

chosen words

A Gift For Chanukah

Lighting Up Our Home

The exile imposed by the Greeks is designated by Chazal as the darkest of all exiles. Yet, when one considers the idea of exile—being driven away from one's land—it seems odd to call our brush with the Greeks an exile at all. The Babylonians laid waste to the Bais Hamikdash and dragged the Jews away to a strange land. Persia also deprived us of our land. Under the Greeks, however, we weren't forced to go anywhere. We remained right there, in the shadow of the Bais Hamikdash, within the walls of our holy city.

The distinction is that, in the Babylonian and Persian exiles, Jerusalem retained its identity as a place of holiness. Even in ruins, it remained a beacon that awakened our longing and gave direction to our dreams for the future. We had lost Jerusalem, but the identity of Jerusalem itself was not lost. But the Greek exile was different, because the Greeks erased the essence of Jerusalem itself. By gradually inculcating its residents with a love for seemingly wonderful things—beautiful buildings, beautiful philosophies, beautiful physiques—it reached into the soul of the city and altered it to the point where its essence, unadulterated emunah, was obscured. Not only had we lost our political sovereignty over our holiest

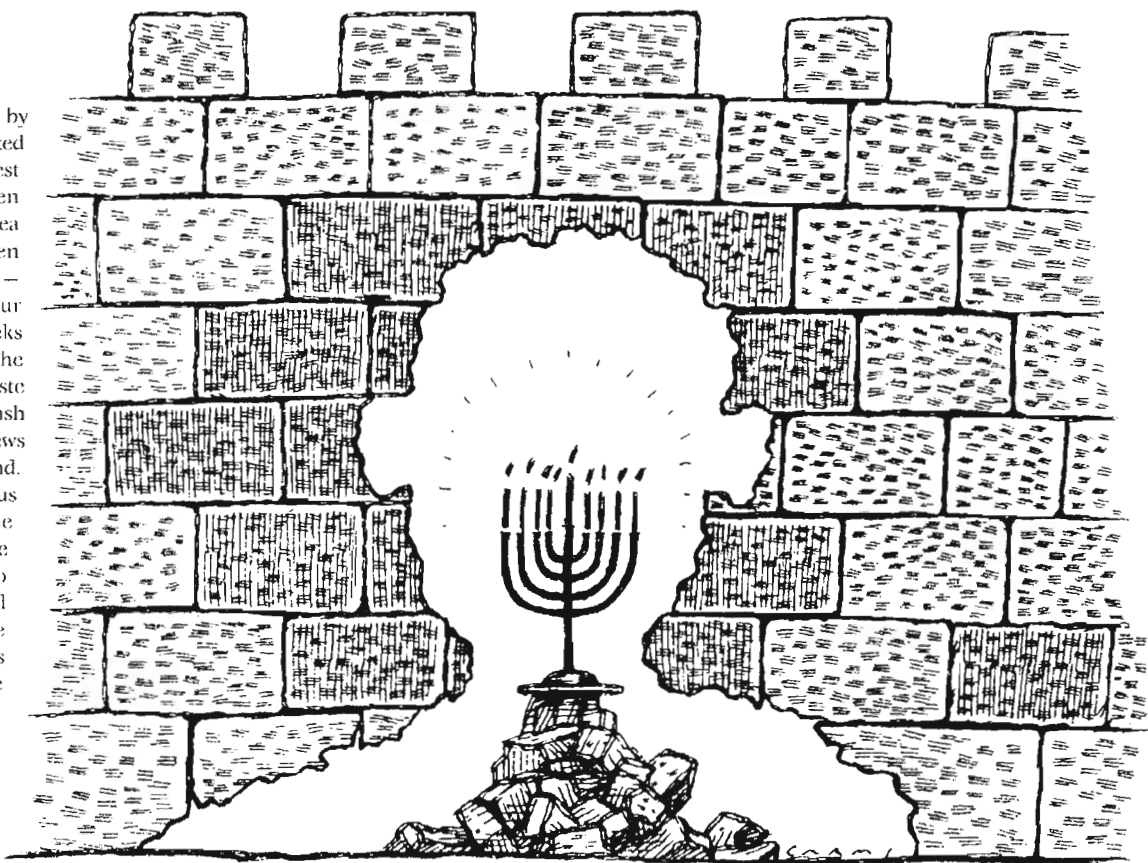
city; we had lost the city itself.

