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WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

### Suffering of Chanukah

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## Part I. Suffering of The Greats

### Re-evaluating The Miracles

When we contemplate the story of Chanukah, it is important to first make a quick disposal of a misconception from our minds. People have the impression that the *nes* Chanukah marks a celebration of a triumphant victory; our enemies were vanquished and the Jews in Eretz Yisroel were now finally able to live in peace. That's what many of us think.

But that's an error – the truth is that after the *nes* happened there were even more *tzaros* and over a longer duration than before. You know, the battles of the Chashmonaim against their enemies lasted thirty years and what happened on Chanukah took place at the beginning of this period; about five years, or four years, after the war began; which means that for twenty five years or more they continued fighting.

And during all of those years the people continued to be persecuted by the Syrians and the Hellenizing Jews, the Misyavanim. Many many Jews were tortured, and many lost their lives during these twenty five years after the *nes shemen* occurred. And our heroes, the Chashmonaim, fell in battle too; all the brothers were killed eventually, one after the other.

I'm telling you this because it's important for understanding the entire subject of Chanukah. We must keep in mind that the *nes* of the *shemen*, the little bit of oil that lasted eight days, didn't come in the midst of victory. It came *in the midst* of great suffering. And so, we have to re-evaluate the place of the *nes shemen* in the framework of the events as they took place.

### Slaughtering Syrians and Sycophants

Everyone knows the story of how the rebellion against the Syrian-Greeks began; it's related in the book of Maccabi'im, the Sefer Chashmonaim, how a Syrian officer summoned the Jews of Modi'in to come forth and offer up on the altar of idolatry. And

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when one Jew, a sycophant, stepped forward to perform the offering, Mattisyohu pulled his sword from under his coat – he had prepared for this moment – and he plunged his sword into the heart of that renegade Jew; and then for good measure he finished off the Syrian officer too. That's how it began.

And in fact, it was just the beginning. The Jews had to escape to the mountains now; they had to leave their homes and hide out in caves in the wilderness. And some even blamed him for that. Some of his own people were dumbfounded at what he did; they were shouting at him, “Are you crazy? To bring such *tzaros* upon us?! גְּזֵרוֹת עֲבִידָא רַבְטָלָא - A decree eventually will be abolished (Kesubos 3b); sooner or later the *gezeiros* will pass but now you are bringing down the wrath of Antiochus on our heads. We have to leave our homes now and live like hunted animals in the desert! And who knows how many of us will survive because of what you did!”

### **Running Into Danger**

Now, we shouldn't hear these words and imagine that Mattisyohu acted carelessly. Mattisyohu was certainly a *ben Torah*. וְזָרִים בְּיַד עֹסְקֵי תוֹרָתֶיךָ it says. You can be sure that Mattisyohu wasn't just a hothead who was looking for some excitement. He was a *talmid chacham* who acted with thought, with *cheshbon*; he saw that the Jewish nation in Eretz Yisroel was at its breaking point; the people were collapsing under the pressure of the Misyavnim and soon all would be lost. And therefore, Mattisyohu and his fellow *talmidei chachomim* had calculated beforehand that it had to be done – they had to put the brakes on this downward spiral.

And they knew what would be; they understood what it meant to incur the wrath of a king with an army. It meant *tzaros*, a lot of *tzaros*. Mattisyohu and his *chaveirim* were clear-eyed about the consequences of defending the honor of Hashem, and they willingly accepted all the consequences. They were ready for everything. And it came – everything came.

And don't think they accepted *tzaros* for other people. Mattisyohu and his sons always were at the front of the battle. They didn't stand in the back and give orders; Mattisyohu's life was in danger all the time until he finally died. And his sons lived the rest of their lives battling in the mountains; they were killed one after the other fighting for Hashem.

### **Blessing in Babylon**

Now we have to understand an important point; they didn't have to die. The story of Chanukah took place in Eretz Yisroel but we have to know that not all the Jews were in Eretz Yisroel at that time. There was a very big *yishuv* of Jews in Bavel – it could very well be that they were even more numerous in Bavel than in Eretz Yisroel. The Jews had come back from *galus Bavel* and settled in Eretz Yisroel. But the majority didn't come; the majority of Jews were still in Bavel.

