

CHANUKA - ITS BIBLICAL ROOTS

Is it simply by chance that Chanuka occurs on the 25th of Kislev? Most students would answer with a definitive 'YES'. After all, doesn't the word 'Chanuka' evolve from the popular acronym, CHANU be-CHAF HEH - they rested [from battle] on the 25th (of Kislev)? Presumably, then, had the battle ended (and/or had the miracle of the Menora taken place) on a different date, we would observe Chanuka on that day, rather than the twenty-fifth Kislev.

Correct?

Not really. A closer examination of various traditional sources relating to Chanuka indicates quite the opposite:

- * The book of Maccabees informs us that the decision to rededicate the Temple on the 25th of Kislev was intentional.
- * Megillat Taanit describes a holiday on the 23rd of Chesvan, commemorating a Hasmonean military victory on the Temple mount that took place over a month before the 'official dedication ceremony' on the 25th of Kislev.
- * In the book of CHAGAI, the 25th of Kislev (or the 24th) was the date when construction of the Second Temple had first begun - some two hundred years before Chanuka!
- * Finally, according to the Midrash, it appears that the time of year of Chanuka had carried religious significance since the time of Adam ha-Rishon. [See Avoda Zara 8b.]

So why **do** we celebrate CHANUKA on 'CHANUKA' (i.e. on the 25th of Kislev)?

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone, who has studied the book of Chagai, immediately notices its connection to the date of Chanuka. Take for example the following pasuk:

"Take note from this day forward, from the 24th day of the ninth month (=Kislev), from the day that the foundation was laid for the Lord's House - take note..." (see Chagai 2:18).

Here we find that the construction of the second Temple began on the 24th day (or 25th / see Further Iyun section) of Kislev! And in the prophecies delivered by Chagai on that special date, we find God's assurances for economic prosperity and predictions of great military victories - should Am Yisrael remain diligent and complete its construction!

Could it be that this date and these themes are simply 'coincidental'?

Furthermore, in the book of Maccabees (I.1.54-59) we are told how that very same Temple (the one built during the time of Chagai) was later defiled by the Greeks on that same day [25 Kislev]; and then re-dedicated by the Hasmoneans - also on that very same day! [See I.4.52.]

Again, this could be just an amazing coincidence, or - this may suggest that the 'roots of Chanuka' had already sprouted way before the Hasmonean revolt first began.

To show how and why, we begin our shiur with a quick overview of the time period of Chagai and Zechariah, and their respective prophecies.

[For a more complete background of this time period, it is recommended that you first review Sefer Ezra chapters 1,3, & 4; all of Sefer Chagai, and Sefer Zechariah chapters 1-4.]

[Unfortunately, the study of NEVI'IM ACHARONIM (the later prophets), and especially TREI ASAR, has taken a back seat in Jewish education. For those of you who never found the hour or so that it takes to read the books

of Chagai, Zecharya, and Ezra; Chanuka 'vacation' would be an opportune time. The following shiur should provide you with the historical background that will help you appreciate their content.]

SHIVAT TZION

The Second Temple period begins when the Jews living throughout the Persian Empire receive permission [from King Cyrus] to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, just as Yirmiyahu had foreseen seventy years earlier. [See Ezra 1:1-8.]

During this time period, better known as 'shivat Tzion' [the return to Zion], only a small portion of the Exile returned. Led by Zerubavel (a descendant of the House of David), these returnees were inspired by their spiritual leaders: the prophets Chagai and Zecharya.

The opening prophecies of both Chagai and Zecharya are delivered in the second year of the reign of the Persian King Darius (see 1:1 in each Sefer), some twenty years after these returnees had first arrived in Jerusalem. To appreciate the prophetic importance of that year (and these prophecies), let's consider its historical setting.

HIGH HOPES FOR BAYIT SHENI

The destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile to Bavel left the people of Israel in an unprecedented condition. Since the time of Yehoshua (i.e. for the past 900 years), the nation of Israel had been living in its own land, while the Mishkan (Tabernacle), and later the Bet Ha-mikdash (Temple), served as their spiritual and national center. In addition, Israel had always been sovereign in their land. Even in times of relative weakness, Israel had never been subjugated to foreign rule. However, after the Temple's destruction, Israel was left without its land, without its Temple and without its sovereignty.

Near the close of the First Temple period, the prophet Yirmiyahu not only forewarned the people concerning this impending exile and destruction - he also proclaimed that God had granted sovereignty to Babylonia for the next 70 years (see Yirmiyahu 25:1-12). As Israel had abused their own sovereignty, God punished them by subjecting them to the 'yoke' of "melech Bavel" (see Yirmiyahu 27:12).

