guide to hanukkah
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by

IRVING GREENBERG

CLAL
The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership
421 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10001
(212) 714-9500
DR. IRVING GREENBERG, President of NJRC, co-edited *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel*. He has served as Rabbi of the Riverdale Jewish Center, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Jewish Studies of City College of City University of New York, and as Director of the President's Commission on the Holocaust.
INTRODUCTION

The eight days of Hanukkah are days of joy and celebration for Jews around the world. They are widely observed both by secular and religious Jews. Yet there is no book in the Bible that tells the story of the holiday.

Hanukkah is a unique holiday. Until Yom Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) was set up in this generation, Hanukkah was the only major Jewish holiday which had no Biblical basis. Yet despite the absence of Biblical authority, observant Jews recite the Hallel (prayers of Thanksgiving) with all the blessings. And when they light the Menorah, they bless God "Who commanded us to light the Hanukkah light".

Part of Hanukkah's popularity is due to 'mazel' (good fortune). In America, it has become the focus of an all out attempt by Jewish parents to reduce their children's 'outsider' status at Christmas time. In Israel, Hanukkah was strengthened by becoming the focus of nationalist feelings. The Maccabees were hailed as fighters for national independence as opposed to the 'Galut Jews' who were seen as passive towards their oppressors. Part of the Hanukkah mythos is the image of the struggle between the good guys (the Maccabees) and the bad guys (the Greeks); of Judah Maccabee, religious freedom fighter, against Antiochus, the mad tyrant. Since the righteous so rarely win in history, it is exciting to sing the "al hanissim" prayer celebrating the miracle of the delivery "of the many into the hands of the few, the wicked into the hands of the righteous". (Prayer Book)

The actual facts of Hanukkah are not quite as edifying as all that. The war was less a battle of Jews against their oppressors, the Greeks, than a civil war between factions of Jews. The Maccabean victory was far from decisive; it resembled, at best, a temporary peace. It is hard to believe but at first, the divine miracle was not appreciated by the Rabbis. And the victorious Jews divided almost immediately over how to deal with their newly won freedom. In time, the holiday
all but disappeared - only to be revived by Jews seeking a rallying point against Roman domination and a puppet government. In short, history is rarely as neat and as edifying as later ideology makes it out to be. Divine miracles are usually more ambiguous and less instantly credible than we think. And yet, if we strip away the patina of piety and propaganda, the real facts of Hanukkah may be even more instructive to us. The Hanukkah story provides powerful analogies to our present situation which can give us insight into this generation's challenges and how to deal with them.
I - HISTORY OF HANUKKAH

A. The Challenge of Hellenism

The story of Hanukkah really begins in the fourth century BCE with Alexander the Great's conquest of Asia and the Middle East. This conquest paved the way for the fusion of Greek culture and Eastern traditions which became known as Hellenism. The rise of cities, the relatively greater communication and dissemination of culture made possible by the new political structures gave the Hellenistic culture tremendous currency. The cultural life of the Jews was swept into the maelstrom of this new current as Hellenism proved highly attractive to Jews. A wealthy society (albeit one built on slave labor and poverty stricken masses) was created and Jews did very well financially within this world. Art, sculpture, and architecture flourished; literary masterpieces in a variety of genres (poetry, satire, biography, history) were created.

Euclidean geometry and Ptolemaic astronomy attained peaks of science that were not matched for another thousand years and more. Philosophy went beyond Plato and Aristotle to Stoicism, Hedonism, Scepticism and neo-Platonism. The rise of sophisticated criticism went hand in hand with the decay of the old pagan idolatry, leaving a void that was filled by scepticism, mystery religion, superstition and, later, even Judaism and Christianity. The cult of the body led to an interest in gymnastics, athletics and sculpture. Sensuality led to freer sexual morality and eventually to ascetic reactions that pitted the body against the soul. The cosmopolitanism of Hellenistic culture and its vision of the individual, supported and associated with political power, proved irresistible to the wealthier educated and ruling groups throughout the East and Palestine.

Alexander died in 324 BCE and within a generation, the Empire split into three fragments - the Macedonian Kingdom in Europe, Asia (including Syria, Mesopotamia, and Persia) ruled by the Seleucids, and Egypt ruled by the Ptolemies. For much of the next century and a half, Palestine was dominated alternately by the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. The battle for control and for dynastic stability within each group set the framework for Jewish existence as well. In accordance with Greek policy, Hellenic cities were established in Palestine; the settlers there intensified the diffusion of the foreign (Hellenistic) culture as never before. The result was a Greek-speaking, culturally Hellenistic Jewry in the Diaspora and an assimilating upper class in Palestine.
This foreign and technologically superior civilization acted as a powerful solvent of traditional Jewish practices and mores. By 300 BCE, records indicate Jewish youth participating naked in the exercises of the gymnasium as was the Greek custom. (Interestingly enough, the earliest record suggests that these youths insisted on special oil for anointing themselves and would not use pagan oils).

As time went on, Jewish traditions of separation and distinctiveness seemed increasingly parochial, old fashioned and embarrassing to well-to-do Jews. The highly respected Book of Ben Sira (2nd century) had to argue against Jews who were ashamed of the Torah and its laws.

The Book of Jubilees, a Midrash on Genesis, (written just after the Maccabean revolt) reflects the earlier conditions when it speaks of Jews who would not circumcise their children and who ignored the Sabbath and the commandments. That book 'quotes' Esau as having stated that no oath is binding forever - an implication that the earlier generations' acceptance of the law was not morally binding anymore. (This argument was used to challenge the claims of the Torah).

