

Torah Weekly

Of Shepherds and Statesmen

Is isolationism the only way to live as faithful Jews, or can we scale the ghetto walls and still remain devout? This is, of course, an ongoing debate among different schools of thought in our community. Some look down on those who insist on insulating themselves as being too tentative, too insecure in their own Jewish identity. Otherwise, why should they fear the outside world? Whereas those who have opted to shelter themselves inside the ghetto would argue that engaging a hedonistic, morally corrupt society is nothing less than spiritual suicide.

And then there are those who took the risk and lived to tell the tale.

Our Parshah recounts the dramatic episode of Joseph and his brothers. The young boy sold into slavery has since catapulted to prominence and is now viceroy of Egypt. The brothers come down from Canaan seeking sustenance during a famine. They encounter the viceroy face to face but do not realize that it is their own long lost brother.

"And Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him" (Genesis 42:8). Rashi explains that when they had last seen each other the brothers, being older, were mature and bearded while Joseph was still young and without a beard. Thus, it was easier for him to recognize them than vice versa.

Applying a more homiletic interpretation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe understands the brothers' lack of recognition not on the facial level but on the spiritual. The brothers were shepherds. It suited their spiritual lifestyle to be alone in the meadows, surrounded by nature and unchallenged by a society that might be hostile to their beliefs.

The sheep they tended to didn't give them a hard time on religious issues. That Joseph could remain a devoted son of Jacob, faithful to his father's way of life while working in the hub of the mightiest superpower on earth was totally beyond their comprehension. They could not fathom or recognize such a thing. Indeed, later we will read how Jacob himself is deeply gratified to learn that the son he had given up for dead was not only alive but that he was *my son*, i.e. faithful to Jacob's traditions.

There is no question that it is easier to be Jewish among your own. Without a shadow of a doubt, it is much tougher and far more testing to practice your faith as a minority. Nobody enjoys sticking out like a sore thumb. So sequestering yourself in your own little comfort zone makes perfect sense. Unless, of course, you believe that you have a responsibility to the world around you. When you believe that G-d expects nothing less from you than to change the world, then simply treading water is not enough. Then you have no option but to go out and take on the world, engage it and make it a more G-dly place.

All Jacob's sons were righteous men. But Joseph was the greatest. He is known as *Yosef HaTzadik*, Joseph the Righteous. Because it is one thing to be righteous in the fields and the forests. It is another to be righteous among men; especially men and women steeped in moral depravity, as were the Egyptians.

The viceroy of Egypt then must be roughly equivalent to the President of the United States, or at least the Secretary of State, today. Imagine that the person holding such high office is a committed, practicing Jew. He is successful in the fulfillment of his governmental duties, brings stature to the position, while at the very same time living the life of a devout Jew. Quite mind-

boggling, but Joseph achieved it. And it was in this spirit that he raised his children, Ephraim and Menashe.

That's why Joseph is an important role model for our generation. Most of us find ourselves in a socially integrated society. We mix in many different circles. We live in a wall-less, even wireless community. Will we maintain our Jewishness with dignity and integrity despite the challenges thrust upon us by a wide open society? This is the question that Joseph answers. It may not be easy but it can be done.

So whether we are head honchos in the corporate hierarchy or diplomats in high office, let the viceroy of Egypt, Joseph the faithful son of Jacob the Jew, inspire us by his example.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

The Miracle of the First Night

Certain facts are taken for granted. At times, however, a little thought raises real questions regarding the logic behind these concepts which are simply accepted at face value. For example: Chanukah is eight days long because the oil which would naturally have fueled the menorah for only one day miraculously lasted for eight. Everyone knows this since their days in Hebrew school. But does this make sense? If there was sufficient oil to burn for one day, then the miracle lasted only seven days. Why celebrate the first day, if nothing miraculous occurred then?

This question has long bothered Jewish scholars, and many, many answers have been suggested. Most of these answers demonstrate how there was indeed some sort of miracle on the first day of Chanukah too. Perhaps, however, it is unnecessary to establish the occurrence of any miracle on the first day of Chanukah in order to

December 12-19, 2020
27 Kislev - 4 Tevet, 5781

Torah reading:
Mikeitz: Genesis 41:1 - 44:17
Haftarah: Kings I 3:15 - 4:1

PARSHAT MIKEITZ

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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justify its inclusion in the holiday. Perhaps we are celebrating the oil itself, which very naturally fueled the menorah on that day. An interesting episode recounted in the Talmud (*Taanit 25a.*) will “illuminate” the matter:

The Mishnaic sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was a renowned miracle-worker. Shortly after sunset one Friday evening, he noticed his daughter sobbing. Upon asking her the reason for her distress, she explained that she had mistakenly lit the Shabbat candles with vinegar instead of oil. Rabbi Chanina comforted his daughter: “Do not be troubled, my dear. The One who commanded oil to burn will command vinegar to burn . . .” Needless to say, the candles did not go out. In fact, they burned until the following night, when the *havdalah* candle (which accompanies the Saturday night ceremony signaling the end of the Shabbat) was kindled from their flames!

