



DISCOVERING CHANUKAH IN THE TORAH

The Ramban, in his introduction to Sefer Bereishit, tells us that, “Everything is written in the Torah, whether explicitly or by allusion.” Given the miraculous nature of the Chanukah story and the fact that a holiday was created because of it, Chazal scoured Scripture to find subtle references to this event. Let’s see some of the references that they found, sometimes hidden and sometimes revealed before our very eyes.

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 2:5) explains that the second verse of the Torah, “And the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep,” refers to the darkness of Yavan, Greece. Why is Greece referred to as “darkness”? Because it was the Greeks who darkened the eyes of the Jewish people with its decrees. The next pasuk, however, seems to contradict the previous one when it

says, “And G-d said, let there be light.” The word *ohr*, light, is the 25th word in the Torah, the idea being that the darkness the Greeks brought to the world would be illuminated by the light of the Menorah on the 25th of Kislev, i.e. on Chanukah.

Chanukah, the Eternal Holiday

The Torah hints to us that Chanukah was not a one-time event, but a holiday that should be celebrated every year in perpetuity. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 29a) gives us the tools to understand this: “Wherever the Torah uses the word “*tzav*,” command, it means that it is to be carried out immediately and for future generations.” Based on this idea we can discover something about the use of the word *tzav* regarding the lighting of the Menorah. The Torah (*Vayikrah* 24:2) tells Moshe Rabbeinu:

צו אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זַיִת זָךְ
כִּתִּית לְמָאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד.

Command (Tzav) the children of Israel to take extra pure olive oil, pressed for kindling, to light the continual lamp.

This command to light the Menorah also contains a reference to a time when the Beit Hamikdash is no longer standing but still needs to be lit in the homes of the Jewish people — on Chanukah. In the following verse, the Torah says, “*chukat olam ledoroteichem*” — it is an eternal decree for your generations!

Chanukah is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. In fact, Chanukah is not mentioned in Tanach at all! The obvious reason is that the events occurred over a millennium after the Torah was given to the Jewish people. The Gemara (*Yoma* 29a) gives a deeper reason why we don’t find the story of Chanukah mentioned in Tanach:

א"ר אסי למה נמשלה אסתר לשחר לומר לך מה שחר סוף כל הלילה אף אסתר סוף כל הנסים והא איכא חנוכה ניתנה לכתוב קא אמרינן.
Rav Assi said, why is Esther compared to the shachar, the morning? To tell you that just as morning is the end of the entire night, so too the salvation of Purim that occurred through Esther is the end of all miracles. But the story of Chanukah occurred after this event of Esther! What it means is that Purim was the last miracle allowed to be committed to writing as part of Tanach.

The events of Chanukah happened at the beginning of the period of the Second Beit Hamikdash, after the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah (the Men of the Great Assembly) sealed the Tanach and legislated that no more books could be added to the 24 books already included in it. The Anshei Knesset HaGedolah were the immediate successors to the era of the prophets (*Avot* 1:1). According to the *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Maamarei Chodshei Kislev Tevet* 2:14), the story of Chanukah was meant to demonstrate to the Jewish people that even though the Jewish people no longer merited the gift of prophecy, G-d still performs miracles for His Chosen Nation.

The 25th Book of Tanach

Chazal indicated that Tanach should only contain 24 books (*Kohelet Rabbah* 12:2), and that all 24 had been designated before the time of Chanukah. Since Chanukah would have been the 25th book, Chazal could not let it be added to Scripture. Fascinatingly, HaRav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld demonstrated this idea from the word Chanukah itself.

The word Chanukah can be broken up into two words: *Chanu*, they rested, and *Kah*, which has the gematria, or numerical value, of 25. This

not only refers to the fact that the Chashmonaim rested on the 25th of Kislev, it also means that even though Chanukah could have qualified to be the 25th book of Tanach, Chazal were the ones who rested from including it.

Chanukah in the List of Holidays

The Torah lists the holidays in Parashat Emor (*Vayikrah* 23). It begins by discussing Shabbat, which occurs every week. Following this, it describes Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and finally Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret. If we follow the chronological order of the holidays as they appear during the year, Chanukah occurs after Sukkot. The Torah hints to this in the next verses (*Vayikrah* 24, referenced earlier), which discuss the command to take extra pure olive oil, pressed for kindling, to light the continual light (i.e. the Menorah).

This verse is describing the commandment to light the Menorah on a daily basis in the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash. However, discussing this command here after listing the holidays, when it could have been mentioned anywhere else, is the Torah's way of including Chanukah in the chronology of the holidays, even though Chanukah didn't occur for another thousand-plus years after the giving of the Torah.

When the verse discusses the Menorah, it commands, "*leha'alot ner tamid*," light a continual lamp. When all the Temple activities ceased after the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, the command to light the Menorah would live on *tamid*, continually, through the Jewish people's lighting of the Chanukah candles (*Midrash Tanchuma, Behalotecha* 5).

The 25th Stop in the Midbar

After the Jewish people left Mitzrayim, they spent 40 years walking through the Sinai desert on their way to Eretz Yisrael. The Torah lists the number of stops as 42. The Ramban (*Bamidbar* 33:1) tells us that when the Torah introduces these journeys, it says, "Moshe wrote about their travels according to their journeys at the request of Hashem." It did this so that Moshe should know that each destination they reached and encamped in should be recorded to convey the message that deep secrets are contained in each of their destinations.

