

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

CHANUKAH

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Gifts, Gelt and Carols

— Q: —

The evening of December 25th is the first night of Chanukah. Should Jews refrain from giving gifts that evening?

— A: —

My friends, if you won't give gifts on Chanukah you won't be transgressing any *mitzvah d'Oraysa* or any *mitzvah d'Rabanan*. There's no *minhag*, no custom, that Jews give gifts on Chanukah. Chanukah gifts is an American translation of gentile ways and so giving money is a much better idea. Chanukah *gelt* is a well-known *minhag*, so give cash if you can.

Now, I'm not saying if you want to give gifts on Chanukah that you shouldn't give but don't feel that you're doing a noble and holy thing. And make sure, in your own mind at least, that you're divorced from any thoughts of the season.

And if you're going to make a big fuss about it and make it into an ideal that Chanukah is *the* time to give gifts then you might as well sing carols and put up a Chanukah tree because that's what it really is.

December 1978

Celebrating the Oil

— Q: —

What is the main miracle that we are celebrating Chanukah for, the war victories or the miracle of the oil?

— A: —

So for that we look into the Gemara. The Gemara (Shabbos 21b) asks **מַאי הַנִּנְבָּה** – 'What is Chanukah?' and Rashi explains **עַל אֵיזָה נִס קִבְעוּהָ** – *for which miracle was Chanukah established?* So your question, that's the Gemara's question.

And it says there, **תַּנּוּ רַבָּנָן** – *The Sages are going to tell us.* It means when you want to answer that question, are you going to take out a *Sefer Chashmonaim*? In *Sefer Chashmonaim* it tells there at length about the war, the battles and all the great things that happened, the victories. No, we don't look there for the answer. **מַאי הַנִּנְבָּה** – *You want to know what Chanukah is about?* **תַּנּוּ רַבָּנָן** – *Ask the Rabanan.* Don't ask Josephus. Don't ask Graetz! Don't even ask the author of *Sefer Chashmonaim* – it's a *sefer chitzoni*. Look only in the Gemara for the answer.

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And along comes the Gemara and it tells us that Chanukah wasn't made because of the wars. It wasn't made because they reconquered Yerushalayim now and they had, at least for the time being, driven away their enemy and overcome the Jewish traitors. No. That's excellent but no, that's not the answer to the question, "What's Chanukah about?"

Mai Chanukah? For which miracle was Chanukah made? And the Gemara goes on and tells us the well-known story about how when the Chashmonaim reconquered Yerushalayim so they came into the Beis Hamikdash and wanted to kindle the *menorah* that had been extinguished for such a long time but they couldn't find any pure undefiled oil. Until they found one cruse of oil that had been hidden away and sealed with the seal of the *kohanim* so they knew it hadn't been touched.

Now, it was only enough for one day's burning and it took time to prepare pure oil. You had to go *tevilah* and you had to make the *keilim* purified – they wouldn't have new oil prepared for another week or so. But what could they do? They did their best and they kindled the *menorah* and they expected it to go out at the end of the day and finished – they didn't have enough yet for another day's burning.

But lo and behold the light didn't go out! It continued to burn. It burned through the night and people came in to look at what was doing. They were surprised. "Look at this!" And it burned the next day too. The news started spreading. "What's happening here?! A miracle is taking place now in the Beis Hamikdash!"

People came from all over. It was jammed with people looking. What's taking place here! And it burned and burned and burned. The light didn't go out for eight days. This was something too spectacular. A one-day supply of oil should burn for eight days?! It can't be! Maybe an extra few hours it could be; it depends on the temperature and other

factors. But eight days?! A miracle! And therefore they went wild with enthusiasm.

And it was because of this, the Gemara says, that they established Chanukah; *that's* why the next year they began this practice of Chanukah. Forget about the military victories – it was the *nes shemen*, the oil that lasted eight days instead of one, that's the heart and soul of the *yomtov* of Chanukah.

