



# HAPPY CHANUKAH

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## YadAvNow.com Weekly Audio Series: Chanukah

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Debunking The Myth Of Chanukah

1. Chanukah: The 8 day holiday commemorates the victory over the Greek armies & burning of oil with the seal of the High Priest.
2. The vial was sufficient to burn 1 night & burned 8 nights.
3. The last of the revealed miracles of 2nd Temple Period done for the Jewish People was the miracle of the oil.
4. If oil burned another 7 days, the Holiday should be a 7 day commemoration.
5. Meiri: The 1st of the 8 days commemorates the victory & the others are for the miracle of the oil.
6. Al HaNissim is inserted in the Amida to thank G-d for the miracle of Chanukah.
7. There is no mention of the miracle of the lights of the Menorah in Al Hanissim.
8. Maharal: The primary miracle of Chanukah is the victory the Greeks as described in Al HaNissim.
9. The miracle of the oil was a revealed miracle not to be understood out of the context of miracle.
10. The victory of the Chashmonaim could be attributed to their physical prowess and strategy in battle.
11. The miracle of the oil was only present to reveal that just as the burning of the oil is the hand of G-d, so is the victory over the Greeks.

### The Machiavellian Approach to Acculturation

1. Al HaNissim: "They attempted to cause the Torah to be forgotten & remove them from your statutes of will."
2. The Greeks forbade Torah study, circumcision, and sanctification of the new moon.
3. 1st paragraph of Shema: the mitzvah of loving G-d.
4. Juxtaposed to loving G-d the Torah states you must engage in Torah study wherever you may be.
5. Chazal: How does that bring one to love G-d?
6. A statute is a law that cannot be understood on a rational basis.
7. Laws, i.e stealing, damages, and injury, can be processed within a rational context but are statutes.
8. The Torah doesn't offer a rationale for its dictates.
9. Seforno: When one observes a statute it is a display of love for G-d.
10. One doesn't understand its value & adheres to it due to love of G-d.
11. The Greeks intended the Torah to be forgotten thus causing the Jews' love for G-d to wane.
12. Consequently they will be removed from the statutes.

## How Quickly a Person Forgets a Favor

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## The Dreams that Created Contention Came to Fruition

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## Parsha Mikeitz

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## Interpreting the Dreams of the King to Determine the Future of the Jewish People

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## Mikeitz: When Personal Initiative Belies Cosmic Intervention

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1. Yosef was imprisoned by Potiphar for 10 years.
2. In year 10, 2 ministers of the king were also incarcerated.
3. Yosef was appointed to attend to their needs.
4. One was the wine steward, the other, the baker.
5. They both dreamed the same perturbing dream one night. Yosef offered interpretation.
6. The wine steward would be reinstated in three days and the baker would be hanged.
7. Yosef requested the wine steward remember him, mention his innocence, & how he was sold into slavery.
8. Midrash: because of this request, Yosef spent two more years in prison for a lack of faith. Why?
9. When one sees that it is G-d catapulting him to the top, taking initiative is a lack of faith.
10. When Yosef was sold as a slave to Potiphar, his level of success was extraordinary.
11. When incarcerated, he rose to unofficial warden.
12. As it was clear beyond doubt that G-d was directing Yosef's life, his initiative was considered a lack of faith.

## Mikeitz: Processing Life Through One's Own Prism

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1. Pharaoh dreamt two dreams that were not interpreted to his satisfaction.
2. The wine steward informs Pharaoh there is someone in prison with him who has the ability to interpret dreams.
3. When he describes Yosef to Pharaoh, he depicts him in the most denigrating context to indicate that he has no qualifications other than interpreting dreams.
4. Each depiction was intended to disqualify him from rising to power.
5. Midrash: we are able to draw from the wine steward's depiction that when evil people do a good deed they cannot do it appropriately.
6. Yosef asked the wine steward to mention him to Pharaoh when reinstated hoping to be released.
7. The wine steward failed Yosef thus causing him to remain in prison an additional two years.
8. The wine steward believed if Yosef rose to power, he would put him to death as an act of revenge.
9. He therefore depicted him as an unqualified person not fit for royalty or any position of leadership for self preservation.
10. Yosef, as a Tzadik, understood his extended incarceration was only due to his own failings.
11. A Tzadik doesn't look for scapegoats to blame because of his belief and faith.
12. An evil person who doesn't have belief, attributes everything to cause and effect to oneself & others.
13. The wine steward being evil processed Yosef's predicament within his own purview thus concluding what he would do under the same circumstances.

## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Mikeitz



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### The Wine Stewart's Depiction of Yosef

*Torah:* Pharaoh had dreamt two dreams. When he had awoken he sought to have them interpreted. No one was able to interpret the dreams in a manner that satisfied Pharaoh. "Then the wine steward spoke up before Pharaoh, 'My transgressions do I mention today... We dreamt a dream on the same night, I and he; each according to the interpretation of his dream did we dream. And there with us, was a youth, a Hebrew, a slave of the chamberlain of the butchers; we related it to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us... and it was that just as he interpreted for us so did it happen..." When the wine steward told Pharaoh about Yosef's ability to interpret dreams, he referred to him in the most denigrating and demeaning manner.

*Midrash:* "Cursed are the evil, for even when they do good their intention is evil. When the wine steward referred to Yosef as a 'youth', he meant to say that he was a fool. 'A Hebrew' meant that Yosef was a

foreigner and refugee who was not familiar with the Egyptian language. When he referred to Yosef as a 'slave', he meant to say, 'It is written in the protocols of Egypt that one who is a slave is not qualified to rule and is not permitted to wear regal garments'."

*Torah:* After Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward, he requested the wine steward to "remember me" him and "mention me" him to Pharaoh. After the wine steward had been released and reinstated, as Yosef had interpreted his dream, he immediately forgot Yosef and did not consider addressing his request. Two years later, when Yosef's assistance to interpret the dream for Pharaoh was needed, the wine steward informed Pharaoh of Yosef's ability.

One could say that the wine steward was concerned that if Yosef were to be released from prison as a result of assisting Pharaoh in interpreting his dreams, he would be elevated to a position of greatness and

power in Egypt. If that were to occur, *Yosef* would then take revenge upon the wine steward because he had allowed him to remain in prison for an additional two years. It is therefore understandable why the wine steward would denigrate *Yosef* as a person who was unqualified for any position of power.

*Chazal*: Although the wine steward's depiction of *Yosef* seems to be justifiable for the sake of self preservation; nevertheless, regarding his behavior, "Cursed are the evil for even when they do good their intention is evil..." Why are *Chazal* so harsh regarding the intention of the wine steward when in fact he was only protecting his life? *Yosef* was appointed to be the valet of the wine steward when they were in prison. Being associated with *Yosef* in this context, the wine steward should have understood that *Yosef* was not one who would take revenge.

*Torah*: When *Yosef* was in the prison with the wine steward and the baker he took pity on them. The *Torah* states, "'(Yosef said to them), Why do you appear downcast today?' And they said to him, 'We dreamt a dream but there is no interpreter for it' so Yosef said to them, 'So not interpretations belong to G-d?'" Although *Yosef* could have attributed the ability to interpret dreams to himself and take full credit for his accomplishment, he chose to attribute it to G-d.

It was clear that every aspect of *Yosef's* behavior was a confirmation that he was a man of G-d, understanding that all that had transpired in his life was due to Divine Providence. Thus, he was not one to take revenge and behave in a vindictive manner towards the wine steward. *Potiphar*, his master, who was a pagan, recognized that G-d was with *Yosef*. As it states, "His master perceived that G-d was with him, and whatever he did G-d made succeed through him."

Since *Yosef* attributed everything to G-d in the most obvious manner, the wine steward should have understood that although he had spent an additional two years in prison, he would not cast blame upon him because *Yosef* would have internalize it as the Will of G-d, due to his own spiritual failings. Thus, the only reason the wine steward degraded *Yosef* before Pharaoh was because he was evil and did not have the capacity to appreciate the good that he had done for him. One who does not believe in G-d's Providence and attributes everything to himself, will

discredit and demean everything unless it is in his best interest. Because the wine steward was self-absorbed and evil, he reflected his own persona upon *Yosef*, that he would act in a manner as he would.

