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ותשובות

**Frequently  
Asked  
Questions  
and  
Answers**

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: HOW TO LIGHT RIGHT

### SURVEYING THE RANGE OF OPINION IN TRADITIONAL LAW

by Noam Zion

#### INTRODUCTION

**M**ore than on any other holiday there is a contemporary consensus on how Jews of all stripes celebrate Hanukkah — candle lighting at home after sunset. Yet even according to the halacha there is latitude and multiple options on how, where, when, who and with what one lights Hanukkah lights. Traditional Jewish law defines the purpose of candle lighting as symbolic “publicity” (*pirsum hanes*) for the miracle of Hanukkah. The medium for that message is light. Yet there is a great deal of variety in how to personalize and to enhance the beauty and intensity of the mitzvah. That personal touch is called “*hiddur*,” special enhancement.

Below are most frequently asked questions and short but varied answers reflecting the complexity of Jewish Law.

#### 1. Buying Candles and Menorahs

**Q** *Do the candles have to be multicolored?*

**A** No! The most recommended fuel is pure olive oil with a quality wick; however, all fuels are acceptable.<sup>1</sup> White wax candles became very popular in the 19th century because of their steady light. Colored candles first appear in 20th century America.

**Q** *How many candles are needed?*

**A** The **bare minimum** is one candle per household per night that burns for ½ hour each night. In theory one could use one Shabbat candle (that burns for 4 hours) and light it again and again every night for 8 nights (½ hour each). However, going back to **Hillel** (40 BCE), Jewish law has commended the use of **an additional candle added for each subsequent night, hence totalling 36 candles** for all

eight nights. Each candle must have enough fuel to burn for at least 30 minutes. Thus each night adds to the *Kedusha* (holiness) by adding more light (*maalim bakodesh*).<sup>2</sup>

Alternatively, or additionally, the Rabbis have encouraged every family member — men and women — to light their own menorah (or set of candles). Thus a family of five would need five candles on the first night and 20 candles on the fourth night of Hanukkah, not including the *shamash* — the extra candle used for light, which is explained below. The recommendation to add an extra candle nightly or to provide separate menorahs for each family member is called *mehadrin* from the term *hiddur*, meaning extra enhancement of the mitzvah.

**Q** *If we need 36 candles for each household, then why does the standard box of Hanukkah candles contain 44?*

**A** Since the 36 candles are wholly symbolic, their light may not be used in any other way. The *shamash*, meaning the “**service candle**” provides the light by which to read the blessings or to eat or to maneuver in an otherwise darkened room, as well as to light the Hanukkah candles. **8 service candles plus 36 Hanukkah candles equals 44 per box.** Obviously one can rely on the electric lights or on a different type of candle to serve as the *shamash*.<sup>3</sup>

One way or another, a *shamash* is needed to provide useable light, and to show the observer that the Hanukkah candles are superfluous hence symbolic. Therefore the *shamash* should be set off from the Hanukkah candles in height or location.<sup>4</sup>

1. *Aruch Hashulchan Orach Hayim* 673:1

2. *T.B. Shabbat* 21b

3. *A.H.O.H.* 671:21

4. *A.H.O.H.* 673:9

**Q** How many menorahs does a family need?

**A** None! Until the late Middle Ages there were no special Hanukkah menorahs. People might use a series of ordinary individual cups of oil or a multiple wick device, the same lamps used for everyday lighting.

Today, the more *Hanukkiyot* the better. Each family member, as well as each guest of whatever age, may have their own 8-branched candelabrum with a special place for the 9th candle — the *shamash*. However, traditional Sefardi families follow the halacha that each household uses only one menorah lit by the head of the household, to represent everyone in unison.

The menorah can be improvised or professionally made. The rabbis felt that the more expensive the workmanship and material, the more the special “*hiddur*” (added aesthetic and personal investment); however a child’s makeshift menorah can also be a spiritually significant example of *hiddur*.

**Q** Isn’t it true that a round menorah is prohibited?

**A** Not really. **The wicks may not be clumped together to look like a bonfire, but as long as each separate flame is clearly distinguished, it is permitted to use a round menorah, as was the custom in many countries.** Of course, some rabbis urge that one avoid any round menorah lest it appear like a bonfire but that level of stringency is not obligatory.<sup>5</sup>

**Q** If it is safer and easier to use an electric menorah, can we say the blessings over it as we plug it in?

**A** Most contemporary Orthodox rabbis discourage the use of electric menorahs for a host of reasons. However, where there are no other alternatives, it may be acceptable, though it is dubious if a blessing may be said (See the sidebar on electric menorahs below).

5. *A.H.O.H.* 671:13

## When Are Electric Menorahs Permitted?

### A Summary of Rabbi Nachum Rabinovich’s Halachic Ruling for Israeli Soldiers<sup>6</sup>

**Q**uestion — May one light electric flashlights to fulfill the obligation to light the Hanukkah light? (Please note that in the army, burning candles inside a tent may be dangerous.)

**R**esponsum — Some rabbis claim that since electricity did not exist in the days of the Talmud, the Rabbis could not have intended to permit the use of electricity. Solid candles (wax or tallow) were only invented several hundred years ago. The Maharal of Prague, Judah Lowe, even forbade the use of wax candles “since the original miracle (in the Temple) was done with oil,” while wax or tallow (fat) candles are not even called “a light” (*ner*).

However Rabbi Moshe Isserles reports that “in some countries Jews light wax candles since they give out a clear flame like oil.”

Can we imagine that wax candles are forbidden? After all, the *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>7</sup> establishes: “all the oils and all the wicks are kosher for the Hanukkah lights.” Might this all include electric menorahs?

There are no proofs and no convincing theories to forbid or to permit the use of electric Hanukkah lights. Therefore, let the custom stand. Jews world over have preferred to use oil or wax candles to observe this mitzvah. Yet there is also a lovely new custom to light electric menorahs inside houses and courtyards and especially on the roofs of public buildings in order to publicize the miracle. Still we do not recite a blessing over these electric lights.

Therefore one should prefer wax or oil candles, but if the soldier for security reasons cannot light these kinds of candles, then s/he may light electric flashlights as long as it is clear that they are for Hanukkah. However, s/he should refrain from reciting a blessing and rely on others [his/her family] at home to say the blessing for the soldier (with him or her in mind) using conventional candles.

