

Shabbat 05 December 2015 – Vayeishev – Chanukah

Chanukah begins on Sunday night.

We almost always begin reading the story of Joseph either just before or during Chanukah. There must be some deep connection between the two stories.

Chanukah celebrates two themes.

Firstly; we commemorate how a small band of men, the Maccabees, against all probability were able to fight and triumph against a dominating force, the Seleucid Greeks who were mightier and more sophisticated than the Jews. And with great optimism and faith in G-d they achieved this, despite the odds against them.

However, in truth, we celebrate predominantly the spiritual victory. Antiochus IV was not a Hitler; he did not want to exterminate the Jews and to bring about a final solution.

What he wanted to achieve was that the Jewish people not just participate in the Greek way of life, but to assimilate into wider Hellenistic culture and abandon their faith. In the *Al Hanissim* prayer for Chanukah we declare how “the wicked Greek Kingdom rose up against your people Israel to make them forget *Your Torah*”. Notice the emphasis, Antiochus was not against the study of wisdom per se, but he wanted them to take out the fact that it is *Your Torah*- that Godly connection and Divine aspect of the Torah was what he hoped to remove from the hearts of the Jewish people, and that is what the Maccabees opposed.

And the connection with the Sidrot of Vayeshev and Miketz? The great feature about the story of Joseph is, despite the fact that he was distant from his family and living amongst the Egyptians whose whole way of life was diametrically opposed to his, and regardless of the fact that he achieved such high status in their hierarchy, nevertheless, he never lost his connection with God. From the very outset, the name of God was always on his lips. When interpreting the dreams of the Butler and Baker he declares “Do not interpretations belong to God?” When told by Pharaoh to interpret his dreams he says “That is beyond me, God will answer the welfare of Pharaoh.” And on revealing his true identity to his brothers he says “Now it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

The real barometer of faith is when a person is taken out of his immediate environment, away from religious lifestyle. Does he retain the same loyalty and devotion to Hashem or does he compromise his ideals? That is the true test of character, and that is something that Joseph lived up to. And that is the message of Chanukah, illuminating the darkness.

Shabbat Shalom and Chanukah Sameach