

# Chanukah and Origins of Modern Judaism

Rabbi Dr Harvey Belovski

## 1 ספר בראשית פרק א

ב וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְּהוֹ וְנִבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:

The earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—

## 2 מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ב סימן ז

וחושך זה גלות יון שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגזירותיהן שהיתה אומרת להם, כתבו על קרן השור שאין לכם חלק באלהי ישראל

Darkness – this is the Greek exile, which darkened the eyes of Israel with their decrees. They said to them, 'write for yourselves on the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the God of Israel.'

## 3 זוהר הקדוש ח"ב רלז.

אשר אין בה מום דא מלכות יון דאינון קריבין לארחי מהימנותא.

In which there is no blemish: this is the Greek kingdom, for they are close to the ways of truth.

## 4 תלמוד ירושלמי מגילה פ"א ה"ט

תני רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר אף בספרים לא התירו שיכתבו אלא יונית בדקו ומצאו שאין התורה יכולה להיתרגם כל צורכה אלא יונית

Rebbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: even with holy scrolls, they only allowed them to be written in Greek, for they enquired and discovered that the Torah can only be adequately translated into Greek.

## 5 מגילת תענית

גזרו היונים על שבת מילה וקדוש החודש

The Greeks decreed against Shabbat, Milah and the Sanctification of the Month

## 6 ראש השנה דף יח:

שגזרה מלכות יון שמד שלא להזכיר שם שמים על פיהם, וכשגברה מלכות חשמונאי ונצחום התקינו שיהו מזכירין שם שמים אפילו בשטרות

When the Hasmonean kingdom became strong and defeated the Greeks, they instituted that people should mention the name of Heaven even in their legal documents.

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7 ספר בראשית פרק ט

כז יִפֹּת אֱלֹהִים לְיַפֶּת וְיִשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי־שָׁם וְיֵהי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ:

May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be a slave to them.

8 מגילה דף ט:

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר אף בספרים לא התירו שיכתבו אלא יונית. אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי יוחנן: הלכה כרבן שמעון בן גמליאל. ואמר רבי יוחנן: מאי טעמא דרבן שמעון בן גמליאל - אמר קרא (בראשית ט') יפת אלהים ליפת וישכן באהלי שם - דבריו של יפת יהיו באהלי שם.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: Even with regard to Torah scrolls, the Sages permitted them to be written only in Greek. Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Yohanan said: The halakha is in accordance with the opinion of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel. And Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the reason for the opinion of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel? He based his opinion on an allusion in the Torah, as the verse states: "God shall enlarge Japheth, and He shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27), indicating that the words of Japheth shall be in the tents of Shem.

9 העמק דבר על שמות לז:ט

...שהמנורה בכלל מרמז להאיר על חכמתה של תורה, בפלפול וחקירה ועיון, וששה קני מנורה עם הקנה האמצעי המה ז' חכמות חיצוניות הטפלים לתורה, ושהתורה משקה להם להתפרש

...the Menorah in toto casts light on the wisdom of the Torah, with subtlety, inquiry and investigation. The six branches of the Menorah with the central branch are the seven external branches of wisdom that are subordinate to the Torah. The Torah enables them to be explained.

10 Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, Collected Writings, III, 'The Menorah'

As for the six branches with their six lights, we are to see them as symbolising man's spiritual endeavour of cognition and volition that are directed toward the physical world. But then it is the one central shaft itself that branches out into these six lateral branches; the six lateral branches all emanate from the same central shaft and, with their six lateral lights turn in the direction of the one central light.

This teaches us that the concept of the recognition and service of God is not an abstraction, or a concept isolating us from the general knowledge and aspirations of the outside world. Rather, it is a concept that is fully activated in endeavors to understand and build the world. Thus, no motive of thought and deed is alien to God and His Service, because both source and goal are rooted in God and give basis and sanctity to thought and action. All that is truly moral and spiritual has only one base, one root and one goal: God is its beginning, God its end.... The fear of God is the beginning, and the crowning glory of all wisdom is the fear of God. The Text clearly stresses the distinction between the one central shaft-the candlestick proper-and the lateral branches.... But the Text repeatedly speaks of the lateral branches themselves, dividing them into two sections: "Three branches of the candlestick out of its one side and three branches of the candlestick out of its other side." This distinction is further defined by showing that two branches each project from the same point on the candlestick above one knob.... In this manner the central seventh light, the light of Spirit, that is turned toward God also dominates the physical world (symbolised by the number six). By turning its light toward the physical world, it seems to support a dichotomy between the spiritual

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and physical, which, however, is reconciled by the harmonious reunion of all the lateral lights at their central point of origin.

## 11 Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, Collected Writings II, 'Hellenism and Judaism'

There is an old-prophecy, to our knowledge the oldest prophetic vision: "God will open the mind of Japhet and He shall dwell in the tents of Shem". If we grasp the meaning of the prophecy, it proclaims nothing less than that God will give Japhet mastery over the minds of men, but only Shem will build homes where God's glory will find its dwelling place on earth. Japhet blossomed into the Greeks, the Hellenistic nations, whose mastery of all that is gracious and beautiful conquered the hearts of men. Shem blossomed into the Hebrew nation which erected homes for God, and became the foundation of God's holy Law, of right and of love.... The history of the world to this day is a fulfillment of these prophetic words. On the stage of history only two elements have appeared to dominate man's intellectual development and actions: Hellenism-the blossoming of the spirit of Japhet which found expression in Greek culture, and Judaism-the spirit of Godly teaching lived and fulfilled by Israel.

