

וּקְבַעַן שִׁמוֹנֵת יְמֵי חֲנוּכָה אֵלָיו

THE STORY OF CHANUKAH

אֲנִי אֶשְׂכַּח לְעַלְמֵי עוֹלָמוֹת

A TEACHER'S REFERENCE

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SHIMON HATZADDIK & ALEXANDER THE GREAT

THE STORY OF NEIS CHANUKAH took place during the time that the second Bais Hamikdash stood in Yerushalayim. During that period in history, Alexander the Great (אלקסנדר מוקדון) ruled over the kingdom of Yavan (Greece). Alexander had a mission. He wanted to rule over the entire world. He succeeded in conquering many nations. He wished to be able to also conquer Eretz Yisroel. Alexander set out with his army and headed to Yerushalayim in order to reach this goal.

Shimon Hatzaddik was the Kohein Gadol at that time. He was also the leader of the Yehudim. Shimon Hatzaddik decided that he must go out and confront Alexander before he reached Yerushalayim. He would try to pacify Alexander and negotiate with him not to harm the Yehudim in Eretz Yisroel. Shimon Hatzaddik dressed in his Bigdei Kehunah and headed out together with a large group of people to meet Alexander.

An amazing event occurred. When Alexander saw Shimon Hatzaddik's face, he stepped out of his chariot and bowed down to him. Alexander's soldiers looked on in confusion. They wondered why their master was bowing to his enemy! Alexander got up and explained to his soldiers the reason for his behavior. He said that prior to each time that he sets out for war, a man appears to him in a dream and helps him win his battles. This man whom he always sees in his dream is none other than Shimon Hatzaddik! Alexander therefore felt obligated to show Shimon Hatzaddik the proper respect and gratitude.

Shimon Hatzaddik then asked Alexander to please treat the Yehudim in Eretz Yisroel well and to allow them to continue serving Hashem in the Bais Hamikdash. Alexander promised not to destroy the Bais Hamikdash, but he imposed an impossible demand. He requested that a golden idol resembling him be placed in the Bais Hamikdash. Now, that could never happen, but Shimon Hatzaddik did not want to incite Alexander's wrath! He carefully explained to Alexander that an idol is forbidden by the Torah. He offered instead an "even better" Jewish remembrance of Alexander's kindness. All baby boys born to Kohanim that year would be named Alexander. What an honor that was for the king! He readily agreed! Alexander became a Jewish name. Throughout the years of Alexander's reign, he was kind to the Yehudim and allowed them to serve Hashem peacefully.



ANTIOCHUS

ANTIOCHUS WAS THE GREEK KING (מלך יון) who ruled over Eretz Yisroel after the kingdom of Alexander (about 150 years later). Antiochus liked to be called "אנטיוכוס" אפיפנוס, which means Antiochus the Great, but many called him "אנטיוכוס אפימנוס" because they disliked him. The Yehudim called him "אנטיוכוס הרשע" because he was so wicked and cruel. Antiochus wanted all the people in his empire to act as Yevonim and take on the Greek culture and its' practices. The Yevonim worshipped idols. They also believed that it was very important to "worship" their bodies and become strong and mighty. They built gymnasiums, sports centers, places of worship, and promoted their culture wherever they ruled. This atmosphere was not a good influence in Eretz Yisroel. There were Yehudim who unfortunately began to absorb the Greek culture, follow the ways of the Yevonim, and abandon the mitzvos of the Torah.

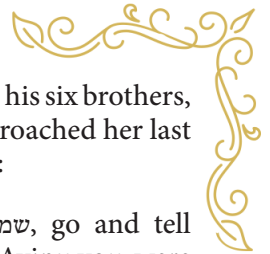
Antiochus realized that the majority of Yehudim were not taking on the Greek culture. They did not worship idols, and they followed their own laws of the Torah. Antiochus wanted all, not just some of the people in Eretz Yisroel to behave like the Yevanim. He decided to send his army into Yerushalayim to enforce his decree of not keeping mitzvos. He ordered his general, Nikanor, to lead the battle against the Jews of Yerushalayim.