November 1981

The Oil and the Shechinah

— Q: —

What's the significance of the *nes shemen*? It's a miracle but what's so important about it, that it should be the main miracle we celebrate?

— A: —

We have to understand what happened at that time.

You know, in the Mishkan and the Beis Hamikdash there was a *menorah* and part of the *avodas Beis Hamikdash* was *לְהַעֲלוֹת נֵר תָּמִיד*, that the *kohanim* had to kindle the lamp of the *menorah*.

Now, the Gemara explains something interesting about this *menorah*. It says that in the days of old, in the *Bayis Rishon*, when they used to come in in the morning after the lamps had burned out, there was one lamp, the *ner ma'aravi*, that continued to burn always. It was a miracle. It didn't go out. And they used that miracle lamp to rekindle all the other lamps. Then they put out the *ner ma'aravi* and they kindled that too, from the other lamps.

Now the Gemara (Shabbos 22b) says about this phenomenon that the *menorah* was *עֲרוֹת הִיא לְכָל בְּאֵי עוֹלָם* – *it's a testimony to all those who come into the world*. It means everybody, even gentiles, has to know this, *נְשֵׁהְשְׁכִינָה שׁוֹרְרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל* – *that the Shechinah rests on the people of Yisroel*. That's what the light of the *menorah*, the miraculous *ner ma'aravi*, served as: It was a special sign that Hashem is here; that He's dwelling among the Am Yisroel.

Now, that background is fundamental in our understanding of the *nes Chanukah* because you have to know that at the time of the *nes Chanukah* there was no *menorah* at all. For years the gentiles had kept the Beis Hamikdash in their power. You couldn't come in. You couldn't kindle the *menorah*. And so there was no miracle anymore, where the *ner ma'aravi* stayed lit.

And so a question began to enter the mind of those Jews. Is the Shechinah still with us? It was a question that bothered them: The fact that for all these years the *menorah* was not kindled and there was no *nes*, did that demonstrate any weakness, any reduction, any diminishing, of the presence of the Shechinah in Yisroel?

Now, today we wouldn't think of such questions. It doesn't concern us too much. And not because we have *emunah* that the Shechinah is with us, no. It's because we have other worries on our mind. How to buy a better house; how to change our furniture every few years. Where to go in the summertime, which bungalow colony. We have other things to keep us busy, to worry about. But in the days of old you must realize this was the main concern of the Jewish people. Is the Shechinah with us like before?

And then out of the blue like a bolt of lightning came the *nes Chanukah*. The *menorah*, the symbol of the Shechinah resting on the Am Yisroel, is burning again! And it's not going out! It's something miraculous! *Baruch Hashem* the Shechinah did not depart from us!

And that's what the Chanukah lights are proclaiming! When you see the Chanukah lights flittering in your house or in anybody's house that's a demonstration the Shechinah will always be with the Jewish people. And for that *לְהוֹדוֹת וּלְהַלֵּל* – that's what we have to thank Hashem for on Chanukah!

And even when the lights go out after a half hour, or even at the end of Chanukah, the Shechinah will never go out. That was the lesson of the *nes*, that forever and ever it burns. It burns not only in

the hearts of the Jewish people. It's a light above our heads, the Shechinah. It's a great happiness forever and ever and that's the great Chanukah lamp that will never go out.

December 1986

Hidden Battle Miracles

— Q: —

Why didn't they consider the winning of the battles as a sign that Hashem was on their side just as much as the miracle of the oil?

— A: —

That's a good question. And the answer is it certainly was a sign. If a man walks out into the street and he finds a \$10 bill, it's also a sign that he's being favored by Heaven. Nothing happens by accident. If you do good business in your store, it's also a sign. But all these signs are called *nes nistar*; they are concealed signs. It's not open enough to make a person marvel.

So battle victories, if you're a *ma'amin* so you understand and you attribute it to Hashem. But that wasn't enough. After all, don't we find sometimes that a small band of guerillas, terrorists, can overcome a bigger army by means of ambushes and other strategies? So it's not an open miracle.

