

# Miketz – Chanuka 5772

## BS"D Parashat Miketz and Chanuka 5772

### Part A: Pirsumai Nisa

The concept of Pirsumai Nisa (to promulgate a miracle) is a major factor in several mitzvot, such as the public reading of *Megilat Esther* which records how HaShem intervened in a miraculous manner to save the Jews from Haman and Achashverosh of Persia-Iran, and the requirement to recline while eating at the Pessach seder to proclaim HaShem's miraculous deeds when He took us out of Egypt.

But none are so emphasized as the *mitzva* of lighting the Chanuka candles. For this mitzvah, our rabbis ordained a three-tiered protocol of Pirsumai Nisa.

The basic level is one candle every night for each of the eight nights, totaling 8 candles for the entire holiday (not counting the shamash). The next level of Pirsumai Nisa known as *mehadrin* (to upgrade the proclamation) is one candle every night for each member of the family, so a family of 5 would light 5 separate candles every night, totaling 40 candles for the entire holiday. The highest level called *mehadrin min hamehadrin* is the common custom today of increasing the number of candles each successive night, totaling 36 for the entire holiday.

What was it in the events of Chanuka that evoked the Rabbis to place a special emphasis on proclaiming the miracles?

The miracle of the oil, so central to the holiday, transpired in a chamber of the *Beit HaMikdash* called the *Kodesh* (a section that stands immediately before the *Kodesh Hakodashim* – the Holy of Holies). Hence, a Levi or Yisrael, who never entered the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*, but who only went as far as the *Azara* (courtyard where the large *mizbei'ach*

[altar] was located), did not witness the miracle. Even the number of *kohanim* who entered the area of the *Kodesh* was limited. Now, if God wanted to impress *Am Yisrael* with a miracle, why did He not perform it publicly in front of the entire nation?

I suggest:

The rebellion against the religious tyranny of the Greeks and our Jewish Hellenized “brothers” began in a town called Modi’in, situated between Yerushalayim and what is now Tel Aviv. A Greek officer erected an altar there, and a Jew offered up a pig on it to one of the many gods the Greeks worshiped. At that point, Matit’ya’hu had had enough. He jumped up onto the altar, killed the officer and his Jewish underling and then called out *mi la’Shem ay’li* – “whoever is on the side of God, come to me.” And with this, he, his five sons, and a handful of loyal Jews withdrew to the hills and declared war upon Greece.

This was a bloody, savage war lasting 25 years. Furthermore, it was unlike what Hollywood would have us believe that after redeeming the *Beit HaMikdash* and the miracle of the oil, they all lived “happily ever after.” The fact is that the bloodshed continued for another 5 years.

I imagine Matit’ya’hu and his military staff sitting at night, reading the weekly reports. “On Sunday, 1000 Jews were murdered and 10 towns destroyed. On Monday 5000 Jews were murdered, 50 *batei kneset* were burned to the ground, and 100 tons of wheat were destroyed.” And this scenario went on for years. The war was not a surgical strike but a long protracted episode, which cost the Jewish people tens of thousands of casualties. At some point, Matit’ya’hu and his sons, who were God-fearing Torah Jews, must have asked themselves who gave them the right to drag the nation into such a catastrophic conflict. They were not prophets. God did not appear to Matit’ya’hu as he did to Yehoshua, Gidon, Yiftach and others

to declare war. This war was the result of a decision made by one family, which affected the entire nation. So perhaps, at some point, Matit'ya'hu may have had misgivings. This war, however, was not only justified, it was essential for our survival as a Torah nation and demanded total defeat of the enemy. But how did Matit'ya'hu and his staff of Kohanim know this?

Furthermore, there must have been a great deal of fierce criticism on the part of the war's opponents, declaring that Matit'yahu had no right to plunge the nation into this deadly war. There certainly were draft dodgers, leftist ideological refuseniks and many who claimed that military service would interfere with their Torah studies.

After 20 years of battle, HaShem deemed that it was the appropriate time to inform the Kohanic-military leadership that their judgment had been correct, and that every able-bodied man was indeed required to participate in this historic war.

Since prophecy had ceased about 200 years earlier, it would have to be a sign from heaven directed to the Kohanic military leadership and from them to the nation at large. In order for the sign to be recognized by the Kohanim, it had to be in the depths of the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*, where only Kohanim were permitted to enter. Hence, the miracle of the oil in the *Kodesh*.

