

Chanukah is the only holiday not mentioned in the Canon. The Book of the Maccabees sheds no light on the meaning behind the holiday. The book conflicts with the statements of Chazal regarding Chanukah. From that book, one might conclude that Chanukah, even today, celebrates a great military victory. However it is mostly a history book, and we do not ascribe any greater accuracy to the author of the Book of the Maccabees than to any other historian who is capable of erring. Neither the author of the Book of Maccabees or modern historians dwell on the spiritual miracles related to Chanukah but rather on the military victories the Jews achieved. If the purpose of Chanukah was to celebrate a military victory, we would not celebrate Chanukah today. For we would discover that the Jewish people had many such great military victories throughout our history recorded in the 24 Books of the Canon. Judaism does not typically celebrate military victories. For example, the sanctity of the land of Israel was predicated on the military conquest of the land at the hands of Joshua. Joshua's conquest and victory, indeed the initial sanctity of the land, was transient and nullified by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered the land and destroyed the first Temple, קדושה ראשונה קדשה לשעתה, ולא לעתיד לבא. There is no permanent festival dedicated to Joshua's transient conquest.

If one wishes to equivocate and look to the Talmud in search of Chanukah's spiritual message, they will usually discover the focus to be on the miracle of the flask of oil that burned for eight days when it was sufficient only for one day, until additional oil could be pressed for use in the Temple. However, even this miracle was not quite unique. We had regular miracles with regards to the Temple and the Menorah. Our Rabbis tell us that 10 miracles occurred in the Temple, included among them up to the period of שמעון הצדיק, was the daily miraculous replenishment of the oil in the נר תמיד, the permanent light that burned constantly in the Temple. We do not have special days of observance, let alone festivals, to celebrate those victories and miracles today because in the final analysis, the נר תמיד was extinguished with the ultimate destruction of the Temple.

If Chanukah has survived as a holiday observance, there must be a deeper reason we observe it to this day. What is special and unique about Chanukah that has captured our religious imagination to such an extent that we enshrined its observance in our laws ascribing to it almost Biblical commandment status? Why did we grant Chanukah this status when it is the only festival that does not have a reference in the 24 Books of the Canon? We must understand the בזמן הזה perhaps more than בימים ההם.

The world around us is most often viewed by what is revealed and that can be perceived or revealed עלמא דאתגליא. While Jewish history and destiny can be viewed through this lens, it would be most restrictive as our story is influenced and understood much more significantly through the hidden perspective, עלמא דאיתכסי. The עלמא דאתגליא teaches us short term, tactical lessons, however the עלמא דאיתכסי teaches us the strategic lessons that provide us the blueprint for our destiny.

Our history records two events where non-Jews entered the Second Temple. The first was Chanukah when the Assyrian Greeks entered the holy temple and as our Rabbis tell us, they defiled all the oil in the Temple. The second is when Titus and the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. For Jews, the ultimate sign of Jewish downfall is the enemy entering the Holy of Holies. What was the difference between these incidents?

Titus entered the Temple intent on one mission, חורבן, destruction. He took a sword and slit the Parochet in his zeal to destroy the Temple. On the other hand, our Rabbis tell us that the Assyrians did not disturb the physical plant of the Temple. Instead they defiled all the oil that was used to light the Menorah. Were they kinder or gentler than the Roman legions? The following law sheds light on the distinction between the Greeks and the Romans. (Moed Katan) Rav Huna says that one who sees the burning of a Torah Scroll must rend his garments twice, once for the parchment and once for the letters that were burned, the כתב. This is the normative law in such a case quoted by Maimonides and others. However, this law would seem to contradict the story (Avoda Zara) of Rabbi Chanina Ben Tradyon, one of the 10 Martyrs, who was wrapped in a Torah scroll and set ablaze by the cruel Romans. His students asked him what he saw and he replied that he sees the parchment burning but the letters are flying off the parchment into the air. If Rabbi Chanina said that the letters do not burn, how could Rav Huna, an Amora who lived several generations after Rabbi Chanina, disagree with him? Why must the individual rend his garments over the letters?