They were looking for something that was open whereby Hakadosh Baruch Hu would reveal it in a way that was *גְּלוּי לְכָל הָעַמִּים*, revealed in an open manner. And that was the *nes shemen*. *עֲדוּת הִיא לְכָל שְׁהַשְׁבִּינָה, בְּאֵי עוֹלָם* – *It's a testimony to the whole world, שְׁוֹרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל* – *that the Shechinah is with us!*

December 1976

The Not Completely Truthful Josephus

— Q: —

Why doesn't Josephus write in his book about the *nes* of the *neiros*?

— A: —

Josephus, you know, was under the influence of the second Agrippas. He himself testifies that when he was writing his history the second Agrippas sent him sixty two letters. It means the second Agrippas was telling him what to write.

Agrippas was a descendant of the Chashmonaim but they already became spoiled at the end. It's an important lesson by the way, that this great family, as dedicated to the Torah as they were, the wealth and power they acquired eventually spoiled them. They fell under the influence of the Tzeddukim and they didn't want any *takkanos Chachomim* to be made. They didn't want the Chachomim to have power among the people and therefore they weren't interested in any *takkanos Chachomim*.

And so Josephus said like this. He's talking about Chanukah and he says it's called a Feast of Lights. Yes, he says it's The Feast of Lights. But pay attention to what he writes: "I think", he says, "that it's because of the *nes* that they were rescued from the enemies. That was the light for them." A really plausible answer – "It's called The Feast of Lights because Hashem brought light to them instead of darkness." It's laughable.

So you see he didn't want to mention the light of burning eight days instead of one day. It's a *takkanos Chachamim*, so he left it out. He knew what it was – he was *meramez* to it – but he left it out because he wanted to gain the favor of those who had power.

Josephus, you have to know, was a patriot for his people and he was a *ma'amin* – he believed in everything and he loved his people – but he was a man who sold out in order to gain privileges, in order to gain the favor of those who had power. Josephus says many good things and we can quote him but he was under the influence of our enemies and therefore it requires a discerning eye to know what yes and what no. He's not a *bar samcha*, someone whom you can trust no matter what.

December 1999

Even Chashmonaim Can Spoil

— Q: —

How could it be that such a great family like the Chashmonaim should eventually become wicked?

— A: —

Well, it happened for the same reason that it happens today. They became spoiled because they permitted themselves to come under the influence of gentiles and wicked Jews. They gained wealth and power and went the way of many others by means of hobnobbing with gentile Jews.

It was a tragedy – it mars the whole story of Chanukah – but it's an important lesson to us that no matter how good you are, you have to beware. Our Sages warn us, "Beware until your last day!" and this family stands forever as a real-life lesson of that warning. Nobody is ever guaranteed of remaining righteous!

It was one of the best families. A family that was willing to give their lives for the Torah. But because they didn't beware, because they weren't on guard against infiltration of bad influences, the end was they became enemies of the Torah.

Not only enemies, but they set out on a campaign to murder, to massacre the Sages. The Chashmonaim became the enemies of the Chachomim. Yochanan Horkanus and Yanai slaughtered so many Sages. They slaughtered multitudes of *frum* Jews. And finally Hakadosh Baruch Hu said **שִׁפְךָ דָם הָאֲדָמָה בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל**, and that's why they were wiped out to the last man finally.

It's unbelievable that you could go from one extreme to the other. It's a great lesson of how much a person must watch his step, how dangerous outside influence can be. It seeps in little by little, and even good people, good families can be ruined forever. Even the great miracle of Chanukah, the return to the Beis Hamikdash, eventually dissipated because of the gentile influence that seeped into our nation because of our association with wicked Jews.

That's why I said this mars the whole story. But we're talking now about the days of Mattisyahu and his pious sons and they lived righteously and achieved a great reward that Hakadosh Baruch Hu showered upon them for their deeds.