However, Yirmiyahu also foresaw the redemption of Israel at the conclusion of those seventy years; promising Israel's return to its land (and sovereignty), in a fashion even grander than their original redemption from Egypt:

"Assuredly, a time is coming, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt,' but rather, 'As the Lord lives, who brought out and led the offspring of the House of Israel from the northland and from all the lands to which I have banished them...' " (see Yirmiyahu 23:7-8).

Nevertheless, this promise of redemption was not unconditional. As Yirmiyahu warned, it would only be realized if it included in change in the people's attitude, i.e. Israel's seeking of God:

"When seventy years of Bavel are over, I will take note of you, I will fulfill for you My promise to bring you back to this place... WHEN YOU CALL OUT to Me and come and pray to Me, I will give heed to you. You will search for Me, and then you will find Me..." (see 29:10-14).

As one would expect, God hoped that the returning exile would establish a better and more just society, thus correcting the ills of the First Temple period.

SHIVAT TZION - NOT WHAT WE HAD HOPED FOR

At the end of these seventy years, Bavel's great empire indeed fell to the Persians (as Yirmiyahu had predicted - see Ezra 1:1). In fact, Koresh [Cyrus the Great], the first king of this newly founded Persian empire, issued an edict allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple (see Ezra 1:1-6).

Generous a declaration as it was, it granted the Jews only religious autonomy, but not political sovereignty. For example,

Zerubavel - the political leader of the returning Jews - is consistently referred to as "pechat Yehuda" - the GOVERNOR of Judah (see Chagai 1:1, 2:2). His contemporary - Yehoshua ben Yehotzadak - was designated to serve as the Kohen Gadol (high priest) - once the Temple would be built.

Unfortunately, only a small percentage of the exile returned; and this small population managed only to build the Mizbeiaich [altar] (see Ezra 3:2-6). Attempts to begin construction of the new Temple were thwarted by the local non-Jewish population (see Ezra 4:1-5). In short, the general situation was quite pitiful, as stated quite explicitly in Ezra 3:12, Zecharya 4:8-10, and Chagai 2:1-6.

Clearly, Yirmiyahu's prophecies of a grand redemption remained only partially fulfilled. Now, it became the challenge of the prophets of shivat Tzion - Chagai and Zecharya - to revive this redemption process.

Some 18 years later, as Daryavesh [Darius the Great] assumes the throne of the Persian Empire, a new window of opportunity opens for the people of Israel, and hopes are re-kindled that construction of the Second Temple could begin once again.

CHAGAI - IT'S TIME TO BUILD

It is in this setting, on Rosh Chodesh Elul during the second year of Darius, that Sefer Chagai opens:

"In the second year of King Darius... the word of the Lord came through the prophet Chagai to Zerubavel ben She'altiel, the governor of Judah, and to Yehoshua ben Yehozadak, the high priest. Thus said the Lord of Hosts: These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the rebuilding the House of the Lord.' And the word of the Lord continued: Is it the time for you to dwell in your paneled houses, while this House is lying in ruins?" (Chagai 1:1-4).

As the redemption process had yet to materialize, Chagai complains that the people lack the necessary enthusiasm to pursue the construction of the Mikdash. There may have even been some logic behind this pessimistic attitude. After all, the first Bet Ha-mikdash had been built only after a monarchy had been firmly established and Israel had achieved economic prosperity (see Shmuel II 7:12-13, Melachim I 5:5, 5:16-19, and Devarim 12:9-11).

Due to the lack of sovereignty and prosperity during these early years of 'shivat Tzion', a general feeling of apathy prevailed (see Chagai 1:2, 2:3, and Zecharya 4:10). Their pathetic situation may have even been understood as a sign to them that God did not want them to build a Mikdash!

Chagai's opening prophecy challenges this apathy by calling for a national process of soul-searching and a united effort to rebuild the Mikdash. To encourage the people, Chagai promises the people that this campaign will yield economic prosperity and political sovereignty (see 1:8-9, 2:7, 2:15-19).

Chagai thus presents a straightforward challenge: First build the Mikdash, thereby directing the nation's devotion to God, and then Am Yisrael will be worthy of attaining their sovereignty and economic prosperity.

Chapter one describes how the people accept Chagai's challenge, and begin gathering the building materials (see 1:12-14). In chapter two, on the last day of Succot, Chagai provides the nation with additional words of encouragement, and delivers yet another prophecy, this time promising that this Second Temple has the potential to become ever greater than the First (see 2:1-9). His concluding prophecy is delivered on the 24th of Kislev, on the day before construction was to begin - and most likely in anticipation of that groundbreaking ceremony.

