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INYANEI CHANUKAH



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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YAVAN IN OUR CURRENT DAYS

Many times in our lives, we face different series of challenges, and many times the challenge is not a direct challenge to our *Yahadus*, but one that sneaks up on us. During *yemei haChanukah*, we need to understand what the challenge of the *Yevanim* was.

The Ramchal writes in his *sefer Derech Hashem* that on Chanukah, with the conquest of the *kohanim* over the *reshayim*, the influence of *bnei Yavan* - whose intention was להסיר ישראל מעבודת ה', to remove *Klal Yisrael* from *avodas Hashem* - was weakened. He says, ונתחזקו הכהנים, the *kohanim* became stronger, ועל ידם, and through the *kohanim*, שבו לתורה ולעבודה, they returned to the Torah and to the *avodah*.

Now, we need to understand exactly what methodology *Yavan* employed so that we can recognize where *Yavan* is rearing its head in our own lives. The Ramchal says the Torah and *avodah* came back, ובפרט, and specifically, that the המנורה לפי ענין תיקוניה, the menorah with its *tikun* that it provided to *Klal Yisrael* was restored.

WHY WAS THE MENORAH CENTRAL TO THE VICTORY

He says, שהיו הקטרוגים נגד ענינה, the challenge that *Yavan* evoked was a challenge *neged* the *inyan*, the concept, for which the menorah stood. והחזירום הכהנים על בורים, and the *kohanim* returned these *inyanim* to their proper place. So we want to know, what does it mean for us that the *ikar kitrug* - the *ikar* challenge of *Yavan* - was to what the menorah represented, and why the *nes* specifically happened with the menorah?¹

THE ERA OF THE YEVANIM - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We're going to begin by introducing you to some words of Rav Yonason Eibshutz from his famous *sefer* called *Ya'aros Devash*. He says like this: You first have to understand the era within which the *Yevanim* showed up on the scene. What preceded the era of the *Yevanim*? It was *Paras*.

What famous story preceded the “*shalom aleichem*” of the *Yevanim*? The story of *Achashveirosh*, and *Mordechai* and *Esther*, that happened right before. The *Yevanim* came on the scene on the heels of the episode of *Mordechai* and *Esther*. People don't realize that you have to know a little bit of history. When did the story of *Mordechai* and *Esther* happen? At the end of the first *Beis Hamikdash* era. The *Yevanim* and *Alexander the Great* came upon the scene in the beginning of the second *Beis Hamikdash* era. Now we have to understand what *shaychus* do they have with each other? Is there a *shaychus*?

¹ חנוכה ופורים: ענין חנוכה ופורים הוא להאיר האור המאיר בימים ההם כפי התקונים שנתקנו בהם. חנוכה בתגבורת הכהנים על הרשעים בני יון שהיו מתכונים להסיר ישראל מעבודת ה' ונתחזקו הכהנים ועל ידם שבו לתורה ולעבודה. ובפרט ענין המנורה לפי תיקוניה שהיו הקטרוגים נגד ענינה והחזירום הכהנים על בורים. ופורים לענין הצלתם של ישראל בגלות בבל וחזרת קבלת התורה שחזרו וקבלו עליהם לעולם כמו שאז"ל (שבת פח א) הדור קבלוה בימי אחשוורוש ופרטי העינים כפי פרטי התיקון (דרך ה', חלק רביעי', במצות הזמנים)

THE END OF IDOL WORSHIP

The *Ya'aros Devash* says that there was something that was accomplished through Mordechai and Esther. You know what that is? During their era, there ceased to be the worship of the *ovdei kochavim*, the worshipers of the stars. People used to worship the stars. That was the main *avodah zarah* in those days. What caused that to become *batel*? Does anybody know what nullified that?

The *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah*, of which Mordechai was one of the leaders, actually got together and they were *mevatel* the *koach* of *avodah zarah* from the world. There was a specific *yetzer hara* that existed in those days, which we, in our modern age, simply cannot imagine. To give you an idea what it was, the strength of it, it was the stronger of the two *yetzer haras* that a person has. Another *yetzer hara* is *ta'avah*, which is active 24/7. You can't imagine how strong the *ta'avah* was, but there was a much stronger type of *yetzer hara*. The urge to worship *avodah zarah* was so strong that there was somebody who was once giving a *shiur* and he was saying, "I can't imagine other people in the previous generation, how could they be so foolish as to fall for *avodah zarah*?" Then he had a dream where somebody who fell for *avodah zarah* in the last generation came to him and said, "Let me tell you something. Thank your lucky stars you're not from the last generation. Because when we did it, we fell and we were *nichshal*, we stumbled, we did it with the heaviest of hearts and we walked very slow. Had you lived in that generation, you would have been walking around with the hem of your coat up, ready to run as fast as you can to do the *avodah zarah*. Don't judge us from your position." But *Anshei Kkenesses Hagedolah* managed an amazing *nes*. They managed to nullify that *yetzer hara*.

