

פרשת מקץ וחנוכה

Almost always our Parshas Miketz coincides with Shabbos Chanukah. In some years there are two Shabbasos Chanukah – Parshas Vayeshev and Parshas Miketz, but when there is only one Shabbos Chanukah, it is almost always Parshas Miketz.

The last time that there was an occurrence of one Shabbos Chanukah only that occurred on Parshas Vayeshev was 5760. The next time will be 5784. So it is a rare occurrence that this Shabbos is not associated with Chanukah.

This year, 5780, is no exception. Shabbos Parshas Miketz is Shabbos Chanukah and thus we are not surprised to find that the Sefarim often seek connections between our Parsha and Chanukah.

We will attempt to do the same here. However, we will not present one theme. Rather, we will present two themes that, on the surface, seem to be mutually exclusive; but they are not whatsoever.

The two themes, in the order of their presentation, will be 'Outcome' and 'Process'.

We begin.

Outcome

Parshas Miketz seem nothing like Chanukah whatsoever. In fact, it seems to be it's very opposite.

Chanukah is a time of miraculous delivery from spiritual decimation. Our enemies wanted to uproot the Torah and its *Mesorah* and thus chose individual observances that were vital for the Jewish People to continue to exist.

Shabbos, Bris Milah, Rosh Chodesh and Torah study were all forbidden upon penalty of death.

The victory of the Chasmonaim ended those restrictions that were meant to sever Israel from its connection with HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

How different is the celebration of Chanukah than the experiences of the Shevatim as we learn in our Parsha.

Yaakov and his family were beset by a terrible famine and their attempt to alleviate the danger to which the famine exposed them brought them into even greater danger.

The accusations of *Tzofnas Pa'aneach* and Yaakov's worries about the welfare of Shimon and then Binyomin, in addition to his ongoing mourning over Yosef, expose layer after layer of agony.

In our Parshas concludes with the arrest of Binyomin and the threat of the death penalty being imposed upon him and servitude for all of the *Shevatim* in hostile Egypt.

Chanukah is a time of victory. Parshas Miketz, in and of itself, is a time of uncertainty, fear and danger and a sense of loss and even defeat.

And thus, regarding the outcome of Chanukah, the holiday that we are celebrating stands in stark contrast to the events of Parshas Miketz. They are quite the opposite.

Process

On the other hand, if we examine 'process', we will find an extreme relationship between the events that led up to the celebration of Chanukah and between the events of Parshas Miketz.

Parshas Miketz begins with a respite for Yosef HaTzaddik. The very title of the Parsha, *מִקֵּץ* – 'at the end' tells us of the frustrations, sufferings and disappointment of Yosef as he sat two long years in the pit that was his jail.

We should not think that the 'honor' bestowed upon Yosef by the manager of the jail changed Yosef's situation drastically. Yosef was still in a pit, incarcerated without any means of extricating himself.

Yosef thought that the *שר המשקים*, the Royal Wine Steward would certainly possess basic human decency and work towards Yosef's freedom. Without a doubt, Yosef thought, there would be a modicum of *הכרת הטוב*, basic appreciation for the wonderful outcome that the dignitary enjoyed.

But, it was not so. Finally, מִקֵּץ, at the end, following two more years of imprisonment, Yosef was freed and then enjoyed years of good fortune, position, wealth and family.

However, the relief that Yosef enjoyed was not shared by the rest of his family.

From the incessant mourning regarding Yosef, a new phase began and that new phase is what brings us to compare the 'process' of Chanukah with our Parsha.

The text of *Al HaNissim* was written at the conclusion of the era of the Anshei K'nesses HaGedolah to reflect the events that took place in Eretz Yisroel prior to the miracle of Chanukah.

What were the challenges that our ancestors faced in their struggles against the Greeks and the Hellenists?

This is what we read in our Tefilla:

להשכיחם מתורתך ולהעבירם מחוקי רצונך

The enemy attempted to force Israel to forget Your Torah and to make them transgress the statutes of Your Will.

We do not say 'to forget Torah and to violate Mitzvos'. We do say, 'to forget *Your* Torah and to violate the statutes of *Your Will*.'

