

Chanukat HaMizbeach

PART 1. THE HISTORY OF CHANNUKAH

Which item in the Temple is most often associated with Channuka? The Menorah of course! Well, in fact, the term "Channuka" is associated with a different vessel of the Beit Mikdash: The Mizbeach. As we sing in Maoz Tzur, it is the Channukat HaMizbeach, the "dedication" of the ritual altar in the Beit Hamikdash that forms the centerpiece of Channuka.

The altar and its dedication is the focus of our Torah Reading during Channuka. Why is that?

THE BOOK OF MACCABEES

The Book of Maccabees I ch.1 depicts the events in the time of Channuka, under the Greek king antiochus:

21 And after Antiochus had ravaged Egypt in the hundred and forty-third year, he returned and went up against Israel. 22 And he went up to Jerusalem with a great multitude. 23 And he proudly entered into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, and the table of proposition, and the pouring vessels, and the vials, and the little mortars of gold, and the veil, and the crowns, and the golden ornament that was before the temple: and he broke them all in pieces. 24 And he took the silver and gold, and the precious vessels: and he took the hidden treasures which he found: and when he had taken all away he departed into his own country. 25 And he made a great slaughter of men

Antiochus desecrates the Temple, and loots its gold. However, two years later, religious persecutions accelerate:

57 On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, in the hundred and forty-fifth year king Antiochus set up the abominable idol of desolation upon the altar of God...

62 And on the five and twentieth day of the month they sacrificed upon the altar of the idol that was over against the altar of God.

In other words, a pagan altar is erected on the old altar of God in the Temple, and specifically **on the 25th of Kislev**, that altar is desecrated with pagan sacrifices. This is part of a wider set of decrees:

63 Now the women that circumcised their children, were slain according to the commandment of king Antiochus. 64 And they hanged the children about their necks in all their houses: and those that had circumcised them, they put to death. 65 And many of the people of Israel determined with themselves, that they would not eat unclean things: and they chose rather to die than to be defiled with unclean meats. 66 And they would not

break the holy law of God, and they were put to death.

THE REVOLT

Tradition has it that Channuka is the day in which Jerusalem was vanquished by Yehuda Hamacabee's soldiers and that "they rested on the 25th" of Kislev. The Book of the Macabees ch.4 suggests a different story. It suggests that they WAITED for the 25th of Kislev to dedicate the Temple altar:

36 Judas and his brothers said, Now that our enemies have been defeated, let's go to Jerusalem to purify the Temple and rededicate it. 37 So the whole army was assembled and went up to Mount Zion. 38 There they found the Temple abandoned, the altar profaned, the gates burned down, the courtyards grown up in a forest of weeds, and the priests' rooms torn down. 39 In their sorrow, they tore their clothes, cried loudly, threw ashes on their heads, 40 and fell face down on the ground. When the signal was given on the trumpets, everyone cried out to the Lord.

The Mizbeach/altar had been desecrated, and they did not know what to do with the stones. On the one hand they were impure; on the other hand they still bore the sanctity of the Temple!

41 Then Judas ordered some of his soldiers to attack the men in the fort, while he purified the Temple.42 He chose some priests who were qualified and who were devoted to the Law. 43 They purified the Temple and took the stones that had been defiled and put them in an unclean place. 44 They discussed what should be done with the altar of burnt offerings, which had been desecrated 45 by the Gentiles, and decided to tear it down, so that it would not stand there as a monument to their shame. So they tore down the altar 46 and put the stones in a suitable place on the Temple hill, where they were to be kept until a prophet should appear and decide what to do with them.

This is an interesting proof that at these times, they didn't have prophets any more! So now they need to build a new altar and refurbish the Temple. They follow Torah law strictly, as they renovate the altar and the Menorah (lampstand) and it would appear that immediately they begin the incense (ketoret) and shewbread (lehem haPanim):

47 Then they took uncut stones, as the Law of Moses required, and built a new altar like the old one. 48 They repaired the Temple, inside and out, and dedicated its courtyards. 49 They made new utensils for worship and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table for the bread into the Temple.50 They burned incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and there was light in the Temple! 51 They placed the loaves of bread on the table, hung the curtains, and completed all the work.

When do they dedicate the altar?

52-54 The twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev, in the year 148 was the anniversary of the day the Gentiles had desecrated the altar. On that day a

sacrifice was offered on the new altar in accordance with the Law of Moses. The new altar was dedicated and hymns were sung to the accompaniment of harps, lutes, and cymbals. 55 All the people bowed down with their faces to the ground and worshiped and praised the Lord for giving them victory. 56 For eight days they celebrated the rededication of the altar. With great joy they brought burnt offerings and offered fellowship offerings and thank offerings.

QUESTIONS

So, why do they celebrate for EIGHT days? And why do they wait until the 25th of Kislev? It seems that they had time to already start lighting the Menorah and to bake bread for the Shulkahn. Why did they wait for the 25th of Kislev?

