

Vayigash 5712

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

The wonderful Chag of Chanukah is over but the message of Chanukah lingers on, and the holiday of Purim is less than three months away.

Purim, we thank HaShem for the salvation of our people in Persia {Iran} where the entire Jewish community was threatened with physical annihilation. Our enemies sought to “*Lehashmid U’leharog et Kol HaYehudim*”, to kill every Jewish male, female and child without exception, but G-d, in His imminent compassion and love for us saved us from our enemies. Chanukah, there was no threat to our physical lives, but rather a threat to our spiritual and religious lives. Our enemies wanted to “*Le’hash’kicham Toratecha U’leha’viaram Meichukei Retzonecha*”, devoid us of our Torah and religious observances.

Every war, every battle brings bloodshed- on both sides. When one’s physical life is threatened then one is permitted kill the pursuer, “*Haba Le’Harogecha, Hash’kem veHorego*”, so Jews in Persia had every right to take up arms for self-defense. However, the Greeks and Hellenists did not threaten our very lives, so the question was raging amongst our Sages- whether or not an armed rebellion is halachically permitted.

The Gemara Shabbat [22a] right in middle of discussing Chanukah cites a verse from parshat Vayeishev [Bereishit 37:24] which has nothing to do with Chanukah and interprets it homiletically. The Torah states “They [the brothers] threw him [Yosef] into the pit; the pit was empty, no water was in it”. So the Gemara asks, “If the pit was empty isn’t it obvious that no water was in it”? And the Gemara answers, “The redundancy implies that there was no water in it- but there were serpents and scorpions in it.”

Rav Soloveitchik asked, “What does this drasha have to do with Chanukah, why insert this drasha right here?” The Rav gave a wonderful and insightful answer. The Gemara did not want to openly discuss the debate of our Sages whether the war against the Greeks should be fought- or not. So the Gemara hints to us a message that life does not tolerate a void or a vacuum. If there is no Torah influence then invariably a negative influence will step in to fill that void. There is no such thing as removing ones self from Torah and remaining neutral. If there is no Torah then there will be Greek influence and philosophy, Avodah Zara philosophy, Communism, Socialism, Secularism or any other anti-Torah “ism”. That’s what the Gemara means. If there is no “water” in the pit, and water is the symbol of Torah [Ein Mayim Elah Torah] –then it is a given, that serpents and scorpions will find their way into the pit.

So the answer was, yes! We must rebel and fight, even at the cost of human lives, because without Torah, Judaism will be spiritually annihilated and that is tantamount to physical destruction. Just as G-d saved our physical lives from the Ha mans on Purim, so did He save us spiritually from the Greeks and Hellenists on Chanukah. May we merit continuing to see the miracles of those days- again in our days.