

PARSHA
MIKEITZ

DECEMBER 20TH 2014
KISLEV 28TH 5775

575



GREEK CULTURE

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

The Sages describe what the Greeks demanded from the Jewish people: "Write on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel" (Bereshith Rabba 2:4). This requires an explanation. First, why write this on the horn of an ox, rather than on some other animal? The explanation is that the Greeks knew that the power of the Jewish people came primarily from their study of Torah, which for them is essential. This was contrary to the view of the Greeks, for whom the body was essential. The Greeks also knew that when Jews strengthen themselves in the study of Torah, no other people can control or disrupt them.

The first letters of the expression *kenen shor* ("horn of an ox") form the term *kash* ("straw"), an allusion to the verse: "The house of Jacob will be fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esav for straw" (Obadia 1:18).

Furthermore, the last letters of this expression form the term *ner* ("lamp") alluding to the fact that the Torah is compared to a lamp. As for the voice of Torah, the Greeks knew that when "the voice of Jacob" is heard in Torah and *mitzvot*, the "hands of Esav" become powerless and turn to straw.

This is why the Greeks wanted the Children of Israel to write on the horn of an ox that Esav's hands were the essential thing, and that they denied the G-d of Israel. By writing this, their descendants would be led into the same error because they would see how their ancestors had testified in writing that they had no portion in the G-d of Israel. Indeed, we find that a signature led them to err during the time of Jeroboam ben Nabat, who feared that the Children of Israel making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem would see Rehoboam, the King of Judah, sitting in the Temple Court in Jerusalem (for only kings from the House of David had the right to sit there), whereas Jeroboam would have to remain standing. Jeroboam therefore thought, "Everyone is liable to think that Rehoboam is the true king, and that I'm but a servant!" What did he do? He set up two golden calves and warned the Children of Israel against making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He then set a wicked man next to a righteous man in the council chamber and said to them, "Will you sign [your approval] for all that I may do?" They replied, "Yes." He then asked, "Even for the worship of idols?" At that point the righteous man said, "G-d forbid!" However the wicked man replied, "Do you really think that a man like Jeroboam would serve idols? He only wishes to test us, to see whether we will fully accept his orders" (Sanhedrin 101b). Even Ahijah the Shilonite, who had anointed Jeroboam, made the mistake of signing for him. In regards to Jehu, who was nevertheless a very righteous man, we read: "He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kings 10:31). What

prompted him to do this? He saw the seal of Ahijah the Shilonite and erred.

In the case of Chanukah, the miracle was that the writing of our ancestors on the horn of the ox had no effect. When the Hasmoneans became stronger than the Greeks, the inscription made on the horn of the ox was annulled, with no ill effects remaining, meaning that no Jew denied the truth. That was the essence of the miracle, and it is why we do not cite the war against the Greeks in regards to the Chanukah miracle. Instead, we mention the spiritual miracle that was done for them in the time of the Greeks, as we say in our prayers: "They instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name." This means that Hashem's Name was not erased among the Jewish people because of what they had written on the horn of the ox.

In reality, why had the Greeks wanted to force various peoples to believe in their culture? What did it matter to them if there was a nation somewhere that did not believe in the same things as they did, namely that the universe is a natural phenomenon, that there is neither Creator nor Master, and that what's important is to benefit from the world without limit, to live for the sake of the body? Greek culture seemed to resemble the horn of the ox – the horn having no understanding, being located above the brain, and yet not benefiting from it to ask where the truth lay.

For them, it was completely unnecessary to engage in soul-searching and to ask Who created everything. Rather, a person should simply benefit from all that is good in the world, as much as he desires, without fearing anything or using his mind to think. His head should be like a horn, which lacks vitality, as well as like an ox, which is strong, energetic, and does not think. It is enough to be like an animal, which has no future beyond its physical life.

That was the Greek agenda, to have people accept their understanding of architecture, poetry, and the like. Yet for that to happen, they had to subjugate the world to their authority. As it turned out, they easily managed to impose their culture on the entire world.