It would be an error to think that the end goal of our enemies was to stop our Torah learning and to violate the commandments alone.

The end goal of our enemy was far greater: they wished to cut off our relationship with HaKodosh Boruch. They wished to cut off our relationship with '*Your* Torah and *Your Will*'.

What power did our enemies possess that would raise such a possibility of success? From our thanksgiving that we recite in *Al HaNissim* we learn the strengths of our enemies.

We thank G-d who delivered:

גבורים ביד חלשים

רבים ביד מעטים

טמאים ביד טהורים
רשעים ביד צדיקים
זדים ביד עוסקי תורתך.

The mighty in the hand of the weak
The many in the hand of the few
The impure in the hand of the pure
The wicked in the hand of the righteous
The plotters of evil in the hand of those learning Torah.

Now, the thanksgiving that is expressed in the first two of these phrases is easily understood. It is not expected that the weak would defeat the mighty nor is it expected that the few would defeat the many.

However, what is the advantage of the impure over the pure? What is the advantage of the wicked over the righteous? What is the advantage of the plotters of evil over those who learn Torah?

Before we attempt to respond to those questions, let us see the parallel between Parshas Miketz and Chanukah.

‘The mighty’ in the hand of the weak certainly applies to our ancestors. Although we are told of their willingness to take on the Egyptian people in order to free Yosef¹, we know from farther on in the Chumash that not all of the Shevatim were uniquely mighty and powerful.

¹ We read in our Parsha (B'reishis Perek 42/Posuk 3):

וַיֵּרְדוּ אֶחָי יוֹסֵף עִשְׂרֵה לְשֹׁבֵר בָּרֶ מִמִּצְרַיִם:

The brothers of Yosef, ten, went down to purchase food from Egypt.

Rashi writes:

וירדו אחי יוסף - ולא כתב בני יעקב, מלמד שהיו מתחרטים במכירתו ונתנו לבם להתנהג עמו באחווה ולפדותו בכל ממון שיפסקו עליהם:

The brothers of Yosef went down – it doesn't write ‘the sons of Yaakov’. This teaches that the brothers regretted the sale of Yosef and they dedicated themselves to relate to him with brotherhood and to redeem him with whatever amount of money that would be set for them to pay.

When Yaakov and his entire family finally reach Egypt and Yosef wishes to introduce his brothers to Par'o, we read (B'reishis Perek 47/P'sukim 1-2):

וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף וַיַּגֵּד לְפַרְעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וְאֶחָיו וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם בָּאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וְהֵנָּם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן: וּמִקְצֵה אֶחָיו לָקַח חֲמִשָּׁה אָנָשִׁים וַיִּצְגָּם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה:

Yosef came and he told Par'o and he said, 'My father and my brothers and their sheep and their cattle came from the Land of Canaan and behold they are in the Land of Goshen. From some of his brothers Yosef took five men and he presented them before Par'o.

Why didn't Yosef take all of his brothers? Why did he choose the specific brothers that he decided upon to present before Par'o?

Rashi explains:

ומקצה אחיו - מן הפחותים שבהם לגבורה שאין נראים גבורים, שאם יראה אותם גבורים יעשה אותם אנשי מלחמתו. ואלה הם ראובן שמעון לוי יששכר ובנימין, אותם שלא כפל משה שמותם כשברכם, אבל שמות הגבורים כפל (דברים לג/2) וזאת ליהודה שמע ה' קול יהודה, (דברים לג/3) ולגד אמר ברוך מרחיב גד, (שם כג/4)

² The entire verse reads:

וְזֹאת לַיהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁמַע ה' קוֹל יְהוּדָה וְאֵל עַמּוֹ תְּבִיאֵנוּ יָדָיו רַב לוֹ וְעֵזר מֵאֲרִי תִהְיֶה:
This is for Yehuda and he said, 'Hashem, hearken to the voice of Yehudah; bring him to his people. His hands are more than enough for him; You should be His help from his enemies.

³ The entire verse reads:

וּלְגַד אָמַר בְּרוּךְ מְרַחֵב גֹּד כְּלִבְיָא שֵׁכֵן וְטָרַף זְרוּעַ אֵף קָדְקֹד:
He said to Gad, 'Blessed is He Who expands Gad; he dwells like a lion-cub.
He tears of the arm and the head.