Apparently there is a fundamental distinction between the burning of the Torah each referred to. The distinction is related to who burned the Torah. If a non-Jew, like the Romans, burns the Torah, then only the parchment can be consumed. The tyrant has no control over the letters. They cannot be burned, but instead float in the air. The more parchments they burn the greater the impact and power of the floating letters. Rabbi Chanina told his students not to worry for the Torah will continue as long as the letters survive. Rabbi Akiva said we must learn thousands

of laws from each and every letter, as the letters are the key. The Romans were intent on destruction and murder. They sacked the Temple and murdered the scholars and leaders of the people. When faced with an aggressive act of physical destruction, the people hunker down and recommit themselves to Gd and his Torah. The parchment may burn but the letters float in the air, untouched and ready to be gathered and reset to start over again. Rabbi Chanina, cruelly murdered by the Romans, recognized that their plan would ultimately fail. The Jews would persevere and recover. Their commitment remains to the letters and the Torah itself. For every generation of persecution and burnings of our Torah Scrolls, our answer is more and more commitment to study of Torah. The loss of a Sefer Torah in this situation, while tragic, requires rending of garments only once, as the Torah survives and Judaism continues.

However when Jews burn the Torah themselves, they defile the letters, the very soul of the Jewish People. It is very seldom that a Jew will burn a Torah Scroll. However he is capable of defiling the scroll and its letters. And when the letters become defiled, it too requires rending of garments. The Talmud asks regarding the Psalm of *מזמור לאסף אלקים באו גויים בנחלתך*, why does it begin with a song of joy? It would be more appropriate to open with a lamentation! The Chatam Sofer explained it is a song because it was gentiles and not Jews who entered the temple and destroyed the Temple. They were able only to destroy the physical, not the spiritual. Had Jews perpetrated these acts, the Temple would have been irretrievably defiled. When Herod undertook to beautify the Temple in improper ways, he defiled it instead.

When the Romans entered the Temple, the nation stood together against them. No Jew lifted a finger to help the Romans. This was a positive event worthy of song because only the parchment burned but the letters survived. On Chanukah, Jews accompanied the Greeks into the temple. *גזרת השמד*, our period of persecution did not begin in Beitar during the reign of Hadrian but rather in the time of Chanukah when the Greeks entered the Temple at the side of Jews and defiled it. It was Jews who ushered in the period of *שמד*. The nephew of Yossi Ben Tzrayda was the lead agent of the Greeks who instigated Jews to rebel against the law. Chanukah represented not *באו גויים בנחלתך* but rather *באו ישראל בנחלתך*. Jews cannot destroy but they can defile. They can burn not only the parchment but the spiritual letters as well.

The fundamental problem of Chanukah was defilement not destruction. It is an error to think that the Chanukah celebration is focused on the military battle between Judah Maccabee and the Greeks. The main battle was for the soul of the Jews themselves, a battle against Jews who wanted to defile everything and burn the parchment and the letters. This battle was kept hidden, in the עלמא דאיתכסי. The focus of Chanukah was not to save the parchment but the letters, in order to protect and save the soul from defilement. Rav Huna's ruling refers to a situation like Chanukah, as he does not disagree with the great Rabbi Chanina. Chazal refer to Jews who are our own people's enemy, as שונאי ישראל. Chazal could have written in the על הנסים that the events occurred during the period when the Hellenizing Jews confronted their brothers in an attempt to detach their religious moorings. In this case, a double rending of garments is required, one for the parchment and one for the letters that were ignored and forgotten. The miracle of Chanukah was that the Jews were able to turn the tide against the defiling influences consuming the nation's soul and spirituality.

Since the times of the Hasmoneans we did not have a situation where the majority of people rejected Torah as it was in that time. That battle to defeat the defilement carries forward to this day, when the majority of Jews have defiled themselves in rejecting the Torah. It is a victory in those days over defilement that still reverberates and is relevant in these days as well.