Yavan—Greece—was a cultured and intellectual people. It lured the Jews with its ample chochmah, the kind of wisdom that can define, delineate, create theories and laws. But the Jew's unique intellectual gift is not chochmah, but daas, the knowledge for which we pray each day in Shemonh Esrei: "Atah chonein l'odom daas," "You graciously endow man with knowledge." Daas is apportioned only by Hashem's grace, as the wording of the prayer implies. It's the insight that lets us glimpse the real, spiritual essence of all we see. The Greek

sees a sunset and revels in its pretty colors. The Jew, through daas, sees the same sunset as the herald of Shabbos. The Greek sees the human body as an ideal of aesthetic perfection. The Jew sees it as proof of the Creator's perfection.

By inviting us to abandon the profundities of daas for the intellectual and sensual joys of chochmah, the Greeks succeeded in gaining our cooperation in our own demise. We were at home in Jerusalem, yet we were farther away than we had ever been. The Macabee rebellion reawakened our claim on daas, and with that, we were

able to defy the seemingly unbending rules set by Greek logic. We regained our soul, *continued on back*



"The Chanukah victory replaced our darkest exile with renewed light."



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In Our Hands

Every Yom Tov has its unique flavor and purpose. Rosh Hashanah reminds us that Hashem is our Creator and Judge. Succos acknowledges that Hashem sustains us. Pesach celebrates redemption and freedom. Chanukah, which celebrates our victory over the Syrian-Greek oppressors, would seem to have the same essence as Pesach. There was a mighty enemy, a miraculous victory and liberation.

But if we look at the prayer of Al Hanissim, which is added to Chanukah's Shemoneh Esrei, we see the vital and unique message that Chanukah delivers. Al Hanissim gives thanks to

Hashem for delivering "the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous and the wanton into the hands of the students of Your Torah."

On Pesach, Hashem did the work. On Chanukah, He helped us to help ourselves. Had the Chashmonaim not organized their revolt — outnumbered and underarmed as they were — the military miracle could not have occurred. Had they not lit the little bit of oil they had, there would have been no miracle of the menorah.

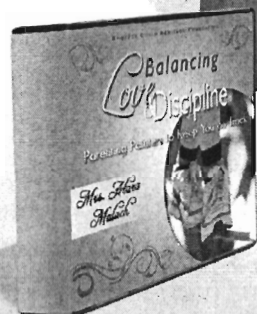
Chanukah comes to tell us

"On Pesach,
Hashem did
the work.

On Chanukah,
he helped us to
help ourselves."

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The Power of One

It would be hard to imagine that there could be, living today, one family that could single-handedly bring all the world's Jews back to their heritage. With assimilation so rampant, and the numbers so daunting, what could one person or one family accomplish? Yet it was just one family, the Chashmonaim, that turned the Hellenist tide and brought about the miracles of Chanukah. This fact carries a vital message through the centuries to us today: It only takes one.

One good teacher can inspire a whole class. One principal's enthusiasm can galvanize an entire school. One dedicated rabbi can reach the souls of a congregation. One family can stimulate the growth of a whole community. One leader can move hundreds—even thousands—to action. There are many goals to be reached and many battles to be waged in our world. Chanukah teaches us that there is no place for despair, even if the numbers seem to be decidedly against us. One person can, and oftentimes has, made all the difference.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What personality traits enable some individuals to have a widespread impact in the world?

Adapted from "Candelight," by Mr. Avi Shulman, with permission from Mesorah Publications

that whatever power is in our hands, whether as individuals or as a community, we must use it to forward our mission as Jews. When we do what we can, Hashem carries us the rest of the way.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

How do you know when you're doing all you can? How do you know when you can do more?

Adapted from "A Gift for Yom Tov," by Rabbi Yisroel Miller, with permission from Mesorah Publications

Lighting

continued from front

and when we did, we were able to make the impossible happen: The mighty fell into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few. Our victory reminded us that our path is never the well-paved intellectual main road. It has always been the higher, more arduous side-street. But it's only from that vantage point that we can stay connected to Hashem's holiness, perceive His presence, and live in Jerusalem, not in darkness, but in pure light.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

Is it against the Torah to appreciate beauty? How do music, art, literature and the beauty of nature fit into a Jew's life?

Adapted with permission from "News from the Home Front," by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, The Jewish Observer, December, 1994

Dedications

לעיני

אסתר בת ר' אהרן אייזיק ז"ל

נלבית כ' כסלו

תנצב"ה.

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