A DIFFERENT LIGHT

A PLURALIST ANTHOLOGY

THE BIG BOOK OF HANUKKAH

Pluralistic Perspectives on the Festival of Lights:
A broad-ranging anthology of short essays by thinkers,
historians, and scientists on Hanukkah themes

Profiles in Modern Jewish Courage:
A collection of dramatic stories about contemporary Jewish heroes —
great and small — and their inner search for courage

BY NOAM SACHS ZION
AND BARBARA SPECTRE

A companion to

A Different Light:
The Hanukkah Book of Celebration
This volume is dedicated to the memory of all those Dutch Jews who were sent to Westerbork transit camp and from there to extermination camps. In particular we remember the Zion and Meijer families of Eibergen and Borculo, the Netherlands.
DEDICATIONS  חנוכת הנ себ

The many people who worked on this Hanukkah project as writers, editors, consultants and sponsors would like to dedicate this book to several very special people:

In honor of my 25th wedding anniversary
to my wonderful wife Marcelle
and our children — Tanya, Mishael, Heftziba, Eden, and Yedidya —
who share our creative celebration of all the Jewish holidays
from Noam Sachs Zion

In honor of my husband, Phil, our children, David, Michal and Guy,
Levi and Galia and our grandchildren, Omri and Tamar
from Barbara Spectre

In honor of Paul, Rachel and Laura Wiener
and the many joyous Hanukkahs we shared
from David and Sheila Wiener, their parents

In memory of Grandfather
Samuel Chazankin,
from Gloria and Mark Bieler and family

In honor of the 80th birthdays
of Harry and Marilyn Saltzberg
from Marc Saltzberg

Marc Chagall, 1946 (© ADAGP, Paris, 2000)
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Introduction to The Big Book of Hanukkah

The second volume of A Different Light is entitled The Big Book of Hanukkah. It is a pluralist Hanukkah anthology in the spirit of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem where it was created. At the Institute we encourage a dialogue of interpretations between Jewish scholars and educators representing different religious denominations, academic disciplines, and political perspectives. When we study the great debates throughout the ages, our goal is not to reach the one truth, whether historical or philosophic, but to illuminate the multiple faces of truth and the interests and ideals that lead us to read classical sources in alternative ways. Each of the following six chapters attempts to further that dialogue. Each invites you to browse and to sample what thoughtful people have written about Hanukkah themes.

Chapter I, Multiple Jewish Identities, Multiple Versions of Hanukkah, is a unique review of the competing interpretations of the common ritual of candle lighting. The shared narrative of the Maccabees is refracted through the prism of Jewish life: Hasidic rebbes, American Reconstructionist rabbis and Reform educators, Zionists of all brands, and even medieval Christian kings revere the same story but derive opposed lessons from its outcome.

Chapter II, The Historians’ Hanukkah, presents two great contemporary historians’ reconstruction of the civil war that underlay the Maccabean revolt. In our age of Jewish denominational polarization, it gives us pause to examine in greater depth the worst Jewish civil war in history, the one we “celebrate” so happily on Hanukkah.

Chapter III, The Philosophers’ Hanukkah: Where Hellenism and Judaism Differ, describes the essential conflict of the ways of life manifested in the days of the Maccabees. Yet the thinkers also help us reflect on the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between the Jewish and the Greek elements that make up modern Western society.

Chapter IV, The Rabbis’ Hanukkah: Rabbinic Reflections on the Warrior, the Zealot, the Martyr and the Family Peacemaker, summarizes some of the original research done in the Shalom Hartman Institute on the way the Rabbis radically transformed biblical values in the process of explicating texts. The values of peacemaking and the priority of life over the fanatical desire to die as a martyr or to kill as a zealot are some of the surprising perspectives presented by the Rabbis. The articles written by Noam Zion and David Dishon explicate basic insights learned from the oral teachings of their teacher, Rabbi David Hartman.

Chapter V, The Scientists’ and the Kabbalists’ Thoughts on Lights and Lamps, is a radical departure from earlier chapters in that it transcends the topic of Hanukkah itself in order to explore the possible analogies between the mystical Jewish and the modern scientific views of light. Albert Einstein’s life and thought are discussed, as is the chemistry and physics of a burning candle and the light it produces. Then we move from light and the candle to the history of the menorah, whether it is used for a household lamp, a seven-branched Temple menorah or a nine-branched Hanukkiyah. The menorah became a central symbol of Jewish national independence in the Maccabean and the modern eras, along with the Magen David.

Last but not least, Chapter VI, Modern Jewish Profiles in Courage, allows us to explore in greater depth the resources of Jewish heroism that make rebellion, martyrdom and ethical protest possible, whether in the days of the Maccabees or in the last sixty years. We read the exciting and inspiring tales of tzedakah heroes, soldiers, social activists and righteous gentiles. The chapter opens with contrasting conceptions of the heroic in Rabbinic thought, in Greek tragedy and in psychological and sociological research. In this concluding chapter, as in the preceding ones, The Big Book of Hanukkah offers you A Different Light on so many important themes related to Hanukkah.
CHAPTER I

Multiple Jewish Identities, Multiple Versions of Hanukkah

A Pluralism of Interpretation

How different communities and denominations find their particular identity symbolized in the light of the Menorah

Israeli children dressed as Judah the Maccabee — an ancient warrior as a hero for the young state
(December 1955, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem)
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A Pluralism of Interpretation

## Introduction
How different communities and denominations of Jews  
find their particular identity symbolized in the light of the menorah

### 1. The American Jewish Renewal Movement:
The Psycho-Spiritual Holiday of Rededication

*by Arthur Waskow and Joel Ziff*

### 2. The Israeli Politics of the Maccabean Holiday:
Secular and Religious Zionists versus Ultra-Orthodox Anti-Zionists

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The Anti-War Celebration of the Maccabees

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### 5. The Hasidic Hanukkah: Lubavitch and Gur — The Inward and the Outward Light

*by Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe,  
and by Yehuda Leib Alter, the Gerer Rebbe*

### 6. The Christian Cult of the Maccabees:
Judas Maccabeus and Judith as Saints

*by Barbara Tuchman*
As Jews worldwide light the same Hanukkah candles, a ritual shared by all denominations whether religious or secular, whether North American or Israeli or Russian, we may be misled into a false sense of unanimity about what is being commemorated and to what values we are rededicating ourselves by lighting these candles. These candles are symbolic — they are meant to “proclaim the miracle” (pirsum hanes) to all those who pass by our Jewish windowsills. Yet in fact Hanukkah lacks an agreed common text as to what the candles symbolize. There is no megillah and no book of the Jewish Bible devoted to its story; there is no agreed interpretation of the symbols. For example, secular Israelis explicitly reject the “miracle” performed by God as they

**Introduction**

**How Different Communities and Denominations of Jews Find Their Particular Identity Symbolized in the Light of the Menorah**

As Rabbi David Hartman has argued, Judaism is a “community of interpretation” rather than a community of common dogmas. In celebrating foundational events of their communal history, Jews redescribe the past in light of their analysis of the present and their blueprint for the future. The Jews share the events, texts and rituals of their collective past, but each sub-community of Jews carves out its own particular interpretation of that past. Just as in families, each member experiences and remembers common events from his or her own unique perspective. In retelling the family autobiography s/he may argue and persuade the others to accept his/her version as the authentic, official account of what happened and therefore of what lessons must be learned.

As Jews worldwide light the same Hanukkah candles, a ritual shared by all denominations whether religious or secular, whether North American or Israeli or Russian, we may be misled into a false sense of unanimity about what is being commemorated and to what values we are rededicating ourselves by lighting these candles. These candles are symbolic — they are meant to “proclaim the miracle” (pirsum hanes) to all those who pass by our Jewish windowsills. Yet in fact Hanukkah lacks an agreed common text as to what the candles symbolize. There is no megillah and no book of the Jewish Bible devoted to its story; there is no agreed interpretation of the symbols. For example, secular Israelis explicitly reject the “miracle” performed by God as they

**Hanukkah Gelt for JNF**

A stamp of the Jewish National Fund depicting the Israeli Chalutz (Pioneer) with gun and plow in hand, with Judah the Maccabee and the Shield of David in the background. The stamp is entitled “Hanukkah Gelt” and its purchase involved a contribution to the JNF for re-forestation and land reclamation in Israel.

(Chicago, 1938 from the Gross Family collection, Beit Hatefutsoth Photo Archive, Tel Aviv)
proclaim even in a children’s song taught in every nonreligious nursery school in Israel.

Moreover, the history of the Maccabean period reveals a terrible cultural, class and religious civil war among Hellenist, Hasidic and moderate nationalist Jews. Each sub-community of Jewish society identifies itself with Mattathias and Judah the Maccabee and often condemns its contemporary Jewish rivals as self-hating Hellenists or as passive self-ghettoized martyrs. Each group claims the symbols and the heroes of Hanukkah as its own and vilifies the darkness of war, of obscurantism, of false enlightenment and of assimilation represented by competing Jewish ways of life.

In our contemporary era of polemical polarization as well as pluralism, Hanukkah becomes a crucial test for the self-understanding of various groups of Jews. Precisely because Hanukkah lacks an agreed narrative, yet celebrates a Jewish ideological civil war, it becomes a kind of Rorschach test for the self-projection and self-creation of Jewish communities. Interestingly enough, Israeli Zionism, Lubavitch Hasidim and even North American Liberal Judaism have invested a great deal of creative energy to revive and reshape Hanukkah so it can carry their banners for Jewish renaissance. For each, Hanukkah is no minor holiday about ancient history.

In the essays below we have tried to epitomize radically different interpretations of Hanukkah, each reflecting a key to the self-interpretation of an entire community, rather than just the philosophic reflections of an individual religious thinker. You may very well disagree with some of these seemingly forced readings of the Festival of Lights presented by competing camps in the Jewish world. Yet you may also discover surprising and enlightening perspectives and implications on a holiday too often regarded as a simplistic children’s festival promoting obvious and banal values.

Our collection of interpretations begins with (1) the American Jewish Renewal Movement with its psycho-spiritual understanding of darkness and light as symbols of personal despair and hope. Then come (2) the Zionist debates about the significance of the Maccabees for the building of a Jewish State from a left wing and a right wing, a secular and an ultra-Orthodox perspective. (3) The Reconstructionist Movement celebrates the ethical evolution of Jewish and American nationalism by drawing a parallel to the increasing number of candles lit each night of Hanukkah. (4) The Reform holiday curriculum, although it is not an official statement of the Reform rabbinate, reveals the struggle to accommodate the anti-war sentiments central to the Reform movement’s social action platform in the 1970s with commemoration of the Maccabean victories. (5) The Hasidic worldview of Habad (Lubavitch) and Gur portrays the battle between Greek and Jew, between darkness and light, as an ongoing struggle fought both within the inner Temple of our souls and without in the public squares of Moscow, Washington and Jerusalem.

Finally, we included (6) the Christian Cult of the Maccabees. In fact, the Church not only preserved the Books of the Maccabees but regarded the Maccabean heroes as saints and role models for themselves.

In conclusion, the multiple interpretations presented here are meant to challenge us to choose our own perspective. It is not enough to light the candle and say we recall the past. Each recollection is an interpretation, and we must reflect on the implications of these interpretations for the Jewish tasks that lie before us “in our days and at this time.”
The Jewish Renewal Movement grew out of the 1960s Jewish student activist organizations (like Arthur Waskow’s Farbrengen in Washington, D.C.) and alternative Jewish religious communities (like the Havurah in Boston). In the 1990s it began to establish its own synagogues and a rabbinc smicha program (with a former Lubavitch Rabbi, Zalman Schachter-Salome). While preserving its progressivist politics (ecological, feminist and Israeli Peace Now leanings), it has developed a personalized mysticism drawing from Kabbalah and Hasidism as well as from Yoga and meditation techniques.

Jewish Renewal is attuned to the parallel structures of the life cycle, the natural cycle of seasons, the psychological cycle and the mystical processes of the universe. Therefore it interprets Hanukkah in a way that transcends historical commemoration. We offer two selections:

Arthur Waskow, a Jewish political activist and a recently ordained Jewish Renewal rabbi, begins his reflections from the fact that the historical events of Hanukkah are commemorated at the darkest time of the solar and lunar cycle. The darkness represents personal exile and despair, while the light represents hope and rejuvenation.

Joel Ziff, a psychotherapist, describes the partnership of both human and Divine initiatives necessary to gain victories in our personal battles between light and darkness. The historical narrative and the ritual lighting are allegories for the inner struggle for spiritual victory over the forces of despair.

JEWISH RENEWAL’S HANUKKAH:
DARK OF THE SUN, DARK OF THE MOON

by Arthur Waskow

By the twenty-fifth of Kislev, we are ready to experience the moment of winter . . . By the twenty-fifth of every lunar month, the moon has gone into exile. The nights are dark, and getting darker. And late in Kislev, we are close to the moment of the winter solstice — when the sun is also in exile. The day is at its shortest and the night at its longest, before the sunlight begins to return. It is the darkest moment of the year, the moment when it is easiest to believe that the light will never return, the moment it is easiest to feel despair . . .

At this dark moment, we celebrate Hanukkah — the Feast of Dedication — by lighting candles for eight nights. Night after night, the candle-light increases. And night after night, we make our way into, through, and out of the darkness of the sun and moon. We experience and feel the turn toward light from the moment of darkness, the turn toward salvation from the moment of despair . . .

. . . The single bottle of oil symbolized the last irreducible minimum of spiritual light and creativity within the Jewish people — still there even in its worst moments of apathy and idolatry. The ability of that single jar of oil to stay lit for eight days symbolized how
with God's help that tiny amount could unfold into an infinite supply of spiritual riches. Infinite, because the eighth day stood for infinity. Since the whole universe was created in seven days, eight is a symbol of eternity and infinity . . . .

There is a great deal of evidence that in much of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, the winter solstice was a time for imploring the sunlight to return and celebrating its readiness to do so. In Rome, the twenty-fifth of December was the birthday of the Unconquerable Sun. In Persia at the winter solstice, the common people set great bonfires and their rulers sent birds aloft bearing torches of dried grass.

