

The Changing Meaning of Chanukah

BY DVORA WAYSMAN

Most Jews know a potted history of Chanukah. Those with a modicum of Jewish consciousness can tell you that it is an annual winter festival, occurring on 25th Kislev, where candles are lit each night for eight days. This symbolizes a miracle which occurred in 165 B.C.E. when a cruse of oil was needed to purify the Temple, and it miraculously lasted for eight days instead of one.

Many Jews also know the story of the valiant Judah Maccabee, the Hasmonean, who led the revolt against the tyrant Antiochus IV and the Hellenistic culture which threatened to wipe out the whole Jewish tradition and heritage.

But there is much more to Chanukah even than this. For a long period it was solely a religious festival. "Chanukah" literally means "renewal," and the historian Josephus tells of the rejoicing that attended the renewal of the Temple service... "and they call it the Festival of Lights because, I believe, the opportunity of living according to our faith was given to us so unexpectedly, like a sudden flash of lightning."

Chanukah, in modern times, commemorates not only the heroism of the Hasmoneans, but heroic acts that have since paralleled it, signifying -- as it did then -- the victory of a small nation over a larger and stronger one; the few against the many; the weak against the strong. On the Sabbath that falls during Chanukah, we read the prophet Zechariah: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The Jews have been described as a "stiff-necked people," and their history is marked by episodes in which, even after centuries of oppression, they have suddenly risen in revolt. At the time of the Hasmoneans, the Jews had been subjugated for so long by the Edomites, the Persians and the Hellenists, that the latter could be excused for thinking that one more tyrant might also be accepted passively. But Antiochus went too far when he issued

decrees to defile and destroy the Temple; to order Jews to worship Greek gods; to forbid them to study Torah, observe 'kashrut' or to practice their customs. In place of servile submission, there erupted a national awakening and many Jews -- such as Eleazar the scribe and Hannah and her seven sons, chose "torture unto death" rather than to obey the unjust and sinful decrees.

There is a parallel between the events of the Hasmonean wars and those of 1948 when the Haganah, despite overwhelming odds, defeated the Arab armies and ushered in the independent State of Israel.

Even before this in World War II, Jewish resistance to Hitler's brutal policies was much more widespread than is generally known. There were Jewish uprisings in the ghettos, and Jewish partisan fighters in the forests outside the cities of Poland and Russia conquered by the Nazis. In occupied countries, Jews joined the resistance movements, many losing their lives. Jews eagerly volunteered to serve in the Allied armies. It is estimated that 1-1/2 million Jewish soldiers fought in the Allied forces against Hitler, and 150,000 in European resistance movements.

The Palmach, the commando troops of the Haganah, were the most mobile spearhead and the largest units of the Jewish forces in 1948. Etzel and Lehi fought heroically. The refugees on board boats illegally bringing them from Cyprus, struggled through passive resistance until they were brought to Israel. Later, Israel's operation into Entebbe in Uganda is a magnificent example of modern heroism, as is the struggle of Soviet Jews for their right to emigrate to Israel, however great the odds against them.

From its beginnings, the Zionist movement adopted the revolt of the Hasmoneans as a symbol. Now we celebrate Chanukah not only as a religious but also as a national festival. As torches are lit each Chanukah in Israel, the story of the faith and the heroism, is told once again, becoming a symbol for the whole people and a beacon to the younger generation.



FRED SCHILLER (LEFT), PRESIDENT OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ALIYAH MOVEMENT, ACCEPTING A SCROLL OF APPRECIATION FROM ISRAEL PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AT AN ALIYAH ASSEMBLY IN NEW YORK. THE ENTIRE AUDIENCE OF 621 AMERICAN JEWS ARE PLANNING ALIYAH WITHIN THE NEXT TWO YEARS AND MOST AMERICAN OLIMARE MEMBERS OF NAAM'S 53 ALIYAH GROUPS CALLED "CHUGIM" WHICH MEET IN EVERY LARGE AMERICAN AND CANADIAN COMMUNITY. LOOKING ON (CENTER) IS DR. AHARON KFIR, DIRECTOR OF THE ISRAEL ALIYAH CENTER.

UNITED NATIONS (WNS) -- The General Assembly's Political Committee voted 117-1 to urge Israel to permit the return of two mayors and a Moslem religious leader. Mayors Fahd Kawasme of Hebron and Mohammed Milhim of Halhoul and Kadi (judge) Rajab al-Tamimi of Hebron were expelled last May after the massacre of yeshiva students in Hebron. Israel cast the lone vote against the resolution in the committee. The United States and Malawi abstained.

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- There were a total of 1687 immigrants in October, compared to 1525 in September, the Jewish Agency reported here.

TO OUR WONDERFUL FRIENDS WE EXTEND OUR
SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR THEIR LOYALTY
AND GOODWILL . . . AND BEST WISHES FOR A

Happy Holiday Season

di MARTINO AND SONS

FAMILY RESTAURANT



OPEN: 4:30 PM-10:30 PM MONDAY-SUNDAY



732-1817



2797 S MARYLAND PARKWAY
(Located in the Sunrise City Shopping Center)
Just 5 Minutes From Strip Hotels



KEEP INFORMED WITH INTERNATIONAL
NATIONAL, AND LOCAL JEWISH EVENTS, AND THE
LAS VEGAS ENTERTAINMENT SCENE ALL IN ONE
PACKAGE.....

\$7.00 for one year, \$12.00 for two years

make checks payable to:
The Las Vegas Israelite.

P.O. Box 14096 - Las Vegas, Nv. 89114

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

