



“THIS OPPOSITE THIS” HASHEM MADE THE WORLD

Based on R. Tsadok HaKohen, Resisei Layla, 57

Chanukka, 2021 / 5782

ועל ידי כח זה שבכנסת ישראל שרוצים להחזיר גם כוחות העמים לקדושה על ידי כח זה (דאת זה לעומת זה עשה להים) נתעורר באומות הכח והרצון לגזור שמד חס ושלום על ישראל להחזיר אדרבה כנסת ישראל חס ושלום להם.

Through this power vested in Israel—their will to influence the world for good, to sanctify the nations [to be a light unto the nations]—this very force itself (via the principle of “*this* opposite *this* HaShem created the world”)...this triggers in the nations an opposite will to pull Israel away from their Sinai legacy (G-d forbid) [breaking their spiritual strength] and thereby pulling Israel down to them through the force of assimilation. [R. Tsadok HaKohen, Resisei Layla, 57]

One of the miracles we celebrate on Chanukha is that our religion remained intact despite fierce efforts by the Greek empire to assimilate us into their culture. Greek philosophy, science, aesthetics and democratic ideals tantalized the Jewish soul and many succumbed to their lure. Previous empires were not concerned with our creed. They enslaved our bodies, collected our taxes, and ignored our beliefs. The Greeks were the opposite: “Abandon your religion and you’ll be free men!”

R. Tsadok asserts that underlying our battle against assimilation is a tug-of-war we experience (and perhaps even provoke) with the nations. Our job is elevate humanity by spreading ethical monotheism out into the world, not by conquest but by example.

But our obligation is not just to influence the nations for good but to also concern ourselves with their welfare. R. Tsadok brings the *korbanot* that we offer for the nations on sukkot as proof of the seriousness of this responsibility. We sacrifice 70 oxen over the course of those days accompanied by a prayer that the nations should have a good year, that they should be free of hardships, and that they should have lots of rain. We seek for them exactly what we hope for ourselves...unconditionally...no matter how they treated us the previous year. It’s a humongous (and generous) investment in their wellbeing.

R. Tsadok brings a second proof. He suggests that mashiach is coming actually, primarily, for the nations.¹ Our job is to do the preparatory work of *tikun olam*—of making the world mashiach-friendly so that there’s enough overlap for Mashiach ben David to finally appear. In the process of laying that groundwork we will attain mashiach consciousness, which means that when mashiach finally does come, we won’t be in need of his teachings. R. Tsadok brings a midrash that one of mashiach’s primary tasks will be to teach Torah *to the nations* and instruct *them* concerning the additional mitzvot that they must now perform.

Yet, says R. Tsadok, as we start to pull *them* up toward *kedusha*, they resist and attempt to pull us down into their world view and value frame. A tug-of-war ensues. We want them to adopt Torah values and they want us to assimilate. Our resistance to their tugs, our refusal to assimilate, our indigestible kernel of soul called *pintilla yid* is experienced by them as a slap in

the face. I bring a quote from a well-respected metaphysical treatise called *Esoteric Healing* by Alice Bailey (1953) that makes this explicit point, unabashedly:

The behavior of the nations towards the Jews, culminating in the atrocities of the second quarter of the twentieth century, have no excuse. ... Though much that has happened to the Jews originated in their past history and in their pronounced attitude of separativeness and nonassimilability [sic] ... The problem will be solved by the willingness of the Jew to conform to the civilization, the cultural background and the standards of living of the nation to which—by the fact of birth and education—he is related and with which he should assimilate. It will come by the relinquishment of pride of race and of the concept of selectivity; it will come by renouncing dogmas and customs which are intrinsically obsolete and which create points of constant irritation to the matrix within which the Jew finds himself;they lose sight of the true solution, which is that, symbolically and factually again, they must be assimilated into all the nations, and fused with all the races, thus demonstrating recognition of the One Humanity.

From this perspective, our Chanukka tale (≅ 175 BCE) actually begins a century earlier with the Torah's translation into Greek, the Septuagint, commissioned by Ptolemy II (285–247 BCE) who demanded access to this book so revered by the Jews. Yet that decision opened the gate for Jewish influence to now seep into Greek culture, activating the mechanism of “*this* opposite *this*.”

