

# The Secret Of Hanukah

Contributed by Tzvi Fishman  
Sunday, 17 November 2013  
Last Updated Sunday, 17 November 2013

Once again, because of the problem of revealing esoteric Torah ideas to an internet audience of all ages, levels of Torah learning, and religions; and because of the author's paucity of true esoteric knowledge, we will only present some selected insights into the deeper meanings of Hanukah.

At the time of the Hanukah story, under the pernicious influence of Hellenism, the Jewish People became so assimilated and so estranged from G-d, they failed to see the miracle in the incredible military victory of the heroic band of Hasmonean rebels. It took the miracle of the Menorah to make them realize that just as G-d had kept the tiny cruse of oil burning for eight miraculous days, it was also G-d who had miraculously led the Hasmonean fighters to victory.

Certainly the Maccabees were brave, fearless fighters and daring military strategists. But this alone cannot account for their battlefield successes over the largest, most powerful, most mightily-equipped army in the world, a devastating opponent backed by endless warships, a division of elephant-tanks, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers. What then was the secret of the Maccabees triumph? What was the source of the miracle?

At the center of the Greek plan to uproot the Torah from Israel was their strategy to lure the Jews into sexual transgression. The Jewish People's belief that G-d ruled over the physical world, as well as the spiritual, was something that the hedonistic Hellenist culture could not allow. Thus the Greeks forced the Jews to write on the horn of an ox, "We do not have a portion in the G-d of Israel." According to the Kabbalah, the horn (keren) represents the sefirah of Yesod, which parallels the sexual organ in man ("Sod HaHashmal," Rabbi Yekutiel Zalman Zev, Part 2, Pg. 571).

In other words, the Greeks did not want the G-d of the Jews interfering in their sexual orgies. Their culture of sexual permissiveness could not tolerate a Divine, co-existing culture that outlawed sexual sin. So after conquering the Land of Israel, the Greeks set up their brothels in Jerusalem and hung up bright neon signs reading: JEWS ALLOWED.

For the majority of Jews, this encounter with a culture that glorified the flesh while lauding the arts and lofty intellectual expression, proved to be too much of a challenge. Young Jewish males stripped off their clothes and rushed to compete in the nude sporting Olympics. Craving to be like the Greeks, the Jewish Hellenists stretched their orlah [foreskins] back over the sign of their Brit, in order to look like their masters. Enraptured by the tantalizing synthesis of Greek intellectuality and unbridled bohemianism, Jews abandoned the synagogue and study halls, adopted Greek names, dressed up in Greek tunics, flocked to Greek theaters, bathed in Greek spas, and drank alongside the "enlightened" foreigners in their pornographic pubs.

This literal and cultural pulling back of the orlah stretched a curtain of darkness over the Jewish People. The Kabbalist elder, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levy, explains that the Nation of Israel's descent into sexual transgression is the esoteric meaning of "The Greeks entered the Sanctuary and ravaged it, and defiled all that had been ritually pure" (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah, Ch.3). The Greeks entered the sanctuary of Jewish sexual chastity and defiled all of the ritual purity.

The Greeks were not content to merely defile the men. Among the harsh decrees that the Greeks imposed on the Jews, the Rambam mentions the ravaging of Jewish daughters (Ibid). Before Jewish brides were allowed to marry, they were

first forcefully taken to the Greek governor to satisfy his lust.

It is told that Mattityahu's daughter, in bold defiance against this edict, appeared naked before her father and brothers. Enraged, they cried out that she must be killed. "Me, you are ready to kill," she challengingly answered. "But not the wicked Greek occupiers who are polluting all of the daughters of Israel and who have brought this terrible immodesty upon us!" (Ketubot 3b, Midrash Ma'ase Hanukah, Rashi on Yehezkel 21:18, Megilat Ta'anit on Elul 17)

Shaken by the words of his daughter and by the horrible disgrace, Mattityahu and his five sons rose up like lions against the enemies of Israel and G-d. When the Greek governor sent an officer to erect an altar in Modiin and force the Jews to sacrifice upon it, Mattityahu rushed forward to slay him. The "Book of the Maccabees" relates:

"Thus he showed his zeal for the Torah, as Pinchas had done toward Zimri, son of Salu. Then Mattityahu cried out in a loud voice in the town, saying, "Let everyone who is zealous for the Torah and who guards the Brit [covenant - sexual purity], follow me!"

In Mattityahu's very first cry to battle lies the secret of Hanukah. First, we must note the comparison to Pinchas. On the advice of the wicked Bilaam, Balak sent the daughters of Midian to entice the men of Israel into sexual transgression (BaMidbar, 25:2-15). The tribe of Shimon had already selected for themselves 24,000 Midian women who were put aside while they eagerly waited to see what would happen with Zimri, their leader. If he got away with his act of whoring, they were ready to follow suit.

When Pinchas rose up and slew him, his zealousness saved the day and won him the Brit of Shalom for appeasing G-d's wrath over the impending national sexual transgression. Nonetheless, as Rabbi Levi explains, 24,000 Jews were killed in the plague, just for having had the thought and intention of whoring with daughters of Midian. This brought about the spilling of semen in vain and the subsequent plague.