But the end of that family teaches us that the fight of the Chashmonaim against the Misyavnim, against gentile culture, is an eternal battle.

December 1999

Al Hanissim I

— Q: —

If the most important aspect of the Chanukah *nes* is the oil lasting for eight days and not the winning of the war, then why don't we mention the miracle of the candles in *Al Hanissim*?

— A: —

I'll tell you a little anecdote that was said over by the Alter of Slabodka. It says in the Torah: זְכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֶתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם - Remember this day when you went out of Mitzrayim ..., הַיּוֹם אֲתֶם יִצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב - it was a spring day when you left Mitzrayim. So the Alter said that we see that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to remind us that it was nice weather when we went out of Mitzrayim.

So here you have a people who were enslaved for so many years *bachomer u'valiveinim*, with mortar and bricks and *avodas perech*, backbreaking labor. For two hundred and ten years they couldn't leave Mitzrayim! And finally the time comes to go out, so let's say it was a blizzard? So what?! They would walk out of Mitzrayim singing in the blizzard! Who cares about the weather?

So the Alter said, yes. Even in a mountain of kindness that someone is giving you, you shouldn't overlook even one grain of kindness. And the fact that the *geulah* from Mitzrayim took place on a beautiful spring day - they were walking, singing, the happiness of freedom but it was also beautiful all around. It was Nissan and the weather was

perfect and nature was blooming. And that helped too; yes, that was part of the enjoyment.

And therefore, although the *nes* of Chanukah was about the oil that lasted for eight days, but it was still a lot of fun beating the enemy. It was a lot of fun when a handful of men under Yehuda Hamaccabi rushed forward with swords and hacked down an army that was far more superior to them. And they left a field that was full of dead bodies. That was a lot of fun! It was an enjoyment to destroy the enemy. And therefore we don't neglect that. We speak about it and we thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for that as well.

But because we want to be sure to emphasize the real *nes*, so we don't mix the *nes* of the oil into it. We only hint at it: וְהִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחֻצְרוֹת קִדְשֵׁיךָ - They kindled *neiros* too. But we don't want to speak about it at length in *Al Hanissim* because then it would lose its character as being most important. We defeated the enemy and we also had a miracle of the *menorah*?! No, no; that would be belittling the *nes* of the oil.

So the *nes* of the oil is played out by itself in our homes. Every night it's a ceremony that stands out on its own and nothing but the oil is commemorated at that ceremony of lighting the candles. Only that in *Shemonah Esrei* we can afford to mention the other things too. But we don't mix them because then you'd be making a mistake about what Chanukah is really about.

December 1976

Al Hanissim II

— Q: —

Why isn't the *nes* of the oil mentioned in the *Al Hanissim* that we say in davening?

— A: —

Actually it is mentioned; וְהִדְלִיקוּ נֵרוֹת בְּחֻצְרוֹת קִדְשֵׁיךָ - And they lit the candles in Your holy courtyard. That's what it means; if *Al Hanissim* was referring merely to the rededication of the Beis

Hamikdash, to the return of the *avodah*, so the *tefillah* would not be interested just in lighting the *neiros*. Why doesn't it also say *וְהִקְרִיבוּ קֶרְבָּנֶיךָ* – that they brought *korbanos*? In the Beis Hamikdash the *neiros* are certainly important but the *korbanos* are maybe even more important. There are other things too that are important, and still it's the *neiros* that are mentioned. And that's because of the *nes Chanukah*.

Now, to say it *b'arichus*, at length, that we have to supply the details from the Gemara, *תְּנוּ רַבָּנַן מַאי הִתְנַבְּהָ*. So *וְהִלִּיקוּ גֵירוֹת בְּחֻצְרוֹת קְדָשֶׁיךָ*. That's enough, that's enough. All the details are in the Gemara.

