

## **It Seems Unfathomable that the Chashmonoim Responsible for the Miracle of Chanukah Sinned by Usurping the Kingship from the Tribe of Yehudah**

In preparation for the upcoming Chanukah festival, let us examine several issues that surely require a deeper understanding. Firstly, we've learned (Kiddushin 70:) that there was not a single, living remnant from the Chashmonoim dynasty: **“אמר שמואל כל דאמר .”** **מדבית חשמונאי קאתינא עבדא הוא.** In other words, anyone who claims to be a Chashmonai must be a slave. The source for this is the gemorah (Bava Basrah 3:):

Herod was a slave of the Chashmonoim family. He fancied a young girl from that family for a wife. One day, he heard a heavenly voice declare: “Any slave that rebels against his masters, at this time, will succeed.” Herod proceeded to kill all of his masters, sparing only this one young female child. When this girl realized his intentions, she went up to the roof and cried out, “Anyone who comes and claims ‘I am of the Chashmonoim dynasty is a slave,’ since none of them remain, except for this one, young girl; and she fell from the roof to the ground. “

We can only wonder, how could this entire Chashmonoim family of holy priests, descending from Aharon hakohen, the very ones instrumental in the miracle of Chanukah and its institution for all future generations, how could they have vanished from this world without a trace.

### **The Chashmonoim Were Punished for Usurping the Kingship**

In truth, the Ramban (Vayechi 49,10) provides an answer; they were punished for taking the kingship which was solely the domain of the Davidic dynasty. Here are his holy words:

**“לא יסור שבט מיהודה... שלא יסור שבט מיהודה אל אחד מאחיו, כי מלכות ישראל המושל עליהם ממנו יהיה, ולא ימשול אחד מאחיו עליו... וזה היה עונש החשמונאים שמלכו בבית שני, כי היו חסידי עליון, ואלמלא הם נשתכחו התורה והמצות מישראל, ואף על פי כן נענשו עונש גדול, כי ארבעת בני חשמונאי הזקן החסידים המולכים זה אחר זה, עם כל גבורתם והצלחתם נפלו ביד אויביהם בחרב, והגיע העונש בסוף למה שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל, כל מאן דאמר מבית חשמונאי קאתינא עבדא הוא, שנכרתו כולם בעון הזה.”**

The question, nevertheless, still remains as strong as ever. In the verse (Shmuel I, 24,13), it states: **“מרשעים יצא רשע”**. Just as evil is perpetrated by the wicked, so too the converse - justice derives from the righteous. We also see this important principle in (Taanis 29): **“מגלגלין זכות על ידי זכאי וחובה על ידי חייב”**.

In other words, only righteous, meritorious people would have been chosen as the devices to implement such auspicious events as those related to Chanukah. Therefore, how are we to understand the improbability that these holy, priestly Chashmonoim committed this serious transgression? How could they have been punished with total extinction? No doubt, it would be considered a "מצוה גדולה" to provide a suitable answer to this perplexing question, and do honor to the Almighty, the Torah and the Chashmonoim.

I found in the Shloh hakadosh (Tomid, Torah Ohr, 2) that the reason the military leader of the Chashmonoim was called "יהודה המכבי", was because his banner carried the inscription: - ב'רוך כ'בוד י'י מ'מקומו - whose first letters spell the word מכבי -- demonstrating his dedication to Hashem. With this banner, he went out to battle the Greeks and defeat his enemies. The Shloh hakadosh explains that he did so to make it apparent that the only reason he temporarily usurped the kingship from the family of Dovid hamelech was to honor and serve the Almighty. The following are his holy words:

"ונראה לי כי רומז למה שאמרו רז"ל (סנהדרין קי.), החולק על מלכות בית דוד כחולק על השכינה, והנה חטא החשמונאים הם שלקחו המלכות לעצמם, כי כבר נגזר המלכות לשבט יהודה כמו שהאריך הרמב"ן בפרשת ויחי בפסוק לא יסור שבט מיהודה, ועל זה הרמז של מכבי" [אותיות] בכי"ם [נטריקון] ב'רוך כ'בוד י'י מ'מקומו, כי ברוך ה' לעולם אמן ואמן, וענין החשמונאים לא פגמו בכבוד השכינה במה שלקחו המלכות וכבודם היה לשמים, וענינם לא היה רק כשגגה היוצאת מלפני השליט".

Even with the Shloh's explanation, we are still left with the problem of how the holy Chashmonoim- whose sole purpose was to serve Hashem- failed to abide by Yaakov ovinu's parting words: "לא יסור שבט מיהודה" - the staff shall not depart from Judah.

To help us, let's introduce the gemorah (Shabbes 21:b): "תנו רבנן נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה" Also, let us understand the reason why the Rabbis instituted lighting נר חנוכה davka in the dark of night and outside the doors of our houses.

In addition, let's explore the Talmudic dispute, as to the permissibility of deriving benefit from the light of the Chanukah candles. Halachically, it is not permitted - as per the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 673,1) - and as we clearly state in the formula of the Chanuka ceremony: "הנרות הללו קודש הם ואין לנו רשות להשתמש בהם אלא לראותם בלבד". What is the source of this dispute? Why does the halacha prohibit such benefit?