It is a short leap to surmising that the Syrian Greeks may have chosen the twenty-fifth of Kislev as a time to desecrate the Temple by making their own sacrifices there, precisely because it was a time of solar and lunar darkness, the time of the winter solstice and the waning of the moon. And it is a short leap to surmise that the Maccabees, when they took the anniversary of that day as the day of rededication, were rededicating not only the Temple, but the day itself to Jewish holiness; they were capturing a pagan solstice festival that had won wide support among partially Hellenized Jews, in order to make it a day of God's victory over paganism. Even the lighting of candles for Hanukkah fits the context of the surrounding torchlight honors for the sun.

If we see Hanukkah as intentionally, not accidentally, placed at the moment of the darkest sun and darkest moon, then one aspect of the candles seems to be an assertion of our hope for renewed light . . . .

Hanukkah is treated in the Talmud in a very off-hand way, without the focused attention that is normal for deciding how to observe a holy day.

The Rabbis' Ambivalence about the Maccabees' Victory

But Jewish tradition about Hanukkah is not so simple. The Books of the Maccabees themselves became an issue. They seem to have been treated as holy books by the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria. But the Rabbis [of Eretz Yisrael] never regarded them as holy, never entered them among the books that made up the Jewish Bible. And it was the Rabbis who determined what became Jewish Tradition. Ironically enough, these books that celebrated the Maccabees' victory over Hellenism survived not in Hebrew but only in the Greek language. Greek became one of the common tongues of the eastern Mediterranean as Hellenism grew stronger over the next few centuries. And it was the most Hellenized Jews [in Egypt] who most honored these [written] memorials of resistance to Hellenism.

Indeed, the Maccabean books survived into modern times only because some of these Hellenized Jews became recruits to Christianity, and brought with them the assumption that these Books of the Maccabees were holy writings. The Christian Church then included Maccabees I and II among its version of what it called the “Old Testament.” They were among the books, available in Greek rather than Hebrew, that the early Church father Jerome called “the Apocrypha.” But they held no honored standing among those Jews who continued being Jewish.

For the classic Jewish view of the origins of Hanukkah, therefore, we must turn to the Talmud. Here we find Hanukkah in a most peculiar position. It is the only one of the traditional festivals that does not have a place in the Mishnah — the earlier level, or layer, of the Talmud. And in the later layer — the Gemara — it is treated in a very off-hand way, without the focused attention that is normal for deciding how to observe a holy day. The Rabbis are discussing what kinds of candles may be used for Shabbos when one of them asks, rather casually, whether the rules for Hanukkah candles are different. They
The Rabbis were not happy with the Maccabean approach to Jewish life. They were writing in the period when similar revolts against Rome had been systematically and brutally smashed by the iron fist of Rome. Only the rabbinical kind of power — the power not of rock but water, fluid and soft from moment to moment and yet irresistible over the long run — had survived.

explore this for a bit, talk about how the candles are to be lit, and then one of them says, as if he cannot quite remember, “What is Hanukkah?” They answer him:

Our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [begin] the eight days of Hanukkah, on which lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils in it, and when the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed over them and defeated them, they searched and found only one bottle of oil sealed by the High Priest. It contained only enough for one day’s lighting. Yet a miracle was brought about with it, and they lit [with that oil] for eight days. The following year they were established as a festival, with Hallel and Thanksgiving.2

And at once the Rabbis go back to discussing the [Shabbat] candles. They have no more to say about the internal divisions of the Jews, the revolt against Antiochus, the victory of the Maccabees, or the rededication of the Temple. Why this cautious attitude toward Hanukkah?

The reason is that the Rabbis were not happy with the Maccabean approach to Jewish life. They were writing in the period when similar revolts against Rome, seeking to win the Jews political independence, to turn Judea into a rocky fortress, and to toughen the Jewish people, had been systematically and brutally smashed by the iron fist of Rome. Only the rabbinical kind of power — the power not of rock but water, fluid and soft from moment to moment and yet irresistible over the long run — had survived. Only the rabbinical kind of power had protected and preserved Jewish peoplehood . . . .

All these Maccabean ways of exercising power seemed to the Rabbis a subtle surrendering to the habits of the Gentiles — ironically, [the Maccabean victory over the Greeks had led to] a form of assimilation — as distinct from pursuing a life-path that the Rabbis saw as authentically Jewish. So in retrospect the Rabbis were critical of the meaning and ultimate outcome of the Maccabean revolt. And so, without utterly rejecting the national liberation movement, they refocused attention away from it toward God’s miracle — toward the spiritual meaning of the light that burned and for eight days was not consumed . . . .

The Zionist “Maccabees” and their Ambivalence about the Miracle of the Cruse of Oil

Through almost two millennia, Hanukkah remained a real but secondary festival of the Jewish people. Beginning late in the nineteenth century in central and eastern Europe, Hanukkah had a second birth. There were two major factors in this second birth, both of them stemming from the emancipation of the Jewish people and their increasing day-to-day contact with the Christian and secular world. One of these factors was that as secular, non-religious or rational religious ideas grew during the Haskala or Jewish Enlightenment in the nineteenth century, there was a special disdain for the notion of such a miracle as the eight days’ light from one day’s oil in the Temple.

2. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b
Another factor was the increasing power of secular notions of Jewish peoplehood — including the Zionist notion of the Jews as a nation needing political rehabilitation through politico-military action. In that atmosphere, the Maccabees began to seem less dangerous and more heroic than they had throughout the centuries of rabbinic tradition. Indeed, many Zionists [in the 19th and 20th centuries] identified the Rabbis' fear of militant action against oppressive governments as a major element of exile mentality to be transcended in rebuilding the Jewish people.

Thus the miracle of the lights declined and the Maccabees advanced in attention and popularity from about 1890 on. Hanukkah became more and more important as a celebration of Jewish political courage and military prowess. Meanwhile, the Christian Apocryphal Books of the Maccabees were becoming more accessible to Jews, as the barriers between the Jewish and Christian worlds crumbled.

New Approaches:
The Struggle Between the Light of Hope and the Darkness of Despair

The Rabbinic tradition was hostile to the Maccabees; and modern Zionism, identifying with the Maccabees, was often hostile to the Rabbis. Thus Hanukkah has been a kind of battlefield between “Rabbi” and “Maccabee” as models of Jewish life. Is there any way to integrate these conflicting orientations to Hanukkah?

From the standpoint of the Rabbi, Hanukkah celebrated God’s saving Spirit: “Not by might and not by power . . . .” To the Rabbi, this spiritual enlightenment required a kind of inwardness and contemplation that was contradictory to insurgent politics.

From the standpoint of the Maccabee, Hanukkah celebrated human courage and doggedness, the human ability to make history bend and change. The need to organize, to act, to fight, to build might and use power, seemed in the aspect of the Maccabee to contradict study, prayer, and contemplation.

Can a new generation of Jews help to resolve this contradiction? If our forebears repressed and ignored the sense of Hanukkah as a festival of the darkened moon and darkened sun, what could we contribute by opening up to that aspect of the festival? What could we add by seeing Hanukkah as part of the nature cycles of the year and month?

Seen this way, Hanukkah is the moment when light is born from darkness, hope from despair. Both the Maccabean and Rabbinic models fall into place. The Maccabean revolt came at the darkest moment of Jewish history — when not only was a foreign king imposing idolatry, but large numbers of Jews were choosing to obey. The miracle at the Temple came at a moment of spiritual darkness — when even military victory had proven useless because the Temple could not be rededicated in the absence of the sacred oil. At the moment of utter darkness in Modiin, Mattathias struck the spark of rebellion — and fanned it into a flame. At the moment of utter darkness in the Temple, when it would have been rational to wait for more oil to be pressed and consecrated, the Jews ignored all reasonable reasons, and lit the little oil they had.

The real conflict is not between the Rabbi and the Maccabee, between spiritual and political, but between apathy and hope, between a blind surrendering to darkness and an acting to light up new pathways. Sometimes the arena will be in outward action, sometimes in inward meditation. But always the question is whether to recognize the darkness — and transcend it.

The necessity of recognizing the moment of darkness is what we learn from seeing Hanukkah in its context of the sun and moon. There is no use pretending that the sun is always bright; there is no use pretending that the moon is always full. It is only by recognizing the season of darkness that we know it is time to light the candles, to sow a seed of light that can sprout and spring forth later in the year.
Lighting a Candle in the Darkness

BY JOEL ZIFF

Nobody can do everything, but we can nearly all do more than we think we can.

— ASHLEIGH BRILLIANT

**Primacy of Human Initiative**

In the battle with the Greeks, the Israelites take most of the initiative for the struggle. The Maccabees organized the Jews to fight the oppressors. In contrast to the conflict with the Egyptians when God brought plagues and split the sea, no dramatic miracles occur in this war. The Maccabees’ initiative and responsibility reminds us that we need to take responsibility at this stage of our work to recognize old, dysfunctional responses to problems, interrupt the habitual mode of coping, and respond with our new, more effective way of being.

**Divine Intervention**

Although more human effort is required, God is also active and present. The Israelites are victorious even though they are fewer in number. In the same way as the tiny candle produces enough light to banish a great darkness, the Maccabees’ effort produced results beyond what one might have expected from their military prowess. In addition, a dramatic miracle does occur when the oil lasts for an entire week instead of just one day. In this respect, the story of Hanukkah is the story of a collaboration between God and the Israelites; as we immerse ourselves in the story, we are reminded that God is with us in our struggles. The old habits, developed and strengthened with years and years of repetition, seem much stronger than our fragile new experiments with change; nonetheless, our efforts to fight the old ways succeed out of proportion to what we might expect.

**Focus on Spiritual Victory**

The political success of the Israelites was limited: 200 years later, the kingdom of Israel was destroyed [by the Roman Empire] and the Jews sent into exile, an exile that lasted 2,000 years. In spite of that limited success, we still celebrate eight days, reciting the full version of the traditional prayer of thanksgiving, the Hallel. Our focus is on the spiritual victory. We celebrate the miracle of the lights more than the material success of the Maccabees. In the same manner, efforts to change our way of being do not always produce immediate results in the world. Our work is difficult, our successes are fleeting, and the struggle is unending. In spite of our limits, we retain a sense of power, competence, and optimism. Even though the results of our efforts are not yet realized, we can celebrate the changes we have made, trusting they will eventually lead to success. Even though we live in darkness, we can light a candle illuminating our way.

**The Candle as a Symbol**

The candles’ importance is not limited to their value as a reminder of the miracle from the time of the Maccabees. In the tradition, it is said that “God’s candle is the human soul” — “Ner Hashem, nishmat adam.”

As we light the candles each day, we are reminded that the process of transforming life-long patterns of response does not usually occur with one experience of inhibiting a particular, dysfunctional behavior and replacing it with a new response. We often need to re-experience over and over again the same dysfunctional impulse, stop ourselves from acting, and replace it with our new choice. Learning is not only step-by-step and cumulative. It requires a series of successive approximations; at each stage, a new more sophisticated and complete understanding replaces an earlier, more primitive, and incomplete understanding.

Although we have experienced a transformation, our old habits are still strong. We experience a battle between the new spirit within us and the old way of being, which mirrors, within ourselves, the battle of the Maccabees and the Greeks.

Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel have given rise not only to new interpretations of the Maccabees, but also to new forms of celebration of the revolt. While Hanukkah was celebrated in Rabbinic tradition as a minor home holiday focused on the miracle of the cruse of oil, the Secular Zionist movement, with Theodor Herzl in the lead, transformed this undramatic observance into an extensive public celebration of political liberation. The Religious Zionists followed suit, while the small Jewish Communist party in Palestine and the large community of Ultra-Orthodox Jews offered anti-Zionist interpretations of Hanukkah.

“The Maccabees will be resurrected!”

— Theodor Herzl

(CONCLUDING SENTENCE OF HIS PROPHETIC BOOK, THE JEWISH STATE, 1897)

Even the name of the holiday was disputed. The Secular Zionists rejected the name “Hamukkah” (Dedication) that focuses on the renewal of worship in the Temple and the supernatural miracle of the...
A male and female runner bear the Hanukkah torch lit at Modiin, the ancestral home of the Maccabees, and carry it on foot to Jerusalem for the official lighting of the national menorah.

(December 1948, Central Zionist Archives)

pure oil that burned for eight days. They wrote a song still sung in every Israeli secular nursery school and in the official torch lighting ceremony on Israeli Independence Day: “No miracle happened here. No cruse of oil was found.” They called Hanukkah — “Hag HaMaccabim/The Holiday of the Maccabees or the Hasmoneans” whose battle for political independence relied on human energies. While the Books of the Maccabees were rejected by the Rabbis (who did not make them a portion of the traditional Bible), these very books were made a part of the national school curriculum by the Zionists. Even the word “Maccabee” was spelled and explained to mean “Hammer” — referring to Judah’s hammerlike military strength. That is the original significance of the “Maccabee” in the Books of the Maccabees where the Hasmonean history was written.

The Rabbis for their part interpreted “MaCCaBeE as an acronym for “Mi Chamocha Ba-elim E (Adonai)” = “Who is like God among the gods?”

God is the supernatural warrior both at the Red Sea in defeating Pharaoh’s chariots and presumably in Judea in the defeat of Antiochus IV.

In the face of the success of the Israeli secular state, the Ultra-Orthodox have been reinforced in their view that the Zionists are continuing the work of ancient Hellenist Jews, not that of the Maccabees. In their view, the secular Israelis have desecrated the holy symbols of Judaism just as the Hellenists desecrated the Temple. The Israeli Shabbat is celebrated by driving through the Holy City on the Holy Day to the stadium to drink “Maccabee” beer and to watch Shabbat violators called “Maccabees” play Olympic-style sports. Not far from the stadium are the honored Greek institutions of the “Jewish” state — the Hebrew “University,” the Israel “Museum,” the secular Supreme Court and the Knesset, home of a Greek style “democracy.” In short, the Israeli state is a form of collective assimilation that defiles the name of “Israel” and calls forth a zealous priestly rejection by the Ultra-Orthodox.

Even among the Zionists there were very different emphases in celebrating Hanukkah. Religious Zionists, left wing Labor Zionists and right wing Revisionists (later the Likud party) read the heroes and villains and the lessons to be learned in distinctively different ways.

