


11-2018

Touro Torah Volume 4 Issue 8

Lander College for Women

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Recommended Citation

Lander College for Women. (2018). Touro Torah Volume 4 Issue 8. Retrieved from https://touroscholar.touro.edu/archives_books/321

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TOURO TORAH

• Lander College for Women • Divrei Torah Newsletter • Kislev •

Volume 4 • Issue 8

כסלו תשע"ט

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Chanukah — Building the Right Desire

By Rivky Blumenfeld

According to the *Ari*, the months of the year correspond to the *shevatim* and their encampments in the wilderness. *Binyamin* was the ninth tribe in the encampment and in line when *Bnei Yisrael* traveled. *Kislev* is the ninth month from *Nissan*. Hence, the two months correspond to one another. It was in the merit of *Binyamin* that *Bnei Yisrael* were able to overcome the Greeks in the Chanukah story during 'his' month. How is this so?

The name *Kislev* is rooted in the word *kesel* — desire. The same root is seen in the Hebrew word for kidneys, *kelayot*, which are also referred to as *kesalim*. The Ibn Ezra explains the connection between the two; the kidneys are the seat of lust and strong desire. He quotes the usage of this root in *Tehillim* 84:3, “כספה וגם כלתה נפשי” — “My soul pines and was consumed in yearning for Your courtyards, *Hashem*.”

Binyamin had the special ability to inspire *Bnei Yisrael* until they strongly yearned for *Hashem*, craving Him with every ounce of their being. He gained this ability when blessed with the merit of having the *Beis Hamikdash* in his territory, as referred to in *Devarim* 33:12. “ידיד ה' ישכן לבטח עליו חפץ עליו כל היום ובין כתפיו שכן” — “*Hashem's* beloved one will dwell securely beside Him; He protects him all day long, and He dwells between his shoulders.”

Binyamin taught *Bnei Yisrael* how to take the lust from their kidneys and turn it into a desire for *Hashem*. This holy desire was the reason the Maccabees were able to defeat the Greeks — the merit of their ecstatic love and passionate yearning made the nations of the world powerless before them, allowing them to defeat all their enemies. The Gentile nations possess only the power of intelligence, as it says in *Eichah Rabbah*, “Wisdom is to be found among them, but revelation is not.” In addition to intelligence, *Bnei Yisrael* also possess this unique longing for *Hashem*. About our relationship with *Hashem*, it is written, “I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine” (*Shir Hashirim* 6:3), and “I am my Beloved's and His desire is upon me” (*ibid*, 7:11).

“This holy desire was the reason the Maccabees were able to defeat the Greeks — the merit of their ecstatic love and passionate yearning made the nations of the world powerless before them.”

– Rivky Blumenfeld

Every year on Chanukah, we have the ability to

access this love. It is on Chanukah that we have the power to raise ourselves above the nations of the world, to tap into the very essence of our being and to strengthen our relationship with *Hashem* until it is forefront in our thoughts. We can build our own personal *Beis Hamikdash* within us, in which we serve *Hashem* with all that we have. We should use the passion of Chanukah to daven that this year we merit the coming of *Mashiach*, the building of the third and final *Beis Hamikdash*, and the time when everyone will feel a true desire for *Hashem*.

Based on the writings of Rav Meir Tamari.

Attitude of Gratitude

By Leah Goldstein

When the *Makkabim* returned to the desecrated *Beis Hamikdash*, they rejoiced upon finding one tiny flask of oil amid the debris. Think of these battered people for a moment. They had been forced to flee their homes, their communities had been uprooted, they had fought against the most powerful army of their time, and worst of all, their beloved Temple had been destroyed. The *Beis Hamikdash* was in ruins and its *keilim* had been defiled by the Greeks. Many atrocities had been perpetrated against the Jewish people as well.

The *Makkabim* could have sat and mourned, dismissing the small flask as useless. Instead, they understood that the oil provided them with an opportunity to serve *Hashem*. They lit the menorah and found the strength to be grateful for what remained. The *Makkabim* tried to find the good — and find it they did, in the form of a miracle that was the catalyst for a holiday for generations to come. Many times in life, we are faced with challenges that fill us with pain, sadness, anger, and/or resentment. It is in these moments that we should remember the *Makkabim*.

I recently read an article by *Hamodia* columnist Rabbi Avraham Y. Heschel illustrating the importance of gratitude even during challenging times. This message gave me a new perspective on relating to challenges, and I hope you will enjoy it as well.

Rabbi Heschel shared a story about his grandmother Raizel, who lived in Vienna after World War I. Raizel's mother had died young, and her father had remarried another woman. The marriage was short-lived, however, and the woman blamed Raizel for its dissolution. Shortly after, the family celebrated the long-awaited engagement of Raizel, who was well into her thirties (she had waited patiently for her older siblings to get married before meeting anyone). Then, the unthinkable occurred. Raizel's ex-stepmother paid the *chosson's* mother a visit to warn her against allowing her son to marry Raizel. The *chosson's* mother saw right through this lie

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and refused to listen to anything the woman had to say.