This story is so striking and unique because Rabbi Chanina didn’t respond by saying, “Wanna see something amazing? Watch this miracle!” Rather, in the eyes of this holy sage, vinegar burning was no more spectacular than oil burning. The only difference between the two was how frequently they occur. If the definition of “miracle” is G-dly intervention in personal or national affairs, then every phenomenon is miraculous—for everything that occurs is a direct result of G-d’s command. “The Guardian of Israel *never* slumbers nor sleeps,” but His watchful eye can and usually does express itself in natural means. Nature is merely the curtain which conceals the grand Puppeteer from our sight.

Nevertheless, we treasure miracles, and holidays are instituted to commemorate the more consequential ones. We cherish those precious moments in history when G-d chose supernatural means to come to our rescue, when the curtain was ripped away, leaving the puppeteer exposed. Rabbi Chanina had the ability to see through the curtain every day, but we don’t. To us, vinegar burning is a remarkable sight to behold.

Once the curtain has been temporarily lifted, the recognition that there is a puppeteer doesn’t fade even after the curtain is restored. After witnessing vinegar burning, we realize that oil’s ability to burn is also a result of G-d’s command.

The seven miraculous days when the menorah remained lit bring us to understand that the first day was no less “miraculous.”

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

Sunday, December 13, 2020 --- 27 Kislev, 5781

3rd Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

On the 25th of Kislev in the year 3622 from creation, the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. The victorious Jews repaired, cleansed and rededicated the Temple to the service of G-d. But all the Temple’s oil had been defiled by the pagan invaders; when the Jews sought to light the Temple’s menorah (candelabra), they found only one small cruse of ritually pure olive oil. Miraculously, the one-day supply burned for eight days, until new, pure oil could be obtained. In commemoration, the Sages instituted the 8-day festival of Chanukah, on which lights are kindled nightly to recall and publicize the miracle.

Flood rains cease (2105 BCE)

The forty days and nights of rainfall which covered the face of earth with water in Noah’s time ended on Kislev 27 of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE). The flood itself lasted a full year, as related in Genesis 6-8).

R. Chaim of Tchernovitz (1817)

Rabbi Chaim of Tchernovitz (1760-1817) was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and of Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov. He authored *Be’er Mayim Chayim* (“Well of Living Waters”), a commentary on Torah. Rabbi Chaim passed away on the 3rd day of Chanukah.

2nd liberation of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1800)

Two years after his arrest and liberation in 1798 Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (founder of Chabad, 1745-1812) was arrested a second time; again, the charges were that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the Czar. His second incarceration was less severe than the first; yet Chassidim mark the anniversary of his release on the third day of Chanukah with *farbrengens* (Chassidic gatherings) and the study of his teachings.

According to other versions of the story, the liberation occurred on the fifth day of Chanukah. Apparently the liberation happened in two stages

Monday, December 14, 2020 --- 28 Kislev, 5781

4th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

Tuesday, December 15, 2020 --- 29 Kislev, 5781

5th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

Passing of R. Chizkiyah de Silva (1698)

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R. Chizkiyah was born in Italy, and at the age of nineteen, he traveled to Jerusalem, where he studied under R. Moshe Galante (see calendar entry for 21 Shevat). He authored *Pri Chadash*, a classical commentary on the Code of Jewish Law, and *Mayim Chayim*. He passed away on 29 Kislev at the age of thirty-nine (some date his passing as 28 Kislev) and is buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

Wednesday, December 16, 2020 --- 1 Tevet, 5781

6th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

Esther made Queen (362 BCE)

“And Esther was taken to King Achashverosh, to his palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tevet, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his favor and kindness more than all the virgins; he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in Vashti’s stead” (Book of Esther 2:16-17). This set the stage for the miracle of Purim six years later, on the 13th and 14th of Adar of the year 3405 from creation (356 BCE).

Thursday, December 17, 2020 --- 2 Tevet, 5781

7th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

Friday, December 18, 2020 --- 3 Tevet, 5781

8th Day of Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

Death of Jacob Frank (1791)

Jacob Frank claimed to be the reincarnation of the false Messiah Shabbetai Zvi. In the mid-1700’s, he sought to create a new religion that would incorporate both Judaism and Christianity, leading to the formation of the Frankist sect, centered in Poland. Many rabbis of the time, including the Baal Shem Tov, battled the new sect and its leader vigorously and successfully halted their influence.

Shabbat, December 19, 2020 --- 4 Tevet, 5781

Passing of R. Gershon Henoch Leiner (1890)

R. Gershon Henoch was a Polish Rebbe centered in the town of Radzyn. He is famous for his efforts in reinstating the *tekhelet*—the blue wool mentioned in Scripture, that is to be attached to each corner of the *tzitzit* garment. The blue color derives from a marine creature known as the *chilazon*, the identity of which has been forgotten over centuries of exile. R. Gershon Henoch identified the *chilazon* with the cuttlefish.