THE WEAKENING OF ORAL TORAH AND THE RISE OF YAVANUS

But there was a problem, says the *Ya'aros Devash*. *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, the Oral Torah, was weak. The *mesorah* of Torah had become weakened. Why? Because the *chachmah* that the Yevanim introduced to the world began to rise. There was intelligentsia and wise people. There was wisdom in the world. It wasn't like we were in some backwater of Poland, or some backwoods of Australia, or backwoods of Russia, where all they wanted to have is a *nuch a shtickle klutz*, another piece of wood. And to sing their funny national songs and think they are imaginary leaders of the world and dreamers. Greeks had *emese chachmah*. And he says at the beginning of the *Bayis Sheini*, there was another thing that happened. The Kusim built a *Beis Hamikdash* on Har Grizim and over there, all the people who were *pokrim* against the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* gathered. They became members of that temple. And he says, all the Tzedukim, all the stubborn ones *l'mineihem*, like it says in Josephus, he writes, joined the Kusim's temple. That was their *Beis Hamikdash*.

THE PERUSHIM, THE TZEDUKIM AND THE ISIM

In Eretz Yisrael at that time, he says, there were three groups. They were the Perushim. The Perushim were the ones who were the *ba'alei mesorah* of Torah. They're the ones who transmitted the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* the way it was given to us from Moshe Rabbeinu.

Then there was the congregation of the Tzedukim who were *kofer* in *techiyas hameisim* and *olam haba*. They came up with a position that there's no such thing as *olam haba*. You live for this world.

The point was just to have a decent life in this world, and to live together in a good manner. They said the Torah just gives all kinds of structures for a moral life.

And then you had another group called the Isim. The Isim were very, very *frum*. They conducted themselves with extreme *prishus*. But they had one problem. They would not accept the *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. They were very big intelligentsia. They were very into studying. Their *derech* was based on the *chachmah* of philosophy and philosophers, and they were interested very much in introducing the *da'as* of the *chitzonim*. You have people today like that. So Isim were very much into scholarly, philosophical discussions. They quoted extensively from Plato, Aristotle, all the *groise chachamim*. They sounded pshhh! And they would quote some kind of *devar chachmah*, as if they were most certainly correct, and that was their *minhag*.

They interpreted the Torah according to their view, and they were very intense in interpreting Torah. They were very intense. They were very extremely committed because they were *fadreit*.

THE RESURGENCE OF TORAH SHEB'AL PEH AND THE RISE OF CHACHMAH

Now, he says, this is the cause that brought about the Yevanim on Yerushalayim. Why is that? He says because all these Jews who had become Hellenized and the *pokrim*, the ones who became *apikorsim*, were *malshin* against the Perushim, the *frum* ones, and when the *Yevanim* came to the holy land, they joined forces with them. All of them joined forces except for the Perushim. And the Perushim of course, their numbers diminished seriously. From the last vestige of these Perushim, the *nes* sprouted forth. They were the ones who raised the banner of Yahadus against the *Yevanim*. What happened as a result of this is that subsequently *Torah Sheb'al Peh* had its greatest resurgence during this era, because they saw the success of the Perushim.

Sometimes people act like sheep, they see who looks more impressive and they go and follow them. You know like some guy who watches TV and sees a rabbi on TV - someone who's called a rabbi. He's a spokesperson for Jewry. Really, the guy's not a spokesman for a jar of pickles. He has a couple of cabbages in his *shul* that sometimes sprout forth on Shabbos, and he's the 'spokesman' for all of Jewry. But he sounds polished and he says *shtusim* that's very close to these people's minds, so they buy into it. Once the Perushim raised their banner, one of the major things the Chashmonaim instituted was that you're not allowed to learn *chachmas haYevanus*. That was one of the things they instituted because that was the philosophy from Aristotle and *chaveirav* that undermined the Torah.

LOGIC THAT IS CONTRARY TO ACCEPTING THE MESORAH

Now, I want you to understand that their undermining of the Torah was a real threat because, as much as we don't like to say it, Aristotle was a brilliant man. How do I know? The way I know this is because there was a brilliant man who said he was brilliant. You know who that brilliant man was? The Rambam. The Rambam writes that anybody who thinks that Aristotle was not smart is mistaken for one simple reason: He hasn't plummeted the depths of Aristotle's mind. Because what Aristotle has to say is brilliant. He's wrong but he's brilliant, the Rambam said. Aristotle was a brilliant man. That was the threat of brilliance. See, we're not afraid of some *shotim* getting up and espousing some *shtus v'hevel* that's not *shayach*.

