

### IT'S DARK OUTSIDE

The enemies of Israel are in a state of exultation, grinning from oil-well to oil-well. Former friends are now hostile, or at best turn away from us. Israel's one great ally, the U.S.A., is showing signs that she is beginning to desert her. Economically we are in deep trouble. Psychologically we are anxious and depressed. The situation of the Jews in the Diaspora, because it is to such a great extent contingent upon the State of Israel, gives cause for much concern. It's dark outside.

What does a Jew do when it is dark outside? "It is better," goes an old saying, "to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Judaism has institutionalized that wise insight. The Talmud teaches: נר חנוכה מצוה מן השקיע החמה, the mitzvah of lighting the Hanukkah candle is from the time that the sun sets. The Hanukkah light has no function during the daytime. When the sun shines, there is no need for candles. When things are going well, faith does not represent a particularly great achievement. The מצוה נר חנוכה applies only משתשקע החמה when it is dark outside.

It is easy to answer ברוך השם ("thank God") when asked how you are, if you are basking in the sunshine of good fortune. But it is infinitely more difficult to say ברוך השם, or recite the blessing ברוך דין אמת ("blessed is the True Judge"), when black clouds have darkened the light in your life and you are in deep gloom.

So, on these dark days, Judaism does not despair but rather lights candles. I am not offering nostrums, cheap consolations. I do not underestimate the gravity of the situation -- although I believe it is not as terrible as most of us feel. But I believe that 3500 years of experience in the course of history should have taught us something about how to act and react when it is dark outside.

The spiritual alternative -- which is implied in the idea of the Hanukkah candles -- is not meant to be exclusive. I am not recommending that all Jews pull inwards and turn their backs on the whole world. Diplomacy, security, economics, politics, production -- all must continue on the highest level possible. But the spiritual dimension of our lives must be enhanced. Jews have learned throughout history that when life is difficult on the outside, then you must build up your inner resources and buttress the spiritual aspects of your existence. משתשקע החמה, when the sun sets, there is one imperative: נרות חנוכה. When it is dark outside, light a candle.

How do you go about it? Where do you light the candles? The Talmud (Shab. 21b) teaches: מצוה להניחו על פתח ביתו מבחוץ... ובשעת העכנה מניחה על שפתו ודיו.

Preferably, one should place the Hanukkah menorah at the entrance to his home, on the outside -- so that the miracle of Hanukkah be proclaimed to all the world. However, during the Babylonian period, whilst the Talmud was being written, the Zoroastrian religion prevailed,

and because they were fire-worshippers they forbade all non-believers to light torches or candles during this season, the Winter equinox. Since this was prohibited under pain of death, the Rabbis said that we may light the Hanukkah menorah indoors, placing it on the table, and that is sufficient.

It is our major mission as Jews to light candles for the entire world -- *עצ פתח ביתו מביא*. But if the whole *עולם*, the entire world, has turned anti-Semitic and has institutionalized its Jew-hatred in one organization and declared a *סכנה* (danger) for the Jew to hold aloft his Hanukkah menorah, then even if it is dark outside, we shall make it light and warm inside.

If the outside world makes a virtue of darkness and aggressively pursues a policy of forbidding light, so be it. We shall remove the *נר* (lamp) from *פתח ביתו מביא* (the outdoors) and place it on our *שולחן*, on our table which is the symbol of family and home and interiority. Let the table become the laboratory in which we fashion the life of our families; the "shtender" of the academy on which we study Torah; the foundry where young souls and personalities are formed; the source from which light will suffuse all our lives.

If on the outside we are plagued by enemies who bear us *שנאה* (hatred), let us on the inside increase our mutual *אהבה*, our love and concern for each other. Let husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, draw closer together, forgive each other, act with more mutual respect and patience.

If on the outside we find that friends betray us, then on the inside let us do the reverse: let us act with greater loyalty to our own people. Whom then do we have if not each other?

If on the outside hypocrisy prevails in the world, then on the inside let us do the reverse: let us study and practice Torah, the repository of truth and decency.

Two weeks ago Friday I woke up in my hotel room in Jerusalem, and turned on the radio. The news was traumatic. It informed us that during the night Palestinian terrorists had broken into a Yeshiva in an isolated area, Ramat Magshimim, and there murdered three nineteen-year old students. It was an especially devastating piece of news for me, because all three were classmates of one of my sons when we were in Israel several years ago. One young man, Shelomoh Mochah, had been captured by the guerillas and wounded in his head, and the murderers intended to kidnap him and take him to Syria, but he escaped. It was he who told the story of what happened. That Saturday night, the television news informed us that the T.V. interviewer had gone to Ramat Magshimim to look for and interview Shelomoh Mochah. He was not to be found in the office of the settlement. Where, the T.V. man inquired, could he find the young man? Was he perhaps in the hospital, recuperating from his wounds? No, Shelomoh Mochah was not in the hospital. Had he possibly gone home, to reassure himself in the warmth of his friends and the bosom of his family? No, he was not at home. Had his parents possibly taken him on vacation to recover from this terrible trauma? No, he was not on vacation. Well, then, where was he? The T.V. interviewer found him: in the Beit Hamidrash, in the study hall,

studying Torah! What was he doing there? The answer was simple: "I and my friends came here to study Torah. They were killed, but had they lived, they would be doing this. So now I am studying for them too." The interviewer looked at the camera and told his audience, with begrudging incredulity: *זהו כחך של תורה*, "This is the power of Torah!"

Indeed, when it is dark outside, and it is dangerous to light candles *בבית*, then *במנורה*, we shall light the candles on the table, we shall create and illuminate an enlightened world within.

