

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

Vayeishev-Chanuka 5783

## The Mission of the Tzadik

On the opening verse in the Parsha (37:1), Rashi quotes the Midrash: "Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility [but then] the ordeal of Yosef sprung upon him. The tzadik seeks to dwell peaceably, but the Holy One Blessed Be He says, 'Is it not enough for the tzadik that which is prepared for him in the World to Come, and yet he seeks to dwell serenely in this world [as well]!'" In light of this Chazal, how are we to understand the mission of a tzadik in this world?

A tzadik is not necessarily one who lives a perfectly blameless ethical and religious life. To the contrary, "For there is no man so wholly righteous on earth who always does good and never sins" (Kohelet 7:20). As such, many decent people would qualify for this laudable designation. What the Midrash, however, is adding is this apodictic truth: that the life of the tzadik will constantly be confronted with increasing challenges and trials. The Almighty apparently needs the righteous ones of the world to each contribute their unique talents towards the realization of His

ultimate eschatological vision for humanity. And so, there is no rest for the tzadik; he/she is never permitted to retire from the "work" of life. As soon as one task is accomplished, another challenge quickly erupts to unsettle the tranquility of the righteous. Often, there are setbacks, failures and defeats: yisurim/sufferings, as Rav Soloveitchik often defined these frustrations. But this too is part of the interminable struggle that is fated for the tzadik.

But lest view the mission of the tzadik as tragic and simply unfair, we are reminded of Yaakov's wrestling with his nemesis, the archenemy who seeks to thwart Yaakov from fulfilling his destiny (B'reishit 32:25-30). The Rav reminds us (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, B'reishit pp. 243-248) that in that bitter encounter, Yaakov, even while wounded, comes out victorious - he was blessed! His new name, Yisrael, attests to the portentous but promising truth that all the "yisurim" - all the obstacles, all the disappointments and struggles - are often the necessary means to fulfill the great mission.

The Talmud tells us (Arachin 16b-17a) that even our illustrious Forefathers "would not have been able to stand in the face of Gd's strict justice." And further, that "Whoever goes for 40

days without yisurim has received his world", that is, he is finished here in this world. The message should be quite clear. That we - the humbled, flawed tzadikim of this world - are nevertheless tapped by the Almighty to do and accomplish. And in that Divine mandate, we realize in the very depth of our being that HaShem values our existence - that in the grand scheme of things, we matter! Thus, no matter the hardships and pain, no matter the difficulties, the plain fact that we have been chosen for something worthwhile - no matter its size or prominence - is the greatest blessing and compliment of all.

The Rav once put it this way: "The struggle is the sanctification!" Indeed, there was to be no rest for Yaakov, but by virtue of that turbulent life, we are here. Let us then commit that "putting our feet up" is not an option, and that until our "120", we will embrace the great mission which is ours, bequeath its successes to the future of our people and thus - like Yisrael - be worthy of an everlasting blessing.

## **The Sufgania-Doughnut**

R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Chanukah p. 319) offers an interesting suggestion for the custom to eat doughnuts on

Chanuka. The Talmud (Avoda Zara 52b) states that the Chashmonaim were able to restore and rededicate every part of the Beit HaMikdash with the exception of the Mizbei'ach, the Altar. As we are told in Sefer HaMaccabim, they were forced to bury the stones of the ritually contaminated Mizbei'ach and build anew. By eating a doughnut then, we are given a special opportunity to pray for the rebuilding of the Mizbei'ach. How so? After we eat doughnuts (or other foods from the five grains that do not constitute bread), we recite the Al HaMichya blessing. In the bracha of Al HaMichya, we specifically pray for the restoration of the Mizbei'ach when we say "Have compassion, Lord, our Gd, on Israel Your people... V'AL MIZB'CHECHA, on Your Altar and Your Temple..." Although Al HaMichya is a shortened version of Birkat HaMazon, this particular phrase only appears in Al HaMichya and not in the full benching. Therefore, a custom developed to eat doughnuts and have additional opportunities to pray for the rededication of the Mizbei'ach.

This answer, of course, only begs the question as to why - other than its historical value - should we be remembering the rededication of the Altar on Chanuka. Rama (O. C. 670:2)

suggests that although on Chanuka, having a seuda (special meal) is completely optional, the justification for so doing might be the mitzva to commemorate this Altar rededication. How though are we to understand why this CHANUKAT HAMIZBEI'ACH should be so significant?

R. Yoel Sirkis (Poland, 16-17th c.), the Bach, offers this explanation (ad loc, s.v. V'HAYA). The Jews, surrendering to the allures of a decadent Hellenistic culture, had forsaken the Temple service. The Mizbei'ach had for all intents and purposes been abandoned. In essence, this disregard of the Avoda signified much more than simply a weakening of ritual observance. It underscored how seriously the Jews had deserted their sacred faith in favor of the regnant Greek hedonistic ethos. The fact is that Mattityahu and his stalwart sons spearheaded only a small minority of Jews who chose to remain steadfast in their ancestral traditions and were willing to fight to the death in order to preserve them. When they were victorious and set about cleansing the Temple of its idolatries and restoring the Avoda - the Mizbei'ach, this act of supreme mesirat nefesh, of great courage, reignited the religious commitment of the people and ensure its spiritual continuity.

And so, let us have a Chanuka meal and enjoy some sufganiot, and in that merriment, remember to hold fast to our Torah traditions and not succumb to a secular ethos, and then give thanks to the Almighty that "He has kept us alive... (SHE-HE-CHE-YANU)" so that we may do our share to guarantee its perpetuation. 🙌