How does one battle against spiritual defilement, against the burning of the letters? The Torah tells us that when טומאה, ritual impurity, sinks deeply into an earthenware vessel, it cannot be salvaged and must be destroyed. It cannot be purified. Vessels made from other materials can be purified and salvaged. Why are there 2 different ways of dealing with a vessel that has become defiled? Why is it important to purify a vessel when we can simply purchase another one? Because these two approaches represent distinct ways to work with Jews who have been defiled. When it comes to defilement of the soul, טומאת הנפש, we have multiple kinds of defilements. The entire world suffers from a defiled soul as evidenced by its bereft behavior. One way of dealing with defilement is to follow the strict letter of the law, ובערת הרע מקרבך, evil must be eradicated. Like an earthenware vessel where the defilement sinks deeply into the vessel, with wickedness, haughtiness, chutzpah and debasement, not only is the vessel defiled, but its contents are defiled as well. There is no safe place in the vessel that is not defiled as the defilement is deeply embedded in it. We cannot contemplate mercy in this case. The only solution is to destroy the vessel as the defilement will never be removed. Had the

world understood the meaning of **הרע מקרביך** in 1936 and eradicated the Nazi evil, 20 million people may have been spared.

If the defilement has not burrowed deeply into the vessel but simply comes into contact with the vessel, such as improper friends or environment, the individual becomes defiled but the essence of the vessel, the person, is pure and can be saved. The image of Gd, **צלם אלקים**, can be recovered by passing it through cleansing water.

Sometimes, eradication of evil is the only way to act, we have no choice. One cannot purify a Hitler **ימ"ש** or Stalin **ימ"ש**. It can only be removed through **וכל** **הרשעה כלה כעשן תכלה כי תעביר ממשלת זדון מן הארץ**. But the Jew can still pray that we find another way besides **ביעור הרע** to heal the world, to purify it, without destroying it, **לתקן עולם במלכות ש-ד-י**. If **ביעור הרע** is destruction, then purification is **העלאת הרע**, to raise and transform it through kindness to a greater level of purity. The Jew who attains purity from his sin does not simply return to his previous state. What did he learn from the period of defilement and estrangement? Going through the purification process of the Mikva should make him better than he was before. The 13 Attributes of Mercy begin with **קל רחום וחנון**. Why repeat Gd's name twice? One Name is before the sin the other is after repentance. It teaches us that there is a great gap between these two Names. It represents **העלאת הרע**.

What is **העלאת הרע**? Perhaps we can understand it by analyzing several stories in the Torah and in Megilat Rut. Why was it necessary to detail the stories of Lot and his daughters, of Judah and Tamar? After all, in the **עלמא דאתגליא** these stories shine a primitive, negative light on the protagonists. Why was it necessary to relate the story in such minute detail? Indeed, why was it necessary to tell the entire story of Ruth? There are seemingly unflattering parts of the book of Ruth that superficially we could do without.

When taken together, these stories represent the foundations of **מלכות בית דוד**. The importance of **מלכות בית דוד** is not his political strength, his mighty warriors or his military victories. If that were true, we would have long ago forgotten about David and his legacy. It would have been impossible to maintain our connection to David, Jerusalem and Israel for thousands of years in exile on the physical might and battles waged by David. There must be something deeper here. There must be an **עלמא דאיתכסי** that points to something else. While the revealed world is destroyed by **חורבן**, the hidden world of **מלכות בית דוד** survives because of the dedication and actions of Lot's daughters and Tamar. In the **עלמא דאיתכסי** these are among the most

beautiful Parshiot. Through them we see the whole beauty of כנסת ישראל. These stories revolve around the potential of העלאת הרע.

וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאוד. How could bad come from a world that Gd pronounced to be good? If we use the abilities Gd gave us for positive purposes we can build worlds with them. This is what העלאת הרע means. On the other hand if we use them for the wrong purposes it results in destruction. If someone has the right attitude and approach, Hashem will sift through his actions and find the gold nuggets of good intention from the vast sand dunes of defilement even bringing forth the מלך המשיח. Gd brought together these disparate people who had fallen away but redeemed themselves through some character trait, revealing a depth that was invisible to the non-discerning eye. The stories of the daughters of Lot and Tamar and Judah convey the idea of העלאת הרע to virtue.