6. Based on N. Rabinovich, *Milumadei-Milchama — Responsa on War* (1994-1995).

7. *Shulchan Aruch O.H.* #673

## 2. Placing the Menorah and Timing the Candle Lighting — Multiple Options

Ideally the menorah should be placed **outside the front door** to the left of incoming guests in order to be visible to passersby on their way home after sunset. That serves best the purpose of publicizing the miracle. Next best is to display the Hanukkah lights on a **windowsill** no higher than 20 cubits, the usual height objects are visible in the normal range of vision of a passerby.<sup>8</sup> However, in time of danger the candles could be lit inside the house on the table for the benefit of the residents alone, at any hour of the evening when they are assembled. Ashkenazi European tradition ruled that we follow the lenient custom as if it were still a time of danger, especially since the weather is often inclement outside.<sup>9</sup>

**Q** *What about lighting the menorah in the synagogue?*

**A** It has become a custom to light the synagogue's menorah which is placed on the southern side of the synagogue just as the seven-branched menorah in the Temple was located on the southern exposure. However, **it is not sufficient to light the synagogue menorah even if the blessings are recited.** In addition to lighting the synagogue menorah, each person must light his/her home menorah for that is the original form of the mitzvah as a proclamation of the miracle by each household.<sup>10</sup>

**Q** *If we usually gather in the family room which has no window to the street or if we live in a high-rise apartment building, what should we do?*

**A** For Ashkenazim there is today no halachic requirement to let the menorah be seen by outsiders. However, in an era when Jews are proud of their identity and danger from anti-Semitic neighbors is minimal, there is no reason not to try to place at least one menorah in public view from the street or from other high-rise buildings across the way. The other menorahs in the house may be placed in more convenient locations in the house, but to keep the memory of the ideal alive, one should try to place at least one menorah in public view.<sup>11</sup> It is also recommended that there be a menorah facing *each* street upon

which the house fronts.<sup>12</sup> Many Sefardim still follow the original ruling on the timing and placement of the menorah.

**Q** *Can we light the menorah first and then place it in the window?*

**A** Ideally Jewish law requires the menorah to be placed in public view **before** it is lit. “Lighting” — not “placing” (*hanacha*) — counts.<sup>13</sup>

**Q** *My children, spouse or guests will be coming late. Can I delay the candle lighting?*

**A** Yes, as far as the Ashkenazim are concerned, public display of the candles during the 30 minutes after sundown is no longer required. However, you may wish to light one menorah “on time” (either at sundown according to Maimonides or after the stars come out according to Rabbenu Asher) and in the proper location (facing the public domain outside the door or on the windowsill).<sup>14</sup> This will keep alive the memory of the original practice of the candle lighting. In many communities there is traffic (passersby) until well after sunset, so the “ideal time” might be extended beyond half an hour and longer candles might well be used. In any case, as long as residents of the household are awake, it is never too late — during the night — to light the candles.<sup>15</sup>

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8. A.H.O.H. 671:20, 22, 23

9. A.H.O.H. 671:24 and 672:6

10. A.H.O.H. 671:26

11. A.H.O.H. 671:24

12. A.H.O.H. 671:27

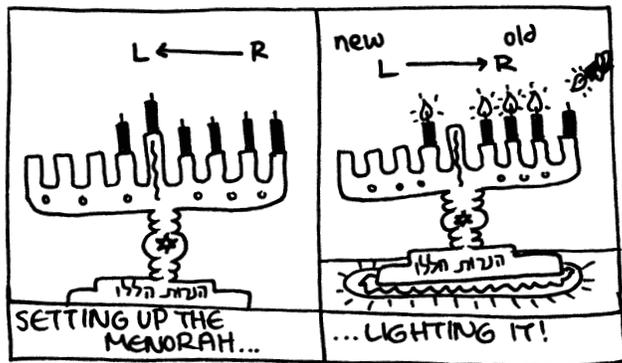
13. A.H.O.H. 671, 675

14. A.H.O.H. 672

15. A.H.O.H. 672:6-7

### 3. Setting up the Candles for Family and Guests to Light

Though the minimum is one candle for the whole family, it is commendable to set up a menorah for each member and each guest, with the candles added — one per night — from right to left — even though they are lit from the newest candle — left to right.<sup>16</sup> Generally the Talmudic Rabbis recommend, “May all your turns be to the right,”<sup>17</sup> just as today putting one’s right foot forward signifies starting off right.



**Q** What if we got mixed up and lit the candles from right to left?

**A** Don’t worry. A minority of rabbis, in fact, require that one light from right to left because that is the direction of Hebrew reading.<sup>18</sup> Besides, the absolute bare minimum requirement is simply to light just one candle per night per household.

**Q** What if I am a guest and do not have my own menorah and candles?

**A** A temporary guest may rely on their family lighting a menorah for them back at home. The mitzvah is primarily for the household, not the individual. However, a guest may wish to be included in the host family’s candle lighting. By making a small monetary contribution, s/he can buy a “share” in the candles being lit by the host.<sup>19</sup> The host may then give the money to *Tzedakah*. Alternatively the guest can simply ask to borrow a menorah or make a makeshift one.

**Q** Can I use one Hanukkah candle to light another?

**A** Yes and No! Yes, one can light a Hanukkah candle with the flame of another Hanukkah candle. Both are holy and both are serving their symbolic

function. No, one cannot light a *shamash* or an interim candle or match from a burning Hanukkah candle. (Of course, some rabbis urge stringency and forbid one to light one Hanukkah candle even directly from another.)<sup>20</sup>

### 4. The Order of the Blessings — Especially on Friday and Saturday Night

**B**rachot (blessings) must always be said before lighting the Hanukkah candles and after lighting the service candle — *shamash* — which should be lit first, so that its light is ready for use.

**Q** On Friday night do we light Hanukkah or Shabbat candles first?

**A** Hanukkah candles are lit first and then Shabbat candles immediately thereafter, so that the lighting precedes sundown and yet the Hanukkah candles burn after sundown. With oil lamps, extra oil is added so it will burn longer — both before and a full half hour after sunset.<sup>21</sup>

**Q** What about Saturday night?

**A** At home, Havdalah (the ceremony with a braided candle, spices and wine that marks the end of Shabbat and of its prohibition on doing work) precedes lighting the menorah. Hanukkah candles cannot double as Havdalah candles because Havdalah’s light is for use and Hanukkah’s is not.

**Q** Can a woman light the candles and say the blessings not only for herself but for her husband?

**A** Of course, women were part of the miracle — they were endangered and contributed to the rescue. They are equally obligated and may represent men in candle lighting.

Children under bar/bat mitzvah age should be encouraged to bless and to light their own menorah. However, if there is only one family menorah, a post bar/bat

16. *A.H.O.H.* 676:11    17. *T.B. Yoma* 15b

18. *A.H.O.H.* 676:12    19. *A.H.O.H.* 677

20. *A.H.O.H.* 674    21. *A.H.O.H.* 679

mitzvah man or woman should light the menorah. A child may sing the blessings for an adult if that adult so stipulates.<sup>22</sup>

**Q** *If I cannot light candles myself, but I see Hanukkah candles burning in a window, what blessings may I say?*

**A** Lighting is only one aspect of the mitzvah. Seeing the candles and remembering the miraculous victory are important in themselves. Therefore one who sees the candles, blesses “*al hanissim*” (“for the miracles”) as well as “*shehechyanu*” (on the first night only).

## 5. When Candles Blow Out

**C**andles need to burn for up to 30 minutes — the time it traditionally takes passersby to empty out of the marketplace after sunset. If the oil or candle does not provide enough fuel or the wind is strong and likely to extinguish the candles, then one cannot light that inadequate candle in that vulnerable location for Hanukkah.

**Q** *What if the candles go out?*

**A** The Hanukkah candles should be relit if they go out during the lighting ceremony itself. If, after the blessings and the initial ceremony, any of the Hanukkah candles go out or are blown out by mistake before burning for ½ hour, **it is not necessary to relight them**. If the *shamash* goes out at anytime and there is another light source in the room, from an electric light or the *shamash* of other menorahs, then it need not be relit.

