Chanukah- The Final Yom Tov

Upon the Yahrtzeit of Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt”l

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Last year, upon the 36th *yahrtzeit* of my *rebbi*, Rav Yitzchok Hutner *zt”l*, the 20th of *Kislev*, I quoted in this newspaper a few lines from the end of the third *Chanukah* *maamar* in *Pachad* *Yitzchok*: “One of the singular aspects of *Chanukah* is that it is chronologically the last of the *Yomim* *Tovim* to have occurred in Jewish history. Our general understanding of this is that with the introduction into *Klal* *Yisroel* and the Jewish calendar of the lights of *Chanukah* and its accomplishments, the road and bridges to *Acharis* *Hayomim*, the End of Days, have been completed. This is reflected in the ancient words we sing in *Maoz* *Tzur*, ‘*Az egmor beshir mizmor* – I shall complete with a song of hymn.’ In other words, *Chanukah* represents the *gemar*, the final link in the chain, toward *Moshiach*.”

Last year, we explored one aspect of this seminal view of *Chanukah*. I would like to suggest another aspect of the conclusive and ultimate nature of this incandescent *Yom Tov.*

Rav Dovid Cohen, *rosh* *yeshiva* of Chevron (*Yemei* *Chanukah*, *maamar* 8), discusses an extraordinary quality of *Chanukah*, relating its special illumination to the *Ohr* *Hagonuz*, the primordial light of creation that preceded the sun itself. The *Rokeach* writes in *Hilchos* *Chanukah* that the 36 lights we kindle over this *Yom Tov* correspond to the 36 hours that “the good light” prevailed at the beginning of the world. Now, one must wonder: What exactly is this correlation between these two seemingly disparate sources of light?

Rav Tzadok Hakohein of Lublin (*Resisei* *Lailah*) quotes the *Pirkei* *Heichalos* (chapter 27), which states that *Chazal* say that “even though the *Shechinah* was not present in the Second *Bais* *Hamikdosh*, the main beauty and glory of the Torah was *only* present in the Second *Bais* *Hamikdosh*, for they refused to build until Hashem promised to reveal to them the secrets of the Torah.

The *Leshem* *Shevo* *Ve’achalama* (*Klalim* 2:3:9) cites the same *Medrash* even more sharply: “Our forefathers determined not to place stone upon stone until [the heavens] agreed to reveal to them the secrets of the Torah.” The *Leshem* himself adds that “from the very beginning of the second *Bais* *Hamikdosh*, the gates of the Torah opened, revealing the hidden wisdom, and permission was granted to all who had prepared themselves properly with holiness to understand the secrets of the Torah.”

Rav Tzadok Hakohein (*Pri* *Tzaddik*, *Chanukah*) explains that those who lived during the time of *Chanukah*, which occurred during the second *Bais* *Hamikdosh* (see *Rambam*, beginning of *Hilchos* *Chanukah*), merited this intense explosion of wisdom because of the suffering and evil decrees they underwent. For this reason, concludes Rav Tzadok, *Chanukah* coincided with the inception of *Torah* *Shebaal* *Peh*.

Rav Cohen derives from all this that since the *Bais* *Hamikdosh* is considered to be “*oro* *shel* *olam* - the light of the world” (*Bava* *Basra* 4a with *Maharal*), and that light had been severely diminished with the removal of the *Aron*, representing the Torah, the builders did not want to rebuild without some kind of exchange for the lost light. That became the light of the Oral Law and the glow of *Chanukah.*

We are now in a position to understand the second reference to Rav Hutner’s remark that *Chanukah* is the “*kevius ha’acharona besidrei zemanim shel moadei hadoros* – the final link in the establishment of *Yomim* *Tovim* for the generations.” The *Ramchal* tells us in many places that the goal of all of Jewish history is the ultimate return to the pristine condition of Adam before his sin. That spiritual stature can only be achieved through the restoration of the lost primordial light, which is hidden in the *Chanukah neiros*. We are witnessing in our days an explosion of the learning of *pnimiyos* *haTorah*, the inner esoteric aspects of the Torah. Perhaps, as Rav Tzadok said about the time of the second *Bais* *Hamikdosh*, we have merited such *seforim* and revelations through the incredible suffering of recent generations, beginning with *Churban* *Europa*. Surely, Rav Hutner had a hand in helping to ignite this eternal flame.

A third level of understanding Rav Hutner’s reference to *Chanukah* as “the final *Yom Tov*” may be seen in a number of Chassidic *seforim*. The Ropschitzer (*Zera* *Kodesh*, second *Ner*, “*Chashomoim*”) writes that “the entire essence of *Chanukah* is to prepare for the future redemption through *Moshiach*.” The *Sefas* *Emes* (*Miketz* 5640), also, writes that “the rabbis ordained that the *menorah* be lit near the door. This custom reflects the teaching of *Chazal* (*Yoma* 29a) that Esther represents the end of all miracles, but we know that *Chanukah* happened even later. Therefore, it must be that *Chanukah* is but the preparation and key to the ultimate redemption.”

The *Bnei Yissoschor* (3:3) picks up upon the name *Chanukah* as stemming from the word *chinuch*, which literally means training or education. Just as we slowly train a child to accomplish certain tasks and to perform *mitzvos*, so is *Chanukah* our training ground to accustom ourselves to the light of *Moshiach*. The *Imrei* *Chaim* of Vizhnitz in many places stresses that the renovating and purification of the *Bais* *Hamikdosh* at the time of *Chanukah* is the harbinger of the future and permanent rebuilding at the time of *Moshiach*. All of this is also embedded in Rav Hutner’s powerful words.

Finally, to end with a *gematria*: The Kotzker Rebbe (*Emes* *Ve’emunah* 834) notes that the word *Moshiach* and the letters on the *dreidel* both add up to 358. This signifies that *Chanukah* represents the turns and spins of life and history, all of which lead to the coming of *Moshiach*. There are ups and downs, seeming losses and seeming wins, but all lead to the “great miracle that happened there.”

*Chanukah* causes us to perceive and understand the miracles in our lives.

We can understand the Kotzker’s lesson with the *Maharal*’s approach to the double miracle of *Chanukah.* Why, of all the *Yomim Tovim*, did *Chanukah* require two miracles to create a celebration? He answers that, in truth, we only commemorate the miracle of winning the war against overwhelming odds. However, since in every war there is a winner and a loser, the power of human rationalization convinces people that what was actually an open miracle can be attributed to strategy, cunning, experience and even luck. To obviate this possibility, Hashem made an irrefutable miracle to shed light quite literally upon the war so that we were not blinded by our distorted vision. This is the transition to the World to Come and the final battles.

We must remember that just as with *Chanukah*, Hashem did it all. We did but a bit of *hishtadlus* – the most minimal of effort – and Hashem saved us. So it will be in the time of *Moshiach*.

Perhaps the *dreidel* also reminds us that when we look at Jewish history, there were times when it seemed as if we were, G-d forbid, down and out for the count. Rav Yaakov Emden refers to this in his short review of Jewish history. There he declares that the greatest miracle in Jewish history is simply our survival itself. That is *Chanukah*, the last step before *Moshiach*, for it signifies the final spin, when we realize that Hashem has been holding us from above, making sure that we will arise again, this time for eternity, speedily in our days.