## The Secret to Yosef's Meteoric Rise

*Torah*: "So Pharaoh sent and summoned *Yosef*... I dreamt a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you comprehend a dream to interpret it.' *Yosef* answered Pharaoh saying, 'That is beyond me; it is G-d Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare.'" Rather than taking credit for his ability to interpret dreams, *Yosef* unhesitatingly attributed it to G-d.

*Midrash*: "Initially, *Yosef* was imprisoned in iron shackles, but he was ultimately exalted and elevated to greatness. As it states, 'Yosef was the ruler over all the land...' G-d said, 'Since you did not in any way elevate yourself, I swear on your life that you will merit to rise to greatness and kingship.'" Thus, *Yosef* ascended to be the viceroy of Egypt because he understood that G-d is the source of everything and nothing can be attributed to himself.

*Midrash*: "*Reb Shimon Ben Gamliel* said, 'Yosef was deserving of everything that he received.' Why was this so? 'His mouth did not kiss something that was not permitted to him.' (His master's wife attempted to seduce him, but *Yosef* resisted.) As a result of your word, all the nations will kiss. (Meaning, only *Yosef's* word will have value. His dictate will determine all that has relevance to Egypt.)" *Yosef* was deserving of all that he was given, because he understood and appreciated that he could not partake of anything that is not his, regardless of the degree of temptation.

The basis for *Yosef's* suppression of temptation was because he said (regarding to the wife of *Potiphar*), "I cannot sin against G-d." It was not based solely on his understanding of the inappropriateness of cohabitating with his master's wife.

*Torah in Ki Seitzei*: "When you will go out to war... and you will see a woman who is beautiful of form (*aishes yifas toar*) and you desire her, you may take her to yourself for a wife." The *Torah* permits the one who is in battle to cohabit with a woman that he desires, although she is a gentile (if one has the intent to convert and marry her). The *Torah* tells us that the only ones who were qualified to go to war were the

most devoutly righteous. If this is so, how is it possible that such a devoutly righteous person should have a desire for a gentile woman and cohabit with her on the battlefield as a non-Jew?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin*: “The *Torah* is addressing the evil inclination of the individual in battle. If the *Torah* would not permit this act to take place, the individual would cohabit with the non-Jewish woman although she is forbidden to him.” It is evident from the *Gemara*, that although the act is inappropriate; however, since the person is in a context in which he is overwhelmed and feels that he is not secure (which is the cause of his vulnerability), the *Torah* permits the Jew to cohabit with the non-Jewish woman. This is because “it is better that he eat the meat of an animal that is about to die in a ritually slaughtered state, then eating the meat that has not been ritually slaughtered (which is forbidden).”

We see that if one is in a situation in which he is overwhelmed with distraction, the *Torah* permits him to behave in a manner that would not normally be permitted. *Yosef* had been a slave and a prisoner in Egypt for twelve years. His circumstance was one of being insecure and thus would cause *Yosef* to be vulnerable to many things. Despite personal predicament, *Yosef* resisted the temptation to be acknowledged as one who has the ability to interpret dreams. Rather, he chose to minimize himself and attribute the interpretation of the dreams to G-d.

Because *Yosef* was able transcended the frailties of a human being, which was a confirmation of his spiritual dimension, G-d allowed him to ascend to greatness in Egypt and rule (dominate) physical existence as Viceroy. Although *Potiphar's* wife attempted to seduce him, because of his subservience to G-d, he resisted her advances and rose above temptation. Consequently, G-d allowed him to be freed from the iron shackles of slavery and rise above the nations to dominate existence.

*Ramchal*: The value of evil in existence is not to succumb to it. G-d created everything in existence with a purpose of good. Despite one's setting, one is continuously presented with the choice to be drawn after one's inclination or go against the grain to do the Will of G-d. The result of making the proper choice will cause one to become spiritualized and thus be able to dominate the material.

