

The Jar of Oil in the Sukkah: Understanding the Connection between Chanukah and Sukkos

The holiday of Sukkos would seem to have no place in an essay about Chanukah. What could these two different holidays have to do with each other? They each have separate mitzvos, and while Sukkos has its source in the Torah, Chanukah is only rabbinic.

Then again, there are several similarities. Both have eight days, and on both we recite the full Hallel. There are two customs from the Jewish community in Turkey that also connect Chanukah and Sukkos (see *Ziv Haminhagim* pg. 258). First, the material used to wrap the esrog was used to make the wicks for the Chanukah menorah. Second, a container of olive oil was hung as a decoration in the Sukkah, and that oil would be used to light the menorah. These two customs take each of the unique Sukkos commandments and connect them to the commandment of Chanukah. In truth, these practices are just two examples of the strong bond the two holidays share with one another. [See *Sefer Chashmonaim* II ch. 10, that records the celebration that took place immediately after the war by the Chashmonaim. The celebration was modeled after the celebration of Sukkos.]

Rabbi Elazar of Worms writes in *Sefer Harokeach* (*Hilchos Chanukah* 225) that the eight days of Chanukah were



Rabbi Chaim Axelrod

Maggid Shiur at YUHSB

Assistant Rabbi, Young Israel of New Rochelle

established to correspond with the eight days of Sukkos. He notes that the end of Vayikra chapter 23, which describes the details of Sukkos, is juxtaposed with the beginning of chapter 24, which mandates the use of “*shemen zayis zach*,” pure olive oil, for the Menorah in the Mishkan. This serves as a *remez*, hint, to the best way to perform the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles — using pure olive oil. He sees further connection to Chanukah in these *psukim*, as first the Torah uses the phrase “*l’ha’alos ner*,” to raise a flame, followed by the phrase “*ya’aroch es haneiros*,” he shall order the flames. The Torah starts with *ner* (singular) and shifts to *neiros* (plural). This is an allusion to our practice on Chanukah, which is to begin on the first night with just one candle, and then add another on each subsequent night.

There is another connection between Chanukah and Sukkos which, on the surface, seems to be tangential. The Talmud in *Shabbos* 21b, discusses the debate between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel about the best manner to light the Chanukah menorah. Beis Shamai

concluded that on the first night one should light eight candles and decrease that number each night so that on the last night, only one candle is lit. Beis Hillel agreed in principle to highlighting the miraculous nature of the number eight, but differed in practice. They say that on the first night one should light only one candle, and then add one more each night, so that on the last night eight candles will be lit. Beis Shamai explain that their position is partially based on the Chanukah lights being “*k’neged parei hachag*,” corresponding to the cows offered on the Holiday (Sukkos). As Rashi explains, the *korbanos* of Sukkos decreased in their number each day (thirteen *korbanos* on the first day, down to seven on the last day). Yet there is perhaps even greater significance to Beis Shamai’s connection between the *korbanos* of Sukkos and the lights of Chanukah. Rabbi Chanoch Henoah Karelenshtein, in *Kuntrus B’Inyanei Yemei Chanukah* pg. 49, explains that on the day that follows Sukkos, Shimini Atzeres, there is only one *korban*, which represents the unique relationship between

Hashem and the Jewish people. According to Bais Shamai, on the last day of Chanukah, which is known as the choicest of the days, one would light only one candle. This serves as a further connection to “the last day” of Sukkos, and highlights the special bond between us and Hashem.

One can even see a connection between Chanukah and Sukkos by noticing when the prophecy about the events of Chanukah took place. In Sefer Chagai, the Navi states that in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day, the following prophecy came to Chagai the prophet:

עוד אחת מעט היא; ואני, מרעיש את-השמים
 ואת-הארץ...

There will be one more, it is a small one; and I will shake the heavens, and the earth...

Chagai 2:6

Rashi explains that Chagai is foretelling the term of exile under

the Greeks, that it will be relatively short compared to other exiles. The “shaking of heaven and earth,” Rashi explains, is in reference to “*nissim hana’su livnei Chashmonai*,” the miracles that were performed for the sons of the *Chashmonaim*. The connection to Sukkos is seen when one focuses on the date this prophecy was given, the twenty-first day of the seventh month, which is the day of Hoshana Rabba, the seventh day of Sukkos. When Chanukah was only a future projection, it was already linked to the holiday of Sukkos.

