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SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT VAYESHEV

The Vision of Chanukah

Chanukah stands apart from all other Jewish holidays in two remarkable ways. First, it is the only holiday with a mitzvah of *pirsumei nisa* — publicizing the miracle. We don't display our matzah in the window on Pesach, nor wave our *lulav* outdoors on Sukkot, nor stand on rooftops blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah. But on Chanukah, we do exactly that. We place the menorah at the doorway or the window, shining its light outward. Cities around the world raise giant menorahs in public squares — all to share the miracle openly. Second, Chanukah uniquely allows us to continue engaging in weekday activities. Unlike Shabbat or Yom Tov, work is not prohibited.

These two features reveal the essence of Chanukah. The great chassidic thinkers explain that after the destruction of the First Temple, the Sages prayed that the overpowering human drive toward idolatry be removed. Their prayer was answered. From that time on (after 587 BCE), humanity no longer experienced the fiery, irrational pull toward pagan worship. While idolatry continued culturally, the spiritual craving behind it disappeared. The world's challenge shifted. Instead of seeing too much spirituality in physical objects, people began to see *none at all*. Rather than worshiping stones and stars, people stopped sensing the Divine even in themselves.

This shift paved the way for Greek philosophy. The Greeks did not deny spirituality outright; they merely reduced God to an abstract concept, detached from real life. If reason or science could not measure something, they deemed it nonexistent. There is no instrument to detect holiness in Shabbat, covenant in marriage, purity in oil, or Divine presence in a mitzvah. If you cannot weigh it or calculate it, it must be imaginary.

That is why the Greeks did not try to destroy the Bet HaMikdash. They wanted to secularize it — to redefine it as a cultural institution with no sacred core. Their claim was simply that nothing is holy. Everything is ordinary. Even what looks holy is merely mundane.

Chanukah is the answer to that worldview. The miracle of the oil — and the mitzvah of lighting the menorah outward — declare the opposite truth: that holiness is hidden within everything. When we illuminate our lives with Torah, we see that what appears mundane is suffused with Divine meaning. Every breath is a miracle. Every cell, neuron, and atom is a masterpiece. Every moment is an opportunity for connection with God. The physical world is not spiritually neutral; it is alive with holiness because it was spoken into being by the Infinite.

This is why we bring the menorah's light into the public domain and why the holiday does not prohibit weekday work. Chanukah teaches us not to retreat from the world but to illuminate it — to reveal the sanctity embedded within the ordinary.

As the poet William Blake wrote, *"To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wildflower, to hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour."* Chanukah reminds us that this is not poetic exaggeration but a spiritual reality. You are holding infinity in the palm of your hand. There is holiness in every breath you take, every task you perform, and every corner of your daily life.

The Greeks claimed nothing is sacred. Chanukah teaches that nothing is mundane. Everything — absolutely everything — is a vessel for Divine light.

(Based on a dvar Torah shared by R' VV Jacobson)

The Balance

Although superficially, the friction between Yosef and his brothers appears to be stemming purely from jealousy, there is much more beneath the surface that the Torah draws our attention to — a practical theme for all of us today.

Yosef, known as the "dreamer," radiates youthful confidence and unwavering faith in the truth of his visions. His brothers, however, perceive his dreams as a threat to their family's unity and survival. In a world fraught with danger and uncertainty, they see Yosef's lofty ambitions as impractical and even reckless. This conflict between Yosef's idealism and his brothers' grounded pragmatism mirrors a universal struggle within us all: the challenge of reconciling bold aspirations with the demands of reality.

Yosef's dreams ultimately come to fruition, but only after years of hardship, including slavery and imprisonment. These trials shape him, teaching him to balance his ambition with wisdom and practicality. Meanwhile, his brothers come to recognize the importance of Yosef's vision when they rely on him during the famine. The Torah thus illustrates that both perspectives — dreaming big and remaining grounded — are vital. Without dreams, we lack purpose and direction, but without practicality, those dreams may never be realized.

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' Gavriel Shimonov)

In a Nazi labor camp, Jewish prisoners used a thread from their clothing as a wick and margarine from their rations as oil to light a Chanukah candle. A survivor later wrote, "That single flame reminded us we were more than prisoners — we were a people who refused to be extinguished."

(Meaningful Minute)