

LUBAVITCH OF N. C.

Thoughts From The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Chanukah, Then and Now

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

The story of Chanukah is described in the Talmud in the following manner:

During the occupation of the Holy Land by the Greeks, the latter entered the Hechal Inner sanctum of the Holy Temple and defiled all the oils in the Hechal. When the Hasmoneans defeated them, one cruse of oil was found, however, which evidently had not been touched by the Greeks. It contained oil sufficient for one day only. The menorah was rekindled and the oil miraculously lasted for eight days (until new oil could be prepared for the menorah).

From the text of the Talmud it is clear that the defilement of the oil was not accidental, but intentional and systematic. A question arises: If the purpose of the Greeks was to put out the menorah and prevent its rekindling, why did they merely defile the oil; they could have more effectively used it up or destroyed it completely?

The answer is this: By emphasizing that the Greeks defiled all the oils in the sanctuary, our Sages indicated to us the true objective of the Greeks, namely, that it was not to prevent the rekindling of the menorah, but rather that it should be rekindled with defiled oil; hence they purposely left a supply of defiled oil in the sanctuary to be readily available for this purpose.

Here lies the essential aspect, as well as the message, of Chanukah:

Chanukah recalls the collision of two worlds: the Jewish world of faith, Torah, and particular way of life, based on pure monotheism, with its concept of holiness in the daily life down to the minutest detail, on the one hand; and the Hellenistic culture, with its polytheistic and largely materialistic concept of life, on the other.

The Greeks used force of arms to impose their culture on conquered peoples and lands. However, their aim was not to eradicate indigenous

cultures, but rather to Hellenize and assimilate them.

The Greeks were willing to recognize the Torah, or even accept it, as a perfect and beautiful literary creation, a work of poetry, wisdom profound philosophy, etc., provided it was considered as a human creation, something like their own mythology, which was a human invention, and where the deities were represented in human shapes and forms, with human characteristics, passions, etc.

As such, the Torah could be changed and modified from time to time, so as to be made to harmonize with the character of the ruling class and the novel ideas of the period, which would do away with the permanence and immutability of religious institutions, such as the Shabbat, circumcisions, etc.

Thus it was not the suppression of the Torah that they aimed at, but at its acceptance as the G-d given word. Similarly they were not averse to the moral and ethical values con-

tained therein, but they prohibited the Divine statutes, which distinguish the Jewish way of life.

Moreover, they favored, and actually endeavored to bring about the rekindling of the menorah, specifically in its hallowed place in the sanctuary, so it could spread its light everywhere as before, except that its light should have the Greek "touch," the "touch" that defiles the oil.

The menorah, which was kindled with pure and consecrated oil, was the visible symbol of the purity of the Jewish way of life. Its Perpetual light flashed this message from the Holy Temple to every Jew wherever he might be.

The Greeks were resolved to change this. Indeed, there were Jews, too, Jewish Hellenists, who felt that the "touch" of the more modernistic and sophisticated Greek culture ought to be applied to the Jewish faith, religion and Torah. But a handful of Hasmoneans, whose vision had not been blurred, recogniz-

ed that this "touch" is a fatal blow that strikes at the inner sanctum of Jewish life.

Divine Providence saw to it that a cruse of oil, pure and uncontaminated, should be left, with which to rekindle the menorah, and that it should not only hold its own, but should grow and spread and keep the Perpetual Light burning.

What was there in those days is just as true in our day and age. Under the assault of environmental influences, a Jew may find his attachment of G-d (through the observance of the Torah and Mitzvot invaded and contaminated by ideas which are alien to the Jewish way of life.)

But in the inner sanctum of his soul there is always a "cruse of oil" that remains pure and holy: that spark of G-dliness which is his Divine Soul, which is indestructible and beyond reach of defilement. The Jew has but to kindle it, and although it may seem like a tiny light at first, it is sufficient to light up one's whole being until it becomes a Perpetual Light.

The Jewish Calendar

Candlelighting

Dec. 6 - 4:53 p.m.
Dec. 7 - 5:53 p.m. (1st night Chanukah)
Dec. 8 - 5:28 p.m. (2nd night Chanukah)
Dec. 9 - 5:28 p.m. (3rd night Chanukah)
Dec. 10 - 5:28 p.m. (4th night Chanukah)
Dec. 11 - 5:28 p.m. (5th night Chanukah)
Dec. 12 - 5:28 p.m. (6th night Chanukah)
Dec. 13 - 4:54 p.m. (7th night Chanukah)
Dec. 14 - 5:54 p.m. (8th night Chanukah)
Dec. 20 - 4:57 p.m.
Dec. 27 - 5:00 p.m.
Jan. 3 - 5:06 p.m.
Jan. 10 - 5:12 p.m.



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Rabbi Yossi Groner

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