The Torah tells us, what prima facie, appears to be an insignificant, perhaps even vulgar story of the daughters of Lot who seduce their father and give birth to Moab and Amon. Why was it necessary to tell us this story? Indeed, by virtue of inclusion in the Torah as כתבי קדש, these stories have the same sanctity as שמע ישראל! Agnostics cite these stories as an example of the irrelevance of the Torah, even as the earliest examples of pornography. The daughters of Lot were unsophisticated, having been raised in a cruel environment. They thought the entire world was destroyed along with Sodom and the three of them were the only survivors. It was now their responsibility to re-populate the world. Had they been more educated or sophisticated, perhaps they would have immediately abandoned as absurd such a monumental mission of rebuilding a devastated world. How could they contemplate rebuilding their world when just a few hours ago the rest of their family and friends were consumed with the city of Sodom? Perhaps their less than moral upbringing influenced their actions, but they did it for a noble purpose. So they seduced their father, who perhaps may have been more culpable than they were in the seduction. The methods they employed were suspect and perhaps vulgar, however their intent, to rebuild a world immediately after death and destruction, was pure. They took an act of sin and elevated it through their ultimate intentions and were rewarded with children, who play a significant role in Jewish history and destiny.

Chazal say that at the time of the sale of Joseph everyone was busy. Reuben was busy with fasting to repent his actions, Judah was busy with his own personal tragedies and Gd was busy with the light of המשיח as told through the story of

Tamar. The מלכות sought by Gd has two 2 components: 1) to remain unbroken by destruction and exile. This is shown by our faith in the מלך המשיח; 2) to wait patiently for something, regardless of how long it takes. I repeatedly ask Gd to hear my prayer, but whether He accepts it or not, I remain committed, נפשי לד' משומרים לבקר שומרים לבקר.

We used to have Jews who remained awake, looking through the window at the long dark night awaiting redemption. They were not disheartened in the morning when their expectations were not realized. They simply began the cycle again. Indeed we see this among the great leaders of Israel. Sensing the gaping hole in Jewish life after the destruction of the Temple, Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai immediately sought to rebuild and enacted various תקנות to guarantee that we would not forget the Temple. He did this while the loss of the Temple was still fresh in the minds of the Jews. There is no time to despair, we must look forward and rebuild. Gd found this pre-requisite for monarchy in the superficially vulgar acts of the unsophisticated daughters of Lot. Just as they were able to rise up from a shattered world and rebuild, so must the Jewish People. There is no greater task for a king than this. They were perfect ancestors for such a king.

Where the daughters of Lot exemplified the ability to rise up from tragedy and rebuild, Tamar demonstrated the ability to wait. Tamar was enamored with Judah and his family and desperately wanted to bear their children. She married Er, Judah's eldest son and upon his death willingly marries Onan, who subsequently dies as well. Judah has no intention of allowing his third son Shayla to marry Tamar. He misleads her to sit and wait in her father's house until Shayla is old enough to marry. Tamar willingly agrees due to her desire to bear Judah's children.

The years pass by, and Tamar remains a widow, waiting for the call to come to marry Shayla and pursue her goal. Tamar gets older, and her friends have all married and started families of their own. Her wait is so long, that Judah's own wife dies and after a while he goes on a wool shearing trip, which apparently marked the end of his mourning period. Her friends taunt her that Shayla would never take an older widow for a wife. Judah will never take her either, even after the death of his own wife. But Tamar does not break her commitment to Judah. Her friends mock her devotion to Judah and her dream of bearing his children. The simple Tamar felt something binding her to Judah. She could not relinquish the feeling that something great would come from them but she did not know how or when. Her destiny forces her to sit at the crossroads and wait for Judah to fulfill her

destiny with him. Tamar is driven to wait by the עלמא דאיתכסי. Finally she realizes that the only way for her dream and mission to be fulfilled, is to act on her own as she has relations with Judah, and becomes pregnant with twins. While Tamar's actions may seem deceitful, her intentions were pure. Through her ability to wait, she realized her goal and elevated her actions to greatness with the birth of Peretz and Zerach.