And in Bavel there was no persecution, there were no Hellenizers ruining the people. The Gemara (Pesachim 56a) says, בְּנֵהֲרָדְעָא דְלִיבָא מִיַּנִּין – in Nehardea, that's the main town where the Jews lived in Bavel, there were no *minim*. They didn't have any Christians, they didn't have any *Tzedukim*, they didn't have anybody; just Jews. That's how it was in Bavel.

Eretz Yisroel on the other hand was a land that was favored with all *tzaros*. It's like today; the worst *apikorsim* in the world are in Eretz Yisroel today. That you have to know; there is nothing as poisonous in the world as the Israeli Hebrew press against religious Jews. That is how it always was because the land of *kedusha* always presents the greatest *nisyanos*; the greatest obstacles are there. But Bavel on the other hand was a country where you could live and nobody would bother you. You could keep *yiddishkeit*; nobody would bother you.

### **Accepting Affliction**

So the question is, if Mattisyohu was interested in living a life of *shleimus*, a life of Torah and *mitzvos* without being hindered, he could have run away. Many Jews fled, this we know. Every time there

were *tzaros* many Jews fled to Bavel. And so Mattisyohu could have gone with all his children to Bavel and he could have lived a quiet happy life. He needed the *tzaros* of battling the Yevanim like a hole in the head.

But Mattisyohu was a leader and he didn't want to forsake the rest of the people. There were many Jews who would remain there and they would be subjected to the pressure and influence of the *reshaim*; what would happen to the Klal Yisroel in Eretz Yisroel if Mattisyohu would abandon them to the power of the assimilated Jews who were infiltrating and destroying the *kedusha* of the people?

And therefore Mattisyohu chose *yissurim*; he knew that right now, being a servant of Hashem meant suffering for Him and so he chose to remain in Eretz Yisroel along with other *ovdei Hashem*. And the remaining wasn't a remaining where they gained power and glory and they settled down to a life of peace. No. They were all dead by the time the victory came. Of course they were in Gan Eden, but in this world they didn't have any pleasure from this fighting, from the *yissurim* they chose to undergo.

And so it was a case where they accepted *yissurim* willingly. Great people are capable of that.

### **The Tanna's Queer Friends**

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (84a) tells about a certain *tzaddik*, Rabbi Elozor ben Rabbi Shimon. He was a unique personality who strove to achieve perfection but he suspected that he had certain flaws. There's an entire story there – it's worth studying. He was blamed by some of the *chachomim* for a certain behavior, a certain mode of action that he followed, and therefore in order to convince himself that he was purified and free of any blemishes the Gemara says he undertook a few courses of action.

The first thing he did, you'll have to read it in the Gemara if you are interested. But despite that first test, Rabbi Elozor ben Rabbi Shimon did not rely on his judgement and he took upon himself

*yissurim* to purify himself further. Just like Mattisyohu, he was a great man and he willingly accepted a career of suffering.

The Gemara says that every night when he lay down he said, **בואו אחי ורעי בואו** – "Come my brothers, my friends." He invited the *yissurim* to come. And in the morning he told them to depart. Now this little story is part of a long narrative which is worth studying, but for our purposes this little piece will suffice.

Rebbi Elozor ben Rabbi Shimon had work to do in this world; he couldn't spend his days suffering. And therefore he chose to suffer at night. At night the *talmidim* went home; the yeshiva was over. I'm sure there were people who studied all night too but now they didn't need his company, so at night he invited the *yissurim*; he suffered. And then in the morning he told them to leave.

### **The Daytime Break**

Now, I would prefer to understand as follows: Rabbi Elozor ben Rabbi Shimon suffered all the time but he had great will-power and a very strong intellect so in the morning he decided to ignore his suffering and apply himself to the business of life which is achieving *sheleimus* in serving Hashem; and because suffering would be an impediment to that, he trained himself to ignore the troubles. In the morning he steeled himself to the day's work and he told his *yissurim*, "Disappear! Don't interfere with my business!"

