

The Jewish Mission

What is the date of Chanukah really about? What was unique about the second temple? When did the Menorah become the symbol of the Jewish nation?

Dimona

Good Shabbos!

In the year 1960, France helped Israel build a nuclear reactor in Dimona. Until then, America had not been very connected to Israel. The level of partnership between the two countries that we're familiar with from the past several decades didn't exist at the time. America didn't sell to Israel the weapons that Israel wanted to buy.

In those days, John F. Kennedy was elected as U.S. President, and on the one hand, he improved relations with Israel, turning them into the "special relationship" we know of today. On the other hand, he decided that it was forbidden for Israel to possess nuclear weapons. He pressured Israel

very strongly on the subject. In every personal meeting between Israeli figures and U.S. government representatives, the primary discussion was on ensuring that Israel would not develop nuclear weapons.

Kennedy spoke about it with Golda Meir, Shimon Peres, Abba Eban and mainly with the Prime Minister at the time, David Ben-Gurion. He demanded that Israel agree to visits by

American experts who would verify that Israel was building a nuclear reactor only for peaceful purposes and not to develop any atom bomb.

Israel, obviously, tried to avoid Kennedy and the issue, until one bright day in July of 1963, a letter from Kennedy arrived in Ben-Gurion's office, warning that continuing to develop a reactor would put the relationship between the U.S. and Israel in jeopardy.

The pressure from the U.S. was so hard that the day after receiving the letter, Mr. Ben-Gurion announced his resignation from the Prime Minister's office. It also caused him to retire from political life. But Kennedy continued pressuring Ben-Gurion's replacement, Levi Eshkol.

The American policy changed when Lyndon Johnson became President.

History proves that the only way to stop the development of nuclear weapons is the way Israel did it in Iraq and Syria—only with military action.

We're now celebrating the holiday of Chanukah—the holiday that reminds us that the survival of the Jewish Nation does not depend on nuclear bombs. It's not The Bomb that guarantees our survival, and it's not The Bomb in the hands of our enemies that threatens our survival, either.

We all know the reason for the holiday of Chanukah: The Greek Empire ruled the Holy Land at the time, and they waged a war against religion. They decreed that Jews would have to commit

heresy—banning the mitzvos of Shabbos, circumcision and others. They even occupied the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, and set up an icon in the sanctuary.

All that, of course, triggered the Chashmona'i Rebellion—and on the 25th day of Kislev, the famous Maccabees succeeded in liberating the Beis Hamikdash and lighting the candles of the menorah using oil that miraculously burned for eight days.

The True History

What's interesting is that the date of the 25th of Kislev has a long history that goes far back before the miracle of Chanukah.

The Midrash tells us that when Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Mt. Sinai on the first Yom Kippur in history and informed the Jewish Nation that G-d had commanded them to build the Mishkan, they were very enthused and immediately volunteered for the construction with great passion. The Jewish Nation built the Mishkan with such speed that the entire structure was ready to be put up by the 25th of Kislev.

In actuality, G-d postponed the putting-up of the Mishkan to the first day of Nissan, so that day (the 25th of Kislev) ultimately became a different "Chanukah"—the holiday on which they once again dedicated the Beis Hamikdash and the menorah. (Yalkut Shimoni Vol. I, section 184).

Additionally, the Rebbe says something amazing: The Second Beis Hamikdash was initially built with the permission of Koresh,

the King of Persia, at which time there went up to the Holy Land from the Persian Empire some 40,000 Jews led by Zerubavel, who was of the Tribe of Yehudah, and Yehoshua the Kohein Gadol (High Priest).

Zerubavel and Yehoshua only managed to build the Mizbayach when Koresh sent out an explicit order to “freeze” construction. So while Koresh had given them permission to start building the Beis Hamikdash, he now put a stop to it.

In the meantime, years went by, and a new king was crowned emperor of the Persian Empire. This was Daryavesh, who was none other than the son of Queen Esther. At the time, the Prophet Chaggai prophesized to the people, instructing the Jewish Nation to go back again and start building G-d’s Temple. And when did this instruction to start rebuilding the Second Temple come in? It was “on the 24th of the 9th,” meaning that on the 24th day of the ninth month, meaning Kislev, the prophecy on the rebuilding of the Second Temple and the victory of the Jewish People was said.

And on all that, the Rebbe says that *since the 24th of Kislev was the day on which the building of the Second Beis Hamikdash began, and additionally was the day on which a prophecy was said on the victory of the Jewish Nation, so m’galgelin z’chus l’yom zakkai*—we roll forward a merit

to a meritorious day, and thus the victory of the Chashmonaim was also on the 24th of Kislev. Why so? Because it’s a day that’s connected to the victory of the Jews. (Sichos Kodesh 5736, Vol.

I pg. 286; Toras Menachem 5712, Vol. I pg. 128.) And so, from the times of the Second Temple, the 24th of Kislev is a day of happiness.

When Did the Menorah Become our Symbol?

Now, everyone knows that the symbol of Chanukah is the menorah. But the truth is that the menorah was already a symbol of the Jewish Nation well before that. As we read in the Haftarah of Shabbos Chanukah about the prophecy of the Prophet Zecharya at the start of construction of the Second Temple, Zecharya envisioned a golden menorah with seven branches. Chasidic philosophy explains that this symbolizes the Jewish Nation. And as we see on the Arch of Titus, which is still standing today in modern-day Rome, when the ancient Romans wanted to memorialize the victory over the Jewish Nation, they included the image of a menorah, because it symbolizes the Jewish Nation.

Now the biggest difference between the First and Second Temples was that in the First Temple, the most important feature was the Ark of the Covenant, covered with the two Keruvim, the angel figures, made of gold. With the Second Temple, however, the Ark was not in the Holy of Holies and in its place was the Even HaShesiyah, the Foundation Stone.

In the Second Temple, the most important feature was the Menorah. When a Jew, or even a non Jew, would visit the Beis Hamikdash, if it were the First Beis Hamikdash, he would know about the Keruvim. As the Talmud (Tractate Yoma 54a) tells us, when the Jewish Nation would make their pilgrimage to

Jerusalem at the holidays, they would show them the two Keruvim hugging

one another. In the Second Temple, however, a visitor would see the Menorah—and therefore, it became a symbol of the Jewish Nation during the Second Temple Era.

Now, what's the difference between the Keruvim and the Menorah? The Keruvim symbolize G-d's Words to the Jewish Nation. When G-d spoke to Moshe, His Voice would come forth from between the two Keruvim; thus the Keruvim symbolize the prophecy that existed among the Jewish Nation during the First Temple Era.

At the beginning of the Second Temple Era, however, prophecy left the Jewish Nation. So what was left? The Menorah. And the entire function of the Menorah was that "light should emit from it to the entire world"—in other words, the Menorah's candles symbolize the mission of the Jewish Nation of being "a light unto the nations," or, as Chasidism puts it, that every Jew must be "a candle to illuminate."

During the Second Temple Era, the majority of the Jewish people were already in exile, and they needed permission from Koresh, King of Persia, for everything, since he ruled the Land.

Now again, the mission of the Jew in exile is to be "a light unto the nations"—to symbolize morality and faith in G-d. As such, each one of us needs to be a walking menorah. Indeed, even after the Destruction of the Second Temple, the Menorah was not "archived"—we still light candles every Chanukah, because our mission of being lights to kindle other lights continues

forever.

As the Sages say, “these candles will never be canceled.”