As for the Eight days, it is possible that they were copying Moshe and also Shelomo Hamelekh:

With the Mishkan, (Vayikra ch.9) :

On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for your sin offering a a ram for your burnt offering...for today the Lord will appear to you.' ...Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

And with Shelomo the EIGHT day celebration of the Temple inauguration coincides and dovetails with with Sukkot:

So Solomon observed the festival at that time for seven days, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. **On the eighth day** they held an assembly, for they had celebrated the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival (Sukkot) for seven days more. (Div. Hayamim II ch.7)

Some suppose that the Maccabees were celebrating the festival of Sukkot late for that year. Others suggest that they were merely dedicating the Temple in an eight day celebration like Moshe and Aharon and like King Shelomo.

THE 25TH

But the idea of the twenty fifth is more specific. It is quite clear that the Greeks deliberately desecrated the altar on the 25th Kislev, and it seems that the Macabees waited for that date, as if to reverse and eradicate the religious scar upon that date. But what is so auspicious about the 25th of Kislev? The Book of Haggai gives us a clue:

"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..." Haggai 2:18

From this verse we see that the original construction of the second Temple began on the 24th. On that selfsame day, Haggai says:

Now give careful thought to this from this day on —consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple (2:15)

It seems evident that in 2nd Temple times, the 25th of Kislev was the anniversary of the founding of the Temple, and it was a date which was publically marked. The Greeks chose to use that day to offer pagan idols on the altar. On the selfsame day, the altar was re-dedicated.

Chavruta Mekorot:

The Kriyat Hatorah for Chanukah relates to the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan as described in Bamidbar 7. It ends with the parsha of the Menora in Bamidbar ch.8 clearly giving a direct connection between the Chanuka of the Mizbeach and the Menora.

Bamidbar ch.8 is not the only place in which the inauguration of the Mishkan is described. We shall discuss each place in which Channukat Hamishkan occurs.

1. Three descriptions of the Channukat Hamishkan dedication ceremonies are recorded in Shemot 40, Vayikra 9:1-10:2, and in Bamidbar 7:1-89 and 9:15-23.

Quickly review those events as recorded in each Sefer and attempt to explain how each specific event relates to the theme of the Sefer in which it is recorded.

Can you explain why the Torah doesn't simply record all these events together in one Sefer?

2. See Bamidbar 7:1.

On which date does this occur?

See Shemot 40:1,17.

It is very difficult to resolve the verses together between Shemot and Vayikra. On the one hand, the Mishkan is set up on the 1st of Nissan. On the other hand, what about the 7 days of Miluim and the eight day? How does it all match up?

To see the *machloket* as to how to resolve these different events see Rashi and Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 9:1. (or in more detail: Ramban and Ibn Ezra on Shemot 40:1)

Further Iyun:

See the Ramban on Bamidbar 8:1 that discusses the relationship between Chanukat HaMishkan and Menorah, and also brings in the Chashmonaim.

Shiur:

The Torah describes the dedication of the Mishkan in three different places, in three different books. Now, clearly when the same phenomenon is described multiple times, one can try to draw upon the common details and to iron over the differences between the parshiot. Our methodology shall be precisely the reverse. Our belief is that if the Torah took pains to describe this event three times, then it is describing it from a variety of angles. It is for us to accentuate the nuances of each parsha, drawing upon its unique emphasis in order to accurately assess its contribution to the wider picture.

THREE PARSHIOT

Let us tabulate the 3 parshiot in order to compare the differences:

	Shemot 40	Vayikra 8-9	Bamidbar 7
The main actor	Moshe	Aharon/Kohanim	Princes of the Tribes
God's revelation	Cloud	Fire	Speech
Where?	Holy of Holies	Mizbeach	Above the Ark
What ceremony?	Construction of the Mishkan	Korbanot – 7 days followed by an eighth day of revelation	12 identical days of gifts and Korbanot to the Mishkan

This summary should put in good shape to understand the speciality of each parsha.

SHEMOT

The stated purpose of the Mishkan in Sefer Shemot, is the notion of Shekhina. From the root SH"KH"N, we realize that the purpose of our Mishkan is that God resides in the environs of Bnei Yisrael. God in our Midst.

The complicated construction plans of the Mishkan are given this explicit aim at their beginning (25:7) and at the end (29:42-26.) Indeed, it is this need for God's presence to reside amongst the nation that frames the revelation at the end of the Sefer:

"The CLOUD covered the tent of meeting, and GOD'S PRESENCE filled the Mishkan."

But there is also a further aspect, and this relates to a certain parallel with Har Sinai. When Moses wishes to ascend the mountain to receive the Luchot, the Torah states:

"And Moses ascended the mountain ... and GOD'S PRESENCE rested upon Mt. Sinai, and the CLOUD enveloped it for six days, AND HE CALLED TO MOSES on the seventh day from the cloud ... and Moses entered the cloud and ascended the mountain" (24:15-18)

These pesukim are mirrored in the closing verses of our Parsha:

"The CLOUD covered the tent of meeting, and GOD'S PRESENCE filled the Mishkan. And Moses could not enter the tent of meeting for the cloud rested upon it, and the presence of God filled the Mishkan... AND GOD CALLED TO HIM.." (40:34-5 and Vayikra 1:1)

With this parallel, we see God's presence at Sinai and his presence at the Mishkan described in most remarkable parity. It would seem that God's presence within the Mishkan is the same intensity of presence that appeared on Mount Sinai at Matan Torah.