The Greek army, the Yevanim, killed many people in Yerushalayim. They also entered the Bais Hamikdash and wreaked havoc there! They stole all of the gold and silver, including many of the Keilim. They broke the jars of שמן זית that were sealed by the Kohein Gadol. The Yevanim then placed a פסל, (an idol), on the Mizbeach. They also brought a chazir as a korban on the Mizbeach. (This happened on "כ"ה כסלו")

THE DECREES OF ANTIOCHUS

ANTIOCHUS ANNOUNCED NEW DECREES to promote his cause of eradicating the observance of Hashem's Torah:

- Forbidden to keep Shabbos
- Forbidden to celebrate Rosh Chodesh – thereby forbidding all Yomim Tovim...
- Forbidden to perform Bris Milah
- Forbidden to keep the laws of Kashrus
- Forbidden to learn Torah
- Every city had a Mizbeach built for the purpose of Avodah Zorah. Yehudim were being forced to bring a חזיר as a korban on the mizbeach.



This was a terrible time for the Yehudim in Eretz Yisroel. They were scared of being punished for keeping mitzvos. Unfortunately, many Yehudim became “Misyavnim” and acted as Greeks because of their fears. Others became Misyavnim because they became influenced by the Greek ways.

Despite the terrible decrees (גזרות) placed upon the Yehudim by Antiochus, there were many, many Yehudim who remained steadfast in their loyalty to Hashem and His Torah. They were forced to keep mitzvos in secret so as not to be caught and killed. Torah learning could no longer take place in public. It was just too dangerous. Many Yehudim went to hide in caves deep in the mountains in order to be able to continue their Torah learning, observance of Shabbos and many more mitzvos.

The Yehudim developed a great method to keep themselves safe while learning Torah. All those who were gathered to learn Torah made sure to take dreidels with them. If they heard soldiers approaching their location, they would quickly hide their seforim and start spinning their dreidels! They were able to deceive the soldiers into believing that they were gathered to play with “spinning tops”, and not gathered to learn Torah! When the soldiers would leave, the Yehudim would then go back to learning Torah. They certainly risked their lives in order to continue למוד התורה!

FOR TORAH & MITZVOS מסירות נפש

חנה ושבעת בנייה:

THERE WERE MANY YEHUDIM who were completely מוסר and risked their lives for the sake of learning Torah and continuing to keep the mitzvos.

One of the well-known examples of Mesirus Nefesh is that of Chana and her seven sons. Chana and her sons were brave and strong, and were proud to show that they fear Hashem more than they fear Antiochus.

They were all brought to stand in front of Antiochus, who kept an idol standing right next to his throne. Each son was ordered, one at a time, to bow down to the idol. Each son, one at a time, flatly refused to obey, and was immediately killed. They were all willing to die “על” “קידוש ה’”. Finally, it was the youngest son’s turn to stand before the king. He also bravely refused to bow down. Astonished at the reaction of the seventh son, Antiochus made an offer. He said to the little boy, “I will throw my ring to the floor right next to the idol. All you have to do is bend down and pick it up”.

The little boy was as strong and as brave as his six brothers, and he flatly refused to do so. Chana approached her last son, hugged him tightly, and said to him:

“My dear son, when you reach the שמים, go and tell Avraham Avinu that I said, “Avraham Avinu, you were willing to give up one son for the sake of Hashem. I have given up seven for the sake of Hashem!!!”

Chana died after her seventh son was killed. When her neshamah reached the heavens, a Bas Kol rang out about her: “אם הבנים שמחה”.

THE WAR- מלחמה AGAINST ANTIOCHUS

THE GREEK SOLDIERS INVADED the streets of Yerushalayim. They were there to enforce Antiochus’s decrees. Life became impossible for the Yehudim in Yerushalayim!

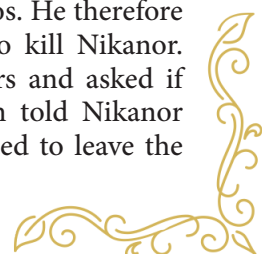
The משפחת החשמונאים lived in Modiin. They were a family of Kohanim. The father was מתתיהו, who was the son of יוחנן כהן גדול. He had five sons who were all tzaddikim; אלעזר, שמעון, יוחנן, יונתן, יהודה.

