



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

CHANUKAH: WHEN WORLD VIEWS COLLIDE

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



LET'S GET BIBLICAL.

The holiday of Chanukah actually has biblical roots although it happened much later. After the Flood, Noah left the Ark with his three sons, Shem, Cham and Yefes, and their families to repopulate the world. After an unfortunate incident which leaves Cham cursed, Shem and Yefes are given a blessing by their father Noah. Shem became the father of the Jewish People, while Yefes became the father of the Greeks. Interesting fact about the etymology of the word Yefes, is that it comes from the root word yofi- beauty, which is just so Greek!

SOURCE 1: *Bereishis (Genesis) 9:26-27*

And he said, blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shem. **"May G-d expand Yefes, but he will dwell in the tents of Shem."** Let Canaan be their slave!

ויאמר ברוך ה' אלהי שם ויהי, כנען עבד
למו. יפת אלהים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם
ויהי כנען עבד למו

Q: From the verse, what seems to be the ideal relationship between Yefes (Greece) and Shem (Israel)? And what does the Torah mean to add by emphasizing the "tents of Shem"?

SOURCE 2: *Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.*

In Bereishis (9:27), the Torah says, "The Lord has given Yefes beauty; let him reside in the Tents of Shem." In Yefes, come together reason and the desire for the spiritual ... Yefes reaches his peak in the culture of Yavan, Greece, and till today these two remain, Israel and Yavan, representing "Sinai" and "humanism", respectively. Yefes beautified the world from an aesthetic point of view, while Shem enlightened the world from an ethical-moral perspective ... Yefes prepares the ground for the mission of Shem. First, let a person be imbued with the ideas of the beautiful and the good in the spirit of the Greeks; afterwards, let him proceed to be imbued with that which is still more beautiful and elevated and harmonious – the G-dly.

The Culture of Yavan (Greece) and the Culture of Israel were meant to complement one another in a joint mission.

Q: Yet the source implies that in a sense, Israel begins where Greece ends? According to Rabbi Hirsch, what is the true goal of Greek wisdom?

In light of the previous source, it's hard to understand our next source:

SOURCE 3: Bereishis Rabbah 2:4

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish explained the verse, "And the Earth was desolate and void and darkness was on the face of the deep"... "And darkness" refers to the Greek Exile which **darkened the eyes of the Jews** through its decrees ...

ר"ש בן לקיש פתר קריא בגליות
והארץ היתה תהו... וחושך זה גלות
יון שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל
בגדירותיהן

Q: It's true that the Greeks promulgated decrees against the Jews. However, why is that called specifically "darkening" the eyes of Israel? Doesn't Greece represent light, reason and culture?

SOURCE 4: Ramban, (Nachmanidies) Vayikra (Leviticus) 16:8

Scientists go in the way of the Greek [i.e. Aristotle] who denied the reality of anything that he could not experience with his senses. He and his wicked students were arrogant enough to believe that anything which they did not understand could not possibly be true. (Real)

המתחכמים בטבע הנמשכים אחרי
היוני אשר הכחיש כל דבר זולתי
המורגש לו, והגיס דעתו לחשוב הוא
ותלמידיו הרשעים, כי כל ענין שלא
השיג אליו הוא בסברתו איננו אמת

The Greeks denied the reality of anything that was beyond human reason.

Q: Nachmanidies describes the students as being wicked and arrogant for having this belief? Why do you think he brings such scathing criticism when he could have simply said they were wrong in their belief?

SOURCE 5: Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 56 –

Greek wisdom is the wisdom of the human intellect, dealing much with the sciences; they explored the laws of nature and became accomplished in this field in order to rule over nature.... One who is master over nature becomes master over the world and its inhabitants...

Although it is permissible for man to utilize nature for his needs, it becomes forbidden when he comes to feel that he can **rely on his understanding and prowess alone without needing the kindness of G-d, leading him to disconnect from G-d and forget Him.**

חכמת יוון היא חכמת השכל האנושי,
שעסקה הרבה במדעי הטבע, הם חקרו את
חוקי הטבע והחכימו בזה, כדי להשתלט על
הטבע, וזו שנעשה בעל הבית על הטבע
הוא אדון על עולם ומלואו

אכן מותר לאדם לנצל את הטבע
ולהשתמש בו לצרכיו, אך הדבר פסול
ואסור כאשר מגיע להרגשה שיכול לסמוך
על שכלו, ומסתדר בכל דבר לבד, ואיננו
זקוק לחסדי הבורא, ומתנתק ממנו ושוכח
אותו ח"ו

Q: Source #3 introduced the concept of the Greeks "darkening the eyes of Israel". How do you understand this statement now in light of sources #4 and #5?

Q: How does a philosophy that restricts our vision to the boundaries of human intellect and endeavor, actually inhibit us from achieving our purpose in life?

The dazzling brilliance of Greek philosophy, aesthetics and science was meant to lead us the beauty and truth of spirituality and G-d. When it was truncated from it's original source, it darkened the eyes of mankind by tragically severing our connection to G-d.

Israel defeated Greece in this struggle of competing worldviews; But the battle rages on today, partly through our almost reflexive faith in science and technology displaying more than a hint of religious fervor.

Q: Where else do you see the battle between and Israel and Greece playing itself out in our modern world?

LIGHTING THE MENORAH AS A SYMBOL OF THIS BATTLE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND GREECE

We all know that the reason that we light the Menorah is to commemorate the open miracle that G-d did for our ancestors in allowing one day's supply of oil to burn for eight days.

Q: Yet, why did G-d specifically use the medium of lights/oil candles to perform an open miracle for the Jews at that time?

Consider the following source for one explanation. In truth, there are many.

SOURCE 6: *Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, p. 68*

The miracle of Chanukah came to instruct the Jews for all generations before the start of the long exile ... **for the Menorah and the candles symbolize Torah, as it says, "... and Torah is light."** (spirituality)

נס חנוכה בא להורות לכל ישראל...
לדורות, לפני הגלות הארוך, ...
שהמנורה והנרות רומזים לתורה...
ותורה אור
(משלי ו:כג)

Q: Why do you think it is crucial that the Chanukah Menorah symbolizes the light of Torah?

Torah connects man's intellect to G-d's wisdom. We strengthen this connection each and every Chanukah, since it represents the one enduring and decisive antidote to the darkness of "Yavan/Greece" when it strays from dwelling in the "tents of Shem".