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*With
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ב"ה

Chanukah - חנוכה

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The Secret Us

Every single year Chanukah coincides with the story of Yosef. Is this merely a coincidence or is there a message each lend the other?

We know that the holidays of the Jewish year are the life cycle and development of our Neshamos, our souls. They collectively form a ladder causing our relationship with Hashem to ascend. The first Yom Tov of the year is Pesach. Pesach is the spiritual birth of the Jewish people. As is evident in the fact that much like a birth of a human in which the atmosphere must be entirely sterile so too the birth of our souls tolerates zero chomitz ensuring utter sterileness from the Yetzer Hara. Next comes Shavuos which is the Bar Mitzvah of the Neshama. It is when we receive the Torah and Mitzvos. The next Yom Tov is Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succos which is the preparation and wedding between us and Hashem. It is where we enjoy a holiday of pure happiness celebrating our cherished relationship with God. That is followed by Shemini Atzeres which is likened to the Yichud room in which we enjoy a day of unadulterated closeness and privacy with Hashem.

The question is how can anything possibly follow that? Shouldn't that be the absolute highest rung on the ladder? Yet Chanukah is the next one up. How does Chanukah fit into this sequence? Listen to the beautiful explanation given by Reb Shimshon Pincus.

One's wedding night is supposed to be the happiest time of one's life. So why is it that often when you go to a wedding the Chosson and Kallah who although smiling and happy, seem a tad nervous and agitated? Queasy and edgy? Perhaps the answer is that although they are filled with joy that they are wed, there is an element of doubt that lingers in their heart. Will this work out? Is my spouse really the one for me? Are we truly compatible? Will we remain loyal?

In contrast, if you ever attend a couple's fiftieth wedding anniversary and look into their eyes what do you see? You see pure, unadulterated love and affection for one another. Almost as if it's two bodies sharing the same heart. Why is that? For that doubt they felt at their wedding is no longer there. Gone is the fear of the unknown. Their faith and compatibility has been tried and tested and they've danced down the road of life, together. They've been through the good times and the bad, together. They've seen the highs and the lows, together. They look into each other's eyes and remember the joy they've felt together when their first child was born. They remember the pain they felt together after they had a miscarriage and the strength each gave one another. They recall those younger years together in a one room apartment without a worry in the world and they recall those long cold nights together wondering if their 27-year-old daughter will ever get married. They remember the joy they had together when he got his first real job and the sorrow and fear they felt together when the business had to close. They remember the glee the day they bought their house together and the scariness of the night there was a fire in the kitchen. They remember the simcha of walking their children to the chuppah together and the sadness they felt together while placing their parent's coffin into the grave. They've been through it all. Together. An anniversary is a celebration of the million small moments that make up a marriage. A marriage that was forever-together.

When we got the Torah from Hashem it was our wedding. We were overjoyed. We were filled with happiness. But there were doubts. There were reservations. Would we remain loyal? Would we stay faithful?

The Greeks were the ultimate test. Amalek, Nebuchadnezzar, and Titus were all horrible murderous people but they didn't offer any reason for us to abandon God. The Greeks were different. Suddenly our loyalty was in question.

Something caught our eye. Something spoke to us. Art. Science. Philosophy. Would we replace passion in God with the study of Greek wisdom and mythology? Would we replace the beauty of the Torah with the “beauty” of the modern world?

The Greeks didn’t want us dead, they wanted us to be “normal.” They wanted us to be “cultured.” The Rambam in Iggeres Hashmad (Kiddush Hashem, pg. 9) says that the Greeks decreed that no Jew was allowed to fully close the front door of their house and eventually decreed no Jew was allowed to have a front door to their homes at all. Why? For they wanted the “wisdom” of the street to permeate the Jewish homes and dilute the love of Hashem that was stored there.

And yet we were loyal. And yet we remained. We clung close despite the streets of Greece begging us to come apart.

Chanukah is an anniversary of our relationship with Hashem. It is the rung higher than the wedding for it’s a celebration of a relationship that’s tried and tested. We clung close through the thick and the thin. Hashem didn’t give up on us and we didn’t give up on him.

Yosef had one of the most difficult lives of any character in Tanach. And yet what does the Torah say about him? “Hashem Ito” (Vayeishev 39:3). Hashem was always with Yosef. Yosef was always with Hashem. He was forever on Yosef’s lips. No matter the degree of helplessness the situation seemed, Yosef forever remained with Hashem.

The Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah is referred to by the Rambam as “Chaviva he ad Meod.” Exceedingly special. The commentators (Sefer Hatodaah) explain that the Rambam uses that terminology specifically in regards to the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah for it is the only Mitzvah that we do today that is an exact replica of something we did in the Bais Hamikdash. It is an echo of that glorious time when Hashem came down from heaven to live with us on earth.

Chanukah is the Yom Tov where we light a fire in our hearts, hold our torch high, look to the heavens and say “Hashem, we cherish our relationship with you and are ready to serve you no matter what and no matter when”. It is a time when we recommit to live a life that is nothing but us and Hashem. Together.