

The following thought is based on *shmuez* from Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz זצ"ל.

To explain why the Chanukah holiday was established, the Gemara (Shabbos 21b) describes how after cleaning and purifying the Beis Hamikdosh from the defilement of the Greeks, the Kohanim wanted to light the Menorah. But the only pure oil to be found was just enough to last one day. Miraculously it lasted for eight days, which gave them enough time to procure new pure oil.

But what about the other Chanukah miracle? What happened to the miraculous victory over the mighty Greek army? The Greeks were the superpower of the world, while the Maccabees were but a handful of Kohanim without any fighting experience or knowledge of military strategy. A modern-day example would be a handful of Kollel rabbis taking on the German Army! This remarkable victory saved our entire nation and it would seem to be far more significant than the miracle of oil which merely provided eight days of a lit menorah.

The question only becomes stronger when we realize how frequently miracles would occur in the Beis Hamikdosh. The Mishna Avos and the Gemara Yuma record many miracles that occurred there on a daily basis. Let us use the “Lechem Hapanim” as an example. Twelve loaves were stacked on a table in the Beis Hamikdosh and replaced once a week. Incredibly, these week-old loaves remained hot and fresh from the moment that they left the oven until they were eaten. Miracles like this occurred on a consistent basis for hundreds of years! What then, is the big deal with oil that for one time in history lasted so long?

If you are not bothered yet, how about this: There is a rule concerning sacrifices called *טומאה הותרה בציבור* namely, if communal sacrifices cannot be processed in a pure state, they are immune to most issues of impurity. Lighting the menorah is a communal service and if pure oil is unavailable *it is completely permitted to use impure oil when lighting the menorah!* Not only could the oil miracle be considered “ordinary”, it was completely unnecessary! Yet, the Gemara presents it as the sole reason for establishing the Chanukah holiday.

To further confound the issue, when we say the Shemoneh Esrei and Birchas Hamazon during Chanukah we insert the passage “Al Hanisim”. There is no mention of miraculous oil in Al Hanisim. Instead, only the miraculous defeat of the Greeks is emphasized. According to the Gemara the miraculous oil is the only reason to celebrate the holiday and yet we ignore it in our prayers!

Before answering these questions let us turn to an incident in next week’s Parsha.

Yosef is betrayed by his brothers and sold to Arab merchants. In passing, the Torah mentions the trivial fact that these merchants were carrying spices. The Midrash comments that this note is to teach us that although these types of merchants would usually transport foul-smelling fuels, Hashem wanted to spare Yosef their odor and so He ensured that this caravan would carry fragrant spices.

Let us imagine what is going through Yosef’s mind at this time. That morning he was on top of the world studying Torah with his loving, close father. In the course of a few hours he had come close to being killed by his brothers only to be spared by being sold as a slave. Now he was headed to a most immoral country - one that was far from the ideals that he was raised with. Let us not forget that Egypt was a country from which no slave had ever escaped. Oh, but the aroma... How could even

the most pleasant scent during such a horrible journey provide any relief? Why would Hashem create a miracle that would seem to be so impractical?

Yosef was experiencing a most difficult time in his life. A time that can easily make someone feel very far from Hashem. But because Hashem loved Yosef, Hashem wanted him to know that He was with him even in this circumstance. Through a slight change in the normal way of the world, through a small miracle, Hashem showed Yosef His presence. Now he would know that Hashem was with him. Indeed, the spices didn't lift Yosef's spirits with their scents but rather with their presence.

Let's skip ahead in the Torah to the birth of Moshe. The Egyptians were killing all the Jewish babies and in order to save his life, Tziporah, his mother, hid him in a basket and placed him in the Nile. His sister Miriam remains behind waiting and watching to see what would unfold. Soon enough Pharaoh's daughter finds the baby and wants to keep him. When he refuses to nurse from the Egyptian nurses, in steps Miriam and suggests using a Jewish nurse. Pharaoh's daughter agrees, Miriam presents her mother and Yocheved "lands the job" of feeding her own son. From this, the Midrash concludes, we can see how much Hashem loves righteous people. Not only was Tziporah reunited with her own child, but she was paid for it!