In the two prophecies that he delivers on this momentous day, Chagai emphasizes the same central points that he had made earlier. Not only will economic prosperity return (see 2:15-20, quoted above), but political sovereignty as well:

"And the word came to Chagai a second time on the 24th day of the month. Speak to Zerubavel the governor of Judah: I

am going to shake heaven and earth, and I will overturn the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the might of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overturn chariots and their drivers, horses and their riders shall fall..." (2:21-23).

Despite these predictions of grandeur, reality fell far short of these expectations. Indeed, the people completed construction of the Temple in the sixth year of Daryavesh (see Ezra 6:13-15); however, during that generation, Chagai's visions were never fulfilled in entirety. [Soon, we will attempt to will explain why.]

Nonetheless, these closing words of Chagai likely echoed in the ears of the Hasmoneans some two hundred years later, as they triumphed over the great Greek armies, thus restoring Israel sovereignty. Certainly, the Hasmoneans had ample reason to conclude that Chagai's prophecy had finally been fulfilled through their endeavors. [See Rashi on Chagai 2:5-7!]

Now, to understand what went wrong during the time period of Chagai (and how this relates to Chanuka), we must undertake a quick study of Sefer Zecharya.

ZECHARYA - IT'S TIME TO REPENT

Sefer Zecharya also opens in the second year of Darius' rule. However, in contrast to Chagai, who emphasized the nationalistic aspects of the redemption process, Zecharya delivers a more 'spiritual' message. His opening prophecy implores the people to perform proper repentance; only then will God return to his people:

"SHUVU EILAI... - Return to me, says the Lord... and I will return to you" (1:3).

The next six chapters continue with Zecharya's various prophetic visions describing the return of God's Divine Presence to Jerusalem. [It is recommended that you scan these chapters to verify this point.]

Chagai and Zecharya strike a critical balance between two conflicting ideals in the redemption process. Surely, both economic prosperity and political sovereignty would be necessary for the people of Israel to achieve their goal of becoming once again a nation representing God. However, as these essentials only serve as vehicles to achieve that goal, they would be useless if the people did not perform "Teshuva" [repentance] in all aspects of their national existence.

For this reason, Zecharya balances the message of Chagai by emphasizing the need for repentance, an indispensable prerequisite for the return of God's SHECHINA.

[In modern day terms, one could say that Chagai would have worn a 'kippa seruga', while Zecharya donned a 'kippa shechora'. Nonetheless, they worked together as a team.]

This balance is underscored in one of Zecharya's most famous prophecies, [and not coincidentally,] the Haftara reading for Shabbat Chanuka (2:14->4:7). Note how this Haftara begins: "Shout for joy, fair Zion! For lo, I come; and I will dwell in your midst - declares the Lord... The Lord will take Judah to Himself as his portion... and he will choose Jerusalem once more." (see Zecharya 2:14-16)

Even though Zecharya first tells the people to rejoice in anticipation of the SHECHINA's return, immediately afterward he calls upon Yehoshua, the High Priest, to 'clean his act' - to become worthy of this redemption:

"And he showed me Yehoshua the high priest standing before the angel of God, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him... Yehoshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spoke unto those that stood before him, saying: 'Take the filthy garments from off him.' And unto him he said: 'Behold, I cause your iniquity to pass, and I will clothe you with robes...' Thus saith the LORD: If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My charge, and also judge My house and keep My courts...." (see 3:1-7)

After this charge to Yehoshua in chapter three, Zecharya continues with a similar rebuke to Zerubavel in chapter four, introduced by the famous vision of the MENORA surrounded by two olive branches, followed by:

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubavel: Not by might ('chayil'), nor by power ('koach'), but with My spirit ('ruchi'), says the Lord" (4:6).

This emphasis of 'ruach' over 'chayil & koach' emerges as God's primary message to Zerubavel, for he is the political leader to whom sovereignty is destined to return. Specifically, he must be reminded of the need to strike this proper balance. Despite the need of the political leader to attain "chayil" & "koach", they are meaningless for the nation of Israel if they are not accompanied by "ruach" [spirituality].

Zecharya's prophecies were optimistic and upbeat, but their fulfillment was **conditional**. In his concluding prophecy of the second year of Daryavesh, Zecharya explicitly articulates this stipulation:

"Men from far away shall come and take part in the building of the Temple of the Lord, and you shall know that I have been sent to you by the Lord, IF ONLY YOU WILL OBEY the Lord your God!" (6:15).

