



CHANUKAH



Remnants of GREECE

Much of what we know as Western culture comes from that ancient empire that long ago tried to destroy us. The battle against the Greek army is long over, but the battle against the Greeks' lingering cultural influence rages on until today | BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



Theatre in Acropolis

OUR SAGES TEACH THAT THE MITZVAH OF Chanukah is “*Ner ish u’beiso* – one candle (for) a man and his house”. Although we are accustomed to lighting more than one candle each night of Chanukah, the basic mitzvah of Chanukah is to light a single candle each night per home.

A *ner*, or candle, our Sages explain, is used for searching. For example, on the eve of Pesach², we are specifically required to use the light of a single-wicked candle in order to search for any chometz (leavened food) that may exist in our possession. So too, as we illuminate the darkness around

us on Chanukah, we are likewise meant to be searching for and finding something via that candle light.

So, what exactly are we meant to be searching for with these candles that we light each night of Chanukah?

Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus, ztz”l, explains that what we are searching for, what we are meant to recognise via this small, flickering flame emanating from the single wick of a candle, is the insidious, inescapable “darkness” that surrounds and envelops us.

But what exactly is this darkness and what is its source?

THE DARKNESS OF GREECE

Our Sages compare the ancient Greek Empire to darkness, noting that the Greeks “darkened” the eyes of Israel with their oppressive decrees. Empires normally rise and fall, vanishing from the earth along with their influence, as was the case with the Babylonian Empire when it was conquered by the Persian Empire and with the Persian Empire when it was later conquered by the Greek Empire.

While we presently find ourselves still in the midst of the exile that resulted from the Roman Empire, which conquered the Greek Empire, unlike those previous empires that we mentioned, the influence of the Greek Empire continues to exist until this very day via what we commonly call “Western culture” – through things like science, sports, entertainment, etc. – all of which originated in ancient Greece.

Consider just for a moment how much of the maths and science that we still learn today dates back to the Greeks and the influence of people like Euclid, Pythagoras, and Archimedes just to name a few; the pivotal role that the Olympics – as well as things like stadiums and gymnasiums – and its many sporting derivatives still play to this day; and that theatre as we know it dates back to Ancient Greece.

Make no mistake, we have certainly benefited from the scientific advances rooted in this culture, through such things as electricity, flight, and on and on – all of which appear to us as rather wondrous and awe-inspiring innovations. As a result, at first glance, we might even consider Western culture to be a source of “light” in the world. Our Sages, however, taught that this so-called “light” is actually darkness.

THE DARKNESS THAT IS IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE

In the world at large, there often exists an attitude³ that science stands in contradiction to faith, chas v’shalom (G-d forbid). Why should this be the case? After all, the study of science – of the world around us, its incredible complexity, and the laws by which that world operates⁴ – should inspire a person to an even greater appreciation for



Panathenaic Stadium built for the ancient Olympic games

the Creator of these things. In fact, the Rambam writes⁵ that the way to acquire love and fear of Hashem is to study the world that Hashem has created, as, by so doing, a person will be left in awe of the Creator. So why does science all too often stand at odds with a person's faith?

The reason for this is because science establishes its findings based upon a rather limited set of ever-evolving tools. Through microscopes science reveals the tiniest of objects, and through telescopes science searches to see if there is life on distant stars. Scientific investigations ultimately lead to scientific "proofs" and conclusions.

For example, say a man wants to know if a fish can be found that is no longer than a half a millimetre in length. He proceeds to take a net and run it through all of the seas and the rivers in the world and doesn't find anything. This is still not a proof that a fish like this cannot be found, since perhaps it was not found because he did not search sufficiently, and if he will search further, he will find it. If, however, he will meet a scientist who will explain to him that he discovered in his laboratory that it's impossible to create a net with holes smaller than a millimetre, and therefore, impossible for anyone to find a small fish like this, this man would stop looking.

But, if we consider just how this man determined not to find such a fish, or more accurately, who told him that he will not find such a thing and caused his eyes to be "darkened" – the answer is that the "light" of science, based upon its limited set of tools, "established" that it's impossible for him to find such a thing. Sounds far-fetched? Consider this 24 October 2017 headline from *The Independent* in the UK, "The universe shouldn't exist, scientists say after finding bizarre behaviour of anti-matter:

We don't know why the universe isn't destroying itself".

It's the same thing regarding the existence of G-d. With all the tools that are in the hands of science – no matter how sensitive and "advanced" such tools may be – one cannot find the Creator of the world. On account of this, science does not believe that G-d exists – and this is what "darkens" faith, this is the darkness of Greece that still remains and envelops us.

But, science is looking for G-d using the wrong tools. There exists in the world incredible machinery, powerful and sophisticated computers capable of incredibly complex calculations, with tremendous storage capacity, and which require relatively meagre energy resources to operate. And these computers, which even grow and develop, are none other than the brain of every person, from young to old – computers comprised of 100 billion interconnected cells that work together. Who made this remarkable device? Did it happen by chance? A person who thinks honestly will discover that G-d exists.

