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A Pure and Holy Nation Unified With the One G-d

The Name 'Yisrael' Denotes the Jewish People's Exclusive Union with Hashem

After Yaakov defeated the Angel of Eisav, he blessed him, "No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael¹". The angel referred to the blessing Hashem would give Yaakov later, after the episode of Dinah and Shechem, that, "Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael²".

The Midrash³ states that with the name 'Yisrael', the Jewish People were designated as the nation of G-d.

ישראל has within it the name of Hashem, ק-ל. With the name Yisrael, the Jewish People assume the name of Hashem. Just as a woman assumes the name of her husband, the Jewish Nation, who are compared to the queen of Hashem, are called with His name.

The name Yisrael was destined to be Yaakov's as is understood from the fact that the Angel of Eisav informed Yaakov of this in advance. The question arises as to why Hashem waited until after the encounter of Dina with Shechem to give it to Yaakov.

The Entire City of Shechem Wanted to Prevent the Jewish People from Emerging

Shechem and his father tried convincing Yaakov and his sons to allow Dinah to marry Shechem saying, '...intermarry with us, give your daughter to us and take our daughters for yourselves. Dwell among us, settle and trade in the land ...'

The Tribes, scheming to rescue their sister, answered, '...only if you will have every male circumcised, will we give our daughters to you and take your daughters. We will dwell with you and **become one nation.**'

Why did the Tribes add the clause, that they will become one nation, if Shechem did not mention it?

The Satmar Rebbe, in his Sefer Divrei Yoel, wonders how it was that an entire city agreed to endanger themselves and undergo surgery because of one person's lust.

He answers, that the people of Shechem knew, through magic and impure powers, that the sons of Yaakov would evolve into the Jewish Nation. Evil people can't tolerate the existence of holiness. They couldn't sleep at night!

Shlomo Hamelech describes this in Mishei, "כי לא ישנו אם לא ירעו ונגזלה שנתם אם לא יכשילו"⁴, 'They [evil people] can't sleep if they didn't do evil; their sleep will elude them if they hadn't caused others to sin'. For a good night's sleep, the people of Shechem endangered themselves. To squelch the torment they felt upon knowing of the imminent emergence of a holy nation of G-d, the risk of surgery was well worth it.

The tribes understood that the chief objective of the people of Shechem was to dilute the seed of Yaakov at its origin, thereby preventing the holy, pure nation of G-d from coming into existence. They knew that Shechem did not want mere 'exchanging of daughters and dwelling and trading together'. Their purpose was that the children of Yaakov would become a **unified nation** with the inhabitants of Shechem, that an untainted, holy nation should never be created.

The War of the Tribes with Shechem Paralleled the War of the Chashmonaim with the Greeks

The war that the holy sons of Yaakov waged against Shechem was a forerunner of the war the Chashmonaim would wage against the Greeks.

Just as Shechem defiled the daughter of Yaakov, the Greeks decreed that before marrying, a Jewish bride had to first be violated by a Greek general. Being few in number, the brothers exercised self-sacrifice in going to war just as their descendants, the Chashmonaim, would do centuries later, despite being severely outnumbered.

The success of the tribes against the pagan Shechemites paved the way for the supernatural victories of the Chashmonaim against the G-dless Greeks. (Both the battle of the Brothers and the Greek domination over the Jewish People took place in Eretz Yisroel.)

Thus, the Holy brothers of Dinah prepared a Chanukah for all generations.

The Self Sacrifice of the Tribes

Shimon and Levi weren't obligated to endanger themselves to rescue their sister. They took their inspiration, however, from their enemy.

Self-sacrifice is a commodity of holiness. The people of Shechem usurped this power for the cause of evil by undertaking Milah in order to thwart the emerging Jewish People. The brothers reclaimed this power through their self-sacrifice to maintain the purity of the Jewish Nation.

The Chashmonaim, like the tribes, endangered their lives for the sake of preventing the contamination of the Jewish People.

The Greeks Protested the Chosen Nature of the Jewish Nation

The exclusive nature of the Jewish Nation vexed the Greeks. They tried assimilating them by prohibiting the three Mitzvos which separate Jew from gentile; Chodesh, Shabbos and Bris Milah.

Shabbos and Chodesh, the establishment of the Jewish calendar through the linear months, a system unique to the Jewish People, separates them from the other nations in the realm of time. Bris Milah marks the Jewish body as different.

It was to maintain their status as the chosen nation of Hashem, that Mattisyahu, the son of Yochana, and his army assembled to fight. שבת, מילה, חדש is gematria (has the numerical value of) בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן (they both equal 1099). Mattisyahu's objective in his G-dly war was to uphold these cherished Mitzvos that elevate and preserve the Jewish People as the nation of Hashem.