That is how many people are; they have sufferings but while they are working they are not overwhelmed by their pains because their occupation, their being busy, causes them to forget to some extent about their suffering.

At night, however, he willingly accepted it and his mind dwelt on them, like someone who enjoys a luscious dish. He focused on his pains and he tried to get as much zest, as much benefit, as he could from the *yissurim*. He was alone on his bed and his wounds were aching and he thought about it; he

didn't want to ignore it, he wanted to gain the most perfection from his situation.

### Relishing the Pain

There are various forms of perfection that a person can achieve from *tzaros*. There's perfection in the tremendous achievement of *anivus*, in humbling yourself before Hashem. You cannot be a *baal gaavah* when you are suffering; even a millionaire, when he is in pain he is a humble fellow. There's also perfection in unquestioning loyalty to Hashem. There's perfection in empathy, in appreciating the aches and pains of others and perfection in appreciating the gift of good health. There's *kaparah* for your sins too. There's more than that and I'm sure Rebbi Elozor gained all of them but our point here is that he accepted them. He willingly accepted upon himself the *yissurim* sent upon him. That is what the Gemara is telling us.

Now, of course, everyone here must go to the doctor if they're sick. Like the Torah says (Shemos 21:19) **וְרַפֵּא יְרַפֵּא** - you must heal your illnesses. Your body is not yours to do with it as you wish just because your *neshama* wants *sheleimus* and perfection. The poor body can complain, "Why should I have to suffer because of your *neshama*?" and so, **וְרַפֵּא יְרַפֵּא** - you have to go to a physician. **וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ** - you have to love your fellow Jew, and your body is a Jew too. And therefore you have to see that your body is always happy and well cared for.

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 91a) says: **אָסוּר לְאַרְם לְחַבֵּל בְּעַצְמוֹ** - It's forbidden for a person to wound himself. And I am certain that Rebbi Elozor ben Rebbi Shimon didn't wound himself either; it's *ossur*. He wouldn't take a knife and cut himself to have *yissurim*; that nobody would do, not Jews. Only that he accepted these *yissurim*. He didn't run away from them. That is a different story. To revel in *yissurim*, to relish them because of the opportunities they bring, that's what he did.

Only the rest of us wouldn't be able to relish it like Rebbi Elozor and Mattisyohu did. And yet, even we can gain immensely by studying the subject of

how great men were willing to accept upon themselves *yissurim*. And so we will attempt to study this together now.

## Part II. Accepting Suffering

### Life Includes Difficulty

How does a person accomplish such a thing? What is the secret to being a Rebbi Elozor ben Rebbi Shimon and a Mattisyohu, a 'someone' who is willing to accept a career of *yissurim*; and to revel in it - not to be afraid and to break down?

It's an important subject because who doesn't undergo hard times? Everyone is subjected to periods of difficulty, difficulties that come because he wants to serve Hashem. It doesn't mean you have to seek it, but they will come - to a certain extent they will come.

A woman who wants to have a big family, she knows it's not going to be easy - but she does it anyhow. She willingly accepts the difficulties. A woman who marries a *talmid chochom*, someone learning in the *kollel*, might have to accept a life of minimal sustenance. And even if her husband is a working man, he gets up when it's dark outside to go and learn in the Beis Knesses before *davening*. He might stay out late in the Beis Medrash learning through Shas. He's not always available to help. It's not easy for her. And he too - he would like to sit on the couch all evening with his feet up on a chair. But he doesn't; he's in the Beis Medrash because he has accepted a way of life that involves struggling for *avodas Hashem*.

So even if you're not from the great ones, they come to you; the difficulties of living a Torah life. It doesn't mean you'll ever slaughter a Greek and have to hide out in the mountains but you'll suffer anyhow. There are periods of our lives - sometimes years and years - when we are placed in difficult straits for the service of Hashem. And so the one who wants to be a successful *eved Hashem* wants to be prepared for such eventualities; he wants to

know the secret that Mattisyohu and Rebbi Elozor knew.

