



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת מקץ תש"ע 5770 Parshas Mikeitz

THE MENORAH AND THE SUKKAH

Last week we discussed the famous question posed by the Beis Yosef concerning the duration of the *Yom Tov* of Chanukah. True, the oil burned for eight days, but only seven of those days seem to have comprised the miracle, as the *kohanim* started out with enough oil to last one full day. Why, then, does the festival last a full eight days instead of the seven that correspond to the miracle? There are numerous posited resolutions to this issue, wherein the commentators go to great lengths to demonstrate how the first day was also part of the miracle.

Another approach (utilized by the *B'nei Yissoschor*) is based on the words of the great medieval Kabbalist known as the Rokeach. The Rokeach claims that the festival of Chanukah was patterned after the *yom tov* of Sukkos, which lasts for eight days. Not only does he bring scriptural allusion to support this contention, but he also points to a fundamental relationship between Sukkos and Chanukah. As we know, the Yevanim (Greeks) promulgated various decrees against the Jewish people in an attempt to stifle their performance of *mitzvos*. Specifically, the Rokeach asserts, they targeted the institution of the *sukkah* and outlawed the fulfillment of this particular mitzvah.

With this idea, explains the *B'nei Yissoschor*, the Beis Yosef's query is handily resolved. Since Chanukah follows the Sukkos model, it must last for eight days, regardless of the miraculous quality (or lack thereof) of day one.

What begs clarification, though, is the very relationship highlighted by the Rokeach. It seems that Sukkos and Chanukah are inextricably bound, to the point where the basic structure of Chanukah

is tailored to dovetail that of Sukkos. And the Yevanim, in the thick of their anti-Torah campaign of that time, placed a premium specifically on the mitzvah of *sukkah*.

Uncovering the underlying ideas behind this curious situation may provide us with a unique perspective on the holiday of Chanukah, as well as the bedrock of what it means to be a Jew.

WHY CHANUKAH?

To begin to arrive at the fundamentals, it is apropos to concentrate on the institution of Chanukah itself. The fact that there exists such an elaborate commemoration of this particular miracle is a point worth noting in and of itself.

The Mishnah in Avos (5:5) states:

עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נַעֲשׂוּ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ... לֹא הִסְרִיחַ בָּשָׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ מֵעוֹלָם; וְלֹא נִרְאָה זְבוּב בְּבֵית הַמִּטְבָּחִים; ... עוֹמְדִים צְפוּפִים וּמְשֻׁתְּחָוִים וְרוֹחִים...

“Ten miracles were wrought for our ancestors in the Beis Hamikdash (only a sampling are listed here)... The sacrificial meat never spoiled; a fly never appeared in the slaughterhouse;... they stood compressed but bowed comfortably (when standing, the crowd of people were tightly packed together, but when it came time to prostrate themselves, there was suddenly plenty of room)...”

Although quite miraculous, no specific holidays or practices were established to commemorate these wonders. Only the Chanukah miracle warranted its own commemorative festival. Why did the miracle of the Menorah receive such special treatment?

Based on a concept cited in numerous *sefarim*, R' Yeruchem Olshin clarified the unique nature of the Chanukah miracle. Most other miracles are of a type known as “*isarusa d'l'eilah*,” they are

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“summoned from on High.” That is, the people are in need of a miracle, and Hashem, in His mercy, sends one to provide their salvation. A classic example would be the miracle of *yetzias* Mitzrayim (the Exodus), wherein the people had no input in the implementation of the miraculous deliverance, but Hashem, in His kindness, dispatched a miracle from His abode.

The miracle of the Menorah was of a different sort altogether; this was an “*isarusa d’lsata*,” a miracle effected from “below.” That is, it came about through the people’s *own efforts*. The Chanukah miracle was unique in that *the Jews themselves* brought it about.

The Bach (*Orach Chaim* 670) mentions this idea. He explains that it was through the *mesiras nefesh* – the intense and life-risking effort invested by the Jewish people at that time to restore the Temple service to its pristine state – that they merited and actually caused the miracle of the Menorah to

occur. By pushing themselves to the limit for the sake of Hashem’s service, they effected the miraculous restoration of this very service through the kindling of the Menorah.

The singling out of the Menorah miracle by Chazal points to the fact that the underlying principle of this miracle is actually fundamental to a Jew’s very service and existence. As noted by the Bach, this miracle encapsulates the inherent strength and obligation of the Jewish people: *mesirus nefesh*. Through it, the Jewish people can even cause miracles; indeed, as R’ Ya’akov Emden states (*introduction to Siddur of Rabbi Ya’akov Emden*), the very fact that the Jewish people continue to exist is the greatest miracle of all.

BUCKING THE TREND

The Yevanim were well aware that this idea was the secret to the Jews’ existence. And it was for this reason that they set their sight on the mitzvah of *sukkah*.

Mesiras nefesh is not limited to risking one’s life on behalf of the greater cause of serving Hashem; anytime a Jew overcomes his inherent nature in order to fulfill Hashem’s Will he is performing a heroic act of *mesiras nefesh*. To combat the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) on a daily basis certainly requires one to push himself to the limits. This is especially so in light of the fact that most of the world is dedicated to the singular pursuit of their natural desires and inclinations.

And this is what the *sukkah* is all about: *mesiras nefesh*. As the Tur (*Ibid.* 625) describes it, while most people start curtailing their outdoor activities to avoid the inclement weather of the season, the Jewish people head outside to perform a mitzvah. The Yevanim realized that this mitzvah symbolized the Jews’ strength to survive as a Torah nation, which is what they sought to quash.

But they are long gone, and the Torah nation continues to thrive.

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