

Foundations of Truth

*On
Chanukah:
The Greek Threat*

*Torah Thoughts From
HaRav Shmuel Yaakov
Weinberg zt”l*

Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivas Ner Yisroel



Torah nuggets harvested from Rav Weinberg’s thought-provoking classes given at Yeshivas Ner Yisroel and Aish HaTorah, Jerusalem, that uniquely reveal essential foundations of Torah and Jewish thought. While these essays include some edits for readability, they largely preserve the Rosh HaYeshiva’s unique style and original messages.

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Chanukah: The Greek Threat
Rav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg zt"l
26 Kislev, 5756

Dedicated By:
Rabbi & Mrs. Yehudah Bukspan and Family

Yomim Tovim: Meeting the Challenge

I think we've pointed out a number of times the difference between the *Yomim Tovim* in the Torah and the rabbinic *Yomim Tovim*.

The *Yomim Tovim* in the Torah are those that create the very being of *Klal Yisrael*, the *kochos hanefesh*, the spiritual characteristics, which define what it is to be a *Yisrael*. While the rabbinic *Yomim Tovim* are specifically to give us *kochos* and aspects to meet particular onslaughts, particular *sakanos* (dangers), which without these *Yomim Tovim*, we would not be able to deal with.

Said another way, from the perspective of *nishmas Yisrael*, we were created in such a way, that our natural state is to deal with a world of *gilu'i panim*, operating in Hashem's open presence. But now that we're in a world of *hester panim*, where Hashem's presence is *kaviyochol*, as it were, hidden, we face different kinds of *sakanos*, different kinds of attacks which the *nishmas Yisrael* is not quite ready and able to face successfully. Therefore, we have to develop additional *kochos hanefesh* in order to meet the particular challenges that come specifically in *galus*, in this exile.

If there is more than one rabbinic *Yom Tov*, it means that there was a deterioration within the *hester panim* and that new situations arose, which required, that *nishmas Yisrael* once again achieve a new *ko'ach hanefesh*, a new aspect of its very existence, to enable it to deal with a particular situation, that it must face from now on.

That is to say, that it wasn't achieved in order to face a momentary *sakanah*, a danger in the past. To face a threat in a particular time or place does not require the formation of a *ko'ach hanefesh* that transforms the very being of *Klal Yisrael*; and therefore, will not express itself in a *Yom Tov*. A *Yom Tov* expresses itself only in that which makes a permanent acquisition, a permanent addition to the *kochos hanefesh* of *Klal Yisrael* as *Yisrael*.

As a result, if you have a *Yom Tov*, it means that from then on, this particular *ko'ach* is needed to meet that new challenge. But it also means that the challenge remains a permanent one; it is not only one of the moment.

The danger of *Purim* was not just at that time; but at that time, and *b'zman hazeh*, nowadays as well "בימים ההם בזמן הזה". The danger of *Chanukah* was not just at that time; but at that time, and *b'zman hazeh*, nowadays as well. The *ko'ach hanefesh* exists nowadays, but the challenge that creates the need for that *ko'ach hanefesh* still exists nowadays as well.

So, it would make sense to clarify what is the particular danger, the particular environment in which we live, that challenges us to exist as an *Am Yisrael*, and what are the things that will allow us to be able to deal with it.

The Tefillah Blueprint

We would expect to find in our *davening* the expression of both: (1) what it was that we faced and (2) what it is that we have achieved through the *Yom Tov* with which we can use to face this new threat. Just as, if we want to know the unique aspects of each of the *Yomim Tovim* mentioned in the Torah, we can find it by looking in the *davening* that *Chazal* established. So too for the rabbinic *Yomim Tovim*, we would expect to find it mentioned in our *tefillah*.

In the *tefillah* of *Purim*, there's *Shushan HaBirah*, the capital city of *Shushan*. The *Shushan HaBirah*, what it and what *Amalek* represents, tells us what the threat was and what it has to do with. On *Chanukah*, our *tefillah* puts it, "*k'she'amdah malchus Yavan harsha'ah*." – "When the evil Kingdom of Greece arose..."

It really could have said "*malchus harsha'ah...l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*," – "an evil kingdom arose [up against your people] to make them forget Your Torah and make them stray from the decrees of Your will" without mentioning *Yavan* (*Greece*), and that would have been enough. At first glance, the specific mentioning of "Yavan" doesn't seem to be of the essence of what the danger was. The threat looks like it was just "*l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*" – "to make them forget Your Torah and make them stray from the decrees of Your will".

