

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE OIL BARGAIN

This week's Torah portion is Miketz. Mikeitz usually falls out during Chanukah. There is a very apparent connection between Mikeitz and Chanukah. In the parsha the Torah describes how the wife of Potifar tried her best to make Yosef assimilate and intermarry. With great effort, he was able to resist the sins of intermarriage and assimilation. "The strength that Yoseph exerted", says Rav Hutner, "gave Knesses Yisrael, the collective body of the Jewish people, the spiritual fortitude to resist assimilation in the future". That strength exerted by Yosef was later manifest in giving the Chashmonaim the strength to resist assimilation and acculturation into Greek culture. Even today, when we try to resist the allure to assimilate and acculturate into the general culture we can access the strength of Yosef and the strength of the Chashmanaim to resist this pull. We can access that energy through the light of the Menorah.

This leads us to the following true story. Chaim saw an opportunity to make some money before Chanukah. He was able to buy many bottles of oil in bulk. He placed bottles of pure olive oil in several shuls near his home, with a tzedaka box next to the oil. Each box had a paper sign saying that the bottles were 18 shekels each. Chaim knew that 18 shekels was a great deal. The same large bottles of oil were on sale in the stores for 40 shekels.

On erev Chanukah, Ari went to shul and saw the box with oil for sale. The box had 20 bottles of oil and each was 18 shekels. Ari recognized the bargain and reached into his



THE BLIND HAVE DEEPER INSIGHT

Adapted from Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky's talk

I am so grateful to the readership of TableTalk as you provide me the opportunity of 'pirsumei nisa' on this beautiful holiday of Chanuka. In light of the holiday I wish to dedicate this thought to Chanukah rather than to this week's Parsha, Mikeitz.

Chanukah celebrates our survival and ultimate triumph over the threat of assimilation into the Greek culture. Although we achieved both military and political victories against the Greeks, it is the religious victory that we celebrate. The reason for this is because the criteria of being worthy of establishing a holiday on our calendar is that the event must be an historically altering event. For example, the Exodus transformed us into a people. The receiving of the Torah gave definition to our mission as a people and so on.

We must therefore ask ourselves in what way did Chanukah alter the history of our people. To do that let us appreciate what challenge we faced against the Greeks and how we overcame it.

The Greeks recognized that our destiny was tied to our past, to Avraham, to Yitzchok and to Yaakov. It was built upon the undying tradition that every generation passed on to the subsequent generation. The Greeks therefore planned to create a gap in this tradition and break one link which would bring down our people and the destiny of our people would become an unfulfilled dream. To accomplish this, they imposed decrees that were intended to create such a gap. These included the prohibition of Torah study, Shabbos, bris milah and observing our calendar. In addition to these decrees, there was widespread assimilation that was occurring and our Torah was quickly becoming forgotten. In fact, until this period of time there were no disagreements in our Oral Tradition. Only once the Greeks penetrated our culture

pocket to pay. But he realized that he had forgotten his cash at home. Ari felt that if he didn't buy the oil now he would not find a convenient opportunity later. He was then struck with an idea that he considered brilliant.

There were 20 bottles of oil selling for 18 shekels. That meant that the owner intended to make 380 shekels profit. 18 shekels for a large bottle of olive oil was very cheap. People would be just as willing to spend 20 shekels or more. It was still much lower than the market value. Ari took out a marker and made a new sign saying that the price was 20 shekels per bottle. Now the owner would make 400 shekels. The extra 20 shekels would pay for Ari's bottle. All the other customers would be paying a little extra and they would cover the price of Ari's bottle. True, Ari never asked the owner if he could do this, but he was certain that the owner would only gain and not lose by this arrangement.

Ari changed the sign and left. Sure enough later that day Ari noticed that all of the bottles were sold and the owner made 400 shekels, not just 380, and Ari's bottle was paid for by everyone else paying a bit more.

In the evening, Ari lit his menorah together with his family. Later that night, feeling very proud of himself, he told his wife what he had done.