Hellenistic culture was supra-national and it set up strong social contact between people. As individuals Hellenized, tribal bonds and local loyalties evaporated. Hellenism ruled the world and the elite everywhere joined it. Thus each local culture faced the challenge of adopting Hellenism or losing its elite. But Jewish law prohibited intermarriage. And Jewish dietary laws prevented social contact. Soon, says the Book of Maccabees, a group of Jews arose who favored aggressive assimilation. "Let us go and make a covenant with the nations that are around us; for since we separated ourselves from them many evils are come upon us" (I Maccabees 1,11). They built a gymnasium in Jerusalem - "They even submitted themselves to uncircumcision [a painful operation to remove the marks of circumcision] and repudiated the Holy Covenant". [Ibid]

As the Jerusalem aristocracy and priests drew closer to the Seleucids, Jewish religion became a state religion. The priests' wealth and power was linked to commerce and tax collection. Wealthy Jewish tax farmers (Jews who paid a fixed fee to the King and then collected the taxes) became part of the ruling class.

Exploitation of poor Jews and of Gentiles caused resentment. Ben Sira put it succinctly when he wrote "As the wild ass is the lion's prey in the wilderness, so the rich eat up the poor". (Ben Sira, ch. 13, V.19).
As the wealthy Jewish upper class drew closer to the Greeks, they shocked the poor with their disrespect for the religious traditions. When Antiochus IV needed money for this plan to conquer Egypt, the Tobiads, a Jewish tax farmer family, gave a substantial payment to replace the high priest, Onias III, with his younger Hellenized brother, Jason, and to establish a Greek constitution for Jerusalem. While acting as High Priest, Jason had sent an offering of 300 drachmas of silver to the festival of Heracles at Tyre! Later, Jason would be replaced by an even more extreme Hellenizer, a layman, Menelaus, who bought the post with an even greater bribe. Jason, however, would not surrender his position to Menelaus so easily. He, at least, came from the legitimate priestly family.

A split between Jason's followers and Menelaus' group developed. Antiochus backed his second appointee, Menelaus. When Antiochus left on an Egyptian campaign, Jason overthrew Menelaus. A significant clash between moderate and extreme Hellenizers was in the making - a split that later proved crucial in the revolt. Antiochus returned, re-instated Menelaus and resolved to crush all opposition.

In 169 BCE, a Greek city was founded on one of the hills of Jerusalem, opposite the Temple Mount. The coast was clear for a full program of extreme Hellenization, instigated by Jews and backed by the full force of the King's might. It included giving a Greek name to God. (Traditional Jews would not pronounce the ineffable name of God). Then a sacred stone symbolizing the presence of God was placed on the sacrificial altar and the detested pig was established as the sacrificial animal. In December of 167 BCE, sacrifices according to the new ritual were begun on the Temple Mount.

Festivals of Dionysus were celebrated in Jerusalem. The implication was that the King would be included in the pantheon soon - as he was throughout the Empire - as Theos Epiphanes (the manifest God).

The high priest Menelaus seeing the growing shock and resistance of masses to the new developments, obtained a decree from the King prohibiting Mosaic law and ordering the introduction of pagan customs.

In Greek thought, the law-giver lays down the basis of social life. As the Greeks interpreted it: Moses had done it this way in giving the Torah and Menelaus could legitimately supplant the Mosaic law with his own. Antiochus IV probably anticipated no resistance to his decree; it made sense by Greek standards and he was assured of the need for it by Jewish leadership with which he worked.

Had the process of Hellenization continued gradually and peacefully, it might well have taken over the Jewish people. The brightest and the best, the richest and the most powerful were increasingly attract-
ed to it. The flow of authority and cultural superiority toward the Hellenists seemed irresistible. Yet there arose a resistance to the process and Antiochus' decree brought it to a head. The resistance came - let us be frank - from the country 'yokels' - from the farmers, the poorer classes, the less educated, the people who did not mix much with Greeks. Like 'hicks' who come to the big city and are horrified by its flesh pots and sinfulness, so the farmers of Judea were outraged and offended by the nakedness, the 'bohemian', avant garde air of Hellenism. They were angered by the dismissal of their sacred customs and the deification of King and cult of Zeus. In their boorishness and provincialism, in their 'reactionary' attitudes, the farmers seemed laughable and backward (we would say old-fashioned) to the Jewish Hellenizers.

Were these 'recalcitrant' Jews able to philosophize they might have argued that it was important that Judaism not disappear. Later philosophers came to see that the reduction of the Supreme Creator to just another god of a pantheon would have been an intellectual, theological and moral disaster. But since the traditional Jews were farmers and country men, they could not articulate a philosophic defense of their position. They only knew the old ways. They clung to them passionately, outragedly, doggedly. The Hellenists smiled condescendingly.

Backed by the power of the King and the growing religious indifference of the elite, the rituals of Zeus worship and pig sacrifice were extended widely and successfully throughout Judea. Hellenization seemed unstoppable. There were some who resisted. They were arrested, punished, slain. The King's order proscribing the Torah was enforced with a vengeance. Sabbath and circumcision observers were condemned to death. It seemed to many Jews that the end of days was coming and only divine redemption could save them from the forced paganization. The concept of martyrdom was developed. It was taught that "ever since Abraham, true Jews were ready to suffer endless torture and death on behalf of their faith". (S.W. Baron, Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol.1, p.230).

The categories of prophet and martyr became merged into one: the highest stage of serving God. Many stories have been passed down to us from that period. One of them was the story of Hannah, a Jewish mother who strengthened all seven of her sons, one by one, in their decision to die, rather than worship Zeus. She sent a message to Father Abraham with her last son saying that she had lived up to his example and then went to her own death.

