



# CHANUKAH- WHEN WORLD VIEWS COLLIDE- WHAT THE GREEKS ATTACKED

## SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We can learn a lot about the clash of world-views between Israel and Greece by how the Greeks persecuted Israel and particularly what they chose to attack in their 25 year war against the Jewish People.

**SOURCE 1:** *Otzar HaMidrashim, Chanukah, p. 189 – The Greeks decreed against mitzvot that symbolize the Jewish covenant with G-d.*

At that time the Greeks arose over the Jewish people and nullified the covenant which the Jews made with their G-d: **Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh [the Jewish calendar system] and Bris Milah.**

עתה באו ונעלה עליהם ונבטל מהם  
את הברית אשר כרת להם אלהיהם  
שבת ראש חדש ומילה

Both the Mitzvos of Shabbos and Circumcision are central to Judaism, and among other ideas they express the partnership that we have with G-d in perfecting His world. Consider the following source regarding Bris Mila (circumcision):

**SOURCE 2:** *Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 5*

The wicked Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, "Whose actions are more beautiful, those of God or of man?" He replied, "Those of man are more beautiful." Turnus Rufus said, "Can man create something similar to the heavens and the earth?" Rabbi Akiva responded, "Do not ask me about something which is beyond the capability of man ... rather ask me something which is within the capability of man."

He asked, "Why do you circumcise yourselves?" Rabbi Akiva said, "I knew that it was this topic that you meant earlier and therefore stated that the actions of man are more beautiful than those of God." Rabbi Akiva brought him raw wheat and some cakes. He said, **"This [wheat] is the work of God and these [cakes] are the work of man. Aren't the cakes better than the wheat?"**

מעשה ששאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר'  
עקיבא איזו מעשים נאים, של הקב"ה או  
של בשר ודם. א"ל של בשר ודם נאים א"ל  
טורנוסרופוס הרי השמים והארץ יכול אדם  
לעשות כיוצא בהם א"ל ר"ע לא תאמר לי  
בדבר שהוא למעלה מן הבריות שאין שולטין  
עליו אלא אמור דברים שהם מצויין בבני אדם

א"ל למה אתם מולין? א"ל אני הייתי יודע שעל  
דבר זה אתה שואלני ולכך הקדמתי ואמרתי  
לך שמעשה בני אדם משל הקב"ה הביא  
לו ר"ע שבליים וגלוסקאות. א"ל אלו מעשה  
הקב"ה ואלו מעשה ידי אדם. א"ל אין אלו  
נאים יותר מן השבליים

**Q: Why do you think Rabbi Akiva said that the actions of man are more beautiful than the actions of G-d and what does it say about our role in the world?**

**Q: It's understandable why the Greeks outlawed the central mitzvos of Shabbos and Bris Mila in their war against us, but why did they attack Rosh Chodesh?**

**SOURCE 3:** *Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, Ohr Gedaliyahu, p. 78*

The Greeks wanted to nullify Rosh Chodesh, Shabbat, and circumcision. We need to understand why the Greeks were opposed to the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month, as this only includes arranging the order of the months. **The explanation is that the Greeks wanted to destroy the power of renewal inherent within the Jew and the ability to release himself from habit and rote.** This power of renewal is related to Rosh Chodesh and to sanctifying the new moon, as is hinted in the words we say when we sanctify the new month: "That in the future they (the Jewish people) will be renewed like her (the new moon)." On Rosh Chodesh a person is given the power to renew himself like the moon that is renewed each month. We see there is a power of renewal in the world.

היונים רצו לבטל חודש שבת ומילה, וצריכין להבין למה התנגדו היונים למצות קידוש החודש, שיש בה רק ענין של סידור סדר החדשים, אלא כבר ביארנו שהיונים רצו לבטל הכח ביד היהודי לחדש את עצמו, ולצאת מתוך ההרגל וההתישנות, והכח הזה של חידוש שייך לר"ח ולקידוש הלבנה וכמרוצח במה שאומרים בנוסח של קידוש הלבנה, "שעתידין להתחדש כמותה", כי בראש חודש ניתן הכח באדם לחדש את עצמו, דוגמת הלבנה שנתחדש בכל ר"ח, כי אם אנו רואים שהלבנה מתחדשת, רואים אנו שיש השפעה של התחדשות אז להעולם

