

Inside Outside

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Celebrating the Oil

In the second Perek of Massechet Shabbat, the Talmud discusses the details of the mitzvah of hadlakat hamenorah on Chanuka. There is an extensive discussion regarding the permissibility and requirements of specific wicks and oils for use in our Chanuka menorah. The Gemara concludes:

R. Zera said in R. Mattenah's name, and others state, R. Zera said in Rab's name: Regarding the wicks and oils which the Sages said one must not light therewith on the Sabbath, one may light therewith on Hanukkah, either on weekdays or on the Sabbath.

Shabbat 21b

אמר רבי זירא אמר רב מתנה, ואמרי
לה אמר רבי זירא אמר רב: פתילות
ושמנים שאמרו חכמים אין מדליקין
בהן בשבת - מדליקין בהן בחנוכה, בין
בחול בין בשבת.

שבת כא:

It is striking to note that although the Talmud is very specific in its description and discussion of particular wicks and oils for use on Chanuka, there is no mention at all of any requirements for the Chanuka menorah itself. In fact, many authorities are of the opinion that one is not obligated to utilize a menorah at all. Simply arranging the lights in the proper order, in the correct location would be sufficient¹. Perhaps this observation can be appreciated in light of a fascinating description in the Midrash:

And why does one kindle lights on Chanuka? For at the time that the children of the Hasmonean High Priest vanquished the Greek kingdom, as it says "and raised up your sons, O Zion, over your sons, O Yavan" they entered the holy Temple and found there eight iron poles and they established them and they lit lights in them.

Pesikta Rabti 2

ולמה מדליק נרות בחנוכה אלא בשעה שנצחו
בניו של חשמונאי הכהן הגדול למלכות יון
שנאמר ועוררת בניך ציון על בניך יון (זכריה
ט' י"ג) נכנסו לבית המקדש מצאו שם שמונה
שפודין של ברזל וקבעו אותם והדליקו בתוכם
נרות

פסיקתא רבתי (איש שלום) פסקא ב

The Talmud Bavli corroborates this account with greater detail:

¹ The Avnei Nezer (Rabbi Avraham Borenstein, Sochatchov, 1838- 1910, Shu"t Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim 150) cites an opinion of the Chessed l'Avraham who requires a proper Menorah and offers fifteen levels of preference among specific types of Menorahs. However, the Avnei Nezer suggests that this is a dispute among the Rishonim. Rav Hershel Schachter, shlit"a, in his sefer, Nefesh Harav p.226, records that Rav Soloveitchik, zt"l, felt strongly that one does *not* require a Menorah. I heard from Rav Schachter, shlit"a, that Rav Soloveitchik followed his opinion in practice as well.

R. Jose b. Judah said: He should not make one even of wood, this being the way in which the kings of the house of the Hasmoneans made it. They said to him: Can you adduce this as a proof? The spits were of iron and they overlaid them with tin. When they grew richer they made them of silver. When they grew richer still, they made them of gold.

Rosh Hashana 24b

רבי יוסי בר יהודה אומר: אף של עץ לא יעשה, כדרך שעשו מלכי בית חשמונאי. אמרו לו: משם ראייה? שפודין של ברזל היו, וחיפום בבעץ. העשירו - עשאו של כסף, חזרו העשירו - עשאו של זהב
ראש השנה כד:

According to these descriptions, the Menorah itself was not involved in any miracle at the time of the victory of the Chashmonaim. On the contrary, the Menorah was a pale shadow of its original form, being constructed of simple wood-covered iron rods, instead of ornate, sculpted gold branches. This mundane portrayal of the Menorah is in contradistinction to the description of the oil that was astonishingly preserved and then miraculously lit to last eight days instead of one. Hence, we understand why the halacha concerns itself only with the details of the oil, the contents of the menorah, and no commemoration is made of the menorah itself. Yet, we are left to wonder. It is surely not by coincidence that the miracle occurred in the oil and not the Menorah. What lesson are we to learn from this?