The lesson in the story is not in what occurred, but in how Raizel would go on to recount the story for the rest of her life. Each time she repeated it, she would say, "Look what a special person my mother-in-law was! Even when she barely knew me, she trusted me and wouldn't listen to any *lashon hara* about me." She would then proceed to extol her mother-in-law's acts of *chessed* and her exceptional character. Any anger or bitterness towards her ex-stepmother was left out of the account. Negative feelings would have been expected, but Raizel had channeled all her emotions from this painful chapter in her life into feelings of gratitude towards her mother-in-law. To her, that was the only part of the experience that mattered.

Like Raizel, the ancient *Makkabim* did not recount their story in a way that spoke of bitterness against the Greeks for defiling their holy Temple. Instead, they focused on the miracle of the oil they had found. *This* is what they recorded to be passed down for generations.

Many people feel they have been wronged by someone in one way or another. Often, they walk around with anger or bitterness. Sometimes they exaggerate the gravity of the events to further their claims of resentment. However, explains Rabbi Heschel, often within the painful chapters of our lives there are incidents of tremendous kindness. It would do us much good to focus on the blessings. Like Raizel and the *Makkabim*, we, too, can channel our emotions



towards gratitude for what we *do* have. Our lives will only be enriched if we can rise above challenges and be grateful for the good and kindness we receive.

Here is another astonishing example. During my freshman year at LCW, I worked part-time as an assistant teacher in a second-grade classroom at an elementary school in Monsey, NY. Esti* was a bright, spunky girl who could always be seen smiling. On my first day at work, the teacher warned me not to be frightened if I saw a leg complete with a knee-sock and a shoe lying prone under Esti's desk. Esti had been born with one leg, she explained, and sometimes she would take off her prosthetic leg when she was sitting at her desk.

Recently, I bumped into the assistant principal in the supermarket. She asked me if I remembered Esti, and I replied that of course I did. She related that there had been a program in school to teach *hakaras hatov* to the students. Each girl was asked to write what they were grateful for, and Esti, now in the third grade, had written, "I am grateful for my one leg. Some people have none."

May we all strive to be more like the Estis and Raizels of the world and, like the *Makkabim*, be grateful for all the good in our lives.

*Name has been changed.

"Often within the painful chapters of our lives there are incidents of tremendous kindness. It would do us much good to focus on the blessings."

- Leah Goldstein

Spotlight on Great Jewish Personalities

Rashi

By Deena Schwimmer



Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, also known as Rashi, was a brilliant commentator on both *Tanach* and Talmud. Born in 1040 CE in Troyes, France, Rashi was raised in a Torah observant family. He married by the age of sixteen and moved to Germany, where he learned for eight years. He then moved back home to Troyes, where he was chosen to be part of the *beis din*. At the young age of thirty, Rashi had opened his own yeshiva. He had several daughters who all married Torah scholars. His grandchildren all continued in his ways by heading *yeshivos* of their own and developing the *Tosafos*. Rashi died in 1105, beloved by his community.

Rashi became well-known during his lifetime for his commentary on the Torah. People would reach out to him from all over the world for his advice. Even after his death, Rashi's fame lived on among the Jewish people. His commentary on the *Chumash* was first printed in 1475, before the printing of the *Chumash* itself! Most commentaries on the Torah are referred to with a definitive article such as "*the*," as in, "the Rambam" or "the Ibn Ezra." Rashi was never referred to as "the Rashi." He didn't need such an identification, because he was known by all! We see from Rashi's Torah commentary and personal life that modesty and self-effacement were very important to him. We often find Rashi describing people in the Torah as modest; examples of this are Noah and our matriarch Sarah. According to E.M. Lifschitz, Rashi's humility was also visible to those around him. Whenever Rashi made a mistake in his *teshuvos*, he would openly admit it, instead of saying that he had changed his opinion. Rashi's modesty and humility did not stem from insecurity; we see many cases in which he argued with his teachers if he felt he was right.

An example of Rashi's humility in both his *halachic* decisions and personal behavior can be seen in the following story:

Rashi was attending his teacher's daughter's wedding. While the food was being prepared, he noticed there was still some fat on the meat. Since the meat was from the hindquarters of the animal, it was required to be stripped of all fat and veins in

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order to comply with *halachah*. Rashi was hesitant to act because his teacher was otherwise occupied, and he did not want to take authority in the presence of his *rebbe*. When his teacher became available, he asked whether he had correctly learned that the fat required removal. Rashi's teacher responded affirmatively and gave the order to have the fat cleaned from the meat.

Although over eight centuries have passed, Rashi continues to educate and fascinate us with his brilliant commentary on the Torah.

Adapted from Bonchek's book, Rashi, The Magic and the Mystery, Gefen Publishers, Jerusalem, 2015.

Happy Chanukah!



~Touro Torah~

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