This then is the culmination of the Sefer. This is what we need to know about the Mishkan dedication. In the first half of Sefer Shemot, God draws us to Him, by taking us away from enslavement, and drawing us to His service, bringing us under His wing. In the second half of the Sefer, we begin to draw God towards us by means of the construction of the Mishkan.

And as a project of national importance, and as a mirror to Mt. Sinai, Moses, the leader of the generation, and prophet extraordinaire is the central figure in Sefer Shemot's Mishkan dedication.

VAYIKRA

Vayikra is a very different Sefer. Its theme is Kedusha. The role played by the Mishkan is primarily by means of the Korbanot. The Korbanot (KR"V) bring us close to God. But who can actually bring the Korban itself? Who can engage in the work? Only the Kohanim.

It is the Korbanot aspect, our approach to God by means of Korbanot, that is described in the seven Miluim – training – days of the Kohanim. They practice for the great Eighth Day on which: "God will appear to you."

Only following an entire week, a cycle, of Temple service, God reveals his presence to his nation. But in contrast to Sefer Shemot where God reveals his presence inside the Tent of Meeting, here the revelation is not in seclusion, in the Holy of Holies. It is outside, and open to all, and the people react enthusiastically (9:24.) It is on the Altar, the place of the Korban. It is performed by the Kohanim, who are the servants of the Mishkan.

This ceremony is very different to Moses' dedication in Shemot 40. There, the process was one of inaugurating ALL the utensils of the Mishkan, anointing them, getting them ready for service.

Here, the focus of the Sanctuary is the Mizbeach, the Avoda, the ongoing service of the Mishkan, its daily routine. That is the central feature and characteristic of this dedication ceremony.

BAMIDBAR

Bamidbar is a difficult Sefer to pin down as it contains a multiplicity of strands that must be correctly woven in order to discern its meaning.

One of the central themes of Sefer Bamidbar the notion of journeying. The book narrates Israel's departure from Mount Sinai and its journey through the wilderness for an entire generation until reaching the border of the promised land. To this end, Bamidbar begins with the organisation and counting of the camp in preparation for the great march to the promised land. The text describes the marching process itself (Ch. 10-11) and it interests itself with the failures and setbacks of the mission. At the end of the day, the book is complete when the Israelites are ready to enter the Land of Canaan. (interestingly, the end of Sefer Shemot hints to this. See the concluding pesukim.)

Another central feature of Bamidbar is its focus upon the Nesi'im (tribal princes) who would seem to be the primary instrument of leadership. In Sefer Vayikra the leader is the priest, the Kohen.

tribal leadership simply does not feature. If the starting point of Sefer Vayikra is the Mikdash or Mishkan, then the functionary of this sacred institution is the Kohen.

But in Sefer Bamidbar, where it is the camp in which the focus is placed. The Mishkan is spoken of as a structure which needs transportation, but does not take centre stage in the drama of the narrative described. Indeed in Bamidbar, Aaron functions orientated towards the nation (6:22-24, 17:11-24) more than towards the Mishkan. He figures as a national leader more than the elevated "Kohen Gadol."

Hence, the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan is re-narrated in Bamidbar as an event orchestrated by tribal leaders. The Nesiim are the main figures, and they bring objects that relate to mundane things. They donate transportation equipment to the Mishkan, wagons and oxen (see 7:3-6) to facilitate the portability of the Mishkan as the Israelites travel. They also bring objects like bowls and other "hardware" to the Mishkan. The Nesiim concern themselves with the physical needs of the Mishkan as much as they bring Korbanot.

This is a new angle. For 12 days, a 12 day ceremony that is as yet unheard of in the Torah, the Mishkan experiences a dedication by the tribes themselves, via the medium of their tribal leaders.

BAYAMIM HAHEM

It is certainly interesting that rather than reading Shemot or Vayikra that focus upon the towering figures of Moshe and Aharon, we read the parsha of Bamidbar that throws the Nesiim, the political leadership, into center stage.

Maybe the reason that we choose to read Bamidbar on Channuka is precisely the notion of "the people" coming to dedicate the Mishkan. Despite the fact that the Chashmonaim were Kohanim, they lead what was essentially a popular rebellion. They Korbanot were not the focus, maybe not even the Mikdash, even though it became the centerpiece once they reclaimed it. They were fighting for the Torah of the "machaneh," of the towns and villages that were being overrun by Hellenistic practices. Bamidbar is the parsha that focuses upon the nation.

And yet, the parsha of Bamidbar finishes with the closing line of God's voice emanating from the Kodosh Kodoshim, instructing and enlightening the nation. The nation finds the way of achieving Hashraat Shechina through their own Chanukkat Hamizbeach (see Bamidbar 7:84.)

Shabbat Shalom and Channuka Sameach.
Written 5765