## The Ramification of Yaakov's Mourning Period

*Torah*: After *Yosef's* brothers sold him into slavery they took his tunic and dipped it into goat's blood. They brought it to their father *Yaakov* and said, “Is this the tunic of your son...*Yaakov* said, ‘a savage beast devoured him!’ *Yaakov* then rent his garments, put on sackcloth and grieved the death of his son *Yosef*. As it states, “...He mourned for his son many days.”

*Rashi*: “Many days” means, “*Yaakov* was in a state of mourning for 22 years.” *Yaakov* grieved not only because of the loss of his most beloved son *Yosef*, but rather, because *Chazal* tell us, that it was known to him that if any of his children were to die in his lifetime, he would not have a share in the world to come. The loss of *Yosef* was an indication to *Yaakov* that he had failed spiritually.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The Divine Presence only rests upon one who is in a state of joy and not grieving, mourning, or depression. Because *Yaakov* was in a state of mourning, believing that *Yosef* was no longer alive, he was denied infinite levels of spiritual growth, due to being denied Divine Prophecy. When *Yaakov* was told after 22 years that his son *Yosef* was alive, the *Torah* states, “... the spirit of *Yaakov* became alive.”

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: G-d's Presence was restored to him and he began prophesizing again. The spiritual loss to *Yaakov*, as a result of being in a state of mourning for 22 years is something incalculable. *Yaakov* was the most special of the holy Patriarchs and was the location of the Divine Presence in this world. Due to his dimension of being, he had a spiritual capacity to advance the Jewish people to unfathomable levels. However, because of his state of grieving, he was denied that ability.

The spiritual tragedy of *Yaakov* had eternal ramifications to the Jewish people. All of this could be attributed to *Yosef's* brothers, who had sold him into slavery. They allowed their father to believe that he had been devoured by a wild beast. Since the spiritual loss that they brought about was on an unlimited level, their level of liability goes beyond the selling of their brother into slavery. Thus, the punishment to the Jewish people in the future needed to be at a level, which has untold ramifications (measure for measure).

*Chazal*: The Ten Martyrs who were the ten greatest *Torah* sages (who had lived in the same generation since the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai), were killed by the Romans in the most cruel manner to atone for the sin of the selling *Yosef* into slavery. The simple understanding as the narrative reads is that the brothers were punished for selling a Jew a into slavery, which carries the death penalty.

However, the sin that the Jewish people needed to atone for, was far greater, because they needed to atone for the spiritual ramifications of the actions of the brothers, which was denying *Yaakov's* Prophecy for 22 years. The punishment of the killing of the ten martyrs was within the context of measure for measure. Just as the ten brothers of *Yosef* denied their father unlimited spiritual growth, so too the Jewish people are being denied the ten most advanced *Torah* sages. Thus, they were denied unlimited spiritual growth and advancement.

*Torah*: *Shimon* and *Levy* the sons of *Yaakov*, destroyed the community of *Shechem* to avenge the defilement of their sister *Dinah*. After this incident, *Yaakov* was disturbed with his sons because of what they had done. He said to them, "*Achartem osi* – you have discomposed me (made me murky)..."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "*Yaakov* said to his sons, 'Prior to your action, I had clarity of mind; however, as a result of your behavior, I no longer have that clarity.'" As a result of the lack of clarity he no longer possessed that unique level of clarity that was necessary for his spiritual growth. By being denied that level of clarity, the spiritual cost factor to the Jewish people is eternal. *Yaakov's* more advanced spiritual contribution will not be able to be realized.

It is because of this that before his passing, *Yaakov* cursed the wrath of *Shimon* and *Levy*. It was not solely because they had destroyed *Shechem*, but rather because of the loss of clarity that he had experienced. Based on Jewish law, *Shimon* and *Levy* had the right to destroy the community of *Shechem*; however, the consequence to *Yaakov's* clarity was the main source of their liability. We find that whenever *Moshe* had forgotten a law, it was because he was in a state of anger, which was the cause of his loss of clarity. Thus, the level of culpability to the ten brothers of *Yosef* and *Shimon* and *Levy* was not only because of the actions that they had taken, but rather, because of

the effect it had upon *Yaakov*, which in turn affected the eternity of the Jewish people.

