

THE JLE JOURNAL

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SOME WARMTH AND LIGHT DURING THE LONG, COLD NIGHT

As the nights grow longer, the chill in the air becomes sharper and winter creeps closer, all of creation seems to be retreating and contracting. Death wraps its icy fingers around the trees and vegetation as it follows in winter's wake. The birds flee and the bears dig in. Indeed our Oral Tradition tells us that Adam

was terrified by winter's approach during his first year of existence. The neophyte was convinced that the increasing darkness and drop in temperature signified the impending doom of creation. It was only after the winter solstice, when the days grew longer, that Adam realized that the phenomena of winter were part of a cyclical process of birth, death and rebirth. Upon making this discovery, Adam celebrated

and thanked God, although it was still the dead of winter. Adam's celebration of the hope of light and warmth during that first cold, dark winter, was the ancient prototype of our Chanukah. In order to understand the deep essence of the festival of Chanukah, let us first recount the story...

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CHANUKAH: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

During the fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great conquered much of the known world, including Judea. He was positively disposed towards the Jews and permitted them to continue with their traditional way of life. However, following his death, there was a bitter power struggle between his generals.

Eventually, his vast empire was di-

vided among his successors. Judea fell into the portion of Antiochus IV. He was a cruel and arrogant man who was determined to "hellenize" the Jews and force them to assimilate into Greek society. He banned the practice of Judaism and established altars dedicated to the worship of Greek pagan idols in every Jewish village and town. The terrorized Jewish populace was presented with a choice: bow

down before the idols and demonstrate your allegiance to Antiochus, or die.

There were a few Jews who betrayed their religion, but many chose martyrdom. The heartrending story of Hannah, who witnessed her seven sons choosing a bitter death rather than abandoning their faith, took place during this era.

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THE REVOLT

At this dark moment in our history, the spirit of courage, dignity and faith shone forth. In a small village, not far from Jerusalem, the revolt began. The Greek general hoped to break the spirit of the local populace by forcing their venerable leader, the old Kohen (priest) Matityahu, to bow before the makeshift idol. The old man, whose eyes burned with resolve, stubbornly refused. A hellenize Jew leaped forth from the assembled crowd, wishing to demonstrate his loyalty. The enraged old man grabbed a sword and slew both the traitor and the general. At that point Matityahu, his five sons and a band of followers fled to the Judean hills to organize the revolt. The old man died shortly thereafter, but the struggle continued under the leadership of his son, who became known as Judah Maccabee.

Despite their small numbers and lack of equipment, after a series of spectacular battles, the Jewish rebels managed to rout the enormous and powerful Greek armies. Eventually, the "Maccabees" liberated Jerusalem. They

found the Holy Temple desecrated and in disarray. They cleansed and purified the building and reinstated the daily services. This day of the rededication of the Temple was the 25th of the Hebrew month of Kislev. This day of rededication is still celebrated by the Jewish People as the first day of Chanukah. ■

MIRACLE OF THE

When the Maccabees cleansed the Temple, they discovered that the Greeks had broken the seals of all the containers of olive oil, rendering them impure and unfit for use in the Menorah. They did find one small container of oil that still had the unbroken seal of the high priest. It contained enough oil to light the menorah for one night. A miracle occurred and the volume of oil that was sufficient for one night, burned for eight-the time required to travel to the site of production, make the oil and return to Jerusalem. In commemoration of this miracle, we celebrate Chanukah for eight days. ■

HOW WE CELEBRATE CHANUKAH

We light candles in honor of the miracle. There are various opinions as to how many candles are lit in each household on each night of Chanukah.



Happy Hanukkah!

There is a discussion among our sages whether on the first

night we should light eight candles and decrease by one each night or whether we should start with one light and increase by one nightly. A rationale for the former opinion is that on the first night, the oil contained the potential to burn for eight nights. This potential decreased each night. The latter opinion focuses on the actual achievement, rather than the potential. With each passing night the miracle became greater. The Talmud also teaches us that when we are involved in holy activities, we should always be striving to in-

crease and expand our service of God, therefore we increase the number of candles lit each night.

In our prayers, we insert special addenda expressing our gratitude to God for allowing a small group of "good guys" to miraculously defeat the mighty, wicked foe, for allowing goodness and justice to triumph over evil and oppression.

It is customary to eat foods such as doughnuts or "latkes" which are fried in oil, since the miracle of the lights was wrought through olive oil.



There is a custom for children to play with a "dreidel", a spinning top with four Hebrew letters inscribed on its four facets. The letters represent the Hebrew words



meaning "A great miracle occurred t/here (in the Land of Israel)".



It is also customary for parents to give their children "Chanukah gelt (money)".