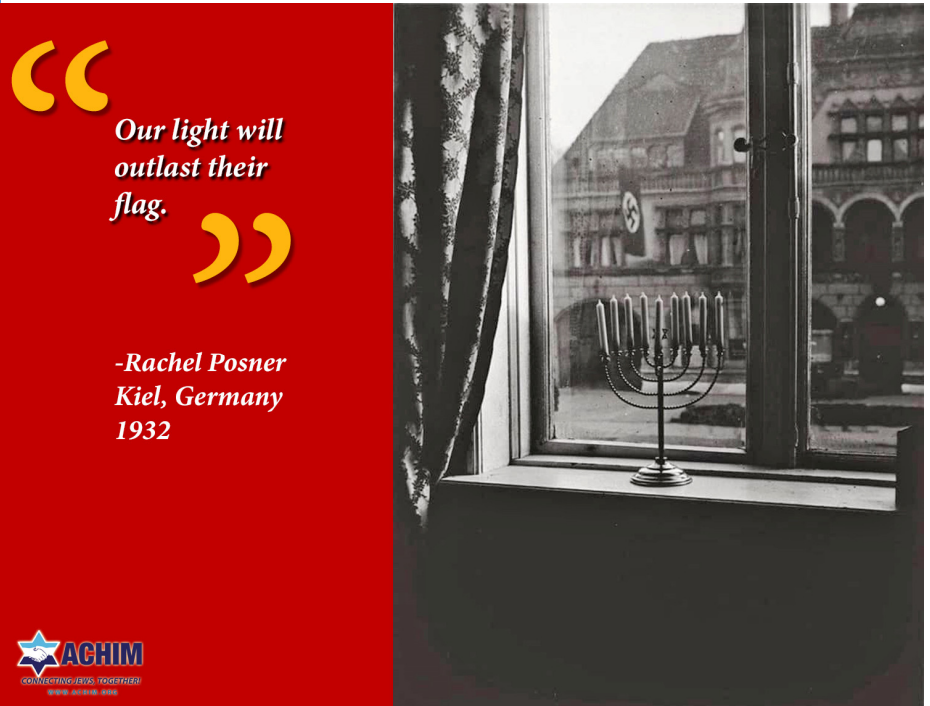
His wife was very concerned. "I'm not sure if you were allowed to do that," she gently said. "It might have been a form of stealing because you never got permission to do that. If the oil was stolen, then we never fulfilled our mitzvah of lighting and we would have to light again. Perhaps the bracha was wasted."

"In addition you might have been stealing from all of the other customers who paid 2 extra shekels because of you."

"I'm not sure you're right", Ari countered. "It wasn't stealing. All of the customers saw the price and willingly paid it. And 20 shekels is still a rock bottom price for such large bottles of olive oil."

A similar question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think. Was it stealing? Did Ari's family fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the menorah? Do they have to light again? Do they have to find a way to reimburse everyone who bought the oil?

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did forgetfulness and lack of clarity set it.

The question is how did we survive? How did we maintain our tradition if the integrity of our unbroken tradition was compromised? Our Sages teach us that after the death of Moshe, over 1000 years earlier we also lost part of our tradition and 3000 halachos were lost. Moshe was no longer with us and there was no one left who could go back to HaShem and retrieve them. Our Sages teach us that they were brought back through 'pilpulo shel Torah'. What is pilpul of Torah?

The Torah was written by HaShem and as such it carries infinite wisdom which can be extracted if properly dissected and analyzed. This hard and toilsome intellectual exercise is pilpul of Torah. All of that infinite wisdom is accessible through pilpul. Therefore pilpulo shel Torah opens up doors of wisdom that actually transcend the Torah that was available before pilpulo shel Torah. This would be parallel to the distinction between the seeing man looking at a bust of the sculpture and the blind man feeling the bust. While the seeing man has perhaps a

clearer picture, the blind man picks up on many nuances that the seeing man will never encounter. It may very well be that even if the seeing man would feel the bust he would not pick up on those nuances that only a blind person can.

Behold, The irony! Although the Greeks sought to break the chain from the past and they succeeded in some way, they nevertheless ushered in a new chapter in the development of our people and their relationship to HaShem and His Torah in a more enhanced way.

Now, in the post Hellenist era, the talmid chachum who acquires Torah through his pilpul, that Torah is his Torah. He is the one who discovered it. It can be attributed to him and is his. In the pre-Hellenist era, the Talmid Chachum who received his Torah from his Rebbe was Moshe Rabbeinu's Torah. It was not his own discovery.

It is no wonder why Chanukah is such an important holiday on our calendar. The military victory came and went, the political victory came and went, but the gain we achieved in our relationship to HaShem and His Torah continues to nourish us today, 2,300 years later.