Shem and Yefet

In Parshat Noach, the Torah details the tragic tale of Noah and his sons upon their leaving the ark:

20. And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard;
21. And he drank of the wine, and became drunk; and he lay uncovered inside his tent. 22. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.
23. And **he** took, Shem and Yefet, the garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. 24. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. 25. And he said, cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. 26. And he said, blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his slave. 27. God shall enlarge Yefet, and he shall live in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his slave.

Bereishit 9:20-27

(כ) ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם:
(כא) וישת מן היין וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה: (כב) וירא חם אבי כנען את ערות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחוץ:
(כג) ויקח שם ויפת את השמלה וישימו על שכמ שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערות אביהם ופניהם אחרנית וערות אביהם לא ראו: (כד) וייקץ נח מיינו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן: (כה) ויאמר ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו: (כו) ויאמר ברוך ה' אלהי שם ויהי כנען עבד למו: (כז) יפת אלהים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם ויהי כנען עבד למו:
בראשית ט:כ-כז

Rashi notes an unusual formulation in Pasuk 23. When the Torah describes Shem and Yefet taking the garment it states, “and **he** took.”

And he took, Shem and Yefet. It does not state and they took, rather and he took, to teach that Shem exerted himself

ויקח שם ויפת: אין כתיב ויקחו אלא ויקח, לימד (ב"ר לו, ו.) על שם שנתאמץ

in the mitzvah more than Yefet. Therefore [Shem's] sons merited the garment of tzitzit and Yefet merited burial, as it says, and I will give a place for Gog there as a burial.

Rashi 9:23

במצוה יותר מיפת, לכך זכו בניו לטלית של ציצית, ויפת זכה לקבורה לבניו, שנאמר אתן לגוג מקום שם קבר (יחזקאל לט, יא).
רש"י ט:כג

Rashi explains that the precise formulation of the Torah, wording “and **he** took” in the singular, is to emphasize that Shem played the dominant role in this mitzvah. Yet, the continuation of Rashi is difficult to understand. Why were Shem and Yefet each privileged to their specific respective spiritual gifts, tzitzit and burial? What do these rewards have to do with Shem and Yefet’s relationship to the mitzvah?

Religious persecution, Spiritual salvation

Perhaps we can better understand these issues in light of a fundamental theme of Chanuka, which is illustrated by a ruling in Shulchan Aruch:

The elaborate meals that we have many of [on Chanuka] are voluntary meals, because [the Rabbis] did not establish [the days of Chanuka] as ones of festive meals and joy.

Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 670:2

ריבוי הסעודות שמרבים בהם הם סעודות הרשות, שלא קבעום למשתה ושמחה
שולחן ערוך או"ח תרעב:ב

This statement, that the meals that we eat on Chanuka are technically not considered Seudat Mitzvah, is interesting if we compare it to the experience of Purim, our other Rabbinic holiday, on which we have a required Seudat Mitzvah. The distinction is explained by a passage in the Levush (Rabbi Mordechai Yaffee, 1530- 1612):

And because the Jews of that time were not subject to one ruler who decreed against them annihilation as it was in the days of Haman. Rather, the enemies came upon them for battle and didn't request of them except subjugation and for their hand to be upon Israel and to change their religion as is known from the story of Antiochus who did not decree against them death and destruction, only persecution to cause them to change their religion... and had the Jews been subject to them to be quashed under their hand, forced to pay tax to them, and change to their religion, G-d forbid, they would have not sought more. But, Hashem strengthened the hand of the Jews and they were victorious. Therefore, [the Rabbis] did not establish it except for praise and thanks, but not for festive meals and joy, as if to say, since they wanted to remove us from this, to deny our religion, G-d forbid, and with His help, they were unsuccessful and our hands were stronger, therefore, they established them in return to praise and thank Him for that

ומפני שלא נמסרו ישראל באותו זמן ביד מושל אחד שהיה מושל עליהם להריגה כמו שהיה בימי המן אלא שבאו האויבים עליהם למלחמה ולא בקשו מהם אלא בהכנעה ולהיות ידם תקיפה על ישראל ולהעבירם על דתם כידוע ממעשה אנטייכס שלא גזר עליהם להרוג ולהשמיד רק צרות ושמירות כדי להמיר דתם ... ואם היו ישראל מכנעים להם להיות כבושים תחת ידם ולהעלות להם מס וחוזרים לאמונתם חלילה לא היו מבקשים יותר אלא שנתן הש"י וגברה יד ישראל ונצחם לכך לא קבעום אלא להלל ולהודות ולא למשתה ושמחה כלו' כיון שהם רצו למנוע אותנו מזה לכפור בדת ח"ו ובעזרתו י"ת לא הפיקו זממם וגברה ידינו לכך קבעו אותם לחזור ולשבח ולהודות לו על שהיה לנו לאלוהים ולא עזבנו