THE 'DARK AGES' OF BAYIT SHENI

Unfortunately, the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya - of prosperity, sovereignty and the "SHECHINA's return - never materialized during that time period, nor during the following generations. Sefer Ezra remains silent concerning what happened after the completion of the Temple's construction in the sixth year of Daryavesh, but the situation appears to have been deplorable. By the time that Ezra and Nechemya arrive from Bavel in the next generation, they find a city in ruins and widespread intermarriage; and even 'chillul shabbat'. Not to mention the fact that Am Yisrael remained under Persian sovereignty; proven by the fact that both Ezra and Nechemya received whatever authority they had from the Persian king.

Israel remained under Persian and then Greek rule for several hundred years. Apparently, throughout this period they had failed to meet the conditions set by Zecharya and earlier by Yirmiyahu, calling for Israel to repent in order to earn their full redemption.

[Rav Yehuda Ha-Levi, in Sefer Ha-Kuzari II.24, addresses the issue of these unfulfilled prophecies in a similar fashion. He mentions inadequate teshuva as well as the exiles' disinterest in returning to Israel. See also Yoma 9b, where Reish Lakish and Rav Yochanan explain why the Shechina never returned during Bayit Sheni.]

Though still unrealized, these vital prophecies had most likely earned their place in the collective Jewish awareness, as they reflected the optimistic goals of the Second Temple. One might conjecture that the people annually commemorated the anniversary of the original construction date, the 25th of Kislev. They may have viewed this day as an appropriate time to recall the hopeful prophecies of Chagai, pronounced on the preceding day, the 24th of Kislev.

THE RISE OF HELLENISM

Later during the Second Temple period, as the Jews lived under Greek rule, Hellenistic culture gradually established its dominance. The rise of Hellenism climaxed with the famous decrees of Antiochus IV in 167 BCE, the details of which are recorded in Sefer Ha-Makkabim I (see chapters 1-4). There we are told that after these edicts, the Hellenists erected an idol on the mizbeyach on the 15th of Kislev of that year. They waited, however, until the 25th of Kislev before offering sacrifices thereupon. On that same day, they began killing women who circumcised their children.

It stands to reason that the Hellenists selected the 25th of Kislev intentionally, 'le-hach'is' [to spite], well aware of its religious and nationalistic significance.

THE REVOLT & THE RETURN TO THE MIKdash

The Hasmonean revolt began that same year, and three years later Judah secured control of Jerusalem and purified and rededicated the Mikdash. It is commonly assumed that the battle to liberate the Temple Mount from the Greeks ended on the 25th of Kislev, and on that same day they began the daily sacrifices (including the lighting of the menorah). According to this account, sheer coincidence determined the celebration of Chanuka on this historic date.

A different picture, however, emerges from other traditional Jewish sources. Megillat Ta'anit records the 23rd of Cheshvan of that year, as well as the 3rd of Kislev, as days of celebration and rejoicing, marking dates of key victories in the Hasmoneans' struggle for control of the Temple mount.

The account in Sefer Ha-Makkabim (see 4:36-60) also suggests that the Temple's dedication ceremony was intentionally set for the 25th of Kislev, to coincide with the very same day on which it was defiled, three years prior (see 4:52-56). It also seems from Sefer Ha-Makkabim that the construction of the new accessories of the Mikdash and the mizbeiach took at least several weeks, as a new altar, menorah, and table were constructed, and the entire building was renovated (see 4:40-51).

Considering that the Temple Mount came under Hasmonean control already in Cheshvan, and in light of the account in Sefer Ha-Makkabim, one may reasonably conclude that the decision to dedicate the Mikdash specifically on the 25th of Kislev was intentional. This day not only marked the date of its original construction, but also symbolized the prophetic ideals and aspirations of Bayit Sheni. Most likely, they selected this date for the precise same reason that the Hellenists had picked this date three years earlier: because of its prophetic and historic significance (since the time of Chagai).

As mentioned earlier, the Hasmoneans most probably saw themselves as fulfilling Chagai's prophecies. In fact, Rashi seems to concur. In his commentary to Chagai 2:6, Rashi writes that the prophecy, "I will shake the heavens and earth" refers to "the miracles that occurred for the Hasmoneans."

The selection of the 25th of Kislev as the date for the dedication of the restored mizbeiach and Temple accessories demonstrated the Hasmoneans' view of their impressive military victory as the fulfillment of Chagai's prophecy.