I used to have a student who was a Reform rabbi and he was on the radio in New York. He moved from here to New York and he started a show. It was called Ask the Rabbi, a one-hour show. He got up on his first show and spoke about capital punishment. What is the Jewish perspective on capital punishment? He calls me up to give me such great *nachas*. He has a tape. I said, "What's the story? What did you say?" "I told them straight. Jewish religion does not believe, never has believed, never accepted the concept of capital punishment." I said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "There's a *mesechta Sanhedrin*, there's a *mesechta Makos*." "Oh, I never studied those." I said, "It's in the *chumash!* *Mos yumas!*" He said, "Where's that?" So I said, "There's *sekilah*. There's *sereifah*. There's *hereg*. There's *chenek*. There are four types of capital punishment." I gave him a crash course. He says, "Oh, I'm surprised. I've never seen anybody do that. Have you?" People like that, we're not afraid of at all.

But a *mentsch* that is *be'emes* brilliant, is a different story. And the Yevanim were brilliant and they had tremendous logic. The ability to present things in a logical, beautiful manner was their *koach*, and it was a tremendous threat. A tremendous threat.

I once met an *emese Yevani*. A guy was learning Chiddushei Rav Chaim Halevi with his *chavrusa*. I remember I was a teenager. I was watching them learn and I was jealous. I'm telling you, the saliva was coming out of my mouth. I was listening to them discuss Rav Chaim. I even remember what the piece was on. On Rav Chaim's famous *chiddush* on *uber*. What status does an *uber*, a fetus, have? It's a very *shver* Rav Chaim. These guys were hocking it over and *mamash* discussing it. I was thinking, wow! They looked like modern guys. Afterward, I *chapped* a *shmooze* with one of them. He told me where they study. So I said, "Okay," and I'm thinking, wow. Then one guy told me a *yesod*. He said, "Let me tell you a *yesod*." I said, "I'm impressed by your clarity." He said, "You'll never get clarity from learning in a *yeshivah*. You have to go to college. You have to study at a university to get a *klar kup* to understand how to understand Torah." I'm thinking, "Shrek. I'm shot. I'm gone. I'm hopeless. I dropped out of ninth grade. I'm finished. I better go back to school." But it's unbelievable how persuasive that *Yevani* philosophy can be.

Then I met a big *talmid* of Rav Aharon and I was asking him about this, and he told me a *noradige ma'aseh*. He told me there was a Yid who was one of Rav Aharon's big *talmidim*. Rav Aharon was having a *machlokes* with this guy. He was trying to explain to him a *sevara*. This guy had gone to university for some time before he went to Lakewood. Rav Aharon was trying to explain the *sevara*, and the guy couldn't grasp it. Finally, Rav Aharon said, "*Vus vilst du?* Nu, what do you want? You went to university. You're never going to grasp this *sevara*." I'm thinking, "A whole different world." You see, there are people out there who think that if you go to college, somehow you can get an *ofene klure kup*, and now, you'll suddenly see things with tremendous clarity. That's what they teach you in college, of course. There are *emes* Yevanim out there.

What you have to understand is this: the *Yevanim* went out of their way to make us forget the Torah, and their hatred was specifically that they could not accept the fact there's a *mesorah*. They wanted to make people forget the concept of *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. The way they wanted to do this, was by introducing people to methods of logic, methods of thinking, thinking for yourself, figuring things out. This is the *shoresh* of *kefirah* in *Torah Sheb'al Peh*.

YAVAN WANTED TO STOP ORAL TORAH

That's what we say in *Al Hanissim*. We say *עמר ישראל* על הרשעה. They wanted to make us forget the Torah. See, if you forget *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, you don't have Torah.

I remember, I used to study with this rabbi and I used to explain *pessukim* to him. The guy's mind would be bottled. Do you know why? Because he never knew there was such a thing called Rashi. He went for many years to study in some 'cemetery' somewhere. And I said, "You thought you were going to a 'seminary.' They sent you to a 'cemetery.'" I said, "They buried you. They buried Rashi." He showed me his *chumash*. I was shocked. They actually printed up a *chumash* with commentaries you've never heard of. Jack this. Harold this. Franklin this. It's like a *gantze* other *velt*. It's an *olam golem*. Ramban doesn't exist. Rashi doesn't exist. Sifsei Chachamim doesn't exist. *Sisfei teme'im* exists. They have all kinds of stuff over there. You have to understand. Bible critics. Half the thing was Bible critics. It's *pashut* mind-boggling. Three quarters of it's from *goyim*. It's unbelievable.

