



בס"ד

Finding light in the darkness

By Harav Y Reuven Rubin Shlita

So what's it all about? In the midst of all the noise we can often lose sight of what it is we as Jews are meant to celebrate. Chanukah is such a wondrous gift, yet it seems to be engulfed in the very crassness we are meant to avoid! To understand let's take a moment to stand back and observe.

Hashem has gifted us with a rare moment in our nation's history wherein we are living in comparative comfort. We are rarely hounded in the streets by anti-Semitic chants, and in our daily lives we can practice our religious duties as we see fit. Our stomachs are full, and we carry comfortable clothing on our backs. Our homes are heated, our beds made with pillows and sheets. The reality is that in every aspect we are doing quite well, thank you very much. Yet, at the same time we are tormented by stress. Many of our young couples seem to be drifting, and some of our youth are leaving the halls of Torah and stooping to the worst levels of what is the materialistic cravenness of society.

"We are that small band of souls that are being tasked with the responsibility to call out, to act, to be Torah-true despite the odds"

Slipping into this topsy turvy world we find Chanukah, a celebration that offers light and sanity. So let us stop for a moment, turn our heads away from the glitter of advertisements for exotic tasting doughnuts and fried delicacies, and seek out what the focus of Chanukah is all about.

Back in those ancient times, the Jews lived in a very materialistic yet cultured society. Ancient Greece wreaked of enticement, Hellenism was the first culture

that did not call others to worship idols, but rather to worship themselves. The glorification of the human body supplanted the need to worship any outside force. Games were played, extravagant shows put on, all in the name of beauty and form. Given the level of technology at hand, it was nothing short of a mastering of the environment that allowed the entire world to be brainwashed by the show of materialistic nihilism. Nothing was sacred, hence the sacred was disdained.

The Jews lived in a vassal state that allowed us to remain apart but beckoned the masses to join in the fun. Tragically, many of our people were caught up in the madness, and soon, even the Holy Beis Hamikdosh fell into disrepair as our tefillos were silenced by the footsteps of our deserting young. Sure we could remain Jews, eat a hundred different doughnuts, and enjoy exotic trips abroad. It was just that Hashem was nowhere to be found. The chant of enticement overwhelmed our cherished davening. This was a new kind of Golus, one we had no blueprint for, one that seemed to be threatening our very existence.

Despite all this, a small handful of devoted Yidden struggled to remain loyal to our heritage and identity. They spoke of Torah truths, of learning, of being that which Hashem most sought, His chosen children. It seemed that their voices were being drowned out by the magnificent fanfare of the new and sparkling world of Greek culture. How can you speak of Yiddishkeit when all about you are shows and entertainment? The body was fed well, and the holy nation kicked. After all, we lived in the hallowed land of Israel, and everyone around us was Jewish. Yet, that small group was pestering, their voices could sometimes be heard above the din of assimilation.

Here then is the true essence of Chanukah: that amidst all the turmoil, despite the dearth of spirituality, that small group made a decision. They would fight against the masters of the benign and, struggling against all the odds, they would bring back our people to our holy role. The sheer audacity of that handful of neshomas is hard for us to comprehend. The whole world was lost to the enticements of this new future. How could those souls even dare to fight against what was so inviting? Even the Holy Beis Hamikdosh was silent, so how could this minuscule minority stand in the way of “progress”? And that was the miracle: they did stand up, they did cry out, they did point out the falseness of the Greek experience. Their bravery led to everything that followed. The return to a cleansed Beis Hamikdosh, the finding of that long-discarded cruise of holy oil, all that and so much more, came about because a small group of Torah Yidden screamed out: Enough!!

Well, let's look around us today. Do you notice anything? Is that bakery window with its hundreds of doughnuts the answer to our spiritual malaise? Have we not in so many ways joined in the worshipers of material gain? We are deluged by advertisements to join in the fun. Shows, fancy cars, sumptuous holidays, tempting styles, all this and so much more. It screams at you with every step you take. It's as if the new Hellenists have made a few minor changes, allowing for modern realities, and picked up where they left off thousands of years ago. Our children leave, young couples lose their way, and the elderly are pushed to the back of our reality. The music blares; sanity remains shivering in the corner. We take ever more pills so as to cope, trying to jump off the treadmill but fearing ridicule.

Modern times, the newest in a long line of beckoning fads that seek to engulf our People.

How can we hope to remain pure with even a semblance of kedusha? By hearkening to the small voice of reason that calls out to us from the corners of our lives. We light candles and remember those courageous tzaddikim who called out from the swamp that engulfed our nation. We stop and gaze at the flickering lights that are our neshomas, and we daven to Hashem. Yes, we don't seek segulahs; we just sit down and ask Hashem ourselves for sanity and redemption.

We must be ever-conscious of the fact that our Torah community is but a small fraction of the Jewish world in which we live. We are that small band of souls that are being tasked with the responsibility to call out, to act, to be Torah-true despite the odds. All the illumination that was created by that small kernel of Torah heroes is what this Yom Tov should be about, and we should learn of their bravery and act accordingly.



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