In the articles below we have created a composite of two fine historical retrospectives on the changing significance of Hanukkah in Israel — one by Ehud

4. Exodus 15:11
Luz, whose father was the Labor Party’s Speaker of the Knesset, and the other by Eliezer Don-Yehiya. Both have written extensively on the philosophy and sociology of Zionism. Included as well is an autobiographical story by Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement in 1897, who abandoned his custom of putting up a Christmas tree and found meaning in lighting a Hanukkah menorah. There is also a memoir about Eliezer Ben Yehuda (who revived the modern Hebrew language in the early 20th century). It reports a piquant anecdote about the clash of Zionist and Ultra-Orthodox interpretations of a famous statue of Mattathias erected in Jerusalem in 1908. The selections below display a wide variety of ideological interpretations of Hanukkah, the most important Zionist holiday.

THE ISRAELI POLITICS OF OBSERVANCE: REMEMBERING THE MACCABEES IN A PARTISAN WAY
by Ehud Luz and Eliezer Don-Yehiya

Writing History is a Self-Projection on the Past

History is a mirror by which we can view ourselves. The motive for our interest in history is to interpret our life ideal and to prove that the ideal is achievable in reality in the future just as it once was a fact of history. This approach is especially relevant for Revivalist Movements that seek to shape the future in the image of the past. Revival is never a simple return to the past, but always a reflective dialogue in which the present seeks to shape the future in the image of a particular past which it has reconstructed in its own image. We turn to the past to derive a concrete model of our soul’s dream and the faith that the dream is realizable. The past is an interpretation and a justification for our aspirations. In this sense, modern study of history functions like ancient myths. Myth gave meaning to one’s private life by anchoring it in the eternal comprehensive lawfulness of life. What is ephemeral is really an example of the eternal; private life is a repetition and a revival of a holy event that belongs to eternity.

Therefore the myth of “revival” plays such a central role in the national awakening of historical peoples in the 19th-20th century.

Historical romanticism is the cradle of modern nationalism because the past is mythic and eternal and it grants the power of renewal to the present. [E.L.]

The Secularization of Hanukkah

Of all the historic symbols used by modern Zionism, none is as important as “the Maccabees.” The rabbinic religious tradition — in so far as it recalled the Hasmoneans at all — emphasized the religious miracle in their battle against persecution of Judaism and the desecration of the Temple (see the traditional prayer “Al HaNissim”). However the Secular Zionists rejected the miracle and emphasized the earthly realism of Hasmonaean heroism. Zionism made Hanukkah a nationalist holiday. The secularization and nationalization of religious celebrations focused on minor religious holidays and reprioritized their significance.

Lag BaOmer became a celebration of Bar Kochba’s revolt against the Roman Empire (132-135 CE); Tu B’Shvat became a celebration of the redemption of Eretz Yisrael through reforestation. However, Hanukkah was the main site of national re-creation. The early religious Zionist Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever proposed that Hanukkah be the official holiday of the proto-Zionist organization in Russia — Hovevei Zion (1881). This minor holiday provided neutral ground for religious and secular Zionists to share their nationalist program. [E.L.]
Hanukkah Displaces Pesach as the Holiday of Freedom

While traditionally Pesach has been the holiday of national liberation, its family observance and its exclusive emphasis on God’s supernatural redemption could not serve the Zionist slogans of “auto emancipation” and “if I do not do for myself, who will do for me?” Yitzhak Ben Zvi, early pioneer and later second president of the State of Israel, wrote in 1911:

The glory and the educational value of the Hasmoneans is that their example revived the nation to be its own redeemer and the determiner of its own future. [E.L.]

The Secular “Hanukkah” becomes the “Festival of the Hasmoneans”

The various new ways of interpreting and celebrating Hanukkah prompted some observers to claim that the traditional holy day had been in fact replaced by a new festival which differed from the older one in content and even in name. Thus, while the Hebrew word “Hanukkah” (which means “dedication”) refers to the religious dedication of the Temple in the wake of its liberation from the control of the Hellenizers, the preferred name now was the “Festival of the Hasmoneans.” The historian Joseph Klausner, who was one of the mentors of the Revisionist
movement, stated:

Hanukkah is an ancient festival, but a modest one. The “Festival of the Hasmoneans” is a new holy day, but full of high spirits and popular gaiety.

**What was Hanukkah?** “A memorial for the Miracles,” the lighting of the little candles at home, potato pancakes and playing cards for the adults, spinning tops for the toddlers.

**And what is Hanukkah now?** — The Festival of the Hasmoneans, a holiday filled with cheering, a big national holiday which is celebrated by the Jewish people in all its dispersions with parties and speeches, songs and ballads, hikes and parades. This is our Festival of the Hasmoneans as it is today. Does any nation have a national holiday as great and as consecrated as this? [E. D-Y.]

**Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox) Condemn the Zionists**

The traditional concept of Hanukkah stressed the miraculous salvation from above, in contrast to the Zionist emphasis on the footraces while the “Palaistra” was reserved for indoor training in combat, wrestling, boxing, and jumping events. The “Palaistra” also served as a private social club for aristocratic members where philosophic discussions were also frequent. It included a powder room and an oiling room as well as an “ephebium,” a common room for athletes. The “hippodrome” was for chariot and horse racing.

Olympic contestants began the games with a solemn oath not to sin against the fairness of the games. They swore upon slices of boar’s flesh before a statue of Zeus carrying a thunderbolt in each hand. Physicians attended the contestants and the great Hippocrates (460-380 BCE) of the Hippocratic oath prescribed an “Olympic Victor’s” brown ointment made of opium, aloe and zinc oxide, to relieve strains. He also discovered a kind of aspirin in the willow bark, which is a pain reliever.

Some trainers held that sexual activities were bad for athletes, but older men often sought male lovers among the younger athletes in the gymnasium and palaistra. Women were not usually present. The rule was, “any woman who is discovered at the Olympic games will be pitched headlong from a cliff.”

Since athletes always competed in the nude, they used olive oil to prevent sun burn. Those disturbed by insects prayed to Zeus for protection, and those by heatstroke, to Hercules.

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7. Pausanias, 2nd century CE
They also fought against the wicked among their own people. This was a *kulturkampf* [a clash between two cultures] — Greek culture triumphed over the whole world, and only the Torah culture was able to withstand it. [E.D-Y.]

Not Martyrs, But Heroes

In reading the *Book of Maccabees* there is praise for courageous religious martyrs like Hannah and her seven sons as well as for Judah the military hero. However the Zionists in their battle against the Ultra-Orthodox saw these as mutually exclusive ideals.

The fiercest opponents of the Zionist version of Hanukkah were the Haredim, who dismissed Zionism as a movement which ran counter to the spirit of religious tradition. They also fought against the wicked among their own people. This was a *kulturkampf* [a clash between two cultures] — Greek culture triumphed over the whole world, and only the Torah culture was able to withstand it. [E.D-Y.]

The fiercest opponents of the Zionist version of Hanukkah were the Haredim, who dismissed Zionism as a movement which ran counter to the spirit of religious tradition. They claimed that the manner of the Zionist celebrations of Hanukkah was closer to the outlook of the Hellenizers than it was to that of the Hasmonaeans, although the Zionists were pretending to be praising the latter. They added that the Zionists expressed admiration for the values fostered by the Hellenizers under the influence of a foreign culture, such as the worship of physical strength. Yitzhak Breuer, a major Haredi leader, commented:

> The Hellenizers loved their people and their land in their own fashion. They loved the land, but loathed the Land of Torah, loved the people but despised the People of the Torah, loved the Greek licentiousness but hated the burden of Torah. It is not for the Jewish State that the Hasmonaeans fought but for the People of the Torah. They did battle against the kingdom of evil when it threatened the People of the Torah with destruction.

The fiercest opponents of the Zionist version of Hanukkah were the Haredim, who dismissed Zionism as a movement which ran counter to the spirit of religious tradition.
Theodor Herzl’s “The Menorah”
From Assimilation to Zionism, From a Christmas Tree to a Menorah

The growth and evolution of Herzl’s conception of the Jewish problem, since the day when he [as a journalist in Paris] looked on at the degradation of Dreyfus [falsely accused of being a traitor to the French army, court-martialled and sent to Devil’s Island, 1895], can be measured almost with laboratory accuracy by a study of the articles which he wrote immediately after the first [Zionist] Congress. He himself was quite aware of the transformation. Two years before, in December 1895, he had been outraged by [Vienna’s Chief Rabbi Moritz] Gudenmann’s declaration that the use of a Christmas tree in Jewish homes — an accepted custom with Herzl’s parents — was essentially un-Jewish. Herzl believed then that it was permissible to interpret the Christmas tree as a “Hanukkah tree”; or it might be looked upon as the celebration of the upward turn of the Menorah. [But in 1897, after the Zionist Congress, he published a short story entitled, “The Menorah,”] in which he told how he had returned to Judaism, how he regarded the celebration of Hanukkah, and how this festival affected him. The story begins like a fairy tale: “Once upon a time there was a man who had discovered deep in his soul the need to be a Jew.” The man was an artist; he had made his peace with the surrounding world; he had long since ceased to concern himself with his Jewish origins and the faith of his fathers. But the ever-rising tide of anti-Jewish sentiment, the incessant attacks on the Jews, tore open something within him “so that his soul became nothing more than an open and bleeding wound.” He came by degrees to “a deep inner love” of Judaism, and to the conclusion “that there was only one way out of the Jewish tragedy, and that was a return of the Jews to their homeland.” Everyone believed that the man had gone mad. Everyone believed that “the way out” which he had chosen would result in a deepening and intensification of the evil. “But he was sure now that the moral catastrophe in Jewish life was all the sharper because the Jews had lost that inner compensation which had existed so strongly in their ancestors.”

Undistracted by the mockery and contempt which were directed at him, the man followed to its logical conclusion the consequences of his conviction. He realized that the first problem was that of the education of the young generation of Jews. He therefore decided to revive the festival of the Maccabees for his children, and to plant in their young souls a feeling of relationship to the past of their people. As he held aloft the nine-branched candlestick he suddenly recalled, in a strange rush of feeling, his own childhood, and the celebration of the festival in his father’s house. He looked at the antique symbol, the prototype of which had so obviously been a tree, and asked himself “whether it was possible to bring new life into its petrified menorah form, and to water its roots again as if it were really a tree.” Herzl wrote:

“The first candle was lit, and the story of the origin of the festival recited: the miraculous origin of the undying lamp, the saga of the return from Babylon, of the Second Temple and of the Maccabees. Our friend related to his children all that he knew. It was not much, but it was enough for them. When he lit the second candle, it was the children who recited the story to him, and as he heard it from their lips it seemed not only beautiful, but quite new. And from then on he looked forward joyfully to the coming of each evening, always brighter than the evening before. Candle stood by candle in the menorah, and by their light, father and children dreamed their dreams. In the end it all grew into something more than he had sought to tell them, for it had risen beyond their understanding . . . .

“A great light streamed out from the menorah. The eyes of the children flashed, but what our good friend saw was the kindling of the light of the nation.”

— THEODOR HERZL

8. Alex Bein, Biography of Theodor Herzl, includes quotes from Herzl’s “The Menorah” translated by Maurice Samuel, used by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.
only for the kindling of the others, burned together with them. A great light streamed out from the menorah. The eyes of the children flashed, but what our good friend saw was the kindling of the light of the nation. First one candle, and dimness all around it, so that the candle was sad and lonely. Then a companion was added to it. Then a third, and a fourth. The darkness is compelled to retreat. The first candles are lit among the youth and the poor, and gradually they are joined by all those who love truth and beauty and justice and freedom. When all the candles burn there is admiration and rejoicing for the work that has been done. **And there is no office more beneficent and creative than that of a Servant of Light.**
heroes are emulated at a time of courage and action. That was why the pioneers of the national renaissance tended to identify with the Hasmoneans and with the other heroes of the Second Temple. The Hasmoneans did not make do with prayers. The Biryonim [the rebels against Rome in 66 CE] did not expect miracles. They shed their blood for the people’s freedom.

In the Hasmoneans, the Zionist secularists saw the beginning of a revolt that was not only nationalist, but secularist in its reliance on human effort to redeem the nation. [E.L.]

Traditional practices in the celebration of the festival, such as the lighting of the candles in the menorah, were observed but they were reinterpreted. The candles were said not to be in memory of the miracle of the cruse of oil, but to betoken the light of national deliverance.

New Songs: “No Miracle Occurred”

The miracle of the cruse of oil was openly belittled since it was believed that it was a salient example of the passive approach, which characterized traditional Diaspora Jewry. Indeed, a popular song, widely heard during Hanukkah, states: “No miracle befell us, no cruse of oil did we find.” The divine intervention of the Lord was replaced by reference to the heroic people who delivered the Jewish community by their own courage and strength. A children’s song chanted on Hanukkah altered the Biblical verse: “Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?” to “Who can recount the exploits of Israel?” The very name “Maccabees,” traditionally considered to be an acronym for the verse, “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?” was given a new rendition by a Zionist functionary: ‘Who is like unto thee among the nations, Israel?’

Traditional practices in the celebration of the festival, such as the lighting of the candles in the menorah, were observed but they were reinterpreted: the candles were said not to be in memory of the miracle of the cruse of oil, but to betoken the light of national deliverance. Furthermore, the ceremony of lighting the candles which traditionally took place in the home was now observed in the town square or other places of public assembly; and instead of the traditional blessings, there were speeches, declarations, and songs of a national-political character, and torches were lit and were carried through the streets in festive parades.

One elaborate event was a pilgrimage to Modiin where members of the youth movement, Maccabee, lit a torch and relayed it in a marathon to light Hanukkah candles along the way. On the first occasion of such a ceremony in Modiin, the audience was told that the torch which was being kindled there would be carried by runners who were the descendants of the Maccabees “not only to light the Hanukkah candles but to light up the hearts of Hebrew youth and to herald unity and national action.” [Ironically] the Modiin Marathon [a Greek term and institution] became part of a series of sports events which were held during the Hanukkah period. [E.D-Y.]

