

Recalculating Our Priorities in Education

When we think about Chanukah, many themes come to mind. We remember the dedication and commitment of the Chashmonaim, the miracle of the Menorah, and the importance of *hallel v'hoda'ah*, praising and thanking Hashem for the great miracles He has performed for us in our lives. While these themes are primary and central to Chanukah, there is another idea, albeit less discussed and center stage, that is part of the fabric of Chanukah and what it represents: Chanukah sheds light on our focus and priorities in Jewish education.

One of the most famous questions raised about the miracle of the *pach shemen* is raised by the *Pnei Yehoshua* in *Maseches Shabbos* (21b). Why was the miracle necessary at all? We have a halachic principle called "*tum'ah hutrah b'tzibbur*," which means that when we are involved in a communal event, even impure oil would have been allowed. Why then, did we need the miracle of finding the one jug of oil?

One answer to this question is as follows: From the letter of the law we could have gotten by with oil that was impure. But there was a much deeper issue that was facing the Jewish people than merely the lighting of the Menorah. We are taught in the Gemara (ibid) that the Greeks came into the Beis Hamikdash and defiled all of the oils. On the surface, that means that they made it impossible



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for us to light the Menorah, as the oil was impure. On a deeper level, the Greeks were out to accomplish much more than inhibiting the kindling of the Menorah. The Maharal in his *Ner Mitzva* explains that *shemen*, oil, refers to wisdom. They went after our oil because they really wanted to defile our wisdom and our Torah. They could not stand the fact that our *chochmah*, our wisdom, was greater than theirs, or that it was Divine. They therefore defiled all our oils — symbolically saying that there is nothing holier about your educational system.

When the Chashmonaim entered the Mikdash, they realized with every fiber of their existence what the Yevanim had tried to accomplish, and thus went on a search to find pure oil to light the Menorah. What they were teaching generations to come was the value of purity and sanctity of our Torah and our *chochmah*. It is so clearly different from the other *chochmah* in the world, because it was given to us by Hashem Himself. As such, although impure oil would have worked to fulfill the technical mitzvah of lighting the Menorah, it would not have taught the lesson that was so important and essential for the day:

the purity and sanctity of Torah.

Perhaps it was this insistence of the Chashmonaim that inspired the miracle from on High. In *Maoz Tzur* we say:

ומותר קנקנים נעשה נס לשושנים.

From the leftover jugs of oil, the miracle occurred for the beloved roses (Jewish people).

In light of the above idea, perhaps the message is that **because** there was such a desire for purity and sanctity, Hashem performed the miracle and allowed the oil to burn for eight days.

This message is extremely powerful and very relevant. While B”H we don’t live in a time of religious persecution, we are constantly challenged, both externally and internally, with ideas and concepts that are not consistent with Torah values and certainly are not in sync with *kedushas haTorah*. Whether it is choosing schools for our children, summer venues or family vacations, we struggle (or perhaps don’t struggle enough) with placing the proper value system and priorities to ensure that we maintain the *kedusha* and *tahara* that is essential to *Toras Hashem*. We always want more for our children: a more comfortable home, a better vacation or the latest technology. But sometimes more is



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less. Sometimes we try to show our love by showering gifts and material possessions without realizing that we are not transmitting the greatest gift possible to the next generation — the essence of Yiddishkeit — in the way that we should.

So where do we start? How can we take the *chinuch* message of Chanukah and properly transmit it to our children and our students?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt”l was once asked by a young father at what age should he begin to be *mechanech* (educate) his son. His son was a few years old and this parent didn’t want to miss the boat and begin his *chinuch* too late. Rav Shlomo Zalman responded gently that the young man was already late in beginning to be *mechanech* his son.

“*Chinuch* begins from the earliest ages when a child soaks in everything he sees from his parents.” The venerable Rav then quoted the verse we recite thrice daily in Krias Shema, “*v’li’madi’tem osam es b’nei’chem...*” which charges parents to teach their children. Rav Shlomo Zalman noted that the word “*osam*” is spelled without a vav — as though it should be read “*a’tem.*” Everything we do teaches our children.

In light of this teaching, it would seem that the best place to start when we revisit the educational value system we would like to impart to our children, is to contemplate our own values and goals in life. What is really important to us? What do we get excited about? How much do we strive for purity and sanctity in our

daily life? How can we improve our mitzvah observance so that it will trickle down to the next generation?

Before Waze was invented, people used to use a separate GPS device. When a person lost track of his original route to his destination, the GPS would announce “Recalculating!” Chanukah comes each year and reminds us to recalculate our goals and dreams in life so that we can hopefully transmit the right messages and lessons to the next generation.

May we each merit to learn this lesson of Chanukah and fill our lives with more *kedusha* and *tahara* and thereby merit seeing our children walk in the ways of our illustrious ancestors: educated, wise and pure.



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