

PARSHAT –וישב—VA'YEISHEV- 5775, 2014, Kislev 21

This Parasha usually falls on the week of Chanukah, and this year is no exception. I would like show a connection that Rav Yosef Soloveitchik saw between the two. The story and the laws of Chanukah are discussed in Gemara Shabbat (21b-22a). The Gemara asks “*Mie Chanukah*”? What is origin of Chanukah all about and particularly what prompted the rabbis to establish the Mitzvah of lighting candles? Was it because of the miraculous victory in battle that the Chash'mo'na'im succeeded over their Syrian-Greek oppressors, or because of the miracle that caused the small amount of oil to burn for eight days? The conclusion of the Gemara is that the Mitzvah was established because of the burning oil.

In the midst of this discussion the Gemara cites a pasuk from our parasha. They question, why in describing what the brothers did to Yosef by placing him in a *bor*, a pit, does the Torah state (37:24) והבור רק אין בו מים That “the bor was empty, no water in it”. Asks the Gemara, if the pit was empty, isn't it obvious that no water was in it? The redundancy implies that there was no water in it-but there were serpents and scorpions in it. However, the brothers could not have known that the pit contained lethal creatures, for Re'uven, who suggested the plan, intended to save Yosef, not throw him to his death. Furthermore, Yosef's survival in such a pit was an open miracle, and the brothers would not have sold him had they known that

G-d had intervened to save his life *****

So far, a beautiful drasha. But Rav Soloveitchik asked, “What does this have to do with Chanukah?” Why is it inserted in the middle of a discussion about Chanukah? He said that the Rabbis of the Talmud often spoke in cryptic terms or in riddles to avoid censorship. What it means is that the Rabbis had a heated dispute concerning two points of view. One opinion was that we should not rebel and fight the Greek army because even if we are victorious in every battle lives are lost on both sides, and this battle is not worth the loss of Jewish men. If the enemy had wanted to annihilate us, like Haman in days of Purim, then of course we have to fight to defend our lives, but here, they merely wanted to make us forget our Torah and stray from the performance of Mitzvot. That does not warrant losing Jewish lives.

The other Rabbis argued, using the pasuk from our parasha, that being devoid of Torah, or years of being “empty” of Torah, does not mean that our nation will remain status quo from what it was; if there is a void of Torah it will be filled with negative theories and Greek philosophies. There is no vacuum in life, and no neutrality; its either Torah or anti-Torah. So our battle with the Greek culture is indeed a matter life or spiritual death. The latter won the debate, and thus, we have a happy holiday of Chanukah.*****

The issue is very relevant for us today. Children raised in homes without a Torah education and foundation, invariably will assimilate and eventually intermarry when they are exposed to the “free- society culture” on the college campuses. If their mind and thinking is not filled with Torah when they are young the void in their minds will be filled with negative thinking.