

Torah Weekly

ד"ב

PARSHAT MIKEITZ CHANUKAH

21 - 27 Kislev 5785
22 - 28 December 2024

1ST DAY OF CHANUKAH

Torah: Numbers 7:1-17

2ND DAY OF CHANUKAH

Torah: Numbers 7:18-29

SHABBAT

Torah: Genesis 41:1 - 44:17

Mafjir: Numbers 7:24-29

Hafjorah: Zachariah 2:14 - 4:7

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.

2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Psalms Daily

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain/Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons)

Grape Juice & Matzah

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THE STORY OF CHANUKAH

Under Syrian Rule

More than 2000 years ago there was a time when the Land of Israel was part of the Syrian-Greek Empire, dominated by Syrian rulers of the dynasty of the Seleucids.

In order to relate the story that led up to Hanukkah, we shall start with Antiochus III, the King of Syria, who reigned from 3538 to 3574 (222-186 BCE). He had waged war with King Ptolemy of Egypt over the possession of the Land of Israel. Antiochus III was victorious, and the Land of Israel was annexed to his empire. At the beginning of his reign, he was favorably disposed toward the Jews and accorded them some privileges. Later on, however, when he was beaten by the Romans and compelled to pay heavy taxes, the burden fell upon the various peoples of his empire who were forced to furnish the heavy gold that was required of him by the Romans. When Antiochus died, his son Seleucus IV took over, and further oppressed the Jews.

Added to the troubles from the outside were the grave perils that threatened Judaism from within. The influence of the Hellenists (people who accepted idol-worship and the Syrian way of life) was increasing. Yochanan, the High Priest, foresaw the danger to Judaism from the penetration of Syrian-Greek influence into the Holy Land. For, in contrast to the ideal of outward beauty held by the Greeks and Syrians, Judaism emphasizes truth and moral purity, as commanded by G-d in the holy Torah. The Jewish people could never give up their faith in G-d and accept the idol-worship of the Syrians.

Yochanan was therefore opposed to any attempt on the part of the Jewish Hellenists to introduce Greek and Syrian customs into the land. The Hellenists hated him. One of them told the King's commissioner that in the treasury of the Temple there was a great deal of wealth.

The wealth in the treasury consisted of the contributions of "half a shekel" made by all adult Jews annually. That was given for the purpose of the sacrifices on the altar, as well as for fixing and improving the Temple building. Another part of the treasury consisted of orphans' funds which were deposited for them until they became of age. Seleucus needed money in order to pay the Romans. He sent his minister Helyodros to take the money from the treasury of the

Temple. In vain did Yochanan, the High Priest, beg him not to do it. Helyodros did not listen and entered the gate of the Temple. But suddenly, he became pale with fright. The next moment he fainted and fell to the ground. After Helyodros came to, he did not dare enter again.

A short time later, Seleucus was killed, and his brother Antiochus IV began to reign over Syria (in 3586, or 174 BCE). He was a tyrant of a rash and impetuous nature, contemptuous of religion and of the feelings of others. He was called "Epiphanes," meaning "the gods' beloved." Several of the Syrian rulers received similar titles. But a historian of his time, Polebius, gave him the epithet Epimanes ("madman"), a title more suitable to the character of this harsh and cruel king.

Desiring to unify his kingdom through the medium of a common religion and culture, Antiochus tried to root out the individualism of the Jews by suppressing all the Jewish Laws. He removed the righteous High Priest, Yochanan, from the Temple in Jerusalem, and in his place installed Yochanan's brother Joshua, who loved to call himself by the Greek name of Jason. For he was a member of the Hellenist party, and he used his high office to spread more and more of the Greek customs among the priesthood.

Joshua was later replaced by another man, Menelaus, who had promised the king that he would bring in more money than Jason did. When Yochanan, the former High Priest, protested the spread of the Hellenists' influence in the Holy Temple, the ruling High Priest hired murderers to assassinate him.

Antiochus was at that time engaged in a successful war against Egypt. But messengers from Rome arrived and commanded him to stop the war, and he had to yield. Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, a rumor spread that a serious accident had befallen Antiochus. Thinking that he was dead, the people rebelled against Menelaus. The treacherous High Priest fled together with his friends.

The Martyrs

Antiochus returned from Egypt enraged by Roman interference with his ambitions. When he heard what had taken place in Jerusalem, he ordered his army to fall upon the Jews. Thousands of Jews were killed. Antiochus then enacted a series of harsh decrees against the Jews. Jewish worship was forbidden; the scrolls of Jewish Law were confiscated and burned. Sabbath rest, circumcision and the Jewish dietary laws were prohibited under penalty of death. Even one of the respected elders of that generation, Rabbi Eliezer, a man of 90, was ordered by the servants of Antiochus to eat pork

so that others would do the same. When he refused, they suggested to him that he pick up the meat to his lips to appear to be eating. But Rabbi Eliezer refused to do even that and was put to death. There were thousands of others who likewise sacrificed their lives.