Permit me to add one more item for your consideration concerning the gravity of our situation. This too deals with Hanukkah, and it is a point that I take quite seriously.

We all know the classical controversy between the House of Hillel and the House of Shamai concerning the lighting of the candles. The House of Shamai teaches that *עושה שמונה*, we begin with eight candles on the first day, and diminish it each day by one candle. The House of Hillel taught *מיום ראשון*, we begin with one candle, and each day add another candle until we reach eight. What is the underlying theme of this controversy?

One of the greatest and most beloved of Hasidic teachers, the Apter Rav, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, known as the *אורב ישראל* (lover of Israel), explained the controversy as follows: Consider that first menorah in Maccabean times, the one in which the miracle was performed. With each successive day that the flame continued in the menorah, although there was no oil to support it, the miracle seemed greater and greater. If on the second day the miracle seemed impressive, then on the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth day it seemed even more amazing. On the seventh day it was almost incredible -- the menorah was still burning! On the eighth day, the miracle reached its overwhelming climax, for one day's oil had already lasted for eight days. Hence, insofar as our perception of the miracle, <sup>is concerned,</sup> every day it grew greater. However, the miracle itself took exactly the reverse course. Only a drop of oil was left after the first day, and that had to support eight days' worth of miracle. Thus, on the second day, for instance, the oil had to support six full days of light -- truly a Herculean task. On the fourth day, it had to support only four more days of light -- a miracle, of course, but not quite of the proportions of the first day or so. On the eighth day, the miracle was still there -- a days' worth of light coming from but a drop of oil -- but the miracle was quantitatively much smaller than the first day, when it had to stretch for eight days of light. Hence, the House of Shamai follows the reality of the miracle, which decreased with every day, whereas the House of Hillel follows the awareness of the miracle, which increased day by day.

So there is a discrepancy and a disjunctiveness between the facts of the miracle and the perception of them, between reality and appearance. The miracles of Jewish survival and redemption are paradoxically most obvious when they are least effective, and least apparent when they are most profound and far-reaching. When we are most conscious of the wonder of our salvation, that is when



the miracles are all but spent, and we must beware of the future. And when we are in the depths of gloom, and seem to find no reason for light or confidence, then we may be sure that deep, deep someplace, God is preparing the greatest miracles for Israel.

I take this to be the deeper meaning of a key verse in today's Sidra. The most dramatic highlight of a highly dramatic Sidra takes place when Joseph and the brothers meet, and Joseph recognizes the brothers but they do not recognize him. So the Torah tells us:

וַיִּכְר יוֹסֵף אֶת אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכִּירוּהוּ

"Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." That verse is somewhat difficult. Only a few verses earlier we were told that Joseph recognized his brothers, and the context itself informs us that they did not recognize him. Why, therefore, repeat it?

Perhaps what the Torah is referring to is not recognition of facial features, of mere physiognomy, but an existential recognition of a far deeper kind. Joseph was not second only to Pharaoh, the ruler of all Egypt. But he had just come up from the most agonizing period of his life. He was in the pit, enslaved, abandoned, all alone, a stranger forgotten by his family and world. From the depths of misery, he now sat on the throne of Egypt, at the pinnacle of his career. The brothers were in the reverse situation. While Joseph was suffering, they went about their business and their daily pursuits with a total neglect of and unconcern with him. But now they were suffering, now they were caught in a terrible vise: torn by their fidelity to their father, their search for food and survival, their guilt over what they had done to Joseph, their worry over Benjamin. Things looked black indeed for them. So, "Joseph recognized his brothers" -- having come through the same experience, he understood what they were going through, and he understood too that their difficulties were the prelude to their salvation

(כִּי שִׁמְחָה שְׂמַחַי לָפָנֶיכֶם), as he later told them: God has prepared this as a way of providing life-giving sustenance for you.) But while Joseph recognized their predicament, and understood that the miracle of their survival was at its height when they were most pessimistic, "they did not recognize him" -- not having undergone this tremendous experience, as Joseph already did, they could not appreciate the situation, they could not know what he knew -- and that is, the teaching we have been presenting in the name of the Apter Rav.

Take but one example from modern history. Do you recall how in 1947, or thereabouts, the Prime Minister of England, Ernest Bevin, of unblest memory, refused to allow 100,000 Jews who were D.P.s to enter Palestine? Just think of it: One hundred thousand straggling wrecks of humanity, emerging from the Holocaust which had consumed six million Jews -- and the most civilized country on earth refused to allow them a haven in Palestine. It was not only scandalous and outrageous, but totally depressing. Jews felt sunken, abandoned, in the greatest despair ever. Yet from the perspective of years later, the greatest miracle was being wrought at that gloomy moment. Had Bevin permitted the 100,000 Jews to come into Palestine, the pressure would have diminished for the founding of an independent Jewish State, and there would be no State of Israel today. Because he was stubborn, because he pressed us so much harder, from that oppression and that pressure and that pessimism, there came forth the miracle

of the State of Israel reborn.

So it is with the State of Israel in the course of its history. At the time of greatest elation -- such as in 1948 and 1967 -- we sometimes overestimated the good news, the הנצח, the miracle of survival. In times such as these, when there are little signs of the הישי or salvation, when it is dark outside, when miracles are as rare as they are necessary, at these times we Jews must be confident that the divine will spins its own plot in the fibre of history on a pattern far different from the trivial designs conceived by piddling mortal men and their pompous conceits. And it is mysterious. And it is deep. And it is miraculous. And it leads to redemption.

When it is at its darkest outside, the lights are beginning to stir on the inside, and sooner or later they will pierce the gloom of the outside world as well.

For the Hanukkah candles are indeed the heralds of the light of redemption.