The willingness to make this greatest of sacrifices - to die rather then to deny the Lord - became central in Jewish (and Christian) testimony in the following centuries. Immortality, resurrection,
and the consciousness of being precious in God's eyes were the re-
compense offered to the martyrs. This devotion should have warned
the Syrians and the Hellenizing Jewish leaders of stiffening resis-
tance but they failed to realize its import.

B. The Maccabean Revolt

In 167, in the town of Modiin, the new sacrificial cult was intro-
duced. There the resentment at the forced paganization and the
desecration of the altar with the unclean pig boiled over in an
act of rebellion. Mattathias, a priest of Modiin, stabbed a Jew
who sacrificed in the new cult, killed the King's agent and pulled
down the sacrilegious altar. These acts made him an outlaw.

Mattathias' social position made him the natural person to lead
a revolt. He was a priest of a small town - not Jerusalem. He
combined in himself enough aristocratic status and Hellenist edu-
cation to be a leader. At the same time, he was a 'country' man
who shared the conservative party's position. He was also
detached enough and rival enough to fight the Jerusalem priests
and their policies. It is also revealing that his five sons' names
-Yochanan, Simon, Judah, Eliezer, Jonathan- are all Hebrew
names in contrast with the Hellenist names like Jason and Menelaus
that abounded among the Jewish assimilating elite.

Elias Bickerman, a noted scholar, has pointed out that Mattathias
did not demand the right of freedom of religion, nor did he
fight for individual conscience. It was "a conflict between
earthly power and the law of the state of God" - opposition to
a King's order which was at variance with the commandments of
God. When they had the power, Mattathias and his sons gave
short shrift to the extreme Hellenistic party. They were not
democrats; they were Jews faithful to their God and Torah.
(see Bickerman- From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees, pp.96 ff)

Mattathias and his five sons (the Hasmonae family) fled to the
mountains to escape the punishment of the government for their
act of 'political terrorism'. They were joined by other Jews,
called Hasidim, pious ones, who sought to avoid the desecration
of the traditions. The group was too weak to fight head on with
the Syrians: farmers, after all, are not well trained soldiers. Like
the colonial militiamen in America, they were far more ready to fight
near home for family and local concerns than they were to fight for
national goals.

Mattathias died shortly after the revolt began. His son, Judah Maccabee
took over the leadership and proved to be a consummate master of guerilla
tactics. The word Maccabee is variously said to be derived from makkab-
the Hammer - or from the letters of mi kamocha baelim ado-nai-'who is like you among the mighty, o'Lord'? or from makab y'ah - the one named by God').

Mattathias' band began a guerilla war which depended on mobility, use of the mountains for inaccessibility and strategic manoeuvering, superior knowledge of the terrain and support of the local population. This tactic proved crucial in the unfolding of the revolt. While the historical sources are scanty, one can project the guerilla war effect. As the Hasmoneans fought, the basic resistance of the masses to Hellenization gave the guerillas a sympathetic local population. To quote the late chairman Mao: like good guerillas, they swam in the sea of the people. As the Syrians and their Jewish aristocratic allies sought to crack down and suppress the revolt, they alienated and polarized the local population, thereby strengthening the guerillas. On the other hand, local pagans and Hellenist settlers rallied to the Syrian government's side, eager to settle scores with their Jewish neighboring settlements and competitors.

C. The Maccabee Coalition

The entire process forced a choice on many Jews who had been drifting into Hellenism. Many who might have chosen Hellenism on religious grounds found themselves facing a crisis of national and personal identity. The destruction of local Jewish populations to advance the interests of Syrians and defense of their home soil by their Jewish brothers made many people decide, in the crunch, that they were primordially Jews, not Hellenists or Syrians. Of course, still other Jews identified with the Hellenists and so the war became a war of brothers. Such wars are uglier, more deadly, more polarizing. Judah and his band might well have succeeded but for the shift of moderate Hellenizers to the side of the revolt. Thus, what started as a revolt of the fundamentalists became a coalition of simple traditionalism and moderate Hellenization. The coalition proved to be more viable, more able to elicit support, more effective in its leadership then a purely traditionalist group would have been.

One striking episode illustrates the positive role of the Hellenization factor. The Hasidim's simple faith and fundamentalism was their great strength. It enabled them to be steadfast when more rational and cultured people lapsed into indifference, drawing away from Jewish tradition. However, the Hasidim's blind unsophisticated obedience to the law made them vulnerable. The First Book of Maccabees tells how a band of Hasidim was trapped in a cave on the Sabbath by a Syrian/Hellenizer army. The Jews, refusing to fight or even to wall up the caves on the holy day, were killed with their families without offering resistance. They chose rather to die than to 'violate' the law of God for which they had forsaken their homes and taken up arms.
Mattathias and his band realized that "if we all do as our brethren have done, and do not fight against the Gentiles for our lives and our ordinances, they will soon destroy us from off the earth". They resolved to defend themselves if attacked on the Sabbath. [In a later period, the Rabbis formulated this principle. "You shall observe my statutes and laws that a man shall do and live by them" (Leviticus 18:5) live by them and not die by them. . . . from this we learn that life saving overrides the Sabbath (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 85).] Later this was refined to the principle that every commandment of the Torah except three - idolatry, murder and certain sexual immoralities - can be overridden to save life (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 74a). The development by the Maccabees of the concept of hierarchy of value, of priority for life, reflects a philosophical influence that quite likely came about through the exposure to Hellenist modes of thinking and philosophy. This thinking became a hallmark of the Maccabees and the later rabbis who responded to Hellenism by respecting its ideas and methods where they could enrich and be assimilated compatibly with the tradition.

