

THE AVODA OF CHANUKAH

One Chanukah, a group of chassidim traveled to see the Chozeh of Lublin. One of them handed the Rebbe a פ"ג on which was written his friend's name, and when the tzaddik looked on the note, he spat. Later the same evening, the chossid decided to try giving the note again. This time, as soon as the tzaddik saw it, he said, "This man illuminates all the worlds!" He then added, "When I first saw the פ"ג, that man was playing cards; this time he is lighting his menorah."

(ספורים חסדים זוין מועדים ע' 286)

Once, some chassidim of the tzaddik Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev were speaking when suddenly the tzaddik approached them and asked what they were discussing. Having been involved in idle talk, they were embarrassed to divulge the subject. When the Rebbe asked again, they were compelled to reveal that they had been speaking of the wealth of a certain poritz, who would indulge in everything he wished. This was to the extent that when he decided to sled in the summer, he had his servants cover a field with mounds of sugar.

Hearing this the tzaddik asked, "Does he light Chanukah Licht?" Surprised the chassidim replied that he does not, and he probably does not even know what Chanukah is. To this Reb Levi Yitzchak responded, "If he doesn't light Chanukah Licht, then he does not have true enjoyment in this world!"

(בני בינה)

After kindling the Chanukah licht, the Rebbe Rashab would sit near them for half an hour and learn (at a slight distance, not to benefit from its light). He would learn Gemara, wherever he was holding in his learning of ש"ס. This is related to the special connection of Torah to light, and is a lesson for every person to increase in learning during the days of Chanukah.

(התוועדויות תשמ"ב ח"ב ע' 618)

There is a minhag to give Chanukah gelt to children, and the Rebbe Rashab would do this on the fourth or fifth night. The Rebbe once noted that the main reason of this minhag is to enable the children to give tzedaka, for what else does a child need money for...?

(התוועדויות תשמ"ט ח"ב ע' 63)

Since the primary נס of Chanukah was a ruchnius'dike one, getting rid of the Yevanim's decrees against observing Yiddishkeit and offering korbanos, we commemorate it in a ruchnius'dike way, by saying Hallel and praising Hashem. However, it is also customary to increase in seudos during Chanukah to remember the נס of winning the war and to commemorate the completion of the mishkan on Chof Hei Kislev. During these seudos, one should sing praise to Hashem about the נסים that He did, thus making it a Seudas Mitzva.

(שו"ע או"ח סי' תע"ר ובהשלמה לשו"ע"ר שם)

It was customary for the Tzemach Tzedek, as it had been for the Alter Rebbe and the Mittlerer Rebbe, to have a gathering on one of the evenings of Chanukah with his family, including his daughters-in-law. This was called 'לאטקעס אווענט' (latkes evening). At this gathering the Rebbes would tell stories, some of which were repeated year after year. The Rebbe Rashab would also set aside time during Chanukah to speak to the children.

(היום יום כ"ח כסלו, רשימות היומן חנוכה תרצ"ג)

When Reb Yechezkel of Shinava, the son of the Divrei Chayim of Tzanz, was a young boy, he was fatally injured when a loaded wagon ran him over. His father Reb Chaim contacted many tzaddikim to daven for his wellbeing. When the tzaddik Reb Naftali of Ropshitz heard of the boy's predicament, he sent some leftover Chanukah oil, to smear on the boy. Reb Yechezkel later recalled that when the oil was smeared on his body, he felt his body return to its normal form, and he regained his health.

(ילקוט מקראי קודש)

THE קדושה OF THE DAYS

In the household of the tzaddik Reb Dovid of Tolna, Hadlokas Haneirois was a special event. With much excitement, his Chassidim would gather in his house take part in the lighting of the tzaddik's menorah, which was made of gold and was an elaborate piece of artistic craftsmanship. One year, on the first night of Chanukah, when the tzaddik was ready to light the menora, he turned to one of his chassidim and said, "Your wife is short, isn't she? When you want to speak to her, what do you

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do? Do you bend over towards her, or does she raise herself up to your height?" Without waiting for an answer, he recited the brachos and lit the menorah. Needless to say, the chossid and all those present were very puzzled.

During this time, Reb Dovid's great nephew, the tzaddik Reb Mordechai Dov of Horensteipl, was staying at his home, and seeing the confusion of the Chassidim, he explained: The Gemara says 'The shechina does not descend lower than ten tefachim from the ground.' However, there is an exception to this rule, for the Chanukah menorah is ideally required to be lower than ten tefachim, and brings the shechina itself here below. Reb Mordechai concluded by quoting from the Arizal that this is the deeper meaning of the Gemara's words, 'If your wife is short, you should bend over and whisper to her.'

