

But a Flicker, But so Brilliantly Expressive

Rabbi Zalman Gurkow

Some of us are entirely caught up in the ordeal while others are simply tired of the trials and tribulations. Our country is engulfed with count/recount mania, as everyone talks about and awaits the outcome of our presidential election saga.

Perhaps we should step aside momentarily from our daily hustle and bustle and conduct our own personal count and recount. Evaluating where we stand in our legal, moral and sacred ideals.

Chanukah is a time spent with family. Around the flickering candle we gather protected from the blistering winds and falling snow. There is a certain feeling of tradition and religious aura. But Chanukah also overwhelms us with something that is the pinnacle of our tradition. The very heart of Jewish observance is expressed on Chanukah.

The Greeks enter the Temple, they make the oil impure. Why did they not dispose of the oil? Smash the Menorah? Ruin the Temple?

The Greek Empire was proud of its heritage. They treasured philosophy and logic. They took pride in tradition and culture as long as it fit within the realm of human perception. Bursting the shell of wisdom, and reaching for something higher was to them unacceptable. Greek culture argues that we may kindle the Menorah, observe tradition, provided that we first eliminate its sense of purity and divinity. Thus, they contaminated the oil and offered that we light our Menorah.

The response of Judah Macabee and the Chanukah miracle is that for a Jew, wisdom must be associated with holiness. A person's understanding must lead towards the heights of human perception, claiming a relationship with the supernal, the sacred and the divine. Eventually accepting the presence of the super human - super logic. Wisdom that rejects tradition when it transcends those boundaries is primarily self-serving. As is evidenced by the Greek conception of knowledge. It led to the lowest common denominator of their society; gladiatorial circuses, stadiums and pursuits of material pleasures.

The Chanukah candle tells us that Jewish observance - while associated with physical performance and human perception - must never lose its bond and affinity with holiness and the divine, otherwise we remain subject to our material instincts and passions. There is a candle that burns within us. It says: "You can grasp me in a very tangible way, simultaneously I will transmit powers of the highest spiritual realm".

The Macabees were willing to put their lives on the line to preserve this ideal. G-d responded by "Delivering the strong into the hand of the weak" and enabling the cruse of oil fit to burn one day to give light for eight.

Rabbi Zalman Gurkow is the rabbi at the Adams Street Synagogue in Newton. For a listing

of Rabbi Zalman's classes, visit www.adamsstreet.org. Comments may be sent to Rabbi Zalman by emailing him at rabbi@adamsstreet.org.