LEARNING TORAH IN ORDER TO DO

I once saw the greatness of *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. I was studying with a doctor, and he was recoring some of the *shiur* I was giving on *chumash*. One day, I got a call from a Roman Catholic, an orthodox Roman Catholic priest, the head priest on the West Side. He had a *shtickel* Greek-like accent or a Polish accent. I don't know what kind of accent it was. Like from the *altere heim* you understand. He said, "Rabbi, I was listening to some tapes of your teachings." He said, "I would like to join the classes." I said, "You're joking around." He said, "No." I said, "What? You've never studied the Bible?" He said, "I've studied the Bible all my life. I never heard the Bible studied or explained in this fashion." He said, "Where are these commentaries?" I told him, "Rashi, Ramban, Ramchal." I named them. He had never heard of them. He wanted to know if he could join my class.

What do I tell the guy? It would be nice to have a *galach*, a *chashuve galach* in your classes, you understand. On the flyer, it would definitely look good. But I told the fellow, "I don't think so." He said, "Could you explain to me why not?" He said, "I understand, but could you explain it to me." I said to him, "Do you know what the word Torah means?" No, he didn't know. He knew Bible. That's what he knew. I said, "What does 'Bible' mean? To me, it means 'babble.' What does 'Bible' mean to you?" He says, "It's a Latin word." He gave me a *gantze shtickel Torah* on the word 'Bible.' It has no *shaychus* to *chumash*. No *shaychus* to Torah. I told him, "Torah means instructions. What we're studying is how I should guide and lead my life per the instructions of my Creator." I said, "First of all, the whole basis of your religion is that what it says in the Torah is *gornisht*. The Bible is something that's meant to be read and not followed. *V'hara'ayah*, it says not to eat *chazir* and you guys eat *chazir*. It says you should rest on the seventh day. You don't rest on the seventh day. It says you should put on phylacteries. You don't wear phylacteries. It says you should wear fringes on your clothes. You don't wear fridges on your clothes. It says you should put scrolls on your doors. You don't have scrolls on your doors." I said, "Matzah on Passover you don't do. Sit in tents and huts you don't do." I said, "That's Judaism. That's our Judaism. You're going to pick and choose to 'love thy neighbor like thyself.' That's not the Torah." I said, "Our whole purpose of learning the Bible is to understand what it is we need to do. And for you, it's not your instruction. The instruction book was given to me, to tell me how I have to conduct my life. For you, it's not your book. So what purpose would it be?" "I understand." I left it at that.

OUR STRUGGLE TODAY TO ACCEPT THE MESORAH

A *mentsch* has to understand that this is what the *Yevanim* were - *ba'alei chachmah*. You have to realize many of us have struggled with this *mesorah* business. It's unbelievable. We can't accept the *mesorah*. That a Jew should dress like a Jew. You'll study the whole Torah. Where does it say a Jew should dress like a Jew? Nowhere. Now we know it. It's a *mesorah*. This is a *mesorah* of the Jewish nation. That a Jew speaks like a Yid. Where do you learn that from?

That a Jew has to have a Jewish name? Where does it come from? Where does it say in the Torah *lo sikra b'sheimos hagoyim*? It doesn't say it anywhere. How does it work? And today, do you know how many *frum* Yidden there are who have this poison in them, this cancer in them, that when their kids are going to be born, they're going to have to name them some *goyishe* name, because "How are you going to get along in the world without a *goyishe* name?" Do you know how many *frum* people have called me up and told me this? I said, "What are you cuckoo?" I said, "My name is Yisroel. I've gotten along." "They don't call you Israel?" I said, "No. My name is Yisroel. Y-I-S-R-O-E-L. Get that straight. You understand? And there's no English name there. No Izzy. No Jack. You understand? No Jisrael or something like that." I don't know what it is. People don't understand that. You know how many *frum* people told me, "Rebbi, you have to have an English name in this world. You just have to have one. You're going to go into the world as 'Moshe'?" I said, "Yes!" "Nah, come on." I said, "Why not?"

That's pure *Yevanus* and every one of us has to get it out of our system.

I tell people, "Now that you're *frum*, why don't you drop your *goyishe* name? Kiss your Franklin away. Kiss your Seth, Jared, Robert, Harold. Kiss it away! Goodbye!" They can't. You know why? People see themselves with the black hats and they worry about their identity. "I'm not getting rid of my name. That's who I am. It's very hard to cut that out of your system."

They try to get rid of us by destroying the *mesorah*, not to allow us to address the *mesorah* of Torah.

HASHEM'S GIFT: PROTECTION AGAINST YAVANUS

Now, who is the counterforce for the *Yevanim*? You know who the counterforce was? The *gemara* says an amazing thing. The *gemara* in *Megillah* (11a) says there's a *passuk* at the end of *Vayikra* that says, *לא מאסתים ולא געלתים*. Hashem says, "I didn't detest the Jewish people. I didn't reject the Jewish people." The *gemara* says that each one of these statements refers to a different era. *לא געלתים* refers to *yemei haYevanim*.