⁴ The entire verse reads:

וּלְנַפְתָּלִי אָמַר נִפְתָּלִי שָׁבַע רְצוֹן וּמְלֵא בְרַכַּת ה' יָם וַיְדוּם יְרֻשָׁה:
To Naftali he said, 'Naftali is replete with satisfaction; he is full with the blessing of Hashem. Inherit the south and the sea.'

ולנפתלי אמר נפתלי, (שם כב⁵) ולדן אמר דן, (שם יח⁶) וכן לזבולן, (שם כד⁷) וכן לאשר. זהו לשון בראשית רבה (צה ד) שהיא אגדת ארץ ישראל.

From some of his brothers – from the lesser ones among them regarding might – the ones Yosef chose did not appear to be mighty. If Par’o would have seen them as being mighty he would have taken them to be his warriors.

These are the ‘lesser’ brothers that Yosef took: Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yissochor, and Binyomin. These were the brothers that regarding whom Moshe did not repeat their name twice when he blessed them.

However, Moshe repeated the names of the mighty ones as we read, ‘this is to Yehuda, ‘Hashem hear the voice of Yehuda’. Gad – ‘Blessed is He Who expands the Tribe of Gad. “To Naftali, he said, ‘Naftali’”. “To Dan he said, ‘Dan’”. And so to Zevulun and so to Osher. That is what it says in B’reishis Rabba, the *Aggadah* of Eretz Yisroel⁸.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

וּלְדָן אָמַר דָּן גּוֹר אַרְיֵה יִזְנֵק מִן הַבֹּשֶׁן:
To Dan he said, ‘Dan is like a young lion; he will pounce from the Boshon.

⁶ The entire verse reads:

וּלְזָבוּלָן אָמַר שְׂמַח זָבוּלָן בְּצֵאתְךָ וְיִשְׂשָׁר בְּאֵהֶלְךָ:
To Zevulun he said, ‘Zevulun, be happy with your going out and Yissochor in your tent.’

⁷ The entire verse reads:

וּלְאֹשֶׁר אָמַר בְּרוּךְ מִבְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יְהִי רְצוֹי אָחָיו וְטָבַל בְּשֶׁמֶן רַגְלוֹ:
To Osher he said, ‘Osher is blessed more than the other sons; you should find favor by your brothers and immerse his foot in olive oil.

(Rashi brings some of these verses out of the order in which they appear in the Chumash. I do not know the explanation for this seemingly unordered presentation.)

⁸ Rashi there continues and tells us the opposite opinion of whom the ‘weak’ brothers were. We read:

אבל בתלמוד בבלי שלנו מצינו שאותם שכפל משה שמותם הם החלשים ואותן הביא לפני פרעה, ויהודה שהוכפל שמו לא הוכפל משום חלשות, אלא טעם יש בדבר כדאיתא בבבא קמא (צב א), ובברייתא דספרי שנינו בה בזאת הברכה (ספרי שנד) כמו תלמוד שלנו:

Certainly, 'the many in the hand of the few' is easy to understand as well. Ten Shevatim entered into the great land of Egypt; the numbers of the Egyptians were overwhelmingly greater.

On the other hand, why should we have to give special thanksgiving for delivering the impure into the hand of the pure? Why should we have to give special thanksgiving for delivering the wicked into the hand of the righteous?

What preconceived notion do we have that makes it more likely that the impure will be victorious over the pure and that the wicked will be victorious over the righteous?

The fact is, though, that unlike purity and righteousness, impurity and evil are contagious and particularly dangerous.

When an object or a person that are *tahor* comes into contact with an object or person that is *tomei*, it is the impurity that spreads upon contact, not the purity⁹. Depending on the particular type of *tum'a* and other circumstances, impurity spreads; it is contagious.

Therefore, when there is a conflict between the impure, the Greeks and the Hellenists, and the pure – the Chashmonaim and those who affiliated themselves with the Chashmonaim, those who were pure were threatened by the *tum'a*-contagion that the Greeks and their followers wished to spread.