However there is another element here and that is *hodaah*, gratitude. You have to know that *Modim*, in which we say *Al Hanissim*, is for thanks. And the *nes shemen* actually is not a subject for thanks – it's a subject for *pirsumei nissa*; we have to publicize the *nes* and make a big fuss about it. But when we are talking about thanks, although we thank for the *nes shemen* too but most of our thanks are for the *milchamos*: *וְעַל הַמְלָחָמוֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמֵי הַהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה*. And therefore they are mentioned most prominently because to be rescued from the wars, people appreciate that and they can say it with more gratitude.

However, the *nissim* are there; *Al Hanissim* includes all the *nissim* and the *neiros* are mentioned too. But it's naturally easier for people to thank for physical deliverance than to thank for the *nes shemen* which after all is something else – it's an especial demonstration of the favor of Hashem.

December 1981

The Fun of Winning Battles

— Q: —

Why do we mention the idea of *רְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צְדִיקִים*, the wicked falling into the hands of the righteous, in *Al Hanissim*? Isn't the real miracle that it was *רַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים*, a multitude falling into the hands of

the few, and *גְּבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים*, the strong falling into the hands of the weak?

— A: —

Now pay attention. Two things are said in *Al Hanissim*. One is the *nes* of *רַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים* and *גְּבוּרִים בְּיַד חֲלָשִׁים* – the miracle of the many into the hands of the few and the strong into the hands of the weak. That's one miracle. After all, the Greeks had a big and strong army and the Jews didn't have any army at all. It's a big *nes* after all.

But the second *nes* is not only that the *reshaim* were defeated, but the added *simcha*, the added happiness, that they were defeated by *tzaddikim*. And that's why we go out of our way to say *רְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צְדִיקִים*. The wicked were defeated by the righteous! A tremendous *kiddush Hashem*!

Look, when a *rasha* is walking in the street and he falls down dead so we say "*Baruch Hashem!*" We say, "*Baruch Hashem, kein yirbu!* They should all drop dead!" But suppose it happens a different way that the *rasha* drops dead. Suppose he starts up with a *tzaddik*; let's say he starts up with a *chassidische* boy, a skinny little *chassidische* boy walking to the *yeshivah*. And this little boy takes his little fist and he gives the *rasha* a hit, and the *rasha* falls down dead. Oh, that's even a better way he should drop dead! That's a *kiddush Hashem*, no question about it! It's *רְשָׁעִים בְּיַד צְדִיקִים*, the wicked one was felled by the righteous one! That itself is a special *simcha*!

So, one is the *nes* of *רַבִּים בְּיַד מְעַטִּים*, the many falling into the hands of the few; but the other is a *nes* that the *tzaddikim* had their *hatzlacha*, their success. We want to see *tzaddikim* have *hatzlacha* in this world! And therefore we say *יְדִים בְּיַד עוֹסְקֵי תוֹרָתְךָ*, the wicked sinners fell into the hands of those who study Your Torah. Because it's a great happiness to see the righteous win out in this world!

December 1999

Spread the Good Word

— Q: —

Can you explain what's the big idea of *pirsumei nissa*?

— A: —

Pirsumei nissa means that we have to go against the world – the world wants to hide the *nes*; they want to make it into nothing – and so we have to pull the *nes* out from its secret and publicize it.

That's why Chanukah, in the olden days, you had to light the lamp outside of your door. Nobody lit in the house; the *ner Chanukah* was put in the street. Remember the Mishna in Bava Kama (62b)? **גָּמַל שֶׁהָיָה טָעוּן פְּשָׁתָן** – A camel was loaded with flax and he passed by the *ner Chanukah* that someone had placed outside and the *ner Chanukah* set fire to the camel's load and the fire burned down the house. So the Gemara says that the man who put the *ner Chanukah* outside is *patur* because he did it *b'reshus* – he's not responsible for the damages caused by his fire because he had a right to keep it outside. Everybody had a right to put *ner Chanukah* in the street in those days because that was the crux of the mitzvah, to publicize it.

