

**HANUKKAH FEATURE**

IN HONOR OF HANUKKAH, JEWISH TRADITION OF SACRED CANDLE LIGHTING, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF STORIES TO COMMEMORATE THE HOLIDAY WHICH COMMENCES SATURDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 18 AND LASTS UNTIL SUNDAY EVENING, DEC. 26.

*Pursuit of Peace*

by Ethel L. Levey

Each year since it was published and shortly before Hanukkah, I reread My Glorious Brothers, Howard Fast's marvelous story of the Maccabees. I do so because it has the faculty of reminding me of ideas that I am apt to forget as I forge my way from kitchen to meeting to lecture to bridge table or wherever.

Active concern for the pursuit of peace has been part of Jewish conception since the beginning of our history. The great Rabbi Hillel among others pointed out that "loving peace and pursuing peace, both near and far" must be a daily goal for Jews. The road to peace, you must have noticed, however, continues to be barricaded by the general misbehavior and orneriness of human beings.

The Maccabees for sure never started out to be anything but a peaceful family, minding their own business. They ended up fighting a twenty-year war, a full scale war, with at least twelve major battles and as nearly as can be determined, some three hundred and forty-four minor sorties. Would you call that the pursuit of peace?

And what a war! It was a war filled with "firsts" at least for Judea. It may have been the first time that a Jewish family appeared as a unit to do battle. And what kind of battle? The first Greek phalanxes advancing on right and left flanks, the first catapults must have taught them a fearful lesson and the first Syrian mercenaries caught them agonizingly unready. But, led by his Maccabees, it took the Judean only a few days to learn the use of another first--guerilla warfare.

"A rhythm of motion" Howard Fast calls it. Allowing the enemy neither pause nor rest, they moved quic,ly, attacking the rear, dispensing with armor and breast-plate,

using the small weapons of their youth, cutting, ambushing, disappearing, hit and run, attack and seek cover, struggle and survive, until the whole of Judea was aroused and the name of Mattathias and his sons lit up the horizon.

The other "first" is the reason they fought. This was, we are told, the first recorded war for religious freedom. Many nations rose and fell in battles for whatever freedom it was they wanted at the time, but none up to that moment as far as we know, went to war to preserve their religious freedom. For most subjugated people, staying alive was an "idee fixe." If they preferred to remain in one piece by accepting the gods of their conquerors with some faint hope of a "spit-in-your-face" tomorrow, who could blame them? For Jews to fight a long, enervating, bloody war of resistance for an abstraction like religious freedom was not only unreasonable and futile, it was, in the eyes of the Greeks, at least, downright silly. But the Jews fought for the freedom to do and think about their God as they wished and it turned out bo be quite a war. It brought the people of Judea all the sorrow and horror, the witless destruction and pestilence that come with war but at its bitter end the Greeks no longer looked upon a Jew of Judea as a simple scholar of

the Book who would rather die reading it than defending his right to read it.

So we know why the Jews fought. What about the Greeks? Even by the measuring standards of the second century B.C.E. the show must have cost them a fantastic figure in men, drachmas and time, to say nothing of the interruption of trade routes. However, lit's not write the Greeks off as stupid; they knew what they were doing. It was that abstraction again. A war fought by dedicated, committed fanatics for religious freedom--the Greeks couldn't let that continue. The whole concept of freedom that little Judea was supporting was a notion that could not be allowed to survive for one single moment in the Greek world or in Greek thought. Judea wasn't fighting only for its won freedom, but for the right of all peoples to be free and to give expression to that freedom, and fighting with a ferocity and exaltation that gave the whole terrible war the dimensions of a morality play staged in the amphitheatre of heaven.

These days, ideas sometimes tend to become obscured by the fog of man's technocracy. I wonder what would happen if a Macabee or two appeared on the scene tomorrow. Would we rally round them? Or would we call them beatniks and arrest them as troublemakers? I think I know how we would react. We would ask them to appear as part of a panel for the next organizational meeting. Subject for discussion: Freedom, Is it Worth Fighting For?

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**Hanukkah GREETINGS**



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*let us all renew our efforts and prayers for peace and brotherly love in all corners of the world.*

**Governor Grant Sawyer**



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