"I didn't reject the Jewish people. You know what I did," Hashem says? *שמעון הצדיק וחשמונאי ובניו ומתתיהו כהן גדול* להם, "I gave them, I presented them with *כהן גדול*." Now, Shimon Hatzaddik and the Chashmonaim were not in the same era. Shimon Hatzaddik lived at the beginning of the second *Beis Hamikdash* era, for forty years during the second *Beis Hamikdash*. Shimon Hatzaddik was the *Kohen Gadol* and head of the *Sanhedrin* in the days of Alexander the Great. He was one of the few people in history that was *zocheh* to a name 'the great.' The man conquered the world. He was a *pelah*. He died very young. He died at 33 years old. The guy was already a ruler of the world in his 20s. It was absolutely absurd.

Alexander Mukdon didn't go anywhere without his *chavrusa* and his *rebbe*. Aristotle was his *rebbe*. He traveled with him to every battle, campaign of war, every theater he entered, he always went with his *rebbe*. The *rebbe* *zugt pshat azoy, pshat azoy*. He was *klering shaylos*. He was an *ish* of *chachmah she'ein kedugmaso*. The *gemara* tells in *Yuma* about the *shaylos* he asked. The *shaylos* that bothered him, we don't think about.

It's very interesting because the Yevanim came around much later. Alexander the Great was at the beginning of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. Then he perished. And we suffered from the Yevanim only another 180 years later. There was a huge amount of time in between.

THE FIRST SEED OF YAVANUS

But you must realize that the *hisnagdus*, the challenge of *malchus Yavan* began from the days of Alexander the Great. He already did actions to challenge Klal Yisrael.

You know what one of the first things they did was? The *gemara* tells us they took the Torah, and they translated it into Greek. It was by order of King Ptolemy. That was in the beginning. It was way before the story of Chanukah. That was as a result of *Yavan's* beginning. You know what they said? "This Torah of yours, this secret book, that you say you have all kinds of secrets and you have all kinds of *mesorahs* and all kinds of Kabbalah - let's translate it into Greek. Let the Greeks study the book." So Ptolemy got five scholars and each one wrote a translation. He said: "What does it say over here? *Gornisht!* In the beginning..." And the Greeks made a little *leitzanus* of the Torah. It's very easy to make fun of the Torah after it has been translated ineffectively. You don't understand anything. You can't decode the *Torah Shebichsav* without *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. But the Greeks applied their limited minds to (mis)understanding the Torah, and this was the result. The *gemara* says that was a day that was *קשה לישראל כיום שנעשה בו העגל*, because the Torah could not be interpreted adequately enough through translation and it was inevitable that there would be issues and that was the beginning of the decline of *Torah Sheb'al Peh*.

JEWS FALLING FOR OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Participant question: Why was it a problem for the Jews? If the goyim have a poor translation of the Torah for themselves, why should that have a bad effect on the Jews?

Very simple. Today, there are tremendous self-hating Jews. Where did Jews learn to self-hate themselves? I'll tell you what happened. When they left the ghetto, they went into the world. All of a sudden they heard that Jews are cheap (unwilling to spend money). So the guy came home and said, "Jews are cheap? I guess Jews are cheap." Now, Jews were the kindest people ever in the history of the world. No Jew ever said Jews are cheap. That's a *goyishe* thing. They took our *ma'aleh* and they made it into our *chisaron*.

People said Jews were unkempt, unclean, and filthy. The fact is that Jews were cleaner than any *goy* ever was. When the Black Plague hit Europe, the Jews were the only ones that didn't die en masse from the Black Plague. You know why? Because the Jews washed themselves. A minimum of once a week they bathed themselves well. Numerous Jews went to the *mikvah* many more times during the week. They were clean. It was such an anomaly to the *goyim*, that they were convinced the Jews made the Black Plague. Who knows how many Jews were killed in pogroms because they claimed the Jews instituted that plague? How is it you guys don't get killed? The *teretz* is we're clean and you're filthy.

When did a *goy* take a haircut? Never. When did a Jew take a haircut? Once in thirty days, the *halachah* says you should take a haircut. Jews always shaved their hair, kept the hair short. When did a *goy* shave his hair? You know when? If his wife got fed up with it and she shaved it off of him when she was in a bad mood. There was no such thing by *goyim*. When did a *goy* take a shower? A *goy* took a shower? I don't know. What did he need to take a shower for? He smelled. All his friends smelled. What did he need to take a shower for? For the *mikvah*? What did he have to prepare for? There is no *halachah* that you can't go into a 'smurch' without getting bathed and showered. What kind of *nafka mina*? The more you smell the better it is because over there, all the people smell, we welcome you all. That's their whole thing. They spread our hands out to all the lowlifes, degenerates, harlots, *ganavim*, *gazlanim*. That's what we do over there. That's their own words. They're very *ofene mentschen*, open people.

