

We are about to greet Chanukah facing a continuing round of stabbings and violence directed against Jews for living in Israel. While much of it happens in the “West Bank” (and a lot near Alon Shvut where many of us have close connections, my own family included) much of it has been in Israel inside the Green Line. Places like Tel Aviv, Kiryat Gat and Hadera have not been immune. This is not about “settlers”. This is about Jews living in their own land. Reading the Israeli papers gives us a bird’s eye view on this. But the American papers seem to offer a completely different story. The Chicago Tribune this past week had a piece headlined “Palestinian shot in violence”. The article spoke of how the Palestinian was trying to stab an Israel and then shot in the process. We get two completely different stories.

It is sometimes helpful to note the context of Jewish History for all this. In the midst of the long first Rashi in Parshat Vayeshev, on the words of the first *pasuk*, “*Vayeshev Yaakov*”, “And Yaakov dwelled”, our erstwhile commentator sneaks in four words: “*Bikesh Yaakov leshev bashalva*” – “Yaakov asked to dwell in serenity”. After years of exile and suffering, (and let’s not forget how the Hagada famously describes that period, “Lavan wanted to destroy everything.”) Yaakov returns home with family, to the place God has promised to him. But it was not to be easy or comfortable. Yaakov did not end up dwelling in serenity. The events of Vayeshev were not ones of serenity.

Most of us do not dwell in serenity. It just seems more intense in Israel.

Many of us are familiar with the well-known dispute of Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai on how to light the candles. Shamai suggests we start with eight and go down to one. This may reflect his understanding of the oil miracle. A little bit more burned down each day. Hillel may have been describing a different reality. He was not so much looking as ways of reliving the miracle of the oil, but rather its symbolism. At the darkest seasonal time of year, at the time the sun shines the least, we light candles. And we increase the candles each night. At our people’s darkest times we do not give in to the darkness. We create and increase light. We try to find meaning and purpose. We look for hope, for a future.

Hazal understood that all is not about serenity. They teach that the events of Vayeshev were engineered toward a goal, a purpose. Later on, when Yosef was sold and landed in Egypt and Yehuda was cavorting with Tamar, whom he thought was a prostitute, the Midrash notes how Yosef was busy crying for help, Yehuda was busy with what he thought was an affair, and God was busy creating the Light of *Mashiach*, who will be descended from the union of Yehuda and Tamar. There is a purpose; it has not yet been revealed. At this season we might like serenity, but we seek hope. Chanukah gives us that hope. Jews have returned to Israel. Whether you identify with the so-called “National Camp”, the so-called “Peace Camp” or the broad body of people like me who are somewhere in that wide middle, seeing merit on both but unable to fully identify with either, we seek hope. Chanukah and the Parsha remind us that the story of the Jewish people is not one of serenity but one of hope.

May you, your families, our people and the world enjoy a warm, joyous and safe Chanukah!

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