Chanukah Corresponds to 'Shema Yisrael'

The Jewish People's refusal to merge with surrounding civilizations is expressed by their name ישראל. Hashem is One; he compares and combines with none. With the name ישראל, The Jewish Nation are designated as his people - they are called with His name. They, too, are one. They compare and combine with no nation. Our task differs from that of any other people.

With the verse of Shema we announce, 'Hear, you are Yisrael, the nation that belongs exclusively to G-d! You are One as G-d, our G-d, is One.'

Chanukah is a Yom Tov that celebrates the preservation of the oneness of the Jewish People. We refuse to assimilate with the prevailing cultures surrounding us.

There are twenty-five letters in the verse of Shema.

Chanukah occurs on the twenty-fifth day of the Month Kislev. Its occurrence on the twenty fifth day of Kislev is not a mere detail of the holiday, it is named for it. חנוכה is composed of the words, חנו כ"ה, they rested [after their battles] on the twenty fifth.

The twenty-five letters of 'Shema' are the essence of Chanukah, the Holiday of the twenty-fifth day in Kislev.

This is what Mattisyahu battled the Greeks for. His name when all its letters are spelled out, ומתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול is gematria שמע ישראל (they both equal 951). He preserved the Jewish Nation as Yisrael, One nation united with One G-d.

The Greeks goal was "ולא יזכר שם ישראל!"⁵ 'The name Yisrael should be abolished!' It is Gematria, מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול (they both equal 1155). Mattisyahu, with his holy power canceled out the wicked ambitions of the Greeks.

He merited establishing a Yom Tov whose entire message is "חלק באלוקי ישראל", '[the Jewish People have] a part in the G-d of **Yisrael**. נרת חנוכה, the candles of Chanukah, is gematria חלק באלוהי ישראל (they both equal 733). Chanukah affirms that the Jew has a part in the G-d of Yisrael and he is part of the One nation that is unified with the One G-d.

Preserving our Status as 'Yisrael' Demands Self-Sacrifice

Maintaining our elevated status as chosen nation, demands self-sacrifice in the face of unrelenting assaults of the shifting yet unchanging ages. Every era has its culture that compels Jews to abandon their status as ישראל, and merge with it.

'Shema Yisrael' is the cry of Jewish martyrdom because its message is what the Jewish Martyr gives his life for. ישראל is gematria "כי עליך הורגנו כל היום"⁶ 'For your sake [Hashem] we killed ourselves every day' (they both equal 541). We give our lives to preserve the nature of ישראל because we refuse to blend with the cultures of the passing ages.

The Talk of Tzaddikim (righteous people)

Tzaddikim are constantly conversing with their creator. Even when they go about their daily affairs, their minds and heart are focused toward him.

When they engage in, what seem to us to be, regular conversation, they are really talking to Hashem.

Once Rebbe Naftuli of Ropshitz complained to his household, "Why don't I receive any milk? Don't I deserve it, with all the work I do in the service of Hashem?" He was given milk. Later, he was heard complaining, "Why is the milk of such poor quality? I need nourishing milk!" Later on he commented, "This milk is good."

This seemed quite strange to those surrounding him, until they found out what had been happening all along. A woman had come to the Rebbe, in a quandary. She had given birth, but had no milk for the hungry infant. Later, she did have some milk, but it lacked the robust nourishing qualities needed to sustain her baby.

The Rebbe, with his 'complaints' about his lack of milk, was really praying to Hashem, effecting her salvation.

The tribes spoke to Shechem and his father, but they were really engaged in prayer to the Almighty. They begged Hashem, "והיינו לעם אחד"⁷, 'May we be a nation alone'. May it be your will, Hashem, that we remain a pure, undiluted, holy nation, unified with אחד ה'.

On Chanukah, we battled to remain an עם אחד. That is why כ"ה בסליו is gematria לעם אחד (they both equal 153).

Holiness is Unity and Evil is Multiplicity

One G-d created heaven and earth. Superficially, the creation seems to be composed of many disparate forces. Idol worshipers are blinded by the external appearance of the world and think that these forces have real power, when in truth they are no more than illusions. (Modern physicists are still struggling to uncover the one underlying force of the universe.)

Regarding the laws of carrying items on Shabbos, the halacha (law) discusses two domains, רשות היחיד the domain of one, the private domain, and רשות הרבים, the domain of many, the public domain. רשות היחיד is the domain of holiness, the realm of those that recognize the underlying force of the One G-d in all of creation. רשות הרבים is the domain of evil, it is the realm of those that see the many forces that seem to be operating as the ultimate reality.

The private domain, a person's home, is where G-d is manifest. The public domain, the street, is where the multiple forces of evil have free reign.

The lights of Chanukah are kindled at the door, where the private domain borders the public. The essence of the Yom Tov of Chanukah is to maintain the barrier between holiness and impurity.