- (1) Renewal is certainly a major theme in Judaism and on a personal level we need to know we can always reinvent ourselves, bringing light out of our personal struggles (darkness), much like the Chanukah candles, burning bright at the darkest time of the year.
- (2) However, the mitzvah of the new moon also symbolizes man's central role in the unfolding drama of G-d's creation of the world. The Greeks also viewed man in the center, but in a very different way than Israel:

**SOURCE 4:** *Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Rosh Hayeshiva Aish Hatorah*

The Greeks were "humanists." Humanism places man at the center of the universe. Were they so far off? Judaism also believes that the world is created for man. There are those who claim that the failing of Greece is that they made too much of the human being. No, that's not our claim. Greece made too little of the human being! They limited the human being's capabilities and accomplishments to the realm of what man can comprehend. Judaism does not. We maintain that we can accomplish more than we understand – we can reach worlds that we know nothing about. What is Greek wisdom? Worship of the human mind, human body, aesthetic sense, and values that speak to the human being.

**What is the aspect that G-d gave the human being that sets him apart? Kedushah – holiness** – there is nothing more powerful, nothing more beautiful, nothing deeper. Through kedushah we affect worlds, transcending physical existence by way of our own actions and intentions. The universe is a lot bigger than what Greece thought it was.

**Q: What do you think "holiness" adds to the human experience? Share your thoughts with your partner.**

The mitzvah of the new moon symbolizes man's partnership with G-d who gave us the power to invest time with holiness, through the creation of our calendar and the institution of our holidays.

But we have to be careful that we use this power wisely. Consider the following source.

## SOURCE 5: *Rabbi Simcha Barnett – Educational Director of Project Inspire*

Perhaps there is a deeper symbolism in the sanctification of the new moon that captures the essence of the struggle between Greece and Israel that continues until this very day. The moon is often likened to Israel while the sun is compared to G-d. Though the moon appears to have its own light, it's merely reflecting the light of the sun. So too, the Jewish Nation is tasked with bringing the light of G-d into this world. He gives us brilliance, the power of reason and creativity, to partner with Him in illuminating the world. If, however, we use this creativity to produce "our own light", untethered from its divine source, we take the world away from its Creator. (like the Greeks) Though we may appear to dazzle humanity with our brilliance, we are inexorably leading the world back to the dark ages. Yafes must "dwell in the tents of shem"- use her incredible gifts to enhance the holy mission of the Jewish People to introduce the world to its Creator.

**Q: Can you think of examples from our modern world where the power of innovation, reason and discovery are used in ways that take us away from our Creator?**

## CANDLES AS A SYMBOL OF THIS STRUGGLE BETWEEN YAVAN AND ISRAEL.

### SOURCE 6: *Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, Vol. III, p. 68*

**All Oils and wicks are kosher for kindling Chanukah candles**, even if the oil is not drawn so well as to produce a beautiful light. Gloss of the Rama: However, **pure olive oil is the best way to do the mitzvah**; and if olive oil is not found an oil should be used whose flame is pure and clean. We are accustomed in our lands to light candles of **wax** since the lights are pure like oil.

כל השמנים והפתילות כשרים לנר  
חנוכה ואע"פ שאין השמנים נמשכין אחר  
הפתילה ואין האור נתלה יפה באותן  
הפתילות: הגה ומיהו שמן זית מצוה מן  
המובחר [מרדכי וכל בו ומהרי"ל] ואם  
אין שמן זית מצוי מצוה בשמנים שאורם  
זך ונקי. ונוהגים במדינות אלו להדליק  
בנרות של שעוה כי אורו צלול כמו שמן

The law states that the mitzvah is accomplished when a flame rises above its candle, whether that be made from pure olive oil (the best way) or another oil or wax producing a clear beautiful flame.

**Q: Lighting our Chanukah Menorahs is certainly a beloved and quaint custom that we have been performing for centuries. However, can you see how the physical candles themselves tell the story of the clash of worldviews?**

You might look at the candle as representing two aspects of reality: physical and spiritual, or the realm of man and the realm of G-d. The candle eloquently attests to the truth that the physical and spiritual worlds are connected, are one and the inner potential of all physicality is indeed spiritual and is meant to transcend its physical boundaries. The miracle of this world is that light (something spiritual) comes out of candle (something physical); And not only that, but no matter how you hold the candle (the physical) the light goes up- since it's trying to return to G-d. Just like the human soul!