



Lesson 3, Series 2

The Miracle of the Oil: What the Greeks Misunderstood

The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) were shepherds. The reason they chose this occupation is because they chose to remove and distance themselves from the bustle of the city to be engaged in Divine service without distraction.

Joseph, Jacob's son, was not a shepherd; to the contrary-**Joseph was second-in-command to Pharaoh**, superpower of the entire world. It is precisely here where his unique quality comes to light: though he was engaged with worldly matters different from the patriarchs, he still maintained a lofty spiritual lifestyle with complete commitment to G-d almighty. Joseph said: "G-d had placed me as a lord over all of Egypt." The explanation of this is: Now (as a result of my efforts) G-d is recognized as Lord over all of Egypt. **Joseph's mission statement is to bring recognition of G-d almighty not only to the Jewish enclave but to all of Egypt!** In Joseph's view, Abraham's revolution, the Jewish monotheistic principles, were not just meant to be the exclusive heritage of a select people. Rather, it was meant to be brought to all humanity to inspire, uplift and transform.

Unlike his brother Judah who saw Joseph's path as a threat to the survival of the Jewish people, *exposing oneself to the possibility of assimilation*, **Joseph believed that Judaism must be brought to the marketplace. Therefore he wore a multi-colored coat and ultimately became viceroy of Egypt.**

The Greeks were pursuing the very same agenda as that set out by Joseph, a thousand years beforehand. Joseph parted from his spiritual, ascetic brothers and staked his fortune among the nations in the leading empire of the time, Egypt. The Greeks wanted the Jewish people to part from the spiritual underpinnings of their tradition. Therefore the Greeks chose to use the symbolism of the "horn of an ox", representing Joseph, to suggest, they become like Joseph and "embrace the horn of the ox"-declare that you have no part in the G-d of Israel. The Greek effort was to tear down the walls or barriers that stood between them and the Jewish nation, to assimilate them, G-d forbid.

Unknown to them, was the true persona of J(Y)oseph the Tzaddik. Yosef's determination to reach out and engage the surrounding world was not born out of an inferiority complex, or desire to assimilate, quite the contrary. **Yosef was determined to change and transform the world, by introducing the oneness of G-d into a fragmented society.** It was the **חשמונאים**, family of Matisyahu of the tribe of Levi, who stood up to the Greeks. They demonstrated that Judaism is indeed unique and must be safeguarded, but it has a message to tell the world. **A Jew can indeed serve as a "Light unto the nations".**

Talmud Tractate Shabbat 21b: The mitzvah is to place the Chanukah lights by the exterior doorway of one's home. If one lives above the ground floor, then the menorah should be placed at a window facing out to the street.

With most of the mitzvot the focus is the individual's personal relationship with G-d. However, the purpose of the Chanukah lights is **פרסומי ניסא** to publicize the miracle, to the outside world. **The purpose of Chanukah is to reclaim Yosef from the Greeks-that while engaging and teaching the world the nobility of an ethical life, we do so without compromising the integrity of our faith.**

If the central mitzvah of the holiday is the menorah, the central ingredient is oil. Not only is oil fuel for the menorah but it is a cooking agent, indispensable, to making latkes and doughnuts. The nature of oil is not to mix. No matter how much you might shake up a mixture of oil and water, the oil will always rise to the top and remain distinct. The lesson is that to associate with, impact, or complement others, does not mean to compromise your own identity. Rather, to be within, but stay above, is key. The truer one is to oneself, the deeper and wider the influence. **Our inward loyalty to Judaism does not exclude our ambition to change the world around us; and our reaching out does not, with the right approach, dilute our internal connection.** To the contrary, success in one dimension leads to the success in the other.

Decades before Ronald Reagan, standing in Berlin, declared: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall", the **Lubavitcher Rebbe** declared to all his disciples and emissaries: **"Tear down the wall; the wall of separation, fragmentation, and distrust. Go out there and embrace every Jew with love; reach out even to inmates, even in South Africa, and what is more, reach out to the non-Jews who run the prisons in South Africa!"** (story: Flames behind Bars)

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Dear Friend:

Chanuka Menorahs light up the streets in America and around the world. Chabad-Lubavitch has taken the Chanuka message to the streets with a strong message of pride and perseverance, while a "light onto the nations". We should take on the persona of Yosef Hatzadik who believed the Jew was a "Universalist". Rather than escape from society and its depravity, within the confines of one's spiritual cocoon, we must approach the open market, mainstream society, and become "the great provider". Yosef dreamed of rising to great heights so that he could then influence the world around him.

Enjoying delicious sizzling latkes and a variety of scrumptious doughnuts should make us take up the "case of oil" throughout Chanukah. At the same time, enjoy the delicious traditional foods, holiday customs and family, united around the Chanukah lights of hope.

We invite you to share with us in our work, with a tax-deductible contribution, to help us educate our Baltimore Jewish community. Please visit us at www.alephlearninginstitute.org.

Happy Chanuka 5777!

Sincerely,

Rachel Kaplan, Director, Aleph Learning Institute

Handwritten signature of Rodulle Kaplan