A SIGN or A REASON

Did the SHECHINA return as well (as foreseen by Zecharya)? The Hasmoneans may have perceived the miracle of the "pach ha-shemen" [cruse of oil] as a divine signal to this effect. Recall that the central vision of Zecharya revolves around the Menora (see 4:1-7). In that prophecy, not only does Zecharya envision the return of the SHECHINA, but also the return of sovereignty. Though not the *reason* for establishing Chanuka, the discovery of the cruse of oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol, and the ensuing miracle that occurred when lighting the Menora, most likely provided Chazal [the Sages] with a divine 'sign' of the prophetic significance of the Hasmonean victory, and hence worthy of commemoration.

Our explanation so far has shown that the primary reasons for the establishment of Chanuka as an annual holiday were the military victories and the dedication of the Bet Ha-mikdash. Why do Chazal in later generations emphasize primarily the miracle of the oil? [See Masechet Shabbat 21b, see also Maharsha on 21b regarding the question "Mai Chanuka?"]

As mentioned earlier, Zecharya's primary prophecy is his vision of the Menora surrounded by two olive branches. This prophecy first and foremost transmitted the critical message of the predominance of spirituality ('ruach') over physical strength ('chayil' and 'koach'). Only through this emphasis on spirit could the people avoid the pitfalls of the monarchy of the First Temple. The miracle of the oil may have been seen as symbolic of this prophecy.

For good reason, then, the Sages placed such a heavy emphasis on the miracle of the oil. The Hasmoneans and those living through the revolt viewed the military victories, the return of Jewish sovereignty, and the rededication of the Mikdash - the

fulfillment of Chagai's prophecies - as the source for celebration. The Sages feared however the dangers of the Hasmoneans' newfound political power. Observing the gradual religious decline of the Hasmonean Dynasty, the Sages felt it necessary to stress specifically this message of Zecharya: "Lo be-chayil ve-lo be-koach ki im be-ruchi."

BA-YAMIM HA-HEM - BA-ZMAN HA-ZEH!

Even after the destruction of the Temple, we continue to celebrate Chanuka, confident that another opportunity for the realization of these prophecies will arise.

The message of Chanuka for our own generation, just as it was two thousand years ago, carries a similar message. To some extent, the prophecies of Chagai have been fulfilled. Sovereignty and economic prosperity have returned to Israel in its own land. Will the prophecies of Zecharya also be fulfilled? Just as before, it will depend on our ability to find the proper balance between 'ruach', 'chayil' and 'koach'.

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CHANUKA - ITS BIBLICAL ROOTS - Part Two

INTRODUCTION

In our first shiur on Chanuka, we discussed how the date - 25 Kislev - was not incidental. Rather it was intentionally chosen by the Hasmoneans to celebrate the dedication of the Temple because of its prophetic significance since the time of the prophet Chagai. [Recall how Chagai delivered his prophecy concerning the great potential of the Second Temple on the 24th of Kislev (see Chagai 2:10-24), as construction of that Temple was about to begin.]

In that shiur, we explained the significance of the 25th of Kislev during the Second Temple period, as its original construction began on that day. However, we did not explain why that day was originally chosen to begin that construction.

One could speculate that this date was simply incidental, i.e. it just so happened that the building materials were finally ready on that day. In the following shiur, we posit that this date may have been chosen intentionally, because of its significance - since the time of Creation!

THE FIRST WINTER

In Masechet Avoda Zara (see 8b), the Gemara records a very interesting Midrash about Adam ha-Rishon's first winter. First, the Mishna notes various pagan holidays when it is forbidden to conduct business (with idol worshippers). Then, the Gemara explains the origin of some of these holidays. In regard to the origin of Saturna and Kalanda, the Gemara records the following story. [As you read it, note how it relates to the time of year of Chanuka.]:

"Kalanda is the eight days after the winter solstice, and Saturna is eight days beforehand. The Rabbis taught: As Adam ha-Rishon [created in Tishrei] noticed [during the first three months of his life] how the days slowly became shorter and shorter - He said: Woe to me, because of my sin [in Gan Eden] the world is getting darker [as soon there would be no more light] and will return to 'tohu va-vohu' - and this must be my 'death sentence'. [Instead of accepting this imminent fate, Adam ha-Rishon overcame his depression] and took upon himself to fast, pray and repent.

After eight days, Adam noticed that the days indeed had begun to lengthen. Realizing that this is 'minhago shel olam' [the way of the world], he made a celebration for eight days [giving thanksgiving to the Almighty]. The next year, he made these days holidays. He [Adam] had good intentions [when making these holidays; however] they [his offspring] turned them into holidays of idol worship" (Avoda Zara 8a, see also Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara - Chapter One).