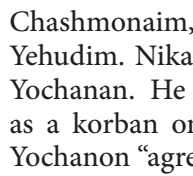
One day, the Yevanim came into the city of Modiin. They saw that the משפחת חשמונאים was gathered there. The soldiers ordered Matisyahu Kohein Gadol to bring a chazir as a korban. Of course he flatly refused to listen! Just then, a misyaven approached and began to bring a chazir as a korban to the avodah zorah. Matisyahu immediately reacted and killed the misyaven. He and his sons broke the mizbeach that was used for the chazir and killed the Greek soldiers. Right then and there, Matisyahu Kohein Gadol decided to form an army and to wage war against Antiochus and his army. He called out to all loud and clear “מי לה’ אלי!” – Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!!

The time had come to once and for all completely defeat Antiochus and chase his army out of Eretz Yisroel. A small army was formed with people continuously joining to help carry out Matisyahu’s mission.

YOCHANAN KILLS NIKANOR

YOCHANAN KNEW THAT THE ARMY of the Yevanim, without their general, would become weaker and would have less power to force Jews to do aveiros. He therefore traveled to Yerushalayim with a plan to kill Nikanor. Yochanan approached the Greek soldiers and asked if he could meet with Nikanor. Yochanan told Nikanor that he had a change of heart. He decided to leave the





Chashmonaim, join the Greek army, and fight against the Yehudim. Nikanor wasn't sure if he could really believe Yochanan. He therefore asked him to bring a chazir as a korban on the mizbeach in the Bais Hamikdash. Yochanan "agreed" to Nikanor's request on the condition that he could bring the korban with noone else present in the Bais Hamikdash besides for himself and Nikanor. Nikanor agreed to Yochanan's request, and he ordered his soldiers to leave the Bais Hamikdash. With the help of Hashem, Yochanan was successful in quickly killing Nikanor. The Yevanim were left without a general to lead them in the war, and they began to lose their power in the war against the Chashmonaim. Eventually, although the chashmonaim were far fewer in number to the Yevanim, they were winning the war!

THE STORY OF YEHUDIS AND ELIPORNEE

YEHUDIS WAS A WIDOW who lived in Yerushalayim. She, like all the other Yehudim, was very upset about all the hardships that Elipornee, a powerful Jew hating Greek general, was creating for the people of Yerushalayim. (Elipornee and his soldiers broke the water pipes around Yerushalayim in order to make the Yehudim die of thirst.)

Yehudis developed a plan to get rid of Elipornee. She asked the Yehudim to daven to Hashem for her success. Yehudis dressed in her finest clothing and jewelry. She packed a bag of delicious dairy delicacies and some good potent wine. Yehudis took her lady servant along with her, and they were on their way to accomplish the mission of getting rid of Ellipornee. They walked through the night until they reached the camping site of Ellipornee and his men.

Yehudis explained to the soldiers that she came because she had a change of heart. She decided that since the enemy is winning against the Jewish nation, she would switch sides. She was willing to share vital information with Elipornee that would help his cause of harming the Yehudim. Luckily, the soldiers believed her, and Yehudis was given a place to stay. She davened for three days that Hashem should help her carry out her plan.

On the third day, Yehudis had her opportunity to carry out her mission! She was invited into Elipornee's chambers for a private party. Yehudis used this opportunity to offer Elipornee very salty cheese. She then served him a lot of wine to drink. He became very thirsty! Elipornee fell into a deep sleep. Yehudis then took Elipornee's sword and killed him!

Yehudis and her servant quickly fled after that, and



headed back to Eretz Yisroel. The Chashmonaim were then ready to fight a fierce battle with the Yevonim and win the battle, because the Yevonim had lost their leader!

Hashem's great miracle of "רבים ביד מעטים" was seen by all!!