**Q** *I need to leave the house. May I extinguish the candles?*

**A** Life threatening situations like a fire take precedence over candle lighting. But

## “It’s Too Cold Outside”

**I**n medieval Germany Jews did not place the menorah outside because of non-Jews (who embarrassed them) and thieves, so they lit the candle inside their house next to the internal doorway of the “winter room,” the one which had a fireplace so essential to family life during the European winter.<sup>23</sup>

23. Yitzchak Zemer, *Olam K’Minhago Noheg*, p. 292.

ideally one should let the Hanukkah candles burn for up to 30 minutes. Afterwards, one may intentionally extinguish them at any time and for whatever reason.

## 6. Time Out from Work — for Women Only — and Time for Publicizing the Miracle

**I**t is customary, though not obligatory, for women to take a break from their work (which in medieval society meant cleaning, sewing and cooking) and concentrate on the candles for the ½ hour duration of their burning. (In fact, it is appropriate for everyone to take ½ hour off to reflect on the symbolic meaning of the candles before rushing on to everyday activities). Women are especially connected to Hanukkah, as the Rabbis explain, because of their central role in the original historical events.

**Q** *What readings are appropriate for Hanukkah?*

**A** There is no official *megillah* (such as the Scroll of Esther) and no *haggadah* (such as on Pesach) for Hanukkah. But there is an obligation **to publicize the miracle** (*pirsum hanes*) that is common to Hanukkah, Purim and Pesach. On Hanukkah the candles are the chief instrument to propagate the educational message to passersby as well as to household members. However, the candles are symbolic and therefore where knowledge is lacking they need to be accompanied by the historical tale.

In the early Middle Ages, the Jews wrote in Aramaic and read from a very concise abbreviation of the *Book of Maccabees* sometimes called “*Megillat Antiochus*” (written between 2nd-8th century CE). Sometimes it was read in the synagogue on Shabbat Hanukkah just as various *megillot* are read on Shabbat Pesach (*Song of Songs*) or Shabbat Sukkot (*Ecclesiastes*). This scroll is no longer used but with the translation of the *Books of Maccabees* into Hebrew and

22. *A.H.O.H.* 675:5

## Can Women Light Candles for the Whole Family?

“Even women were involved in that miracle”<sup>24</sup>

Generally, the Talmudic Rabbis rule “that women are exempt from all time-bound positive mitzvot,” those ritual actions that must be performed at a certain time.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, in direct contradiction to the rule, the Talmud obligates women to drink four cups of wine on Pesach, to read the Megillah on Purim and to light candles on Hanukkah. Each of these mitzvot are Rabbinic in origin and each one is explained by the Talmudic Rabbi Yehoshuah ben Levi with the historical rationale — “even women were involved in that miracle.”<sup>26</sup>

The medieval German rabbis argued over the interpretation of this rationale. The German Tosafists argued that the phrase “even women” means only that they were secondarily involved since their lives were also “at risk,” but Rashi and Rashbam argued vigorously “that the (miraculous) redemption was a Divine reward for the actions of righteous women in the generation of each event” — the Exodus, the fall of Haman and the Maccabean victory.<sup>27</sup> The word “even” in “even women were involved in that miracle” should be understood as “especially,” for activist women were at the heart of triggering Divine intervention.

Which women are they referring to?

In the Megillah it is obviously Esther. In the Exodus it may be referring to the midwives and to Moshe’s mother and sister. The Rabbinic midrash developed tales of female heroism associated with Miriam and with the Jewish women who aroused their husbands to procreate even though they were crushed with harsh

labor and despair.<sup>28</sup>

But what about Hanukkah? Where is the heroine among Judah and his brothers?

In the *Book of Maccabees* IV 8:3 the heroine is a mother of martyrs. Hannah encourages her seven children to choose torture and death over obeisance to Antiochus and his pagan gods.

In the later Rabbinic midrash the Apocryphal book of *Judith* (who beheads the enemy general Holofernes) is identified with Hanukkah and her story becomes the rationale for eating milk-based foods on Hanukkah.<sup>29</sup> Medieval midrash also created the Hasmonean sister — Hannah, daughter of Mattathias — who triggers the revolt when she is forced by the Hellenist ruler to spend her first night as a married woman sleeping with the Hellenist lord.<sup>30</sup>

The rabbis took the principle of R. Yehoshua ben Levi seriously, so that women can represent men in reading Megillah, lighting Hanukkah candles, and saying Kiddush on Pesach. Later this principle was expanded to include saying Hallel and eating three meals on Shabbat.<sup>31</sup>

24. “*Af Nashim*” by Chana and Shmuel Safrai, *Yeshurun*, 1999.

25. *Mishna Kiddushin* 1:7

26. *T.B. Shabbat* 23a; *Pesachim* 108a; *Megillah* 4a

27. *T.B. Pesachim* 108a-b

28. See *A Different Night — The Family Participation Haggadah* by Noam Zion and David Dishon, p. 91.

29. *Midrash Hanukkah* in A. Jellinek, *Beit Midrash* 8 p. 133.

30. A. Jellinek, *Beit Midrash* 6: p. 2-3; *Megillat Antiochus*.

31. Rabbenu Tam, *Mordechai*: on *Shabbat* 39b

English, it is appropriate to read aloud from them. (See above *Maccabees’ Megillah*, page 25).

**Q** Isn’t there also a *Book of Judith* for Hanukkah?

**A** Strangely enough the rabbis identified Hanukkah (165 BCE under the Greek Syrian Empire of Antiochus IV) with the Persian Jewish or Hellenistic Jewish romance (historical novella) entitled *Judith* (attributed to the days of General Holofernes, representative of the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar, 586 BCE). The *Book of Judith* is preserved in Greek in the

Catholic Bible. The rabbis identified Judith as a female heroine whose active role in saving the Jewish people from the Greeks justifies women’s obligation to light candles and take a half hour pause from their tasks. Women in Jewish law are usually exempted from mitzvot requiring performance at a particular time like candle lighting on Hanukkah, but Hanukkah is an exception since women played an essential role in the redemption. (Read Judith’s story in the *Maccabees’ Megillah*, page 45.)

## Deadlines for Lighting the Menorah: How late can we do Candle Lighting? The Zoroastrian Threat and the Polish Winter<sup>32</sup>

The Talmudic Rabbis insist that Hanukkah candles be lit **on time — at sundown** so that they will shine on the passersby on their way home from the market, approximately one half hour after sunset.<sup>33</sup> The latest they need to burn is when the last workers leave the public space. In their days “last workers” were defined as those who collected and sold fire wood and who remained in the market until people had gone home to light their hearth.<sup>34</sup> To publicize the miracle of Hanukkah, the menorah had to be placed outside the doorway of each house or, for second story dwellers, in the windowsill facing the street no higher than 20 cubits. Otherwise the normal passerby would not see the candles, since one generally looks forward — and not upward — while walking. Most Sefardim follow that tradition.