[It should be noted that in the Roman Empire, a popular pagan holiday was celebrated at the end of December, which (according to historians) later evolved into Xmas.]

This Midrash already points to a thematic connection between Chanuka (an eight day celebration) and this time of year (the winter solstice). It should not surprise us that Adam ha-Rishon noticed this winter solstice, and properly related this phenomenon to God Himself; while his offspring (living in a pantheistic culture) instituted a pagan ritual to mark this critical time of the solar year.

However, this Midrash also alludes to a human psychological phenomena as well, i.e. what we call winter depression. [It is well known that lack of sunlight leads to depression.] Adam ha-Rishon did not simply give up [or get drunk at a New Year's party] at this depressing time in his life; instead, he transformed it into a time for introspection and repentance, with hope for a better future.

Now that we have found the 'roots' of Chanuka in the story of Creation, we will now examine other Jewish sources that relate to the importance of this time of the year.

BIKKURIM

A very interesting mention of Chanuka, once again in relation to the solar year, is found in Masechet Bikkurim. The Mishna (see I:6) states that Bikkurim [the first fruits] can be brought to the Mikdash [Temple] between the holidays of Shavuot and Sukkot. But if necessary, one can even bring them until Chanuka!

This Mishna suggests that Chanuka marks the very end of the agricultural year. [Recall that 'olives' are the final crop of the seven species to ripen in the land of Israel (usually in the early fall). In a very interesting article on this topic in Megadim vol. 8, Rav Yoel bin Nun suggests that, historically (during the first Temple period), this time of year may have included an 'olive oil' festival of some sort, marking the conclusion of the olive harvest and the year's oil production.

Hence, we can assume that this time of the year already carried religious and agricultural significance during the First Temple period. We will now show why this time of the year took on historical significance as well, during the time period of the Second Temple. To do so, we must return once again to Sefer Chagai and history of 'shivat Tzion'.

IS THIS A TIME TO BUILD?

As we discussed in Part One of this Chanuka shiur, the 24th (or 25th) of Kislev was chosen as the day to begin construction of the Second Temple during the time period known as 'shivat Tzion' (Zerubavel et al - see Sefer Chagai & Ezra chapters 1-4). In anticipation of that momentous day (after almost twenty years of anticipation), Chagai delivered a very enthusiastic prophecy expressing the great hopes for that Temple.

When studying those events during the second year of Darius, it is not at all clear why that date was chosen to begin construction. After all, Chagai's first 'call for action' to build the Temple was delivered on the first of Elul that year (see 1:1). He delivered yet another speech on this same topic on the 21st of Tishrei (see 2:1). Yet, it is only several months later, at the end of Kislev when construction actually began (see 2:10, 15, & 18).

One could conclude that it simply took a few months to gather the necessary building materials, and hence the delay. However, when we consider the fact that it took some five years to build that Temple (see Ezra 6:13-15, re: its completion on 3 Adar, during the **sixth** year of Darius), the timing of this groundbreaking ceremony becomes even more difficult to understand. The question isn't why they waited so long, but rather why were they in such a rush to start! Let's explain why.

Anyone who is familiar with the weather in Israel knows that late Kislev is no time to start a building project. It's too cold and rainy. Why allow the wood to become damp (see Chagai 1:8), and why work in muddy and cold conditions. It would have made much more sense to continue gathering the material, but wait until the spring to begin the actual construction.

Instead, it appears that Chagai intentionally wanted to 'break ground' during this 'darkest time of the year'. Most likely, the 'heavy construction' only began in the spring, yet Chagai wanted

to do something 'symbolic' that would lift the people's spirits at this significant time of the year. He intentionally chose the last week of Kislev, because it was the darkest time of the year!

To appreciate this assumption, we must return once again to the description of this time period in Sefer Chagai and Sefer Zecharya, noting why the people's spirits needed some lifting. But first, we must explain the connection between 25 Kislev and the winter solstice.

THE DARKEST TIME OF THE YEAR

In a lunar calendar, it is impossible to set a precise date for the winter solstice. Nonetheless, because Nissan is always set for the spring by definition (see Shmot 12:1-2 and Devarim 16:1, note that if Adar is too early, we add a second Adar ['ibur shana'] to ensure the Nissan will become the first month of spring), the winter solstice will always fall either in late Kislev or early Tevet.

As the winter solstice is basically the longest night of the year, then these months are the 'darkest'. However, when we consider that the moon provides at least a small amount of light in the evenings; to find the 'darkest nights' of the year we must consider the phases of the moon as well. If you know your astronomy lessons, you'll remember that the darkest nights of any month is always during the last week (i.e. the fourth week of the month). During that week, the moon rises very early in the morning and wanes from a crescent to a sliver. For all intents and purposes, it remains unseen. Hence, the last week of any month is always the darkest.