### ***It's All a Preparation***

The Mesillas Yesharim makes a fundamental statement. He says, “We are here in this world only for one purpose and that is to *prepare for the World-To-Come*. You should never forget that!” I am adding these words, “You should never forget,” but he tells us that it must be the constant focus of our lives. וְלִזְמַן יְשׁוּעָה וּמִגְמָלוֹתוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּינוּ – “For this purpose, to remember we are preparing for the next world, you should put your glance, your look, your gaze *all the days of your life*.” Whatever you do, he says, בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר הוּא עֹמֵל – *in anything you are working at*, whatever you’re struggling with, keep in mind that your purpose is the World-to-Come.”

That itself is a thundering statement. When you go to the *beis haknesses* to daven, when you’re in the office making money – or *chas v’shalom* the opposite – when you go to work or sit down to do homework with the little children, keep in mind that your purpose is the World-To-Come. When you sit down to eat breakfast, when you are going to the *chuppah* to get married, you’re preparing for Olam Habo.

And not only what you *do* is a preparation, what is *done to you* is a preparation. When it rains and when it snows you are being prepared for Olam Habo. How does that work? It takes time to explain. When there is war *chas v’shalom*; you didn’t ask for it but that war is preparing you for Olam Habo. And peace prepares you too. When a man’s time comes and he knows that his minutes are counted, when he is on the operating table – all the vicissitudes, all the changes that he undergoes in life he should keep in mind always, that everything is a preparation for the World-to-Come.

Isn’t it worth coming here just to hear that? “This world is a vestibule”; we should never forget that. It’s good to live with that ideal.

### ***We’re Just Passing Through***

I told you a number of times the story of the Chofetz Chaim. Once a visitor came, a rich man, to see the great Chofetz Chaim and he came into the Chofetz Chaim in a room. He saw him sitting at a table of planks, like a makeshift table, and he was sitting on an old wooden bench. It looked like he had moved out for a time being while they were making some renovation in the home.

Then he discovered that this is the home so he asked the Chofetz Chaim, “Where is your furniture?”

So the Chofetz Chaim said, “And where is your furniture?”

So the man says, “I’m just a traveller here.”

The Chofetz Chaim said, “Well, so am I.” He understood that he’s only in a vestibule; he had no furniture.

Now, I am not saying that you have to make yourself especially uncomfortable in this vestibule. Many times, in order to achieve what you have to achieve, you have to have a certain amount of comfort to encourage you – I might talk about that yet someday. And therefore I don’t know if we can demand of ourselves to immediately begin living like the Chofetz Chaim did – it took a lot of hard work and struggles for the Chofetz Chaim to achieve such an attitude; but we should know what we’re aiming for. We should never forget that whether we live in comfort or in more comfort, we are here for a purpose – it is only a waiting room to get ready for the World to Come.

### ***Vestibular Vicissitudes***

Now we begin to understand what our great heroes, the Chashmonaim, understood. They understood that this world is a *prozdor*, a hallway into a more important place, and in a hallway you don’t become broken from vicissitudes. People who lose sight of that would be terrified; they would be overwhelmed at the prospect of having years and years of war confronting them. That is what it means to start up with Antiochus; it means years and years.

Antiochus, of course, is not eternal and the truth is soon after the beginning of the war he got what was coming to him. He was a failure; he died far away from home. Josephus says he regretted what he had done to the Jews, that's what Josephus writes. But even if he didn't, it makes no difference; he was a failure and you can be sure that after he left this world in misery then the hot days were waiting for him. There is no question that he is in *Gehenom* and he didn't get out yet.

But our fathers knew that somebody else would take his place and that is what happened. There is no lack of *reshaim* in the world and once you start up with the *umos haolam*, it is not that easy to stop it. And therefore they knew what was going to happen.