But that's not what the *tefillah* says. The *tefillah* is specifically about *malchus Yavan*. The danger was that of *malchus Yavan*. "*L'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*" is that which *malchus Yavan* uses to carry out its purpose.

Greek Goals

It is not the *pshat* (the explanation), that the danger we faced was "*l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*." The threat was *Yavan* who used certain tools with the aim of annihilating *Klal Yisrael* as an *Am Hashem*. The methods that *Yavan* chose to carry out its agenda were those that supported its purpose, which consists of these two aspects: (1) "*Hashkachas haTorah*" (making Torah forgotten) and (2) "*l'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*" (making them stray from the decrees of Your will).

We can easily think that *Yavan* is long gone. That *Yavan* was conquered by Rome and since then, is long lost and forgotten. But comes along our *tefillah* and says "not so at all!" *Yavan* is the predominant existence of the world today. Most likely, that which we refer to as Western society is *Yavan*. Rome re-organized it, but its driving force, its values, its ideals, and its agenda is *Yavan*. *Yavan* was then, and remains today the same threat to *Klal Yisrael's* very existence.

Its tools, of course, have not changed either. Its methods remain: "*l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*" with which it wants to carry out its entire purpose. Its purpose is to drive the existence of *avdus Hashem*, *service of G-d*, out from the world; to drive, *kaviyochol*, *Hashem* Himself out of His world.

This is only possible by destroying the *avdus* of *Am Yisrael*. Because the existence of *kaviyochol Hashem* in His world is dependent on *Am Yisrael* maintaining its existence as a servant of *Hashem* and by revealing *Hashem's* true glory to the entire world. (*megaleh kevodo l'chol ha'olam kulo*). *Yavan* is the force that wants to drive that concept out of our world.

Man-Centered Culture

And it does so, of course, by its culture. By its music, by its theater, by its sports, by its science. All of these together form what *Yavan* understands to be the centrality of man against the Divine. According to *Yavan*, it is not *kaviyochol Hashem* who permeates the world and who is the Source of all that is great, noble, and worthwhile. On the contrary, it is the *adam b'asher hu adam*, man as a man, with his intellect and with his body. There is also no choosing the body over intellect and there is no choosing the intellect over the body. Sports have to have equal representation in the values and the achievements of mankind, just as the mind does.

But if the mind is man-centered, it is not just in terms of science and philosophy alone, it has to include culture. The emotional aspects of the human creature as well - theater, its music, its art. These become central to Western civilization that is Greek-directed. *Yavan* has brought all that which the human mind finds most fascinating, most *mamshich*, most seducing.

Sports is the easiest, obviously, because it requires the least amount of *seichel*, thought. Sports becomes the obsession of the entire human society; it lives on sports, which is an incredible phenomenon.

Music, reduced to its lowest element, that requires the least amount of involvement of the mind, the crudest, the most primitive, of music is the type of music that permeates our whole society. Music that denies that there is a *cheilek ha'adam*, part of man, which rises above the animal that he is.

The arts, we hardly need to point out, has also been reduced to its lowest possible element. The comics or TV that requires the least amount of intellectual involvement, has become the most pervasive among the whole so-called "culture" of Western society.

It is science that we, as an *Am Yisrael*, have to combat with, which challenges anything in the Torah that seems not to appeal to intellect. In a sense, the greatest of all the challenges on the intellectual level is the challenge that science, so-called, "offers" to *emunas Yisrael*.

Fighting On Two Fronts

This is the whole agenda of *Yavan*. Greece understands that, in order to succeed, it needs two things:

(1) Number one, it needs, "*l'hashkicham Torasecha*", making Torah forgotten.

It recognizes and understands that as long as *Am Yisrael* is involved in *limud haTorah*, it has the *mekor*, it has the sources with which to refute and deny all these seductions. To recognize the folly of all that Greece presents, and to point out the *sheker* (falsehood) that is in it. To be able to point out the seduction that is in it, the *ivus haseichel v'hahargashah*, the twisting of logic and emotions, that it represents.

