

Good Shabbos and a *Freilichen* Chanukah, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Yankie and Dena Goldsmith on the *bar mitzva* of their son, Zevi. Mazel Tov to Zevi's grandparents, Isser and Idie Goldsmith and Nosson and Lisa Garfunkel.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Idie and Isser Goldsmith, "in honor of our grandson Zevi Goldsmith's *bar mitzva* this Shabbos." Mazel Tov!
- Cheryl Mitnick, "in memory of her mother, Mollie Mitnick, Mala bas Elchonon, whose *yahrtzeit* is (today) 26 Kislev."
- Henry and Charlotte Reches and family, "(1) with *Ha'Koras Ha'Tov* to Rabbi Marwick and (2) to commemorate the following *yartzeits*--Mrs. Deborah Spiegelman (Devorah Mirel bas R' Aharon Ha'Kohen) 8 Cheshvan, Mr. Mark Reches (R' Mordechai ben Sholom Elazar) 21 Cheshvan, Dr. William N. Lerer (Zev Natan Ha'Kohen ben R' Aharon Ha'Kohen) Rosh Chodesh Kislev, R' Aharon Lerer (R' Aharon ben R' Shlomo Leibish) 28 Kislev, and Mrs. Shirley Rabinowitz (Shaindel bas R' Aharon Ha'Kohen) 29 Kislev."
- Hillel and Dena Soclof, "in memory of Dena's father, Aron Bernstein, Aharon Yehoshua ben R. Ephraim Peshel, whose *yahrzeit* is 29 Kislev "
- Shraga and Yehudis Sunness, in memory of Shraga's father, Benjamin Sunness, Boruch ben R. Zalman, whose *yahrtzeit* is 30 Kislev.

May all the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may all the sponsors be rewarded for their generosity and support of the shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, and good health!

Sadly, we learned on Thursday of the passing of a great rabbinic leader, Rav Gedaliah Dov Schwartz *zt"l*. I am including part of the statement issued by the Orthodox Union so that you will get some idea of the immensity of the loss:

Rav Schwartz led the American Jewish community for over sixty years and the Chicago Jewish community for over thirty, serving as the present Rosh Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council and as Av Beth Din of Beth Din of America.

He was a universally recognized leader of American Jewry, whose psak halacha and wise counsel were sought by innumerable lay people, community leaders, and rabbis alike.

Rav Schwartz had a breadth and depth of knowledge that spanned centuries of Jewish law, allowing him to draw upon a reservoir of understanding in issuing halachic guidance to tens of thousands and in authoring his three sefarim.

In addition, he was extraordinarily well read and well spoken, serving pulpits in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Boro Park, NY prior to settling in Chicago in 1987. Rav Schwartz was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey, studied at Yeshiva College and was amongst the first American-born students to receive semicha from RIETS and study with Rav Joseph B.

Soloveitchik, zt"l. Later Rav Schwartz became the first second-generation American rabbi to publish an original halakhic work, Divrei Regesh, which received the endorsement of the late Rav Aaron Kotler, zt"l. Aside from Rav Schwartz's encyclopedic knowledge of Torah literature, he was an incredibly compassionate and sensitive person, whose impeccable midos and warm demeanor made him approachable to all. He earned the genuine respect of the entire spectrum of Jewish communal leaders, even of those who differed with him in their religious viewpoint. His illness the past few years presented an enormous physical challenge, which Rav Schwartz accepted with extraordinary grace and dignity. He will be missed deeply by his family, by his Chicago Jewish community, and by all of American and world Jewry.

I was privileged to have had a personal relationship with Rabbi Schwartz. Many of you may remember that he visited our *shul* and community quite frequently, when he stayed with his daughter, Mrs. Rivka Leah Goldman, who is a Shomrei member. When Rabbi Schwartz visited her, he would attend our *shul* and give *drashos*. He was in Shomrei for my first Sukkos and Pesach, which gave me the opportunity to consult him about the numerous complex *shailos* that came up. Over the years, I called him with difficult questions, and was always amazed by his vast knowledge and sensitivity. May his memory be a blessing.