The Candles of Shabbos Protects the רשות היחיד of Shabbos

Shabbos is a day of רשות היחיד. It is a day in which we engage in the service of יחודו של עולם, the One G-d of the universe. We don't venture out into the public domain to conduct our affairs, as in the weekdays.

As on Chanukah, when we light the candles in the place that divides between the public and private domains, on Shabbos, we light during the last moments of the weekdays, at the borders of Shabbos.

Light has the power to repel and nullify impure forces. The Gemara warns against sleeping alone in a completely dark house. Rather, one should light a candle.

The candles of Shabbos and Chanukah are lit at the boundaries of holiness. Security must always be most vigilantly ensured at the borders.

Yaakov Instituted 'Techum Shabbos'

On Shabbos, we may not carry anything from the private domain into the public domain and vice versa. We mustn't tarnish the exclusivity of the domain of the one G-d with any outside influences.

One must also not carry himself out of his domain, although this domain is larger than the confines of his home. Generally, a Jew is not allowed to go more than 2,000 cubits outside of his city on Shabbos. This is called 'Techum Shabbos', the borders of Shabbos.

When Yaakov came to Shechem, he instituted the 'Techum Shabbos' and determined until where it was permissible to go out on Shabbos. This is inferred by our sages from the words, "וַיַּחֲנוּ אֶת פְּנֵי הָעִיר"⁸, 'He encamped before the city'.

To prepare for the battle the tribes would wage to ensure that the Jewish People, the private domain of G-d, aren't left to be lost in the public domain of the nations of the world, Yaakov designated borders of Shabbos and created the domain for the individual on Shabbos.

Yaakov Merited the Name Yisrael After the Battle with Shechem

In their war against Shechem, the tribes exercised self-sacrifice to preserve the oneness of the Jewish People. Afterwards, they merited being called 'Yisrael', the name that denotes their union with Hashem who is One.

The Birth of Binyamin

After Yaakov received the name Yisrael, Binyamin was born.

Each of the twelve tribes correspond to another one of the twelve months. Binyamin corresponds to the month of Kislev. The Nasi, leader, of the Tribe Binyamin's name was אבידן בן גדעוני which is gematria חודש כסליו (they both equal 444).

His birth was made possible through the self-sacrifice of his mother Rachel; she gave her life for him.

She had endangered herself to steal the Terafim, the magic apparatus, of her father Lavan. Yaakov promised Lavan that none of his people had taken the Terafim, saying that anyone who had taken it would die.

Rachel knew that she would die, but she also knew that she would first have to give birth to Binyamin. By conceiving Binyamin, Rachel knew she was signing her own death sentence.

Being the One Nation of Hashem demands self-sacrifice. The Chashmonaim rose to the challenge to prevent the contamination of the Jewish People. They merited a Kislev and Chanukah, a Yom Tov which protects the holiness of ישראל.

To merit a Binyamin, a Kislev, i.e. to be One nation unified with the One G-d, is possible only with self-sacrifice.

The Greek Culture

The kelipah (forces of evil) of Greece is called Terafim. Rachel had stolen the Terafim, this power of evil, from her father and thereby merited giving birth to the tribe of Kislev.

The culture of ancient Greece did not disappear. It was transmuted over the ages into today's 'Western Culture'.

Greece culture worshiped the body. The goal of Western Culture is to 'raise the standard of living', to improve man's earthly situation as if it were his permanent home.

Professional sports is a relic of ancient Greece. Interestingly, winners of the games receive 'trophies' as awards. Trophy is likely derived from Terafim, the kelipah of ancient Greece.

Preparing for Chanukah

Chanukah demands that we exert ourselves to prepare for it. As discussed above, Chanukah corresponds to 'Shema', the verse of self-sacrifice.

Reb Aharon of Belz quoted his father, "In our times, one can merit nothing without self-sacrifice". If this was true in his time, how much more so is it today.

The Tanya discusses the phenomenon of a pious Jew that expends no effort to be one, as he is righteous naturally. Today, however, there exists no such phenomenon. Without expending continuous effort, the alluring 'webs' and 'nets' of our time will certainly trap him.

The ultimate self-sacrifice is to give up one's life. To live is our strongest desire. However, it is not our only desire; we have many. Every time we forfeit a desire, no matter how small, it is a degree of self-sacrifice. Within the course of a lifetime, one can accrue enough self-sacrifice that it can be considered as if he gave up his life for Hashem many times.

May we merit absorbing the precious, holy, divine gifts of Chanukah.

¹ בראשית לב:כט

² בראשית לה:י

³ תנחומא קדושים פרק ב'

⁴ משלי ד:טז

⁵ תהלים פג:ה

⁶ תהלים מד:כג

⁷ בראשית לד:טז

⁸ בראשית לג:יח