But they understood that this world is a *prozdor*. And they understood what it says in Pirkei Avos about that statement. He adds there an admonition. Since this world is a vestibule, **הַתִּיקֵן עֲצֻמָּךְ בְּפֶרוֹזְדוֹר** – *Be sure to prepare yourself in this vestibule*, **כִּדְרֵי שְׂתַבְנֶנְךָ לְטָרְקֵלִין** – *in order that you should enter the banquet hall*. **הַתִּיקֵן!** In this waiting room you don't just sit. **הַתִּיקֵן** - Your business here is to get ready, to prepare yourself, from the word *tikkun*. And sometimes the *tikkun* of this world is if a person takes his body and he utilizes it in ways of defending the honor of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. That is one way – it's one of the biggest ways of gaining *sheleimus*; to fight for the glory of Hashem.

### Friendly Fire

That's what it says in Mishlei (27:6), **נֶאֱמָנִים פְּצָעֵי אוֹהֵב** – *The wounds of a friend are trustworthy*. It means if a friend wounds you, you can trust in him.

Now, we'll explain these words of Shlomo Hamelech as follows: Who is the *ohev*, the friend, who's wounding you? We know who that is – there is only one friend in this world that is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Especially for the *Am Yisroel*. He is **אוֹהֵב עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל**. And so when this Friend sends wounds we must understand that they are **נֶאֱמָנִים**, they are trustworthy. It means they are for a benefit. And that is what the *possuk* says, **נֶאֱמָנִים פְּצָעֵי אוֹהֵב** – How

loyal, how trustworthy, are the wounds of a good friend.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu made the Chashmonaim great by this period of long suffering; thirty years of real *tzaros*, the worst kind of difficulties, and they understood that. They knew that when something comes from the Friend, He is trustworthy enough, and it's for our benefit.

### Gaining Gold

Now let's see what happened afterwards. The Syrian kings began quarrelling with each other; there was a war among them and each one began bidding to get the Jews to be on his side. And as a result, finally the Jews were given all the rights and they became independent and now one of them was made king.

Suddenly we have kings now. There had been no king in the *Am Yisroel* since the last king Tzidkiyahu had gone into exile. So many years passed and suddenly we are restored to the status of a monarchy! In those days that was the glory of a nation, to have a king.

And who were the kings? The *kohanim gedolim* were kings! And they had wealth. Yochanan Hyrcanus used to feast every year on the anniversary of the victories. And he had golden tables, tables of gold; not inlaid with gold – solid gold tables. And now the Chashmonaim were basking in the sunshine of prosperity.

### Enemy Kisses

And now they were getting the second part of that *possuk*. It says “The wounds of a friend are beneficial,” but **וְנִעְתָּרוֹת נְשִׁיקוֹת שׁוֹנֵא** – *the kisses of the enemy are overabundant; they're not going to be to your benefit*. Now came the kisses instead of the wounds. And then everything changed. I don't want to mar the story of Chanukah by relating the downfall of this great family, but in their prosperity they were ruined. They were the opposite; they became *tzeddukim*, they became enemies of the *chachmei haTorah* eventually. The Torah for which their fathers had given their lives, in prosperity,

they became so spoiled that they became enemies of the *chachmei haTorah*.

Of course Mattisyohu and his sons already went to the next world with their crowns of glory on their heads; they could never lose what they achieved in the midst of their *yissurim*. But their descendants squandered away those crowns; they exchanged them for crowns of gold, for actual crowns of kings. That's what happens during good times. Wealth, good times, is a more difficult test. By the way, that's why wealthy Jews – it means Jews in America; Jews who have plenty to eat – have to apply themselves to the great task of showing their appreciation to Hakodosh Boruch Hu constantly and always. They have to apply themselves to the *emunah* that it all comes from Him and their mouths should constantly be full of **בְּרִכּוֹת וְהוֹדָאוֹת מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם**. If you do that then maybe, maybe, you'll succeed in good times. It's not easy to achieve crowns of glory when everything is going well.

