

Bar Mitzva – Yehuda Ezra Feuerstein

Shabbos VaYeishev - Chanukah – Mevorchim Tevet – 5781 (December 12, 2020)

Yehuda:

By way of an introduction, I wish to start by thanking HaKadosh Boruch Hu for blessing us all with good health in this dangerous time. The fact that we can gather in this small group is no small feat. It may not be a miracle on the level of Nes Chanukah, but it is an opportunity to take a moment to express our gratitude to HaShem.

Both “Mommy” and I are thrilled to be able to participate in the celebration of your Bar Mitzva (in fact, we’ve been patient and have waited 13 years for this day). We wish you continued hatzlacha in your studies and a lifetime of sipuk nefesh from your observance of mitzvos (especially those tefillin that you started wearing a few weeks ago).

If there is a set of names that evoke the Chanukah holiday, one of them is surely Yehuda. We know the story of Yehuda, one of the 5 sons of Matisyahu, who rose to a leadership position in Israel after the death of his father and, over a seven year period, helped the Jewish people to mount a successful revolt against the Greek forces ultimately leading to the liberation of Yerushalayim and the rededication of the Bais HaMiqdash.

When Leah Imaynu gives birth to Yehuda, she says – HaPaam Odeh es Hashem – Now I will give thanks to HaShem – the word Odeh derived from Todah. The form of the name Yehuda expresses a view towards the future, meaning that I will always express gratitude to HaShem, I will realize the full extent of the brachos that I have been given and I will understand from where they came.

Isn’t Chanukah as well a lesson about looking forward? The gemara tells in Shabbat 21 about the nes of the pach shemen. Then the gemara continues that “l’shana ha-acheres kva-um limey halel v’hoda-ah” that in the following year, (Chazal) established the 25th of Kislev and the 7 days following it as days for praise and gratitude. Why did it take until the following year to establish Chanukah and why did Chazal feel that this miracle deserved an eternal holiday?

The Sfas Emes (Chanukah 5644), quoting the Chiddushei HaRim, suggests the following answer. In the chaos of the rededication of the Bais HaMiqdash and the search for pure olive oil and everything else that needed to be done to get the avodah restarted, Bney Yisrael could only focus on the experiences they had just encountered. They were “heads-down” rebuilding and bringing the Temple back to life. They were grateful for the miracle, not yet of the oil, but that HaShem had placed “rabim byad me’atim”, the many into the hands of the few. The military victory was just sinking in and they had so much work to do.

Chazal knew that the word Mo-ed (Mem-Ayin-Daled) has the same letters as the word Amud (Ayin-Mem-Daled). Thus, they understood that the three moadim were like the Mishna in Masechet Avos that tells us that the world is supported by three concepts (Torah, Avodah, and Gemilas Chasadim). Why not only two? Because just like the fewest number of legs that a chair or stool can have and still provide support is three legs, three basic philosophical concepts and three moadim provide the Regalim (the legs) on which Bney Yisrael can be supported.

Chazal realized a year after the Nes Chanukah that the event represented another of the fundamental foundations of Yahadus. Over the years since, we have said “Bayamim HaHem” to remember that special time in our collective historical experience. But each year, we also recite “Bazman HaZeh” exactly before the dark winter that starts with Chodesh Teves. It is now that we look forward with the light of Ner Chanukah lighting the way for us in both physical and spiritual ways.

We can take this idea one step further. Whereas, in Galus, we can only fulfill the Torah moadim in an incomplete way since we cannot be oleh regel that was the fundamental simcha of each chag (yayra-eh kol zchurcha), we can fulfill the two rabbinic moadim, Chanukah and Purim, completely and fully. There is something special about being able to experience the totality of these rabbinic moadim, Chanukah celebrating our spiritual renewal and Purim, celebrating our physical survival. Above all, the one theme that underlies all the moadim is gratitude and that is the lesson that Mommy and I want to leave with you for this special event in your life.

You, Yehuda, are someone for which all of us are incredibly grateful. Your easy-going manner and friendly disposition, your curiosity and humor, your family-centeredness and likability are all endearing traits for which all of us are thankful.

May Hakadosh Baruch Hu continue to bless you with good health and tremendous mazel, and together with your wonderful parents, your siblings, and the extended family, may we all together merit to celebrate semachot together always looking forward and always thankful.

“Daddy and Mommy” Hefter