From the *Torah*, we can understand and carry out the *emes*, the truth, and not be lost in the so-called "challenge" of science, and certainly not in the primitive, physical reality of Western culture. As long as we have the truth of *Torah*, we can recognize the reality of *kaviyochol's briyah*, Hashem's world and the reality that He is the source of all being. That He is the source of all truth, of all purpose, and that which creates a reality for existence; without which would be

utterly meaningless. Only from *limud haTorah*, from *Torah* learning, can we come to this recognition; there is no other way.

They know that. They know that so well that that is their whole program, "*l'hashkicham Torasecha*" to make *Torah* forgotten; to take away the *metzi'as*, the very existence of *Torah*. To combat it as wasteful: "What are you accomplishing? You're not doing anything constructive. Studying the work pattern in Shakespeare, that's constructive – but studying *Torah*, that's not constructive. The history of how a law was written, that's constructive - but learning *Torah*, that's not constructive."

But just knowing this, doesn't matter, of course it's meaningless. But it's the ongoing, constant attack that we have to defend against. Yes, learning *Torah* is meaningful and yes, it's constructive, and yes, it is worthwhile. But they're constantly, coming up to us, "what are you doing?" with an ongoing barrage - when in fact, we are the source of the entire world's existence!

Illogical Logic

(2) And number two: "*Ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*", make them stray from the decrees of Your will.

Not *mi'mitzvosecha*, from Your commandments that have logical reasons, but "*meichukei retzonecha*" – even those that don't seem to have a logical reason. Their program is, "where's your *seichel*? Where's your mind?"

"How do you accept laws that have no rational explanation, that only depend on "*retzonecha*," His will, His *Chukim*?" - "Are you human or are you a mouse?"

"How is it that you carry out *mitzvos* which have no purpose and have no rational explanation, which has no basis in human reality and scientific teachings? How do you keep such *halachos*? How do you keep such laws? How do you give up your basic humanity, your mind, your *seichel*, to carry it out?"

These are the tools which *Yavan* uses to uproot the very existence of *Klal Yisrael*, that we should no longer function and exist as an *Am Hashem*. That we should no longer be the conduit through which *Hashem* can come down *kaviyochol* and be involved with the world and mankind.

There has been no other person since *Avraham Avinu*, who "received the reward for all of the [preceding generations]" (*Avos* 5:2), and became the particular conduit through which the Creator of the world comes through to the world and maintains a connection; only through *Am Yisrael*. Therefore, only through *Am Yisrael* is the world able to exist and only through *Am Yisrael* is the world able to recognize *Hashem*, to whatever degree it is able.

The Chanukah Vaccine: L'hodos U'lihallel

This is *Yavan*'s attack and this is how *Chanukah* enables us to resist - *l'hodos ul'hallel*. As it says in our *tefillah*: "*V'kavu shemonas yemei Chanukah eilu l'hodos ul'hallel l'Shimcha hagadol*" – "And they established these eight days of *Chanukah* for to express thanks and to give praise to Your great Name". Our davening tells us not only what the danger is that *Yavan* wanted "*l'hashkicham Torasecha ul'ha'aviram meichukei retzonecha*," but it also identifies what about the days of *Chanukah* enables us to retain our existence as an *Am Yisrael* and with which we can resist

and defy the attack of *Yavan*.

Chazal established these days as "*l'hodos ul'hallel*"; do you hear? "*L'hodos ul'hallel*" are the *kochos hanefesh* with which the *Yom Tov* endowed us and injected into our souls as a Jewish people. It is through *hoda'ah* and *hallel* that we can withstand these tremendous tribulations.

At first glance, it doesn't sound like this should be an answer to the kind of attack that we just described. An attack that we face in every area of our existence in the entire world. From the highest intellect to the lowest of existence. From the daily plague to the rarified atmosphere of intellectual endeavor of science and philosophy.

But *Chazal* tell us "*l'hodos ul'hallel*" is sufficient; with "*l'hodos ul'hallel*," we have all that we need to withstand these horrific tests. Because "*l'hodos*" is to acknowledge that we owe everything to *Hashem*. "*L'hodos*" counteracts "*l'hashkicha Torasecha*" – “to make the Torah forgotten” by acknowledging, recognizing, and accepting the *emes*, the truth, that all that we have and all that we are is from Him - and only from Him. We are *modeh*, we acknowledge and accept, that He is the source of our existence. The source of our *da'as*, the source of our *intellect*, and all of our *kochos*, all of our talents and achievements. He is the source of it all - that's "*l'hodos*."