THE FINAL BATTLE

ANTIOCHUS DECIDED TO MAKE a final attempt to completely annihilate the Jewish army. He asked his general, Bagris, to help him. Bagris agreed to help Antiochus only on the condition that he would arrange a huge army. Thus, a huge army was formed, along with many war elephants, which were used in big wars in those days. The soldiers sat on top of the elephants. They were enclosed in special protection and would shoot arrows at the enemy. Hashem performed tremendous nissim in this battle by having the arrows that the Yevanim were shooting come right back to them (instead of hitting the army of the Chashmonaim). Eventually, the Greek army was completely destroyed, including the Bagris, the General. This was all because of the miraculous "Yad Hashem" to the Chashmonaim!

THE FINAL DAYS OF ANTIOCHUS

ANTIOCHUS EVENTUALLY RECEIVED THE NEWS that his huge and mighty army had lost the war in Eretz Yisroel. He was devastated by this, and literally became sick from his aggravation over the terrible defeat. He developed a dreadful disease as a punishment sent to him by Hashem. Antiochus was in awful pain, and his body was giving off a terrible smell.

One day, Antiochus was riding his royal chariot. His horses suddenly went wild, and his chariot overturned. Antiochus fell to the ground, and many of his bones broke as a result of the fall. Although Antiochus screamed and begged for help, nobody was willing to assist him because of his awful odor. Eventually, he died on the roadside in disgrace! The medrash states that as Antiochus was dying, he openly admitted that he was punished by Hashem for all of the evil he had done to the Yehudim and to their Bais Hamikdash.

THE NEIS OF CHANUKAH — NEIS HASHEMEN

IT WAS ON THE 25TH OF KISLEV, exactly three years after the Yevanim had first entered the Bais Hamikdash. Yehudah Hamacabee, together with the Chashmonaim, headed to Yerushalayim with eager anticipation of returning to the Bais Hamikdash to once again do the Avodah (of the Bais Hamikdash). They were shocked and dismayed at what they saw when they entered the

Bais Hamikdash! The Yevanim had made a huge mess, and they stole many of the Keilim (utensils) of the Bais Hamikdash. There was a lot of work to be done in order to restore the Bais Hamikdash!

The Chashmonaim worked hard to fix the walls and the floors of the Bais Hamikdash. They had to build a new mizbeiach because the Yevonim had made the original mizbeiach “tamei” by placing a pig on it! They made a “Chanukas Hamizbeiach” and celebrated the use of the new mizbeiach for korbanos of thanks to Hashem.

The Chashmonaim were then ready to light the Menorah. They were shocked to discover that the Menoras Hazahav was gone (stolen)! They had to build a new Menorah as swiftly as they could. They could not construct the Menorah out of gold because the Yevonim had stolen all the gold! They therefore used iron and covered it with tin. (Years later, a beautiful golden Menorah was built for the Bais Hamikdash.)

Now the Kohein Gadol was ready to light the menorah, but there was still one problem. Not one sealed jar of shemen zayis zach could be found to be used! The menorah was lit daily in the Bais Hamikdash using shemen zayis zach, which is the first squeeze (only) of oil from each olive. This oil was then placed in a jar that was sealed with the stamp of the Kohein Gadol. These sealed jars were the only ones permitted to be used to light the Menorah in the Bais Hamikdash. Now there were none of these jars to be seen to be used to finally kindle the Menorah once again!

The Chashmonaim searched and searched every corner of the Bais Hamikdash, but they were not able to find any shemen zayis zach. The Chashmonaim were despairing, when suddenly just one small jar of shemen zayis zach was found! They rejoiced at this miraculous find and they lit the menorah. “At least they could have the menorah lit for one night and day”, the Chashmonaim thought to themselves.

Little did the Chashmonaim know that Hashem, in His great kindness, would perform another miracle. This one flask of oil that was supposed to burn for one night and one day actually burned for eight days and nights, at which time there was new shemen zayis zach ready for use!

CELEBRATION OF CHANUKAH

THE CHASHMONAIM REJOICED with this tremendous neis. They decided to make these eight days into a Yom Tov, a time of celebration of Hashem’s miracles. This Yom Tov is Chanukah.

Each year, beginning on ב'ה כסלו, we celebrate Hashem’s wondrous miracles that He did for our nation; the miracle of winning over the Yevanim, and the miracle of the “one” pach shemen that burned for eight days and nights!

May we merit lighting the Menoras Hazahav once again in the Bais Hamikdash, במהרה בימינו!!