So what happens is, Jews tend to hear what others say about them, and then they become *mushpa*, and they start believing it. When you have a guy who is not so sharp, he believes what the outside world says. Not everybody's a genius, not everybody's a *talmid chacham*. There are a lot of *pashute* Yidden. And here, they meet this brilliant *goy*, and the brilliant *goy* says, "You know what the rabbi's telling you? There's nothing here that's cracked up to be anything. It's all baloney. It's a bluff. They're selling you a bill of goods. They want to have the secret cabal of rabbis to control the Jews and that's how they control Jewish people, by telling you you have to have a *mesorah*. And you can't get the *mesorah*. It's not online. You can't access it and it's not available and it's not in your language. It's written in a funny language. You can't understand it." And then those people say, "I looked at it. We read it. It's *gornisht*." Because they can't understand it at all without *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. So of course this is what's going to happen, they don't understand the Torah, they end up making a *leitzanus* of it and the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* declines in the world.

You have to understand this is tremendous and every Jew today suffers from this. I see it all the time. I had a *talmid* once. He was in a *yeshivah gedolah* for a while. He tells me, "Rabbi, these people are disgusting." I said, "How? In what way?" He said, "Can you imagine? I see kids shaving and they clean up after they shave. But they don't do a good job and they leave some of their hairs around the sink." I said, "So." He said, "Rabbi, I was in university. Such a thing never happens in university." I said, "What? Were you in a university of one person?" I said, "Let me tell you something. In university, if your room is not locked, you're *bechezkas* to get your stuff stolen. In *yeshivah*, there's no *bechezkas* it's getting stolen." I said, "And in that place, everybody cleans their sinks up beautifully, right?" I said, "You probably couldn't go to the bathroom in one of these universities without catching every disease in the world there. Of course, they don't leave their hairs on the sink. You know what I mean? They don't have any reason to go near the sink. He tells me, "Universities are halls of fame." I told him, "Are you cuckoo? You think I never saw guys from university? A bunch of drunks. They're a lot worse than *yeshivah bachurim*. What do you want?" "Ah, please!" But this is all anti-semitism. Although the guy heard what I was saying, he was convinced he was right. That's what it is. You become *mushpa*. You become *mushpa* very easily. That's what a *mentsch* has to know.

SHIMON HATZADDIK, HASHEM'S GIFT TO KLAL YISRAEL

Who was Shimom Hatzaddik? What group did Shimon Hatzaddik belong to? He was from the last of the *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah*. How do you know that? It's a *mishnah* right in the beginning of *Avos* (1:2). It says שמעון הצדיק היה משיירי כנסת

הגדולה, “Rav Shimon HaTzadik was one of the last of the men of the great assembly.” You know what the Rav Bartanura says?² He was the last. He was the last person to have the *mesorah*. After all of the *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah* died, and he was the last one to hold the *mesorah*. The Rambam lists who were the ones who transmitted the Torah from Moshe Rabeinu, and he says האחרון מהם, the last of the *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah* was Shimon Hatzaddik. He was one of the original one hundred and twenty, and he was שבעל פה מכולם.

Now, Shimon Hatzaddik was the one who established the *koach haTorah*. You could ask him any question you wanted. Him, you couldn’t shake. He was unshakable. Even the story the *gemara* tells us shows this: Alexander fell on the floor from him. It’s a *noradige gemara*. It says when Alexander met Shimon Hatzaddik he went nuts. Aristotle and his people asked him why are you getting nuts about him? They said, “He’s one of those guys. He’s one of the Jews!” He said, “I see his face before me every time I go into war. If I see his face, I win.” He said, “This is the man that guides my wars.” “What! You’re cracking. You’re hallucinating. You think about Jews now in your dreams?” Shimon Hatzaddik was in his mind. That’s what it was. A *peledige zach*. And Shimon Hatzaddik was *mekabel Torah Sheb’al Peh* from all of the *Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah*.

NO MORE AVODAH ZARAH, NO NEED FOR PROPHECY

Now you have to understand, with Alexander’s demise, you know what happened? He was a king for just twelve years. And with his demise, a tremendous change happened in Klal Yisrael, and that was that prophecy ceased to be from Hashem. You have to realize there was an era when *nevius* was available. You could actually talk to Hashem, which is something that transcended anything natural. The Yevanim were the biggest haters and denigrators of prophecy. They hated prophets with a passion. You know why? There was no logic to prophecy. You couldn’t explain it. Figure out a prophecy. Let’s say Hashem tells me a prophecy. They ask you, “Is Hashem talking to you now?” You answer, “Yeah, Hashem talks to us. He’s been talking to us for years.” So an interesting thing happened with the demise of Alexander. There was no more prophecy. It says ומכאן ואילך הט אזניך ושמע דברי חכמים, the supremacy of the words of the *chachamim* were instituted, became established, with the demise of prophecy. *Chachamim* became the king. Before that the *nevi'im* were the king and now *chachmah* became the king. And you know when it happened?