In short, without fundamentalism there would have been no Maccabean revolt; without moderate Hellenization, the revolt would not have succeeded. The differences between these allies led to significant splits later on and to errors on both sides. Yet, without the coalition, the Maccabean Jews would very likely have been destroyed.

There was another important bonus in this decision to fight on the Sabbath. Authority to govern and to give religious rulings was vested in the High Priest and his council. The assumption of the power to give such rulings confirmed the authority and leadership of Mattathias. The lesson, then, is obvious: authority flows from the ruling not the ruling from the authority. It is a lesson that modern day religious leadership must still learn.

D. The Maccabean Victory

At first, Judah defeated the Seleucid auxiliary armies because the government was preoccupied elsewhere. By 165, he had cut off Jerusalem. Then a major Syrian army, under the leadership of Lysias, was sent to fight. Despite Judah's victories, it became expedient for the rebel Jews to settle the war in the face of so serious a military threat. A Roman embassy intervened in favor of the Jews and Menelaus, the High Priest, served as mediator. The agreement that was reached was a triumph for the Maccabees. The King granted amnesty to the rebels and granted the Jews the right to use their own food and to observe their own laws as of old.
However, Menelaus and his group still maintained control of the city and the Temple and Judah's Hasidic followers soon melted away. They were satisfied with the grant of freedom to worship in the old way and were relatively uninterested in the concerns of a national government. Later in the year, the Syrian army was called away to another war. Judah gathered his followers and struck, capturing Jerusalem and driving Menelaus out of the priesthood. With the Temple now in their hands (except for one fortified section, the Accra, which held out), the Maccabees cleansed the city of all idolatry and purified and restored the Temple. On the 25th day of Kislev, three years to the day since the first pagan sacrifices had been offered, Judah offered up the restored Tamid (daily) sacrifice of the morning. For eight days, the dedication (Hanukkah—dedication) of the altar was celebrated. Later these days were designated to be celebrated annually.

Some scholars believe that the eight day period was modeled on the eight days of consecration of the first Tabernacle in the desert. (Leviticus, chapter 8;9 ff). Some point to the Solomonic dedication of the Temple which was described as lasting seven days (plus seven days more) plus one-then, on the eighth day, the people were sent home. (See I Kings, ch.8, v.65 ff)- [II Maccabees 2:12,4]

The first book of Maccabees suggests still another model for the holiday. Only a few months earlier, Judah and his followers had been hiding in caves in the mountains and were unable to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot properly. They pledged then that if they were ever victorious, they would fulfill the Sukkot holiday as the Torah had ordained it. And so on 25 Kislev, the suddenly victorious Maccabees celebrated a belated Sukkot. They took and and waved the lulav (palm) and etrog (citron), marched with the willows and even lit torches and held torch light parades - all for eight days in accordance with the Biblical laws of Sukkot. And so, for the first century or so of its existence, the Hanukkah holiday was called "the Sukkot of the month of Kislev". (II Macabees 10: 6-8; 1:9).

Despite the second smashing victory of Judah, the Maccabean wars were far from over. In 163 BCE Antiochus died during a campaign in Persia. Judah sought to reduce the final fortress of Accra in Jerusalem. The Hellenizers called for help. Lysias returned with a major army, defeated Judah's men and besieged them on Mount Zion. Judah's troops dispersed and his cause appeared lost when suddenly word came to Lysias that Antiochus had appointed a new regent of his kingdom, a general named Philip, who was about to seize the kingdom in Antioch for himself. Lysias hastily negotiated an agreement with Judah which granted Jews the right to live undisturbed and to attend to their own concerns. The agreement stipulated that the Jews regain the Temple and be per-
mitted "to live after the manner of their ancestors". The earlier agreement had allowed Jews to live in accordance with Jewish law. Now the treaty of 162 gave the Torah full authority as the obligatory law of the land. In addition, the new King had Menelaus executed for having instigated Antiochus to abrogate the ancestral constitution of the Jews. The triumph of traditional Judaism appeared to be complete.

E. After the Maccabean Victory

Once again, however, the limitations of Judah's followers became apparent. The Hasidim were essentially apolitical, interested in the right to strictly observe their faith rather than in the governmental process. They correctly sensed that for any government to survive it would have to engage in diplomacy and intercourse with the Hellenist Empire, a course which would once again bring Hellenist influence to bear on national life. As long as they were not bothered religiously, they were content to let the Syrian government rule. Thus, when the government appointed a new high priest, Jakum, who hellenized his name to Alcimus, the Hasidim were the first to accept his authority. Judah, however, withdrew to the mountains.

When Antiochus V was overthrown in Antioch, Judah sought to exclude Alcimus from the priesthood on the grounds he had tainted himself by joining in pagan worship during the time of persecutions. The majority stood by Alcimus. A bitter war followed: once again brother fought against brother. Judah won and sought out a treaty with Rome to stabilize his position. The Syrian government retaliated with a massive invasion. Most of Judah's troops fled, and he was left with eight hundred men. In a gallant last stand, Judah gathered his remaining men to fight. In the battle of April 160 BCE, Judah was killed. In two years Judah's forces had gone from triumph to tragedy. Large numbers of Maccabean followers were executed and Judah's surviving brothers fled to the wilderness.