All the nations worship idols that have no truth to them, and furthermore they possess no understanding of Torah. That is not the case for the Jewish people, however, whose faith is different. Faith in Hashem is engraved in their hearts, and they believe in the One and only G-d, the beginning and the end, besides Whom there is no G-d. Man's soul draws him closer to and connects him to his Creator, for the soul itself is a part, so to speak, of G-d. A Jew's goal is to be a servant of the holy Torah and *mitzvot*, to illuminate the soul, and in this way to illuminate all the worlds and bring satisfaction to the Creator. Furthermore, the Torah is found in the center of a Jew's life, so much so that he has no desire for the vanities of

Publication of
HEVRAT PINTO
Under the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita**
CHEVRAT PINTO
207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024
Tel: 1 212 721 0230
www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.com
Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

this world. In his eyes, the entire universe exists only to serve Hashem, and he does not try to draw any personal benefit from it. Even when he actually benefits from this world and rejoices in it, he thanks and exalts Hashem, benefiting from nothing without blessing Him. In this, the Greeks considered the Jews as their opponents in regards to wisdom and culture. And since all their wisdom was based on falsehood – just like a horn that has neither life nor wisdom, but which simply stands over the head and grows proud – the Greeks were ready to trample upon the truth in order for the Jewish people not to disrupt them. Consequently, the miracle that

took place consisted of this: That the Greeks almost had the upper hand, but that in His great compassion the Holy One, blessed be He, saved us from them and delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, and the wicked into the hands of the righteous and the pure. The result was that the Greeks were punished. As for the beauty of nature and the body, this had no effect on the Jewish people. Conversely, Jews do not impose their beliefs on anyone, for the Torah is found in a corner, and whosoever desires can come and take it; a person is free to choose good or bad.

The Words of the Sages

The Chanukah Miracle at Neider-Orschel

I discovered with great delight that Chanukah was only a few days ahead. I decided that we should light a little Chanukah lamp even in Neider-Orschel [industrial-camp complex in Buchenwald, Germany], which would go a long way in restoring our morale.

I immediately spoke to Benzi, who had become a trusted man among those living in the camp, and he was enthusiastic about my idea. “Yes, we should light the Chanukah lamp. We can then fulfill the commandment at the same time as lifting the morale in the barracks. It’s a good plan, but we have to be extremely careful!”

Two problems had to be overcome: Oil had to be “organized,” and a place had to be found where the lighted wick would not be seen. There was no lack of oil in the factory, but how could we smuggle even a few drops into our barracks in time for Monday evening, the first night of Chanukah?

We knew, of course, that Jewish law did not compel us to risk our lives for the sake of fulfilling a commandment. But there was an urge in many of us to reveal the spirit of sacrifice implanted in our ancestors throughout the ages. We who were in such great spiritual, as well as physical distress, felt that a little Chanukah light would warm our starving souls and inspire us with hope, faith, and courage to keep us going through this long, grim, and icy winter.

We decided to draw lots. The first name drawn would have to steal the oil, the third would be responsible for it and hide it until Monday evening, and the fifth would have to light it under his bunk. I was drawn fifth.

Grunwald, the first drawn by lot, persuaded the hated work supervisor that his machine would work better if oiled regularly every morning, and that this could best be arranged if a small can of fine machine oil was allotted to us. He therefore received a flask “blessed” with lubricating oil. We now had oil that occupied a special place in our toolbox, which also solved the problem of concealing this precious liquid. Each of us fulfilled our roles to perfection.

On Monday evening, I put the oil in the empty half of a shoe polish tin, took a few threads from my thin blanket, and made them into a wick. When everything was ready, I quickly sat down to eat and convinced our friends to participate in the lighting of the candles on the first night of Chanukah. Suddenly, I realized that we hadn’t thought of matches! I whispered to Benzi, “Each of us should leave a little soup.” Benzi therefore explained the situation to his friends, who although starving, agreed to our request. In less than five minutes, five portions of soup were exchanged for one cigarette among those living in the next block. In turn, this cigarette was swapped for a box of matches in the kitchen without raising any questions.

I recited the three traditional blessings after the meal, and a little Chanukah light flickered away slowly under my bunk. Not only my friends from the other “religious” table were there with us, but also many others from the room joined us in humming traditional Chanukah songs.

For a moment, nothing else mattered. We were a group of Jews fulfill-

ing our religious duties and dreaming of home and bygone years. Tears flowed down our emaciated cheeks.

Everyone then sat on his bunk, deep in thought. For a moment, it seemed that nothing could be more important to us than this tiny vacillating flame.

