenced by the Greek way of life. If one views the Torah only externally, it can't match the beauty and grandeur of the externals of Greece. Therefore they accepted it as an alternative to the drab Jewish existence that left them feeling disillusioned and unimpressed due to its lack of real content.

For this reason, this period is referred to as gaalos Yavan, the Greek exile—even though we were in Eretz Yisrael with a Mikdash, still we were in exile. We may have been connected to the externals of the land and the Temple, but we were millions of miles away from their inner spiritual essence. Since the Jews had this weakness, they were vulnerable to the decrees of Yavan. G-d did not thwart these decrees so that Klal Yisrael should wake up to their faults and repent and strengthen themselves.
“TO DEFILE AND TO DESCEND”

It is a sad fact, says the Chafetz Chaim, that sometimes one does not appreciate what one has until it is taken from him or he is threatened that it will be taken from him. The decrees the Greeks made against us are mentioned in the Al HaNisim prayer that we say on Chanukah. First, “Pshchasim Torahcha — to make them forget Hashem’s Torah.” Their main purpose was to make them forget Your Torah. This refers specifically to Torah Sheba’al Peh, the Oral Torah, which could be forgotten if the chain of transmission was interrupted. The Greeks did not mind if we retained the Written Torah as a body of Jewish folklore, as long as our lifestyle reflected the values and morals of Greek culture. The Written Torah without the Oral Torah is like a body without a soul. Hence the letters of Mishnah, the Oral Torah, also spell nachmah, “soul.” Without G-d’s explanation of the Written Torah, it can be distorted, misrepresented, and reduced to a lifeless compendium of history and folklore. Then it is no longer “Your Torah,” but something very different. It is a shell without content.

The second decree against us was “Ishlaivim mechevkei retsoncha — to transfer them from the laws of Your will.” Here, too, the Greeks were perfectly willing to let the Jews observe mitzvos as folk culture, as long as the essence of their lifestyle was in line with the basics of Greek philosophy.

The Greeks did not seek to destroy the Jewish people or even our Midos. They sought to defile and to desecrate — to “metamei” and “mechalel.” Mechalel means literally “hollow out,” to remove inner spiritual meaning, leaving but an outer shell. Tanimah is the vacuum left when holiness and spirituality leave an entity as when a soul leaves a body.

for eight days. The bond through Torah and mitzvos is symbolized by the Menorah, which represents the light of Torah that emanates from the receptacle of the mitzvos when they are pure and untainted. Recognition of our unique relationship with Hashem generated an increased awareness of G-d’s special relationship with us and resulted in eight days of hallel and hoda’ah to Hashem, of intensifying closeness to Him through prayer and praise.