### **And I "Passed" Through the Land of Egypt: An Example of a Transgression with Good Intent**

To begin to solve these problems, "אל ההרים אשא עיני", I set my sights on high to the teachings of the B'nei Yissoschar (Nissan, maamar 4, drushim 7 and 9). He cites the possuk (Shemos 12,12):

“ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה, והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים, ובכל אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ה'”.

We know the familiar exposition from the Pesach hagaddah:

“ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה, אני ולא מלאך, והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים, אני ולא שרף, ובכל אלהי מצרים אעשה שפטים, אני ולא השליח, אני ה', אני הוא ולא אחר”.

The holy Zohar (Bo36:) states that wherever we find the terms: “ועברתי” “ועבר” , it means that the Almighty, as it were, deviated from the usual manner of conduct to either, mete out judgment or to show mercy.

It remains, however, to define the term “ועברתי”: it derives from the word “עבירה”, transgression - in the sense of someone who doesn't act in accordance with the norm “כהלכה”, but, instead, deviates.

In this manner, the B'nei Yissoschar explains, by fulfilling positive commandments, we are able to draw positive influences, kindness and mercy into our lives - life and good; whereas, by failing to observe negative commandments, the result is judgment and punishment - death and evil - in the world. Paradoxically, in times of Jewish crisis, we need both effects simultaneously. We need to effect kindness and mercy upon the nation of Israel, while effecting retribution and suffering upon our wicked enemies. This raises the question, how do we accomplish both effects at the same time?

### **A Transgression with Good Intent is Greater than a Mitzvah Lacking Proper Intent**

The solution was revealed to the B'nai Yissoschar by his Rabbis. In times of need, the pure, holy, tzaddikim of a generation, may be compelled to perform an “עבירה לשמה” a transgression with good intent - as stated by our blessed sages (Nozir 23:): “גדולה עבירה לשמה” “לשמה ממצוה שלא לשמה”. The fact of the transgression creates a negative impact upon the goyim; whereas, the well - meant intention draws kindness and mercy upon Israel.

An illustration of this concept can be found in Shemos (9,29). Moshe Rabeinu says to Pharaoh: “כצאתי את העיר אפרוש את כפי אל ה'”, and Rashi comments that Moshe did not pray within the city limits, since it was full of idols. We know that Hashem follows the same Torah guidelines and standards as He has set forth for us (we recite the formula in our blessings: “אשר קדשנו במצוותיו” which indicates that these are His commandments that He Himself observes). How, then, could the Almighty allow Himself to pass through Egypt - a place replete with tumah and idol-worship? It appears as if the Almighty Himself performed a transgression of good intent, in order to bestow mercy upon Israel and hand out justice to the Egyptians.

This is precisely the meaning of the verse: "ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה", and why the term "ועברתי" is used here - to indicate that entering this place of tumah was a well - intended, well - calculated deviation from His usual conduct, meant to invoke judgment. In this manner, "והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים" - the firstborn Egyptians were smitten; as explained above by the holy Zohar, "ועברתי" indicates a deviation from the usual dictates of Torah law – an "עבירה לשמה". This is the beautiful insight of the B'nei Yissoschar.

### **For the Average Person תשובה מאהבה Is the Solution**

The catch, however, is that עבירה לשמה is reserved for the elite, the tzaddikim and leaders of each generation--such as Mordechai and Esther. Only they are able to discern the appropriate time to utilize this device; only they can be certain to be free of ulterior motives or personal agendas other than to serve Hashem - such as Eliyahu hanavi on har hacarmel.

For the average person, the performance of an "עבירה לשמה" is fraught with great danger. It would be so easy for the יצר הרע to trick one into doing an aveirah on the premise that it is really an "עבירה לשמה". This was the case with the followers of Shabbsai Tzvi, ימ"ש. So, in lieu of an "עבירה לשמה", what mechanism can the average person employ to simultaneously effect kindness and mercy on Israel and stern justice on our enemies?

Once again, the Bnei Yissoschar in his sefer Agrah D'Kallah (beginning of parshas Reeh) offers a solution. When a person repents for his sins out of "אהבה", the gemorah states (Yuma 86:): "זדונות נעשות לו בזכות". Our actual sins cause severity and justice to be directed to the wicked; while our "תשובה מאהבה" directs kindness and mercy toward Israel. Now, we, indeed, have an amazing tool that can be wielded even by an average person - without the inherent risks of an "עבירה לשמה".

While it is fitting and appropriate for our leaders and great tzaddikim to employ the device of "עבירה לשמה" when necessary, "תשובה מאהבה" doesn't really apply to them - since they are essentially free of wilfull transgressions. The average person, on the other hand, should avoid performing an "עבירה לשמה" because of the danger he may perform an aveirah even without due cause. For, most of us, therefore, the suggested course of action is to repent out of "אהבה" for הקב"ה as just explained, "תשובה מאהבה".