Now, *nes* means to uplift, to raise up, but we're not interested in elevating the *nes* per se. It means to uplift Hashem. Like we say in *Al Hanissim*, **וְלָךְ עָשִׂיתָ שָׁם גְּדוֹל בְּעוֹלָמְךָ** – *You made for Yourself a great Name in the world.* The purpose of the *nes* is to elevate Hashem's name in the world, to make great the Hand of Hashem in this *olam*, in this world.

You know what *olam* means? It means 'concealed'. Why is this world called 'concealed'? Because Hashem is hidden in this world. Even though He is **מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ**, even though He is everywhere but people don't want to see Him; they don't look for Him so He's concealed in the world. And so we say **נִקְרָשׁ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ בְּעוֹלָם**, that in this world of darkness and concealment we are going to sanctify Your name. We're going to light our candles and we're going to say, "*Af al pi ken*, even though

you, the world, wants to hide Him away, we're going to say the truth. We're here to tell the world – at least among ourselves we have to say it – that the Shechinah is with us forever!"

We say to all of those who bring darkness upon the world with their false religions and their colorful lights and their lies about Hashem changing His mind, *chas veshalom* – they say He changed His mind and said goodbye to the Am Yisroel and He chose a *mamzer* instead – so we say nothing doing. We light the *ner Chanukah* in public in order to demonstrate that He did a *nes* for us and that **שֶׁהִשְׁכִּינָה שׁוֹרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל**. That's the purpose of the *neiros Chanukah*, to publicize what Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for us, the miracle that demonstrated that He is with the Am Yisroel forever.

But it's not enough, just to light the *neiros*. We have to talk about the *nes*, about the One Who made the *nes*. So if you're going to make a little party, a Chanukah party, make sure to talk about the *nes*. We have to make *latkes* too. We have to buy *dreidelach* for the children. We have to teach the family to enjoy Chanukah. We have to do everything. But don't forget while doing all these things to din in their ears over and over again the *nes* of Chanukah. The *nes* of Chanukah, the *nes* of Chanukah, the *nes* of Chanukah over and over again.

Let them remember that it was the *yad Hashem*; it was a demonstration of the Glory, the Might of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in order to publicize that He is with us and will be with us forever.

November 1981

Blame the Jews

— Q: —

I'm wondering about who the real *reshaim* were in the story of Chanukah. Sometimes we seem to blame it on the Misyavanim, the Jewish Hellenizers, but then it seems like it was really Antiochus and the Greeks who caused all the trouble, like we say in *Al Hanissim* **כְּשֶׁעָמְדָה מְלָכוֹת יוֹן הִרְשָׁעָה עַל עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל**

— A: —

You have to know that in the *siddur* when you read that “the kingdom of the Greeks arose against the Jewish people”, it’s not the whole truth. Because the truth is that the whole calamity was caused by *Jews*, by renegade Jews who wanted to adopt the ways of the Greeks. Only that these Jews *used the Greeks* as a way of forcing their fellow Jews to forsake the Torah.

Only that the Sages who established this prayer always tried to protect the honor of the Jewish people. They didn't want the truth to be known and so they blamed the Greeks, the ones who actually did the work of the renegade Jews, and they left out the cause, the ones who caused the Greeks to come against the nation.

And at the end of the whole thing, finally Antiochus, after many wars, he became so disgusted that he said: "What do they want of me? Why are the Jews dragging me into their own personal problems? The Jews want to keep their religion, what business is it of mine?" And at the end he gave up, just before he died. He gave up the whole business because he wasn't interested in the whole thing. Only that he was being prodded and pushed constantly by these Hellenizer Jews.

It's only from people like me who like to rake up mud and tell the dirt that you'll hear this. And I wouldn't tell it either, but since it's already told – Josephus tells the whole story and the Book of Maccabees tells the whole story anyhow – so now it's no secret anymore. It was Jews who caused the whole thing.