Labor and Likud (Revisionists):
Parties of the Left and Right Celebrate a Different Hanukkah

The vast majority of the Jewish community of pre-state Israel regarded Hanukkah as chiefly expressing the values associated with the struggle for national liberation. This perception was shared by the two rival movements which competed for hegemony in the Zionist movement and in the Jewish community of Palestine (the Yishuv): the Labor movement which was established in 1905 [and led by David Ben-Gurion] and the Revisionist movement which was founded in 1925 [and led by Zeev Jabotinsky and later Menachem Begin and his Likud-Herut Party]. However, the two movements differed in their approach and in their

The Maccabees and Muscular Judaism

BY MAX NORDAU

In Europe and Palestine in the early 20th century newly created Jewish youth movements and student groups were named after heroes like “Maccabees” or “Bar Kochba” and devoted to physical education and sports. Max Nordau, Herzl’s second in command in the Zionist Congress and a famous writer who lamented the degeneration of Europe at the turn of the century wrote in the newspaper of the Bar Kochba Sports Club of Berlin:

Two years ago, during a committee meeting at the Congress in Basel [the Zionist Congress of 1898], I said: We must think of creating once again a Jewry of muscles. Once again! For history is our witness that such a Jewry had once existed. For too long, all too long have we been engaged in the mortification of our own flesh.

Or rather, to put it more precisely — others did the killing of our flesh for us. Their extraordinary success is measured by hundreds of thousands of Jewish corpses in the ghettos, in the churchyards, along the highways of medieval Europe. We ourselves would have gladly done without this “virtue” [i.e. the Christian virtue of corporeal mortification]. We would have preferred to develop our bodies rather than to kill them or to have them — figuratively and actually — killed by others. We know how to make rational use of our life and appreciate its value.

If, unlike most other peoples, we do not conceive of [physical] life as our highest possession, it is nevertheless very valuable to us and thus worthy of careful treatment. During long centuries we have not been able to give it such treatment. All the elements of Aristotelian physics — light, air, water and earth — were measured out to us very sparingly. In the narrow Jewish street, our poor limbs soon forgot their gay movements; in the dimness of sunless houses, our eyes began to blink shyly; the fear of constant persecution turned our powerful voices into frightened whispers, which rose in a crescendo only when our martyrs on the stakes cried out their dying prayers in the face of the executioners. But now, all coercion has become a memory of the past, and at least we are allowed space enough for our bodies to live again. Let us take up our oldest traditions, let us once more become deep-chested, sturdy, sharp-eyed men.

This desire of going back to a glorious past finds a strong expression in the name which the Jewish gymnastic club in Berlin has chosen for itself. “Bar Kochba” was a hero who refused to know defeat. When in the end victory eluded him, he knew how to die. Bar Kochba was the last embodiment in world history of a bellicose, militant Jewry. To evoke the name of Bar Kochba is an unmistakable sign of ambition. But ambition is well suited for gymnasts striving for perfection.

For no other people will gymnastics fulfill a more educational purpose than for us Jews. It shall straighten us in body and in character. It shall give us self-confidence, although our enemies maintain that we already have too much self-confidence as it is. But who knows better than we do that their imputations are wrong. We completely lack a sober confidence in our physical prowess.

Our new muscle-Jews (Muskeljuden) have not yet regained the heroism of our ancestors who in large numbers eagerly entered the sport arenas in order to take part in competition and to pit themselves against the highly trained Hellenistic athletes and the powerful Nordic barbarians. But morally, even now the new muscle-Jews surpass their ancestors, for the ancient Jewish circus fighters were ashamed of their Judaism and tried to conceal the sign of the Covenant by means of surgical operation, while the members of the “Bar Kochba” club loudly and proudly affirm their national loyalty.

May the Jewish gymnastic club flourish and thrive and become an example to be imitated in all the centers of Jewish life!

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12. Max Nordau (1849-1923), physician, avant-garde literary critic, novelist, and one of Herzl’s earliest supporters. At the Second Zionist Congress, Nordau proposed a program to promote the physical fitness of Jewish youth. In response, the Bar Kochba gymnastic club was founded in Berlin in 1898. Similar clubs were soon established throughout Europe under the name Maccabee. Today Israel’s best sports teams are part of the Maccabee Sports Club.
interpretations of Jewish historical myths. **Revisionists** emphasized the theme of combating rule without hesitation and without compromise, however dangerous the fight, and even if the [majority of their] own nation was not willing to rebel. The Revisionists glorified the Zealots who revolted against the Romans in 66-70 CE as well as Bar-Kokhba’s fighters who also rebelled against the Romans in 132-135 CE. Bar-Kokhba’s last stronghold was Beitar and this was also the name of the youth.

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**A Biblical Psalm Becomes a Secular Song**

**PSALM 106**

Hallelujah.
Praise the Lord for God is good;
God’s steadfast love is eternal.

**Who can retell the mighty acts of the Eternal,** proclaim all God’s praises?
God saved [our ancestors], as befits God’s name . . .
God delivered them from the foe,
Redeemed them from the enemy.

**MI Y’MALEL — An Early Zionist Folksong**

Who can retell the mighty acts of Israel,
Who can count them?
In every age a hero rises to save the nation.
Hark! In those days at this time,
a Maccabee overcame and redeemed.
And in our day the whole nation of Israel will be united and rise to be redeemed.
movement of the Revisionists, while their most radical group was called Brit HaBinyanim, after the most militant of the Zealots.

Although other Zionist groups also admired the fighters against the Romans, they gave pride of place to the Hasmoneans who had waged war only after grave acts of provocation and of suppression by the Greek rulers. Such a reaction was more in tune with the “defensive ethos” of the Labor movement and of other moderate groups in the Yishuv, while the revolts against Roman rule were more in line with the militant ethos of the Revisionists.

Many Zionist leaders, writers, and poets, who inspired the Revisionist movement, were admirers of the Hellenistic culture, which was anathema to the Hasmoneans. The Revisionists saw themselves as disciples of the renowned Zionist leader, Max Nordau. In an article published in 1900, Nordau urged the cultivation of a “muscular Jewry,” which he associated especially with Bar-Kokhba, whom he described as “a hero who never knew defeat” and who embodied “the Jewry that is steeled in war and is enamoured of weapons.” Nordau also lauded, as representatives of “muscular Jewry,” the young Hellenizing Jews who took part in wrestling competitions and who were among the bitter enemies of the Hasmoneans.
One of the Zionist leaders who admired Hellenistic culture was the founder of the Revisionist movement, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who in 1905 declared:

Mankind will be eternally grateful to Hellenism, which was first to point to sports, as the best educational means for creating, by prolonged training and will power, a type imbued with spiritual beauty and courage. The Hellenes were the first to establish special gymnasia for this purpose.

The ideological differences between the Revisionists and Labor also became apparent in their differing concepts of the Hanukkah festival and of the Hasmonean revolt. The Revisionists saw the revolt as [a militant demand for national] independence, while their political rivals interpreted that revolt as a popular uprising of peace-loving peasants who had to defend themselves against their cruel oppressors.

Thus, in 1910, the Labor Zionist Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (who later became the second President of Israel) depicted the Hasmoneans as “simple peasants” who liberated their people from foreign rule, as well as from exploitation by Jewish priests and

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**The “Battle” over the Maccabees in the Streets of Jerusalem, 1881-1908**

Eliezer Ben Yehuda, the reviver of Hebrew as a modern secular language, believed that the Talmudic Rabbis had intentionally downplayed the proto-Zionist military heroism of the Maccabees while upgrading the exilic holiday of Purim. Purim’s story was included in the Bible and a full tractate dedicated to its observance in the Mishna and Talmud. Many mitzvot and customs fill the day of Purim (reading, costumes, eating and drinking), while the Rabbinic Hanukkah has no tractate and few observances and no mention of Judah the Maccabee at all. So Ben Yehuda wrote school plays for Hanukkah and in 1881 published in his Hebrew newspaper, issued in Jerusalem, an article calling metaphorically “to gather strength (military?) and proceed forward (eastward?) like Judah the Maccabee.” The anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox informed on Ben Yehuda to the Turkish authorities ruling Palestine, accusing him of calling for armed revolt. Ben Yehuda was jailed until the Turks could be persuaded that he had no concrete plans for an uprising.

In the light of the harrassment by the Ultra-Orthodox, Eliezer Ben Yehuda sought to enlighten his Zionist colleagues about the dangers of the romanticization of the Maccabees. When the Secular Zionist artist Boris Shatz, founder of the Jerusalem Institute of Art, Bezalel, unveiled his famous statue of Mattathias the Zealot, Eliezer Ben Yehuda refused to make a speech in its honor at the Zionist Hanukkah party in 1908. (See a picture of this statue on page 151.)

Ben Yehuda explained, “it is a mistake to think of the Hasmoneans as the middle way, the moderates combining foreign content with national form, bringing the beauty of the Greeks into the tents of Israel. The truth is that the Hasmoneans never succeeded in finding a middle way of compromise between Hellenist and Hasidic Jews because it was not really possible then nor is it possible in our day. When Professor Shatz asked me to speak in honor of his new statue of Mattathias holding a sword, I refused because I was afraid of the wrath of that image of Mattathias. I imagined that Mattathias’ eyes were looking at our Hanukkah party with zealous anger. If his statue were to come to rise from his grave and find himself in this Temple of Art, (the Bezalel Institute of Art in Jerusalem), surrounded by statues and pictures, then he would surely stab me with his sword with the same holy zealous emotion that he stabs the Jew who agreed to sacrifice pig on the altar in his hometown of Modiin two thousand years ago. He would smash all the statues while screaming in a great voice: “Accursed Hellenists! Violators of the Covenant! Are you the inheritors of the Maccabees? Did we spill our blood so that you would come to our land, pollute it and put statues in the Temple?” [E.D-Y.]

13. Eliezer Ben Yehuda, Hashkafah newspaper, Year 9, vol. 24, 6th Tevet 1908
“capitalists,” who enriched themselves “at the expense of people.”

The Zionist scholar Joseph G. Klausner wrote:

The great victory of Judah Maccabeus, whose memory is honored in every Jewish house and every Jewish heart during the eight days of Hanukkah, was the triumph of the Jewish tiller of the soil. It was not the city of Jerusalem nor the ranks of the wealthy and large landowners, but the obscure village of Modiin in Judah, with its peasants whose plot of land was their all, that produced Mattathias the Hasmonenean and his sons, who saved Jewish culture and perhaps the whole Jewish race from destruction. We have here an historic redemption, and the creation of a class of workers on the soil that shall serve as a basis for the future existence of the race.

The Jewish Communist Hanukkah

A peculiar attempt to use Hanukkah for class-struggle propaganda was made by the Palestinian Jewish Communists, who supported the anti-Zionism of the Arabs and who went so far as to portray the anti-Jewish riots of 1929 as a popular uprising of Arab peasants against Zionist efforts to dispossess them. In 1929, the Communist Youth League of Palestine published a pamphlet in which the leader of the Palestinian Arabs and self-confessed foe of Zionism — the Jerusalem Mufti, Hadj Amin al-Husseini [later a Nazi collaborator in Berlin during World War II] — was portrayed as the equivalent of Mattathias the Hasmonenean, since both were spiritual leaders who encouraged the emergence of a national class-liberation movement:

It may well be that the symbol in whose name the Hasmonenean muftis fought was a fanatic-religious character, but the real cause for which the peasant masses rose up was that of a movement of liberation from foreign domination and cruel exploitation.

The Moderate Religious Zionist Compromise

As for the religious Zionists, they sought to reconcile the national myth of the Maccabees with the traditional elements of Hanukkah. They held that the struggle of the Hasmoneneans was fueled by both religio-spiritual and national-political goals. Rabbi Yeshayahu Shapira, the HaPoel-Hamizrachi leader, considered the exploits of the Hasmoneneans to be a shining example of the special obligation on the Orthodox community to rally to the cause of national redemption:

In the days of the Hasmoneneans the banner of the revolt was raised expressly by Torah

fact which speaks more than all the theoretical arguments in the world for the importance of national land and agricultural workers who literally draw their bread from their soil by the labor of their hands, for the sake of the culture, the freedom, the life of the nation.

Zionism knew how to raise the Feast of Hanukkah, that feast of small candles, which shed their eternal light from the past into the future, to the height of a new national symbol. Can one ever forget that fine sketch, “The Menorah,” written by the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl? The picture of Herzl standing wrapped in troubled thought, in front of a menorah, is one of the most beautifully symbolic in the life of the leader. But it seems to me that this festival has come to tell the people, through its two thousand year old symbol, of the principle of land
followers, and they risked their lives for the liberation of the land and of the Jewish spirit. Today, we face a similar war, a war for the redemption of our land and a war for the liberation of the Jewish spirit from the alien cultures that we have absorbed.

The Decline of the Zionist Hanukkah

The establishment of the State of Israel apparently led to a decline in the importance of Hanukkah in Israeli political culture. It is no longer a major national event, with public assemblies, declarations and speeches, or with mass parades. One reason for this decline was that there was now a new annual national celebration — Independence Day.

The changes in the public perceptions of the festival are also reflected in the patterns of its celebration. Today, Hanukkah is celebrated mainly in the circle of family and friends, in the home or in parties. This whole process is linked in turn to the great decline in the status of secular ideologies, such as Socialist Zionism, or Ben-Gurion’s version of Mamlachtiut (Statism). These ideologies were intended to replace traditional Jewish religion as a symbol-system, which would underpin the cohesiveness of Jewish society and be a source of inspiration for the achievement of national goals. With the decline of these ideologies, institutionalized and politicized structures of festivals and ceremonies were abandoned in favor of more traditional or more individual and spontaneous styles, which do not reflect clear and well-defined ideological commitments. A related development is the attenuation of political authority in Israeli society, as evidenced in the refusal of large sections of the Israeli public to accept the dictates of the establishment concerning the management of social and cultural affairs, including symbolic and ceremonial behavior.

Gush Emunim: The Messianist Religious Settlers Movement

The only exception to the current trends of divesting Hanukkah of its political and heroic overtones is to be found in the symbol-system of Gush Emunim. In that movement, which advocates a mixture of devoutly religious and national values, Hanukkah symbolizes the uncompromising struggle for both religious and national goals. In 1980 one of the spiritual leaders of Gush Emunim, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner [who heads a Yeshiva in the Moslem quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem] declared that the chief feature of the festival was a commemoration of the victory of the heroic Hasmonaeans over their people’s oppressors. But that victory, the rabbi added, was achieved because the Jewish fighters were divinely inspired with spiritual power, which proved miraculous just like the miracle of the cruse of oil. Here we have a conception which stresses the centrality of the heroism of the Hasmonaeans in the struggle to liberate their people, but which asserts that the source of that heroism was divine inspiration.