Many commentators through the ages have asked why, in our celebration of Chanukah, the miracle of the oil is the main focus, not the military victory. The “*pach shemen*” really defines the Yom Tov, through the menorahs we light and the oily latkes and donuts we eat. In contrast, the actual war between the Greeks and the Maccabim is mentioned only in the “*al hanissim*” prayer of gratitude that we recite during *davening* and *birchas hamazon*.

This seems counterintuitive. The miraculous war--the few defeating many, the amateur army with basic weapons defeating a well-trained army with sophisticated munitions--guaranteed us continued life as a people. The miracle of the oil was simply icing on the cake...why is there a disproportionate focus on the oil that lasted eight days?

I would like to suggest that, in Judaism, of course we value life for its basic meaning; our ability to breath...our beating hearts...and for that definition of life we are thankful and have gratitude every moment.

But what we **value and celebrate even more** than basic life is the ability God gave us to transform our lives by living lives of meaning and achieving a spiritual life through adherence to Torah and *mizvos*. We thank God every day for basic life, מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים שהחזרת בי גשמי, while we **celebrate** on *Yamim Tovim* the heroic spiritual choices in Jewish history that give life everlasting meaning.

It is one thing to survive a war...not to die at the hands of the Syrian Greeks. But then what? Once you are not dead, what do you do with that opportunity? Once you have been saved from death, how do you choose to live? What are you living for?

The Maccabim teach us that lesson. Against all odds, they survived a war against the world's strongest army. Instead of the predicted massacre, the amateur Jewish army was not defeated. They pushed the Syrian Greek army out of Jerusalem and reclaimed the Temple. But they did not rest until they were able to relight the menorah with pure oil and rededicate the Beis Hamikdash.

To celebrate only the victory in battle would be to miss the essence of Chanukah. The original fight between the Maccabim and the Syrian Greeks was never about basic life—it was always about the way life is lived. The Syrian Greeks were not interested in physically wiping out the Jews and conquering their land; that was Haman and the Purim story. Antiochus's goal was assimilation...that was why they were fighting...for their spiritual survival.

The earliest written account of Chanukah, in the first chapter of *Maccabees I* shows very clearly that it was the attack on religion that spurred the Maccabim to revolt.

1:19: Then Mattathias answered and spoke with a loud voice, Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away everyone from the religion of their fathers,

and give consent to his commandments:

20: *Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.*

21: *God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances.*

22: *We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand, or the left.*

27: *And Mattathias cried throughout the city with a loud voice, saying, Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me.*

The **Levush** while explaining the unique nature of Chanukah celebration, points out that the war was never about physical survival, that it was always about spiritual survival—always about the battle for the Jewish soul.

לבוש אורח חיים סימן תרע סעיף ב

. . . 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 ההכנעה, ולהיות ידם תקיפה על ישראל ולהעבירם על דתם, כידוע ממעשה אנטיוכסיד שלא גזר עליהם להרוג ולהשמיד רק צרות ושמדות כדי להמיר דתם, כדרך המלכים המנצחים זה את זה וכובשין אחד מדינות חבריהם ומכריחין לאמונתן, ואם היו ישראל מכניעים להם להיות כבושים תחת ידם ולהעלות להם מס וחוזרים לאמונתם חלילה, לא היו מבקשים יותר, אלא שנתן השם יתברך וגברתו יד ישראל ונצחום, לכך לא קבעום אלא להלל ולהודות, ולא למשתה ושמה,

And after months of fighting, when they chose to rededicate the temple and looked for oil to rekindle the menorah, they showed that that they were still focused on their original mission. They were still alive—not just physically, **but spiritually, as well**. They were not simply breathing...they were using their time for meaningful and significant deeds.

And, in truth, although the Syrian Greeks may have never been aware of that miracle, the lighting of the menorah was a more significant defeat of the Syrian Greeks than the military battles. Because the war was never about conquest of the Jewish land or the Jewish body...it was always about conquering the Jewish soul. And every time we light the menorah...keeping our tradition...we are defeating the Greek ideology that seeks to make us forget who we are.