However, most Ashkenazim (Europeans from France, Germany and later Eastern Europe) are much more lenient on the timing of the lighting and placement of the menorah. This stems not only from modern times when people come home later because of electric lighting, but can be traced back to the little known persecution of Babylonian Jews in the 3rd century CE by the Zoroastrian rulers of Persia who worshipped fire, their god of light:

“In the kingdom of the Persians they went through all the houses of Israel extinguishing candles and coals. Only fires dedicated to their gods were permitted. They carried pans of burning coals through the streets.”<sup>35</sup>

Therefore the Talmudic Rabbis ruled: “In time of danger it is sufficient to place the menorah on one’s table (inside the house).”<sup>36</sup>

The Babylonian Geonim expanded this exception: “If a strong wind is blowing (that can extinguish an outdoor menorah) or robbers may be attracted to one’s house by the light, then place the menorah on the table and that is sufficient.”<sup>37</sup>

In Ashkenazi lands the exception became the rule, and everyone was permitted to use an indoor menorah on their table. Some rabbis explained that even though it is no longer dangerous to light outside, the permission to light inside was never rescinded officially. The 19th century *Aruch HaShulchan* code

summarizes Eastern European practice:

“Since our lands are rainy and snowy with strong winds during Hanukkah, it is impossible to put the menorah outside unless it is enclosed by glass. However the rabbis did not ask us to go to such trouble. After all, an outdoor menorah might not be all that noticeable and the non-Jews might not allow it. Therefore we all light inside the house (on the table).”<sup>38</sup>

Since the candles are lit on the table inside the house, the only *pirsum hanes* (publicization of the miracle) is aimed at family members and no longer at passersby. Therefore the medieval German rabbis (12th century) ruled: “It does not really matter what time we light the candles, since it is only for inhabitants of the house” (as long as they are still awake) and “it does not matter if the candles are placed (in a window) above 20 cubits.”<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, the authors of this book would recommend that, if possible, the menorah be lit on a windowsill facing the street as soon as family members arrive home during the period of time after sunset when people (or cars) are still passing by. Candles may be lit more than once if necessary, for example, at sundown and once again when the whole family gets home. In Israel, it is appropriate that the light of the menorah face the street, for Israeli sovereignty means that the public space is Jewish. Thus electric menorahs are lit on public buildings and giant oil lamps are lit at the Kotel (the Western Wall). In Christian countries, presuming that there is no persecution, it is appropriate that Jews let themselves and their homes be identified by the lights, just as Christians display Christmas lights. While many Jews in the Diaspora argue that the public space should not be dominated by Christian or Jewish symbols, at least individual families should feel proud and confident enough to make their religious commitments at home a matter of public record.

32. Based on sources collected by Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael: Hanukkah* p. 43-49.

33. *T.B. Shabbat* 21-2      34. Rashi, *ibid.*

35. *Ozar Ha Geonim*, Babylonian heads of the Academies, 9th-11th century CE on *T.B. Gittin* p. 225).

36. *T.B. Shabbat* 21      37. *Halachot Kezivot Hanukkah* 2

38. *Aruch HaShalchan Orach Hayim* 671:25

39. *Tosafot Shabbat* 21b and *Ravayah* #843

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS GETTING THE HISTORY OF HANUKKAH RIGHT

### LEGENDS OR FACTS?

by Noam Zion

**Q** Isn't it true that we celebrate Hanukkah for 8 days because the only cruse of pure oil found, burned for 8 days instead of its usual 1?

**A** Not according to the best historical records of the time — *The Book of Maccabees* (125 BCE) and Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (100 CE).

The 8 days are a “make-up” holiday for the 8 days of the previous Sukkot, which could not be celebrated in 164 BCE since the Greeks were still occupying the Temple. The *Second Book of Maccabees* calls our holiday “**Sukkot in the month of Kislev**” (December, instead of September-October, the usual date of Sukkot).<sup>40</sup>

“They celebrated for eight days with gladness, like Sukkot, and recalled how, a little while before, during Sukkot they had been wandering in the mountains and caverns like wild animals. So carrying wands (*lulav*) wreathed with leaves and beautiful branches and palm leaves too, they offered hymns of praise to God who had brought to pass the purifying of his own place. And they passed a public ordinance and decree that the whole Jewish nation should observe these days every year.”<sup>41</sup>

In fact, Sukkot is originally a holiday celebrating the dedication of Solomon's First Temple.<sup>42</sup> The dedication of the Second Temple took place on the 24th of Kislev.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it was also appropriate that Hanukkah, the Maccabean Rededication of the Altar (defiled by Greek sacrifice of pigs to Zeus Olympus whose statue was erected in the Temple), should also last 8 days and begin on the 25th of Kislev.

The alternative explanation of the 8 day length of Hanukkah is the miracle of the cruse of oil which only appears in later sources like the Scroll of Fasts<sup>44</sup> quoted in the Talmud.

**Q** Isn't it true that the 25th of Kislev, the first day of Hanukkah, is the day the Maccabees recaptured the Temple and lit the cruse of oil?

**A** On the day of the military victory, the Maccabees may have lit a makeshift menorah described in the Scroll of Fasts:

“Why do we light candles on Hanukkah? For in the days of the Greek dynasty, the Hasmoneans entered the Temple with seven iron lances in their hands. They covered these (round hollow lances<sup>45</sup>) with wood and lit them (with oil) for the next 8 days.”

Perhaps the miracle of the oil refers to this temporary menorah of seven lances.

However, the *First Book of Maccabees* describes no rush to light the menorah. The Maccabees did not capture Jerusalem on the 25th of Kislev, but at least a week earlier. The Maccabees had an enormous amount of work to do before they held the official Rededication Ceremony on the 25th of Kislev. They had to remove the defiled altar and build a new one, as well as prepare all new gold utensils including a new gold seven-branched menorah to replace the one plundered by Antiochus in 169 BCE. They recalled that:

Antiochus had entered Jerusalem with a strong force, and in his arrogance he went into the sanctuary and took the gold altar and the **lampstand (menorah) for light**, and all its furniture and the table for the Presentation Bread and the cups and the bowls and the gold censers and the curtain and the

40. *II Maccabees* 1:10 41. *II Maccabees* 10:6-8

42. *I Kings* 8 which lasted for twice seven days 43. *Hagai* 2:10, 20 44. *Megillat Taanit*

45. Daniel Sperber (*Minhagei Yisrael*: Hanukkah p. 4-7) suggests according to Greek sources that the lances were sharp, hollow metal weapons also used as impromptu torches.

crowns and the gold ornamentation on the front of the Temple, for he stripped it all off. He took them all and went back to his own country.<sup>46</sup>

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**Q** Is the miracle of the cruse of oil just an arbitrary invention of the Talmud?

**A** Yes and No.

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When Jerusalem was liberated, Judah said:

“Now that our enemies are crushed, let us go up to purify the sanctuary and rededicate it.” They purified the sanctuary and carried out the stones that had defiled it to an unclean place. They took whole stones, as the Law required, and built a new altar like the former one. They built the sanctuary and the interior of the Temple and consecrated the courts. They made new holy vessels and they brought the lampstand and the altar of incense and the table into the Temple. Then they burned incense on the altar, lighted the lamps on the lampstand and lit up the Temple.<sup>47</sup>

### Finding a Name for Hanukkah: Names Change and the Essence Changes as Well

- (1) **“SUKKOT IN THE MONTH OF KISLEV.”** The *Book of Maccabees* notes that the 8 day Sukkot holiday celebrated in the Temple in Tishrei (Sept.-Oct.) was postponed until Kislev (Dec.) because the Greek Syrians still occupied the Temple during Sukkot, while the Maccabees hid in caves in the wilderness.
- (2) **“FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS.”** Josephus, the first century CE Jewish historian, is the first to use this term.
- (3) The Rabbis of the Talmud ask — “What is **HANUKKAH?**” and explain it in terms of the **dedication of the new Menorah, the new Altar, and the rededication of the Temple.**”
- (4) The Zionists renamed the holiday **“HOLIDAY OF THE MACCABEES OR THE HASMONEANS”** to emphasize the human heroes who recaptured Jerusalem and instituted a holiday celebrating their political independence.