The story of the daughters of Lot is that of the inconsolable mourner whose world is shattered by the loss of a close relative. Immediately upon filling in the grave, 2 rows are formed and the mourner passes between them to wishes of comfort among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. Out of the ashes of despair, the mourner must begin immediately to rebuild life. Just like Jerusalem, the Temple and מלכות בית דוד will be rebuilt, so will the mourner's life. We do the same thing on Tisha B'Av as we mourn the destruction of the Temple like the loss of a close family member. We are no different than the daughters of Lot who were able to rise from the ashes of a destroyed world and rebuild it. From the depths of despair on Tisha B'Av, we too start to hope again and look forward to redemption. After midday, we don our טלית ותפילין as we once again anticipate the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Zion and the return of מלכות בית דוד. At Mincha we recite the blessing of שמונה עשרה in נחם. Indeed, we are defined by our prayers that harp on the idea of redemption, return to Zion, the Temple and the restored מלכות בית דוד. Tamar teaches us that we must wait patiently for the fulfillment of the promise of redemption. Despite all our disappointments we continue to wait faithfully.

Ruth the Moabite, the prototypical convert, is specifically the one to bear the child of Boaz who would be the grandfather of King David himself. How could it possibly be that the מלך המשיח will be the child that results from the union of these 2 seemingly dishonorable incidents, involving the daughters of Lot and Tamar? It is illogical in the עלמא דאגליא. However if we look more deeply into them, we discover that both are characterized by elevation of sin, העלאת החטא. True, they appeared superficially to be obscene. However, on deeper analysis, they were done for the right reasons and will ultimately result in the fulfillment of the destiny the Jewish people were promised, the coming of מלך המשיח and return to Jerusalem.

Christian missionaries and our enemies mock us saying "how long will you wait for your Gd and your messiah to come?" We endured pogroms and crusades and have not yet been redeemed. Yet like Tamar, we remain committed to our Gd and our Torah, waiting for redemption to come. Where they see only the עלמא דאגליא,

we see the עלמא דאגליא. Often we see in retrospect Gd's outline. The עלמא דאגליא tells us to ignore the stories of Lot's daughters and Tamar. In hindsight we see how important they are. For without their noble acts, we would not have had a King David who is so central to Jewish destiny.

At the opening of the Israeli Parliament after the establishment of the State of Israel, speaker after speaker extolled the establishment of the state as the fulfillment of the Herzl's dream or the dreams of those that came on Aliyah in the late 19th century. They neglected to say that the establishment of the State, which perhaps can be viewed as the beginning of the beginning of the redemption process, owes itself more to the millions of Tamars and daughters of Lot throughout Jewish history, men and women, who patiently waited and continue to wait for the arrival of מלך המשיח and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. In spite of our history of blood, pogroms, Holocausts, death and destruction we remain loyal and wait. Unfortunately those leaders only saw the עלמא דאגליא, not the עלמא דאיתכסי.

We are all familiar with the story of Rachel the daughter of Kalba Savua who urged her husband to study for 20 years with Rabbi Eliezar Ben Hurkanos and ultimately became the great Tana and teacher of Torah in Israel. When he returned home she came out to greet him along a great throng of people. She was now much older, dressed in meager clothes she retained from her youth and was barely recognizable. As she approached her husband, his students pushed her away. When he saw her, Rabbi Akiva insisted that she be allowed to approach, exclaiming that his Torah and their Torah were ultimately hers. It was her power of patience, to wait all those years, never despairing that one day her husband would become the great teacher of Israel. We stand on her shoulders and others like her who waited for the fulfillment of our destiny.

In על הנסים we say that the Chanukah miracle included the defeat of the many by the few, the strong by the weak, the defiled at the hands of the pure, the wicked at the hands of those who engaged in Torah study. The elevation of the Jewish people from a state of defilement, העלאת הרע, was perhaps the major victory of the Chanukah experience. For only after one has sunk to a very low depth can he turn around and set himself on the proper path. The miracle of טמאים ביד טהורים is greater than רבים ביד מעטים in that it redeemed the defiled Jewish people and brought them to a higher level than they previously attained. Only then could they return to Gd's Temple and rededicate it.

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