December 1970

The Healing Shmad

— Q: —

If it was only the Hellenizer Jews who were the ones who wanted to assimilate the Greek ways into the Jewish nation, why did Hashem bring the tzaros of a Shmad on the whole nation?

— A: —

You have to know that even though there was only a small group of people among us who sought to adopt the ways of the Greeks but the entire nation is blamed to a certain extent. Why? Because had there been a stronger enthusiasm among the nation as a whole, among the good ones, then such a group could have never arisen.

It's like a sore that arises in your mouth or somewhere else on your body because the whole body tone is not sufficiently vigorous. If the body would have had all the vitamins and all the other requirements for perfect health then it's quite possible that this sore would never have happened. And so too, if the nation as a whole had been healthy and vigorous enough in their love of Hashem, then such a painful sore, such a group like the Hellenizers, never could have arisen among us.

And therefore the entire nation was given now an exercise in virtue – it became especially hard to be a Jew. It was a test to see if they would rise to the occasion. And they did; they began to sacrifice themselves for Judaism. The generation of Mattisyahu was being tested and very many of them withstood the test. Very many of them gave their lives and many gladly gave their lives. And that brought them back to their original greatness!

December 1970

The Chanukah Story Lives On

— Q: —

The Rav said tonight that the suffering we endured during the Shmad of Antiochus was for the benefit of the Am Yisroel. How could it be that we benefited from the decrees of Antiochus if we were not allowed to keep our religion?

— A: —

So listen now; listen to the result of the Chanukah story.

Everyone knows the story of Chana and her seven sons. They were brought before the ruler and

the ruler said “Bow down to the idol.” But the son said he cannot bow down: **לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל פְּנֵי**. So the king had him tortured to death in the presence of his mother. His mother was watching and she said to her son, “Don't yield! That's the purpose why I gave birth to you, that you should be a servant of Hashem. Don't yield!”

And the king said the same thing to the next son. But he said “Nothing doing” and it was the same story. And then another son. Same story.

So the king spoke to Chana. “Look what's happening to your children,” he said. “Tell them not to be foolish.”

But instead she urged her children to go ahead and give their lives. And finally they came to the last child, a little boy, and the ruler said to her, “Don't you have pity on your own son?”

The ruler said, “My son, at least I'll have pity on you. I don't want you to lose your life. I'll tell you what you do. I'm going to throw down some money in front of the idol. Don't worship the idol. Just bend down and pick up the money.

So the child said, “Nothing doing.”

And his mother blessed him and she kissed him and the king took him and tortured him to death.

Then she went up to the roof. She knew what was waiting for her so she leaped off the roof. And a *bas kol* came out and said **אִם הַבְּנִים שְׂמֵחִים** – *This is the happy and successful mother who has nachas from her children.*

Now, when we read the story of Chana and her seven sons we have to understand that this story is not just a single story. It's an illustration of that generation's greatness. That's what happened over and over again throughout the entire period; very many heroes of the first degree came forth! The *Shmad* brought out the best in the nation and the body of the nation became vigorous and healthy.

And not only for that generation. It was forever; because when I was a boy, we acted in the play, ‘Chana and Her Seven Children’ and it inflamed our

imagination. What a glorious story! Ah! To this day the Jewish nation lives on the stories of our ancient heroism and we're inspired to walk in the ways of our ancestors. It was a fiery ordeal for a fiery nation and it set fire to our hearts forever and ever.

You have to know that the Jews in ancient times gave away everything for Hashem. They gave their lives and the lives of their children. In the Middle Ages when they were being approached by a mob of 'holy' gentiles who were coming with swords in their hands – the “peace-loving, turn-the-other-cheek” gentiles were coming now to teach the Jews “the truth” and to force them to kneel to the cross and to accept *Oso Ha'ish*.

