



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Rosh Chodesh, Women and Strength

Tally Rush

Rosh Chodesh is a gift we are privileged to receive each month. The renewal of the moon on this day inspires us to recognize the glory of G-d's creation and reminds us to serve Him with joy. Every month, G-d gives us a chance to renew ourselves, as the moon does, and remind ourselves of our purpose. This is especially relevant for women because Rosh Chodesh is considered a "women's holiday," based on this famous midrash:

Aharon made a determination within himself. He said: If I say "give me silver and gold," they will bring it immediately. Instead, I will tell them "give me the earrings of your wives, your sons, and your daughters" – and immediately the matter will be nullified...

The women heard, and they were not willing and did not accept on themselves to give their earrings to their husbands. Rather, they said "To make a disgusting abomination, that has no power to save, we will not listen to you."

And the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave their reward in this world, that they guard the new moons more than the men do. (**Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer chapter 45**)

The women kept their faith in G-d and Moshe, and refused to put their faith in an idol. As a gift in return, women may abstain from work on Rosh Chodesh and are given the task of publicizing the special day. Perhaps this is because it was the women who recognized a truth symbolized by the waxing and waning of the moon. Like the waxing of the moon, G-d's presence was felt increasingly as He took the nation out of Mitzrayim and brought them to Har Sinai – but with Moshe up on the mountain for so long, that feeling of His closeness began to wane and many of the Jewish

people began to lose faith. However, the women were able to maintain their faith that Moshe would return, that G-d was still with them - just as the moon might diminish to the point of near disappearance but is always there and will eventually reappear.¹

The Shulchan Aruch calls women's abstention from work on Rosh Chodesh "a good custom" (*Orach Chaim* 417). Today, women in some communities honor this tradition by learning Torah, wearing special clothes, or holding special Tehillim gatherings.

In the Jewish home, women are called the "*akeret habayit*," the "mainstay" of the home. It is the women who largely determine the characteristic and atmosphere of the home, preserving its sanctity not just on Shabbat and Yom Tov but on weekdays too. The home becomes an abode for G-d's *Shechina*, as the woman transforms her home into a place of holiness, peace, and tranquility. Women strive to help their families feel Hashem's presence, even when it is not obvious, through *tefilla* and through Torah. When a Jewish woman creates a Jewish home and instills Torah values, it is then she is worthy of King Solomon's praise, "A woman of valor, who can find..." In so doing, she preserves the tradition of her ancestors, who had the strength to maintain their faith in Hashem even when His presence was not easily felt.

Rosh Chodesh is truly a well-deserved holiday for women on so many levels. To be given a day solely to rejoice and renew is truly a gift. Embracing the "good custom" of abstaining from work on Rosh Chodesh is a wonderful way to make sure we set aside time each month to think, reflect and move forward.

1. http://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/1232520/jewish/Why-is-Rosh-Chodesh-Considered-a-Womens-Holiday.htm

Shabbos Chanukah

Josh Botnick

Chanukah – the festival of lights. Houses alit with candles as we witness *pirsume nisa*. What a wonderful sight, as we pass by homes with windows showing flickering candles. Everyone with his or her own menorah, saying the brachot and celebrating the Chanukah miracle. It gives me a personal warmth to think of families all getting together, standing around, signing Maoz Tzur and lighting the Chanukah menorahs.

How much more is there a special holiness that comes with Shabbos Chanukah. We have the unique opportunity to have our houses aglow with two mitzvot at the same time – the lights of the Chanukah menorah as well as the lights of the Shabbos candles.

As with other holidays that fall on Shabbos, Chazal designated a specific *haftarah* to be read on Shabbos Chanukah.

The Gemara in Megillah 31a states that instead of reading the *haftarah* for *Parshat Miketz*, we select one befitting Shabbos Chanukah:

On [each day of] Hanukkah, [they read a selection from the portion of the dedication of the alter by] the tribal princes (Numbers 7),

And they read as the *haftarah* "the lights of Zechariah."

And if it occurs that there are two Shabbatot [during Hanukkah]:

on the first Shabbat, they read "the lights of Zechariah";

and on the latter one they read "the lights of Solomon," (which discusses the lights in the Temple).