It appears, however, that only the blessing, the victory and the fulfillment of the perception of God as proclaimed by Shem would prevail. The domination of minds by Japhetic culture would only be the groundwork for the houses of men into which the God portrayed by Shem would move and find His place on earth. At first minds would be receptive to Japhetic culture and then Shem's God will enter into the tents of man. While all others are subdued by Japhet, Shem will overcome Japhet....

Hellenistic thought stimulates mind and soul and aims to develop, through joy in knowledge and pleasure in all that is noble, harmony and beauty as weapons to suppress brutish outbursts of passion. It makes him responsible to himself, and expects him to ennoble himself by self-control, by doing away with all that is evil and vulgar, attributes that disturb the divine harmony in character and in sentiment, in speech and in deed. The Hellenistic spirit creates civilized, gentle, joyful and free men. Should we not rejoice in the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy, "God will open the mind of Japhet"; should we not rejoice in the power displayed by this Hellenistic culture which has gained increasingly control over the minds of man, by suppressing all that is vulgar and by stimulating the enjoyment of beauty. By measuring sensual beauty as a standard for self-perfection which develops nobleness of character, it fosters a loathing of the vulgar as a mortal danger to morality. The Hellenistic spirit appeals to the Godly spark in the human breast and encourages the human mind to perfect his self-perception, to the recognition of the greatness of intellectual pursuit and science, and guarantees man's spirit of individual freedom.

Not for nought did God clothe the world with the garment of beauty, formed the law of harmony into shapes and sounds, and opened the eyes and ears of mankind to grasp these harmonies and to enjoy them intellectually and spiritually. Every perception of the loftiness as demonstrated by a star-studded sky, by the rays of the rising or setting sun, every joy experienced by the grace and beauty of a flower elevates man to the level of lofty concepts and ideals. Ennobled by the appreciation of beauty, man will learn to appreciate the joys of his earthly existence and, thereby, the prophetic vision of the triumph of the Japhetic spirit over all other states of mind will become a reality. It will eliminate every precept and every delusion which seeks to deprive man of his self-confidence, of the dignity of his earthly existence and the absolute freedom in exercising his humane character traits.

And yet, Hellenistic culture contains only a small fraction of the truth which will eventually effect the salvation of mankind. As long as Hellenism is not coupled with the spirit of Shem, as long as it prides itself on being the sole road to happiness it falls prey to error and illusion, degeneration and decay. Hellenistic culture stimulates only the mind, creates only a thirst for knowledge and truth, but is unable to generate knowledge of truth. The mind revels in notions and suppositions, forms ornate and hypothetical assumptions in order to solve the riddles which face it.

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Hellenism considers human reason as having been created to "comprehend" the truth; at the same time, human reason is considered to be the initiator, revealer, discloser and giver of the truth. Although it is certainly subject to error and fallacy, it depends only on itself to reach the truth. This has been evident in the history of human thought which has been searching for wisdom in the Hellenistic spirit for close to three thousand years.

Hellenistic culture knows how to arouse the desire for ennoblement of man's character and life. But its measure for this ennoblement is only sensual beauty based on the symmetry of harmony and beauty. This search for self-ennoblement is motivated solely by a delight in one's own personality, by satisfaction with its improvement and by the pleasure derived from the awareness of a nobler existence. It limits itself to a superficial polishing and smoothing of the raw surface of one's personality and life-style. Under the polished surface of a refined culture remains hidden the desire for pleasure and material gratification. Hellenistic culture makes man conscious of his sublime worth, his equal rights, his nobility and his inalienable claim to equality of birth....

The spirit of Shem as disseminated by the Jewish people has made its impact upon mankind as no other force before it. Though it is only a tiny spark, it has wrought a mighty change in man's thinking and feeling. Ever since "Shem" proclaimed the name of the "Only One" in the world, darkened minds have become enlightened, cobwebs of error and illusion have begun to disappear, and a true understanding of man's task in this world has become evident everywhere....

The teaching of Shem refrains from making demands on man that are beyond his capacity to comprehend. The teaching of Shem shows man the way to God, revealing only those attributes of God which will permit him to understand and fulfill his mission on earth. It does not expect of man to solve the enigma of God's divinity through an understanding of the world and mankind, but teaches him to understand the world and mankind through God. Thus, it opens a limitless field of ennobling truths that are accessible to all. Shem's teaching does not contain man's thoughts of "God and the Divine" but God's thoughts of man and human endeavor. It therefore gives precedence and preeminence to the Law and the establishment, development and shaping of all human affairs according to God's Will....

Japhetic culture offers man his own pleasure, his own sense of grace and beauty as the motive and measure for his own perfection; but it also leaves him subject to human shortcomings and weaknesses, errors and delusions. The opposite delusive belief [Christianity] denies the possibility of man's ennoblement ["original sin"] and robs life on earth of all justification and happiness. The Law of the God of Shem, however, establishes God's will as the motive and measure of man's ennoblement. It teaches him what is pure and impure, refined and unrefined, holy and profane, that which pleases God and that which displeases Him. It demonstrates to man the boundary between freedom and servitude, shows him where freedom ends and subjugation begins in the spiritual-material, divine-earthly human being, and admonishes him: for the sake of your God be pure, be holy; for the sake of your God take hold of your life and dedicate and sanctify all of your earthly existence; ban all that is impure, unclean, unholy, contrary to freedom, displeasing to God, unworthy of man in the context of his spiritual and physical life, so that your surroundings be holy and pleasing to God, that God will dwell with you and accompany you and grant you good fortune, and that He shall not see in you the animal nakedness that is displeasing to God and unworthy of man, and abandon you.