Only when the Temple was wholly cleansed and new utensils prepared, could Judah and his brothers begin the rededication of the Temple. They probably had time to replenish the supply of pure oil as well.

Then they arose early on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, that is, the month of Kislev [December, 164 BCE], and offered sacrifice according to the Law upon the new altar of burnt offering which they had made. At the time and on the day the Greeks had polluted it, it was rededicated . . .<sup>48</sup>

That date was not merely a function of the time it took to complete the refurbished Temple, but a direct reference to the date the Temple had first been defiled by the Greeks in 167 BCE.

**Q** *Is the miracle of the cruse of oil just an arbitrary invention of the Talmud?*

**A** Yes and No. Talmudic traditions are often carefully preserved oral traditions from generations previous. One way or another, the Rabbis needed to explain the observance of Hanukkah. The eight days of lighting candles is never mentioned in the *Books of the Maccabees*, Josephus, or Philo, and yet it seems to be an established custom before the destruction of the Second Temple.

Perhaps the story of the miracle of the cruse of oil sought to give Jewish roots to the pagan practices like the Dionysian torch processions that the Greeks forced on the Maccabean Jews:<sup>49</sup>

When the festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and march in procession in his honor.”

Perhaps it is related to the festival of the sun’s rebirth on December 25, celebrated by lighting fires.

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46. *I Maccabees* 1:21-23      47. *I Maccabees* 4: 36,43-51

48. *I Maccabees* 4: 52-54, see also *II Maccabees* 9:5

49. *II Maccabees* 6:7

However, its Jewish roots may be much deeper. After all, the dedication of the *mishkan* (Tabernacle) by Aaron, involved a miraculous fire from the sky that consumed the sacrifices:<sup>50</sup>

Fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering on the altar. All the people saw and fell on their faces.

Similarly, when Solomon dedicated the First Temple in Jerusalem, fire descended from the heavens:<sup>51</sup>

When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the Presence of the Lord filled the Temple.

When Elijah dedicated a new altar to God on Mount Carmel, he called down a miraculous fire:<sup>52</sup>

“O Lord, Let it be known today that You are God in Israel.” Then fire from the Lord descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones and the earth. When they saw this, all the people flung themselves on their faces and cried

out: “The Lord alone is God!”

When the Second Temple was rededicated, the *Book of Maccabees* recalls, the miraculous fire of the Second Temple altar — a petroleum oil called *nephtai* — was rediscovered by Nehemiah.<sup>53</sup> (See *Maccabees’ Megillah 6th Candle* sidebar, page 41).

In short, the combination of miraculous Divine fire and the rededication of the Temple suggests that the seemingly trivial, late legend of the cruse of oil continues an ancient tradition of Divine miraculous intervention. The miraculous fire is God’s response to the human invitation to God to renew his dwelling in our cultic midst.<sup>54</sup> The Maccabees, no less than the Rabbis, sought a sign of Divine legitimacy to their new holiday, since it had no roots in the Biblical world.

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50. *Leviticus* 9:24

51. *II Chronicles* 7:1

52. *I Kings* 18:36-39

53. *II Maccabees* 1:18-23, 33-36

54. Yariv ben Aharon, “Hanukkah,” *Shdemot*, Tevet 5742

## Appendix 3

### HALLEY’S AND HANUKKAH

#### THE TALE OF A COMET AND THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME “FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS”

by Al Wolters<sup>55</sup>



**H**alley’s Comet, the brightest of the periodically returning comets, may explain why Hanukkah is called the “Feast of Lights.” According to our calculations, Halley’s Comet was visible in Jerusalem at the time of the first Hanukkah.

Until the rise of modern astronomy, comets were almost universally regarded as supernatural portents, usually presaging some major historical event. They were often taken as a forewarning of some catastrophe, such as

a great military defeat or the death of a ruler. As Shakespeare wrote in *Julius Caesar*: “When

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55. Published by *Moment Magazine*, December 1995, p. 28-29, based on A. Wolters, “Halley’s Comet at a Turning Point in Jewish History,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993) 687-697. Al Wolters is professor of biblical studies at Redeemer College in Ontario, Canada. In 1994 his parents, Syrt and Lucinda Wolters, were honored by the Israeli ambassador to Canada as Righteous Gentiles. Used by permission.

beggars die there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.”

In connection with the last appearance of Halley’s Comet in 1985, two astronomers and an Assyriologist announced that cuneiform records housed in the British Museum referred to the appearance of Halley’s Comet in 164 BCE. The period of visibility for an observer in Baghdad in 164 BCE was from September 24 to November 10, after which the comet disappeared for more than three weeks during its swing around the sun. It then reappeared again at the end of November and continued to be visible for about three weeks in December. These dates would not be significantly different for Jerusalem.

In 164 BCE, the comet came unusually close to the earth, within 16 million kilometers. Its closest approach is usually between 25 and 73 million kilometers from the earth. Its appearance in 164 BCE must have made quite a spectacular display in the night sky. A month or two after the initial appearance of the comet, the Seleucid ruler of Syria, the Hellenistic tyrant Antiochus (Antiochus IV Epiphanes) died. The Syrians very likely regarded the comet’s appearance as a portent of his death.

For the Jews it would have had another meaning. The Maccabees capped their military success by purifying and rededicating the Temple in Jerusalem three years to the day after Antiochus desecrated the Temple and triggered the revolt. The rededication of the Temple occurred on the 25th of Kislev, 164 BCE. The equivalent in our civil calendar is December 14 or 15.

The actual dedication of the Temple was preceded by its purification, which is described in some detail in *I Maccabees* 4:41-51. Not until completion of all this purification did the formal rededication take place on the 25th of Kislev, that is, in mid-December. Since the extensive work of purification was carried out by a select group of priests rather than by experienced tradesmen, it is reasonable to assume that it took a week or

two to complete. The purification therefore began in early December.

This means that the reappearance of Halley’s Comet on December 3 would have come just before or right at the beginning of the work of purification and that the comet would have been visible on clear nights throughout the period in which the priests were preparing the Temple for the rededication ceremony on December 14 or 15. It was not until the rededication had taken place that the comet would have gradually disappeared from sight.

Why is Hanukkah called the Feast of Lights? The earliest mention of this name is found in the work of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who was already uncertain about its origin. In *Jewish Antiquities* he tells the story of the rededication of the Temple and the origin of the feast and then adds the following comment:

And from that time to the present we observe this festival, which we call the **Festival of Lights**, giving this name to it, I think, from the fact that the right to worship came to light [or shone brightly] to us at a time when we hardly dared hope for it.

As the historian Ralph Marcus explains this passage, “Josephus here means that the deliverance experienced by the Jews ‘was like a light appearing in the darkness of despair.’” Another explanation is that the name has something to do with a pre-existing pagan festival celebrated at the winter solstice.