Antiochus's men went from town to town and from village to village to force the inhabitants to worship pagan gods. Only one refuge area remained and that was the hills of Judea with their caves. But even there did the Syrians pursue the faithful Jews, and many a Jew died a martyr's death.

One day the henchmen of Antiochus arrived in the village of Modi'in where Mattityahu, the old priest, lived. The Syrian officer built an altar in the marketplace of the village and demanded that Mattityahu offer sacrifices to the Greek gods. Mattityahu replied, "I, my sons and my brothers are determined to remain loyal to the covenant which our G d made with our ancestors!"

Thereupon, a Hellenistic Jew approached the altar to offer a sacrifice. Mattityahu grabbed his sword and killed him, and his sons and friends fell upon the Syrian officers and men. They killed many of them and chased the rest away. They then destroyed the altar.

Mattityahu knew that Antiochus would be enraged when he heard what had happened. He would certainly send an expedition to punish him and his followers. Mattityahu, therefore, left the village of Modi'in and fled together with his sons and friends to the hills of Judea.

All loyal and courageous Jews joined them. They formed legions and from time to time they left their hiding places to fall upon enemy detachments and outposts, and to destroy the pagan altars that were built by order of Antiochus.

The Maccabees

Before his death, Mattityahu called his sons together and urged them to continue to fight in defense of G d's Torah. He asked them to follow the counsel of their brother Shimon the Wise. In waging warfare, he said, their leader should be Judah the Strong. Judah was called "Maccabee," a word composed of the initial letters of the four Hebrew words Mi Kamocho Ba'eilim Hashem, "Who is like You, O G-d."

Antiochus sent his General Apolonius to wipe out Judah and his followers, the Maccabees. Though greater in number and equipment than their adversaries, the Syrians were defeated by the Maccabees. Antiochus sent out

another expedition which also was defeated. He realized that only by sending a powerful army could he hope to defeat Judah and his brave fighting men.

An army consisting of more than 40,000 men swept the land under the leadership of two commanders, Nicanor and Gorgias. When Judah and his brothers heard of that, they exclaimed: "Let us fight unto death in defense of our souls and our Temple!" The people assembled in Mitzpah, where Samuel, the prophet of old, had offered prayers to G-d. After a series of battles the war was won.

Now the Maccabees returned to Jerusalem to liberate it. They entered the Temple and cleared it of the idols placed there by the Syrian vandals. Judah and his followers built a new altar, which he dedicated on the 25th of the month of Kislev, in the year 3622 (139 BCE).

Since the golden Menorah had been stolen by the Syrians, the Maccabees now made one of cheaper metal. When they wanted to light it, they found only a small cruse of pure olive oil bearing the seal of the High Priest Yochanan. It was sufficient to light only for one day. By a miracle of G d, it continued to burn for eight days, till new oil was made available. That miracle proved that G d had again taken His people under His protection. In memory of this, our sages appointed these eight days for annual thanksgiving and for lighting candles.

CHANUKAH HOW-TO

When Is the Menorah Lit?

The Chanukah lights are lit in the evenings preceding each of the eight days of Chanukah, beginning with Wednesday night, December 25, 2024.

Who Lights The Menorah

Both men and women are obligated to light the Chanukah Menorah, or to participate in the household Menorah lighting. Children should be encouraged to light their own Menorahs. Students and singles who live in dormitories or their own apartments should kindle Menorahs in their own rooms.

Where To Place The Menorah

Many have the custom to place the Menorah in a doorway opposite the Mezuzah (such is the custom of Chabad-Lubavitch), so that the two Mitzvot of mMezuzah and Chanukah surround the person. Others place it on a windowsill facing a public thoroughfare. (If placed on the windowsill, it should be no higher than 20 cubits—about 29 feet—above street level.)

Setting Up The Menorah

The Chanukah lights should consist of lamps or candles - i.e., a flammable fuel that feeds a visible flame via a wick. The most ideal way to fulfill the mitzvah is with cotton wicks in olive oil, or beeswax candles; paraffin candles or other types of candles or lamps are also acceptable, but not gas lights or electric lights. (If circumstances do not allow the use of an open flame, a proper rabbinical authority should be consulted.)

The lamps or candles must contain enough fuel, at the time of the lighting, to burn until half an hour after nightfall.

The lamps or candles should be arranged in a straight row and should be of equal height. The shamash - the "servant" candle that kindles the other lights - should be placed apart from the rest (higher, outside the row, etc.).

On the first night of Chanukah, one light is kindled on the right side of the menorah. On the following night add a second light to the left of the first, and kindle the new light first, proceeding from left to right, and so on each night.