At the end of the year, a rabbinic ordinance was evoked making it mandatory to declare one's loyalty and dedication to the national war effort. As is customary in ideological-based matters, where there are varying degrees of compliance – especially at that time when the Jewish Hellenists were so influential – the rabbis provided an avenue for people to express their total dedication to the war effort to free Eretz Yisrael from the Greek predators. This was done by providing the level of *mehadrin min hamehadrin* to declare their absolute

compliance with the Kohanic-military leadership.

The concept of Pirsumai Nisa as with all things in Jewish life, has its roots in the Torah – but where?

I submit that the expression of this concept is found in the parasha Miketz, which most often occurs in or around Chanuka:

The brothers arrived in Egypt. At Yosef's command, the border police were to bring to him all arriving from Eretz Canaan, and Yosef's brothers now find themselves accused of being spies for a foreign country.

It was Yosef's original intention to severely punish the brothers, but something happened in the incidents recorded in the parasha to change Yosef's mind from punishing them to exalting them and caring for their welfare.

In this week's parasha, Yosef reaches the pinnacle of his career. He is the viceroy of Egypt, and no one raises a hand in the land without his authorization.

When reviewing the life of this man, one cannot but wonder from where he received the spiritual strength to endure all that happened to him.

Yosef was 17 years old, orphaned from his beloved mother Rachel, rejected by his brothers and with only his father Ya'akov and younger brother Binyamin to bring him comfort and solace.

The brothers go to Shechem with the family herd, and Yosef is sent by Ya'akov to see how they are faring. When he draws close, the brothers rip off his many-colored cloak and throw Yosef into a pit swarming with snakes and scorpions. At the same time, the brothers sit down to eat bread, as the Torah states, while the young helpless Yosef calls out for help.

He is sold into slavery, put to the test with Potifar's wife and thrown into prison for many years.

At any point in his early life, Yosef could easily have concluded that HaShem had abandoned him.

Were it not for one subtle, elusive seemingly insignificant incident.

When Yosef was in the pit, a caravan of Yishmaelim approached. This was a caravan on its regular route from Gilad to Egypt with its usual cargo of kerosene. Upon Yehuda's suggestion, Yosef is taken out from the pit and sold to the Yishmaelim to be resold as a slave in Egypt.

The Torah takes the trouble to inform us that on this particular run, the caravan was not carrying kerosene but three very pleasant-smelling spices of tzarie, nachot and lot



Rashi explains that HaShem created a mixup in Gilad, and the kerosene was replaced with the spices so that the Tzaddik Yosef would not be troubled by the foul smell of the fuel.

How bizarre of the Torah to inform us of HaShem placating a 17-year-old boy – betrayed by his brothers and tied to a camel with iron chains to be sold as a slave in Egypt – with pleasant smelling spices!

A visit to the famed Louvre Museum in Paris can help decode the mystery. Among the paintings in the great chambers of art is one of a smiling young woman. How much would you pay for the painting and its handsome frame – 1,000 shekels, 10,000 shekels?

As you get closer to the painting, you will see on the lower right side a scribbled signature of Leonardo Da Vinci. This is, indeed, the magnificent *Mona Lisa* worth tens of millions of dollars. What elevated the portrait to its incomparable worth is no more than a scribbled signature on the side, which has no intrinsically esthetic value. The price informs the viewer that it is the handiwork of one of the world's greatest

artists.

Yosef's situation was miserable. His present state was bleak and his future even darker. But within the darkness of his suffering, he saw the signature – the sweet-smelling spices instead of the foul-smelling kerosene. This was HaShem's signature signaling to Yosef that HaShem would protect him.

In this week's parasha Miketz, Yosef sits on the throne as the second most powerful man in the superpower of that day – Egypt. Laying prostrate before him are his ten brothers. He recognizes them, but they do not recognize him – a fulfillment of what Yosef had dreamed of 20 years earlier. Yosef now embarks on the systematic plan he has worked out over the years to inflict psychological torment on those who had caused him such mental anguish and physical pain.

Yosef sends them back to their father's home with the directive that they must bring to him the youngest brother Binyamin.

Ya'akov is extremely distraught with the tide of events which had begun as a simple errand to purchase food. Now it had reached a stage where he must send away the last living memory of his beloved wife Rachel. When the brothers prepare to return to Egypt together with Binyamin, father Ya'akov gives them gifts for the cruel viceroy.