Have a wonderful Shabbos and a most beautiful Chanukah.

Paysach Diskind



THE GREEKS AND THE WAR ELEPHANT

Josephus (Antiquities 12.9.3–4, Wars 1.1.5) writes that the Seleucid king Antiochus invaded Judea in 161 BCE with eighty war elephants, some covered with metal armored breastplates, in an attempt to subdue the Jews. In the ensuing battle, near certain mountainous straits adjacent to Beth Zachariah, Elazar the Hasmonaean attacked the largest of the elephants, assuming it belonged to a high ranking officer. Elazar pierced the elephant's underside, bringing the elephant down upon himself. Elazar died but he was able to kill the enemy with him.

The elephant is the largest land animal. Let's learn a bit about the elephant's use in war, and particularly its use by the Syrian Greeks. A war elephant is an elephant that is trained and guided by humans for combat. It was the "Tank of its time", and was an effective heavy cavalry. There were many military purposes for which elephants could be used. The animals are very intelligent and can be trained relatively well. Elephants were trained to raise their legs to help riders climb on. The elephants were taught to run and maneuver around obstacles and move in formation. Elephants were also trained to systematically trample and charge enemies. Their tusks were covered with iron and those were used as weapons. The elephants caused many losses with their tusks fitted with iron spikes or by lifting the enemies with their trunks and trampling them. War elephants are described as having remarkable intelligence and care for their masters. In one Roman account, a war elephant is described as bravely defending its master and beating back his assailants. When it perceived that its master was wounded with a spear, the elephant knelt softly on the ground, and with its nose gently removed spears out of its master's body.

War elephants were generally deployed in the center of the line, where they could be useful to prevent a charge or to conduct one of their own. Their sheer size and their terrifying appearance made them valued heavy cavalry. Probably the biggest advantage of using elephants in battle was the terror caused in the opposing army's ranks when they saw the giants stampeding towards them at speeds that could exceed 20 MPH. Sometimes more than a hundred would be used at once, not only potentially routing the men who may never have seen such beasts before, but horses unaccustomed to them would also be frightened, which could cause mayhem in the ranks. The elephants would rush forth against tight ranks of infantry and demolish a phalanx of soldiers, as dense as it was. An elephant charge could be quite fast and unlike horse cavalry, they could not be easily stopped by an infantry line setting spears. Such a charge was based on pure force with elephants crashing into an enemy line, trampling and swinging their tusks. Those men who were not crushed were at least knocked aside or forced back. The elephants' thick hide gave them considerable protection, while their height and mass protected their riders. Even musket bullets were not always effective against elephants.

In addition to charging, the elephants could provide a safe and stable tall platform for archers to shoot arrows or a ballista, giant crossbows in the middle of the battlefield. This gave a great height advantage, allowing the infantrymen to bear down on the enemy and the archer to greatly increase his range. Many generals preferred to base themselves atop elephants so as to get a better view of the battlefield.

Elephants were further enhanced with armor and weaponry. They were equipped with armor to protect the body and legs of the animal while leaving the trunk free to attack the enemy. Sometimes heavy iron chains with steel balls at the end were tied to the trunks of war elephants, which the animals were trained to swirl menacingly and with great skill. Tusk swords were also sometimes employed.

Off the battlefield, the elephants were used to carry heavy loads of equipment and supplies, making prolonged campaigns easier to manage as more food and other vital resources could now be taken on a campaign.

How did the Greeks start using war elephants? It is widely accepted that the use of war elephants began in ancient India. It is said that the Nanda Empire had an army that had 200,000 infantry, 80,000 cavalry, 8,000 chariots, and 6,000 war elephants. Alexander the Great came in contact with the Nanda Empire on the banks of the Beas River and was forced to return due to his army's unwillingness to advance. Alexander was deeply impressed by the enemy elephants and took them into his own army. He used them to successfully defeat Darius and capture Persia. The successors to Alexander's empire, the Seleucids and Antiochus, were particularly notable for their use of the war elephants.