In 152 BCE, another revolt broke out against the Seleucid King, Demetrius I, the man who had conquered Judah. He desperately needed military allies and the Jews were known to be excellent fighters. Demetrius realized that only Jonathan, Judah's brother, could organize the army for him - so he quickly negotiated a deal which allowed Jonathan to occupy Jerusalem in return for his military help. The pretender to the Syrian throne now made a counter offer and appointed Jonathan, High Priest!

This incredible reversal of fortunes restored the Maccabean dynasty. For 20 years, the brothers Jonathan and Simon played politics back and forth between reigning Kings and contenders for the Seleucid throne. The peak years were 142-139 when Judea was completely exempt from tribute. By 130 Jewish luck ran out and John Hyrkanos,
Simon's son was reduced to a dependent vassal status. Over the next twenty-five years, Hyrkanos restored the military power of Israel by developing a mercenary army. The achievement alienated him from the people who resented the foreign army and the sacrifice of treasure (including temple treasure) needed to support the aliens. The Hasidim's forebodings of inescapable Hellenization had now come true. Hyrkanos' son, Alexander Jannai was successful in expanding the boundaries of Judah substantially, but the estrangement from the people - especially from the rising Pharisees - remained a feature of the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty. It persisted down to the reign of the usurper and stranger, Herod, who took over the dynasty with Roman sponsorship. The increase of wealth and dominion by the Hasmoneans turned them into tyrants and even assimilationists.

The Rabbis were so estranged from the Hasmoneans that they do not mention Judah Maccabee in the Talmud. The justification of the holiday they offer is the classic tale of the miracle of the Temple oil which lasted eight days instead of one day. Indeed, the holiday was so neglected that the schools of the great sages, Hillel and Shammai, had no tradition concerning whether the Hanukkah lights were lit in ascending or descending order (one candle the first day up to eight on the eighth day or the reverse). Yet as Roman oppression grew, the longing for independence focused on dreams of a new Hasmonean to throw off the hated foreign yoke. Then the holiday of Hanukkah regained importance as the focus of the dream of a new restoration. Once recovered, it remained a central and popular holiday. Despite Judah's untimely death and overthrow, and despite the later decline of the Hasmonean rulers' religious quality, the work of the Maccabees was essentially a success. Had the revolt not taken place, the combination of political backing and Hellenistic cultural imperialism might have overwhelmed Judaism. Thanks to the Maccabee uprising, the basic rule of Torah was assured. Although Hellenization necessarily and inescapably continued - it was incorporated into a Judaism that could assimilate these new elements to itself. Thus it maintained a coherence and integrity which enabled it to be a vital religion. The rise of the Pharisees and their theological revolution - developing the fullness of the oral Law, and incorporating the individualism and sacred dignity of the human fully into Judaism - was made possible by the temporary respite won by the Maccabean revolt.

History is rarely neat. The liberators became tainted. The Hasidim's disillusionment with government only intensified the assimilation and alienation which separated the Hasmonean rulers from the people. The moderate Hellenizers saved the revolt, yet Hellenization led to moral and political deterioration of the rulers that followed.
Following generations were embarrassed at the deviations and ambiguities of the actual historical record and of the movements through which God saved the people and the faith. So they idealized the holiday. The Rabbis decreed that the prophetic verses "not by might, nor by power but by my spirit, saith the Lord" be made the focal point of the Hanukkah prophetic readings. Even the focus on the miracle of the oil was misleading in that it sanctified the miracle of the tenuous military victory and of the coalition which saved Judaism.

Still the ultimate gift the Maccabees have given later generations may well be the holiday of Hanukkah itself. It took great spiritual courage to recognize that marginal, sharply contested victory as the decisive redemption which it actually was.

It took even greater courage to apply the classical model of Exodus to the event. The Hasmonaeans believed that just as God had led the people Israel out of Egypt so had God redeemed the people in their generation. Therefore, the Maccabees decreed a holiday celebrating God's new redemption, even though it was achieved through human agency. On this humanly instituted holiday, one recited a blessing to the Lord "who...commanded us to light the Hanukkah Candle" and "who performed miracles for our fathers in those days and at this time". Chayim Nachman Bialik, the great Hebrew poet has suggested that the impact of Exodus had weakened by Maccabean times, centuries later. Had Hanukkah not restored that sense of God's redemption in history, the conviction of ultimate deliverance which is Judaism's central affirmation and promise might well have faded. (see: Sefer Ha Moadim, Hanukkah, p. 146).

II - CELEBRATION

The standard model of Jewish holidays commemorating historical triumph or tragedy is reenactment - retelling the story, with food, song and other dramatization of the event. Due to the checkered history of the Hanukkah holiday, this pattern is not as well developed as usual. The most notable omission is that of a book to tell the story. Neither the First nor Second Book of Maccabees (which tell the story in variant ways) were accepted into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. Interestingly, they were incorporated into the Christian Bible as the last books of the "Old Testament". This seems to reflect the high status of the books among the Jews who became Christians (they were included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible which was read and accepted as Holy Scripture by Greek speaking Jews and their fellow travelers) and the influence of the Maccabean martyrdom stories on the early Church and its martyrdom struggles.
An attempt to fill the void of the missing book was made in the "Megillat Antiochus" (Antiochus Scroll), a legendary account of Hanukkah which borrows from the First Book of Maccabees, probably written around the 8th or 9th century. It was read aloud in some synagogues, notably in Italy, and it has been found in a number of manuscript Torah scrolls following the Five Books of Moses or among the five Biblical scrolls. However except for the Yemenite liturgy, this book has disappeared from use.

