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RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL
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Joseph and Chanukah

There is meaning in and symbolism to every detail of the Jewish calendar. Chanukah always falls on the Shabbat when the Torah reading tells the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik believed that this bears witness to the fact that there is a link between the events surrounding Joseph's experience and our Chanukah celebration... even today.

The story of Joseph tells of the devastating break-up of the sons of Jacob.

Joseph is hated by his brothers and is ostracized from the rest of his family.

However, ultimately there is a reconciliation. The brothers regret their unfortunate actions. Joseph heroically forgives his siblings. Joseph did not simply forgive them and suppress his

resentment for their abuse of him. Rather, he loved them and cared for them as if nothing had happened, telling them that he feels toward them as he does to Benjamin, who was not involved in the kidnapping (Rashi, Genesis 45:12). The family, the children of Israel are reunited, they are one.

Like the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers the Chanukah story echoes a similar drama. There was a rift within the Jewish people. There was a severe clash of ideas and ideals between two factions. There were the Chashmonaim, those that held fast to Torah law on one side and the 'Hellenists' on the other. This was a dangerous schism which split the Jewish people and threatened our very survival as nation.

Chanukah not only celebrates a military victory and the return to the Temple in Jerusalem. Maybe more important, Chanukah celebrates a fractured people coming together again; a reconciliation and a return to brotherhood.

The Talmud says (Shabbat 22b) that they waited a year until they established Chanukah as a new holiday. "Why?" asked Rabbi Soloveitchik. The Sages waited to see if there was true reconciliation between the Jewish people. It was insufficient just to remove the physical *tumah*, impurity, from the Temple, but the spiritual *tumah*, the 'impurity' of divisiveness and strife had to be removed as well. The nation of Israel had to make peace with one another. And they did.

Chanukah teaches us that making peace is an essential ingredient towards redemption.

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Joseph makes peace with his brothers; the *Chashmonaim* and the Hellenists came together once again and unified our people. This is the great celebration of Chanukah!

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, when he was the Chief Rabbi of Palestine had many detractors. His critics slandered him and hung posters criticizing his positions on matters of policy and religious observance. When he walked through the narrow streets of the Holy City, his enemies would even go so far as to empty their chamber pots on him.

It once came to pass that one of Rabbi Kook's most rancorous opponents needed a letter that had to be signed by none other than the Chief Rabbi himself. Too embarrassed to face Rabbi Kook directly, the man sent a messenger in his stead. The messenger went to the Rabbi's office and asked him to write the letter. Rabbi Kook sat down right away and wrote the letter. When he finished he put down his pen and gave the messenger the letter, but almost immediately asked for it back.

Rabbi Kook opened the letter and reread it word for word. He then gave it back to the messenger who left before Rabbi Kook could change his mind again. Rabbi Kook's assistant,



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puzzled by this, asked, “Why did the Rabbi want to see the letter he had just written?”

Rabbi Kook answered. “I reread the letter because I wanted to be certain that it did not appear to be written with any lack of enthusiasm and I wanted to make sure that even subconsciously I did not hold back in any way from supporting this person.”

The lesson of this story may be best captured in the beloved words of Rabbi Kook himself. He said, “The Temple was destroyed due to senseless hatred, the Temple will therefore be rebuilt with senseless love”. ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, “Torah United” on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

As we all look forward to celebrating Chanukah, you can help us provide over 200 poor and needy families with chickens and other necessities so they can have a joyful holiday, too!



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