

R. Joseph Radinsky

## Joseph & Chanukah

Why is it that the Rabbis have always arranged it that we will read about Joseph on the Shabbos of Chanukah? What does the life of Joseph have to do with Chanukah? Joseph was brilliant and because of this his father Jacob loved to learn with him but he had faults. He was constantly telling his brothers that they had to improve and even tattled about them to their father Jacob. The text even says how Jacob rebuked Joseph. Jacob was not oblivious to Joseph's faults, but he loved him anyway, just as he loved his other sons in spite of their faults. Joseph's brothers believed that their father Jacob's love was finite and therefore they had to get rid of Joseph so they could get their father's love. They of course were wrong. Jacob loved all his children. He rebuked them when they were wrong, but he always loved them. He loved them in spite of their faults. After the loss of Joseph he could hardly love anyone. He was so overwhelmed with grief.

Chanukah teaches us why we Jews have been singled out for persecution. Many times the nations of the world do not like the message which Judaism teaches. They do not like to hear the message that we all are not perfect, that there is no perfect society or people, that we all must constantly try to improve. People hate to hear that message. They like to believe that they are perfect, so that they can feel that, one, they deserve the love of others and the love of G-d, and two, so that they do not have to make the arduous efforts needed to improve, and three, so that they can persecute and harm others who tell them they are not perfect, with a clear conscience,

Joseph, throughout his life, was always the target of hatred and envy because he did stand out about others. He is the only one, who is known in our tradition as "HaTzadik," the righteous one. He was not perfect, but he had a good mind and a compassionate heart. He was thrown into prison for no good reason, because the wife of his Egyptian master could not stand his goodness, and wanted to seduce him and bring him down to her level. In prison, Joseph rose to high position again because of his talents. He matured in prison and learned how to stress his compassion over his talents. He especially learned how to listen to the dreams of others, as well as to his own.

G-d's love is not finite, and it is not true that we have to be perfect in order to deserve it. This doctrine that you have to be perfect in order to be loved has caused so many lies and so much injustice, because when people find out that they are not perfect, they immediately start to cover up, so that they will not lose the love they have. They deny that they have done anything wrong so that they will not lose their spouse's, their parent's, their children's, and especially G-d's love. G-d, though, loves us even if we are not perfect

The symbol of Chanukah is the lit candle. We light candles five times in Judaism. The first time we light a candle is Erev Pesach, when we search for chometz. Searching for chometz signifies not only a physical search, but also a spiritual search as well. We are constantly to look for the truth. We are constantly to recognize the truth that we are not perfect, the truth that destroying other people will not make us more perfect. The second time we light a candle in Judaism is on Shabbos. Shabbos teaches us that we deserve to be loved (by others and by G-d) just because we exist, not because we produce. Even if we produce nothing, we still deserve to be loved, and on

Shabbos we do not produce anything. The third time we light a candle is at Havdallah. Havdallah is a multi-wicked candle. This teaches us that light and love are infinite. From one candle you can light thousands of candles and the original light is not diminished. So it is with love. Love is not finite. G-d can love us all. Just because He loves one person or people, does not mean He cannot love other people or persons.

The fourth time we light a candle is when someone dies. This teaches us that everyone has a role to play, that everyone is missed, that whether we have large talents or small talents, great compassionate souls or small souls, we are still needed and are still loved. Finally, we light a candle at Chanukah to teach us all that we should never put down others because they seem to exude goodness or because their life styles cast a doubt on their state of perfection. The Greeks could not stand us Jews because we questioned their ideals. We said beauty without goodness is nothing. We said that Greek society was not perfect.

The story of Joseph and his brothers and Chanukah teach us that G-d's love is infinite and that we do not have to be perfect to deserve it we just have to try to improve to try do better. We should always remember this so that we will always want to nurture the brilliant sweet, gentle neshomas among us, and not try to destroy them. We need the Josephs of the world, and even though we know that they are not totally perfect, we should never try to destroy them or bring them down to our level just because we are afraid that if we do not destroy them, we will not be deserving of G-d's love. G-d loves us all in spite of our faults, the good ones, the mediocre ones, and even the bad ones.

Many thanks to Lester King and Michael Davis for all their help on my website  
<http://www.josephradinsky.com/>