Unlike the Biblical holidays (except for Purim) the days of Hanukkah are not considered sacred time in which work is prohibited. (One custom achieved some currency: that women not work while the Hanukkah lights are burning). The eight days are marked by prayers of Thanksgiving (Hallel). A special song of praise Al Hanissim ("for all the miracles and the redemption", etc.) is added to the Shmoneh Esrei (the central silent prayer) three times a day and to the Grace After Meals.

The major ceremony of the holiday is the lighting of the Hanukkah Menorah. The purpose of the lighting is to 'publicize the miracle' of Hanukkah. While the Talmud focused on the miracle of untainted oil that burned for eight days instead of one (Babylonian Talmud Sabbath 21b), Maimonides and other codifiers (and the prayer of Al Hanissim itself) make clear that the primary miracle is the military/diplomatic triumph of the few over the many. Due to the dominance of lights, the holiday was known for a while as Chag Haurim (Urim - lights).

Although the Biblical candelabrum was a seven branch Menorah, special eight branch menorahs (nine branch for those that provide a Shamash - or lighting candle) were created for Hanukkah. One Menorah may be lit for the entire family, but the beautiful tradition has developed for each member of the family - even children - to light his/her own menorah.

The school of Hillel ruled that one candle should be lit on the first night and one additional light be added every subsequent night. The school of Shammai suggested starting with eight candles the first night and decreasing one every night. This is in imitation of the miracle in which the supply of oil was progressively used up. The tradition of adding lights each night won out - on the grounds that holiness and sanctity should be directed toward growth and not toward shrinkage! One candle is lit the first day. The candle is placed on the right side (which is generally the preferred side in Jewish ritual). One additional candle is added every night (so you light two on the first night, three on the third night, etc.). The candles are added each night from the right to the left of the menorah. The newest candle is lit first - so that the actual lighting ceremony is conducted from left to right.
Since the original lighting in the Temple was done with olive oil, many prefer to light menorahs using oil and wicks. Beautiful multi-colored Israeli made candles are available for those who use candle menorahs. It is especially nice to use Israeli products whenever possible so that you get the additional mitzvah of supporting the modern Maccabees. Traditional Rabbinic opinion has leaned toward using electric menorahs as supplements to a regular menorah.

Since the object of the lighting is to publicize the miracle, the candles are lit and placed near the windows so they can be seen by passers-by who will be reminded of the holiday and the redemption. If one lives in a high rise apartment (over the eyesight line of pedestrians) the custom is to consider the family the 'passer-by' and place the menorah where they can best see it. One tradition is to place the menorah near the door, opposite the Mezuzah, so that a person entering the apartment is 'surrounded by mitzvot'.

It is customary to light the candles right after sundown (while people still walk the streets) to burn for at least a half hour (so the lights will be seen and the miracle publicized). However, if working parents come home later than sundown (as they frequently do in the short winter days) the candles may be lit at any hour of the evening - as soon as possible. On Friday evenings, the candle should be lit before the Sabbath has begun - i.e. before lighting the Sabbath candles. (Traditional law requires that the candles burn for a half hour after 'sunset' and the Sabbath candles are lit almost an hour before that time, so it's best to check your local calendar or rabbi for proper lighting times. Many traditional Jews use larger candles on Friday to last for the extra period).

The menorah may be of almost any shape as long as it keeps the lights distinct - although the straight line menorah is preferred. It is customary to use a special candle (the Shamash-servant) to light the others. Since the candle/lights are devoted to the commandment of publicizing the miracle, they are not used for any other purpose (such as illuminating the room for reading or to light other candles). Hence the use of a shamash candle which is more elegant than matches.

It is customary to put the shamash on a different level or place to make clear it is not one of the candles burning in celebration of the day of Hanukkah.

On the first night, three blessings are said over the light.

1. L'hadlik nayr shel Hanukkah (to light the Hanukkah light)
2. She-assah nissim (who performed miracles for our fathers in those days and at this time)
3. Sheheheyanu (who has kept us alive and brought us to this time)

For the rest of the holiday only the first two blessings are said.

The lighting is a wonderful opportunity for the family to sing the traditional Hanukkah songs together - Ha-nayrot ha-lalu kodesh haym (these are sanctified candles), Maoz tsur (fortress rock of my redemption), al hanissim, and other songs of thanksgiving. It is a good time for telling the story of Hanukkah and discussing its fine points because the ceremony is always such a warm and joyous family occasion.

It is customary to light candles wherever you are; even if you are away from home. If one is a guest at someone's home and has no access to a menorah or lights, it is considered meritorious to contribute a token amount toward the cost of the candles so as to be truly a partner in the mitzvah. If one cannot light any candles, one can make the blessing on seeing a lit menorah, omitting only the first blessing, I'hadlik nayr (to light the Hanukkah candle).

III - WOMEN AND HANUKKAH

There are special traditions associating women with the Hanukkah miracle. The most famous is that of Judith and Holiofernes. Tradition has it that, during the Maccabean wars, Judith's home town of Betulia was besieged by a Greek army led by Holiofernes. The military situation appeared to be hopeless. Despite the fact that she was a modest, shy widow, Judith volunteered to go on a dangerous mission to save the town. Dressed stunningly, she went to seek out Holiofernes. The general, besotted by lust, invited her to his tent and remained alone with her. She plied him with wine and good food and when he was overcome with sleep, she cut off his head and escaped. When the Greeks discovered Holiofernes' death, they fled in panic and the town was saved.