Therefore, if we are to choose the darkest and longest nights in a lunar calendar year, the last week of Kislev is definitely the 'best choice'. [This can explain why Chanuka begins on 25 Kislev, and why 24 Kislev in Sefer Chagai could be considered more or less the same date.]

Let's return now to Sefer Chagai to explain how the events of 'shivat Tzion' relate to this 'darkest time of the year'.

LIFTING LOW SPIRITS

Recall Chagai's opening censure of the people in the second year of the reign of Darius:

"The people are saying - the is not the proper time to uild a House for God..." (see 1:2-4).

Considering their situation, the people have ample reason to make such a claim. After all, only a very small group of people returned to Tzion, while the majority of Am Yisrael remained in Bavel. Furthermore, Israel had not regained its sovereignty, while their economic situation remained quite pathetic (see 1:3-> 2:9). This setting explains why it was necessary for Chagai to repeat his promise that both prosperity and sovereignty would return, should the nation indeed build the Mikdash.

To show how 'depressed' the people truly were during this time period, let's quote several statements of Chagai and Zecharya. For example, Chagai says:

"Who is there you among you who remembers the glory of this House in its former splendor? How does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing to you! So be strong O' Zerubavel - be strong..." (Chagai 2:3-4).

[See also Chagai 1:13-14.]

"The glory of this latter House will one day be even greater than the glory of the First Temple, claims the Lord, and in this place I will grant prosperity and peace, declares the Lord of Hosts" (see 2:8-9).

Zecharya, a contemporary of Chagai (speaking during this same year - see 1:1), tells the sad people to rejoice:

"Roni ve-simchi bat Tzion - Be joyful and rejoice daughter of Tzion, for I am coming to dwell in your midst declares the Lord..." (see Zecharya 2:14).

Due to their predicament, as described by Chagai, the people are understandably quite sad; therefore Zecharya makes several efforts to give them hope. For example, after his famous vision of the Menora in chapter four, he explains how it is truly God behind this building project, warning the cynics not to make fun:

"Zerubavel's hands have founded this House, and Zerubavel's hands shall complete it! Then you will know that God has sent me - *KI MI BAZ LE-YOM KTANOT* - For who belittles this day of small beginnings! (see 4:8-10).

From Zecharya's statement, it is quite clear that there were many cynics who doubted the potential of this building project that was about to begin.

A TIME OF HOPE

Unfortunately, during the time of Zerubavel, these hopes were never fulfilled. In Part One of this shiur, we explained how the Hasmonians may have understood their own military victory over the Greeks as a fulfillment of these prophecies. This also explained why they may have intentionally chosen the 25th of Kislev to mark the dedication of their rebuilt Temple.

However, towards the end of the Second Temple period, and especially after its destruction, the question arose as to whether there was any value in the continuation of the celebration of Chanuka. After all, why celebrate the re-dedication of a Temple that had been destroyed, and national redemption during a time of Exile. [Recall that all the other dates of Megillat Taanit had been nullified.]

Based on our above discussion, one could suggest a deeper reason for the celebration of Chanuka, especially **after** the destruction of the Second Temple.

After the 'churban' [destruction of the Temple], Chanuka marks not only a time to remember what did happen, but may also serve as a reminder of our hope for redemption, that could happen once again - should we be deserving. Even during our darkest times of Exile and destruction, Am Yisrael needs a yearly 'reminder' that there remains hope that one day the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya will be fulfilled.

A FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

This background can also help us understand the famous Gemara in Masechet Shabbat concerning the custom of lighting candles on Chanuka (see 21b). Recall how the Gemara explains that the original custom [i.e. before the 'mehadrin' customs] was simply to light one candle for each household ["ner ish u-beito"]. This 'original custom' now makes sense, for lighting a candle each night at this 'time of darkness', represents a sense of 'hope', and even more so when we consider the prophecies of Chagai and Zecharya.

Furthermore, lighting with olive oil at this time of year, takes on additional meaning, based on the laws of Bikkurim (noted above), and the completion of last year's fruit harvest.

It is interesting to note that Josephus, in Antiquities, adds an important comment re: Chanuka. Recall that Josephus himself was a 'kohen'; who participated in the great revolt against Rome (then 'switched sides' in the middle). He wrote his history works during the decade after the destruction of the Second Temple (some two hundred years after Chanuka). As he concludes the story of how the Hasmonians dedicated the Temple on 25 Kislev, he makes the following remark:

"And from that time to this we celebrate this festival and call it LIGHTS. I suppose the reason was, because this liberty beyond our HOPES appeared to us, and that thence was the name given to that festival" (see Antiquities VII:7).