*He was our G-d and did not allow us to abandon His service
... Therefore, the increase of meals on Chanuka is only
voluntary.*

Levush Hachor 670:2

מעבודתנו ... הילכך ריבויי הסעודות
שעושין בחנוכה אינן אלא סעודות
הרשות.
לבוש החור הלכות חנוכה תרע"ב

The history of Chanuka and the revolt of the Chashmonaim was not a reaction to external Greek political dominion or threat of annihilation as in the story of Purim. The Jews in Israel had been subject for decades to Greek hegemony in the land of Israel (with varying degrees of proper and improper government involvement in the functioning of the Beit Hamikdash). Only after the degradation of the Beit Hamikdash and the initiation of anti-religious decrees by Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) did the Maccabees challenge Greek authority. They fought in search of reclaiming and maintaining religious freedom, not on political grounds. They battled Jewish Hellenists as well as Greek armies to re-establish traditional Jewish mores and modes of worship, especially in the Beit Hamikdash. This notion, that the Chashmonaim were resisting religious persecution and not foreign rule is accented in the tefillah of Al Hanisim. The Al Hanisim prayer describes that the aim of the Greeks and Antiochus's religious persecution, was not to destroy us, rather: "*L'hashkicham toratecha ul'ha'aviram me'chukei retzonecha*" - To cause them to forget Your Torah and to remove from them the laws of Your will.

Hence, the salvation of the Chashmonaim and the holiday of Chanuka is a celebration of religious observance, not of physical survival. On Purim we feast because we were at risk of losing our physical existence. In contrast, the celebration of Chanuka for generations is not one that engages our physical bodies with lavish meals; it engages our spirits, our religious sensibilities with prayers and thanks to Hashem.

Inside Outside

This understanding that the conflict between the Syrian Greeks and the Chashmonaim was, at its core, not a political and military one but rather a religious one, reflects a broader difference in the worldview of these two societies. Perhaps we could encapsulate the difference between these cultures as "inside" versus "outside". Greek culture, as it was practiced at the time, placed great emphasis on the external aspects of the world. The human body and its form were highly regarded, almost worshipped, in a culture that celebrated the body in art and sports. Clothes were regarded as impediments to the appreciation of the external form of the human body. The physical world at large became an object of study in art and science, but it was understood to be the beginning and end of life. Nothing existed before the world that we see and nothing exists afterwards. This external view of life is contrasted with a Jewish perspective that focuses on the internal.

According to Jewish tradition, the body is significant because it houses the soul within; it is not essentially valuable in its own right. The world in which we live is significant as it houses and

manifests G-d residing within it. Judaism looks beyond the body to appreciate the soul within it, and it charges us to seek out Hashem who hides beyond the physical limits of our natural world.²

Perhaps this explains the text of Maoz Tzur which emphasizes, “*Vetimu Kol Hashmanim*” - they **defiled** all of the oil. They did not destroy or remove the oil; they made it *tamei*. Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, zt”l, former Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav, noted in a speech to his students that the notion of *tumah* highlights this distinction between inside and outside. From an external perspective, ritual impurity is imperceptible, and there is no distinction between pure oil and impure oil. Only from an inside, spiritual perspective is there a fundamental difference. The Greeks sought to impose their view that only the outside matters, while Jewish resistance declared that the inside, the spiritual qualities of the body, the world and life are what truly matter.