But alas! Our dream ended much too soon. The shout “Listen!” suddenly brought us back to reality as we were swiftly called to attention. That skinny little untershaarfuere[r] [“junior squad leader” – paramilitary rank of the Nazi party during WWII] stood silently at the door, as he often did during his “surprise visits,” anxiously looking for some excuse, if only the slightest, to wield his dog-whip. He suddenly sniffed as loudly as his Alsatian and yelled, “It stinks of oil in here!”

My heart skipped a few beats as I stared down at the little Chanukah light flickering away, while he and his Alsatian began to parade along the bunks in search of the burning oil. I didn’t dare bend down to extinguish the light with my foot, lest the dog notice it and jump me. I quickly looked at the faces around me, which were as pale as death. The officer also did the same, scrutinizing us and looking deeply into our eyes. In a few moments, he would reach our bunks, at which point nothing could save us from his cruel hands.

Alert!

Suddenly a roar of sirens, sounding an air raid, forced the officer to stop, and within seconds all lights in the entire camp were switched off from outside. The cry of “Alert! Alert!” resounded through the camp. With lightning speed, I extinguished the light with my foot. All of us then followed instructions and rushed outside.

“There will be an investigation! There will be an investigation,” he screamed above the clatter of rushing prisoners who fled. But I didn’t worry. With delight I grabbed my little Menorah and ran out with it.

This was a sign, the miracle of Chanukah, the recognition of our struggle against the temptations of our affliction. We had been helped by G-d, even in this forsaken little camp at Neider-Orschel.

Outside in the glacial cold, the glittering stars shined. Upon hearing the sound of allied bombers overhead, I said another blessing in my heart: “Who performed miracles for our fathers, in those days, at this time.”

– Adapted from The Yellow Star

Rabbi Simcha Bunim Unsderfer - London 5721

Guard Your Tongue

Everyone Will be Upset

In regards to rechilut [talebearing], there is no difference between telling Reuven that Shimon disparaged him, or telling Reuven’s wife or relatives that Shimon disparaged him. In fact they will all be upset and disappointed by Shimon as a result. Thus even if we tell them not to reveal anything, it is still rechilut. – Chafetz Chaim

Demonstrating Chesed

It is written, "Let them gather all the food of those approaching good years; let them amass fine grain under Pharaoh's authority for food in the cities, and safeguard it" (Bereshith 41:35).

Rabbi Avraham the chassid is cited as teaching that it was the attributes of compassion and mercy that pushed Joseph to demonstrate chesed [lovingkindness] towards the Egyptians when they went through this difficult period. Joseph was afraid that Pharaoh and his ministers did not grasp the severity of the famine that he predicted, and were thus leading the people to their doom.

Over the course of the generations, the great Torah scholars of Israel have always lived according to the Torah principle: "The world is built on chesed" [Tehillim 89:3]. In more recent times, we have been able to admire the conduct of Rabbi Israel Salanter, who from his early youth was filled with love for others and yearned to help people as best he could.

He was constantly thinking about ways of doing good and helping everyone around him. It was from this perspective that he made great sacrifices to establish organizations to help the community when a cholera epidemic erupted in Vilna.

He devoted his life to the community. He dropped all personal occupations and had no concerns or desires outside of the people. Nothing could prevent him from caring for the people of his community.

Already from his youth in Salant, his profound concern for others was well-known. He lived in an attic, where he studied Torah and received meals from his in-laws, which were brought to him by his brother-in-law, a young man at the time. Every morning, his brother-in-law would bring him cakes and coffee.

The book Tnuat HaMussar recounts that Rabbi Israel once told his brother-in-law that in the Beit HaMidrash there were elderly people who were poor and had difficulty walking. It was therefore better to serve them cakes, while he would make do with ordinary bread. The Rav, aware that the members of his family would not approve of his decision, made his brother-in-law promise not to reveal a thing. From then on, and continuing for many years, he would bring these cakes to the poor elderly men, while he was content on eating black bread.

Invigorating

When Rabbi Aharon Rokeach, the Rebbe of Belz, was still a young man, he returned from the bath house one day and asked his assistant to bring him some coffee and cakes, specifying to make sure that "it's good coffee." His assistant was delighted, for he was always ready to serve Rabbi Aharon and waited for an opportunity to please him. It was the first time that the young Rabbi Aharon had asked for material enjoyment, contrary to every other time, when he didn't even taste the meals that were brought to him.