Let us imagine what is going through Tziporah's mind at this time. She was no doubt extremely sad when she had to place her baby on the banks of the Nile. Now she is finally reunited with him. But wait... the money! The money?? At a moment like this, money could not possibly be important to any mother- let alone a woman as great as Yocheved. What is this Midrash saying?

To explain this Midrash, we need to recognize the type of action that clearly indicates a parent's love. Let us use an example of a father buying a wheelchair for his handicap son. From this purchase alone, there isn't an indication of love. The act could easily be attributed to a feeling of responsibility. If, however, the father purchases an ice cream cone for his son, this could be an indication of the father's love.<sup>i</sup> *The more unnecessary a provision is, the more apparent is its provider's love.* This rule can be applied when observing Hashem's miracles as well. The more unnecessary a miracle is, the more it indicates Hashem's love for its beneficiary.

This is what the Midrash means. It was completely unnecessary for Yocheved to receive compensation. No doubt she would have *paid* to be reunited with her baby Moshe! Nonetheless, through performing this unnecessary miracle Hashem showed her His love.

Let us now return to our key questions. What about the miracle of the oil is so unique and how does it outshine the historical miracle of winning the war? The extraordinary miracle which was necessary in order to keep us alive only shows Hashem's feelings of responsibility towards us. He promised that the Jewish People will survive for all eternity and when our sins had gotten us into a terrible situation, He rescued us from it. That was necessary. But Hashem did more: After the fight with the Greeks was over we still felt quite far from Hashem. The vast majority of Jews had become Hellenists and our nation's religious, physical and emotional infrastructure was in ruins. What did Hashem do? He performed a miracle: Oil that should have burned for one day lasted for eight - *a completely superfluous miracle*. And because of that very fact we establish a holiday - Hashem had shown us His love.

All that remains to be answered is why in Al Hanisim - the paragraph that is inserted in our prayers - we elaborate on the miracle of the war and completely gloss over the reason for the holiday.

Before we answer this question let us make one key observation regarding Al Hanisim. Usually, holiday insertions are placed in the blessings associated with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdosh (since only then can they be celebrated properly). The insertion of Al Hanisim however, is inserted in the blessings of Thanksgiving.

A mother prepares supper for her child and as a special treat, she makes cake for dessert. What will the child appreciate more? What *should* the child appreciate more? Unfortunately, human tendency does not feel gratitude towards compulsory acts and the cake – not the supper – will get the thank you. The mother feels obligated to make supper and the child feels that it is coming to her. But this mindset is wrong. Appreciation should not depend on the attitudes and abilities of the giver but on the degree of benefit that a recipient receives. In fact, the opposite of our natural tendency is true: The more essential a provision is, the more its gratitude is warranted.

The miracle of winning the war was indispensable – without it the Jewish nation would not have survived. Therefore, we are much more obligated to show our thanks for it. In fact, when we mention it in Al Hanisim an unusual amount of expression is used to describe the miracle. And perhaps the less significant oil miracle is completely omitted in order to stay focused on the more essential miracle of the war.

A final note: The name Chanukah is a derivation of the word חניכה – “dedication” as it marks the rededication of the Beis Hamikdosh. It is also the contract word חנו כ"ה – “we rested on the 25<sup>th</sup>” for on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kisleiv we rested from the battle with the Greeks. In contrast to other countries that commemorate the day that the battle is won, we celebrate the day that we are able to rest from war. We commemorate the day we were once again able to live peacefully, use the Beis Hamikdosh, light its menorah and feel Hashem’s loving embrace. May it happen again speedily in our days.

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<sup>i</sup> (We are speaking of a parent who is purchasing the wheelchair and ice cream altruistically for his child and not for any personal reasons)