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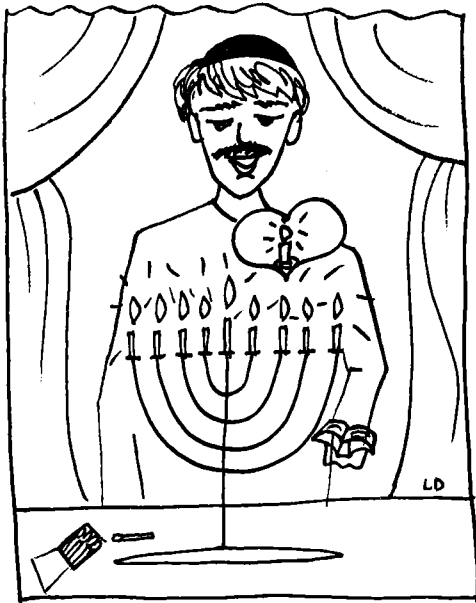
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BERESHITH: "In the Beginning"

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LIGHTING A CANDLE: OUTSIDE AND INSIDE

by Alan Magill



What we have is rarely ever enough. Many times we want more, more, more. Particularly in this holiday season when gift-giving and visits to family are prevalent, there is a clash between expectations and reality. The holiday season rarely turns out to be as good as the one for which we had hoped, or, unfortunately, demanded.

All too often I find myself falling prey to this malaise. It's only when I realize that an overemphasis on wanting more can't hold a candle to appreciating what I have, do I find happiness.

And speaking of candles, I want to share with you some thoughts concerning Chanukah. A few years ago, I was working for a business newspaper at which the general mood of the office was 'work harder, do more, produce more,' with an occasional pleasantry thrown in. Of the handful of Jews in the office I was known as the most overtly religious, which sometimes became a subject of conversation.

One late afternoon, when Chanukah was only a few hours from starting, it was not surprising that a fellow employee (who rarely left his computer
(cont. p.2)

THE LIGHTS OF CHANUKAH

by Freema Gottlieb

Most of the festivals have many *mitzvot* connected with them. But on Chanukah, all that has to be done is to kindle the Chanukah lights.

Not the grandiose masculine treelike 7-branched Temple Menorah, but the small womblike receptacle of oil from which it all sprang was the true miracle. In 165 B.C.E., when the victorious Maccabees liberated the Temple in Jerusalem, they discovered that, though all the Temple furniture had been desecrated, a small vial of olive oil remained undefiled. Though this was enough to keep the Temple candelabra alight for only a single day, and not the 8 days necessary until a fresh supply of oil could be brought in, they did not hesitate to light it anyway. It was this initial gesture that caused the light to shine and shine.

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CHANUKAH...IN THOSE DAYS, IN THESE TIMES

by Rabbi Michael Taubes

If one should tune in to a news program on television or radio during the few days prior to Chanukah, one will most likely hear, at some point during the broadcast, a greeting to "our Jewish friends in the listening audience" wishing us a Happy Chanukah. This well-intended recognition that this time of year is also a holiday season for Jews, is sometimes accompanied, however, by a very brief but erroneous description of what the celebration of Chanukah is all about. The holiday is often described as an observance commemorating victory in an ancient battle and the rededication of the Temple. This is indeed the view which many Jews today, whether they hear it on the radio or not, subscribe to as well.

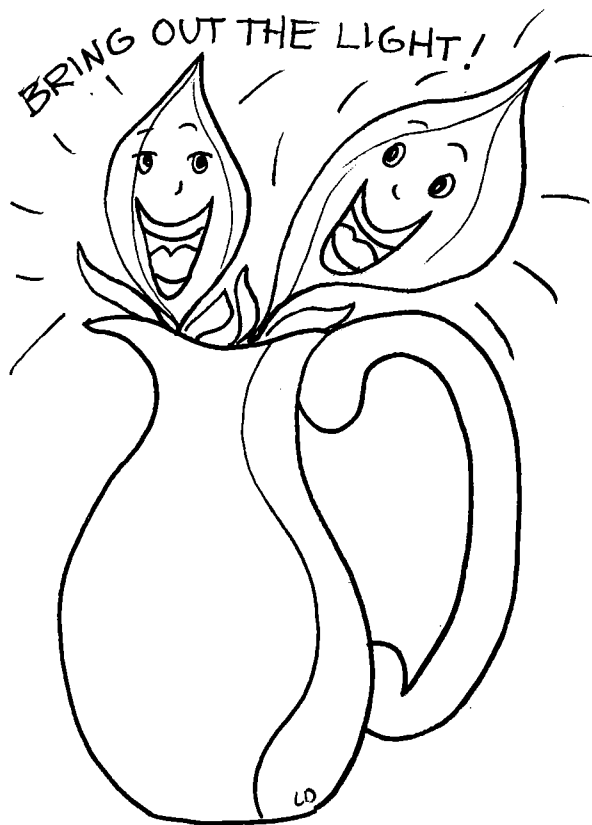
A closer examination of the real meaning of Chanukah,
(cont. p.3)