And that's why, when was it that the Chashmonaim achieved their real crowns, the crowns that mattered in the Next World? It was during the years of **פְּצִיעֵי אוֹהֶב**, that's when they achieved greatness. And they were able to do it because they remembered always that this world is only a *prozdor*, a hallway, into the *traklin*, the great palace of Olam Habo.

### Part III. Day-to-Day Suffering

#### **Fighting the Good Fight**

And so we go back to the Mesillas Yesharim now and we understand that those words “you should put your gaze, your focus to the ideal of Olam Habo, all the days of your life” are the key to success. The way to Olam Habo is only by means of Olam Hazeih. You can't skip the stage of going through this world – and this world sometimes includes difficult days.

Now, if things are going smoothly and you don't have opponents, naturally you have to do something; you have to sit and learn. You have to use that

opportunity to gain *shleimus*. And even then, many times it's a struggle. If you are studying Torah, you are giving your life to know *Shas*; that's not an easy thing – it's a struggle. You think it's easy to become great in Torah?!

And for some it's especially hard; if you come in from the outside there are heartrending hardships involved in becoming a yeshiva man. You have to struggle with the idioms of the Gemara, with the concepts of the Gemara. Let's say a boy comes in from a small town in Nebraska; he never learned anything and he leaves home to the yeshiva; he doesn't have a brilliant mind either. Maybe he has a slow head and the Gemara is very difficult for him.

In addition he's struggling with the environment. He has a lot of people including his uncles and aunts who are jumping on his back and belittling him. Sometimes his own sisters and brothers are dissuading him.

#### **The Slap Auction**

Even his mother. A boy told me his mother slapped him for sitting up late at night learning Gemara. She didn't like that he was up late learning Gemara. He wasn't making noise; he wasn't keeping his brothers and sisters up. But his mother was an irreligious woman and she wasn't happy that he was dedicating himself to Torah. She wanted him to be a doctor; at least a lawyer. And now he's learning Gemara late at night. So she lost herself and slapped him.

So I said to the boy, “You want to sell me that slap?”

He thought it over and said, no, he wants to keep it. That's a smart young man. That slap is worth an endless amount of money.

Now imagine that many years have passed; throughout all the difficulties, still, despite everything he continued to forge ahead in *yedias haTorah* and in *emunah* and *avodas Hashem*. And now let's say he finally manages to be a *far-zichnik*, he can learn a piece of Gemara on his own. He's already giving *chaburos* in the yeshiva; he's from the

better ones in the yeshiva; he thinks he's not suffering like the "bad old days."

### **The Good Bad-Old-Days**

Don't think that! Those are the *good* old days! That's the best time of your life. That's the apex, the summit of your success. Your throne in the next world is built on *tzaar*, on sacrifice and difficulties. You'll be sitting on a golden throne because you had to chew the earth with your teeth in order to arrive at even a little bit of success in *avodas Hashem*.

So when you look back and you see, "There was a time when it was so difficult to be *frum*. I was in a bad environment, and still I fought back; I resisted the adverse influences and now *boruch Hashem* I came out of the woods and I'm keeping everything. So you look back and you're grateful for all the difficulties that faced you then. It was a *bracha min hashomayim* that made a man out of you. It gave you so much *zechus*.

And so we learn from this that when we are young, let's say, just married; a young couple is struggling to establish themselves as a *frum* family, to build a loyal Torah home. And so they have opposition many times from their relatives – they're too fanatic, too *frum*, for their relatives' taste.

And they don't have much money either. And so they look forward to the good days when they will be established finally and have a big bank account and property. Oh no! You have to know the good times are right now when you are struggling for Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

You are sitting in a *kollel* and learning or you are fighting for any ideal, that is the time when you are making the greatest headway in life.

### **Hectic Happiness**

And so even when things are hectic and difficult – here's a young lady who has one baby after the other and she's thinking, "Now this is not what I *really* want. I want my children to grow up; I should have big married children and I'll have *nachas* from

my grandchildren. This is too hectic right now! Every day, all day long, I'm busy!"