But *Chazal* told us another amazing thing: "*L'hallel*". What is "*l'hallel*?" To express the greatness of *kaviyochol Hashem*. We praise Him "*l'hodos*", to acknowledge, recognize, and see the *emes* that He is the source of all being and all that is good. But if we already have a "*L'hodos*" to recognize all of this, why do we need a "*l'hallel*" as well?

A Different Type of Hallel

"*L'hallel*" giving praise is from the very *metzi'as* of the *avodas hayom*, of the very essence of the *Yom Tov*. It isn't like the *hallel* of other *Yomim Tovim*, where we praise *Hashem* for the miracles He performed for us. On Chanukah, *Hallel* is part of the day itself. On Purim, we read the *Megillah*, have the *se'udah* and send *mishlo'ach manos* as our *avodas hayom*, that day's particular *mitzvos*. The *hallel* we say on Chanukah is the *avodas hayom* of Chanukah - which is the reason why the *Rambam* discusses *Hallel* specifically in *Hilchos Chanukah*. The *hallel* on Chanukah is not just an act of *hallel*, it's that which establishes in us the ability to take a stand and successfully resist *Yavan*. That's *hallel*.

We see from here that recognizing *Hashem Yisborach* as the source of all truth, being *modeh* that we owe everything to Him, is not enough. We all know the highest of all possible achievements is to be a true servant of the *Ribono Shel Olam* - what could be greater! But even under the best of circumstances, *avdus*, being a servant is not pleasant – deep down, you don't want to be a servant.

L'hallel is to recognize that the highest achievement that we have is specifically through this *avdus*, through this *Torah* and through "*chukei retzonecha*" - “the decrees (even not logical) of Your will”.

Yavan tells us that we surrender a little bit of our intellect, when we accept the *chukei Hashem* because we accept His will without understanding. Without knowing, we surrender to His teaching and don't rely on our own great minds.

When it comes to science and philosophy, over there is where the mighty human mind itself and alone that achieves. In *Torah*, *Yavan* tells us, we have to accept ourselves as being at a

lower level. They have the giant minds, they have the intellect of accomplishments, the science that they open up, the philosophy that they present. But according to *Yavan*, we *nebach*, unfortunately, have to stay with our little *Torah*!

A Magnificent Gift

Through the *hallel* of *Chanukah* we say: No! In that *Torah*, are the highest intellectual achievements that the human mind is capable of!

The *hallel* tells us that this *avdus*, being a servant to *Hashem* and His *ratzon*, His will, is the biggest *kavod*, is the biggest achievement, the biggest nobility. Because the *avdus* of *Hashem* is to grow, to achieve, and to attain and recognize - more than any other way that a human endeavor could possibly reach.

The highest level of the human mind is *chidushei Torah*, breakthroughs in *Torah*. Not only in attaining intellectual heights, but it achieves creativity in the source of all existence. The *Torah*, is that which "*histakel b'Oraysa u'borei alma*" – "*Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world*" (*Zohar: Teruma 161:1*). In the *Torah* itself, we uncover new insights and open up new understandings into and about the world which previous generations didn't reveal. This is where one can attain the highest heights in the human mind: in *hallel*. To see the greatness and the incredible loftiness of it, the brilliance, the power, and the "*chukei retzonecha*."

An Uplifting Life

This submission to the *Ribono Shel Olam's* will is not to negate, but on the contrary. It is to become a *cheilek*, to become a part of that which lives in the heavens, to become a *cheilek* of the creativity of *kaviyochol Hashem*, to achieve the highest, noblest, the most powerful, abilities of a human being!

"*L'hodos*," it's from Him, "*ul'hallel*," there is no greater - to recognize its greatness and the incredible magnificence that's involved in His *Torah* and "*chukei retzonecha*."

With the *mesiras nefesh* and greatness in *Torah* and *avodah*, we're able to establish within ourselves the ability to recognize *Hashem through hoda'ah* and say *hallel*, to recognize not only its truth, but its greatness and grandeur as well. And we achieve this only through learning His *Torah* and carrying out *chukei retzonecha*. From this, we're able to establish a source of life not in ourselves alone, but literally, for the entire world.

May we merit to have a *ratzon*, a deep drive to learn Your *Torah Hashem* and involve ourselves fully in it, until we can drive away the darkness that is *Yavan* from the world. So that the light of *Torah* can permeate the entire world and we can merit truly knowing *Hashem*, which is the ultimate goal of all our *avodah* in life.