In 1965, on the first night of Chanuka, the **Ponovezher Rav** spoke at the dedication of a new Beis Medrash in Moshav Yesodot, a small moshav founded after the war by Holocaust survivors.

He began his address to these survivors by asking the following question: In “*al hanissim*” after thanking Hashem for the miracles, redemption, bravery, and salvation, we thank God על המלחמות for the wars. But why, he asked, are we thankful for the wars? Why do we not leave it as thanks for the victories in war?

His answer was that it is still too early to thank God for the victory—because we have not yet arrived at the final victory. The real battle with Greece was a battle for the soul of the Jew—a conflict of culture and ideology that continues today. It is the battle Jews have faced for the past 2,000 years. To be thankful for the *milchamos*, the wars, means that we are thankful that we are still willing and able to fight the ongoing war for **spiritual** survival.

In his words:

"רק על דבר אחד יש בידינו יכולת להודות גם כיום: על עצם הדבר שאנו נלחמים, על כך שגם במצבים הקשים ביותר, כאשר הטומאה מאיימת להשתלט ולכבוש הכל, יהודים אינם נכנעים ואינם אומרים נואש, אלא נלחמים בכל כוחם על יהדותם! (הרב מפונוביז' ח"ג)

If the **Ponovezher Rav** felt that we were still fighting the war of culture and assimilation in Israel of 1965, how he would respond to the 21st century predicament of modern Jewry?

The culture war certainly continues...the battle for the Jewish soul is still raging, maybe today like never before.

But we are thankful that we are still in the fight. We are thankful that so many Jews take pride in their Jewish identity and in their connection to Hashem, His Holy Torah, His people, and the Promised Land of Israel.

And we need to remember that we are still in this fight only because of the ideology of the Maccabim, who were ready to fight for their values...and who celebrated life by always looking to add light and meaning to their lives, in every situation.

When we light our menorahs each year, we are not just celebrating a battle of long ago...we are continuing the struggle in each generation to preserve Jewish identity...a literal fulfillment of *היה זה הזמן להם* to transmit our beautiful heritage and tradition to the next generation of Jews.

That is why we highlight the miracle of the oil...that represents the essence of our struggle.

But there is one more piece. The Chanukah story was fought by a family—*מתחיהו ובניו*. As he said in his speech cited in *Maccabees I*: “**Yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.**” To commemorate that fact, Chazal told us to light our menorahs as a family—*גר איש וביתו*. The message is clear, as expressed by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks** in an article entitled “*The Light of Home*”:

And yet within a few years Greece began its decline and fall, yet Jews and Judaism survived; they still do. What was the difference? The Greeks focused on politics and the state. Jews placed their faith in something smaller—the family and the home. . . . When families are strong, children are strong, and they can face the future without fear. When families are weak, children grow up anxious and confused and a civilization begins its decline. The future of our world won't be decided by the Euro, the Internet, or space probes to Mars, but by how much or how little we value our children—by the flame we light at home.”

Commentators note that Chanuka always fall out in the middle of the Yosef story. Given his situation, wouldn't we have expected Yosef to be totally assimilated into Egypt? But he withstood the test and stayed true to his faith. How? It was the image of his father—his connection to his mesorah--that kept him strong. As the **Kedushas Levi** points out, the *trop* on the word *va-yemaen* is a *shalsheles*—highlighting the chain of tradition, connection to his family heritage, that kept him strong.

And in truth...the greatest message of a little bit of oil going a long way is that a little light can dispel great darkness. It can dispel the confusion and darkness that remain as we fight for our spiritual survival. Every good and kind act brings us a little closer to the time when all will recognize the glory of Hashem.

May we commit on this Festival of Lights to continue the struggle for Jewish survival...by rededicating ourselves to the Jewish cause. Though we no longer have a temple...and the light of the its menorah does not shine anymore, Chanuka teaches that each of us can light our own *chanukia*, wherever we are—that can spread the pure light of Hashem, and push away the darkness that surrounds us. May we merit to see the day when the world will be filled with only the light of Hashem...*bimhera viyamenu*...amen.