

Dvar Torah by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

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Vayeishev-Chanuka

Jews from all walks of life can recount the miracles of Chanuka, even more, perhaps, than the Biblical Holidays of the year. Rambam (Chanuka 3:1-3) offers an elaborate account of Chanuka. The Greeks, attempting to subvert Jewish life and coerce assimilation into Greek culture, ransack the Temple and deprive the Jewish people from practicing Mitzvot. After retaking control of the Temple, only one unopened and sealed flask of oil is found. Enough oil in this flask to light for one night yet lasted eight nights. Hence, the celebration of Chanuka. What is troubling about the miracle of Chanuka is that if we examine the Jewish Law, this miracle was not necessary. The Talmud (Pesachim 66b) states TUM'A B'TZIBUR HUTRA - "Spiritual impurity is permitted when it concerns the whole community who are unclean." The Hasmoneans would have well been within bounds of Halacha to light the Menorah with any oil that would found. What then is the significance of the miracle of Chanuka?

Rabbi A. Miller points out that the true miracle of Chanuka lies in the perseverance of the Jewish people to stand strong against any adversaries to adherence to our Jewish values. It is certainly correct that any oil could have been kindled in the Menorah by the Hasmoneans, but what a mistake that would be for the masses of Jews who had all but given up hope for a brighter Jewish future. When the story of Chanuka occurred, Jewish morale was at an all time low. Jewish life was ravaged. In fact, the majority of Jews were assimilated into Greek culture. Shabbat observance and Brit Mila were waning. In this context, the initial kindling of the Menorah in the Temple symbolized Jewish renewal. To get oil from anything less than the "best" would seriously undermine the intent of a Chanukat HaBayit and Jewish renaissance of the special eternal connection between G-d and the Jewish people. Perhaps, this is also the reason why Parshat Vayeishev is read around the time of Chanuka. After being sold down to Egypt, the protagonist Yosef was bombarded with all the entrapments of the then civilized world, including its moral depravity and lack of regard for the spirit. It would have been very easy for an embittered Yosef, to forget or at least want to forget about the ways of his father and

grandfather. Instead, Yosef was constantly aware of the special heritage he represented to the outside world. He did not compromise his ideals. Under each set of hostile and unfavorable circumstances, Yosef would have been more than justified in hiding his belief in G-d, but instead made a deliberate and unswerving decision to sanctify G-d's name. Therefore, in the metaphysical sense, the Hasmon-ean's struggle for the purest of oils is that we, while being bombarded by outside cultures and voiced objections against us, it is imperative not to compromise our own Jewish values in the process. 🚧