Rashi explains that "the lights of Zechariah" refers to *Rani Vesimchi*, Zechariah's prophecy about the Menorah in the 2nd Bais Hamikdash

(Zechariah 2:14–4:7). The *haftorah* begins:

Shout for joy, daughter of Zion! For lo, I come; and I will dwell in your midst—declares the LORD. **(Zechariah 2:14)**

And it ends with Zechariah's famous vision of the Menorah in the second Bais Hamikdash:

And he said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I saw, and behold [there was] a candelabrum all of gold, with its oil-bowl on top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; seven tubes each to the lamps that were on top of it. And [there were] two olive trees near it; one on the right of the bowl, and one on its left. **(Zechariah 4:2-3)**

So that's it? So what if Zechariah mentions the menorah that will be used in the Second Temple? Why is *Rani Vesimchi* so special that Chazal chose this *haftorah* to be read on the special time of Shabbos Chanukah? There are other places in Nach where a menorah is discussed! Our Gemara even mentioned one: "*Nerot Shlomo*," which is read on the second Shabbos Chanukah when there are two. Why is that reading relegated to second place, while *Rani Vesimchi* is chosen to be read every year?

Rashi on this Gemara tells us that "*Nerot Shlomo*" refers to the passage in Melachim I that describes the menorahs constructed for the first Bais Hamikdash:

And Solomon made all the furnishings that were in the House of the LORD: the altar, of gold; the table for the bread of display, of gold; the lampstands—five on the right side and five on the left—in front of the Shrine, of solid gold; and the petals, lamps, and tongs, of gold. **(Melachim I 7:48-50)**

When looking at both *haftarot*, it would seem more apropos to read the *haftorah* from Melachim, which describes the menorahs in the Bais Hamikdash, than the *haftorah* from Zechariah which merely mentions the prophet's vision of the Menorah! Perhaps we should be reading *Nerot Shlomo* instead of *Rani Vesimchi*!

The Ran, in his *peirush* to the Gemara in Megillah, looks at the difference between the two Temples to explain why *Rani Vesimchi* is always read on Shabbos Chanukah:

"On the First Shabbos of Shabbos Chanukah [we read the *haftorah* from] the Lights of Zechariah" - Because the essence of Zechariah's prophesy was in the Second Temple, and the miracle of Chanukah happened in the Second Temple, we prioritize the lights of Zechariah over the lights of Shlomo.

According to the Ran, it is more logical to read the *haftorah* from Zechariah on Shabbos Chanukah because Zechariah references the Second Temple, which is where the miracle of Chanukah occurred.

However, there is also a deeper, spiritual connection between Chanukah and this *haftorah*. Rabbi Yakov Horowitz, the dean of Darchei Noam Yeshiva in Monsey, NY, points out on his website (rabbihorowitz.com) that the true lesson of Chanukah is derived from the distinct message that comes from the vision in those last few lines of the *haftorah*. Rabbi Horowitz focuses on the symbolism of the olive branches that flank the Menorah in Zechariah's vision.

The prophet describes two olive trees next to the Menorah, which indicate a continuous supply of fuel for the lights of the Menorah. Zechariah is confused about the two olive trees and questions their symbolism. The angel to whom he posed the question responds "Not through might nor through power, but by My spirit, says Hashem." **(Zechariah 4:6)**

While this answer regarding their symbolism is cryptic, the message is that Hashem will restore the Bais Hamikdash and will enable a continuous supply of oil. The underlying meaning of this message is that Hashem determines the action in this world and when all is said and done, it is the spirit of G-d that determines the course of events. Rabbi Horowitz believes that is the true lesson of Chanukah, which is why this *haftorah* is specifically chosen to always be read on Shabbos Chanukah. Hashem is the true hero in the Chanukah story; as we say in "*Al hanisim*" – "You delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure ... You made a great and holy name for Yourself in Your world, and effected a great deliverance and redemption for Your people Israel to this very day."

With this paradigm of Hashem as the ultimate provider, we can take the relationship between the *Rani Vesimchi haftorah* and Chanukah one step further. A pattern is discovered when we recognize Hashem as the catalyst for 1) rebuilding/restoring the Bais Hamikdash; yielding to 2) the re/dedication of the Menorah; which leads to 3) the miracle/continuity of oil. Just as in Zechariah's vision, where Hashem restored the Bais Hamikdash, enabled the Menorah to be returned to its rightful place, and endowed the oil (through the olive trees), so too in the story of Chanukah: Hashem enabled the Chashmonaim to restore the Bais Hamikdash, returned the Menorah to its former glory, and performed one of the miracles of Chanukah by extending the supply of oil. Hashem, the Master of the Universe, guides us and the entire world step by step, as shown through the vision of Zechariah and the holiday of Chanukah.

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