Hannukah -The Feast of Lights

BY DVORA WAYSMAN

Although it is not even mentioned in the Bible, Hannukah is an important Jewish festival. The word itself means "Dedication," and it takes place each year on 25th Kisleve, often coinciding with the gentile festival of Christmas. In a way, it's a happy coincidence because Diaspora Jewish children have no need to envy their neighbors - they have their own festival of light, no less significant and enjoyable as that of their Christian friends.

For its origin, we must go back to the Jerusalem of 2,000 years ago - 165 B.C.E., when Palestine became part of the Hellenist Syrian empire. The northern part was ruled by the ambitious Antiochus Epiphanes, who wanted to build an empire that would hold its own against Rome. So, in 175 B.C.E., he tried to subdue Palestine by wiping out the Jewish religion and substituting the Greek language, gods and customs. Giant amphitheaters were build for sport and the people indoctrinated with the hedonist philosophy that religion lay in beauty, as opposed to the Jewish faith which saw beauty in their Jewish Divine law.

Many Jews, known as Hellenizers or "mity-avnim" (today we would call them 'assimilationists') began to speek Greek instead of Hebrew and spent their days in the gymnasium, neglecting the Sabbath and their own festivals. Greek civilization seemed to be a flood threatening to destroy the whole Jewish heritage.

The final blow came when the temple was defiled and a giant statue of the Greek god Zeus installed, with the Jews ordered to worship it. Some - like Hannah and her seven sons - resisted bravely but passively, choosing death rather than idol worship. Hundreds hid in caves and suffocated to death, but this bravery accomplished nothing until the Hasmonean family of Mattathias and his five sons at Mod'in raised a banner: "Whoever is for the Lord, follow me!"

An army, small but well - trained, sprang up, led by Judah Maccabee and his brothers. Antiochus sent three large armies to suppress

Israel Defense Forces defeated massive Arab
armies to usher in the independent State of Israel. Before this, in World War II, there was
widespread Jewish resistance to the brutal policies of Hitler and Jews fought heroically in
the ghettos and joined partisan units in forests
outside Polish and Russian cities conquered by
the Nazis. Israel's operation into Entebbe to
rescue the hostages in Uganda is another example
of modern heroism and our history abounds with
examples.

The revolt of the Hasmoneans is the symbol

more oil could be acquired.

of the spirit expressed today by Zionism. Today, in Western society, no tyrant is forcing us to abandon our faith and worship strange gods, but the Jews are still in great danger of losing their identity in the Diaspora. Hellenism, in a different but insidious form, is alive and well today. To prevent our doing to ourselves what

LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE

the revolt, but courage and clever military

tactics resulted in a Jewish victory, with Judah's first priority the purification of the Temple. The big problem was that all the cruses

of oil had been defiled except one and it would last for just one day. The miracle we celebrate at Hannukah is that it burnt for 8 days until

Today Hannukah has a poignant relevance to contemporary Jewish history. We remember

not only the heroism of the Hasmoneans, but

heroic acts that have since paralleled it. Over and over again, we in Israel have seen the vic-

tory of a small nation against a larger and stron-

ger one; the few against the many; the weak

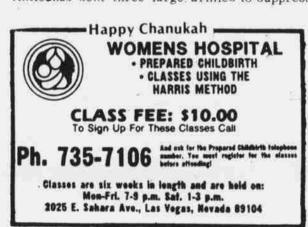
In 1948, despite overwhelming odds, the young

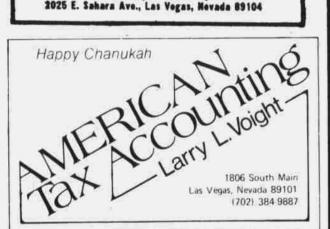
against the strong; spirit over matter.

To prevent our doing to ourselves what tyrants failed to impose on us, we must cling to our own heritage, customs and faith. It is in Israel that this is best achieved - here there is nothing to compete with our own national and religious holidays and traditions, although we respect those of the Moslem and Christian communities, who have their own heritage. Hannukah has broad human significance as

Hannukah has broad human significance as a festival of liberty and religious freedom - not just for us but for all people. It is a humanistic festival par excellence. The symbol of Hannukah is light and the real miracle is that, despite millenia of persecution and dispersion, the light of our people has never been extinguished.

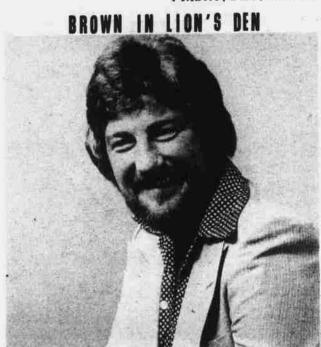
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PIANO MAN . . . JERRY BROWN PLAYS AND SINGS NIGHTLY (EXCEPT THURSDAY) IN THE LION'S DEN LOUNGE IN THE MGM GRAND HOTEL.

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- About 700 Druze leaders from the Hassbay and Shuf areas in Lebanon met August 2 with thousands of Israeli Druze at their holy place -- Nabi Shueb in the Galilee. This is the first time since 1947 that such a meeting took place.







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