



# Hanukkah 2006

## The Hanukkah heroine

By RABBI ELIEZER ZALMANOV



Of the many laws pertaining to lighting the menorah during Hanukkah, one rule tends to stick out more than others. It is the law that during the entire time that the candles are burning, Jewish women may not do any chores – household or otherwise.

The little-known story behind this law is an essential part of the greater story of Hanukkah. It underlines the bravery of one woman, whose

heroic acts should be a model for us, as well.

During the Syrian Greeks' siege on the Land of Israel, a Greek general by the name of Holofernes demanded that before any Jewish woman married, she must spend one night with him. One can imagine the distraught atmosphere this caused among the Jews – and the reluctance of many Jewish women to enter the covenant of marriage.

One woman, the beautiful Yehudit, daughter of Yochanan the High Priest, realizing that the continuity of the Jewish nation was in jeopardy, decided to put an end to this horrible decree.

On the evening preceding her own wedding, she packed a bag with cheese and strong wine, and approached the general's campsite. She was escorted to the general's tent and told him that she had a gift for him. She produced the cheese, and he began to devour it. After satisfying himself with the cheese, he became extremely thirsty. Yehudit then gave him the wine to quench his thirst. All it took was a few shots of the strong wine and Holofernes fell into a deep stupor.

In the silence of the night, Yehudit beheaded the general with his own sword and placed his head in her bag. She quickly left the Greek campsite and went directly to the Jewish army's camp. She excitedly recounted what had just happened and suggested that now was the time for the Jews to attack the enemy preemptively.

When they saw what her bag contained, it boosted their morale and gave them the strength to continue battling the Greeks. The army immediately regrouped and attacked the camp that Yehudit had just come from.

As the Greek soldiers saw that they were being attacked, they ran to their general's tent to get instruction on warding off the attack, only to find his headless body lying on the bed. The Greeks scattered at the site of their fallen general, thus giving the Jews an easy victory. This victory, and the Jews' triumph in many other battles, eventually led to the Jews regaining control of their land.

The heroic bravery that Yehudit showed is something that we can all learn from. She did not worry for her own safety and well-being. Instead she took the initiative and saved the Jewish people from a lurking danger. Her courage, and that of many brave Jewish men and women throughout our history, is evidence of our ability to persevere and survive, even in the hardest of times.

With the faith that G-d is on our side, regardless of who the enemy may be, we will always be victorious.

Rabbi Zalmanov is the director of Chabad of Northwest Indiana. He can be reached at [rabbi@chabadnwind.com](mailto:rabbi@chabadnwind.com).

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## Hanukkah's meaning

By RABBI MAURICE DAVIS

Hanukkah this year begins on Dec. 16, and each one sees it as he will – pitiful, proud, or pained.

There are those – the pitiful ones – who turn away, shrugging their shoulders to show how little it means. They see it as a day of tinsel, gift-wrapped presents, and homes bedecked in a pale, but frenetic, imitation of Christmas.

There are those, the Israelis, for whom it is a holiday of unending pride. A finger pointing from the past, and straight at them. A land where every man is Maccabee and all about is a kind of *déjà vu*.

Their struggle for the right to be is but another round of what the man called Judah first began. No wonder that they take these days to be their very own. Theirs was the land. Theirs is the pride that turns the phrase from "there" to "here." *Nes gadol hayah po*, a great miracle happened here!

There are the Jews of Russia, who more than all the rest relive the days that were before the days of that first Hanukkah. Antiochus was not a Hitler bent on killing all the Jews. His was the mood of Russia – to destroy not men but faith, to wipe away not Jews but all the things that made them Jews: their faith, their culture, their integrity. Save the body, kill the soul, and make them worship as their masters do.

The Jews of Russia read the words of the old man Mattathias in the village of Modin: "Though all the people under the king obey and fall away each from his father's faith, yet shall I, and my sons, and my kindred walk in the faith of our fathers."

They read the words and weep because for them there is no Mattathias. Theirs is the setting, the preface to Hanukkah, and no way to make it happen once again.

And there are we, or here are we. In our minds we gaze on Modin, and on Moscow, and on Jerusalem. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

And we know that we are all three. We always were. This year we light our candles to renew the pledge of one old man in Modin, to keep faith with those who live in darkness and to strengthen those who carry the torch.

If this we know, perhaps our Hanukkah will have a special meaning, and we shall see within the candle's flame not pity, pride, nor pain, but a promise we somehow share, and somehow keep.

