

## Chanukah, Hellenism, and Hamas

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Jewish history isn't random. Selected to represent Hashem and inspire moral and religious spirit, our battles aren't local and aren't purely geopolitical. We stand against toxic cultures which threaten both moral spirit and religious consciousness. In defeating the dangerous ideas posed by these wicked cultures, we protect the world from its own darkness. So it was, and so it always will be.

Obviously, our current war with Hamas isn't purely military and isn't merely a local skirmish. We face sub-human barbarians who committed horrific atrocities in the name of God. Our eventual defeat of their culture of death, rape, and torture will protect this world from moral and intellectual collapse. The ferocious international opposition which our just war has aroused affirms that, in our battle, there is more at stake than merely the future of Gaza.

Thousands of years ago, our Chanukah battles were also ideological. The Maharal, claimed that the four notorious empires or the "arba malchiyot" which visited our planet weren't just mighty kingdoms which persecuted us and banned our religious freedom. Each empire posed a religious threat to humanity and each of these four dominant cultures introduced hazardous religious ideas, which, if left unchecked, would have infiltrated the human imagination and corrupted moral and religious experience. As the religious guardians of humanity, we battled these four empires and defended humanity from moral and religious collapse. Greece was the third of the four empires, and much was at stake for humanity at large in this epic battle between Athens and Yerushalayim.

Greece was the first civilization to both organize and dramatically improve our world. The word "cosmos" is a Greek term which translates into 'order', reflecting their newfound ability to organize and rationalize a previously vast and disorderly universe. Greek advances in science and mathematics lent predictability to a world, which for the ancients, had seemed chaotic and intimidating.

Greece also developed a rudimentary form of democracy, which offered a degree of fair and equitable government. Furthermore, major

advances in art and culture enriched the aesthetic quality of human experience. Greece was brimming with confidence as it sought to relandscape a new enlightened pan-Greek society, centered in Athens, which would unify man in pursuit of a more civilized and elegant lifestyle. Greece offered great hope for the human future.

Yet, despite these possibilities, Greek Hellenism was based upon flawed religious concepts which threatened the evolution of religion. Our defeat of Hellenism dismissed these erroneous notions, preserving moral spirit.

### Hellenism and Hamas

On the surface, there is nothing in common between our ideological war with Hellenism and our cultural war with Islamic fundamentalism. These struggles are separated by thousands of years and are being waged against very different cultures. However, each of these battles is centered upon the same city of Yerushalayim, and evidently, as different as they seem, they share a common feature. Nothing in Jewish history is random, everything repeats itself.

### Divine image?

In its rejection of ancient paganism, Greece renounced molten idols and no longer imagined gods to be grotesque, heavenly monsters. Yet, for all their religious progress Greece was utterly incapable of discovering a One Hashem responsible for all creation. Instead, Heaven was occupied by a noisy pantheon of gods and goddesses each with specific domains and responsibilities. The Greek gods who inhabited Mt. Olympus, weren't very much different from us, but were merely larger and stronger versions of Man.

Within this cavalcade of gods, the details of Man's creation remained murky. Greek mythology provides differing accounts as to how Man originated. In one famous myth Prometheus fashions man and delivers him creativity, only to anger a different god, named Zeus. The creation of Man is tangled in the rivalries between warring gods. Even amongst classical Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who studied virtue, knowledge, and the nature of the human soul, the description of Man's creation is either absent or vague.

Though Greece broke with crude paganism and introduced philosophical inquiry, it could not imagine a one Hashem Who both created Man and endowed him with Divine image. Instead believing in God creating Man in His image, Greece continued to craft gods in human image.

Being that Man wasn't fashioned with any surpassing divine image, he didn't possess any distinctive or lofty features to distinguish him from the rest of the cosmos. Man didn't possess autonomous free will because there was no all-powerful Hashem to grant it to him. Without free will, Man was left entirely to the whims of fate. In a famous mythological tale, Oedipus is prophetically informed that he will murder his father and marry his mother, yet his efforts to reverse this tragic fate are futile. Fate, not free will, determines human experience.

Our defeat of Hellenism reinforced the belief in an all-powerful Hashem who crafted Man as the masterpiece of His creation. Moreover, Hashem gifted us with divine image including traits such as speech, creativity, consciousness and free will. Reverence for Hashem demands respect for every human being gifted with divine image. Belief in Hashem demands respect for Man.

Though Greece took dramatic leaps, without belief in divine image, its ability to spur human progress was severely limited. Without belief in divine image Greek influence on the human development was capped. By the 3rd century the Roman empire, the cultural descendants of Greece, had begun its rapid decline and the prospects for further human development were handed off to other cultures. By denying tzelem elokim or divine image, Greece could not glorify Man and was limited in its ability to advance the human condition.

What went wrong?

In 2002, Bernard Lewis, a mid-Eastern historian authored a book entitled "What Went Wrong?", which probed the historical factors contributing to the decline of the Islamic world, in comparison to the West. Factors such as resistance to technology, a decrease in scientific inquiry and intellectual openness, an absence of political pluralism, and the presence of stifling social structures, all led to the stagnation of Islamic culture, while the West was racing ahead.

In addition to these socio-political influences there is a religious root for the relative lack of progress in the Islamic world. We believe that God is compassionate and desires welfare for the creatures He crafted in His image. When human beings suffer, or even when human experience is limited, we sense a religious calling to discover, innovate and transform our world. For a Jew progress, science, and discovery are driven by a religious impulse: Hashem is compassionate, fair, and just and wants human prosperity. We are His agents in delivering that prosperity.

To Islamic Fundamentalists, God is angry and vengeful. There is great joy in Heaven when innocents suffer or lose their lives. If God is angry and capricious, there is little religious motivation to alleviate human suffering or to ameliorate the human condition. In the West, religious-based humanism drove the evolution of modern society. While the West believed in a kind and just God, and labored to relandscape the world in His image, the East was bereft of any religious motivations for change and progress. A dysfunctional world of suffering and misery was in perfect concert with an impulsive and irate God.

Hellenism could not imagine divine image, while Islamic Fundamentalism scoffs at it. You cannot believe in Man's divine image, while also wantonly murdering, raping, mutilating, and burning human beings. If you believe in an angry and enraged God, these abhorrent acts can be committed in His name.

Just as the Hellenists before them, Islamic Fundamentalists threaten the cardinal belief in the divine image of human beings. Just as then, it is our historical responsibility to defeat these ungodly ideas and restore belief in a One, all-powerful and merciful Hashem who crafted us in His image and desires our well-being.

The Chanukah battle continues. We are modern day Hasmoneans waging a battle on behalf of tzelem elokim. The battle between good and evil wages on. There is only one ending to this battle. It just takes unwavering conviction and patience.

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