It’s interesting. The Vilna Gaon says that happened simultaneously when they destroyed the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zarah*. Rav Hutner explains this as follows. He says as long as there was *avodah zarah* in the world, Hashem gave the *koach* of prophecy to counter that *koach*. Once *avodah zarah* went down in the world, there was no need for prophecy.

THE RISE OF KEFIRAH, AND IT DIDN’T FALL YET

But now a new *avodah zarah* replaced the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zarah*. What was that? *Kefirah* in *Torah Sheb’al Peh*. A person could be *kofer* in the *mesorah*. Aristotle and his friends represented this specific challenge and that brought the *hashpa’ah* of *minus* to Klal Yisrael and Jews started being *kofer* in *Torah Sheb’al Peh*. Over time it became whittled down and whittled down and whittled down and whittled down. Our job was to be *mechazek*, to accept the *divrei Chachamim*, and the *yetzer hara* was working on the other side.

² משיירי. שלאחר שמתו כל נביאי הנבואה בידו. והוא היה כהן גדול אחר עזרא.

That is the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zarah* today. That permeates the world. That's why you have many, many *frum* Yidden, who don't believe or understand or accept the supremacy of *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. You know how many *yeshivah bachurim* think that the study of *Torah Sheb'al Peh* has no value? "It doesn't teach me anything. What do I gain by toiling over what the *hava mina* was and another *hava mina*, another *maskanah*, another *kasha*? And at the end, I get a *teretz* which I'm not clear about."

REJECTION OF TORAH SHEB'AL PEH

People say, "I like the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*. Give it to me straight." You know what kind of *yetzer hara* that is today? Every second guy has the *yetzer hara*. "Come on, who cares what the *hava mina* was? Why does Tosfos write this huge Tosfos to tell what the *hava mina* was, one *pshat*, two *pshat*, three *pshat*, four *pshat*? What do we need that for? Does it butter my bread? What does it do for me at the end of the day? It tells me how to keep Shabbos better? I want practical Judaism." Practical Judaism - that's *Torah Shebichsav*. They want *Torah Shebichsav* Judaism. It's a very big *yetzer hara* today, a tremendous *yetzer hara* today. And it keeps on raising its head. And people twist and twist and turn, all kinds of things. They bring down from this *sefer*, from that *sefer*. And it's all *Yevanische ma'asos* and it's all to undermine *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. That's what they're trying to do.

APIKORSUS

That's why you'll notice: where in today's world was *apikorsus* most baked in? In Soviet Russia. That's where it is. The real thing, the real McCoy, denial of Hashem. What is one of the greatest challenges that Russians Yidden have? Two main challenges across the board. Accepting a *rebbe*. They can't buy into that. That thought *pashut* goes against every grain in their system. And the second thing is *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. They have a really difficult time with *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. They love philosophy. I'm talking about deep Jewish philosophy. They love these theoretical, idealistic concepts. They really do! It's unbelievable! That, they go for, but anything *Torah Sheb'al Peh* - no.

This happened because they grew up in *kefirah* of the Soviet Union, everything about *kefirah* is the *shoresh* of *ra*. The totalitarian society is not the *shoresh* of the *ra*. You have to know what the *shoresh* of the *ra* is. That's what they grew up in.

The way the *koach* of *ra* sells itself is irrelevant to me. See, most people say, "I understand it." I understand it too, but you're looking at the end result and how they sold it to the masses, and I'm telling you what the *shoresh* of the *ra* is.

THE MENORAH AND CHACHMAH

Now, we need to understand what is the connection of *chochmah* to the menorah. So we're going to introduce you to a piece of the Netziv, from his commentary *Ha'amek Davar*, in the beginning of *Parshas Tetzaveh*. He says as follows. There are two *keilim* which we find in the *Beis Hamikdash* that represent Torah. He says the whole *Mishkan* is called *Mishkan Ha'eidus*. It's a *Mishkan* of the Torah. That's what it is. What was the most important *keili* in the *Mishkan*? The *aron*. What did the *aron* house? The *luchos habris*, the Torah. The *ohr haTorah* is the *tachlis* of the *Mishkan*. What brings the Torah to the masses in the *Mishkan*? There were two *keilim*, two fundamental *keilim*. What was that? The *aron* and the menorah. Those two. But what was the difference between the *aron* and the menorah? What did the *aron* do that the menorah didn't do? If you had the *aron* what do you need the menorah for?

He says the *aron* represented the *Torah Shebichsav*. It also represented the fact that we must adhere to the *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, to understand that the Torah only has a value by considering alongside it what's transmitted as part of the mesorah. But then there is a *koach*, what's called a *pilpul* and *chiddush*. Hashem created a code system within the *Torah Shebichsav* that's based on *pilpul* and *chiddush*. It's called *chachmas haTorah*, where a person could be *mechadesh* something, you can derive something from the Torah. That *koach* is called *talmud*. That *koach* was given through the menorah. And there are *zayin chachmos* included in that menorah and every one of those *kochos* requires the *pilpul* of Torah.

