

3. *Maintaining On One's Focus*

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos asks, "What is Chanukah?" The Gemara cites a *beraisa* which states, "On the 25th day of the month of Kislev the days of Chanukah begin. There are eight days of Chanukah. One is not permitted to deliver a eulogy and one is not permitted to fast. When the Greeks entered into the Sanctuary they contaminated all of the oil. When the Chashmonaim gained the upper hand and defeated the Greeks, they searched and only found one vial of pure oil bearing the seal of the High Priest. There was only sufficient oil to burn one day; however, a miracle occurred and they were able to light from it for eight days. The following year, they designated it as a holiday that is celebrated through praise and thanks (to G'd)."

When the Gemara answers the question "what is Chanukah?" why does it cite the beginning of the *beraisa* which states the prohibitions regarding eulogies and fasting? The Gemara should have only cited the *beraisa* which tells us the extent of the holiday (eight days) and the historical background which recounts how the holiday was established.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos asks, "What is the basis for reciting a blessing before one partakes of food or drink?" The Gemara responds with the concept of *Kal V'Chomer* (logical deduction – which is one of the 13 methodologies which were ordained to Moshe at Sinai to interpret the Written Law). Just as the Torah obligates one to acknowledge G'd after one is sated after eating (as it states – **"You shall eat and be sated and bless Your G'd"**), is it not logical to say that one must acknowledge G'd before one partakes of food when he is in a state of hunger?" The Gemara concludes, "The reason one recites a blessing before partaking of food is based on the principle that one who benefits from this world without a blessing is considered as if he had benefited from something that was consecrated." When one recites the blessing (acknowledging G'd as the source of the food item), he releases the food from its consecrated status.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl points out that the blessing that one recites before eating is only of Rabbinic nature while the after blessing (*birchas hamazon*) is a Torah dictate. If the obligation of reciting a pre-blessing is derived through the principle of *Kal V'Chomer* then the pre-blessing should be classified as a Torah obligation and not Rabbinic. Reb Meir Simcha explains that the *Kal V'Chomer* employed initially to establish the obligation of the pre-blessing has a fallacy in its reasoning.

The reason the Torah obligates one to recite a blessing after one is sated is because one tends to forget G'd when one becomes complacent and secure. As the verse states, "When Yeshurun (the Jewish People) become fat (financially secure) they bolt (from G'd)." When one is in a sated state, he must immediately acknowledge the source of that satiation and complacency. Thus, the Torah requires one to immediately recite the after blessing. However when one is in a state of hunger and feels needy, one tends to have greater clarity and recognizes the source of his blessing. He is fully cognizant that he is in need of G'd's kindness. Thus, the Torah does not require one to recite the pre-blessing before eating.

In order for one to recognize and be fully appreciative of G'd's Kindness, one needs to be focused. Although fasting and saying eulogies have great value in their own right; however, because their focus has no relevance to the event of the day/Chanukah they are considered a distraction. Therefore they are not permitted on Chanukah. Thus, before discussing the extent of the Chanukah obligation and its historical background, which is the basis to give thanks and praise to G'd, the Gemara presents the *beraisa* that communicates first what one must not do to be distracted.

The Chofetz Chaim z'tl would send his students to surrounding villages in the proximity of Radin (his community) in order to teach them about Judaism. He instructed them to present and elucidate only one central point per Shabbos. If one presents multiple points, regardless of the

capability of the lecturer to transmit cogent concepts, he would not sufficiently impact upon the listener because one point will detract from the other. Therefore, the Gemara needs to instruct the Jew to be cognizant and fully focused on the event of Chanukah.

4. Torah Has the Power to Penetrate the Jew

Every day during the festival of Chanukah, we insert in the *Amidah (Silent Prayer)* the paragraph of *Al Haneesim* (on the miracles). It recounts how the Greeks oppressed the Jewish people and how ultimately the Jews were able to defeat them, despite the fact that they were few in number. It is stated in the *Al Haneesim*, "...The wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and compel them to stray from Your Statutes (Chukim)..." The Greeks had decreed that Torah study was a capital crime punishable by death. Seemingly, the Greeks understood that if they prevented the Jewish people from studying Torah they would ultimately stray from the Statutes (Chukim), which are laws that have no rational basis within the human context and are beyond the human intellect. What is the relationship between adhering to the Statutes and Torah study? If a Statute is a law that has no rational basis, how could Torah study affect one's observance and adherence?

One can be committed to rational laws/Mishpatim purely based on one's humanitarian sentiments. One may give charity generously simply because he relates to the value of the cause or he feels the pain of the needy. Even if the Torah would not have stated the obligation to give charity, that individual would have been fully committed because of his feelings towards his fellow. On the other hand, the adherence to the Statutes (Chukim) is one that is solely based on one's commitment to do the Will of G'd. Dietary laws, the prohibition of combining wool and linen (shatnez), and the laws of the Red Heifer are classical examples of Statutes.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, "Great is the study of Torah because it brings to actualization." Is it only that Torah study causes one to be knowledgeable and understanding of the laws so that he should appreciate and observe them – or does it go beyond that? The effect of Torah study has the innate ability to impact on a Jew when it is studied properly, even to value and relate to concepts and laws which are beyond the human intellect. Torah study itself penetrates and affects the spirituality of the Jew causing him to develop a second sense of valuing aspects of the Torah – such as Statutes which are not comprehensible. Therefore when one studies the mitzvos which are rational, the motivating force to perform and actualize them will no longer be based on one's emotion and intellect, but rather, the spirituality of the Jew sensing its value.

The Greeks understood and realized the paramount value of Torah study and its far-reaching ramifications. They wished to negate and purge the Jew of his spirituality. Thus, by decreeing that the Jewish people were not permitted to study Torah, they would ultimately cause them to lose their spiritual sensitivity. Consequently, even when they would perform many of the mitzvos, it would be only for humanitarian reasons and unrelated to G'd.