

Parshas Mikeitz

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The Yom Tov of Chanukah celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the threat of spiritual annihilation. During the period of the second Beis Hamikdash, Greek culture permeated much of the fabric of Jewish life, and threatened the fundamentals of Jewish living. The Greeks attempted to eradicate Bris Milah, Shabbos, and Rosh Chodesh. The Beis Hamikdash was defiled and turned into a pagan Greek temple.

In response, a small group of Jews, popularly known as the Maccabees, rose up to fight the powerful Greeks and expel them from Eretz Yisroel. This seemingly impossible quest was miraculously successful, and the Beis Hamikdash was subsequently rededicated to Hashem. The Jews endeavored to relight the Menorah, but then realized that the Greeks had defiled every cruse of oil. Ultimately, one flask of pure olive oil bearing the seal of the Kohen Gadol was found. Although it contained only enough oil to last for one day, miraculously it lasted a full eight days. Chanukah was established the following year to celebrate these miracles.

It would appear that the more noteworthy miracle that transpired during this period was the victory of the Maccabees and the resulting salvation of the Jews from spiritual ruin. Yet, the Gemarah in Shabbos (21b) explains that the Yom Tov of Chanukah was established to commemorate the relatively insignificant miracle of the flask of oil, implying that the triumph of the Maccabees was merely of secondary importance.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, late Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, and legendary mussar personality, proposes an illuminating explanation.

A loan extended to a person struggling through a financial crisis is greatly appreciated, but sending a bouquet of flowers and an encouraging note along with the check is an expression of friendship and caring, and therefore treasured. Providing a child with his needs is important, but love for the child is conveyed in the provision of the extras.

The miraculous victory of the Maccabees was indeed critical to Jewish continuity but the continuous burning of the oil was immeasurably more precious. The seemingly trivial miracle of the flask was a proverbial kiss from Hashem; an expression of Hashem's fondness for the Jewish people.

the sweet-smelling spices conveyed a profound message to Yosef. He may have been betrayed by his brothers, sold into captivity, and facing an uncertain future, but he was still treasured by Hashem. Although he was being brought down to Mitzrayim in captivity, nevertheless he was not forgotten.

When a child misbehaves and is banished to his room, a thoughtful parent may go in to the room and plant a kiss on the child's forehead. This undeserved, seemingly insignificant kiss can be transformative. The child now recognizes that although he was deservedly punished, he is still loved and cared for.

“Chanukah is an opportune time to appreciate the positive life events we encounter”

In challenging times too, we can take consolation and Chizuk from the small acts of kindness bestowed on us from Hashem.

We see this idea expressed in last week's Parsha. Yosef Hatzadik was sold by his brothers into slavery. The Torah makes a point of mentioning that he was sold to an Arab caravan transporting fragrant spices. The Midrash comments that although Arab caravans generally carry foul smelling items, such as hides and tar, Hashem performed a miracle and orchestrated for Yosef Hatzadik to be transported to Mitzrayim in a pleasant, sweet smelling environment.

At first glance the Midrash seems inexplicable. Yosef was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and completely forsaken; would the fragrant scent of the caravan transform this event into a pleasant experience?

Rav Chaim explains that the miracle of

There is a grand divine plan we may not always recognize, and sometimes have trouble comprehending; nonetheless we need to take notice of the continuous rays of light dotting the landscape, and understand they represent the special relationship we have with Hashem.

Chanukah celebrates the unique bond between Hashem and the Jewish people. We acknowledge the miraculous victory over the Greeks and the reinstatement of the Bais Hamikdash, and we also recognize the apparently trivial miracle of the flask of oil. Chanukah is an opportune time to appreciate the countless, seemingly insignificant, positive life events we encounter often. During both joyous times and challenging circumstances, small “miracles” reassure us of the wonderful affection Hashem has for us all. ♦

*Good Shabbos and
A Freilechen Chanukah!*