How could such wild, powerful and intelligent beasts be defeated? War elephants did have tactical weaknesses that enemy forces learned to exploit. Elephants had a tendency to panic themselves after sustaining painful wounds. If an elephant's rider was killed it would run wild, indiscriminately causing casualties as it sought escape. Their panicked retreat could inflict heavy losses on either side. They could end up killing or wounding large numbers of men from the ranks they were supposed to be helping, indiscriminately trampling on anyone who got in their way. Sometimes, riders would carry a large hammer and spike in order to kill their own animal if it appeared that it might lose control; the spike would be driven into the back of the head, stopping the elephant in its tracks before it could cause harm.

Experienced Roman infantry often tried to sever their trunks, causing an instant panic, and hopefully causing the elephant to flee back into its own lines. The Macedonians would focus on piercing the unarmoured elephants' legs. One historical method for disrupting elephant units was the "war pig". In one of Alexander's wars near Greece, the Megarians poured oil on a herd of pigs, set them on fire, and drove them towards the enemy's massed war elephants. The elephants bolted in terror from the flaming squealing pigs. The Mongols are said to have attached straw to camels so that when the elephants got close, they would set the straw on fire, causing the camels to run forward. This routed the elephants causing them to crush many of their own soldiers. Some military gateways had spiked, anti-elephant gates to repel elephants.

With the advent of gunpowder warfare in the late 15th century, the balance of advantage for war elephants on the battlefield began to change. While muskets had limited impact on elephants, which could withstand numerous volleys, cannon fire was a different matter entirely. An elephant could easily be knocked down by a single shot. With elephants still being used to carry commanders on the battlefield, they became even more tempting targets for enemy artillery.

Nonetheless elephants were used for transport by the British as late as World War I. Sir William Slim, commander of the British 14th Army wrote about the elephants used by the British during World War I, "Elephants built hundreds of bridges for us, they helped to build and launch more ships for us than Helen ever did for Greece. Without them our retreat from Burma would have been even more arduous and our advance to its liberation slower and more difficult."

Let's keep all of this in mind when we say that HaShem "delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak." With HaShem's help, the Chashmonaim defeated these mighty beasts of war.

NEVER IN JEWISH HISTORY HAVE WE SEEN SUCH STRENGTH

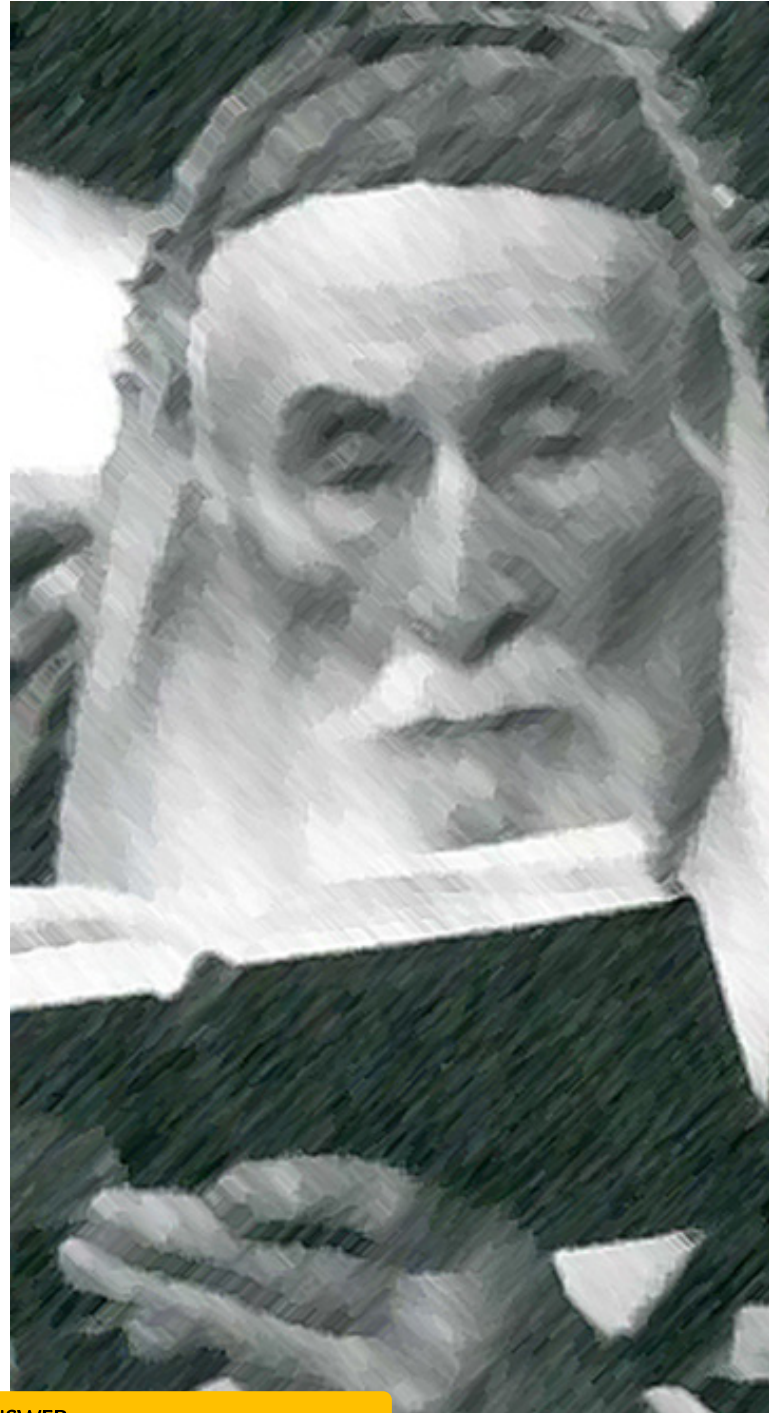
One of the themes of Chanuka is the importance of being moser nefesh, of going beyond our nature, to fulfil the Will of HaShem. While this is true in general, there have been many examples of Jews who displayed incredible mesiras nefesh to fulfil the mitzvah of Chanuka lights. Here are three short anecdotes.