## Oil Illuminates

During the festival of *Chanukah* there is a special insertion (*al hanissim*) in the *Amidah* (silent prayer) which is recited three times a day. The paragraph that is inserted recounts the miracles pertaining to *Chanukah* that G-d had performed on behalf of the Jewish people. The text of *al hanissim* reads, "...You (G-d) in Your great mercy stood up for them (the Jewish people) in the time of their distress...You judged their judgment... You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of Your *Torah*..."

In recounting the miracle of *Chanukah* we thank G-d for the victory over the mighty Greeks; but, there is no mention of the miracle of the oil. When the Jewish people rededicated the Temple after it had been desecrated by the Greeks, they searched for pure olive oil for the kindling of the *Menorah*. They had discovered that the Greeks had defiled all of the oil except for one vial, which still bore the seal of the High Priest. It would have taken eight days to produce new pure olive oil for the *Menorah*; however, the one vial that was meant to burn for only one night continued to burn for eight nights.

In order to commemorate this miracle, the Rabbis legislated that the observance of *Chanukah* shall be through the lighting of the *Menorah* for eight consecutive nights. The *Menorah* must be displayed and kindled in a location that will publicly acknowledge the miracle of the oil. If the central and primary observance of *Chanukah* is through the commemoration of the miracle of the oil, then why in the *al hanissim* where we are thanking G-d for all the miracles that He performed on our behalf do we not mention the miracle of the oil?

The Jewish people experienced many revealed miracles during the redemption from Egypt such as the plagues and the splitting of the Sea; however, the Rabbis did not establish any events to specifically commemorate those miracles. Nevertheless, they did legislate that one must kindle the *Menorah* for eight nights to commemorate the miracle of the oil.

The appellation for the holiday that was chosen by Chazal is “*Chanukah*,” which means “they had a respite on the 25th.” Meaning, the victory over the Greeks was complete on the 25th of the month of *Kislev*. As we see from the appellation for the holiday that the essence of the commemoration is the victory over the Greeks. If this is so, then why is the central mitzvah of *Chanukah* the kindling of the oil lamp?

*Maharal* of Prague: The essence of the holiday is to celebrate and commemorate the victory over the Greeks. We give thanks to G-d for “delivering the strong into the hands of the weak.... The multitudes into the hands of the few...” What then is the value of the miracle of the oil?

*Gemara*: The miracle of *Chanukah* took place during the Second Temple period. It was a time that G-d had said that He would go into concealment. The era of revealed miracles came to a close with the destruction of the First Temple. Despite this fact, G-d nevertheless performed an open miracle through the oil of the *Menorah*. The military victory of the few over the multitudes, the *Chashmonaim* (family of Priests) over the Greeks, although it was a miracle, it could be understood within the context of guerilla warfare/astuteness in battle –rather than the Hand of G-d. G-d therefore performed a revealed miracle (the miracle of the oil) which could not be understood in any other context other than His Hand – to reveal that just as the vial of oil lasting eight nights was a miracle so too was the victory over the enemy a miracle.

*Chanukah* is a celebration of the victory of good over evil. The Greeks wanted to Hellenize the Jewish people by acculturating with their values and beliefs. This would have led to the spiritual destruction of the Jewish people. The Jews would have ultimately assimilated. The *Chashmonaim*, understanding and appreciating the seriousness of the moment were no longer able to tolerate the oppression and presence of the Greeks in their land. The victory reestablished and reinstated the supremacy of *Torah* and spirituality over the physical. The material and the physical was no longer believed to be an end unto itself but rather only as a means to do G-d’s Will. Why did G-d use the miracle of the oil as the revelation to appreciate His Hand within the victory over the Greeks?

*Torah*: The location of the *Menorah* was on the Southern Wall of the covered Sanctuary. When

the *Torah* identifies its location it states that it was “outside of the Curtain (*Paroches*).” The Curtain separated between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. The *Menorah* was located in the Holy, and the Ark containing the Tablets and the Written *Torah* was contained within the Holy of Holies. Seemingly, the *Menorah*, which represents illumination should have been placed along side the Ark itself. However, the *Torah* states differently – that it is placed on the “Outside of the Curtain” so that the Jewish people should not think that “I (G-d) need your light.” (The Ark was in the same location of the Divine Presence.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Basra*: The light of the *Menorah* symbolizes the Oral Law, which is the elucidation of the Written Law. One is only able to comprehend and process the Written Law with special Divine Assistance. The kindling of the *Menorah* gave the Jewish people the merit to be able to understand and grasp the meaning of G-d’s Words. One is only qualified to be the recipient of this special Divine Endowment when he is selflessly dedicated to the study of the *Torah* – even to the point of material sacrifice.