This tug-of-war stripped down to its basics is really about “who eats who?” And, really, the whole drama of geopolitics comes down to exactly that: In the end, whose narrative, whose scripture, whose ideology, whose story of why we are here and where we're headed and what G-d wants from us...whose narrative is going to prevail, and absorb everyone else into its story line. “Who will eat who?”²

That's a weird statement, but let's look at the mechanics of eating to understand what it means: When I eat a piece of food, something that was “not me”, now loses its *self* and becomes me. A conquest has occurred. Before eating, that fruit, vegetable or animal was doing its own self-directed thing. It had its own trip. Now, after being eaten, it is reduced to serving my trip. Its entire existence is subjugated to my will and direction.

On a cosmic scale, “Who eats who?” is a deadly serious question, and the stakes are high. The Zohar sheds some insight on the matter.

[Spoken by the son of the venerable R. Hamnuna³, who is called, “The Light of the Torah”]...My father inhabited the great sea, he was a huge fish who spanned the sea from one end to the other; he was mighty and noble and ancient of days. He would swallow up all the other fish in the sea and then release them again alive and filled with all the good things of the world...[Zohar 1: 6a]

The Zohar is teaching about rectified eating, about what to expect if the Torah's narrative prevails and why that is something to hope for. There is eating and there is eating. There is eating that is an act of conquest and utter subjugation (as described above). You might call it narcissistic eating. And then there is the eating attributed to the giant fish (or Leviyatan/Leviathan) symbolizing the Torah, that eats all the other fish but then spits them out *more* vitalized and enriched than they were before. You might call that generative eating.

To be eaten by the Torah's narrative (so to speak) is to discover your place and purpose in creation...to glimpse your essential, and inimitable task that can only be served by you alone. The gestalt of the Torah—the sum-total of wisdom generated by people engaged with its texts—has a place (and a need) for everyone. No life or creature is superfluous. And that applies on all scales: individuals, family units, tribes, nations, generations. Everything that's

here has a point, and nothing could exist without one. A person or a people's strength of life is proportionate to their sense of purpose. The Torah absorbs you, fuses you with your place and purpose, and then spits you out vitalized and enriched with a job to be done. It's the opposite of subjugation.

The baffling survival of the Jewish people—that they've resisted assimilation by the mightiest of empires for thousands of years—is due (in large part) to their deep sense of purpose...their belief that they've been chosen for a mission and that the universe depends upon their success.

The Western world is suffering from a crisis of purpose on both the individual and collective scales. Its liberal, secular, democratic values are wearing thin. The pillars of democracy: honest press, free speech, pluralism, rationality, Judeo-Christian values are wobbling. The Western world is losing its way.

Ancient Greece is considered the birthplace of many elements of Western culture, including the development of a democratic system of government and major advances in philosophy, science and mathematics. [Wikipedia: Western Culture]

In contrast, Israel is thriving. Their sense of purpose remains strong. A treasury of texts, wisdom and traditions (going back thousands of years) reinforce its importance and guide its fulfillment.

There is so much we have to share with the world, but the obstacle of “this opposite this” is as active today as it ever was. Even still, our obligation to concern ourselves with the nations' wellbeing requires us to find a way through the resistance (both ours and theirs).

And, in the meantime the Chanukah menorot in our windows and doorways are beacons of light, radiating our well-wishes out to the world. Their precision-guided photons should touch the hearts and uplift the lives of all who behold their beauty. A candle, says the Zohar, is not just a source of illumination. It is a living symbol that broadcasts the truth of Divine oneness into the psyche of those looking on.⁴ Please, HaShem, as we shine our lamps out to the street, from every land where Jews may be, let all the peoples of the world (including us), be touched and awakened to their purpose, in the deepest (most healing) sense of what that might be.

חנוכה שמח

¹ BR 98:9. "...AND HIS VESTURE IN THE BLOOD OF GRAPES...R. Hanin said: Israel will not require the teaching of the royal Messiah in the future, for it says, Unto him shall the nations seek (Isa. XI, 10), but not Israel. If so, for what purpose will the royal Messiah come, and what will he do? He will Come to assemble the exiles of Israel and to give them [the Gentiles] thirty precepts, as it says, And I said unto them: ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver (Zech. XI, 12).

² That is what the Torah means in (Dev. 7:16) when it states that we will “consume the nations.”

³ *nun* meaning fish

⁴ Zohar 1:50b-51b.