



IN THOSE DAYS, IN OUR TIMES

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayeishev Shabbos Chanuka 5781

The celebration of *Chanuka* this year should be different than any in recent memory. Not because we need to abide by Covid restrictions and conduct our family and community celebrations in a very unusual manner, which of course, we will do. Nor because of places and people we won't connect with this year, to our deep regret.

What should be different is our mindset and understanding of the *Mesiras Nefesh* of the *Chashmonaim*. When confronted with a direct attack on the core values of Torah Judaism, and in light of the abandonment of those values by a large number of their co-religionists, *Mattisyahu*, his family and a relatively small number of followers abandoned the security of their homes and community, and with incredible determination, fled into the wilderness and, in fear for their lives, hid in caves for an extended period of time.

Not content to merely preserve their own personal way of life and values, they endangered their lives again and again by venturing forth in battle against overwhelming odds. This was not a short-lived military campaign, but one that dragged on for years and years. How does one remain committed to a cause for such an extended period of time? From where does one draw the inner strength to not weaken in his or her resolve as time passes and a return to 'normal' remains elusive?

We are experiencing our own battle that threatens not only our health but our ability to maintain and strengthen a robust Torah community and spiritual way of life. We have not disappeared into caves in the wilderness, but we have been confined to our homes with greatly limited ability to join together as a community of Torah committed, *mitzvah*-observing members of *Klal Yisrael*. As the months drag on in this surreal experience, are we able to summon up the inner strength to maintain our level of *Mesiras Nefesh* that we demonstrated back in the spring? Has "Corona Fatigue" set in and brought with it a malaise and lethargy when it comes to maintaining our physical and spiritual well-being?

We should utilize the lessons from the *Chanuka* story to help us reflect upon the reality that has been thrust upon us. How did the *Chashmonaim* do it? Were they just some super-heroic *tzadikkim* to whom we cannot possibly relate, or were they committed, sincere Jews who consciously chose to follow their higher values and not compromise. Even without super-hero standing, they were Jews who didn't let someone else worry about the

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future of the Jewish people, rather they decided to fight the complacency that was all around them.

It is perhaps not so well known, that the backdrop to the *Chanuka* story, as explained by the *Bach* in his commentary to the *Tur Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 670)* was an atmosphere of complacency about the service in the *Beis Hamikdash*. People were no longer animated or passionate about the daily sacrifices. They took them for granted, going through the motions in rote compliance of the *Halacha*. This less than desirable approach resulted in

Hashem taking away the opportunity to perform the service, until the fire and passion of the *Chashmonaim* brought back the holy service to the Jewish People.

Is it perhaps our complacency about the wondrous gift, in our day and age, to be able to practice our *Yiddishkeit* with full legal protection in a country that is kind and compassionate towards us, and that has enabled us to advance materially with no restrictions, which has caused those foundations to be shaken to the core? Have we become so comfortable that we are unaware of our historically tenuous existence in *Galus*? There are numerous parallels that can be drawn between the circumstances surrounding the experience of Greek oppression and how we should be reacting to the current pandemic.

At minimum, we can gain a greater appreciation for what the *Chashmonaim* endured and accomplished. We can hold up their successes and reflect them upon our trials and tribulations. Torah Judaism survives and thrives because when *Hashem* sees that Jews won't have it any other way, and are prepared to sacrifice comfort, security and safety for it, He brings about a miraculous salvation. Our ability to remain focused on our personal and communal spiritual growth will put us in a league with the great *Maccabees* and will give us the fortitude to fight fatigue and complacency of any kind.

Our current difficulties provide us with a strikingly teachable moment – to show our children what "*Netzach Yisrael Lo Yeshakeir*" ("the eternity of Israel is not a falsehood") is all about. The heroes of *Chanuka*, the heroes of our recent past all teach us that with resolve, faith, determination and solid *Bitachon*, we are a nation of winners in the epic battle to bring *Hashem's* truth to the world.

May the light of *Chanuka* be the light at the end of our tunnel and may that light enable us and our children to find the true path to happiness, that awaits all of us.

Best wishes for a *Chanuka* filled with light, joy and good health,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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