The members of Gush Emunim consider themselves to be the successors of the Maccabees. Gush Emunim played a dominant role in “The Movement to Stop the Withdrawal from Sinai,” which was engaged in 1982 in a struggle against the implementation of the Camp David agreements with Egypt. Members of that group described themselves as “the Hasmonaeans of their generation, the few against the many, fired with the spirit of truth and faith.” The case of the Hasmonaeans was used by the [extreme] political radicals of Gush Emunim in their polemic against their rivals on the Israeli left.

Dan Be’eri was a member of the “Jewish
Underground” which was active in the West Bank occupied territories in the years 1980-84, and he received a prison sentence in 1985 for his part in the plot to blow up the Dome of the Rock — the Muslim shrine on the Temple Mount. At the trial of Be’eri and his comrades, one of the defense’s arguments was that “this court would also have convicted Judah the Maccabee for removing the idols from the Temple.” The same reaction was implicit in a comment by the father of one of the accused: “This court is situated on Salah al-Din Street [in East Jerusalem] and not on Judah the Maccabee Street: that’s the whole problem in a nutshell.”

In an article published on Hanukkah, 1987, Dan Be’eri commented caustically that Hanukkah celebrations hailing the heroism of the Maccabees were increasingly becoming “something both creaking and grating.” [With tongue in cheek he presented the Maccabees through the eyes of Israeli liberals who view both Gush Emunim and hence “necessarily” the Maccabees as “dangerous religious fanatics”]:

The prevailing tendency now is to observe the festival in a manner which reflects a mild fusion of national and traditional elements and which to a large extent is characteristic of Israeli political culture in general.

“Just between ourselves, the Maccabees were at bottom pretty ‘fascistic.’ They were also terrorists and religious fanatics who thrust the nation into mortal danger. They operated out of irrational, Messianic motives, and fomented a civil war. They also spurned the nation’s legitimate legal institutions, which enjoyed the solid support of a broad consensus, whereas they were a radical, violent minority. They despised progress and universal cultural values. So, is it the deeds of these people that we are instilling in Jewish youth, not to mention the miracle of the cruse of oil? This must be stopped at once! It’s all very well and fitting for Orthodox Jews. But it cannot be a Zionist holiday, glorious and positive, a source of inspiration for a progressive and humanistic society.”

Gush Emunim made efforts to link Hanukkah to its settlement activities. On Hanukkah, 1976, it established its first settlement in the occupied territories at Sebastia, and on Hanukkah, 1981, it launched a countrywide campaign to stop the Sinai withdrawal, using the slogan, [taken from a famous popular song by Naomi Shemer], “Do not uproot what is planted.” However, despite the importance which Gush Emunim has attached to Hanukkah, it has not been able to restore its standing as a central national event. One reason for this is that Hanukkah could not compete with new national festivals, such as Independence Day — and since the Six-Day War of 1967, also Jerusalem Day, which has acquired special importance and is indeed particularly celebrated by Gush Emunim. But the important factor is that while Gush Emunim can boast of its achievements in establishing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, it can hardly boast of having made a deep impression on Israeli culture.

There has clearly been a great weakening in the link between Hanukkah celebrations in Israeli Jewish society and the national myth of the Maccabees. The prevailing tendency now is to observe the festival in a manner which reflects a mild fusion of national and traditional elements and which to a large extent is characteristic of Israeli political culture in general. [E.D-Y.]
Av Beit Din (Head of the Sanhedrin): We are concerned with the lighting of the Hanukkah lights. In our previous session, we determined that the lights are to be placed at the door or window, in order to be visible from the outside, in order “to broadcast the miracle.” As the Prophet said, “Israel is to be a light unto the nations.” We are called upon to remind humankind of the duty to grow in ethical evolution, based on an awareness of God’s presence in the world and his universal command to advance ethics. Our task is to spearhead the movement toward this goal, to lead mankind in the spirit of “maalin bakodesh” (“we ascend in holiness, never regressing”). Hanukkah is therefore a universal holiday, testifying to the universality of Judaism.

Shamash (official of the Sanhedrin): Will the assembly please rise for the arrival of the Av Beit Din? (Assembly rises, and sits down as the Av Beit Din, the head of the Supreme Court and legislature, takes his seat.)

Av Beit Din (Head of the Sanhedrin): We are concerned with the lighting of the Hanukkah lights. In our previous session, we determined that the lights are to be placed at the door or window, in order to be visible from the outside, in order “to broadcast the miracle.” As the Prophet said, “Israel is to be a light unto the nations.” We are called upon to remind humankind of the duty to grow in ethical evolution, based on an awareness of God’s presence in the world and his universal command to advance ethics. Our task is to spearhead the movement toward this goal, to lead mankind in the spirit of “maalin bakodesh” (“we ascend in holiness, never regressing”). Hanukkah is therefore a universal holiday, testifying to the universality of Judaism.

Beit Hillel: We would like to yield to our brethren, the House of Shamai, and give them the honor of starting the debate.

Beit Shamai: The lights ought to be lit in descending order. This procedure is valuable from the psychological point of.
view: the Jew, lighting the candles, will be reminded every night that, after an initial effort, his task of promoting kedushah (holiness) in the world will be easier; the obstacles recede and the goal will be nearer. He will thus grow in his determination.

Beit Hillel: We hold the opposing view. The growth of kedushah must rest on an awareness of our historical past, on the lights we have kindled in the past. To this past we add the contribution of the present, thereby modifying the past, increasing illumination. The approach of our brethren of the House of Shamai may actually symbolize a relaxation of the spirit of the enlightenment, as time progresses. Therefore, in the spirit of an evolving Judaism, we hold that the lights be increased in number from day to day, in accordance with the days yet to follow.

Beit Shamai: We are agreed that the meaning of the Hanukkah lights is to inspire a growing dedication to kedushah (holiness) among Jews and humankind. May we therefore remind our brethren of a similar symbolic action in the Torah? When our holy Temple still stood, may it be restored in our days, on the Feast of Sukkot, 70 sacrifices were offered in a descending order, beginning with 13 on the second day of the feast, followed by 12 the following day, etc. The Hanukkah lights express the same symbolism, hence a decreasing sequence is indicated, as we find it “in the steers of sacrifice on the festival of Sukkot.”

Beit Hillel: With all due respect to our brethren of the House of Shamai, we have to disagree for various reasons:

(1) Beit Shamai mechanically transposes the rite of Sukkot to the practice of Hanukkah, without considering its meaning. The sacrifices are our expression of prayer for the nations. We realize that the complete unification of humankind under God will come to pass only “at the end of days,” and we refer you to the prophecy of the Prophet Isaiah. We pray however that, from the very beginning, a large number of nations may cast off their power drives, to be followed by the others, until, at the end, only a few stragglers will be left, who will then find their way to true national ethics and that all will then follow the ideal of Israel, namely, ethical nationhood. Therefore we offer one sacrifice at the end of the feast, symbolizing Israel. The decreasing number of sacrifices thus reflects our prayer for a growth in holiness.

The Hanukkah lights express our task and the tasks of the nations: each is to add to the light of kedushah, until its light dispels all darkness. Therefore we must add lights to make manifest the need for growing world-wide kedushah.

(2) The task of promoting kedushah runs counter to the usual historical development. The nations usually start out with great ideals and high aims. In the course of their development they forget their past and their ideals. Their high goals are replaced by power drives and materialism; eventually, they go to war and the lights go...
Nations usually start out with great ideals and high aims. In the course of their development they forget their past and their ideals . . . Decreasing the Hanukkah lights would express what is; we must increase them, in order to demonstrate what ought to be: a growth of kedushah.

痛苦的事情。Kedushah衰败了，随之我们也失去了自由，失去了主权。我们必须教导每一代人都要为kedushah增加光芒，我们必须逆历史的潮流而行。

Av Beit Din: I recognize a hand in the rear of the hall. Please identify yourself and state your point.

First American Jew: We are Jews of a distant land and distant time. We live in America, in the year 5736 [1976]. America contains the largest Jewish community in our world. Though far removed, we are your disciples.

Second American Jew: America has been good to us. We are fully equal and fully integrated. We live in two civilizations, the Jewish and the American; at least, we should live in two, as we have the opportunity. America is an idealistic democracy based on human rights. We have a popular hymn, including the words: “God mend thine every flaw, and crown thy good with brotherhood.” It is a nation “under God” striving for kedushah. We mention this by way of introduction, as we now wish to support the idea of Beit Hillel.

First American Jew: In America, too, ideals yielded to expediency, and in the course of the years, the lights kindled by the Founding Fathers were extinguished — to our sorrow. American Jewry has followed this decline in spirit; it decreased its spiritual lights, when it should have added to them.

Second American Jew: Our nation attained its independence exactly 200 years ago, in the year 5536 [1776]. I would like to outline its development by citing its spirit at various anniversaries.

(1) Similar to the Maccabees, the Founding Fathers regarded independence as a spiritual act. They fought a war against Britain and won it. They fought this war because they saw in Britain nothing but materialistic imperialism; its morals were low, its church, a state institution, was domineering and tried to pervert the people from their simple and true devotion to God to an alien, idolatrous worship. The Revolution was seen by the Americans as an act of redemption. A simple, God-fearing, ethical nation was to arise, a nation of brothers, dedicated to reason. All men were to be equal. Ethical nationhood was the ideal.

(2) Fifty years later, the nation had embarked on a great industrial expansion, the industrialists were to be granted privileges; the lawyer had become leader, and the loopholes of the law permitted the circumvention of ethics. It was all in the early stages of development, but it was obvious that the light of idealism was diminishing.

(3) One hundred years later, in the year 5636, a great exhibition at the City of Philadelphia was held to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic.
The observance of Hanukkah assumes for us a deeper meaning than ever, now that not only the Jewish people but all the democratic forces of the world are engaged in a struggle for survival and freedom. The historic similarity between the Maccabean war of liberation and the present conflict is deeper than would appear at first sight.

The fundamental likeness of the two wars is that both are clashes not only between antagonistic political and military powers, but between antagonistic civilizations. The foes against whom the Maccabees, for example, had to contend, were not merely the Greco-Syrian armies but the Jewish Hellenists. These were the men who, deeply impressed by the brilliance of Greek civilization and the success of its eastward march, felt that they were riding “the wave of the future” when they identified themselves with the cause of Hellenism. Some of them were undoubtedly venal scoundrels eager to curry favor with any who had favor to dispense. But others were probably sincerely convinced that Greek civilization was inherently superior and that it was sheer obstinacy and obstructionism for Jews to insist on loyalty to the Torah. They no doubt considered the Jews who persisted in their ancestral ways as narrow-minded, and regarded every protest of theirs against Hellenistic encroachment as intolerance.

Among our people too, we still have the modern equivalent of the Hellenists. A Jewish congregation in Houston, Texas, for example, excludes from its membership, and by implication from the fellowship of Israel, all who adhere to the rules of kashrut or espouse Zionism. What a vile insult to the martyrs who gave up their lives rather than eat forbidden food at the behest of the Syrian tyrant, and of the warriors who perished for the freedom of Judea from the Syrian yoke! If it is a principle with these Texas Jews that they must eat trefot (unkosher meat), nobody will deny them the right to do so. But this does not give them the right to deny equality of status in Israel to those who see in kashrut an expression of Jewish loyalty.

And what justification have they for their sabotage of Zionist effort? The strangest thing about these modern Jewish Hellenists is their effrontery in waging their fight against Zionism in the name of Jewish religion. They identify Zionism with secularism, and secularism with irreligion. Why are they so furious against Zionism? The reason, but thinly concealed behind their absurd rationalizations, is that they are embarrassed by being identified with a people which the tremendous forces of tyranny and oppression would like to destroy or suppress. Like their prototypes in the days of the Maccabees, they have no faith in the value of Jewish life and would like to see Jews give up all those aspects of Judaism which seem to stand in the way of the social acceptance of Jews by non-Jews. We do not challenge their right to refrain from participating in the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, if it means nothing to them, any more than we challenge their right to disregard kashrut. But we do deny their right to interfere with the effort to establish a Jewish Commonwealth on the part of other Jews who find its establishment necessary to their security or to their self-fulfilment as Jews.

How ironical it is that these Jewish Hellenists celebrate Hanukkah! They no doubt rationalize their doing so on the ground that Hanukkah stands for freedom of religion.

We Reconstructionists, because we have resented the effort of the American Council for Judaism16 to frustrate Zionism, have been charged with intolerance. Well, Zionism is part of our religion. If combating efforts to interfere with our freedom of religion is intolerance, we admit the charge with pride. We do not think that the Maccabees were any more tolerant of the Jewish Hellenists in their day.

16. The American Council for Judaism was a group of anti-Zionist Jews, many of them wealthy Reform Jews, who opposed Zionism in the name of Americanism.
Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) festival, to be denied to the immigrants. The unity was gone; lights had gone out.

(4) The 150th anniversary saw America submerged in a “business spirit,” morality had decayed, gangsterism reigned, and the WASP spirit had grown. The bonds with humanity had been severed by an isolationist America. The fighters and the ideal of the Revolution were forgotten.

(5) As we set about to observe the Bicentennial year, we are all confused, not knowing how to celebrate it. It must be added that American Jews, sucked in by the spirit of the country, followed the same line; Jewish knowledge and observances declined, the family fell apart, marriages out of the faith multiplied, the wealthy, rather than the dedicated, emerged as leaders. Lights have gone out. Jews should have increased the light, as Hillel suggests.

First American Jew: As we set about to celebrate the Bicentennial, new forces are stirring; minorities have gained many of the rights due them being “men, created equal,” women have progressed, social legislation has expanded, labor is no longer exploited, youth is stirring in search for new answers, based on justice and love, America is supporting Israel. It is all not perfect, many lights have yet to be kindled, but many lights have been kindled. Unlike the progress of the Hanukkah lights, fully determined step by step, we do not see as yet the steps next to be taken and the rate of progression.