But in our Talmud Bavli we find that those whom Moshe repeated their names were the weak ones and it was those whom Yosef brought before Par'o. However, regarding Yehuda, whose name was repeated – he was mighty. The reason for the repetition of his name is found in Masseches Bava Kamma and the Sifrei.

⁹ The Halachos of *טומאה וטהרה* are complex. Not every contact between the impure and pure renders the latter impure.

There are various levels of impurity and various categories of impurity, each with their own set of rules, many of which are unique to a particular category.

It should be noted that in one instance, at least, that which is *tahor* can purify that which is impure. A Kosher Mikveh, containing the requisite amount of water, purifies other waters that may be added to it, even if those other waters are *tomei*.

Thus, we praise Hashem on Chanukah for the unusual victory of purity over impurity.

In the short run, at least, evil seems more powerful than righteousness.

The Mishnah in Masseches Ovos (Perek 4/Mishnah 2) teaches:

בן עזאי אומר הוי רץ למצוה...ובורח מן העבירה...

Ben Azai says, 'One should pursue Mitzvos and flee from sin...'

Mitzvos elude us; to reach them we have to run after them. Sin pursues us; in order to avoid sin we must run away from it¹⁰. Sin appears to be attractive and seductive. Mitzvos appear to be encumbrances.

Who would anyone choose an encumbrance over attractiveness?

Thus, we can explain why we take special note of the deliverance of our ancestors, with their purity and righteousness, from the hands of the Greeks and their Hellenistic followers who were at the other extreme of the spectrum.

But, when we come to עוסקי תורה, those who are involved in Torah study, we need to again question the superiority of the עוסי תורה the evil-plotters over עוסקי תורה.

After all, עוסקי תורה seem to be superior to those who 'just' learn Torah. Learning Torah, of course, is an extraordinary accomplishment. However, those who are עוסקי תורה are far more involved in Torah study than those who are 'just' learning.

And regarding those who are learning, we learn in Masseches Sotah (21 a):

אמר רב יוסף: מצוה, בעידנא דעסיק בה - מגנא ומצלא, בעידנא דלא עסיק בה - אגוני מגנא, אצולי לא מצלא; תורה, בין בעידנא דעסיק בה ובין בעידנא דלא עסיק בה - מגנא ומצלא.

Rav Yosef said, 'Mitzvos, when a person is involved in their fulfillment they protect and save. When a person is not involved in their performance, they offer protection but do not save.'

¹⁰ In Aley Shur II, Perek 6 of *Maareches Odom*, Rav Shlomo Wolbe ZT"l offers an explanation as to how the balance of these aspects of sin and goodness, respectively, are equitable despite the fact that sin pursues us and Mitzvos seem to flee from us.

Torah, whether one is involved or not, Torah protects and saves¹¹.

Certainly, those who were עוסקי תורתך should have had an advantage over the evil plotters!

However, there is another Gemara in Masseches Sanhedrin (26 b) that offers a very different perspective. We read there:

(ישעיה כח/כט¹²) הפלא עצה הגדיל תושיה. אמר רבי חנן: למה נקרא שמה תושיה - מפני שהיא מתשת כחו של אדם.

The Posuk writes: 'Hashem gives wondrous counsel; He increases inspiration'. Rav Chanan said, 'Why is Torah called תושיה? Because it weakens (מתשת) a person's strength.

When questioned about these paradoxical sources, Maran Rav Chaim Kanievsky's response is quoted in *Derech Sicha* (Chelek I, Parshas Voeschanan):

שאלה: בשם הגר"א איתא שבלימוד לשמה אין התורה מתשת כוחו של אדם, והרי מצינו שרבנן תשושי כח הן מפני שהתורה מתשת כוחם (ר"ן נדרים מט, א ד"ה מאן), וזה נאמר על "רבנן"?

תשובה: לא כולם לומדים לשמה, וגם בלשמה יש דרגות.

Question: In the name of the Vilna Gaon it is said that when one learns Torah לשמה, for its own sake and without ulterior motives, Torah does not weaken a person. But we have found that the *Rabbanan* are weak because they learn Torah. And it says *Rabbanan*?

Answer: Not all of them learn Torah לשמה and even in לשמה there are different levels.