It seems far more likely that Halley’s Comet accounts for the name. The comet appeared as an unexpected bright light both at the purification of the Temple and at the death of Antiochus some weeks before. It is likely that many Jews would have been struck by the coincidence of this great light in the heavens and the great liberation celebrated in the festival thereafter called the Festival of Lights.

## Is there a common pagan holiday that lies behind both Hanukkah and Christmas? Hanukkah and Sun Worship?

**D**oesn't the 25th of Kislev sound suspiciously like the 25th of December?

The 25th of Kislev was probably related to the 25th of December, the pagan solstice holiday which the Greeks probably chose for their rededication of our Temple to Zeus Olympus three years earlier on the 25th of December, 167 BCE.

The shortest day of the solar year in the Northern Hemisphere is also the first day when the hours of daylight begin to increase. That common natural fact may well have shaped the Jewish, the pagan and the later Yuletide Christmas holiday. However, it is pointed out in the *Book of Maccabees* that the 25th of Kislev, the day of the Greek desecration of the Temple, was chosen not as a continuation of the solstice theme but as a satirical lambasting and a nosethumbing reversal of the pagan date.<sup>56</sup>

In the 3rd century CE some of the church officials moved the date of Christmas from January 6 to December 25. A Syrian church Father explained that thereby they sought to draw Christians away from the pagan celebration of the rebirth of the Sun on December 25 by rededicating that date to the birth of their Lord. Both the Sun's birth and the birth of the son of god were celebrated by the lighting of a fire.<sup>57</sup> December 25 was both the Sun's birthday for the Iranian sun-god Mithra and the "Day of the Invincible Sun" for the Romans. Birth, resurrection and victory over darkness were reinterpreted in terms of Christ. "Christmas" is a development of the English term for Christ's mass.

Similarly, the Mishnah<sup>58</sup> reports that in the Second Temple on Sukkot morning after a night of acrobatics, dancing and juggling of burning torches, the Jews' procession "arrived at the Eastern Gate of the Temple. They turned their faces westward and said: 'While our ancestors turned their backs on the Temple and their faces to the East, bowing eastward toward the sun, we face west — our eyes are directed to You, God.'" That seems to indicate a conscious reformatory movement to adopt and yet polemically transform the solstice-related celebrations in a monotheistic direction.

Perhaps this solar solstice imagery lies behind the argument between the schools of Hillel and Shammai

regarding the adding or deleting of one candle for each night of Hanukkah. Shammai's school says we begin with 8 candles and delete one a night (in reference to the decreasing days of the holiday) while Hillel's school says we add one candle a night (in reference to the increasing days).<sup>59</sup> Arye Ben Gurion, director of the holiday research division of the Kibbutz Movement,<sup>60</sup> suggests this parallels the Ancient Near Eastern solstice rituals which followed the "emptying" and "filling" processes of the sun. Those sympathetic rituals urged the sun on as it weakened or strengthened in its struggle with the forces of darkness, dying slowly or reviving slowly on the solar cycle of death and life.

The Rabbis were aware of the pagan fear underlying the Roman winter solstice holiday of Saturnalia that was celebrated in a carnival from December 17-24 annually.

"When the Adam, the first human, noticed that each day [after his creation in Tishrei / September] grew shorter, he said: 'Oy! Poor me. Perhaps I sinned and now the world is darkened because of me and it is now returning to chaos. This is my death sentence decreed by the Heavens.'

"So Adam stood and fasted and prayed for 8 days. At last he saw the day getting longer in the month of Tevet [immediately after Kislev] and he realized: 'The waxing and waning of the day is simply the way of the world, the natural cosmic order.' Therefore he went and celebrated for 8 days. The following year he established these 8 days of festivity as a permanent annual holiday."<sup>61</sup>

Here the Rabbis implicitly identify the eight-day winter holiday with a pagan holiday that originated in an unfounded ignorance and fear. However, once the reliable and beneficent ways of the Creator are recognized the festival is no longer tinged with the fear that the world may return to darkness.

56. *I Maccabees* 4:54-55

57. James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Chapters 37: 62-63.

58. *Sukkah* 8:5 59. *T.B. Shabbat* 21b 60. *Yalkut Hanukkah* 37-40

61. *T.B. Avodah Zarah* 8b

# GLOSSARY

by Jeni Friedman

**Acra** — the fortress built by Greek Syrian soldiers in 167 BCE in order to control Jewish Jerusalem at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt. It was later recaptured by the Jews in 140 BCE.

**Acropolis** — the city center in a Greek-style city which contains the public buildings like the gymnasium.

**Al HaNissim** — the prayerbook's summary of the miracles and the political events of Purim and Hanukkah. It is recited during those festivals both in the *Amidah* (the Standing Prayer) and *Birkat HaMazon* (Grace after Meals).

**Alexander the Great** — the Macedonian general who studied under the philosopher Aristotle and led his native Greeks to a lightning conquest of the east from Turkey to India (332 BCE). His Hellenist successor-empires lasted some 300 years until they were swallowed up by Rome.

**Antioch** — the name of important Greek cities in the Greek-Syrian empire including the capital — all of which were named after King Antiochus. In 174 BCE, Jerusalem was renamed “Antioch” under the Hellenizing High Priest Jason.

**Antiochus** — King *Antiochus IV*, was the ruler (175-164 BCE) of Greek Greater Syria in the dynasty of the Seleucids. He considered himself a manifestation of God on earth, hence his acronym of “Epiphanes.”

**Apocrypha** — a miscellaneous collection of sacred books, written by Jews and Christians from the third century BCE to the second century CE, which were not canonized, i.e., formally admitted to the Rabbinic or Christian Bible. The *Books of the Maccabees*, for example, were formally part of the Egyptian Jewish Bible, the Septuagint, and later the Catholic Bible, but not the Rabbinic or Protestant Bible.

**Aruch HaShulchan** — the expanded version of the traditional *Shulchan Aruch* (by Yosef Caro, 16th century), was written by Rav Yechiel Michal Epstein, a scholar of Jewish law in the late 19th century in Lithuania.

**Beit Din** — the Jewish court where legislative as well as judicial matters are decided.

**Daniel** — a Biblical prophet whose story is set in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia in 586 BCE. In fact, large parts of it were written during the Greek persecution of martyrs in Judea in 166 BCE. Daniel prophesied the fall of this great evil empire by supernatural intervention.

**Diaspora** — all Jewish settlements dispersed outside the land of Israel.

**Dinah** — daughter of the biblical patriarch Jacob, was raped by Hamor ben Shechem and was avenged by her brothers Shimon and Levi (*Genesis 34*). Their zealous vigilante activity was condemned by Jacob but praised by Judith.

**Edom** — the people that emerged from Esau, fraternal twin brother of Jacob, settled in southern Israel and southern trans-Jordan. Traditionally, Edom whose name means “red,” like his ancestor Esau, the “ruddy” hunter and man of war, is identified with Rome, and the heirs to Rome, Christian Europe. *Maoz Tzur* refers to the Christian Crusaders as Edom.

**Elazar** — refers to two characters in the *Book of Maccabees*. Elazar the elderly scribe was martyred for his refusal to eat impure food, and Elazar the brother of Judah was killed in a suicide-mission trying to destroy the elephant of a Greek general invading Judea.