When To Light Your Menorah

The Chanukah lights are kindled in the evening preceding each of the eight days of Chanukah. The custom of many communities (and such is the Chabad-Lubavitch custom) is to light the menorah shortly after sunset; other communities light it at nightfall. In either case, the menorah must contain enough fuel at the time of the lighting to burn until 30 minutes after nightfall.

If one did not kindle the Chanukah lights early in the evening, they can be kindled later, as long as there are people in the streets (or others awake in the house).

From the time the Shabbat candles are lit (Friday evening) until Shabbat ends (after nightfall

Saturday night) and until the Havdalah prayer (separating Shabbat from the weekday) is recited, the Chanukah menorah should not be relit, moved or prepared.

Chanukah lights for Saturday night are kindled only after Shabbat ends after nightfall.

Blessings To Recite Before Lighting the Menorah

On the first night of Chanukah (Wednesday, December 25, 2024), recite all three blessings. On all subsequent nights, recite blessings number 1 and 2.

1. *Bah-rookh ah-tah ah-doh-noi eh-loh-hay-noo meh-lekh hah-oh-lahm ah-sheh ki-deh-shah-noo beh-mitz-voh-tahv veh-tzee-vah-noo leh-hahd-lik nayr kha-noo-kah.*

(1. *Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah light.*)

2. *Bah-rookh ah-tah ah-doh-noi eh-loh-hay-noo meh-lekh hah-oh-lahm sheh-ah-sah nee-sim lah-ah-voh-tay-noo bah-yah-mim hah-haym biz-mahn hah-zeh.*

(2. *Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.*)

3. *Bah-rookh ah-tah ah-doh-noi eh-loh-hay-noo meh-lekh hah-oh-lahm sheh-heh-kheh-yah-noo veh-kee-mah-noo ve-hig-ee-yah-noo liz-mahn hah-zeh.*

(3. *Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.*)

Sitting by the Lights

One is not to benefit from the light of the candles, only from the shamash and other sources of light. For the first half hour when the candles are burning, it is customary to sit by the candles and tell stories relating to the holiday.

Work should not be done in the proximity of the burning candles. Women have a custom to refrain from household work during the half hour that the lights are burning, to honor the brave Jewish women who played a significant role in the Chanukah story.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 22 Kislev 5785 - 23 December 2024

Passing of Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (1585)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Eliyahu Ashkenazi (5272-5345, or 1512-1585) was a highly regarded Talmudist, as well as a physician. He authored various works, including Ma'ase ha-Shem - a commentary on the historical portions of the Pentateuch, also including a commentary on the Passover Hagaddah - and Yosef Lekach, dedicated and named after Don Yosef Nasi, the Duke of Naxos.

Tuesday, 23 Kislev 5785 - 24 December 2024

Jews Accused of Poisoning the Wells (1348)

As the "Black Death" plague decimated Europe, Christians accused the Jews of causing the plague by poisoning the wells to wipe out the Gentile population.

On the 23rd of Kislev 5109 (Nov. 15, 1348), Rudolph of Oron, bailiff of Lausanne, Switzerland, sent a letter to the mayor of Strasburg, France, informing him that certain Jews of Lausanne had "confessed" under torture that they together with their coreligionists had

poisoned all the wells in the Rhine valley. This resulted in the masses persecuting and killing tens of thousands of Jews throughout Europe.

Thursday, 25 Kislev 5785 - 26 December 2024

Cain Kills Abel (3720 BCE)

The first murder in history occurred on the 25th of Kislev in the year 41 from creation (3720 BCE), when Adam and Eve's eldest son, Cain, killed his younger brother, Abel, as recounted in the 4th chapter of Genesis.

Mishkan completed (1312 BCE)

The vessels, tapestries, wall sections and other components of the Mishkan (the portable sanctuary or "Tabernacle" built under Moses' direction to house the Divine Presence during the Israelites' journeys through the desert) were completed on 25 Kislev in the year 2449 (1312 BCE). The Mishkan was not assembled, however, until 3 months later, when, beginning on Adar 25 of that year, it was erected and taken down daily for a 7-day "training" period prior to its dedication on the 1st of Nissan.

Chanukah Miracle (139 BCE)

On 25 Kislev in the year 3622 (139 BCE), the Maccabees liberated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, after defeating the vastly more numerous and powerful armies of the Syrian-Greek king Antiochus IV, who had tried to forcefully uproot the beliefs and practices of Judaism from the people of Israel. (See main article for more.)

Friday, 26 Kislev 5785 - 27 December 2024

Raavad's Passing (1198)

Rabbi Avraham ben David of Posquieres (Provence), France, known by the acronym "Raavad", wrote the famed "Haga'ot, critical notations to Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. Born approximately 4880, he passed away on 26 Kislev 4959 (1120-1198).

Shabbat, 27 Kislev 5785 - 28 December 2024

Flood rains cease (2105 BCE)

The forty days and nights of rainfall which covered the face of earth with water in Noah's time ended on 27 Kislev 1656 (2105 BCE).