

HANUKAH FEATURE

IN HONOR OF HANUKAH, JEWISH 8-DAY TRADITION OF SACRED CANDLE LIGHTING, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF STORIES TO COMMEMORATE THE HOLIDAY WHICH COMMENCES AT SUNDOWN WED. DEC. 19 AND LASTS UNTIL THE EVENING OF THURS. DEC. 27.

(NO MATTER HOW YOU SPELL IT - CHANUKAH, HANUKKAH, HANUKA, HANUKAH - IT ALL ADDS UP TO HAPPY HOLY DAYS WITH SUCCESSIVE CANDLES ON THE MENORAH.)

False Gods

By RABBI JACOB J. HECHT

Who doesn't know the story of the Golden Calf? When Moses went up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from G-d--and didn't come back so soon--the people, impatient, pressured Aaron to make them, "new gods".

And Aaron did, telling them to bring him the golden earrings from the ears of their family, and out of them was fashioned the golden calf which was immediately proclaimed by the people as the "gods" who had brought them (the Israelites) out of the land of Egypt.

When Moses finally returned, the people became aware of their great sin, and many died for their idolatry.

But somehow the lesson has never been learned by some, which is why one of the Ten Commandments must constantly remind us to put "no other gods before me".

Today I do not believe that many of us would think of erecting a golden idol in the middle of a city street and organizing around it a block party. But in our own way, many of us are still worshipping false gods. Usually this worship is on such a sophisticated level that it almost passes as being socially acceptable.

Consider the case of the man who thinks about nothing but accumulating money. He takes no vacation; his family life is almost nil because he is always working at his money-making; he has no hobbies, no outside interests, no religion.

"I'm doing it for the children", he says when people ask him why he works so hard. Or he may say he is doing it for his parents. Whatever the case, he is (as we know) really doing it for himself, and in pursuing his goal to the exclusion of everything else, he is worshipping a 20th century golden calf.

This man is not unique. There are some people who seek social status and stop at nothing to attain it. There are others who will spend fortunes and ten hours a day for the sole purpose of trying to keep their good looks. There are others (like the Water-gaters) for whom political power is everything. And so it goes--with the inevitable results which both you and I have frequently seen.

The man who spends his life acquiring money, suddenly loses it. The woman whose beauty appearance dominates her life, begins to age. Those in political power are dethroned. In other words, the false gods they had worshipped ended up deceiving them, and they were no better off than those Israelites who sinned in the desert by worshipping the golden calf.

There is of course another side to the coin.

JUST A SUGGESTION

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ITS RENEWAL TIME RIGHT NOW

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Namely, worshipping not false gods, but the one and only G-d.

What this can do for an individual is sometimes truly miraculous. I was reminded of this recently when I read of the return from North Vietnam of the four P.O.W.'s known to be Jewish. One of these P.O.W.'s in particular caught my attention--Lt. Arthur Black of Bethlehem, Penna.

Lt. Black in several ways was different from all other U.S. P.O.W.'s. This was because he was the first to be captured, the youngest of all the prisoners, and the longest to remain in captivity (7 1/2 years).

This Jewish officer, who was a member of the Air Corps, had been captured in 1966 while flying a mission over North Vietnam. The marvel of his story was not only that he got home safely, but that he arrived in fairly healthy condition.

Soon after his return to the U.S., Lt. Black told the story of how he survived. It seems he came from a very religious family, and, as he wrote his father in one of the few letters he was able to mail, his "Jewishness" had helped him get through.

Commented his father: "He told us he felt G-d was very close to him and he asked us to pray for him, which we did".

Lt. Black had no Jewish books in the North Vietnam prison camp. He had no Bible. He had no prayer guides. All he had was his faith, but this was all he needed. As he explained in an interview when he returned, he made up his own prayers and he prayed everyday to G-d.

If Lt. Black had worshipped money how could this have helped him in a P.O.W. camp? What good would political power have been? Or good looks?

It just so happened Lt. Black worshipped the one thing, and the only thing, that could have possibly helped him in his hour of trial--G-d.

Worshipping G-d is hardly just for P.O.W.'s. No matter who a person is, or where he is, or what he does, faith is the only answer.

Indeed, with the world seemingly gone crazy, I wonder why more Jews--as well as people from other religions--do not see faith as the answer. Certainly something beyond the human experience is necessary to cope with the cockeyed world we have today, when our government lied to us, when our political leaders try to destroy our democratic freedoms, when our industry seems to care more about its profits than its products or customers when our power utilities poison our water and our air with pollution, when our cities have become jungles, when our respect for tradition has been shattered, and when our family units have been broken up.

Once some of us worshipped our government and its leaders. Once our industry

was put on a pedestal. Once our cities were thought to be the epitome of civilized society. But these idols were as false as those of the golden calf.

Only Faith survives intact. Only Faith endures. Faith provides structure and depth to our lives. Thus, when things go wrong, as they inevitably do, our Faith is a support. Faith gives us perspective by reminding us that we are humans, and, as humans, cannot play the role of G-d.

With Faith, problems do not become so crucial; the Faith helps smooth them over.

So, if the answer is Faith, why is it that more people are not faithful and religious? It is, I think, that acquiring Faith involves a lot more than just signing up as for a magazine subscription or filling out a form as for an application. The Israelites in the desert did not acquire Faith easily (as witness their premature attempt to switch to reject G-d and worship the Golden Calf.)

The first step in acquiring Faith is to become observant. This means going all the way--twenty-four hours a day. Homes should be kept Kosher. Children should be sent to Jewish schools if possible.... Synagogues should be attended and supported. Individuals should be conscious at all times that they are Jews, and they should never forget the moral and spiritual responsibility that their Jewishness imposes on them. In other words, Judaism is a way of life, not a question to be asked in school or on a classification blank.

Once a person acquires Faith, he has a source of inner power and strength. As such, his power and strength are real, as opposed to the power and strength from false gods which is external and superficial. It is up to us. The road map is clear. We must make the decision as to whether to follow or whether to continue to chase after the golden calf.

NEW YORK, N.Y.--Expressing "a sense of solidarity" with Israel, Cesar Chavez, - president of the United Farm Workers Union, called upon the American government to continue granting aid to the Middle-Eastern nation and lauded U.S. efforts to achieve peace in the area.

NEW YORK:--- Edward Ginsberg, Joint Distribution Committee Chairman, announced the retirement of Louis D. Horwitz on his 65th birthday from his position as Director-General of Overseas Operations of the agency.

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