

LESSON IN A BOX



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ToraH Cafe



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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EIGHT

LESSON 2 // SERIES 3

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Seven symbolizes the Natural order, for G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, which He made holy, thus creating the holy Shabbos. Seven, therefore, represents the whole of Creation, or Nature. Eight, on the other hand, being higher than seven, symbolizes the Super-natural. The human brain is a creation of G-d, and part of Nature. Human intelligence is therefore limited to the Natural order; anything which is above and beyond Nature is also above and beyond human understanding.

G-d, the Creator of Nature, is obviously over and above Nature. We cannot understand G-d, or his ways. There are many things which we can know and understand about G-d: We know He is the Creator - from the world He created; we know He is wise and mighty - from the wonders we see in Nature; we know He is good and kind - because we see His goodness and kindness in our daily life. But even this knowledge cannot be a perfect knowledge, not to mention any knowledge of G-d Himself. We can know something of what G-d does but not what G-d is.

By the same token, the Torah and Mitzvoth, which G-d gave us, and which contain G-d's wisdom and will, are also beyond our understanding, except in a limited way - to the extent that G-d revealed them, and made them known to us. However, the wonderful thing about Torah and Mitzvoth is that the more Torah we learn and the more Mitzvoth we observe in our daily life, the more we become attached to G-d's wisdom and will. By being attached to G-d, we are no longer limited to our own human resources, but are able to draw from the unlimited "storehouse" of Divine wisdom. In other words, the more Mitzvoth we observe, the more we understand them. It follows, therefore, that the way to understand G-d's Mitzvoth is to do them first. To say, "I want to understand them first, and then do them," is the same as saying, "I want to be able to swim before going into the water."

The Jewish viewpoint and attitude is that of Na'aseh V'Nishma - we will do (first) and (then) we will understand. This is how we accepted the Torah and Mitzvoth at Mount Sinai. At the time of Chanukah, the Jewish people faced a serious challenge to this view and way of life. Then came Antiochus, the Greek King of Syria, who held Eretz Yisroel under his power. The Greeks, at that time had many philosophers and men of science, who believed that there was nothing higher than the human brain and human intelligence. They did not believe in the true G-d, the Creator, because they did not understand G-d, and according to them, anything that could not be understood was not to be believed.

The Syrian king Antiochus of the Chanukah story got it into his head to force the Jews to give up their way of life and to follow, instead, the Greek way of life. He wanted to force the Jews to give up the observance of all such Mitzvoth which seemed “unreasonable” to him. Among these Mitzvoth, which were especially forbidden by him, was also the Mitzvah of the Bris (Circumcision) which is carried out on the eighth day after the birth of a Jewish boy. As far as the Torah was concerned, Antiochus did not mind if the Jews studied it as a book of literature, or history, or anything else; so long as they did not believe in it as given by G-d. For the first time in Jewish history, the Jewish way of life came into a head-on collision with the Greek way of life. It was an unequal struggle, for Antiochus had on his side vast and well trained armies which overran the whole country, eager to put to death any Jew, man, woman or child who disobeyed the King’s orders. Under these circumstances, a number of Jews accepted the new order and the whole future of the Jewish people was in great danger.

Fortunately, a handful of Jews, led by Mattisyohu and his sons, openly resisted Antiochus. They kindled the flame of true faith in G-d, and with G-d’s help the struggle against overwhelming odds resulted in a complete victory for the faithful Jews, who would not make any compromise with the enemy. The victory of the Jews against the Greeks was not only a miraculous victory in the battlefield, but a great spiritual victory, the victory of light over darkness. This victory of the spirit was emphasized by the miracle with the oil; One little cruse of pure olive oil, undefiled by the Greeks, was found in the newly rededicated Beth Hamikdash, and instead of lasting for one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days.

The eight days of Chanukah, with the eight Chanukah lights, remind us that the victory which gave rise to this festival of Lights was not merely a “supernatural” victory for the “Weak over the mighty” and for the “Few over the many,” but also a victory for the Jewish world-outlook and way of life, namely, that the true approach to Torah and Mitzvoth is not through the limited human intelligence, but rather through the actual fulfillment of the Mitzvoth first and foremost. Chanukah also reminds us that the Jewish people are not subject to the laws of Nature, like other peoples and nations. For as long as there is even a minority of Jews who remain faithful to G-d and His Torah and Mitzvoth, in all their purity and holiness, without concession or compromise, there is no power on earth that can overwhelm them.

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