¹¹ See the continuation of the Gemara there as it deals with sources that do not seem to be supportive of this statement.

¹² The entire verse reads:

גַּם זֹאת מֵעַם ה' יִצְאָה יְצֵאָה הַפְּלִיא עֲצָה הַגְּדִיל תּוֹשִׁיָה
This as well came out from Hashem of Hosts; He was wondrous with His counsel; He increased inspiration.

Thus, we see that there can be a situation in which even those who were genuinely עוסקי תורה would not have the physical ability, or better yet – not have the spiritual backbone to provide the physical ability, to stand up against such formidable foes.

But, we must still ask – why are םיד׳, those who intend to do evil the contrast to those involved in Torah learning.

I have seen in the various *sefarim*¹³ a discussion of why those who are evil are often successful against those who are righteous.

The answer that I have seen in numerous places, perhaps not so different than the one that Rav Chaim Kanievsky gave above is that the wicked, the evil-plotters may be completely dedicated to their mission whereas the Mitzvah observers, those who truly do strive to do that which is correct and to fulfil G-d's Will, may have that dedication somewhat diluted. The dedication of righteous to their goals may, at times, be less than the parallel dedication of our enemies to destroy us, physically and spiritually.

That is the reason that there are times when the םיד׳ are more powerful than the עוסקי תורה and thus in *Al HaNissim* we give thanks for the fact that the victory over the Greeks and their followers was an exception to that possibility.

And we now can conclude that depending on how we look at Chanukah, by its miraculous outcome or by its difficult process, we can determine if Parshas Miketz stands in contrast to Chanukah or is in painful harmony with its content.

In fact, though, not are only both perspectives true, this dual message of Chanukah is already expressed explicitly in the *piyut* of Maoz Tzur.

Maoz Tzur is one of the easily recognized songs in our repertoire of *Tefilah*-music. Perhaps it is only second in its fame to *Dayenu* of the Pesach Seder.

Yet, despite its fame and the familiarity of its tune, its content is not attended to as much as it should be.

Maoz Tzur begins with a call to praise Hashem and a request that He should establish our Beis HaMikdosh:

¹³ I regret that I cannot give a precise source for this explanation at this time.

תכון בית תפילתי ושם תודה נזבח

Establish my place of prayer and there I will offer a Korbon of Thanksgiving.

However, until we had respite,

חיי מררו בקושי

In Egypt they embittered my life with hardship.

Despite Egypt being a most difficult environment:

ובידו הגדולה הוציא את הסגולה

With His Great Hand, Hashem took out His treasured People.

The *piyut* continues in its second stanza and informs us that in fact Hashem did build us a Beis HaMikdosh:

דביר קדשו הביאני

He did bring me to the House of His Sanctity

But, we were not worthy because

יין רעל מסכתי

I poured libations of idolatrous wine

and was banished.

But that exile was not final:

לקץ שבעים נושעתי

I was saved after 70 years following the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdosh.

The threat of Homon was upon me then and he was decimated and in place of the slaughter that he planned:

ראש ימיני נישאת

You Hashem raised up Mordechai!

And yet there were more threats to us as we come to Chanukah.

יונים נקבצו עלי

The Greeks gathered together against me.

They did not threaten our physical lives as much as they threatened our spiritual lives.

ופרצו חומות מגדלי וטמאו כל השמנים

They breached the walls of the Beis HaMikdosh and wrought impurity throughout.

But as had occurred in the past,

נעשה נס לשושנים

A miracle was done for Israel.

This is the history of our People through Chanukah, the final celebratory days that were established by *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*. The pattern is fixed. The vicissitudes are ongoing and repetitive.

There is a process that is so often inundated with suffering and there are wonderful outcomes which, alas, have been temporary only.

With that we turn to G-d and ask of Him,

חשוף זרוע קדשך וקרב לנו הישועה

Reveal Your true infinite strength and bring the *Geula* soon.

May the sorrowful process of Jewish History throughout the ages come to their end and may the glorious final and eternal outcome that has been promised for Israel be revealed soon in our days so that just as the perceived persecution in Egypt was turned around, so may our difficult and ongoing exile find its conclusion with the Redemption that Hashem has promised us.

Chanukah Sameach

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock