

## Chanukah For Grown Ups

Relate history of the actual historical events

“Judah Maccabee with his men, led by the Lord, recovered the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. He demolished the altars erected by the heathen in the public square and their sacred precincts as well. When they had purified the sanctuary, they constructed another altar; then, striking fire from flints, they offered a sacrifice for the first time for two whole years and restored the incense, the lights and the show bread...The sanctuary was purified on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of Kislev, the same day of the same month as that on which foreigners had profaned it. The joyful celebration lasted for eight days...A measure was passed by the public assembly, which stated that the entire Jewish nation should celebrate these days every year. (*II Maccabees 10:1-8, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE*)”

Book of Maccabees not canonized - became sacred scripture bc of Greek (Hellenized Jews) translation and their admiration for the Maccabees even though was anti-Hellenizing force

Maccabees had missed celebrating Sukkot - Both 1st and 2nd Temples dedicated on Sukkot

Decided to dedicate Temple with 8 day festival (7 days of sukkot + shemini atzeret)

Tell history of rabbinic interpretation in light of Rome (Talmud) - how Hannukah survived

Talmud:

“What is Chanukah? Our rabbis taught: On the 25th of Kislev begin the eight days of Chanukah, on which we refrain from eulogizing the dead and from fasting. 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 that had been sealed by the High Priest. It contained only enough for one day’s lighting, but a miracle was brought about with it, and they lit from it for eight days. The following year they were established as a festival, with Hallel and thanksgiving.” (*Talmud, Shabbat 21a, c. 500-700 C.E.*)

*'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. Moreover, the Maccabees had made themselves and their offspring kings, after expelling the Syrian-Greek empire. In itself, that was a violation of the ancient Israelite constitution, which requires the priests and the king to come from different tribes and thereby created a check-and-balance system between religious and political power. Even worse in the eyes of the rabbis, the Hasmonean kings—despite their anti-imperial, anti-assimilationist origins—had invited the Roman Empire to become protectors and overlords of the Jewish kingdom, paving the way for the ultimate Roman conquest. And worst of all, the Hasmonean kings sided with the Sadducees, the priestly upholders of the primacy of Temple sacrifice as a channel to God, against the Pharisees forerunners of the rabbis who saw prayer and the study and interpretation of Torah as the path to God.*

*All these Maccabean ways of exercising power seemed to the rabbis a subtle surrendering to the habits of the Gentiles-ironically, 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.' (Rabbi Arthur Waskoe, Seasons of Our Joy, p.91)*

The conversation we had about assimilation last week in Torah study - here's the prime example from Jewish history

Hellenized Jews were the aristocracy and merchant class

General Jewish holiday idea - conflict between military victory and spiritual victory

Tension within Jewish community of the time - Hellenizers and Zealots - DEEP division!!

## STOP FOR QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Origins of festival in Solstice envy? Irony of that and Xmas now

Practice of menorah

Lit in Temple ritual so central to the rededication

Argument between Hillel and Shammai

Shamash so that light won't be "used" for practical purposes

Women traditionally do not work during time candles burn - could be about Judith

"There is a debate between Rashbam and Tosfot regarding what this phrase actually means. Tosfot hold that it means that women were miraculously saved from danger as well as the men. Rashbam explains there was a female heroine who had an active role in saving the Jewish people, like Esther on Purim or in this case, Yehudit on Chanukah. The minhag of women refraining from work after lighting Chanukah candles seems to follow the Rashbam's interpretation. If the women were passively saved, like the men, then everyone would refrain from work after candle lighting. The fact that it is almost exclusively a woman's minhag reinforces the position that women played a unique role, therefore only they refrain from work.

### **Menorah in window - need to publicize hope now more than ever!**

How we live and bring light should shine out from our private lives into the world

*By lighting the menorah, we ignite the flame in our souls, the sparks that cannot be extinguished, that will burn not for eight days but for eternity. We place the menorah in our windows to be visible to those passing by, just as our inner light must shine against the darkness of evil and indifference and must kindle the spirits of our fellow humans. The menorah reminds us of the miracle that no matter how dark life may be, there remains a source of light deep inside us. The light in our souls reflects and refracts the light from the One who is all brightness." [Rabbi Michael Strassfeld From The Jewish Holidays, p. 177]*

### **Argument about how to light - spiritual meaning**

*"There is a debate in the Talmud between Hillel and Shammai about how the candles should be lit. Hillel says that we should light one the first night, two the second, and so*

*on. Shammai says that we should start with eight candles the first night and then light seven the second, and so on. I would suggest that Shammai is following his general overriding principle—to tell the truth. The truth is that we live in a world of ever diminishing expectations. The moment we are born we begin to die. Each day brings us one day closer to our last day....For Shammai, truth is the ultimate value. ..similarly, for Hillel there is a deeper sense of truth at issue here. The deeper truth is that our lives become ever richer and fuller with the passage of time, not increasingly diminished. The light of Hanukkah reminds us of the potential that lies within each moment. The present can be filled with light and that light can increase no matter where we are in the span of our lives. Like life, light can pierce any darkness.”*

Rabbi Michael Strassfeld p.288-289 (Hillel Shammai)

### **Maccabee vs. Rabbi - spiritual teaching of how can be both**

*“When Hanukkah is seen as 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 members 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 Modin, Mattathias struck the spark of rebellion and fanned it into flame. At the moment of utter darkness at 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.*

*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.*

*Seen this way, Hanukkah can become a time for accepting both the Maccabee and the Rabbi within us, seeing them as different expressions of the need to experience despair and turn toward hope. Seen this way, Hanukkah can become a resource to help us experience our moments of darkness whenever they occur throughout the year—and strike new sparks.” (Seasons of Our Joy, Rabbi Arthur Waskow)*

## **Chanukah in light of election:**

“The number eight mystically represents transcendence and infinity, one beyond the number seven which represents the natural cycle. There is a natural limit to all human endeavors, to all human knowledge, but Chanukah introduces the eighth dimension, the power of transcendence that enables us to go beyond our natural limitations and transform darkness into light.

The festival of Chanukah calls us all to revolution, a revolution of light fought over centuries by all people seeking true freedom. The Festival entreats us to reclaim our most basic freedom, the freedom to rise above our subjective, limited perspective and reach for the above and beyond. As Americans and as citizens of the world, it is our duty and privilege to add to the forces of light both at home and abroad in a steadily growing measure.”

(Simon Jacobson, Meaningful Life Center)

## **Menorah as metaphor for human being**

It is one thing to fashion a menorah out of gold or silver. Can we fashion a menorah out of our own flesh and blood?

Well, we can definitely try.

### **1. BASE LINES**

For a menorah to be a viable luminary it must have a solid foundation. This baseline allows an instrument of light to flourish in all environments, no matter how cold or dark. For our menorahs to stand steadfast and proud, we should build them upon the unequivocal essence of who we are, the constant that is our soul.

### **2. BRANCH OUT**

An embrace requires opening of arms.

Our lives consist of many facets: from family and community to work and entertainment, and everything in between. To turn our multidimensional lives into a menorah, it isn't enough to be light in one area of life; as a menorah we strive to be lights in its branches.

### **3. WORLD CUP**

Try drinking without a cup.

In every branch of life, we must make a receptacle by which to build our flames and receive our light. Branching out alone is not enough. Picture a vast pool of water, whose width and breadth and depth seem limitless. Do we not need to cup our hands to drink its refreshing delight? Every branch of life is a vast ocean of energy. We need to create the structure and definition "the cup that will contain and utilize its luminary potential.

#### 4. FUEL EFFICIENT

If machines require it, how much more so do people?

Once we make a vessel, we have to fill it with the appropriate fuel. Fuel comes in many forms, ranging from the purest to the crudest. The purer the fuel the purer the light. Generally speaking, the deeper we have to dig to find the fuel, the better the quality of the fuel. Prayer is a great source of fuel, as is study, as is self-reflection.

#### 5. WICK IT

Wick is to fuel what piano is to music.

Fuel alone does not create light. We need a wick, something dry and simple to imbed itself into the fuel so as to ignite it. The simpler and less sophisticated the wick, the better a conduit it will be. Matter at its most material is the best vehicle for the spiritual. Turning a wooden table into a Shabbat table is wicking our fuel; as is giving a material dollar to charity.

#### 6. MATCH MAKER

Can one burn without igniting?

Fuel and wick still do not a flame make. We need to ignite, to get inspired, to spark ourselves with something meaningful. Sometimes it can be a simple conversation, sometimes it can be a profound experience, sometimes it can be through innocently surfing the World Wide Web and stumbling upon an article. They are called sparkplugs because they spark us up and plug us in. And once we are sparked!

#### 7. FLAME BUOYANT

They don't have to be told to reach upward.

Flames never stop dancing, and always burn upward. Even if we hold a candle down, the flame will gravitate upward. Transforming ourselves into menorahs is the process

of always reaching higher, always striving for more, never ceasing to flicker and dance. Though at times life may knock us down, as flames we always reach upward. Though at times our legs may seem shackled, as menorah flames we never stop dancing.

## 8. SOCIAL LIGHT

The luminance is communal and communicable.

When all the previous seven elements are in place, the result is light. Light is a wonderful thing, unselfish in the extreme. Usually, two people cannot enjoy the same thing without compromise. If two people share a latke, the more one person eats the less is left over for the other. Light is the exact opposite: When one lights a menorah alone, in private, it is nice; but when one lights a menorah in public, with a group of people, the light seems to miraculously multiply.

A drop of oily donut can feed one person; but a drop of pure oil can illuminate the whole world.

## RISE AND SHINE

The menorah is an instrument of light. And so are we.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, is a celebration of a historical miracle. But no less significantly, Chanukah is the celebration of a present-day miracle: the miracle of you and I lighting up the world.

Some menorahs are made of gold, some of silver, some of plastic. The most profound menorahs are fashioned of flesh and blood, of tears and sweat, of you and I.

We are menorahs. It is time to rise and shine.

## **For Community Candle Lighting**

Rabbi Shefa Gold:

“Spiritual practice is about making our lives into a Mishkan, a dwelling place for Divine Presence. When the Temple was destroyed, the place of our connection to God moved inside. Prayer takes the place of sacrifice and the altar of sacrifice is hidden in the dark recesses of our own hearts.

The story of Chanukah reminds us that even the holiest place within us can become desecrated. We must enter the darkness of our own wounded hearts, survey the damage, clear away the rubble, and then light a candle to rededicate ourselves to holiness, to our own wholeness and connection to the cosmos. It is truly miraculous that a single spark of hope can ignite the radiant fires of passion that illuminate our way forward, even on the darkest night.

As the days grow short and the night darkness long, we are invited to enter into the darkness of our own hearts. There, buried beneath the rubble of our disappointments, we find the miraculous spark of our Divinity, the awesome knowledge that we are each created in the image of God. This is the spark that kindles our Festival of Lights. Each night of Chanukah, we light another candle. Each night the light grows brighter, shining its radiance into our own hidden places.

The “Great Miracle” of healing is happening right here within us when we call light into our own places of Darkness, when we bring the healing light of compassion into hidden crevices of shame or fear.

As we light the flames of Chanukah, may we kindle the flame within that will shine the light of awareness across the true expanse of Soul.”