The gifts include varieties of spices – tzarie, nachot and lot, the very same spices transported on the caravan that took Yosef into slavery.

The plot thickens as the brothers, together with Binyamin, stand before the viceroy and present him with the gifts from Eretz Yisrael. Yosef opens the package of unique spices. Suddenly, the years fade away and he sees himself again chained to the camel, with the sun intensely beating down on him, and smells the unique mix of these three spices. At that moment, Yosef realizes that all that was done to him by his

brothers was part of HaShem's master plan, as told to grandfather Avraham, that his descendants would be enslaved 400 years in a foreign land and then return to Eretz Yisrael.

And just as this subtle sign from HaShem ushered in Yosef's period of slavery resulting in his rise to greatness; so too is this a subtle sign ushering in the period of exile and slavery of the Jewish people, which will result in the exodus, receiving the Torah and rise to greatness as HaShem's chosen people.

Yosef realized – and later his brothers and father Ya'akov – that HaShem was personally directing the affairs of the family and the future Jewish nation. It was cause for immense exhilaration and the necessity to proclaim this before all the House of Israel in all ages. Yosef performed it by totally forgiving his brothers, and caring for their well-being by providing them with the best that Egypt had to offer.

Here was born the principle of promulgating the eternal presence of HaShem in the affairs of Am Yisrael; is there any greater miracle than this?

## **Part B: Religious leaders in the Galut**

As we consider the history of our people over the last 2000 years, we find parallels with the young Yosef. We were exiled from Eretz Yisrael, sold into slavery, beaten, starved by crusaders, pogroms, expulsions, inquisitions and concentration camps.

At the end of the Second World War, the Jewish people were destitute physically and spiritually. How would we survive?

And then HaShem gave us a sign – Medinat Yisrael was the signature that He was with us through the entire history.

We were a small signature, a scribble on the map of the world – like the sweet, small smell of tzarrie, nachot and lot.

When the Medina was finally established in 1948, this small splinter of a state had to defend itself from attack from seven established armies.

The United States warned Ben Gurion not to declare a State and to show they “meant business” the US imposed an arms embargo on the fledgling Medina.

In 1967, during the Six Day War, we were no longer a small splinter but a big stick; and in six days, the area of the Medina increased threefold. For the first time in 2000 years, the Jewish people were sovereign in Yerushalayim.

In 1973, during the Yom Kippur War, we wielded a powerful club with which to beat the enemy – including not only the Arabs but many Soviet advisers and weaponry.

David Hamelech says in Tehilim (23):



*Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

A stick can be used for two purposes: as a shevet (club) to strike an enemy or as a mish'enet (cane) to lean on for support.

Medinat Yisrael is both for the Jewish nation. It gives us comfort and support after 2000 years of wandering in the galut, but it is also a powerful club to strike out at our enemies.

Of all the responsibilities to fulfill the mitzva of *pirsumai nisa* incumbent on everyone who has chosen to be a religious leader in the galut – pulpit rabbi, yeshiva teacher, rosh yeshiva, grand rabbi – the most awesome mitzva of *pirsumai nisa* is to teach and promulgate the sign from HaShem of His



presence within our history, is the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps this is what is meant by Mashiach ben Yosef, because Yosef's destiny is that of the Jewish people – from a small signature to the pinnacle of power.

A rabbi, wherever and whomever he may be, must view himself as a small candle whose mission is to ignite the flames of others; or like the starters in a car whose sole purpose is to create a spark that will ignite the motor, it is our duty to ignite the spiritual motors of the people who surround us.

The most essential duty imposed on a rabbi in the galut today is to encourage the Jewish people to come home to the land promised us by the Creator Himself.

A rabbi who shirks this responsibility will pay the spiritual and material price, not unlike the Le'vi'm, who were the spiritual leaders of the Jews in the exile of Babylon, who did not return in masse to Eretz Yisrael, and Ezra the Scribe penalized them with regard to their rights to receive *ma'aser shaini*. I believe HaShem will not be so lenient as Ezra.

Every sermon must be a message to come home. Every *shiur* must stress the centrality of the holy land to the keeping of the Torah.

And Foremost, the rabbi and his family, must be the example for your community and come on *aliya*.

During this very special holiday of Chanuka, let us all pray



*Our Father, our King, may this moment be a moment of compassion and a time of favor before you.*

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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