

Toldos

Perceptions • Kislev 5, 5784 • November 18, 2023 • Issue #2021



We are now in the month of *Kislev*, *Chanukah* territory. It was the last Jewish holiday to be established, and the only one to occur after the time of prophecy. This is why, unlike *Purim*, *Chanukah* was not immediately established as a

holiday, as the *Gemora* explains:

What is *Chanukah*? The rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* begin the eight days of *Chanukah* . . . When the Greeks entered the Temple they defiled all the oil that was in the Temple. When the *Chashmonaim* overcame them and defeated them, they searched and found only one jar of oil that had the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*, which had just enough oil to light the *Menorah* for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit from it for eight days. The next year they established [those days] and made them a holiday . . . (*Shabbos* 21b)

Unlike with respect to *Purim*, when Mordechai and Esther had *Ruach HaKodesh*, the incredible victory over the Greeks was not taken to be enough of a Divine sign to establish a new Jewish holiday for the nation. A time for immediate celebration? For sure. An eternal celebration? Not sure.

But when the oil burned supernaturally for seven extra days, then the rabbis of that generation realized that there had been something unique about their particular against-the-odds military victory. They took it as a Divine sign that they were meant to make a national holiday out of it. Thus *Chanukah* was born and celebrated the following year and henceforth.

But how did they know that the miracle was that kind of message? Maybe it was just God's way of saying, "Nice job, fellas," or, "Just to let you know that your victory was no fluke but engineered by Me!" Besides, why did they need any kind of sign at all? The *Midrash* had already predicted a 180-year Greek exile, and their victory had

come at the 180-year mark against the Greeks. How obvious can it get? And aren't you supposed to celebrate *any* day of miraculous redemption by saying *Hallel*?

Maybe we're not fully understanding exactly what was in doubt, and how the miracle of oil cleared it up. Maybe the Jewish people were ready to make a yearly holiday out of the military victory anyhow, but the miracle of the *Menorah* altered their perspective. Maybe the truer understanding is not that they established a holiday called *Chanukah*, but they established that the holiday they had already wanted to establish was really meant to be the holiday of *Chanukah*.

This requires some explanation.

Shabbos Day

THINK ABOUT IT for a moment. The last holiday to be officially established for the nation was *Purim*. The main miracle was the toppling of Haman, but there was also a military victory involved as well. How do we celebrate *Purim*? By recounting the story, giving charity, sending gifts, and having a drinking feast, all very active and physical forms of celebration.

Then why not celebrate the victory over the Greeks the same way? Perhaps they were about to, especially since they did not have any prophets to tell them what to do. And when in doubt, why not simply copy the generation that had prophets who got it right? Why not just make the victory over the Greeks "*Purim, Part 2*"?

They might have, had not the miracle of the oil occurred. That miracle they realized was God's way of saying, "No, this victory is different, and the holiday should be as well. In Mordechai's and Esther's time, the message was, 'I am God and you are My people. No matter where you are in the world, I will have your back, even if it means having to work through back channels.'" That was not the message of the *Chanukah* victory.

The miracle of the oil sent a different message. It said, "Even when the Mordechais and Esthers of history no longer exist, and less prominent people have to fight on behalf of the Jewish people and Torah, I will be there for you as I was for all your great ancestors before you. I will perform miracles for you as I did for them. It may look like you have to fight on the same level as everyone else around you, but I will fight for you on a higher one."

This would help to explain why the miraculous military defeat over the Greeks is not the main emphasis during the eight days of *Chanukah*, as the victory over Haman is on the day of *Purim*. It would have been, had God not injected the celebration with

a victory over *nature* by making the oil burn well beyond its physical capacity. This made us look at *physical* success in *spiritual* terms instead. We learned at that time that we had gone to war against nature, and won.

That's why it had to be a war against the Greeks, whose very God was the natural world. They worshipped it and idolized it, as the modern world still does to this very day. *Chanukah* reminds us each year that we still possess the capacity to defeat the natural world if we are prepared to follow in the footsteps of the *Chashmonaim* and, put ourselves out there for the sake of God and Torah.