Now the Jews knew that they themselves, the adults, would allow themselves to be killed. We'll say no and we'll be put to death. But the little children will be taken away and brought up as gentiles. So what did the fathers and mothers do? They locked themselves in the synagogue with their families and when they heard the mob storming the synagogue they took out their kitchen knives and they slaughtered all their children. Little children were climbing under the shul benches and the mothers got down on their hands and knees to pull them out by their feet, like you pull the chicken out who is trying to run away from the *shechitah*. And the mothers handed them over to the *shochet*. The father slaughtered his wife. He slaughtered his babies. And then he slaughtered himself.

That was the fire of Chanukah that still burned in the Middle Ages. And when the *goyim* finally broke through the barricade and entered the *shul* there was a deathly silence. There was a whole congregation of *kedoshim* lying on the floor.

Of course what happened after that it says in *kinos*. It describes it. The *goyim* danced on them, urinated on them spat on them. That's what they did. They took the dead bodies and threw them in the streets, in the mud. But it was already too late. The Jew had already taken off his overcoat and left this world. You can take my overcoat and spit on it.

You can drag my overcoat through the mud. I'm gone already.

There was Chanukah in Communist Russia too. The Russian Jews sacrificed their lives. The Lubavitcher especially! Although we like all Jews, but the Russian Lubavitcher are a noble breed; they sacrificed their lives for *yiddishkeit*.

Do you know that the Lubavitcher made *mikvaos* in Russia? A *mikveh* is hard to make any place, but in Soviet Russia?! They made *mikvaos* in Soviet Russia in those days, in the 1920s, when there was a death penalty for doing things without a license. They built *mikvaos*; not one! Many!

They ran Hebrew schools, the Lubavitcher. To be caught meant you were finished but no matter, they had underground *yeshivos*. And when somebody snitched – there were *Misyavnim*, renegades, in Russia too – that there's a Hebrew school and the inspector came he found nothing but an old man sitting by himself. Nobody was there. When he left, all the children started coming out from all the hiding places; in the loft, in the backyard, in the cellar. They all came back to learn. And again he sat and learned with them while the lookout was watching for the next time inspectors should come. What they accomplished under the nose of the Soviets!

That's the history of the Am Yisroel. You remember the story of the old Satmarer Rebbe, how he never shaved off his beard in the concentration camp. How did he do that? In a concentration camp! He had a 'toothache' and so there was always a big rag over his face. For years and years! When he was finally released, they hadn't cut his beard even once. Where did that strength come from? Among other things, it came from the fire that was lit on Chanukah.

And so to answer your question, absolutely, the *gezeiros* of Antiochus were a benefit to our nation because we were tested and hardened. And all the generations after that, Jews sacrificed for *yiddishkeit* because of the great preparation that they had gone through **בְּיָמֵי מַתְתִּיָּהוּ**.

And it's the result of Antiochus. He brought the Jews back to their original greatness! And so there's no question that the decrees, the *gezeiros* of Antiochus, were a very big benefit for the Jewish people. Of course, we're happy that he got his comeuppance. This Antiochus eventually, not too long afterwards, became seriously ill. It's described in the *Chronicles of Josephus* how he suffered from a loathsome disease. I suppose Josephus enjoyed telling us that. It was a loathsome disease and finally he died, regretting his misdeeds. He died a failure. But before he died, he accomplished enough to make the Chashmonaim great.

And so when we light these joyous candles, the joyous lamps, we celebrate the light that can never go out among the Jewish people. The light that burned for eight days from a little bit of oil, that's the Am Yisroel. They'll never go out because Hakadosh Baruch Hu kindled that light in our hearts by means of that generation that didn't allow the light to go out when Antiochus and the Hellenizers were trying their best to extinguish the Torah. The nation became stronger and more fortified and the examples of all these martyrs continues to inspire the world to this day. As a result of Chanukah the Jewish nation remained so much stronger in all the centuries since then until now.

November 1970

**Have a Wonderful Shabbos
and a Freilichen Chanukah**