

THE SOURCE OF TRUE JEWISH MIGHT

On Chanukah, we recite the beautiful expression of gratitude, *Al Hanissim*, in our tefillos and Birchas Hamazon to thank Hashem for saving us. In describing the incredible odds we overcame in our victories, we highlight several key differences between the Jewish people and the Greeks of that time:

גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים וטמאים
ביד טהורים ורשעים ביד צדיקים וזדים ביד
עוסקי תורתך.

The mighty in the hands of the weak, the many in the hands of the few, the impure in the hands of the pure, the evil in the hands of the righteous, and the wicked in the hands of those who study Your Torah.

The last one, “the wicked in the hands of those who study Your Torah,” seems to be the most perplexing. What does the fact that we learned Torah have to do with the fact that we won the war? The first two comparisons clearly highlight our military victory and the third one highlights our cultural

differences, clearly hinting to the purity and miracle of the jug of oil. However, the last one seems to be the outlier, why focus on learning Torah specifically?

Rav Matisyahu Solomon Zt”l, the Mashgiach of Beis Medrash Govoha, explained in his sefer *Matnas Chayim* that while of course we need the Jewish people to be powerful, mighty and pure, our true strength emanates from our collective *limmud Hatorah* and our collective connection to Hashem through learning Torah. We see this idea in a number of fascinating sources. The pasuk in Parshas Toldos says, *hakol kol Yaakov vehayadaim yedei Eisav*, Yitzchak tells Yaakov that his voice is the voice of Yaakov, but his hands are the hands of Eisav. The *Medrash Rabbah* in Eicha (Siman 2) expounds, as long as the voice of “Yaakov” (meaning Bnei Yisrael) is heard learning Torah in batei medrash in the world, the hands of Eisav will not conquer us. The sefer *Maalos Hatorah* asks, this Medrash takes the words of the pasuk out of context. Is that what the pasuk was meant to say?



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Maalos Hatorah explains that the end of the pasuk says *vayevarchehu*. What bracha did he give him? According to the Medrash, the bracha of Yitzchak to Yaakov was that if Yaakov continues to learn and be connected to Hashem, his hands will be like the hands of Eisav and no enemy (even the hands of Eisav) will be able to harm him.

We have seen this in every generation, that when Klal Yisrael goes to war, the successes that the Jewish people have had defy logic. Most of their successes are miraculous. Those successes are dependent on our dedication to Torah

even when life is difficult and we are oppressed. We have seen this particularly in the current war, with the incredible dedication of the chayalim and Klal Yisrael as a whole to connect to Hashem through learning Torah, wearing tzitzis, laying tefillin and through intense tefilla.

In Sefer Yehoshua (5:13), Yehoshua was visited by an angel who appeared to him as a warrior with a drawn sword as if to threaten him and Klal Yisrael. As the Gemara, *Megilla* (3a) teaches, when Yehoshua asks why the angel was there, the angel responded that he is there to punish Klal Yisrael because they did not learn Torah even during their war

to conquer Eretz Yisrael. The Alter of Kelm asks the obvious question, how could the angel implicate the Jews for not learning Torah? They were at war, weren't they exempt from learning? He says that Rashi in *Megilla* was sensitive to this question there and he says that since they were not fighting at night, they should have learned at night. We see from this how high the bar is raised and what we should be working towards, that even when life is incredibly busy and difficult we still need to find time to learn and grow.

Our personal growth is what fuels our collective and national salvation and

success. Rav Eliyahu Lopian points out an additional insight from that Gemara in *Megilla*. Notice that the malach appeared to Yehoshua as a soldier and not as a Rosh Yeshiva, even though he was there to give mussar about not learning Torah. Rav Lopian explains that the malach was teaching Yehoshua that "I am appointed to fight your wars for you, but I can only do so if you do your part and continue to learn Torah."

We should all take the lessons of the great tzadikim of the Chanukah story and continue to learn and grow even in the most challenging times and light up the darkness with the light of Torah.

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