

Shabbat Chanukah – 5783

Chanukah is the only 8-day festival on the Jewish calendar that can sometimes have two Shabbatot in it. That is because of the unique timing on the calendar of when the first night of Chanukah actually begins. The two eight-day pilgrimage festivals are both timed so that there is never more than one Shabbat in their middle. They are each referred to Shabbat Chol HaMoed or the Shabbat in the middle of Sukkot or Pesach. Usually, Shabbat Chanukah and Rosh Hodesh come on the same day and so, from a gabbai's perspective, it is a uniquely challenging service in order to choreograph properly. We need to take out THREE torah scrolls. One is the regular Torah Scroll from which we read the parshah of the week as we are accustomed to do. The second one is in order to read the selection of Pinchas which addresses the sacrifices required during the observance of Rosh Chodesh. The third is required so that we can read a selection from Parshat Naso which focusses in specifically on Chanukah and its observance.

From where you are sitting though, all you can see is that three scrolls are taken out. We read from three different parshiot in different locations in the Five Books of Moses. You see three Torahs lifted up and then tied. I bet though that it can be very confusing when you try to figure out exactly what we read and why. Unless you are a Torah scholar, it probably just comes across as very confusing.

Let's look at what we are actually reading today. Firstly, we read from Parshat Mikketz. In it, we read about Joseph and his technicolor dream coat, as Andrew Lloyd Webber popularized in his famous musical of the same name. Joseph is obviously his father's favorite son because he was

conceived of the love between Jacob and Rachel, his first choice of bride in the home of his father-in-law Laban. Jacob is given a special garment and then sent out into the wilds to find his brothers who are shepherding their herds at some distance from the encampment. Joseph has his dream about the stars and the cattle and bowing down to him which only angers his brothers to the point of hatred for all that he represents. They throw Joseph into the pit and leave him to die. But we know that Joseph does not die. He is rescued by a caravan and taken to Egypt where, we read today, he interprets the dreams of Pharaoh and becomes the Pharaoh's second-in-command and begins a new life in Egypt of power and prestige.

From the second Torah scroll, we read about the requirement to sacrifice especially in honour of the New Moon and even more especially for the New Moon when it falls on a Shabbat. Lastly, we read from Naso the section in which the Children of Israel are commanded concerning the procedure to dedicate the Mishkan, the tabernacle holding the Ten Commandments. We have therefore jumped from Joseph and his new role in Egypt to the rituals surrounding the New Moon when it falls on the Shabbat to how to dedicate the newly constructed Mishkan. We are commanded to study Torah every day so today, you would not be wrong to argue that it has become very confusing, and you would wonder what exactly to study. I hope though that I have framed my comments in such a way that I have led you precisely to where I think the commonality between the three selections of Torah are to be found.

As I reflected on what I wanted to say to draw significance to this idea of newness as reflected in today's readings, I also thought about what I think is a cardinal difference between what we as Jews focus in on and what our Christian brethren are drawn to. Time and time again, Christian dogma and

liturgy focusses on the question of sin because they believe that Christ was born to redeem them from their sinful state. The Christ takes the sins upon himself for the Christian world and relieves the Christian of his guilt over his sin. We take an entirely different position. WE focus on the ability for man to redeem himself time and time again. We pray daily to be forgiven for our sins and orthodox men strike themselves twice on the chest when begging for forgiveness for sins committed. We sacrifice every month at the New Moon and pray for a month in which we find new purpose and turn away from the evil inclination to the Good one. At Yom Kippur we are provided an opportunity yet again to find forgiveness through confession of our sins committed against our fellow man and with HaShem watching us.

And now, at Channukah, we read about the dedication of the Mishkan, the new tabernacle as if to remind us that we can rededicate ourselves every year in a similar manner. Channukah is the festival that evolved around the rededication of the temple after purifying it from the wicked influences of the secular, Hellenistic world within which the People of Israel were living. Reading this every year as we do draws attention to the idea of rededication regardless of what came before. Channukah is celebrated to remind us of those days long ago when the Maccabees rose up to reclaim their heritage and reclaim the practices that dedicated them to their faith. We are thereby reminded that we too can do that and not just at Chanukah but throughout the year.

How fitting it is in today's world that we are reminded of a previous period in history where we gave in collectively to the influences of a secular world and then realized how wrong we were and that we needed to return to our heritage and our faith. It is only while being rooted in that faith tradition that we can make the changes necessary in our behaviours and religious

practices to retake possession of our collective identity and express that which makes us a light unto the nations. We do not need to pray for redemption every day. We need to act, just like the Maccabees of old. Deeds not words make the difference every day, every month, every year.