I may add that the non-Jewish American is better acquainted with Hanukkah than any other holiday of Jews. There are extraneous reasons for that, but perhaps, the spirit of the increase in light has caught the imagination of the American people, so closely fashioned, in principle, on lines of Jewish ethics.

Second American Jew: We have outlined the fact that the decrease in light means decay, and the increase in light means spiritual growth. We believe that the American example speaks for the opinion of the House of Hillel, and would respectfully submit that this opinion be given preferred consideration in the shaping of Halakah [Jewish law].

Av Beit Din: Your view is of importance to us. It reflects the living spirit of the Jewish people. It is the voice of the people. We conclude that Beit Hillel expresses the Jewish people in its historical growth.

Hillel has always placed emphasis upon this voice, calling the people “if not prophets, then sons of prophets.” The voice of the people is essential. The Romans have a saying: “Vox populi, vox dei;” the voice of the people is “Bat Kol,” the daughter of God’s voice, and Bat Kol pronounces in favor of Hillel.

I want to stress that Beit Shamai and Beit Hillel are in agreement on the principle — the purpose of the Hanukkah light is “maalim bakodesh,” ascending holiness. This agreement reinforces our conviction that the opinions are indeed “the words of the living God;” discussants must be taken seriously. Nevertheless, Beit Hillel has shown the greater practical insight. Closer to the people, Beit Hillel has truly articulated how the ideal can be best symbolized and taught.

The Halakah is according to the House of Hillel: the Hanukkah lights are to be kindled in increasing number from the first to the eight day. The meeting is adjourned.

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A Reconstructed Version of Maoz Tzur

The editors of the Reconstructionist prayerbook of 1945 were appalled by the sentiments of the traditional verse in Maoz Tzur — “When You prepare the slaughter of the enemy dogs.” Its vengeful dehumanization of Israel’s foes led them to substitute a Hebrew phrase meaning literally, “When You put an end to all slaughter.” They translated the new verse into rhyming English:

“When the force of hate is demolished,
And war at last abolished,
We then will greet with joy complete
Thine altar’s consecration.”
**AN AMERICAN REFORM HOLIDAY CURRICULUM**

**THE ANTI-WAR CELEBRATION OF THE MACCABEES (1971)**

by Harry Gersh

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**Hanukkah Among Reform Jews**

Hanukkah may be difficult for some Reform Jews to embrace because of its emphasis on the Temple, on political independence of the Jewish nation, on the negative image of Western culture (Hellenism) as a coercive source of assimilation, and on the military heroism of the Maccabees. In contrast, freedom of conscience, faith in God and ethics have been central Reform values.

Thus it should not be surprising that Isaac M. Wise, who introduced Reform Judaism in the United States, suggested in 1865 the elimination of the Hanukkah lights. However, six years later the Augsburg Synod, with delegates mostly from German Reform congregations, introduced a resolution urging the appropriate commemoration of Hanukkah, which had been neglected in many Reform Jewish congregations. The rationale for this resolution was to counteract the celebration of Christmas by many Jewish families “in direct opposition to Jewish consciousness.”

A hundred and thirty years later, American Jews continue to give great significance to Hanukkah as a counter-weight to Christmas. Consistent with the Reform movement’s essential values, the curricular efforts of 1971 and 1993 sought to retool the meaning of the holiday to emphasize peace, not war, and religious freedom, not traditional religious rituals. Read carefully these familiar retellings of the story for children and try to discover the educational message of the authors.

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**Freedom of Worship**

Jewish holidays have to do with nature and God, with the growth of crops and the growth of the Jewish people. **Only one Jewish holiday — Hanukkah — centers on a war.** Even that one does not celebrate victory but cleaning the Temple and dedicating it once again.

**Jews never take up the sword willingly.** No one can take joy in the death of another human being. But sometimes we have no choice. We must stop and fight those who would deny us the freedom to be Jews. If we do not, we are, in effect, agreeing to become slaves.

That’s why Mattathias, the priest of Modiin, is the real hero of Hanukkah. He had the courage to stand up to the Syrians. **Mattathias did not want war. When many people shouted for war, Mattathias ran away from Jerusalem hoping to avoid war.** But when he found that meant he would have to give up his Judaism he knew what he had to do. If war and death were the price the Jews had to pay for the right to be Jews, then war and death it would be.

Two thousand years before Abraham Lincoln said that “a nation cannot endure half slave and half free,” Mattathias, the priest of Modiin, sent his five sons into war against the Syrians because he knew that the Jews could not exist half slave and half free.

When Antiochus’ soldiers came to the village of Modiin, Mattathias stood firm. The Book of Maccabees (in the Apocrypha) tells what he said:

> *Even if all the nations within the king’s empire listen to him and give up, each its own faith, yet will I and my sons and my brothers follow the Covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we give up the Torah and the Commandments.*

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17. While the title is the editor’s, the text is from *When a Jew Celebrates* by Harry Gersh with Eugene Borowitz and Hyman Chanover, 1971, (pp. 171-181). Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Behrman House.

18. Based on *The Hanukkah Anthology* by Phillip Goodman

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4. **MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**
not listen to the king’s words, to leave our faith.  
Let all who will obey the Torah and keep the 
Commandments follow me.

Mattathias and his sons fought with the 
Syrian soldiers and drove them from Modiin.  
And the war began.  Mattathias’ son Judah 
gathered together groups of Jews and created 
an army in the hills of Judea.  For three years 
they fought and beat the Syrians.  As winter 
came in 165 BCE, Judah’s soldiers entered 
Jerusalem and then Judah’s army came to the 
Temple.  The great stone altar stood there, 
with a great statue of Zeus — or was it 
Antiochus?

Cleansing the Temple

The soldiers threw down their arms and 
began to clean the Temple.  The idols were 
thrown out and everything cleaned.  Priests 
and Levites came forward from among the 
soldiers, and animals for sacrifices were 
brought.  All was ready for the beginning of 
services — except for the great menorah.  
One legend says that then the soldiers found 
eight iron rods stuck in the walls.  They put 
them together in the shape of a menorah and 
lit candles in them.

And on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, 
exactly three years to the day from the day the 
Temple was taken over by the Syrians, the 
Temple services were held.  Each soldier 
waved a palm branch instead of a sword.  
For many years after the end of that war of 
independence the Jews celebrated Hanukkah. 
But it was a kind of old soldiers’ holiday, 
when those who fought the war got together 
and recounted their battles and victories.  As 
these soldiers died, the holiday became less 
important.

The sons and grandsons of Mattathias died, 
and new kings ruled the Jews.  Like so many 
kings, they became tyrants.  The Jew in the 
street cursed the Hasmonean tyrants and 
would not celebrate the holiday of the victory 
of the Hasmoneans.

The Legend of the Oil

Then the Hasmonean kings were pushed 
off the throne by the Romans.  Foreigners 
rule the Jews and they were cruel.  The Jews 
hated them and wanted to rebel.  Now the 
people began to remember their last fight for 
freedom, from Antiochus.  And they remem- 
bered Hanukkah.  New stories and legends 
began to grow up around this great victory.  
That may be when the story about the oil was 
born.  It explained why Hanukkah is eight 
days and not just a week.  The spears and 
torches legend is another.  We don’t know 

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Another Reform Curriculum for Hanukkah (1993): 
Assimilating yet Drawing the Line —
“No compromises on our inner faith!”
BY ADAM FISHER

Many Jews also followed Greek ways.  But there was one 
thing the Jews would not do.  They would not worship 
the Greek gods.  No matter what the Jews looked like on the 
outside, on the inside they remained faithful to God.

— STUDENT BOOK

Introducing the Lesson

Begin by explaining that it is usually a good idea to follow 
rules and accept regulations that are imposed upon us by 
parents, school officials, government, and so on.  But there are 
exceptions when we know that a rule or regulation is wrong.  
At those times we need to speak out against it, rather than just to 
continue doing the wrong thing.

Come to class prepared to relate an experience you had when 
you felt compelled to speak out against something you felt was 
wrong.  Try to make it something on the students’ level so that 
they will be able to appreciate it fully.

Many Jews also followed Greek ways.  What were some 
Greek things that Jews began to do?  (Speak and read Greek, 
study Greek art and music, play Greek games, learn Greek 
math.)  Do we do some Christian things because we live near 
many Christians?  In what ways is this good?  In what ways is 
this not a good thing?  (Try to steer the discussion toward 
expressing that we can learn from others and absorb new things 
as long as we don’t compromise ourselves and our beliefs.)  You 
can also express that it is important for others to learn from us.

— TEACHERS’ GUIDE

which one is exactly true. But it doesn’t much matter. Sometimes there’s more real truth in the legends than in the bare facts of history.

**The Right to Worship**

Today some people try to use Hanukkah to show that the Jews were a warrior people. They were not. **Most Jews in all ages thought war was stupid.** The great men of the Jews were not warriors. They were men of learning, lawgivers, wise men. In a period of about 1,500 years there were only four great generals among the Jews. Two of them are not thought of as generals, Joshua and David. Only Judah Maccabee and Bar Kokhba are remembered as warriors, and they are more important to us today, because our times are so troubled, than they were to the Jewish tradition.

Some people try to change the meaning of Hanukkah so that it celebrates a war for

**Freedom to Serve God**

So this war was the first for the right of a people within a country to believe as they wish — so long as they followed the king’s law in worldly matters. For thousands of years, Jews have lived under kings, princes, dukes, caliphs, governors, presidents. And they have always been loyal to these rulers — so long as they were permitted to practice their own religion. **This idea of religious freedom is followed in all free nations today. It was first given to the world by the Jews.**

One thing more: Antiochus offered the Jews complete equality with all the rest of his subjects — so long as they would agree to be like all his other subjects. He said: If you Jews become like all my other people, you can enjoy all the rights my other subjects have. So the Jews fought, not for equality, but for the right to be different.

For Jews life is very, very important. But it is not the most important thing. Jews will **not do anything** to survive. For some things one must stand up and not give in. The Maccabees risked their lives for freedom to serve God.

That’s why the festival of Hanukkah does not take place on the day of a great battle. It does not take place on the day the Jews reconquered Jerusalem. It takes place during the week that the Temple was cleansed and a new fire lighted in the menorah. Such a day is so important that it must be celebrated.

This is the meaning of Hanukkah. Hanukkah is a Festival of Dedication. It reminds us of the value of freedom of worship. It recalls our dedication to God.

Some people try to change the meaning of Hanukkah so that it celebrates a war for independence. It wasn’t. The Jews would rather have had their own government and king, but they did not go to war over politics.
Hasidism has long sought the spiritual meaning of Jewish rituals and events, interpreting them both literally and allegorically, as referring to psychological and spiritual processes within the cosmos, history and the individual. Generally Hasidim have been spiritual activists who believe that by the proper channelling of spiritual intentions (kavanot) they can transform themselves and the cosmos in a redemptive way.

We have selected two Hasidic interpretations of the lighting of the menorah — one from the Hasidism of Lubavitch and one from Gur. Although the reader will see a familiar story retold, the special value emphasis of each Hasidic school will become apparent.

Lubavitch is the town in Lithuania where the Habad movement developed. In recent years Lubavitch Hasidism has been involved in a redemptive and sometimes messianic campaign to redeem every assimilated Jew, every Divine spark in the world and thereby the cosmos.

Lubavitch is well-known for its missionary activity to Jews seeking to bring them to observe at least one mitzvah. The lighting of a giant menorah in the public square has become a central event, even though it is not a halachic act since the menorah is meant to be lit at home. Habad promotes public candle lighting ceremonies at the White House, on highways and on satellite television as an analogue for their own mission to publicize God’s hidden miracles and help each Jew to discover the Divine spark hidden within.

The Gerer Rebbe, from the village of Gora (or Gur or Ger) outside Warsaw, founded one of the largest and most intellectual dynasties of Polish Hasidism. His son Yehudah Leib Alter (rabbi from 1871 to 1905) collected his very popular weekly spiritual meditations on the Torah reading and the holidays into a book called Sefat Emet: The Language of Truth. The selection on Hanukkah can be juxtaposed to Habad. While Habad emphasizes the light of one’s soul used to illuminate the darkness of the Western world and to rekindle the darkened sparks of assimilated Jews, the Gerer Rebbe focuses on the need to shine a light into our inner darkness and to purify our inner Temple. It is not to publicize the miracle to others, but “to find the hidden light within all our own chambers.” Although Habad is also concerned with inner illumination, its emphasis lies with lighting the souls (candles) of others. The lighting of the menorah is a fulfillment of the Divine purpose of creation — “Let there be light,” “for a world without the light of Torah is mired in darkness.”
Today, the lamps are there, but they need to be lit. It is written, "The soul of man is a lamp of God," \(^{21}\) and it is also written, "A mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light." \(^{22}\) A Hasid is one who puts personal affairs aside and goes around lighting up the souls of Jews with the light of Torah and mitzvot. Jewish souls are in readiness to be lit. Sometimes they are around the corner. Sometimes they are in a wilderness or at sea. But there must be someone who disregards personal comforts and conveniences and goes out to ignite these lamps with his or her flame. That is the function of a true Hasid.

Hasidism in general demands that one disseminate Torah and Yiddishkeit all over and seek to benefit fellow Jews. In the words of Rebbe Sholom Dov-Ber: "A Hasid is he who surrenders his self to seeking the welfare of another." Over and beyond that, Habad demands pnimiyut (inwardness): one should not act superficially, as a mere act of faith, but with inner conviction, with the soul-faculties of HaBaD (Hochma — conceptual wisdom; Bina — comprehensive understanding; and Da’at — penetrating analytic knowledge).

The message is obvious. This function is not really limited to Hasidim, but is the function of every Jew. Divine Providence brings Jews to the most unexpected, remote places, in order that they carry out this purpose of lighting up the world.

May God grant that each and every one of us be a dedicated “lamp lighter,” and fulfill his or her duty with joy and gladness of heart.