The assistant returned, carrying a beautiful platter on which was arranged a plate filled with cakes and a steaming cup of coffee. However Rabbi Aharon asked him to bring it "to a certain tailor"!

Although he was surprised that such an honor was being granted to the tailor, the assistant didn't dare ask any questions. He therefore hurried to fulfill his mission. When the tailor saw the platter sent to him by Rabbi Aharon, he was very moved.

The tailor explained to the assistant: "When I was at the bath house a half-hour ago, I told him during a friendly conversation that it would really be delightful to drink a good cup of coffee and eat a few cakes after such a nice bath. It would be invigorating." The young son of the

Rebbe remembered the tailor's wish, and upon returning home he rushed to "invigorate" this Jew.

– Bemechitzatam

Here's another marvellous story about the attribute of chesed: During the cold days of winter, the gaon Rabbi Abba Swiatycki, the Rav of Kosova, would usually go for a walk, early in the morning, down the empty lanes of the city. He would look at all the wooden rooftops of every Jewish home to see if he could discover a certain "secret" that lay inside.

Which secret was that? Each roof was equipped with its own chimney. A chimney from which smoke was not billowing demonstrated that the furnace inside was not lit, revealing just how poor the residents were, since they couldn't even purchase wood to heat their home. The residents were therefore shivering inside. Who would worry about them, if not the Rav of the city?

Rabbi Abba knew exactly what to do. Towards the end of the day, as nighttime approached, he got an axe and headed out to the woodpile in his yard.

He would chop some dried logs and gather bundles of wood together. Then, at the darkest point of the night, as everyone was sleeping, he would quietly make his way to the homes in question, and there he would secretly leave bundles of chopped wood before departing.

– Pe'er HaDor

In the Light of the Parsha

The Secret of the Chanukah Lights

The lights that we kindle on Chanukah should remind us of the verse, "Tzedakah [charity] saves from death" (Mishlei 10:2). In fact by helping the poor, those afflicted in body and lacking financial means, we rekindle the lights of life and hope in them. We bring them courage and a little peace of mind, for just a little light can push away great darkness. We find an allusion to this idea in the term chanukah, whose numerical value (including one for the word itself) is the same as the expression koach nadav ("the power of generosity"). Thus by demonstrating generosity to others, we empower them and ignite a spark of hope for them. In the opposite case, G-d forbid, the term chanukah also has the same numerical value as the expression koach ganav ("the power that steals"). In fact by refusing to help the needy, we are declaring: "My strength and the might of my hand have gotten me all this wealth!" (Devarim 8:17). Such an attitude amounts to stealing from the poor, since money and wealth belong to G-d, Who in His great kindness has safeguarded them with us in order to help the needy. Thus refusing to help the needy is considered actual theft.

According to Kabbalah, Chanukah is the moment when the books of the living and the dead are closed. It is therefore the time to practice charity, since we may fear that we have not given as much as we should have during the year. Thus by the merit of "tzedakah saves from death," we can be inscribed for life and peace. When we light the candles of Chanukah, we illuminate the darkened souls of the poor, for "the soul of man is the lamp of Hashem" (Mishlei 20:27), and by supporting them materially, we ourselves will prosper.

We should give more each day, as the verse teaches: "You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him" (Devarim 15:10). Obviously, we shouldn't feel bad to give to the poor, nor should we try to exempt ourselves from giving. Just as Hashem never ceases to satisfy us even when we don't deserve it, we too must continue giving with a willing heart. This goes back to simply fulfilling our role as an emissary: G-d entrusted us with money so we can give it to people who are in need. This is the secret of the Chanukah lights.

Two Famines

It is written, “The seven good ears [of grain] are seven years...and the seven ears [of grain], empty, blasted by the east wind, will be seven years of famine” (Bereshith 41:26-27).

Why does this passage first state that the seven good ears “are seven years” (present tense), but then states that the famine “will be seven years” (future tense)?

Rabbi Shaul Katzenelbogen of Vilna asked this question and provided an explanation: The Sages have said in a Beraita, “The famine lasted two years, for as soon as Jacob went down there, it came to an end. When did [the remaining years] return? In the days of Ezekiel!” (Bereshith Rabba 89:9).