Like Pinchas, Mattityahu, was an upholder of the Brit. As Kohen Gadol [High Priest], he was entrusted with guarding the sexual purity of the nation, as it says regarding the Kohanim [Priests], "For they have observed Your word and guarded your Brit" (Devarim, 33:10). Zealousness for the Torah and guarding the Brit go hand in hand. Thus Mattityahu's cry to war was, "Let everyone who is zealous for the Torah and who guards the Brit, follow me!"

The Zohar teaches that as long as Israel is free from sexual transgression no rival nation can rule over them. "Rabbi Elazar said, As long as men remain attached to the Brit and do not loose their sovereignty over it, there is no nation nor language in the world that can do them harm" (Zohar, Bereshit 66b).

This was the secret weapon of the Macabbees. {styleboxop width=200px,float=left,color=skyblue,textcolor=black,echo=no}Guarding the Brit - sexual purity - was the secret weapon of the Macabee.{/styleboxop}

As guardians of the Brit, they were raised up over the normal ways of the world. Rabbi Nachman teaches that their valor and prowess derived from the transcendental holiness of Kedushat HaBrit [holiness of sexual purity]. Their shield in battle was their high level of sexual purity. Because they ruled over the sexual passion, they were able to shatter the wicked kingdom that deified the gratification of sensual pleasure. Only such exalted heroes of holiness can battle the forces of darkness and win (Likutei Halachot, Hanukah, 3:4).

This is the reason that the Torah portion of Miketz always falls on Hanukah, because it tells how Yosef, in the merit of guarding the Brit by overcoming the temptations of Potifar's wife, rose to rule over the evil empire of Egypt. "Because Yosef mastered his passion, the forces of evil bowed down before him, and he was made master over the licentious land" (Ibid, 3:7).

Thus, with the cry of Mattityahu, the rebellion had started. But as holy and brave as his sons were, the Maccabees still needed more reinforcements.

Once again, the daughters of Israel came forward to rally the men of Israel to war. Until the revolt, Jews who remained true to the Torah had to go into hiding. If a son were born to the wife of one of these fugitives, she would dutifully circumcise the child on the eighth day. Then she would go up on the wall of Jerusalem, carrying her child, and leap to certain death. The act was a rallying cry, calling out to her husband and her brothers in hiding, "If you will not go out to wage war against the enemy, you will have neither children nor wives. If you want to save us, then emerge from your caves and wage war against the enemy until you destroy him" (See "The Book of Our Heritage," by Rabbi Eliahu Ki Tov, the month of Kislev).

Once again, we must understand this event on its deeper level. Men are born with an orlah (foreskin). The orlah represents the darkness of the natural world. Removing the orlah through the Jewish brit milah [circumcision] is an act above the natural way of the world, declaring G-d's Kingship over both Heaven and earth.

Because of their allegiance to the Brit, the Hasmonean fighters were above the natural world. It didn't matter if the Greek army had one hundred thousand soldiers or a million - the Maccabees were fighting on a totally different spiritual and physical level that transcended normal military laws. Thus, Yehuda the Maccabee could proclaim, "There is no difference in the sight of Heaven to save by the many or by the few. Victory in battle does not depend on the size of the army, but rather on the valor that comes from Heaven" (Book of the Maccabees, Part One, 3:18-19).

A brit milah is performed on the eighth day after birth. Thus the Brit is associated with the number eight. The number eight belongs to the world above nature. The musical instrument associated with the days of Mashiach has eight strings, unlike the seven-string harp ordinarily used in the Temple (Arachin 13B).

The Maharal of Prague teaches:

"The workings of the natural world are under the influence of the number seven, because the natural world was created in seven days. Therefore, whatever is beyond the natural world is under the realm of the number eight. Thus, the milah is beyond nature, since men are naturally born with an orlah, and consequently, it is performed on the eighth day" (Ner Mitzvah, Pg. 23, "Yahadut" Edition).

As everyone knows, after the Maccabees purified the Temple, the miraculous light in the Menorah burnt for eight days, symbolizing that the miracle in the Temple occurred in the merit of the Brit and its guardians who risked their lives to defend it. The eight days of Hanukah and the eight days of the Brit share this transcendental eighth world, which is called "Shemeni." The miracle of the Menorah came about through the cruse of undefiled oil that should have only lasted one day. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for oil is "shemen." According to the Kabbalah, shemen also belongs to this world of Shemeni [the 8th].

Shemen, in its function as the oil of annointment, drew Divine blessing unto the kings of Israel and the Kohen HaGadol. Thus shemen is associated with the sefirah of Yesod, the channel that brings Divine blessing to the world. The pure cruse of shemen (representing the Yesod), sealed with the stamp of the Kohen HaGadol (the guardian of the Yesod) was the source of the miracle in the Temple. Since the Yesod parallels the Brit, we once again see the centrality of sexual purity in the Hasmonean victory over the Greeks. Fittingly, the gematria (numerical value) of the word Yesod is eighty, or "shemonim," teaching that the Yesod is also a part of the transcendental world of "Shemeni." (Interestingly, in English, the letters of shemen form the word semen.)

Each year when we light the Hanukah lights, we are reminded that in every generation, we are called upon to stand firm against the forces of evil which constantly seek to uproot the Jewish People from the Brit [the covenant of sexual purity] which binds us to our G-d, our Torah, and our Land. Today, when spiritual enemies have exported their hedonistic cultures to our shores, and when physical enemies threaten the People of Israel from the north and the south, we should remember that it isn't the strength of the army that brings victory, but rather the holiness with which we live our lives.