In his commentary on the Siddur, Rabbi Elazar of Worms (*Perushei-Siddur* 141) explains that there were two groups of five decrees that were placed upon the Jews by the Greeks. The first group of five came with a penalty of death for violation, while the second group of five did not. Included in this second group of decrees is the outlawing of the

celebration of Sukkos. Again, we see a connection to Sukkos in the events of the Chanukah story.

The midrash (*Midrash Chanukah*), commenting on the verse in Koheles (11:2), “*ten chelek l’shiva v’gam l’shemonah*,” divide a portion into seven, and even into eight, states that the number seven relates to the seven lights of the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash, while the number eight relates to the eight days of Sukkos:

אמר הקב"ה חשבתם לעקור שבעת הנרות ושמונה ימי החג הנני מביא עליכם שמונה ימים ושבעה בני חשמונאי שמאבדים אתכם...
Hashem said, you [Greece] sought to uproot the seven lights of the Menorah and the eight days of Sukkos, behold I will bring upon you an eight-day holiday (Chanukah), and the seven members of the Chashmonai family that will destroy you...

This midrash is perhaps hinted to in *Al Hanisim*, which states “*nakamta*



YUHSB Simchat Beit Hashoeva, October 2016

es nikmasam,” You (Hashem) have avenged their vengeance. Rabbi Dov Tzvi Karelstein (cited in *Kuntrus* loc. cit.) explains that the ultimate revenge is to do to the perpetrator the exact opposite of what they tried to accomplish. This was clearly fulfilled. Not only were the Greeks unsuccessful in erasing the eight days of Sukkos, but Hashem brought about the eight days of Chanukah for the Jewish people.

Why are these two holidays so linked, and why did the Greeks feel so strongly about outlawing Sukkos?

The midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 2:3) describes the essence of the Greek exile and the impact it sought to make:

וְחוֹשֶׁךְ זֶה גְלוֹת יוֹן שֶׁהַחֲשִׁיכָה עֵינֵיהֶם שֶׁל
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִזְרֹתֵיהֶן שֶׁהִיְתָה אוֹמֶרֶת לָהֶם, כְּתוּבוֹ
עַל קֶרֶן הַשּׁוֹר שֶׁאֵין לָכֶם חֶלֶק בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל.
*And darkness, this is the Exile of
Greece, that darkened the eyes of the
Jewish people with their decrees. For the
[Greeks] would tell the [Jews] to write
on the horn of their oxen, that they have*

no portion in the G-d of Israel.

It is noteworthy that the defining decree of the Greeks against the Jews chosen by the midrash is writing on the horns of the oxen. It was this decree that gets to the core of how the Greeks desired to profane Judaism. Our commentators explain that the Greeks wanted the Jews to publicize that they had no faith in G-d. Writing a message on the horn of an ox would be the equivalent of mandating a bumper sticker that proclaims you do not believe in G-d.

There is perhaps further significance to the idea that a Jew had to write that he has no portion, *chelek*, in the G-d of Israel. The term *chelek* is also used to describe the spiritual side of man. Our tradition understands that there is a “*chelek Eloka mima’al*,” a portion of G-d from above (Iyov 31:2) inside each of us. This concept encourages man to strive to emulate G-d. Judaism believes that man is not the center of the world. Mankind is subjugated to a Supreme Being, and man can only hope to try and imitate the ways

of Hashem. Such a belief system is completely antithetical to the ancient Greek philosophy that humans are at the center of the world. Mandating that Jews write that they have no *chelek* was asking them to proclaim that they have no right to achieve godliness.

Sukkos is the holiday where we publicize our faith in Hashem. All of our neighbors are heading inside after summer has concluded, but the Jewish people head outdoors. We build and move into temporary dwellings, and proclaim to ourselves and to the world that our security is always provided by Hashem. Just as Hashem provided security for the Jews on their journey from Egypt to Israel, so too He continues to provide our security. The Greeks sought to destroy the eight-day holiday that celebrates this faith. Hashem came to the rescue, and not only performed the miracles needed to keep Sukkos alive, but He also gave us the gift of another holiday, the yom tov of Chanukah, eight more days on our calendar to proclaim our faith for all to see.



The ultimate revenge is to do to the perpetrator the exact opposite of what they tried to accomplish. Not only were the Greeks unsuccessful in erasing the eight days of Sukkos, but Hashem brought about the eight days of Chanukah for the Jewish people.