

PTDT

PhiloTorah D'var Torah

THEN AND NOW

BAYAMIM HAHEIM BIZMAN HAZEH

The first b'racha we say for Chanuka lights is the b'racha for the mitzva -

BARUCH ATA... who has sanctified us with His mitzvot, and commanded us to kindle the NER (of) Chanuka.

[See the Chanuka file for the explanation of the parentheses around the word (of) - i.e. SHEL.]

And then, immediately, we say a second b'racha -

SHE'ASA NISIM... Who did work miracles for our ancestors in days of old, at this season.

That's one way to understand BAZMAN (or BIZMAN) HAZEH - at this time.

We can also understand the wording of the second b'racha to mean that G-d performed miracles then and also now, at this time.

Looking at it this way, we can broaden the picture to include more than miracles - meaning, to look at then and now for similarities and patterns... and differences.

Ed. note: I'm leaving the first column as I wrote it, but I am changing the focus of the rest of this PTDT.

Let's look at two THENs and the one NOW.

2216 from Creation - The Sale of Yosef. Previously in Sefer B'reishit, we have seen friction and tension between Yishmael and Yitzchak, between Eisav and Yaakov, Lavan and Yaakov. Let's call that our difficulties from outside. We've had plenty of that throughout Jewish History.

But the Sale of Yosef is another story altogether. It is within the family, internal. And the problems between Yosef and his brothers didn't end with their 'reconciliation' towards the end of B'reishit. It too, echoes throughout Jewish History.

Fast forward to 3622 from Creation. The Chanuka story. A success over one of our oppressors and enemies from the outside. But a serious internal problem. The Chanuka Story included - although it is totally downplayed by Chazal - a brother vs brother battle between the Mityavnim (Hellenized Jews) and the Chashmona'im and those who remained faithful to G-d and Torah.

As mentioned, Chazal downplayed that part of the story. They touched on it briefly in Al HaNisim in

describing the miracle of the victory - GIBORIM (the Greeks), RABIM (the Greeks), T'MEI'IM (the Greeks), R'SHA'IM (the Greeks), but...

ZEIDIM B'YAD O-S'KEI TORATECHA
(the Mityavnim).

Fast forward to 5784, the first 21 days of the year. Until, but not including Simchat Torah. Brother vs brother - sadly, YES and the split ever increasing.

Since Simchat Torah - the war - there are encouraging signs and deeds of Jewish Unity. Will it last? Who knows. What we should know is that it is possible to unify. But it shouldn't be just when we are face to face with a vile and despicable enemy.

(Sadly, even during the war, even when we are seeing such amazing acts of unity, we also hear about a non-religious woman who saw a t'filin stand and swept the t'filin to the ground.)

We in 5784 have a tremendous challenge - to improve (vastly) the notion that what unites the Jewish People is greater than what divides us. We need to do our share - actually more than our share of reconciling the Brothers and Yosef, and the problem of assimilation (as typified by the Mityavnim), and develop a society that - while not ignoring

differences within the Jewish People, will recognize that Jewish Unity is the only way to go. The only way to proceed towards the Geula Sh'leima.