DARKNESS IN THE EYES

Believe it or not, one of the greatest obstacles we face, responsible for some of the greatest "darkness" in the world, is our very own eyes!

Consider this: we establish tens of thousands of facts throughout the course of our lives based solely upon what our eyes see. If we're looking for someone somewhere, and, after looking carefully in every possible place, we don't see him, we can conclude that he must not be there. When we look in a cup to check that it's clean and that there's nothing inside it, if our eyes don't see anything, we establish that there isn't anything in it. We become so accustomed to doing this that we come to believe that what

the eye doesn't see doesn't exist.

And this is "darkness" because there are many realities that are impossible to see with our eyes. Take, for example, a sound wave; if we didn't know what a telephone was and what it was used for and we were to witness someone speaking into one, we would consider the person to be quite mad, muttering to himself like a raving lunatic – all because we are unable to see (and hear) the sound waves coming through the device being held to his ear and are unable to see that there is another person on the other end of that device in communication with him. The same goes for electricity. Electrical current cannot be seen, and nevertheless if, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), a person was to touch it...

In fact, our senses – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching – are the five greatest sources of deception in the world, as they can all be easily tricked and deceived.⁶ And, because we so often rely upon them in order to establish what is and what is not, our senses can even cause tremendous devastation. Consider, for example, the phenomenon known as motion-induced blindness in which stationary objects in a person's field of vision "disappear", as if erased, as a result of a person staring in the same place at a moving background. Such a thing can and does happen when a person stares blindly ahead as he drives down a long stretch of highway for an extended period of time, and the result can be deadly – with other cars (the stationary objects that "disappear") suddenly "coming out of nowhere", giving the driver little to no time to react.

THE DARKNESS OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LIGHT OF IGNORANCE

Rabbi Pincus tells of how he once went

with someone to visit the granddaughter of the Chofetz Chaim. She told them that at the age of 17, she had run away from home to study in university. After two years, she went to visit her grandfather, the Chofetz Chaim, and said to him, "Grandfather! Why are you sitting in the dark? Go out to the great light!" The Chofetz Chaim answered her, "My granddaughter, you see these aeroplanes [this was around the time of World War I and aeroplanes were bombing places] – they will reach the moon, they will make bombs that are able to blow up the entire world, but we make men!"

Rabbi Pincus said, "It's stunning how this young woman felt that the Chofetz Chaim, the 'light of the world', sat in darkness – just imagine how things would look without the Mishna Berurah (an authoritative and profoundly influential commentary authored by the Chofetz Chaim on one of the four sections of the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law) [or, for that matter, his novel and influential works on *loshen horah*]. What caused this attitude? The 'light' of science, whose

darkness prevented the Chofetz Chaim's granddaughter from seeing the true light."

THE SPECIAL AVODAH ON CHANUKAH

Today, the world is such that a person does not have time to be with himself. [Rabbi Pincus, who died in 2001, said this before the advent and prevalence of the smartphone, which has only exacerbated this situation.] A man needs to take the time to stop – to disengage from the world – in order to recognise the impenetrable darkness around him and seek out the light, to open his eyes to observing the true reality, to appreciate the wonders that exist all around us in creation in the smallest details, in every blade of grass and every blossom, and to recognise the hand of his Creator.

The special avodah (Divine service) of Chanukah is to see the darkness that is in the world, to recognise it for what it is, and to know that what we think we can rely on, what we perceive with our physical senses, is not so, because those same senses can trick us into thinking that we are in the "light" when, in truth, we are surrounded by

darkness. Instead of simply looking with and relying upon our physical eyes, it's incumbent upon us to instead look with our reason and to reach honest conclusions about Who made this whole wonderful world and the implications of such a thing.

May the light of the Chanukah candles serve to dispel the darkness that surrounds us. Wishing everyone a freilichen (happy) Chanukah!

Adapted from a sicha by Rabbi Shimshon David Pincus, ztz"l

¹Shabbos 21b

²Pesachim 7b

³Historically, this has certainly been the case with other religions. Consider, for example, the Church's persecution of Galileo.

⁴See e.g., goo.gl/qxmbKq (or search YouTube for "The Fine Tuned Universe", a BBC Documentary)

⁵Yesodei Torah 2:2

⁶See e.g., www.hms.harvard.edu/news/harvard-medicine/tips-tricking-your-senses, www.livescience.com/28911-7-ways-to-trick-your-brain.html, www.nytimes.com/1987/02/04/garden/try-and-experiment-to-fool-the-senses.html

BUY  KOSHER  Wines.co.za



Quality, Consistency, flavourful -
All occasions, every occasion!

Available to you at Pick n Pay, Spar Norwood, Freshfella's, Thrupps, Kosher World, Off The Strip, Moishes Butchery and most kosher outlets nationwide, Spar Sandringham & Tops Sandringham.

For these fine wines & the exclusive full range visit
www.buykosherwines.co.za
info@buykosherwines.co.za



CALASKA TRADING

Calaska Trading 29 (Pty) Ltd t/a Adam International Group, Est 1976