Since a woman had been a primary agent of a Hanukkah redemption, the Talmud ruled that women are included in the obligation to light candles (although normally they are excused from time fixed positive commandments). Since women are obligated to light, they can halachically fulfill the mitzvah and light candles on behalf of others as well. Various halachic strategies have been invoked to withdraw this assignment for women. However, more and more women are exercising their right to participate.

The involvement of a woman in the redemption created two other traditions. The first is the tradition that women not work during the period the candles are burning and the second has to do with that gastronomic delight of Hanukkah, the latka (ground potatoes fried in oil). Tradition has it that Judith prepared a dairy meal for Holiofernes to make him very thirsty. It became customary to serve an elegant dairy meal in reenactment of that event.
-and a latka is, after all, an elegant preparation of a pretty inelegant food - a potato. (If your latka is heavy and hard rather than light and heavenly, you haven't fulfilled the mitzvah!)

**IV - THE JOY OF HANUKKAH**

Jewish tradition sought to embellish these days of joy. Since joy overflows, it is customary not to fast or mourn during this period. It became the practice to have festive meals for the eight days and in addition to latkas, jelly doughnuts fried in oil became popular. (Both summon up the miracle by the use of oil).

It is striking however, that whereas the festive meal of Purim is central to the holiday, Hanukkah feasting is more marginal. It is the Hallel - the spiritual songs of praise - that stand out in this holiday. Commentators have suggested that this difference reflects a deliberate religious strategy. On Purim the Jewish people's physical existence was threatened. Therefore the body was entitled to a special treat in compensation for the anguish and doom it suffered through. On Hanukkah, the religious and spiritual existence of the Jews was challenged. If the Jews had yielded their religious principles, no harm would have come to them. Therefore the soul and the spiritual should be the focus of the holiday. Hallel prayers are said on Hanukkah although they are not said on Purim. The difference is that Purim was a temporary reprieve. After the Purim victory, the Jews remained dependent on the goodwill of a government and society in which Jews were, at best, a tolerated minority. Hanukkah deserves Hallel because it was a fundamental solution: it gave Jews some independence and some measure of control over their fate. In the long run, says the tradition, this is the fundamental basis of redemption. In this sense, Hanukkah is a 'Zionist' holiday.

Other popular sources of joy, especially for the recipients, are Hanukkah gifts, and of course, Hanukkah gelt (money). I feel a bit ambivalent about these phenomena. On the one hand Judaism should be a source of joy, gratification and pleasure: and on the other hand, it is hopeless and wasteful to think one can offset Christmas by lavishing gifts. The only way Jews can avoid being outsiders is to live in a majority Jewish culture, i.e. Israel. However, an American Jewish home, filled with the hope and strength of Judaism all year round, will not feel terribly deprived at this time of the year. Of course, in giving gifts, one should never forget the importance of sharing with the poor through gifts and charity.

It should be added that some scholars have sought to connect the lights of Hanukkah and the Christmas celebration to a winter solstice festival celebration of the passing of the shortest day of the year and the consequent lengthening of the day. (This winter shrinking of the daylight hours has been a source of fear in many world-wide cultures). The irony
of this interpretation is that it would connect Hanukkah to Christmas
in a way that is scholarly as against the simple assimilation which brings
the two together in all too many Jewish homes.

I am fairly sceptical of this claim and do not see it as very convincing.
If it were true, however, Hanukkah would be another example of how Jewish
tradition takes natural phenomena (such as spring or harvest festival)
and transmutes it into a festival of history (such as Passover and Exodus,
redemption). This symbolizes the movement from necessity and physical
dependence on the world toward human freedom and striving to redeem the
world.

Another outstanding celebration device added to Hanukkah has been draydel. Those who would like to part quickly with their gelt Hanukkah and other-
wise - play the game of draydel. On the draydel are written in Hebrew
letters: nun, gimel, hay, shin - symbolizing: nays gadol haya sham - a
great miracle occurred there. (In Israel, it is inscribed a great miracle
occurred here). Each player puts money into "the pot". Then the draydel
is spun. If it falls on a nun, it means nothing happens. Gimel means
"ganz" (winner takes all). Hay means "half" (winner takes half).
Shin means "shtell" or put in money.

To be honest, we must admit that the Rabbis opposed these gambling
games. The folk adored them, however. The Rabbis, nonetheless,
consider gamblers' earnings as akin to taking someone's property
without real consent, and so the custom arose for all the money
used to play to be given to charity after the games were over,
or to play with nuts or other trivia in the pot.

V - REFLECTIONS ON HANUKKAH TODAY

The fundamental issues of Hanukkah are still very much with us.

One theme is the clash of the universal with the particular. Hellenism
saw itself as the great universal human culture, open to all. It dis-
missed the tradition and separatism of the Jews. It demanded that
Jews give up their distinctiveness for the sake of the betterment of
mankind. In our time too, many universal cultures - Marxism and Commun-
isms, certain forms of liberalism and radicalism, fascism - even mono-
lithic Americanism - have all demanded that Jews dissolve and become
part of mankind. The same attack is found in Christian spiritualism
which denies the need for a people, Israel, or the State of Israel.
The U.N. anti-Zionist resolutions essentially make the same claim.
There is no need for Jews to have their own state, Therefore Zionism-the
desire for a Jewish state - is, by definition, racism - since
Jews could just as well live in a 'secular' state. All these philosophies
are claiming that Jews can depend on humanitarianism (liberalism,
communism, Arab kindness, etc.) for their rights. The Maccabean revolution challenged all of these claims. It said that a universalism that denies the rights of the particular to exist is inherently totalitarian and will end up oppressive in the name of one humankind. Universalism must surrender its overweening demands and accept the universalism of pluralism. Only when the world admits that oneness comes out of particular existences, linked through overarching unities, will it escape the inner dynamics that lead to repression and cruelty and to homogenization of culture.