**Gematria** — an ancient system of equating letters of the Hebrew alphabet with numbers and establishing equivalencies between words spelled differently but equaling the same sum.

**Gorgias** — a supporter/friend of King Antiochus IV, who, along with General Nicanor, gathered Greek forces for the destruction of Judea in the days of Judah the Maccabee (ca. 164 BCE).

**Gur/Ger** — a village outside of Warsaw where the Ger Rebbe established his Hasidic dynasty.

**Habad** — the Lithuanian Hasidic movement led most

recently by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was founded in the village of Lubavitch in Lithuania. Unlike all other Hasidic groups, Habad is interested in outreach to non-observant Jews and therefore lights giant menorahs on Hanukkah in public squares.

**Halacha** — Jewish law

**Hallel** — a collection of the Psalms of praise recited on holidays of redemption.

**Hannah** — mother of seven sons martyred for their refusal to bow down to Antiochus' god — Zeus. Hannah is also the name of Mattathias' daughter who, according to medieval tales, instigated the Hasmonean revolt.

**Hanukkah** — a modern Israeli term for a Hanukkah menorah with nine branches including one for the *shamash*.

**Haredi** — a contemporary term for Ultra-Orthodox Jews, both Hasidim and Mitnagdim (opponents of Hasidism), fearful of assimilation with anything from the western world.

**Haskala** — the 18th and 19th century Jewish enlightenment movement dedicated to the modernization of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

**Hasmonean** — the term for the family and dynasty of the descendants of Mattathias the rebel priest, who are called also the Maccabees.

**Hasidim** — refer to the followers of any Jewish religious sect that goes beyond the letter of the law in its strictness and willingness to make sacrifices for observance of Judaism. The Hasidim of the Hellenist period refused categorically to violate Jewish law in any way; therefore they hid in the caves in the wilderness of Judea and later joined the Maccabean revolt. In the 18th century the Baal Shem Tov in the Ukraine founded a modern movement of Hasidism.

**Havdalah** — literally, “the ceremony of separation,” marks the conclusion of Shabbat and other holy days at sunset.

**Hellenism** — the culture created by the integration of Greek and Oriental traditions resulting from the conquest of the Middle East by Alexander the Great from Macedonia. It differs somewhat from the original culture of the native Hellenes, the ancient Greeks.

**Hillel** — founder of the most influential school of rabbinic thought, lived in the land of Israel between 40 and 0 BCE in the reign of King Herod.

**Holofernes** — the enemy general who was beheaded by Judith when he sought to invade and conquer Judea. Holofernes is not necessarily a historical figure, but appears only in the *Book of Judith*. He is sometimes identified alternatively as a Babylonian general, an Assyrian general or a Greek king.

**Hutzpah** — Jewish daring, cheek.

**Jason** — the High Priest of Judea who won his office by bribing Antiochus the IV. He used Temple funds to pay his bribe and establish hellenizing institutions like the gymnasium in Jerusalem (174-171 BCE).

**Josephus** — the Jewish general who fought for the Jews against the Romans in the Great War, 66-70 CE. When captured, he became a historian of the Jewish wars and Jewish antiquities for the Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus from the house of Flavius.

**Judea** — the original area of Eretz Israel around Jerusalem, Bet Lehem and Hebron, which was the home of the tribe of Judah. After the exile of the northern ten tribes, Israel, Judea was the only remaining Jewish political entity. Hence all the remaining children of Israel became known as “Jews” rather than as “Israelites.”

**Judith** — the heroine of the *Book of Judith*, who seduced and beheaded General Holofernes and thus saved Judea from destruction. The *Book of Judith* was written in the Persian or the Hellenist period and appears to be a historical romance.

**Kabbalah** — the Jewish mystical tradition which goes back to the period of the Rabbis of the Talmud. It was systematized in the Middle Ages in the book of the Zohar (13th century, Spain) and in many other works.

**Kislev** — the ninth month of the Jewish solar/lunar year during which the winter solstice generally falls.

**Knesset** — the ancient Jewish assembly and today the term used for the Israeli parliament.

**Lamentations Rabbah** — The Rabbinic explication of the biblical *Book of Lamentations (Eicha)*.

**Lubavitch** — a town in Lithuania, from which the original Lubavitcher Rebbe started his movement.

**Maccabees, Books of** — The four *Books of Maccabees* are preserved in the Christian Bible in Greek. Although they were written by Jews in the century after the Maccabean revolt, they were not made part of the Rabbinic Bible. The first two volumes are written by Maccabean historians and the second two volumes are

written by Greek Jewish philosophers praising the Maccabean martyrs as philosophic heroes.

**Maccabiah** — the Olympic-style games inaugurated in 1932. Joseph Yekutiel convinced Meyer Dizengoff, mayor of Tel Aviv, to build Israel's first sports stadium and then convinced the Zionist Maccabiah sports clubs around the world to come to Israel to hold the first world Jewish Olympics in an era of extreme anti-Semitism that excluded Jews from interfaith competitions such as the 1936 Olympics held in Berlin.

**Maimonides** — the great Jewish philosopher, legalist, doctor, and political leader of the Jews of Egypt in the 12th century, integrated western philosophy with Jewish law. He wrote the *Mishneh Torah*, the most comprehensive code of Jewish law, and the philosophical *Guide to the Perplexed*.

**Maaz Tzur** — this 13th century European medieval poem about the historic rescues of the Jews is sung by Ashkenazim on Hanukkah.

**Martyr** — the Greek word “*martyr*” means “witness.” The first recorded human beings to choose death over the public denial of their religion were the Maccabean martyrs who bore witness to their faith in a God who would ultimately defeat the evil empire of the Greeks.

**Mattathias** — this elderly priest of the Hasmonean family inspired the Maccabean revolt led by his five sons.

**Megillah** — a *megillah* means literally “a rolled up parchment.” This was the typical “book” of the ancient world. All of the books of the Bible, as well as international letters, were called in Hebrew “*megillah*/scroll.” Later in Jewish history, only five short books of the Bible were called “*megillot*” including *Megillat Esther* which is read on Purim.

**Megillat Antiochus** — an abbreviated Aramaic summary of the *Books of the Maccabees* which was written sometime between the 2nd and 8th centuries and used to be read aloud in the synagogue on the Shabbat of Hanukkah.

**Megillat Ta'anit** — this scroll of rabbinic dates lists days on which it is forbidden to fast. Written in the 1st century CE, it is the earliest written example of Rabbinic literature. Several of the dates are associated with Maccabean victories including Hanukkah itself.

**Menelaus** — the Hellenist Jew from Jerusalem who displaced the high priest Jason in 172 BCE by offering a larger bribe to Antiochus IV than his predecessor. He

was killed by the Greeks in order to appease the Maccabean rebels in 162 BCE.

**Menorah** — a “lamp” referring to the Temple menorah of seven branches, to household lamps, and to Hanukkah menorahs of eight/nine branches.

**Midrash** — any Rabbinic explication of the Biblical text is a *midrash*. Sometimes a *midrash* involves a liberal, literary re-writing of a Biblical story.

**Mishnah** — the first code of oral Jewish law, officially promulgated by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi (the Prince) c. 225 CE in Eretz Yisrael.