This is what the Torah is hinting to us by using the future tense (“will be seven years”). That is, there will be a second famine. When? In the days of Ezekiel.

Reminders

It is written, “Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh, for ‘G-d has made me forget all the hardship.’ ... The name of the second son he called Ephraim, for ‘G-d has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering’” (Bereshith 41:51-52).

The Malbim, Rabbi Meir Leibush, explains this as follows:

In choosing names for his sons, Joseph gave himself signs so as not to forget, during good times, his days of poverty and misery. This is how the righteous act. For the same reason, we have been commanded to eat matzah and bitter herbs on the night of Passover, in memory of the exile, so as not to forget it during times of freedom.

And for good reason: The exile was but the passageway to liberation, evil being followed by good.

A Hidden Lesson

It is written, “Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Tzafnat Paneach” (Bereshith 41:45).

The name Paneach, notes the book Ha’amek Davar, is composed of two roots: Pa, from a root that signifies appearance; and Nach, in the sense of tranquility, calmness.

After raising Joseph from prison and honoring him, Pharaoh gave him this name because he was astonished at Joseph’s power.

In fact a person who has lived in a lowly state for several years, yet suddenly finds himself at the top of the social ladder, is usually unable to cope and likely to lose his mind or die as a result. Yet Pharaoh saw how Joseph emerged directly from prison and was elevated to greatness without changing in the least!

Likewise, generally speaking, a person who is used to serving and being passive cannot suddenly be called upon to govern. Yet Joseph went directly from servitude to holding tremendous responsibilities. Thus Pharaoh deduced that Joseph was not a lowly slave. On the contrary, he was a very noble and lofty individual who had simply never had a chance to live up to his potential till now. Hence this is the lesson that lies hidden in the name Tzafnat Paneach: Joseph was a man of fine appearance, a man capable of commanding, all while remaining tranquil and calm.

Breaking the Desire

It is written, “Joseph’s brothers went down – ten – lishbor bar [to buy grain] from Egypt” (Bereshith 42:3).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger explains that the expression lishbor bar means to break (lishbor) the desire for food. In fact there is nothing extraordinary in wanting to abstain from food when it is lacking. However that was not the case in Egypt, a land of abundance.

Facilitating the Pursuit

It is written, “They had gone out of the city, had not gone far, when Joseph said to the one in charge of his house: ‘Get up, pursue the men’” (Bereshith 44:4).

Rabbeinu Haim Vital affirms that one who recites Tifillat HaDerech before going on a journey will be protected from all harm along the way.

Rabbi Avraham Meir of Ger explains that this is why Joseph commanded his servants to pursue the men before they had time to recite Tifillat HaDerech, for in this way they could be captured and brought back to Egypt.

It is also for this reason that Joseph ordered, “Fill the sacks of the men with food, as much as they are able to carry” (v.1), this being to prevent them from traveling quickly, making it easier for them to be pursued and caught.

To Fulfill a Dream

It is written, “Joseph recalled the dreams that he dreamed about them” (Bereshith 42:9).

One should remember a good dream, for although there is no forgetfulness before the Holy One, yet if a man forgets his dream, it will also be forgotten above.

A dream that is not remembered might as well have never been dreamed, and therefore a dream forgotten and gone from mind is never fulfilled.

Joseph therefore kept his dream fresh in his memory. In order that it be fulfilled, he never forgot it and was constantly waiting for its fulfillment.

– Zohar I:199b

Men of Faith

By the Merit of Tefillin

The eyesight of a Jew originally from New York, who had come to ask for a blessing from Rabbi David Hanania Pinto, was progressively getting worse. Doctors didn’t know how to restore his eyesight, which is why he came to ask the Rav for G-d to send him a complete blessing. The Rav asked him if he usually put on tefillin, to which he responded in the negative.

The Rav then made a suggestion: “Start putting them on. The merit of my ancestor Rabbi Haim Pinto will protect you, and you will be completely healed.”

Later on, this man recounted that from the day he started putting on tefillin, his eyesight progressively improved, until he began seeing normally again.

Upon his return to the hospital for new tests, doctors couldn’t believe their eyes, and they wanted to know what had happened.

“What doctor treated you?” they asked him. “Normally, people with your condition don’t get their eyesight back.” With Jewish pride, he replied: “I was healed by the merit of the mitzvah of tefillin, which Rav Pinto told me to perform.”