We already noted that the number 25 is strongly connected to the holiday of Chanukah, and not just because Chanukah appears on that date in Kislev. When we look at the 25th encampment of the Bnei Yisrael in the desert, we see that the verse records it as "*vayachanu B'Chashmonah*," they camped in Chashmonah. These words can actually be read as "they rested in Chashmonah," a reference to the Chashmonaim, a.k.a the Hasmoneans, that fought and defeated the Greeks on the 25th. The word Chashmonah is spelled with a letter *hey* at the end, whereas the Chashmonaim is spelled with an *aleph*. Spelling it with a *hey* reveals the word "*shemonah*" eight, contained within it. This is a hint that the holiday that begins on the 25th will last eight days (*Hamaor SheB'Chanukah, Neis Chanukah* p. 125).

The Torah Reading for Chanukah

The Torah readings for Chanukah are taken from the Parasha of Naso (*Bamidbar* 7:1-89). They describe the bringing of the *korbanot*, offerings,

by the *nesi'im*, princes, of each of the tribes at the *Chanukat HaMishkan*, the inauguration of the Tabernacle. The inauguration started on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and lasted for 12 days. During each one of those 12 days a different nasi, one per day, brought 21 korbanot.

A seemingly more appropriate reading for the holiday of Chanukah would be something related to the Menorah. What is the connection between the korbanot listed in the Torah and the dedication of the Mishkan and the holiday of Chanukah?

The dedication of the Mishkan is directly related to Chanukah, because according to the midrash, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:2, the construction of the components of the Mishkan were completed in the desert on the 25th of Kislev, the date that centuries later would become the holiday of Chanukah. Although the Mishkan's dedication did not occur until Nissan, it was ready to be dedicated in Kislev, and the rededication of the Beit Hamikdash many years later did fall in Kislev. This rededication is considered to be just like the original dedication itself, as though the Mishkan was standing anew for the first time.

In order to connect the reading of Chanukah with the lights of the Menorah, most communities have the custom to extend the Torah readings of Chanukah past the parsha of Naso, which deals with the Korbanot, directly into the Parsha of Beha'alotcha, which describes the Menorah and its lighting in the Mishkan by Aaron HaKohen.

Yosef's Connection to Chanukah

The parshiyot of Vayeishev, Miketz and Vayigash tell the story of Yosef's rise to power as the second in

command to Pharaoh. Chanukah always coincides with the Shabbat that we read Vayeishev or Miketz. Sometimes it coincides with both. What is the deeper connection between the story of Yosef and the events of Chanukah, which would occur many years later?

Chanukah is about the ability of the Jewish people to face adversity and succeed in overcoming challenges to our core values. In addition, we learn not to succumb to outside forces or feel despair in the challenges we face as a nation. The ability to be in a dark environment and to bring light into that place is a quality we learn from Yosef Hatzadik.

Yosef was the first person to be thrust into exile when his brothers sold him to Egypt. The fact that the Egyptians referred to him as the *Ivri*, Hebrew, informs us that he kept his Jewish identity, and did not become lost in the norms of Egyptian culture. He proved that exile can be beaten, no matter how bleak the circumstances may appear.

Yosef married Osnat, who according to the midrash (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* ch. 38) was the illegitimate daughter born to Dina through Shechem and was adopted by Potiphar. With such a background, it would seem like nothing holy could emerge from such a union. Yet Yosef's entire future, his sons Menashe and Efrayim, who become their own tribes of Israel, were born from her. Rav Gedalya Schorr (*Ohr Gedaliyahu, Moadim, Galus Yavan L'Ohr Maaseh Avos Siman L'Banim*) explains that precisely for this reason, the episode of Shechem and Dina is a precursor to the entire Chanukah story.

While in prison for a crime he did not commit, Yosef refused to give in to despair. When the royal baker and wine server were depressed, it was Yosef who

took it upon himself to cheer them up. For Yosef, a little bit went a long way, just like a little jar of oil lasted for eight days. When the world around Yosef was full of falsehood, Yosef stayed connected to the truth and passed that on to his children.

The Jews in the time of the Greek exile did the same. When harsh decrees were placed upon them, they stood up proudly, and confidently declared their identities as Jews. It is for this reason that we connect Yosef and Chanukah, because Yosef teaches us how to survive in the darkest and harshest of spiritual and physical exiles, while remaining connected to the cause.

Chanukah represents the power of light in the deepest darkest moments in the year and in Jewish history. As we stand today at the last moments of the final exile, we can learn so much from the Chanukah story. Just like Yosef didn't despair in the darkness of his time in prison and stayed true to his faith and people, so too, we who are experiencing the last darkest moments of this exile, with all the personal and national challenges that it brings, must hold on tight to the message of the menorah and that small light of hope it contains.

The fact that we can see the Chanukah story hinted at in the Torah, just proves that it was part of Hashem's plan for the world and the Jewish people. How much more so does this apply to these final moments of exile, which are also alluded to in the Torah? We wait for the day when Mashiach comes and shows us how everything was truly part of Hashem's plan for from the very start of history.

May we all learn how to strengthen ourselves in the last moments of this final exile and keep the flame of connection to Hashem, His Torah and the mitzvot.