You have to realize this is a tremendous thing. You know why? Because most *frum* Yidden are not aware of this. You know there was a time in the first *Beis Hamikdash* that they didn't learn *gemara*. It's amazing. They didn't learn *gemara*. They learned Torah. They didn't learn *gemara*. They didn't say *amar Rava amar Abaye*. They didn't have that. You have to know that the *chachmah* that came about, the revealed *chachmah* that came about through Rabbi Akiva and *talmidav*, and through the *amoraim*, was unsurpassed. It wasn't around in previous generations. In the *Bayis Rishon* it wasn't there. This was a *koach* of *chachmah* and *pilpul haTorah* that Hashem revealed when He took away prophecy.

THE RISE OF PILPUL, CHIDUSH AND TALMUD

When Hashem took away prophecy from Klal Yisrael He gave Klal Yisrael the *koach* to be *mefalpel* and be *mechadesh* and to decode the Torah. This is called the *middah* of *chachmah*, and that's why in the *Bayis Sheini* there was a tremendous amount of *yeshivos*, a tremendous amount of *talmidim*, all discussing Abaye and Rava. You know why? He says, because during the *Bayis Sheini* the *koach* of the menorah came to the forefront. The light that the menorah brought to the world was revealed in the second *Beis Hamikdash*. And that's why it says in the *gemara* in *Brachos* (57a) that if somebody sees *shemen zayis bechalom*, יצפה למאור התורה, you should hope for the light that's within the Torah.

Torah Sheb'al Peh is much more than that. *Torah Sheb'al Peh* has tremendous *chachmah* in it, *koach hapilpul*, a *koach* to derive things, to mine things, all the *gemara* discussions. Those are not just straight facts. The *gemara* doesn't go *passuk* by *passuk* בראשית ברא אלקים Hashem said this. The next *passuk* Hashem said this. It doesn't go like that. It discusses questions from the *pesukim*. It brings all kinds of codes. The codes of Torah only came about later on. They could not plummet it then. That's what it says. When Hashem showed Rabbi Akiva to Moshe Rabbeinu, and he saw what Rabbi Akiva was able to be *doresh* from the crowns of the Torah and extract from *halachos* them, that was something that Moshe Rabbeinu did not know how to do. You know what Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem? "You have a man like that and You're choosing me to give the Torah? He should be the one. I don't hold a candle to him." Hashem said, "You're right, but he'll be in his generation and you're in your generation."

So the *inyan* of the menorah is the *chachmah* of *Torah Sheb'al Peh*. It's the *pilpul*. That's what it is. It's the extrapolation. That's what we call *Talmud*.

❧ IN SUMMARY ❧

Although many years have passed since the Chanukah story took place, the fight against *Yavanus* is still being fought. *Yavanus*, the influence of the ancient Greek ways, influences our thoughts and beliefs. We must identify how it affects our lives and be alert to fight it. Examples where we struggle with *hisYavnus* include: using a non-Jewish name and struggling to dress like a Jew and speak like a Jew. The Yevanim were against *Torah Sheb'al Peh* - accepting a *Mesorah* and living by it - which was represented in the *Beis Hamikdash* by the *menorah*. They introduced logical ways of thinking to lure *Klal Yisrael* away from the Torah. Unfortunately, the Jews fell for impressive Greek-style, logic-based lifestyles at the expense of keeping the Torah. We still struggle against that today. Although, thankfully Hashem allowed the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zarah* to be vanquished, the *yetzer hara* of allowing logic to dictate how we live and serve Hashem took its place. As a consequence, a new struggle began between *chachmas Yevanis* and *chachmas haTorah* - which Hashem opened up to the *ameilei Torah* at that time - and this struggle is still in full force. In our times, this is expressed in a struggle against rejection of learning *Torah Sheb'al Peh* and accepting that the *Mesorah* relates to our personal lives. The most disturbing influence of the Yevanim began with King Ptolemy's demand to translate the Torah to Greek. That very limited translation - sans *Torah Sheb'al Peh* - led to ongoing challenges to being a believing Jew throughout the years; it brought *apikorsus* and *kefirus* of *Torah Sheb'al Peh* into the world. Hashem gave *Klal Yisrael*, Torah Sages, and tools to explain the Torah in ways previous generations never did (*pilpul*, *chiddush*, and *talmud*), and through this we are able to uphold the transmission of the Torah. This week I will (*bli neder*) continue the fight against *hisYavnus* by investigating opportunities for learning *Torah Sheb'al Peh* in a way I can relate to it. Also, I will think about whether my name, and manner of dress and speech reflect being a Jew.

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