

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Bluma *bas* Binyomin *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Wall of Chanukah

PARSHAS MIKEITZ 5776

The Chanukah story is a most familiar one. From the greatest scholar to the layman, mention of the name of this *yom tov* immediately evokes thoughts of the miracle of the menorah and the wondrous victory against the Yevani persecutors.

Oy, Yevanim...

Also quite well known are the words to the *Ma’oz Tzur* hymn, which encapsulate the essence of the events marked by this festival. But here we discover what appears to be something of an anomaly, as much emphasis is placed on a relatively obscure aspect of this episode:

אָזי בימי חשמונים,	יָוָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי
וְטָמְאוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמָנִים,	וּפְרָצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדְּלִי
נֶעֱשָׂה נֶס לְשׁוֹשָׁנִים,	וּמְנוֹתַר קִנְקָנִים
קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וְרִנָּנִים.	בְּנֵי בֵּינָה? מִי שְׂמוֹנָה

The Greeks have gathered against me, They breached my towering walls, But from the remainder of the flasks, The discerning ones – for a period of eight days – established singing and praises.	Back then, in the days of the Chashmona’im, And defiled all of the (menorah) oil. A miracle was wrought for the rose-like people, The discerning ones – for a period of eight days – established singing and praises.
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The greater part of the stanza certainly reflects the central personalities and facets of Chanukah: the Yevanim and Chashmona’im; the need – due to a lack of pure oil – for the miracle of the menorah; the eight-day duration of the *yom tov*; and the obligation for thanksgiving. All primary features of the festival. But somehow, amongst these key items, special mention is also made of a “breaching of the walls.” To what does this refer? Furthermore, there are numerous details associated with the Chanukah story that were not alluded to in this hymn; the harsh decrees against such precepts as Shabbos and circumcision, by way of example. Why, of all things, was the incidence of broken walls granted such prominence?

No Trespassing

There are those who identify the abovementioned “wall” as the *soreig*, a type of lattice-work fence that, in the time of the Beis Hamikdash, stood at a point between the Temple and the walls of the *Har Habayis* (Temple Mount). Its connection to the events of Chanukah is alluded to in the Mishnah in Middos (2:3), which states:

לְפָנִים מִמֶּנּוּ, סוּרְגַּ גְבוּהָ עֶשְׂרֵה טְפָחִים. וְשִׁלַּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה פְּרָצוֹת הָיוּ שָׁם שֶׁפְּרָצוּם מֶלְכֵי יָוָן. הִזְרוּ וּגְדָרוּם.

“Located within (the walls of the Har Habayis) was the *soreig*, standing ten handbreadths tall. There were thirteen breaches along its perimeter, having been so breached by the kings of Yavan. (Upon achieving dominance, the Chashmona’im filled in and) restored the fence.”

This *soreig* served a specific function. The Tosfos Yom Tov explains that even some gentiles would visit the Temple area to offer their prayers to Hashem Who resided therein. However, they were not authorized to traverse past a certain point. It was the *soreig* that served as the demarcation line, restricting the nations' access to the Temple area itself.

Thus we discover just how central the notion of this “*chomah*” and its breaches actually is to the Chanukah story; it reflects the primary aim of the Yevanim's entire campaign against the Jewish people. R' Gedalyah Shorr explains (*Ohr Gedalyahu, Chanukah*) that the breaching of “the wall” – that is, the fence that forged a separation between Yisrael and the nations – was emblematic of the Yevanim's strategy. They were seeking to undo this separation and facilitate the intermingling of the two nations.

A Unique Enemy

The situation described above seems to be very much in line with the exposition of the Maharal (*sefer Ner Mitzvah*) concerning the Yevanim. Interestingly enough, it appears that the Yevanim do not fit the profile of the “garden variety” antagonists against the Jewish people. The Egyptians, as we know, despised the Jews: “And they were repulsed before the presence of B'nei Yisrael” (*Shemos 1:12*). As such, they sought to crush them through backbreaking slave labor. Haman, of course, was intent on the complete physical annihilation of the entire Jewish nation.

But the Yevanim exhibited neither of these pathologies. In fact, they did not necessarily harbor an inherent dislike for the Jewish people. To a certain extent, they even admired them. The Greeks themselves were a people of letters and learning; they respected wisdom and even had the Torah rendered into Greek (a serious and profound issue in and of itself; for another time, perhaps).

This is not to say that their attitude towards the Jews was benign, of course, as evidenced from the decrees and persecutions they did inflict. But their orientation was completely different from that of the typical enemy. Their main contention, as the Maharal explains, was that they could not tolerate the aspect of *kedushah* (sanctity) that Yisrael held so dear. They were content to let the Jews live – even to maintain their own “culture.” It was the spiritual quality of their lifestyle that they could not – and would not – endure.

And so they took aim at this area specifically – and such is encapsulated in the Chanukah hymn. They sought to expunge the notions of sanctity and purity from the nation, which found expression in their efforts to defile the holy oil. And underscoring their entire campaign was the idea of breaching the wall. Rather than an insignificant, peripheral aspect of the Chanukah story, the “*Partzu chomos migdalei*” was the Yevanim's chief goal. They did not want Yisrael to be a separate, more elevated people than the rest of the nations. And so they broke down the barriers, fostering a climate of assimilation and Hellenization.

We discover, then, that it is to repair this breach – as the Mishnah stated, *הָזָרוּ וּבְגָדָם* – that is one of the primary messages of the Chanukah festival. Especially in our times, there exists great concentrations of contamination in the surrounding culture, manifesting itself on a number of fronts. To retain the unique and exalted status of Yisrael it is necessary to keep a distance, and maintain a wall without breaches. This is essential in preventing the harmful influences from the outside from seeping into our lives.