Ethics and Etiquette

Now the story of Shem and Yefet can be fully appreciated with an insight that Rabbi Hershel Schachter, shlit”a, shares in the name of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l.³ Rav Soloveitchik posited that there are two distinct principles which guide a person’s behavior: ethics and etiquette. Ethics mandates that a person act in accord with proper behavior under all circumstances. An ethical individual is bound to do the right thing regardless of context. In contrast, etiquette mandates behavior that conforms to social norms. These principles of etiquette are only in effect when one is in a social setting. In the privacy of one’s home and beyond the view of others, one is not bound by these guidelines. While ethics concerns itself also with the “inside”, etiquette only regards the “outside.” Shem was concerned with ethics, with what transpires on the inside. Hence, when he learned that his father was disgraced in his tent he immediately went to cover him. Yefet was a man of etiquette. Noach’s situation inside the tent was unknown to the outside world. There was no breach of etiquette and no need to respond. Yefet joined in only after Shem moved to act, as it would be a violation of basic etiquette for Yefet to stand by idly as Shem helped their father. This is the meaning of Rashi’s comment on the word *vayikach*, and **he** took; Shem took the initiative and Yefet joined later.

This distinction can explain the reward which each of them received. Shem was granted the mitzvah of tzitzit, which is a private mitzvah, signifying a personal, intimate relationship with Hashem. The Magen Avraham (Rabbi Avraham Abele Gombiner, 1633- 1683, Poland, Orach Chaim, 8:13) notes that although one may wear the strings of the tzitzit on the outside, the actual garment should be worn on the inside, under one's clothing. In contrast, Yefet was granted burial, which is a social convention. We bury the dead out of *kavod haberiyot*, human dignity, but not from any ethical or moral obligation.

² In contrast to Hellenism, Judaism guides us to cover our bodies and conceal ourselves in modesty, precisely because there is a precious quality within. For a fuller exploration of this thesis, see “Tzeniut, A Universal Concept” by Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm in his book, *Seventy Faces vol. 1*, pp. 190- 202.

³ Nefesh Harav, pp. 272- 273

Shem, the progenitor of the Jewish people and the monotheistic code of morality is the model of ethics and concern for the inside. Yefet is the father of Yavan, the Biblical progenitor of the polytheistic Greek society that is obsessed with the outside, the external.

Let us be clear: Judaism does not eschew the external, the role of etiquette. We appreciate it for its value. Yet the external is only meaningful when it is complemented by internal values and ethics. Arts and sciences are meaningful when informed and illuminated by the guiding values of Torah, as Noach himself noted, “*Yaft Elokim l’Yefet v’yishkon b’ohalei Shem*” - God shall enlarge Yefet, and he shall live in the tents of Shem.⁴ As the Gemara in Megillah 9b paraphrases: the beauty of Yefet is in the tents of Shem.

Chanuka: A Celebration of the Inside

Now we can fully appreciate the message of Chanuka, the victory of Jewish ethics and Torah values over a purely superficial worldview. This concept of an inner view of existence, the notion of Torah wisdom, is symbolized by oil and its light. Oil emerges from within, from inside an olive from which it is squeezed, and it is this substance that fuels the warmth and light of illumination. The greatest lesson of the Chashmonaim is the insistence upon purity of oil, the Torah light, that emanates from the inside. The spiritual vision of these warriors enabled them to perceive and appreciate the inside aspects of the world and not be carried away by the Hellenistic culture which held sway on the outside. Hashem choreographed the miracle of Chanuka to revolve around a cruse of oil, the symbol of ethics, and decidedly not on the Menorah itself, which is a visible, external symbol. Hence, our halachic insistence upon kosher oil de-emphasizes, and perhaps ignores, the Menorah itself. Instead, it accents this lesson that the victory of Chanuka is the continuation of our timeless values, our inside - the inner light of Torah. Perhaps this is why the mitzvah of hadlakat hamenorah is at the entrance of the home on the outside, or in a window overlooking the street. The light of our Menorah, the glow of the inside, is meant to radiate outside. The illumination of Torah, which is situated at and emanates from the inside, serves as a guiding beacon of light for the outside world in which we live.

⁴ Halacha recognizes the contribution of the Greek aesthetic as well. We see this in the Gemara in Masechet Megillah 9b, which uses this verse regarding Yefet and Shem to teach that according to the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, although one may only write a Sefer Torah in specific Hebrew script, one may also write a Sefer Torah in Greek. Even the Greek alphabet has holiness when it contains the words of Torah.