These customs developed in order to facilitate the fundamental Jewish task of educating our children about their glorious heritage and teaching them to appreciate and delight in the miracles that God performed for us in ancient times and continues to perform to the present. ■

A CHANUKAH MESSAGE

There are many important and meaningful lessons to be learned from the story of Chanukah. Perhaps there is one idea that is especially relevant in these times, on both a national and a personal level. Sometimes we reach a point in life where it appears that all is for naught. We have entered a bleak, cold, dark wintry landscape. It seems that all is lost, that we will soon succumb to depression, to illness, to financial difficulty, to strained personal relationships, to the evil that seems to envelop us. We may feel just as Adam did back at the beginning of history that the end is near. We may feel just as the Jews did two-and-a-half thousand years ago that they could possibly be crushed under the weight of Greek oppression.

We should remember the lessons that history has taught. As the cold wind blows in the dark winter night outside, we should look into the warm glow of the Chanukah candles. We should reflect on the indomitable spirit of the Maccabees. In the face of overwhelming odds, they had the faith and courage to stand up for what was right.

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was right. They believed that if they did what ever was in their capacity to do. God would take care of the rest. This faith was so clearly vindicated through their unlikely victory and the miracle of the oil.

This miracle occurred specifically via

When one looks at an olive, one would never imagine that this small fruit contains the potential to produce fuel for a clear and bright flame. The same is true for the Jewish People. If one looks at the Jews, they are a tiny nation. They are not a physically mighty or ferocious people. Yet they have not merely survived crushing oppression against all the odds; but in spite of it, or perhaps because of it, they have brought so much light into the world.

olive oil. The oil is symbolic of the Jewish People. In order to obtain the oil, the olive must first be crushed. When one looks at an olive, one would never imagine that this small fruit contains the potential to produce fuel for a clear and bright flame. The same is true for the Jewish People. If one looks at the Jews, they are a tiny nation. They are not a physically mighty or ferocious people. Yet they have not merely survived crushing oppression against all the odds; but in spite of it, or perhaps because of it, they have brought so much light into the world. We introduced monotheism, which has set a basis for morality in much of the world. Proportion-

ately we have made more of a contribution to the fields of science, medicine, ethics and education (see a list of Nobel prize winners) than any other group.

On an individual level, one needs to experience challenges in order to actualize one's potential. Just as gifted musician will never express his gift until he picks up an instrument, so too, each one of us who has been given many gifts of inner fortitude and resilience, will never realize what we possess unless we are challenged.

Life's vicissitudes and troubles are indeed the instruments given to us to reveal our latent

gifts. If we view them as such, and do

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that which is in our ability to do and have faith that the darkest, coldest part of winter is really the beginning of renewal; then we will certainly bask in the joyful glow of light that will illuminate our lives. ■

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LIGHTING THE CANDLES

WHERE SHOULD THE CANDLES BE LIT?

Since the major reason that we light the candles is to publicize the miracle, the candles should be lit in a place where they will be easily noticed. Lighting them in a window that faces a public thoroughfare is ideal. If you live in a high-rise building, you should light in your window if there are neighboring buildings as high as your window,

otherwise it is best to light outside your front door where passers-by in your building will see the lights. In Israel, the custom is to light outdoors. At least the candles should be lit in a place where the members of your household will see them.

WHEN SHOULD THEY BE

As mentioned above, we light the candles in order to publicize the miracle. Therefore, the Talmud tells us, the candles should be lit at a time when the maximum number of people is on the street. At sunset into the early evening is when many people return home from the market place. This is the ideal time, but if one missed it, one may light the whole night until first light.

HOW ARE THE CANDLES LIT?

Set up the candles starting on the extreme right side of your "menorah".

Each night add one candle towards the left (replacing the used candles first then adding a new one to their left).

We use a "**Shamash**" ("service candle") to light the actual Chanukah lights. One of the reasons for this is M that we are not allowed to derive any personal, practical use from the Chanukah candles since they are there to publicize the miracle. This would not be apparent if we used them for our personal benefit. The Shamash is placed near the Chanukah candles but is set apart from them (usually placed at a different height) so that if we accidentally make use of the light, it will be as if we were using the light of the Shamash.

Light the Shamash and say the following blessings:

1. Baruch atah ado-noi, elo-hainu, melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah.

(Blessed are You Lord, our God, King of the universe; Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to light the Chanukah lamp.)

2. Baruch atah ado-noi, elo-hainu, melech ha'olam, sheh-assah nissim lavotainu bayomim hahaim b'z'man hazeh.

(Blessed are You Lord, our God, King of the universe. Who has wrought miracles for our fathers in earlier times and even in our times.)

If you are lighting for the first time this Chanukah add the following blessing:

3. Baruch atah ado-noi, elo-hainu, melech ha'olam, sheh-heh-cheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higi'anu l'z'man hazeh.

(Blessed are You Lord, our God, King of the universe, that You have allowed us to live and exist and reach this (joyous) moment.)

Start lighting the candles immediately. We start lighting the candles from left to right, starting with the evening's newly added candle (as opposed to the order in which we placed them in their holders which is right to left).

While we are lighting the candles we sing the song "**Haneirot hallalu**" which describes the miracles that are commemorated by lighting the candles. We then sing another joyous song which describes how the Jewish People have survived the nefarious plots of our enemies and how we have outlived them all.