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**CANDLE LIGHTING BY SATELLITE (1992)**

An Address by Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Recently we can “proclaim and propagate the miracle” world over using a satellite or other scientific inventions to honor God, because as the Rabbis said "everything God created in the world was for his honor." \(^{23}\)

In fact the ability to see visually by satellite how one person, even a child, can light a candle seen round the world instantaneously teaches us that it is within the power of each one of us to light up the whole world. By satellite we can unite Jews all over the world no matter how dispersed; thus Hanukkah teaches the oneness of Israel, of God and of Torah.

The satellite connection teaches the Jews that what happens in one place can have an

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20. The Lubavitcher Rebbe from 1950 to 1994. Based on Sichot HaRebbe (Talks) from the years 5701, 5700, 5722.
effect in any other place, what happens in heaven (satellite) can have an effect on what happens on earth. If it is a mitzvah “to place the candle on the outside of one’s doorway to proclaim the miracle,” then even more so is it a mitzvah to place it “outside” in a central public space for even greater “proclamation of the miracle” — including for the nations of the world, for they too are commanded to observe Torah, the laws of Noah. Of course one’s house should also be a source of light for one’s environment — a house filled with inner spiritual light of Torah, prayer and loving kindness.

The Hanukkah candles we light are comprised of two aspects: (a) illuminating the world during the time of exile, and thereby (b) preparing the world for the coming redemption.

Kindling Hanukkah Lights Today, Illuminating the Exile

The Hanukkah candles are lit for eight days. This does not mean that the same mitzvah is repeated eight times in succession. Just as in a physical sense new candles are lit each night, so it is in a spiritual sense, every night a new mitzvah is fulfilled with new fire. Also, each night we add another candle, indicating how we must constantly increase our efforts to spread light. The Hanukkah lights reflect the fire within the Jewish soul, as it is written, “The soul of man is the lamp of God.” Each person possesses this light within his body. Hanukkah teaches how this light must be ignited and shine forth and how it must be renewed and increased each day.

The Hanukkah candles are to be placed “at the outside of the entrance to one’s home.” This indicates how the light of a person’s soul should shine not only within the confines of his own being, but must also be projected outward, thereby illuminating his environment and filling it with light.

The kindling of each person’s individual menorah, the fire of his soul, leads also to the kindling of the collective menorah, the Jewish people. The light they produce is not self-contained, but rather shines “outside” and illuminates the world at large, spreading light in the totality of the darkness of exile.

Projecting light to the world at large is the underlying intent of all the mitzvos, as it is written, “A mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light.” However, to a greater degree than in other mitzvos, this intent is reflected in the Hanukkah candles, for they produce visible light and they spread that light throughout their surroundings.

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A Lubavitch Children’s Story: The Young Hasmonean by R. Zamir

When little Yisrael returned from Heder (Hebrew school) on Hanukkah evening, the whole family was ready to light the candles. “How much I desire to be one of the Hasmoneans, to join Judah the Maccabee in fighting the evil Greek Empire that tried to separate Israel from its Holy Torah,” thought Yisrael. An inner desire to be one with the Hasmoneans took control of the young mind.

His sparkling eyes fastened on the candle that began to flicker and almost to go out. The flame rose and then fell again and again as if the candle were saying: I want to live, to light up the world . . . Yisrael’s blue eyes closed for a moment and it seemed as if the candle was speaking to him before it departed and went out:

My dear son! I understand your desire to be a heroic Hasmonean, willing to sacrifice your life for the Holy Torah. Therefore I have come to assure you that you have the inner strength to be a Hasmonean. What the Maccabees did “in those days,” you can do “in these days.”

How? Let me tell you: Not far from your house are hundreds and thousands of Jews. Though inside them they have a holy Jewish soul like yours, it is hidden. They have no idea what a great and holy day Hanukkah is and what the candles symbolize — all those miracles. They know nothing. Listen, my dear son! You have a wonderful opportunity to be a Maccabee, to fight the Greek spirit that distances them from the Hasmonean spirit. Go and talk to them. Tell them all the wonderous stories you have heard. Perhaps you can influence them so that they too will go with you to Heder (Hebrew school). Before I leave you, (said the candle), I promise that if you really want it, you can be a Maccabee just like Judah the Maccabee.
Our Children, the Lights within the Exile

The darkness of exile is in fact being illuminated. Proof of this is that the majority of the participants in this gathering are children. Children perpetuate the golden chain of our people’s bond with the Torah and its mitzvos. The fact that our children accept their responsibilities as Tzivos HaShem (“God’s army”) demonstrates how “the lamp of mitzvah” and “the light of Torah” are spreading throughout the world.

This special quality of children is also reflected in the very name of the festival, for Hanukkah is also related to the word Hinuch, meaning “education.” It is written, “Educate a child according to his way [so that] even when he grows older he will not depart from it.” This points to the unique role of childhood in, and the effect it has on all stages of one’s life. It is the experience and training during one’s childhood which affects the entire life of the person. Therefore, when we see the excitement of children participating in this gathering, we are certain that this will be carried into all different stages of their lives.

Bringing the Redemption Near, Through Tzedakah

The preparation of the world for the era of redemption is enhanced by the mitzvah of Tzedakah (charity). In particular, this is accomplished by children, for we find a unique quality in the Tzedakah given by a child, which is not found in the Tzedakah given by an adult.

Adults work to earn their livelihood, and thus can perhaps replace the money that they have given away. In contrast, children do not earn their own money and have only what they have been given by their parents. Nevertheless, we see that a child gives generously.

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The White House
Washington
January 22, 1987

Dear Rabbi,

I was delighted to accept the handsome menorah from you and your fellow rabbis when you came to the White House for the third consecutive year. Thank you very much for this spiritual gift — and for the copy of Let There Be Light24 which you also presented to me. I am particularly pleased to have these special remembrances in observance of Hanukkah — and your organization’s steadfast support and friendship mean more than I can say.

Please convey my kindest regards to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Schneerson. You and all the American Friends of Lubavitch have my best wishes.

Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan

Furthermore, in keeping with the Hanukkah lesson of increasing light, a child does not remain satisfied with giving once, but continues to give many times. And most importantly, the child gives with joy, happy at the opportunity to fulfill God’s will. Indeed, a child’s eagerness and joy in the performance of this mitzvah should serve as lessons for his or her parents, inducing them to emulate these qualities in their observance of the mitzvos.

At the conclusion of this gathering, each child will be given three coins as Hanukkah gelt. Our Sages associate the number three with a chazakah, a sequence that firmly establishes a lasting practice. This word also signifies strength and is reflected in the Jewish people’s growing stronger from day to day in their observance of the Torah and its mitzvos. A fourth coin will also be given to you, for you to give to Tzedakah, preferably together with additional money of your own. When the number four is doubled, the sum is eight, a number also associated with the future redemption.

The Menorah Around the World

Lights the Path for the Menorah in the Beis HaMikdash

Through telecommunication, we have just witnessed how the Jewish people, dispersed as they are throughout the entire world, have gathered together to kindle the Hanukkah menorah, joining the individual lights of their souls together into the larger torch. The fusion of all these lights reflects the kindling of the worldwide menorah, the Jewish people. Its fusion shines “at the outside of the entrance to one’s home,” kindling the fire in the hearts of other people, inspiring them to light their own menorahs, and illuminating the world at large.

May the merit of these achievements and the resolve to increase efforts to reach out, even to those who may not of yet been reached, cause God to grant our prayer and bring the coming Redemption so that “at this time,” now in our days, we will “kindle the lights in Your holy courtyard,” in the courtyard of the Third Beis HaMikdash.

### Al HaNissim: “The impure were handed over to the pure, the evil to the righteous . . . .”

**By the Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson**

The “impure” refer not to the Greeks as such, who as non-Jews have no basis for purity or impurity, but to the Hellenist Jews who have the potential to be pure. The miracle is even greater since the enemies of the Jews who were pure, righteous and students of Torah, were the majority of Jews who willingly and by force became Hellenized. Yet the minority of Jews — pure, righteous students of Torah — defeated the many.

This is a source of encouragement for our generation in which the true and complete observers of Torah and mitzvos are a tiny minority among the Jews. Contemplating this fact can lead one, God forbid, to despair, since redemption requires all the Jews to repent. But the model of Hanukkah shows that a minority of Torah-true Jews can, with God’s help, win over the majority who are like “children who were captured” by others and never learned about Judaism. The minority is small in quantity, not in quality; because of their holiness they not only defeat the others but the others are “handed over” to the pure and become “pure, righteous, students of Torah.”

This battle of majority impure and minority pure Jews is repeated inside each Jew. The minority, i.e. one’s inner holiness and spirituality, can transform the majority, i.e. one’s physicality. Thus we can be encouraged to repent and to build our own inner sanctum by purifying ourselves and then lighting within us our candle, for “God’s candle is the human soul.”
Remember that the “light” symbolizes the holy Torah and its commandments. The “darkness” is the absence of Torah. The “inside” is the inner spirituality of Torah, while the “outside” is the material world.

The message of Hanukkah is our obligation to propagate the “light of the Torah” into the “outside” which is still without Torah. Torah and the Jewish way of life are not meant to be confined “inside” on holy days or holy places but rather to fill every moment and every place whether at home, at school or in the market place. It is our mission to shine our inner light into the material world, even in public spaces.

Just as an added candle is lit on every night of Hanukkah, so each one of us must add to the light of Torah in the world. If each of us does his duty then we can confidently expect the Fulfillment of Divine promise that “night will be as light as day.” Then the end of our dark exile is near and the light of our Messiah will shine over the darkness of the nations, then the Third Temple will be built, the Temple menorah will be lit and never again be extinguished.

The Error of Greek Ways

Some people think that Hanukkah is chiefly about a military victory. However while the military victory was essential, it was a means to the final purpose of purifying the Temple, spiritual survival. In short, the point is to remove Greek pagan influence and to spread the light of holiness.

Greek culture has two faces. Outwardly, it is brilliant and attractive. Inwardly, it is rotten and corrupt. It is the culture of sports, circuses and theater. Nevertheless, even in Eretz Yisrael there were Jews who wanted to assimilate, “to live it up” as Hellenists.

An observant Jew can survive as the only Jew in the city. He must see himself as the little candle, the single cruse of oil, lighting up the great darkness. The nature of a candle is that one can light more and more candles (souls) from it — endlessly.

The Greeks made a gross error when they persecuted the Jews. They didn’t know that when one “presses” a Jew to abandon the faith of his/her ancestors, then precisely at that moment the “pintele Yid” — the Jewish inner point is revealed and the Jew resists energetically and offers his whole self. That is the nature of the Divine soul, of the “stiff necked people, Israel.”

THE HASIDIC HANUKKAH OF THE REBBE OF GUR:
FINDING THE HIDDEN LIGHT WITHIN

by Yehuda Leib Alter of Ger

It is written: "A lamp [candle] of the Lord is the soul of man, seeking out all the belly's chambers." The Gemara (Talmud) notes that searching requires a candle. "I will seek out Jerusalem with candles."

Sanctuary and Temple are found in every one of Israel, as the Torah says: "I will dwell within them." These are present insofar as a person makes it clear to himself that all of life-energy comes from the soul. Thus we say each day in the prayerbook: "The soul You have placed within me is pure..." This means that there is a certain pure place within each Jew, but it is indeed deeply hidden.

When the Temple was standing, it was clear that all life-energy came from God. This is the meaning of the phrase: the indwelling of Shekhinah [in the Temple] was witness that God dwells in Israel. But even now, after that dwelling-place has been hidden, it can be found by searching with candles. The candles are the mitzvot; we need to seek within our hearts and souls in order to fulfill a mitzvah with all our strength. The word NeR (candle) stands for Nefesh Ruah ("soul" and "spirit"). To fulfill a mitzvah in this way we also make use of all our 248 limbs. These, combined with love and fear, together add up to the equivalent of the word NeR (248 + 2 = 250/Ner). Then we are ready to find the sanctuary, to come to that hidden point within.

Especially at this season, when lights were miraculously lit for Israel, there remains light even now to help us, with the aid of these Hanukkah candles, to find that hidden inner light. By the power of the mitzvot that you do with all your strength, you can arouse the inner life-energy, which is the pure point. Of this, the Bible says: "Seeking out all the belly's chambers." By the power of inwards we can find the hidden light within all our own inner chambers.

This is the meaning of the statement: "A person must always measure himself as though a holy being dwelt within his innards." Of a person who conducts himself in this way it is written: "Let them make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them." Truly within them!

Arthur Green comments: The Hanukkah candles are here reinterpreted as a spiritual symbol. They are the light of the mitzvot by which we search out our inner selves. We are looking for the hidden divine light within ourselves; the mitzvot are light-seeking candles, instruments given to us to aid us in that search.

Hanukkah is the time of rededication, making the Temple once again pure enough to be a dwelling-place for God. Our inner Temple, too, needs to be dedicated anew, to become again the place where God can dwell "within them."

My grandfather and teacher quoted the Gemara that says: "Wicks and oils that the Rabbis said not to use to light Sabbath lamps may be used for the light of Hanukkah." This, he explained, refers to the impure souls within Israel. The word NeFeSh (soul) stands for Ner/Petilah/Shemen (lamp/wick/oil). Those that cannot rise up on the Sabbath — because "the light skips in them and [the wicks] are not drawn up" — can be brought up on Hanukkah.

These holidays of Hanukkah and Purim belong to the oral Torah. The three festivals which God gave us, [Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot], are commanded expressly in the written Torah. God gave us those holy times, sanctified since Creation, for all was created through the Torah. They bear witness that the blessed Holy One has chosen Israel and is close to them, giving them his holy testimony. The word mo'ed, used for these festivals, is related to edut (testimony).

But Hanukkah and Purim are special times that Israel merited by their own deeds. These are called oral Torah; they are witness that Israel chose the blessed Holy One. Israel are

32. Sefat Emet 1:198
Because Hanukkah and Purim were brought about by Israel's own deeds, every Jewish soul can be restored through them.

 Arthur Green: Every Jewish soul is kosher enough to be a candle in God's menorah! This is our holiday, one that became sanctified only because of our actions, not by original divine intent. For this sort of holiday no one needs to feel inadequate or insufficiently holy to participate.

 All this shows that were it not for the evil forces and the wicked who cover over the power of holiness, Israel would be ready to ascend to the highest rung, to cleave to the Root above. But "darkness covers the earth." As soon as they overpowered the Hellenists, they were blessed in a single moment and enabled to cleave to that Root above.