In essence, this is what Ya'akov told Eisav when he bought the birthright from him in this week's *parsha*. Before selling it, Eisav asked Ya'akov what it meant and what it included. Ya'akov told him:

"There are many prohibitions and punishments and death penalties involved with it" . . . He (Eisav) said, "I am going to die because of it (i.e., the birthright). If so, why should I want it?" (*Rashi, Bereishis 25:32*)

Thus, the Torah concludes: "*Eisav despised the birthright,*" and we became God's people forever while Eisav and his descendants became subservient to nature. No wonder he and all those like him have had to be so forceful to get what they want.

Seudas Shlishis

IT IS QUITE amazing. When we think of the Jewish people, we think of one small religion in a world of a couple huge religions. The amazing thing is how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all came from one family, beginning with Ya'akov, Eisav, and Yishmael respectively.

But the two fundamental ideologies of world history were in Rivkah's womb at the beginning of this week's *parsha*, the root of the Jewish people and the root of the Roman Empire. Never before have twins been so unlike each other.

One might say, "Well, the Romans were just one people who may have lasted for hundreds of years, but they are now long gone. Sure they have descendants, but they're nothing like the original Roman's themselves." But that is not completely accurate. Many have wanted and tried to be the continuation of the Roman Empire, like the Nazis, for example. That's why they called themselves the "Third Reich."

And even though America's founding fathers rejected European control, they embraced many of the values of the Roman Empire. They even modeled their architecture and government like the original Romans. Washington was supposed to have been the new Rome, because that is how Europeans thought at that time of

history, in terms of continuing the legacy of the Roman Empire.

Russia too. “Coincidentally,” “Russia,” transliterate into Hebrew means “evil,” which Eisav was called. Their national color is red, just like Eisav was. And their leaders have certainly acted like Eisav in history, plundering other peoples and imposing their will on surrounding nations with brute force to this day.

Once again, though the Torah is discounted by so many as being written by man and over many generations, it has offered remarkable insight into current nations for over three millennia now. It has predictions that could only have been made if “someone” had an accurate vision of the future back then.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 73

LEARNING THE ENTIRE Bavli had become important to me a long time ago. I started long before the *Daf HaYomi* became so popular, so it was an important personal goal in which I was encouraged by my *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rabbi Noach Weinberg, *zt”l*. I go at my own pace, and when I eventually finish a round, I just start again.

Where I am in the course of the 2,711 folio pages on any given day is totally unpredictable and hard to plan. Some days I have more time to learn and I cover more ground. Some days I am more focused than others and I can go a little faster. There are so many variables that determine where I close my *gemora* one day and open it the next.

There is a popular *parsha* sheet distributed to the *shuls* each week. It is one page (both sides), colorful, informative, with usually a drawing in the middle of the first page that pulls you in. On the back side, there is a box with its own drawing and a *halachab* that I find to be very informative, often one I did not know before.

I rarely read the part on the *parsha* because it is so long and I have my own learning to do. But I have often read the *halachab* because it is short and to the point. But I do not do it every week, because sometimes I don’t see the *parsha* sheet in *shul*, or I don’t feel like taking the time to read it.

But I wonder about the odds of seeing a lone *parsha* sheet last *Shabbos* in *shul*, deciding to pick it up and learning a *halachab* that was based on the very obscure *gemora* I had just learned moments before. The *halachab* had to do with which *mitzvos* can be done within the vicinity of a dead person while in a cemetery.

The irony of the situation was not lost on me and at the moment, I felt a great sense of *Hashgochab Pratis*—Divine Providence. The odds against such a “coincidence”

happening have to be astronomical, and therefore could only have been arranged by God. But why? Just to say that He is there? Just to say hi?

Maybe. We all have similar stories and have felt the same way at one point or another. But we can sum them up with one phrase: *Ain Od Milvado*, because it also means that God is there too, even in those situations and at those times that seem too insignificant for Him to reveal Himself. But He does nonetheless.