**“Jewish Sovereignty Was Restored”**

**Based on a *sicha* by**

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During the days of Chanuka, we add into our prayers the words:

Your children came to the Holy of Holies of Your House, and cleared Your Sanctuary, and purified Your Temple, and kindled lights in the courtyards of Your Sanctuary…

An interesting question arises in the wake of this historical episode: what happened next? What happened after the purification and rededication of the Temple and the miracle of the cruse of oil that lasted for eight days?

The answer is to be found in *Sefer Chashmonaim*:

And it was, when the nations around about heard that the altar had been rebuilt and that the Temple had been re-dedicated as before, they were incensed. And they conspired to annihilate the descendants of Yaakov who were in their midst, and began putting Jews to death and killing them… And the nations that were in Gilad were gathered against Israel who were on their border, to wipe them out, and they fled to the fortress of Datima… And they put about a thousand men to death there… They gathered against them from Acre and from Tyre and from Sidon, and the entire Galilee of the gentiles, to wipe us out… (*Chashmonaim* 1:5)

The situation, both in *Eretz Yisrael* and outside of the land, was very difficult. The war continued. Four of Matityahu’s sons were killed in battle. It was hard for them to exercise sovereignty.

The reason for this is clear, as we find in the Rambam's ruling that *kohanim* may not rule as kings. Their "realm" is limited to the priesthood alone. Moreover, there is an established principle: "Anyone who claims, 'I am a descendant of the Chashmonaim,' is known with certainty to be a slave, for none of them remained other than one child, and he perished" (*Bava Batra* 3b).

Already in the days of Yehuda Maccabee, there were some ugly practices in *Eretz Yisrael*. Already then, the internecine battles, which ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple, were evident. The clear impression arising from the historical facts that are known to us (including from Greek works dating to this period) is that *Am Yisrael* had nothing to be proud of during the period following the victory of the Chashmonaim. On the contrary - the great light that came about through the Chashmonaim, which we mention every year at this time, was only temporary. Hence, we must ask, why the great celebration?

The Rambam seems to understand the situation differently. I would like to emphasize his interpretation, with its special significance for our own era:

During the Second Temple Period, when the Greeks ruled, they issued decrees against the Jews, denying their faith, and did not permit them to engage in Torah and the commandments. And they appropriated their money and their daughters, and they entered the Temple and broke in, and defiled the holy things, and caused the Jews great anguish. And they subjected them to harsh oppression, until the God of our fathers had mercy on them, and delivered them from their hands, and saved them. And the sons of Chashmonai, the *Kohanim Gedolim*, prevailed, and killed them, and saved Israel from them, and appointed a king from among the *kohanim*. And **Jewish sovereignty was restored for more than two hundred years**, until the destruction of the Second Temple. (*Hilkhot* *Chanuka* 3:1)

The Rambam views the great achievement of the Chashmonaim as the very fact that Jewish sovereignty was restored until the time of the destruction. To his view, Chanuka is celebrated not only to commemorate the miracle concerning the oil, but also to commemorate the appointment of a Jewish king and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty for two more centuries. And this, despite the fact that the Jewish state that was thus established was extremely limited in its independence and its leaders were very far removed from Torah.

In our day, there is a growing number of people who value settling the Land of Israel more than they value Jewish sovereignty. I once heard about a conversation between two of the leaders of the struggle against the evacuation of Yamit. One asked the other, "What would you have done if, in 1948, you had been given the choice of remaining in Gush Etzion under Jordanian rule, or leaving in order to live within the sovereign territory of the State of Israel, under Israeli rule?" The other replied, "I would not have achieved such a high level that I could decide to remain; I would have left, to live in the State of Israel." When I heard this I was shocked and saddened. For two thousand years Jews have dreamed of Jewish sovereignty, and now that it finally comes, there is someone who argues that if he was "worthy," if he had achieved a sufficiently "high level," he would choose to remain outside its borders!

I have heard Religious Zionists claim that the State of Israel is merely a means to fulfill the commandment of settling *Eretz Yisrael*. I was astounded. Religious Zionism means one thing: God is bringing *Am Yisrael* back to their land. What differentiates our path from that of R. Shakh, for example, is the view that Jewish sovereignty is important and significant in and of itself. And this is doubly true after the Holocaust.

What better authority could we seek than the Rambam, who views the fact that Jews achieved some level of independence in their own country as one of the reasons for the holiday of Chanuka? We must guard ourselves against the anti-Zionist trends that are developing specifically within the extreme Zionist Jewish public.

 It is true that we have great differences of opinion in many realms within our small sovereign kingdom. Everything that exists in the western world makes its way here very quickly and finds its way onto the streets and into popular culture. The secular public has increasing difficulty with the idea of Jewish sovereignty. We, who recognize the value of Jewish freedom and sovereignty, and who recognize the significance of God's compassion towards us, must grant each value its proper weight.

If those two hundred years of Jewish sovereignty give added significance to the miracle of Chanuka, then the ingathering of the exiles, which is taking place before our eyes, is surely of no less significance!