Yosef Mendelovitz was a refusenik in the USSR. The authorities placed him in solitary confinement. One day Yosef knew it was Chanuka but he had no way to light candles. What could he do? He etched the shape of a menorah in the stone wall of his cell. Then he took thread and filled the etched menorah with the thread. He lit the thread and the menorah was lit. The menorah only lasted a short while but he knew he was doing his best to do the mitzvah. That short light of the menorah kept him inspired for the duration of his imprisonment. After he was eventually released, Yosef was asked how he was able to keep going, and be moser nefesh, under such conditions. Yosef answered that we are like trees. Just as you can't stop a tree from growing, no one can stop an inspired neshama from looking to grow.

The Satmar Rebbe was freed from Bergen Belsen four days before Chanukah. He was brought to the Swiss city of Montreaux for Chanukah. On the first night of Chanukah he was asked to light the menorah at his hosts house. The rebbe agreed. He then proceeded to remove the nice wicks that were prepared in the menorah and reached into his pocket. He took out his hand made wicks that were ragged and unrefined. He put those wicks into the menorah. With tearful eyes the rebbe made the bracha and lit his wicks. He then turned to the host and explained why he used his own wicks. The wicks he took out of his pocket were ones he made himself in the concentration camp. He knew that Chanukah was coming and had no idea how to light. But at least he should make some effort. Without knowing how he would light he began making wicks by removing thread from his clothing and weaving these threads into wicks. Miraculously a short while after that he was freed. These homemade wicks made with this mesiras nefesh are much more mehudar, more beloved and beautiful, than regular wicks.

In Bergen Belsen, the Bluzhever Rebbe helped lead a group to light Chanukah candles. They used shoe dye for oil, and thread from their clothes for wicks. They all risked their lives to gather together to light the candles. As the Rebbe was about to make the Brachos and light, a Polish Bund leader named Zomatchkovsky spoke up and said, "Rabbi, I understand how you can make the other blessings, but how can you make the shehecheyanu? How can you thank HaShem for bringing us to this time?" The Rebbe looked at him and said, "I had the same question. How can we thank Hashem for bringing us to this time? But as I look around, I see hundreds of faces of Jews who are risking their life for this mitzvah. You have all never given up. You have such incredible courage. Never in Jewish history have we seen such strength. For this I make the bracha of shehecheyanu. I lived to see the greatness of the Jewish people that never before in history has been seen." After the war Zomatchkovsky sent a message to the Bluzhever Rebbe, "That answer that you gave me saved my life. You gave me the strength to endure and continue. Thank you."

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THE ANSWER

Regarding the question of the hospital administrator, Rav Zilberstein answers that this position could be considered a Kli Kodesh position, or at the very least it has the status of a community leadership position. The Halacha is that one is not allowed to dismiss someone from such a position unless there is a specific problem; not because someone better was found.

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