### **The Chashmonoim Sacrificed Their Souls to perform an "עבירה לשמה"**

The sforim hakdoshim quote Josephus who describes how many Jews became Hellenized during the Greek exile; they sank in the mire of the Greek culture. So much so, that the holy Chashmonoim recognized the great danger to the survival of klal Yisroel. They realized that the situation called for a dual strategy (1) directed judgment and punishment

on our Greek enemies and (2) drawing Hashem's mercy to Israel - which numbered many who had gone astray and followed the Greek ways, may Hashem protect us.

They burned with a desire and zeal to fight in Hashem's name and decided to commit an "עבירה לשמה", by taking over the kingship of Israel. With full knowledge that they would suffer the consequences, they proceeded to sacrifice their lives in the service of Hashem, in order to save klal Yisroel.

This is why they are referred to as "קדושים" in the poem "הנרות הללו"; they clearly sanctified the name of Heaven in deciding to perform this "עבירה לשמה".

Why was it also important for the poet to refer to them as "כהניך הקדושים" - your holy priests? Here we find the answer in the gemora (Sanhedrin 7.), which examines the role and motives of Aharon hakohen in making the golden calf. He had already witnessed the murder of Chur for refusing to make the calf; he feared that if they murdered him as well, there would be no way to save them - for the verse states (Eichah 2,20): "אם יהרג במקדש" "ה' כהן ונביא" he rationalized, therefore, that if he helped them make the calf, they would still have the possibility of salvation via תשובה.

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Ki Sisho, 194) is troubled by Aharon's decision, since it appears to violate the principle of "יהרג ואל יעבור"-- idol-worship is one of the three cardinal sins for which one must submit to death rather than transgress. Furthermore, after his actions in this matter, he was promoted to kohen gadol - in what merit?

He answers that "מסירת נפש" includes sacrificing your soul to Hashem ie being ready to give up your portion of "olam habah" as well as your physical existence in this world. Aharon hakohen made the calf to save Klal Yisroel even if this meant that he would lose this world and also "olom habo". Hashem saw his good intent and love for his Creator and for Israel, thereby recognizing his actions as an "עבירה לשמה". This is why he and his descendants were designated as high priests.

It is now ever so clear why the poet emphasized that the miracle of Chanukah was facilitated by "your holy priests." A connection is being drawn between the actions of the Chashmonoim and Aharon hakohen godol, from whom they inherited the priesthood. Both performed deeds of self-sacrifice in the service of Hashem, even at the cost of losing their "olam habah" as well as their "olam hazeh."

### **By מאהבה תשובה We Invoke Kindness and Severity**

By performing an "עבירה לשמה" at a time of dire need - taking the kingship from the tribe of Yehudah -they managed to invoke severity and judgment upon the Greeks, who

fell in battle despite their superior numbers and strength. Simultaneously, in their merit, the Jews were treated with kindness and mercy.

This is also the meaning of the holy Shlo"h as to why Yehudah "המכבי" inscribed on his banner **בִּירוֹךְ כְּבוֹד יְיָ מִמְקוֹמוֹ** (whose first letters spell out **מכבי**). This inscription was to illustrate their lofty intent, despite the apparent transgression.

We may also shed light on the aforementioned Talmudic dispute concerning the permissibility of using the light of the Chanukah candles. Those who permit its use, wish to teach an important lesson concerning "עבירה לשמה" and its dual effects. Nevertheless, the halachah follows the view of those who prohibit the light's use. For, they wish to teach that there is a grave, inherent danger in performance of an "עבירה לשמה"; it is not a device to be used by the average person.

The lighting of the Chanukah candles is a reminder of the holy service of the Chashmonoim, the descendants of Aharon hakohen. We've learned that they succeeded in invoking mercy and kindness upon Israel, while invoking judgment and punishment upon our enemies. Yet, it is prohibited for us to follow in their footsteps. So, how are we to perpetuate their legacy from generation to generation? We've learned the answer from the Agrah D'kallah; we can accomplish the same effect through "תשובה מאהבה"; but, where do we find an allusion to this is the mitzvah of lighting Chanukah candles?

This allusion can be found in the fact that we are instructed to perform the mitzvah on our doorsteps, outside. Nighttime and darkness refer to our sins; daytime and light refer to Torah and mitzvos - which illuminate the world. As it is written (Mishlei 6,23): **"כי נר מצוה ותורה אור"**. Through the institution of this mitzvah by our blessed Rabbis, we illuminate our sins with the light of Torah. We transform our sins, which are outside the walls of kedushah "מבחוץ" into assets. This is the same process as **תשובה מאהבה**; the transformation of willful transgressions into merits and assets. This, we accomplish by lighting **"על פתח ביתו מבחוץ"**.

In summary, we now have a better understanding of the Chashmonoim's self - sacrificing deeds in a time of great need – **"עת לעשות לה"**. What remains to be explained, however, is why the Almighty saw fit to punish them so severely. G-d willing, we will delve into this subject further during the week to come in honor of the second Shabbos of Chanukah **הבא עלינו לטובה**.