She should know that *this is the happiest part of her life*, right now! When she's all day long tired and worn out, nervous, excited. This child has a cold. That child fell down and cut his finger and he has to run out the door to get the bus to go to the yeshiva. All day long there's excitement. In the midst of that excitement, that's her success. That's the cream, that's the summit of the perfection of her life. And later when it becomes easy, she's losing out on all that achievement that she had in the hectic days.

So we have to learn that while we have the period of hardships, whenever people are suffering for an ideal, they should consider it the best time of their lives. Your merits are multiplied by the numbers of your opponents. And the more you are ridiculed, the more you are opposed, the bigger is your reward.

### **Rav Miller's Yeshiva**

I look back. We founded a yeshiva in Chelsea during my first *rabbonus*. What *tzaros* we had! What opposition we had! There was a week that I didn't sleep. A whole week I couldn't sleep because of the opposition. They wanted to take away our funds that we collected to buy a building.

The day that we were buying the building for the yeshiva, I had to hide out that day. I was afraid that they would force my presence – they would come to me and say, "Rabbi! You have to back out. The public is against it."

So I was hiding out that whole day in a friend's house. And I waited for a telephone call that would tell me that the papers were finally passed. Only then was I able to come out. It was too late for our opponents! The papers are passed!

At the time I was young and I couldn't appreciate what a big gift it was. But looking back, Boruch Hashem! Chasdei Hashem. Of course we stayed the course and we won. But it wasn't only the winning that mattered. It was the struggle that mattered! Every opponent, everyone who slandered us,

everyone who tried to put obstacles in our way was a *matanah!* (Ed. Note: For more details, see Rav Avigdor Miller: *His Life and His Revolution* chapter 7 “A Rav in Chelsea”).

### **Miracles Amidst Persecution**

And so we come back to the period of the Chashmonaim in which we found them at first, the period of struggle, the period when their blood was being shed. Their relatives were being slaughtered; thousands and thousands were tortured to death for keeping *mitzvos*. And all over the land a cry went up to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, a cry because of their persecutions, terrible persecutions.

And in the midst of everything, Mattisyohu, his sons and many other loyal Jews were fighting with the sword to uphold the Torah. They could have run away; they could have run away to Bavel and lived in security. No, they fought and they suffered for the Torah.

The Chashmonaim were enduring the **פְּצָעֵי אֹרֶב**; there were wounds aplenty for a long time. But the result of all these wounds was an entirely new level of perfection for our people. Each one of them became *niskadesh* and the *Klal Yisroel* as a result became so elevated that what happened then was so unusual that it is considered one of the great *nissim* of history – for eight days the menorah miraculously remained lit.

### **The Eight-Day Moment**

Now this was actually a most remarkable phenomenon. We are accustomed to the idea of *nes Chanukah* because we consider it just a continuation of the old *nissim* of the days of the *bayis rishon*. But you have to realize there was a great gap in between the old *nissim* and the *nes Chanukah*.

You should remember, *nissim* of that kind no longer happened! The *Shechina* was only in the *bayis rishon*. The Gemara says that in the *bayis sheini*, even though Ezra and the *anshei knesses hagedolah* with some *nevi'im* still were present at the early part of *bayis sheini*, still, no more open *nissim* that could compare to those of the first *bayis*

ever occurred again. Of course, there were *nissim* happening all the time, **עַל נֶסְךָ שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם עִמָּנוּ**, but open miracles that demonstrate the presence of Hashem stopped at the end of *bayis rishon*. And the nation had lost all hope of such *nissim* that they should reoccur. The days of open *nissim* of that kind were gone.

And then suddenly it happened again. Suddenly in the midst of the darkness a light appeared, and that was the *nes Chanukah*. It was entirely unexpected! And we can understand that everybody went wild when it happened. It meant the recurrence of the days of old in a certain sense. Like Dovid said, **הָשִׁיבָה לִי שְׂשׂוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ** - *bring back to me the joy of your salvation*. That's a great joy when the *yeshuas Hashem* was openly displayed. And here for a moment, for eight days, it returned.