**Mitzvah** (pl. *Mitzvot*) — the commandments of the Torah as formulated by the Rabbis.

**Modiin** — a provincial town in the hills, on the road between Jerusalem and Jaffa, where Mattathias initiated the Maccabean revolt against the Greek religious coercion.

**Nehemiah** — a Jewish officer of the Persian court sent to the province of Judea to govern it and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (circa 450 BCE).

**Ner Tamid** — usually translated “the eternal light,” refers to the seven-branched, gold menorah of the Temple. In fact, the *Ner Tamid* originally burned daily only from evening until morning. In today's synagogue, the *Ner Tamid* burns continuously during all hours of the day and night.

**Nicanor** — one of the Greek generals sent by Antiochus to put down the Maccabean revolt. His death in battle on the 13th of the month of Adar was established as a Maccabean holiday.

**Nike** — the Greek goddess of victory, is often portrayed holding a palm branch.

**Olympics** — these ancient sacred celebrations and sports competitions were held every four years at Mount Olympus in Greece. Male participants would compete in the nude and victors earned fame and an olive wreath.

**Philo** — the 1st century Greek Jewish philosopher, was a student of Platonic philosophy and was the first to integrate Judaism and Hellenism in his interpretation of the Bible.

**Pinchas** — Aaron's great-grandson, Pinchas earned his position as the high priest by acting as a vigilante zealot to stop the public desecration of the covenant caused by the provocative act of public intercourse between a

Jewish leader and a non-Jew from the enemy nation in front of the Tabernacle. His zealous act served as a model for Mattathias.

**Pirsum HaNes** — the mitzvah of “publicizing the miracles” performed by God is achieved on Hanukkah by the lighting of the menorah in the doorway or window of the home at a time when passersby are likely to be out and about.

**Rabbis** — with a capital “R” refers to the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud (70-500 CE).

**Reconstructionism** — this movement for American Jewish renewal seeks to reconstruct Jewish civilization in the light of the growing ethical, scientific, and spiritual insights of the modern period. Its chief philosopher is Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan; its rabbinical seminary is located in Philadelphia, USA.

**Reform** — a German and later American movement for the reform of modern Jewish life which has emphasized ethics, progressive politics, and individual autonomy as a continuation of the Biblical prophetic tradition. It now has the largest synagogue affiliation in the United States.

**Righteous Gentiles** — a Rabbinic term for a non-Jew who performs moral acts above and beyond the call of duty. Today the term is used specifically to honor non-Jews who endangered their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

**Sanhedrin** — the legislative and judicial body of Judea at the end of the second Temple period and during the Mishnaic period.

**Seleucus** — one of Alexander the Great’s generals who, after Alexander’s death, won control over Greater Syria and established a dynasty that conquered Judea (200 BCE) and ruled it until the Maccabean revolt succeeded in gaining independence (140 BCE).

**Sefardi** (or Sephardi) — the Hebrew term for Spanish Jew, refers to all Jews who were expelled from Spain and Portugal yet retained their Spanish Jewish identity, often preserving the Judeo-Spanish language Ladino. This term is often used loosely and mistakenly for all Jews from African and Asian backgrounds even though most of them have no Spanish traditions.

**Septuagint** — the Greek Jewish translation of the Torah (c. 300 BCE) and later the whole Hebrew Bible prepared, according to tradition, by 70 (*septa*) scholars at the request of Ptolemy, king of Hellenist Egypt. It

includes the first two *Books of the Maccabees*, even though they were not included in the Eretz Yisrael Rabbinic Bible of the same period.

**Shamash** — the “service candle” used to provide light for practical purposes and to ignite Hanukkah candles whose light may not be used for mundane purposes.

**Shechinah** — the feminine presence of God in the terminology of medieval Jewish mysticism.

**Shehechyanu** — the Rabbinic blessing for new or annually renewed experiences of joy such as the reception of a nice gift on Hanukkah or the first night’s lighting of Hanukkah candles for the first time for that year.

**Shulchan Aruch** — the basic medieval code of Jewish law written by Rabbi Yosef Caro in Safed in the 16th century. It was annotated by the Ashkenzai scholar Rabbi Moshe Isserles.

**Solstice** — refers to the longest and shortest day of the solar year. The winter solstice (December 21-22 in the contemporary calendar) falls close to or on Hanukkah. It is the 24-hour period of the longest night and the shortest day of the year and it is often celebrated with popular festivals of light.

**Sufganiyot** — jelly doughnuts eaten during the Hanukkah festival in Israel, symbolizing the miracle of the oil in which they are fried.

**Sukkot** — the eight-day biblical holiday of celebrating the harvest festival while residing in booths (*sukkah*) usually in the months of September or October. It also became the holiday of the dedication of the first Temple when dedicated by Solomon on Sukkot. It provided the model for the celebration of the new eight day holiday of Hanukkah established in the month of Kislev/December by the Maccabees.

**Talmud** — the comprehensive rabbinic discussion of oral Torah consisting of the code of the Mishnah, and its rabbinic explication in the Gemara.

**TB** — the Babylonian Talmud, completed in the year 500 CE, one hundred years after the completion of the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud.

**Tanach** — the Hebrew initials of the Bible made up of T= *Torah*, N= *Neviim* (prophets), and K= *Ketuvim* (miscellaneous writings).

**Tur** — the practical code of Jewish law written in Spain in the 13th century by Rabbi Yaakov ben Rabbenu Asher. It served as the model for the later 16th century *Shulchan Aruch*.

**Tzaddikim** — literally means “righteous human beings.”

In the Hasidic world the rebbe is called a *tzaddik* and he claims to have spiritual powers to invoke God’s help for his people.

**Tzedakah** — literally means “an act of justice and mercy” performed by giving financial support to the needy.

Unlike the Christian concept charity which means “free will offering of love,” *tzedakah* is an obligation of Jewish law.

**Yael** — a non-Jewish biblical heroine who killed General Sisera, the enemy of Israel, when he forcibly took refuge in her tent when escaping from Deborah and Barak (*Judges* 4-5). Yael served as a prototype for

Judith’s beheading of General Holofernes.

**Zealot** — a Greek term referring to vigilante activists who seek to defend what is holy in their society against its desecration by internal traitors and external enemies. More specifically, the most radical rebels of the Great War against the Romans (66-73 BCE) were called Zealots and ended their lives in a mass suicide on Masada.

**Zechariah** —the 6th century BCE prophet of the rebuilding of the Second Temple. His messianic imagery includes an organic golden menorah and his prophetic chapter is read on Shabbat Hanukkah and concludes with “*Not by might, and not by power, but by My spirit, said the Lord.*”

## Permissions

“Don’t violate the borders of your neighbor’s property.” (Deuteronomy 19:14)

We wish to thank all those who allowed us to use their creative work in *A Different Light*. We apologize to those whom we were unable to locate to request their permission and to offer them copyright fees. We have diligently sent many letters to publishers in order to obtain rights for all the photographs and articles contained in both volumes of *A Different Light*. In a small number of cases, we were unable to find a copyright holder. The creator of the text is acknowledged in the book, as well as the original publisher in whose volume the material was first discovered.



“Be warned! The making of many books is without limit . . . and very wearying.”

— Ecclesiastes 12:12

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– *Noam Sachs Zion*

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62. *Ecclesiastes* 4:9