The following evening, at the time of Hadlokas Haneiros, Reb Dovid again made some puzzling comment to one of his Chassidim. Immediately, though he had not been told of the previous night's explanation, he turned to Reb Mordechai and said, "This time, you will not understand as you did yesterday!"

(סיפורי חסידים זוין מועדים ע' 281)

There was once a man whose mind was severely troubled by constant thoughts of kefirah and avoda zara. In search of a remedy, he went to a certain tzaddik but was told, "I cannot help you, young man. I would advise you, however, to pay a visit to the tzaddik Reb Shlomo of Karlin and he will help you." The man promptly traveled to Reb Shlomo, and upon reaching his home, he found the tzaddik reciting Pesukim from Tehillim, as was his minhag to do while lighting the menorah. When the tzaddik came to the Possuk, "ויפרקנו מצרינו כי לעולם חסדו" (And He delivered us from our oppressors, for His kindness is everlasting), he slapped his visitor on the shoulder and said, "Do you believe that Hashem can deliver a man from every tum'ah and from every mitzrayim?" (For מְצָרִים also implies מְצָרִים, the restraints and limitations suffered by the neshama in a body.) At that moment, the man was free of all this disturbing thoughts, and he left – a new man.

(סיפורי חסידים זוין מועדים ע' 281)

The Rebbe explained that Chanukah is an opportune time to increase in Torah and mitzvos, being that the נס was related to ruchnius'dike matters: the learning of Torah and keeping of mitzvos. One can especially increase in Yiras Shomayim, for that is the purpose of Torah and mitzvos, and that was what the Yevanim were particularly opposed to.

We must also learn this from the way we increase, lighting an additional candle each night. During Chanukah, one should add in tzedaka and learning Torah. Thru the mitzvah of Neurois Chanukah, one merits the light of Torah.

(התוועדויות תשמ"ח ח"ב ע' 67, התוועדויות תשמ"ד ח"ב ע' 596)

THE WAR OF THE יונים

The goal of the Yevanim was "להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי" (to make them forget Your Torah and go against the

decrees of Your will), as the medrash says that the Yevanim demanded the Yidden write that they have no part in Hashem. It was a war against Hashem. "Let them study Torah," said the Greeks. "Let them practice the mitzvos, mishpatim, and eidus, but they must not mention that the Torah is Hashem's Torah and that the mitzvos are the decrees of His will. Torah and mitzvos must be severed from ג-טליכקייט."

(היום יום ב' טבת)

In the time of the Yevanim, the aveiros of the Yidden were: befriending and socializing with the Yevanim, studying their culture, desecrating Shabbos and Yom Tov, eating treif, and not observing the Yiddische tahara. The punishment was: the spiritual destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh, death, and slavery in golus. Through teshuva and mesiras nefesh came the great ג-טליכע wonderous salvation – the miracle of Chanukah.

(היום יום כ"ט כסלו)

In a Sicha (כ"א כסלו תש"מ), the Rebbe explained how the goal of the Yevanim and the Misyavnim was to remove the separation that exists between Yidden and goyim, and educating children to be similar to the other nations. This is worse than placing decrees regarding Torah and mitzvos, because its effect remains even after the decree is over. It begins with something 'small', through 'lighting up' the way for a child with 'oil' that is contaminated with goyishkeit, claiming that it produces the same light. When one educates children improperly, drawing 'light' from a source which is not tahor, this leads a child to become a Misyaven (ר"ל).

The lesson from Chanukah is: when lighting up Yiddische homes, one must use only pure Yiddische light, uncontaminated by any goyishkeit. By doing so, with mesiras nefesh (not giving in to the majority, who also appear to be stronger), we will be victorious, for Hashem is on our side.

(לקו"ש ח"כ ע' 438)

In a Sicha to children (ז' חנוכה תשל"ח), the Rebbe spoke of the war of the Yevanim in our times. During the time of Chanukah, the Chashmona'im withstood a tremendous challenge, battling a huge, mighty army with mesiras nefesh. Today, the nisyonos are not as difficult, but are of a different nature. The Yetzer Hora comes to a child and tells him to spend his time playing games like others around him, thus causing him to forget to learn Torah. Or he will convince him to eat a candy which others are eating, even though the kashrus of the candy is uncertain. The child must act strongly with mesiras nefesh, no matter how exciting or enticing it is, and then he will certainly be victorious.

(לקו"ש ח"כ ע' 483)

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