### **Cause Of The Miracle**

Now, if there was this one time that a miraculous light came forth in the midst of darkness, after the *Shechina* had already departed, we can understand why it is such a big thing for us to celebrate the *nes Chanukah*. And it's even a bigger thing to remember what it was that caused this light to reappear.

It was because these great people chose the system of accepting the *yissurim* that came to them in their service of Hashem. That's why they became so purified; because they willingly, of their own volition, chose this career – many years of being in constant peril of their lives to fulfill the Will of Hashem. And so we understand that they became so great as a result, that this remarkable event of the *nes shemen* happened.

And that's why it happened not after they won the battles and after the kings made treaties of peace with them and after they gained wealth. No; then no *nes* of Chanukah could have happened. It was while they were suffering that the *nes* took place. It was in the midst of shedding their blood, in the midst of not sleeping, in the midst of constant fear of death, that is when the *nes shemen* occurred, because that's what merited them the miracle.

## The Symbolism of Chanukah

And so we can conclude now with a better understanding of the symbolism, the secret of the olive oil that remained lit. The oil of the menorah was *שֶׁמֶן זַיִת יָד בְּתִיבָה לְמָאוֹר* – it was pure olive oil that had been produced from pounded olives, ground olives. And everyone knows what the *chachomim* say on this, that the olives are a symbol of the Am Yisroel; that when they are pounded and they are ground, then they give forth the pure olive oil of illumination. Because these olives were being pounded and ground, they produced that pure oil of *kedusha* which ennobled them so greatly.

That's *bepashtus*; the voluntary assumption of difficulties and *yissurim*, that's what produced the *shemen zayis* that brought forth the *nes* of Chanukah. The *ner Hashem* was kindled from this *shemen* of their idealism and that is the symbolism of the whole story of Chanukah.

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos Chanukah

#### LET'S GET PRACTICAL

##### Greatness Through Suffering

I understand that this world is but a preparation for the Next World and therefore suffering is not a mistake; something to be survived, rather it is an integral part of our preparation.

As I light the Chanukah candles I will *bli neder* look into the flames and take half a minute to reflect on this lesson: The miraculous flames came into being because of the pure oil of the *tzadikim* who were ready to be crushed for Hashem. Suffering is what ultimately brings illumination. I will try to take this lesson with me throughout the week: whatever problem I may have, is a means of preparing for my eternal pleasure.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

340 - Chanuka VI | 391 - Chanuka VII | 528 - Loving His People

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**Why is it that we find Mattisyohu and other tzadikim in the older generations carried swords and today a Rosh Yeshiva would never think about owning a weapon?**

A:

The truth is that not only *roshei yeshiva* but even bums shouldn't carry weapons today. Because it's not necessary. Unless you're going to go at night through Bedford Stuyvesant, or take a walk through Harlem; but then a sword wouldn't help you anyway. You'd have to have a shotgun. Or an armored car. Because they also have shotguns, so what will your shotgun help you?

Besides, Mattisyohu wasn't in the habit of carrying a sword. Only that he knew what was going to happen that day so he put a sword under his cloak. But in general it doesn't pay to carry weapons today at all. If you're a man of peace and you're not armed, you're more likely to survive. Once you pull a knife, then you cannot tell what the other party might do. He'll get desperate and who knows what he'll do!

That's also why I don't approve of learning karate for self-defense purposes. What good is it if you know the ways and means of tackling an opponent if the opponent will be standing behind a door ready to jump you as you pass by? And these bums won't play by the rules of karate. They hurl knives. Some of them have learned how to hurl knives from a distance. And the knife reaches the victim with the point first. They hurl knives and they shoot guns. So what is it going to help if you learn karate? Karate won't help against the bullet.

So the best karate is to stay home. Don't go out at night. And if you're stuck and you're confronted by bums, the best self-defense is to just keep quiet and empty out your pockets and give them everything. That's the best karate.

I always say over the Chinese proverb, "The biggest hero is the one who survives." The one who runs away, that's the hero.

TAPE # 391 (December 1981)