 This should console our generations as well. Even though we see how lowly we are, how we sink lower and lower in each generation, we retain our hope that in a single moment, when the time of redemption comes, we may, with God's help, be carried all the way back to wholeness.

 Arthur Green: Here the miracle of the Hanukkah lights is interpreted symbolically, as it properly should be. The bit of oil that remained, miraculously lasting eight days, stands for the bit of strength that was present in the Jews, allowing them to last out the struggle with a much stronger enemy. In this Hasidic version it is the bit of holiness still within them, despite the violations of Judaism imposed by the Greeks, that blossomed forth into true wholeness as soon as the oppression was improved.
The Christians sanctified the Books of the Maccabees and of Judith contained in Egyptian Jewish's Greek Bible, the Septuagint. Although Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, later relegated the Maccabees to the Apocrypha, the supplement to the Old Testament, both Catholics and Protestants revere the Maccabees, the religious martyrs like Hannah and warriors like Judah and Judith. Hanukkah is even mentioned in the New Testament. “It was the Feast of Dedication of the Temple at Jerusalem; it was winter.”

The Church Fathers (100-400 CE) fortified their congregants during the era of Roman persecution of Christian martyrs by praising the Maccabean martyrs — Hannah and Elazar. Gregory of Nazianzus identified Hannah’s grief over her martyred seven sons with Mother Mary’s grief over the crucified Jesus. St. Augustine designated August 1 as the spiritual birthday of the Maccabean saints (Commemoratio Sanctorum Macchabaeorum Martyrorum). In Antioch, Syria, a church was built to house their relics, the bones of the Maccabees, and in the 6th century the bones of Hannah and her seven sons were reinterred in Rome on orders of the pope. They are now located in the same church, San Pietro in Vincoli, in Rome, as is Michaelangelo’s statue, “Moses.”

In the Middle Ages the Christian warrior kings and knights identified with Judas Maccabeus and Judith. Below we have brought two selections from historian Barbara Tuchman’s The Bible and the Sword, about the 10th century English King Alfred and his Abbot Aelfric and about the Crusader King Richard the Lion-Heart, leader of the Third Crusade.

In the modern era “Judith” was the subject of many European plays and “Judas Maccabeus” became one of Handel’s great English oratorias (1746).

**Judas and Judith, Heroes for King Alfred and Abb Aelfric**

by Barbara Tuchman

As the annual terror of the Norsemen [the Viking invaders from Norway who conquered and pillaged northern Britain in the 9th-10th century] lengthened into territorial conquests, and as the hope of ridding the country of its enemies all but flickered out, last-ditch fighters like King Alfred and religious leaders like the Abbot Aelfric (died 1020) tried to inspire a sense of national resistance among the people. To spread religious education, but also to foster a fighting patriotism among his people, Aelfric turned to the example of the ancient Hebrews. In addition to translating the Pentateuch he epitomized most of the Old Testament in a running narrative about Esther, “who delivered her nation,” Judith, and Judas Maccabaeus. He explains his choice of the last by “the great valor of that family who prevailed so much in fighting against the heathen forces encroaching upon them and seeking to destroy and root them from the land which God had given them, and they got the victory through the true God in whom they trusted according to Moses’ law. I have turned them also into English so read them you may for your instruction.”

**Judas Maccabeus**, whose history Aelfric included in his Lives of the Saints, was, he says, “as holy in the Old Testament as God’s elect ones in the Gospel-preaching because he ever contended for the will of the Almighty. He was God’s thane [vassal, warrior, baron, knight] that most often fought against their conquerors in defense of their people.”
Judas then girt himself with his shining breast plate
Even as an immense giant and completely armed
himself
And guarded his host against the foes with his sword.
He became then like a lion in his strifes and deeds.

Likewise the story of Judith, Aelfric explains, “is also
arranged in English in our manner as an example to you
men that you should defend your land against the hostile
host.” Aelfric’s homily on Judith’s heroic tyrannicide was
inspired by the most stirring of all the Anglo-Saxon Bible
poems, Judith, which is supposed to have been composed
in honor of Alfred’s stepmother, the young Queen Judith
(856 CE).

In the fragment that survives we read how Holofernes,
drunk as a typical Saxon thane:
Laughed and shouted and raged so that all his folk
Heard far away how the stark-minded stormed and
yelled,
Full of fierce mirth and mad with mead [alcoholic ale].
Judith enters the tent where the Assyrian king is
sleeping off his drunken stupor; down flashes her glitter-
ing sword, beheading the tyrant. Triumphantly she holds
aloft the black-bearded, blood-dripping head to the people
assembled at the city’s walls, exhorting them to revolt.
Proud the Hebrews hew a path with swords
Through the press thirsting for the onset of the spear.

An illuminated medieval Christian manuscript depicts the martyrdom of
Hannah and her seven sons. Hannah
and her children are shown being boiled
to death in a pot while Antiochus,
holding his sceptre, looks on. In the
background, another female martyr is
being crucified and stoned. Inset at the
top of the illustration shows the
crucifixion of Jesus which, according to
Christian interpretation, was
foreshadowed by the death of the
Maccabean martyrs, 200 years earlier.
This illustration accompanies the
translation of IV Maccabees by Erasmus
of Rotterdam, 1517, and all the scenes
are portrayed as foreshadowing the
persecution and death of Jesus.

(Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish
Theological Seminary of America)
The Warrior Patriots: Richard and Judas Maccabeus

In some way men of the Middle Ages were able utterly to dissociate in their minds the contemporary Jews from the ancient Hebrews. The archetype of warrior patriot to whom both Richard the Lion-Heart and Robert Bruce were compared by their admirers was Judas Maccabeus. In fact, it was the great captains and kings among the Hebrews, not their prophets, who particularly appealed to the mailed mentality of the age of “chivalry.” Among the “Nine Worthies” of history, “three pagans, three Jews and three Christian men” whose figures so often appear carved over church doors or embroidered in tapestry, the three Jews were represented by Joshua (not Moses), David, and Judas Maccabeus.

Richard may have been a Maccabee in valor, strength, and strategy, but not in motive. He fought for fun, nor for liberty; that is, in Palestine. The fable agreed upon as regards Richard — a towering red-head — is of a sort of second King Arthur, which he was anything but. However, he provided England with a legend and with a feeling for the Holy Land as the locus of his legend, so that for his time and the hundred years that followed many an Englishman could have said: “When I am dead and opened, ye shall find Palestine lying in my heart.”

His legend tells of the glorious tale of his prowess in Palestine as he hacked and slashed his way through the Saracen (Moslem Turk) ranks with sword in one hand and battle ax in the other. It was in Palestine that he became Richard the Lion-Heart and in Palestine that he was transformed from the quarrelsome, valorous, conscienceless man into England’s first hero king since Alfred.

The Crusaders and Income Tax

At the outset the Crusades were set in motion by a thirst for gain, for glory, and for revenge upon the infidel [the Moslem conquerors of Jerusalem] in the name of religion. Exulting in bloodshed, ruthless in cruelty, innocent of geography, strategy, or supply, the first Crusaders in 1096 plunged headlong eastward with no other plan of campaign than to fall upon Jerusalem and wrest it from the Turks. This in some mad fashion they accomplished only because the enemy was divided against himself.

Thereafter mutual dissension defeated them too; even the most elementary loyalty among allies that ought to have been dictated by a sense of self-preservation was lacking. For the next two hundred years the trail of their forked pennons [flags] across the heart of the Middle Ages was but a series of vain endeavors to recapture the victories of the first expedition.

The immediate cause of the Third Crusade was Saladin’s capture of Jerusalem from the Franks in 1187. So great was the response that kings, nobles, and knights were taking the vow right and left until, says de Vinsauf, “it was no longer a question of who would take the Cross but who had not yet taken it.” He reports, too, that it became the custom to send a distaff [an implement for spinning] and wool, token of a woman’s role, to prod reluctant warriors.

Initially the Crusades were supported by placing alms boxes in all the churches for contributions in aid of the Templars, and a levy ad sustentationem Hierosolymae terrae [to sustain the Christians in Jerusalem] amounting to twopence in the pound for the first year . . . Later, one outcome of the fate of far-off Jerusalem was England’s first income tax, devised by Henry II to meet the cost of the expedition. Crusaders were exempt, but everyone else had to pay a tenth of all rents and movables.

Henry died in July 1189. The rampaging Richard was king. He had taken the Cross two years earlier, within a fortnight of the news of Jerusalem’s fall, and now he could be held back no longer. Unlike his father, he was unconcerned with the responsibilities of kingship or with England as a kingdom,
except as it gave him the opportunity to indulge in grand style his ruling passion for battle, adventure, and glory. The Crusade offered all these with chivalry’s greatest gage [challenge], a renowned and valiant enemy, and salvation for his soul.

“**The Sword of the Maccabees** and the Pogroms

Though armed with the “sword of the Maccabees,” in the words of Pope Urban, the Crusaders struck their first blows at the people of the Maccabees before they ever left Europe. Every Jewish community on their path was put to the sword by the Christian warriors, who could not wait for the end of the journey to bathe their hands in blood. In part these massacres were an anticipatory lunge at the infidel in the person of the Jews who were the most convenient victims, the more so as it was rumored that they had devilishly inspired the Turkish persecution of Christians in the Holy Land. Partly also, the pogroms were an opportunity for loot, always a powerful motive among the Crusaders.

**Popular hatred of the Jews** was not a particularly active sentiment until inflamed by the Holy Wars. Medieval man’s almost superstitious dread and detestation of the “heretic,” the person outside the church, was one component. Another was the common feeling against the person to whom money is owed. Usury, the lending of money at interest, was practiced by the Jews in the Middle Ages because the guild system excluded them from other forms of livelihood, because their own law, while forbidding usury among themselves, permitted it toward non-Jews, and because usury, although Christian law forbade it among Christians, was necessary to the community. Ultimately, when the rise of capitalism and a money economy made it even more necessary, Christian scruples relaxed sufficiently to permit the practice of usury by themselves. But during the Middle Ages it was largely confined to the Jews, and through them it provided the Crown with a lucrative source of revenue.

The more the sovereign encouraged Jewish usury, the more the people hated the Jews. During the crusading era they learned that violence practiced under the banner of the Cross was a simple way to wipe out debt and to seize Jewish gold with impunity. By the time of the Second Crusade in 1146 its preachers were inveighing against the Jewish race in general, and the first recorded accusation of ritual murder [in which Jews supposedly used Christian blood for making matza] was brought in 1144 against the Jews of Oxford. By the time of the Third Crusade in 1190 the association of **Crusade and pogrom** was automatic, and the killings began immediately on Richard’s coronation, though not at his order. Once started, they spread in waves from London to all the cities in which Jews lived, until the final ghastly climax at York, where the only Jews to escape slaughter by the mob were those who slew their wives and children and then died by their own hand.

“**Jerusalem is Lost**” and **Maoz Tzur**

[The red haired Richard the Lion-Heart of England (1157-1199) arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1191 and valiantly recaptured the city of Acre from Salah-a-Din, brilliant commander of the Turkish Moslems. But Richard’s ally, the red-haired Frederick Barbarossa of Germany (1123-1190), drowned on his march through Turkey. Due to bickering and disorganization, Richard never succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem. But his crusades kept him far from England where his corrupt brother John exploited his subjects. The legendary stories of Robin Hood focus on this period.]

Palestine was a lost cause. Exactly one hundred years after Richard the Lion-Heart broke the walls of Acre two hundred thousand Mamelukes marched against the Crusaders’ last city. In 1291 Acre fell; the same year that Edward expelled the Jews from England the last Christians were driven from Palestine.

From the Crusaders’ throats there first rang the sinister “Hep, hep!” (**Hierosolyma Est**
When Handel began to work on the oratorio *Judas Maccabeus*, he was caught up in the patriotic struggle of his patron the Hanoverian king of England who was threatened by an invasion led by his rival Prince Charles Edwards. In 1745-1746 the loyalists battled the invaders in Scotland, emerging victorious under the Duke of Cumberland to whom the oratorio *Judas Maccabeus* was dedicated. (At the same time the still-contemporary English national anthem was written.)

This oratorio reflects the popular nationalism of the day that saw in Judas the courageous defender against the Greek Syrian invaders. *Judas Maccabeus* Act I reads, “Chorus of Israelites, Men and Women, lamenting the death of Mattathias, father of Judas Maccabeus.” They pray for a new leader. Simon feels “the Deity within” and points to his brother Judas as the future liberator. Judas recalls God’s traditional aid and his father’s dying injunction to resolve on liberty or death. Disclaiming personal ambition, he leads the people to battle. In Act II the Jews celebrate at considerable length their victory. (The Jews of London were particularly enthusiastic supporters of this enormously popular oratorio, proud that Judas Maccabeus, rather than Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, was the main character presented).

Handel continued the tradition of identifying Judith’s and Judas’ enemies with contemporary enemies. Hans Sachs (1551) wrote a play, “Judith,” in which the enemy are the Turks then threatening the gates of Christian Europe. J. Greff (1564) identified the enemy as the Catholics besieging the Protestants. But the most sophisticated treatment of Judith is by the playwright Friedrich Hebbel (1840):

Hebbel himself remarks that he could not model his heroine on the Judith of the Bible, who deceives Holofernes and triumphs vociferously after she has murdered him in his sleep; for hers is a vile deed. In Hebbel’s drama, Judith is still a virgin. She wants to save her people by a bold feat, but is enraptured by Holofernes and hates herself for it. Holofernes is a Near Eastern despot who envies Nebuchadnezzar for having first thought of making his people worship him as a god. He is given to pontificating about religion and morality. He violates Judith. After she has cut off his head, she realizes that she (like Schiller’s *William Tell*) has not acted as representative of her people, but in order to avenge her virginity — that she committed the right deed for the wrong reason. She is plagued by doubts about whether her compatriots even deserved her sacrifice. In the last scene she addressed her people bitterly: “Yes, I have killed the first and last man on earth, so that you may let your sheep graze in peace, that you may plant your cabbage, and that you may pursue your trade and beget children who will be like you.” As a reward she demands to be killed if she bears Holofernes’ child: “Pray to God that my womb be barren. Maybe he will show mercy to me.”

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