Here we find 'testimony' that soon after the destruction, the focus of Chanuka had already turned to the custom of lighting candles - a holiday of LIGHTS - and the theme of this holiday relating to 'hope', and not simply thanking God for a military victory.

MAI CHANUKA?

This background can also shed light on the Gemara's question "Mai Chanuka" - What is Chanuka; and its subsequent answer relating to 'nes pach ha-shemen' - the famous miracle of the small flask of oil that lasted eight days [see Masechet Shabbat 21b].

As the Maharsha explains (ibid), the reason for celebrating Chanuka is not the miracle of 'pach ha-shemen', but rather the re-dedication of the re-built Temple ['chanukat ha-Mizbeiach']. The Gemara's question is not why we celebrate Chanuka, but rather for what reason do we light candles on Chanuka!

In a similar manner, the Maharal in "Chiddushei Aggadot" on Shabbat 21b explains that the primary reason for Chanuka was 'chanukat ha-mizbeiach', while the miracle was a 'sign from Heaven'.

But when we examine the miracle itself, it also echoes a similar theme of hope in a time of darkness. First of all, just the idea of finding one tiny container of pure oil is against all odds. But even more significant is the striking similarity between this miracle and the miracle described in II Melachim 4:1-7. In that story, a widow finds herself in a hopeless situation, as her creditors are about to seize her two sons as slaves in lieu of an outstanding debt. All she owns is a small jug of oil; but Elisha instructs her to use that small jug to fill up numerous empty vessels, which she can sell to pay back her debt.

Here we find a story of a widow in a destitute situation, where a small jug of oil represents her only ray of hope for a better future.

Carrying a very similar message, the story of 'nes pach ha-shemen' carries a similar message of hope for Am Yisrael, as we remember the glorious days of the Hasmonean victory.

The strength of the Jewish people throughout all generations has been its ability to remember its loftiest dreams even during times of its greatest despair. It is this theme that keeps Chanuka meaningful in every generation, especially in our own.

Furthermore, Chanuka should remain a meaningful time of the year for us, just as this was for Adam ha-Rishon - not only a time of hope, but also a time for introspection and prayer.

As Chanuka approaches, let us 'hope' and 'pray' that the darkest times of our present crisis already lay behind us, and that we can look forward to a time of spiritual growth and prosperity.

Chanuka sameach,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Concerning whether the construction got underway on the 24th or 25th of Kislev, note 2:15, which indicates that construction was to begin the next day:

"On the 24th day of the ninth [month], in the second year of Daryavesh (Darius), the word of the Lord came to the prophet Chagai... And now, take note from this day forward, as long as no stone has been laid on another in the House of the Lord... for from this day on I will send blessings..." (see 2:10-19).

It is clear from verses 15 and 18 above that the construction of the Temple was to begin the next day, on the 25th of Kislev. Several hundred years later, that very same Temple was rededicated on the 25th of Kislev.

2. In his article "Yom Yisud Heikhal Hashem," Megadim Vol. 12, Rav Yoel Bin-Nun addresses this question at length. His approach emphasizes the agricultural importance of this date, marking the end of the olive harvest and the finale of the agricultural season of the previous year. He also deals with the historical importance of this date and its relationship to Chagai and Zecharya, as presented in this shiur in a more simplified manner.

3. Chayil can also imply economic prosperity; see Devarim 8:17 in its context. This understanding would relate nicely to the prophecy of Chagai.

See chap 1:54-61, Sefer Ha-Makkabim I, part of the Apocrypha. Although this book is not prophecy, its style indicates that the author was a God-fearing Jew. See Avraham Kahane's introduction to "Ha-Sefarim Ha-Chitzonim" (Hebrew).

4. See Sefer Ha-Makkabim I chapter 4:36-60. From this account, it appears that more than one day was necessary to prepare the mikdash for the dedication ceremony on the 25th of Kislev. It was necessary to build a new mizbeiach, shulchan, menorah etc., prepare the courtyards, and remove all the pagan idols.

5. See Masechet Avoda Zara 8a (right after the Mishna). The Gemara suggests that the season of Chanuka had already carried significance since the time of Adam ha'Rishon!

6. The "semel ha-medina" - Israel's national symbol - is modeled after Zecharya's menorah (see 4:1-9 and the Knesset Grounds).

In your opinion, based on the nevu'ot of Zecharya, was this a good choice?