



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

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The *Talmud* in *Masechet Shabbat*, in describing the Miracle of *Chanukah*, speaks primarily of the *Nes pach hashemen*, the miraculous oil that burned for eight days, and makes no mention of the perhaps more significant miracle, the military and spiritual victory of the *Chashmonaim*, who not only defeated the mighty Greek Empire, but restored a Torah way of life for the many thousands of Jews who had assimilated into Greek culture and society.

This might easily be explained by the positioning of this Talmudic entry, indeed the entire Talmudic account and description of *Chanukah* and its practice appears as a footnote to a discussion regarding materials that may be used to kindle the Sabbath lights. Perhaps the message being conveyed is that the account of the victory of the *Chashmonaim* is placed specifically within the discussion of lighting *Shabbat* candles, to emphasize that the *Chashmonaim* courageously fought to restore the sanctity and centrality of *Shabbat* in Jewish life.

However, our Master, Rabbi Avraham

Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *ztvk"l*, had a fascinating and original approach to the entire passage.

The *Gemara* introduces us to the story of the *Chashmonaim*:

“Mai Chanuka? D'Tanu Rabanan, B’Kuf Hey B’Kislev, yumei d’chanuka, tamneya inun delo lemasped behon, udelo lehitantot b’hon. Shekenichnisu yevanim leheichal timu kol hashmanim shebeheichal. Uchshegavra malchut beit Chashmonai, unitzchom, bidku velo matzu eleh pach echad shel shemen munach b’chotmo shel cohein gadol, velo haya bo l’hadlik yom echad, naaseh bo nes, v’hidliku mimenu shmona yomim...”

*“What is Chanukah? As our Rabbis taught: On the 25th of Kislev begins the days of Chanukah - days when we do not eulogize, and do not fast. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, and rendered impure **all** of the oil that was in the Temple. And when the Kingdom was again established by the Chashmonaim, they went to search for oil, and found only one jar of oil with the seal of the High Priest. It was barely enough oil to burn for one day, and a miracle occurred and the oil burnt for eight days...”*

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The obvious question to be asked is if the Greeks had indeed defiled all the oil, as the first part of the text suggests, how is it possible that there was a vessel that remained with

the proper seal? Might this in itself be the reason why our Sages chose to highlight the miracle of the oil, over the miraculous military victory?


Rav Kook as cited in the anthology, *Moadei HaRayah*, explains this Gemara:

“B’Chol Adam MiYisrael, yesh tzad kehuna, mipnei shebichlalam heima mamlechet cohanim v’Goy kadosh, uteshuka hapnimit likedushat hachaim ulefaat HaTorah; ganuza hi b’omek halev hayisraeli. V’oto-Hapach hakatan- haolam hapnimi haganuz-Shemunach b’chotmo shel cohein gadol, lo yochlu hayevanim letamei...”

“Within every single Jew exists an aspect of priesthood, because collectively the Jewish People are a priestly nation and a holy people; and are joined by the inner desire for a life of holiness and to know the secrets of the Torah. This quality remains safely hidden deep within the heart of each and every Jew. This small container, the hidden inner eternal holiness, which is sealed with the seal of the high priest, this inner holiness could not be contaminated by the Greeks!”

The miracle of the *pach hashemen*, as understood by Rav Kook, is not in the extended flammability of a small cruise of actual olive oil, but rather the sudden awareness of the flame which burns inside of each of us as Jews, hidden safely away inside each of our hearts, which can never be extinguished.

May the lights of our *chanukiot* inspire us to tap into the inner light, the tucked away jar of pure oil which burns within each of our hearts. Chanukah Sameach! ■



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