Those stubborn 'reactionary' Hasidim raised one of the great, subtle issues of political existence and religious truths which is only coming into its own in the 20th century. Ultimately, the touchstone of human survival will be the ability of passionately held beliefs and absolute commitments to incorporate pluralism and the inherent dignity of the other into their own structures. How to achieve this without surrendering to indifference or to pure group selfishness is the great challenge of our time. On Hanukkah, we celebrate that challenge and we affirm our Jewish conviction that we will never again let universal rhetoric ('to make the world safe for . . . . . democracy, Communist utopia, America first, etc.) cripple our right to defend ourselves. On Hanukkah Jews urge humankind to take responsibility for the varieties and multiforms of human life. In this sense too, Hanukkah is a profoundly Zionist holiday which asserts the right and the necessity of politically self-determined existence.

Hanukkah also dramatizes the positive strength of pietism, of Hasidism's unquestioning loyalty to Judaism. It asks us to review our own easy acceptance of cosmopolitanism and sophisticated culture as superior to the sentiment and tribal feeling of being Jews. It asks us whether, consciously or unconsciously, we are part of the Hellenizing assimilating majority. Like the crisis of the Holocaust and the threats to Israel it forces us to face up to the issue: are we ultimately Jews? In an ultimate crisis of loyalties would we choose Jewish survival?

At the same time, Hanukkah warns us of the limits of fundamentalism. It shows the central necessity of uniting all Jews and warns us not to dismiss assimilating Jews. In a showdown (as in 1967 and 1973) many more Jews will be with us. We need a coalition and symbiosis of traditional Jews, modernizing Jews and those assimilating Jews that we can reach. The real task is to begin the 'guerrilla warfare' that means people from their excessive absorption in the status quo and liberates them for authentic Jewish existence.

Hanukkah shows the fragility of historical redemption and the ambiguity of its messengers and leaders. Salvation does not come from one group or through pure angelic leaders. Redemption comes out of a mixture of self-interest, ideas, class and social conflicts, out of governmental errors and human miscalculation. One should not be put off by the all too human frailties and shortcomings of Jewish leaders and organiz-
ations. The faults should be challenged and worked on but the ultimate validity of the cause is not destroyed by such flaws. There are those who insist on perfect religious frameworks or absolute victories, who grow disillusioned with the ambiguous victories of Israel or the Jewish community. There are those who grow weary that the victories of 1967 and 1968 are not final. Hanukkah shows that spirit can persist and that redemption in history can be discerned in the flawed partial human realities we create, with God's help.

By the same token, there are religious Jews who insist that this generation does not have the spiritual authority to create Yom Atzmaut as a religious holiday or to develop Jewish Law to respond fully to the valid needs of the Jewish state. The lesson of the Maccabees' rulings is that authority in Jewish law flows from the community of Israel (standing before its God and its commandments). This bestows the authority on lesser judges to make the rulings needed for the Jewish people's life. "Jephtah (the lesser judge) in his generation is equivalent to Samuel (the great prophet) in his generation." (Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana 25b)

Those who persevere will live to celebrate the flowering of the victory. Those who insist on perfection or nothing will surrender the world to evil, making possible the triumph of evil. That is the punishment for simple mindedness.

Finally, Hanukkah challenges us to recognize the revelation and redemption of our time. The obligations we take on for Israel, for Soviet Jewry, for rebuilding Jewish life and for humankind are the commandments God has given us in our time. The gratitude we feel for the miraculous events of our generation gives us the strength to persevere.

The battle of Hanukkah is being fought again in this time. It is our task to fight it – through joy, tradition and family life, through hope and realistic dreams, through partial solutions and visionary persistence. Pessimists and assimilationists have often told us that we have no more oil to burn, that we must surrender to the darkness. With the help of God, enough Jews will light the lamps; though our flame may flicker, it will never go out.
OUR NAME

Yisrael refers to the indivisibility and sacred collectivity of the Jewish people. It is in this spirit of pluralism and respect for the many forms which Jewish practice may take, that we have chosen the word CLAL for our name. CLAL heralds our belief that only by strengthening each and every constituent part, and by encouraging dialogue between groups, can all of Judaism be strengthened. CLAL symbolizes our commitment to serve as a Center where Learning and Leadership go hand in hand.

WHY CLAL

CLAL is dedicated to preparing Jewish leaders to respond to the challenges of a new era in Jewish history; challenges which include the freedom to accept or reject Judaism, the liberty to choose from an abundance of Jewish values and lifestyles, and the exercise of Jewish power after the Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel.

CLAL believes that freedom and pluralism are unparalleled blessings in Jewish history which can stimulate higher standards and more individual participation, strengthen each segment of Judaism, and enrich the totality of Jewish life.

WHAT WE DO

CLAL educates Jewish leaders, teaching them the lessons of leadership through the treasures of Jewish history and texts. Our programs strengthen Jewish unity, create a deeper appreciation for Jewish culture and religion, yield insights from our tradition, and offer authentic Jewish responses which can be applied to private behavior and communal policies.

CLAL provides its learning experiences to Jewish leaders through classes, dialogues, study groups, conferences, publications and retreats. Our programs are offered to Jewish groups in their communities throughout North America.

CLAL (formerly the National Jewish Resource Center) was founded in 1974 by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, Elie Wiesel and Rabbi Steven Shaw. In 1983, the Institute for Jewish Experience, founded by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, merged into CLAL.

HOW WE DO IT

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