

Hannukah is Still Relevant

BY DVORA WAYSMAN

We call Hannukah a minor festival. This Feast of Lights is not even mentioned in the Bible, and it celebrates a military event rather more than a miracle. During the eight days of its observance, very little fuss is made -- Jews continue their workaday routine; there are no celebrations in the synagogue; few customs associated with it apart from gastronomical ones and the nightly kindling of the "menorah" lights. Why do we still bother to celebrate it at all?

Hannukah celebrates the successful revolt of the Jews in the days of the Second Temple, against the Greeks who had inherited the Syrian part of Alexander the Great's fallen empire. Antiochus Epiphanes, the tyrannical ruler, tried to force Greek religion and culture on Judea, finding the non-conformist Jews a threat to the state. His oppression reached its peak in 168 B.C.E. when his army erected an idol in the Temple in Jerusalem and he forced Jews to sacrifice swine to the Greek gods.

This was the final insult that caused the Jews to rise up and revolt, stemming the evil tide of events. On 25th Kislev 165 B.C.E., Judah Maccabee led a victorious band of loyalists and the Temple was recaptured. Eight days were spent in purifying and rededicating it (Hannukah literally means "Dedication"). The Temple service continued for two more centuries until the Romans overthrew Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and again the Temple was destroyed.

Hannukah is the most recent festival in terms of origin, and has the least number of observances connected with it. Although it commemorates oppression and subsequent victory, there are countless examples in our history of Jews driving out oppressors and regaining independence. What makes Hannukah more important?

It was Judaism's first encounter with the danger of assimilation that threatened to wipe out Jewish identity for all time. It is a similar threat which Jews living in the Diaspora are facing today, and the same question which must be asked: can a small minority, dwelling among a different culture, take part and contribute to the general society without imitating its customs to such an extent that they are swallowed up?

The masses of Jewish people today face two major threats to Jewish identity - one posed by the cruel repressions of the Soviet and similar regimes, and one posed by the tolerant, seductively attractive societies of the free Western world. It is hard to know where

the greatest danger to Judaism lies. Behind the Iron Curtain, Antiochus lives again where our faith is considered to be superstitious and barbaric. Marxism has replaced God and freedom of worship exists mainly on paper. Jews who wish to practice their religion, study the Hebrew language or make 'aliyah' to Israel are persecuted and placed outside the pale, with all their rights and liberties denied them.

The opposite is true in the West, yet the danger is greater because the threat is more subtle. There are no restrictions at all on following the Jewish religion and tradition, yet there is the hidden pressure to imitate what many Jews are seduced into believing is a culture superior to their own.

It begins by celebrating Christmas as well as, or even instead of, Hannukah; the New Year rather than Rosh Hashana; Easter instead of Passover; until a Jew sees most of his heritage slipping away as he takes on more and more gentile culture and observance. It is hardly different from the Hellenization that was imposed on Jews in the time of the Maccabees, except that it is a voluntary act.

When we light the Hannukah candles, we are "proclaiming the miracle" of the cruse of oil that lasted for eight days instead of one in the Temple. What we are really commemorating is our whole history -- the Jewish nation that should have lasted a brief hour yet has never been consumed, and still burns brightly. Israel is a nation again with its own heritage, its own destiny. The miracle of Hannukah is not a supernatural act. Its symbol is the light which emanates from God, but the real miracle is that because of our Torah and the State of Israel, the light is still burning brightly despite the surrounding darkness.

YOUNG LEADERS CALL FOR PROBE

NEW YORK (WNS) -- Two leaders of the international Young Israel movement, Harold Jacobs, president of the National Council of Young Israel, and Martin Lasher, chairman of the National Council of Young Israel public affairs committee, have called for a Congressional investigation of an Oct. 27 U.S. Customs Service ruling changing the identification of goods made in Judaea and Samaria from "made in Israel" to "made in Israel-occu-

piated West Bank." Jacobs and Lasher described the designation change as "symbolic of a clear shift of American foreign policy away from its traditional support of Israel and the Camp David peace process. While official Administration spokesmen pay lip service to the Camp David process and the security of Israel, actual American foreign policy continues to tilt toward the so-called 'Saudi peace plan.'

FAHD ON HOLD

WASH. (WNS) -- Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who had been expected to visit Washington during December, may not come here until next year. This became apparent when State Department deputy spokesman Alan Romberg said the U.S. and the Saudis were "working on a mutually convenient date" for Fahd's visit. It could take place "after the first of the year," he said.

Soon after the Senate approved the sale of five AWACS sur-

veillance aircraft and enhancement equipment for F-15 jets to Saudi Arabia, a Saudi newspaper announced that Fahd would visit Washington soon.

But Romberg stressed that the report was "erroneous" since a mutually agreeable date has not been set. A State Department source said later that neither the U.S. nor the Saudis were holding up the visit but that they only have not been able to agree on a date that was convenient both to the Reagan Administration and Saudi Arabia.



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