(cont. from p.1) (LIGHTS OF CHANUKAH)

"In days past and in our own time." Just as we can never look into someone's eyes, or indeed into our own reflection, without seeing an image of a person mirrored in the pupil, so the memories evoked by these lights kindle the person who sees them, so that his whole being radiates like a Lamp.

Although these Chanukah lights last only about a half to three-quarters of an hour, by kindling, you connect with the hundreds of generations of Jews who have lit Menorot going back to the actual Hasmoneans who were fortunate enough to experience in person the "great salvation and visitation" of the miracle with the oil.

There is a hidden point of light in Israel that is above nature and can spread to every action, and turn everything to innerness. This point -- this vial of oil -- always remains. Every human being is like the cruse of oil of Chanukah, mostly sealed, a little revealed. What we have to do is to bring out more and more of that light.



The original placement of the Chanukah menorah was on the left doorpost outside the Jewish home, opposite the Mezuzah on the right. The Chanukah Lamp is on the left, because even the person who seems to have no connection with spiritual things -- the Chanukah light enlightens him!

Usually we say a blessing only when we are carrying out a religious observance ourselves, and not when we see someone else doing it. However, when it comes to Hanukkah lights, we spiritually join in the blessing whenever we see them being kindled. Though holiness is inherent in the lights of Chanukah, and not specifically

in the lights of Shabbat, certain wicks and oil that are not permitted for Shabbat are allowed for Chanukah. Since the various forms of lighting symbolize the soul ("The lamp of God is the human spirit," Proverbs 27:20), this expresses the idea that even the souls that do not ascend on Shabbat do so on Chanukah.

The essential "point" of the soul remains intact like the small cruse of oil. All that is needed is that it spread throughout the whole human being. Through the person's joy in this point, it can provide warmth for every extremity of the body. Externals may change, but inside, the potential is always for the highest -- a point to which one can always return, the eternal light within.

"These lights are holy," we say on Chanukah. Says the Ramban: -- The World exists only because of the Chanukah Lights.

Dr. Freema Gottlieb is the author of The Lamp of God: a Jewish Book of Light, (Aronson, 1989) upon which this essay is based. Contact Arthur Kurzweil (201)-767-4093, Jason Aronson, Inc., 230 Livingston St., Northvale, NJ 07647. Reprinted with permission.

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Telephone (212) 873-3389

(cont. fro p. 1) (OUTSIDE AND INSIDE)

terminal to speak with me) came over and asked, "So, what are your big plans for tonight?" I thought about it briefly, and said, "I'm going to light a candle." He smiled, I smiled, and went back to his terminal.

There in that office, where enough was rarely enough, in the city and culture where the same could be said, a very warm feeling came over me. I deeply appreciated the concept of the wholeness of lighting a candle--in its simplicity and depth of meaning, and I didn't need anything more.

I doubt if ever I appreciated Chanukah more than I did at that moment, an appreciation which lingered with me on my way home, as I watched the frenetic-paced civilization pass me by, rushing here and there.

When I arrived home I lit that candle, and felt that the expectations and the reality for Chanukah had become one.

This of course, doesn't mean that I didn't go to parties and celebrate in other ways during Chanukah. But the starting point--the lighting of the candle--helped me to realize that sometimes "all's well that starts well," especially if it's appreciated from the beginning.

Alan Magill is a writer-playwright who attends Congregation Havurat Yisrael in Forest Hills, N.Y.

(cont. from p.1) (THOSE DAYS, THESE TIMES)

however, reveals that this explanation is inaccurate and incomplete. To be sure, Chanukah does, on a simple level, mark the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greek armies which resulted in a measure of autonomy for the Jews and enabled the Holy Temple to be purified and put back into operation. But that is not the total and true significance of this holiday. There were, after all, other battles and wars waged in our long history, some of which were extremely important for the future of our nation, and yet none of those victories are remembered with a special 8 day holiday to be observed forever. Likewise, it is not only the famous miracle of the oil flask which, containing enough oil for just one day's requirement for kindling the Temple's Menorah, sufficed instead for 8 days, that is commemorated by this special holiday. The Talmud tells us that there were many miracles which took place in the Temple on a daily basis, but none of them are recalled by observing a holiday. What was it about the events of Chanukah, then, which warranted the establishment of this holiday that has become so important and famous a part of the Jewish calendar year?

become complete by himself through perfecting his body physically, and by mentally enjoying the beauty of art, drama and poetry. Why remain committed to G-d and His Torah which is so outdated?"

Needless to say, this was an approach which appealed to many Jews. And so, in large numbers, many Jews became Hellenized and sought to assimilate into that modern culture which surrounded them. They abandoned the study of Torah as well as the basic ritual observances which had characterized the Jewish people for generations. They pursued the pleasures and rewards of the modern Hellenistic world at the expense of commitment to the values and beliefs which their parents and grandparents had sought to instill within them. It was against this backdrop that the story of Chanukah took place. The threat against the Jews, therefore, was not physical, but spiritual. There was no movement to wipe out the Jews as a people, but rather, Judaism as a religion was attacked. As more and more people assimilated, the future of Torah adherence looked very bleak.



The key to understanding the answer lies, I believe, in the recognition of what the true threat and danger at that period in our history actually was. Unlike the so many other occasions in Jewish history, the enemy of the Jews at the time of Chanukah was not one which wanted to obliterate the Jewish nation, destroy their people physically, or wipe their country off the face of the map. The Syrian-Greeks of that time sought rather to attract the Jewish people to their culture and their system of beliefs and values, known as Hellenism. They were ready to welcome the Jews into their ranks with open arms, provided that the Jews would agree to give up their ancient traditions and observances, and accept the modern culture and lifestyle of the Hellenists. "Why continue to observe these old-fashioned practices of your archaic religion?," the Hellenists said to the Jews. "The world has progressed; man no longer needs G-d and religious rituals to find fulfillment. Man can

Only a small band of Jews recognized that this was all wrong. Only a few people realized that the Torah is not at all old-fashioned and archaic, but is timeless, and it can and must be understood and observed in all societies and under all conditions. These people, whose numbers gradually grew, realized that although some of the beliefs espoused by the Hellenists may have some value and worth, but when put into the proper context, they are in many ways fleeting and transient, and are certainly not a replacement for the laws and rituals handed down by G-d Himself. The ultimate victory of this small group of Maccabees, then, was not just a political or military triumph, but a triumph over a serious challenge to the very core of the Jewish religion: the suggestion that G-d and the Torah are no longer relevant. The purification and rededication of the Temple symbolized the victory of Judaism as a

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religion, with its unbending commitment to the word of
G-d which is in vogue at all times.

It should be quite obvious that we today face many of
the same challenges and threats from modern civilization
that our ancestors in Israel faced from the Hellenists
so many years ago. We hear that the Torah and observant
Judaism is old-fashioned and silly, and that those who
stubbornly cling to it are close-minded fanatics. In
that sense, when we observe Chanukah, we are not merely
recalling some ancient battle, because the battle is
still taking place today. The question is whether or
not we will be victorious again.

The Bnai Yissoschor, a great Chassidic leader, once
pointed out that according to the Talmud's account of
the story, the Sages waited for a year after the events
took place before proclaiming Chanukah as a national
holiday. He suggests that this was because the military
victory and the miracle of the oil were not enough on

their own to warrant the establishment of a holiday.
The rabbis had to first wait and see what impact those
happenings would have on the religious commitment of the
people. Only after a year, once they saw that many Jews
were inspired by those events to return to G-d and the
Torah, did they feel justified in proclaiming a holiday.

Today as well, we see a religious reawakening of many
"Hellenized" Jews. But we all have to go still further.
We have to make sure that this feeling spreads to, and
impacts many more people. The word Chanukah itself, in
Hebrew, is related grammatically to the word "chinuch"
meaning education. If we use Chanukah as a time to not
only celebrate, but to commit ourselves to continuing
our Jewish education, then we will be playing an ongoing
role in the battle against assimilation and we will help
bring about, in the near future, a dedication of the
Holy Temple once again.

*Rabbi Michael Taubes is the Director of the Jewish
Learning Experience of Bergen County, N.J.*

בראשית

Bereshith: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Beryl Levenson of the National Jewish Outreach Program, Inc. Special Beginners Services are conducted at synagogues throughout the United States to introduce those with limited backgrounds to the beauty of the traditional Hebrew service. For more information regarding the Beginners Service closest to your home, to establish a local Beginners Service, or to learn more about programs of the NJOP, please write or call: 485 Fifth Avenue, Suite 212, New York, NY 10017, (212) 986-7450.

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