*Midrash*: The reason G-d needed to place the mountain over the heads of the Jewish people at Sinai was in order for them to accept the Oral Law. Although they had unequivocally already accepted the Written Law with their declaration of, “*Naaseh v’Nishmah* – we will do and we will listen.” However, they had to be compelled to accept the Oral Law, which can only be acquired and gained when one is willing to selflessly sacrifice for it.

The *Chashmonaim* had challenged the Greek armies, despite the overwhelming odds against them. This was only precipitated because they could not tolerate the continuous desecration of G-d’s Name. They were willing to die as Jews rather than live as Hellenized Greeks. They had made the ultimate sacrifice for G-d when they entered into this battle.

Because of that selfless sacrifice of the few, the weak, the pure, and the holy, against the strong, the multitudes, the evil, and the contaminated, were they victorious. The key element that brought about victory was that they were willing to sacrifice for G-d. The victory was unrelated to their unusual ability as strategists. How was this made known and obvious to the Jewish people and the world? It was through

the miracle of the oil which is synonymous with the Oral Law – the illuminator of the Written Law. The miracle of the oil was the revelation of the basis of the victory over the Greeks which was their sacrifice for the sake of G-d.

## **Torah Has the Power to Penetrate the Jew**

Every day during the festival of *Chanukah*, we insert in the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) the paragraph of *Al Haneesim* (on the miracles). It recounts how the Greeks oppressed the Jewish people and how ultimately the Jews were able to defeat them, despite the fact that they were few in number. It is stated in the *Al Haneesim*, "...The wicked Greek kingdom rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your *Torah* and compel them to stray from Your Statutes (*Chukim*)..."

The Greeks had decreed that *Torah* study was a capital crime punishable by death. Seemingly, the Greeks understood that if they prevented the Jewish people from studying *Torah* they would ultimately stray from the Statutes (*Chukim*), which are laws that have no rational basis within the human context and are beyond the human intellect. What is the relationship between adhering to the Statutes and *Torah* study? If a Statute is a law that has no rational basis, how could *Torah* study affect one's observance and adherence?

One can be committed to rational laws/*Mishpatim* purely based on one's humanitarian sentiments. One may give charity generously simply because he relates to the value of the cause or he feels the pain of the needy. Even if the *Torah* would not have stated the obligation to give charity, that individual would have been fully committed because of his feelings towards his fellow. On the other hand, the adherence to the Statutes (*Chukim*)

is one that is solely based on one's commitment to do the Will of G-d. Dietary laws, the prohibition of combining wool and linen (*shatnez*), and the laws of the Red Heifer are classical examples of Statutes.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "Great is the study of *Torah* because it brings to actualization." Is it only that *Torah* study causes one to be knowledgeable and understanding of the laws so that he should appreciate and observe them – or does it go beyond that? The effect of *Torah* study has the innate ability to impact on a Jew when it is studied properly, even to value and relate to concepts and laws which are beyond the human intellect. *Torah* study itself penetrates and affects the spirituality of the Jew causing him to develop a second sense of valuing aspects of the *Torah*– such as Statutes which are not comprehensible.

Therefore when one studies the *mitzvos* which are rational, the motivating force to perform and actualize them will no longer be based on one's emotion and intellect, but rather, the spirituality of the Jew sensing its value. The Greeks understood and realized the paramount value of *Torah* study and its far-reaching ramifications. They wished to negate and purge the Jew of his spirituality. Thus, by decreeing that the Jewish people were not permitted to study *Torah*, they would ultimately cause them to lose their spiritual sensitivity. Consequently, even when they would perform many of the *mitzvos*, it would be only for humanitarian reasons and unrelated to G-d.



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