



EMET Matters

Chanukah - Why the Oil?

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Although our enemies have tried to annihilate us physically countless times, what's unique about Chanukah is that the Yevanim, Greeks, tried to annihilate us spiritually. There were 3 specific mitzvot they attempted to obliterate: Shabbat, Brit Milah and Rosh Chodesh.

Yet in addition, there is something else they tried to take from us. The Greeks contaminated all of our oil, so that we could not perform the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah properly.

Why go after a seemingly insignificant item?

When Yaakov found out that Yosef was alive and it was time to move his family to Egypt as a result of the famine, he insisted on dwelling in a city exclusively for Jews, Goshen, to protect against assimilation. The pasuk says, "V'et Yehuda shalach l'fanav el Yosef l'horot l'fanav Goshna", which means "And he sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef to prepare ahead of him in Goshen." Astonishingly, there is a connection between Goshen and the custom Jews have of spinning the dreidel.

The function of the dreidel was to pretend that our lifestyle was like that of the Greeks. Whenever they entered our hideout, we took out the dreidel to make it look as if we were gambling and playing time-consuming games for no reason. As soon as they exited, we went back to learning Torah.

The Rabbis were concerned that gambling would eventually become habitual and that we would slowly become more like the gentiles and start gambling for real.

remember the purpose of the dreidel and remain far away from negative influences.

In addition, the Bnei Yissaschar points out that the gematria of the letters on the dreidel, 358, is equal to the gematria of Mashiach. This teaches us that if we internalize the message of Goshna and separate ourselves from non-Jewish culture and appreciate what we have as Jews, Hashem will bring us salvation as He did when we left Egypt!

Now we can return to our original question: Why did the Greeks go after the oil? Oil does not mix with other liquids, and similarly, the Jews remained separate from non-Jews, which angered the Greeks. By destroying the oil, they were sending us the message that we must assimilate. Hence the miracle of Chanuka is not merely the fact that the Greeks could not eradicate Shabbat, Brit Milah and Rosh Chodesh, which keeps us different from them, but that they could not even fully confiscate the main ingredient—which was the oil. The fact that they did not succeed in integrating us and that we, who are compared to oil, are able to live throughout exile and not assimilate and remain the eternal nation, is in itself a miracle of Chanukah! May we continue to be like the oil and internalize the message of the letters of the dreidel, and in doing so, may we merit to bring our ultimate redemption with the coming of Mashiach, Amen!



To prevent this, the Rabbis brilliantly placed 4 letters on the dreidel—gimmel, shin, nun and hey.

That spells Goshna--a reference to the city that we built so that we would not assimilate! This helps us