Rabbi Davis, z"l, wrote this column for the Dec. 10, 1976 edition of "The Indiana Jewish Post & Opinion."



## Hanukkah 5767 – a time for renewal, restoration, unity

By RABBI LEW WEISS



Hanukkah is the Jewish Festival of Lights and Dedication. During the dark and gloomy days of winter, we devote 8 days to celebrating God's gift of light and warmth. The Festival of Hanukkah commemorates the triumph of light over darkness, freedom over slavery, liberty over coercion, faith over cynicism, and hope over despair. Hanukkah is a Feast for Rejoicing in God's victory over evil and humanity's hope for the future.

Hanukkah is one of the oldest historical holidays to celebrate God's gift of religious freedom and liberty. Over two thousand years ago, in 165 BCE, at Modiin, in Northern Israel, Judah Maccabee, son of the Hasmonean High Priest Mattatias, fought a war for freedom of religious worship against the Hellenistic Syrian troops of the dictator Antiochus Epiphanes, who thought he was the image of God. God blessed the Hasmoneans with a victory of the few over the many.

The Assyrian forces had defiled the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. When the Jews were able to overthrow their oppressors, Judah the Maccabee and his four brothers were able to find only one small jar of pure oil for one day of sacred use. A great miracle occurred, and the oil lasted for 8 days. Thus Hanukkah becomes an 8-day celebration of light and rededication. Hanukkah is also related to the Hebrew word for education – the sacred task of passing on our glorious tradition of Torah and faith.

From December 15 through 22, we light the Hanukkiah, or *menorah*, adding one candle or supply of oil each night, adding on holiness according to the tradition of Rabbi Hillel.

We eat *latkes* and *sufganiyot* and cookies that remind us of the miracle of the oil. Many exchange gifts or donate *tzedakah*, charity, to make the holiday meaningful. Children, the focus of many Jewish observances, spin the *dreidel* to recognize that a great miracle happened there.

Most often, Hanukkah coincides with the Torah Portion Miketz, Genesis 41–44. We read about the dreams of Joseph, how his brothers conspire against him and say, "Behold the dreamer of dreams comes, let us see what happens to his dreams." Hanukkah is about dreams – dreams of freedom, justice, and peace. Significantly, three weeks after Hanukkah is Martin Luther King Day. On Jan. 15, we remember Dr. King, who is considered a drum major for justice in our own times.

Last year, due to the Hebrew lunar leap year, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa fell at the same time, starting on Dec. 25. I believe this was a message from God about the importance of interreligious unity at a time of war, tsunami, earthquake, hurricane, and flood.

Kwanzaa is a unique African American celebration that focuses on traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement. Kwanzaa means "the first fruits of the harvest" in the African language Kiswahili. Kwanzaa was founded in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga and is celebrated by more than 18 million people worldwide. During 7 days, candles are lit to celebrate the traditional African values of unity, self-determination, community responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith.

It is interesting that Kwanzaa recalls a harvest festival, since some scholars think that Hanukkah is a delayed celebration of Sukkot, the biblical Feast of Booths, a harvest thanksgiving festival.

Some of our historical rabbis were concerned that Hanukkah might be interpreted as a glorification of a military and material victory. Perhaps this is why they chose the Prophet Zechariah as the Haftarah for Shabbat Hanukkah. Zechariah 4:6 proclaims: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Word says the Lord of Hosts."

In Israel, they read the letters on the dreidel as referring to a great miracle occurring *here*, not just *there*.

We also can celebrate Hanukkah this year by celebrating a new miracle of oil, independence from foreign oil. We can make our oil last longer. We can celebrate a miracle of environmental conservation, protecting our home, the earth. This would be true faith and true freedom.

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## The Night Before Hanukkah

'Twas the night before Hanukkah, boychicks and maidels  
Not a sound could be heard, not even the draidels.  
The Menorah was set on the chimney, alight  
In the kitchen the Bubba hut gechapt a bite.  
Salami, pastrami, a glessala tay  
And zayerah pickles with bagels, oy vay!  
Gezunt and geschmack, the kinderlech felt  
While dreaming of tagelach and Hanukkah gelt.

The clock on the mantelpiece away was tickin'  
And Bubba was serving a schtickala chicken.  
A tumult arose like a thousand brauches,  
Santa had fallen and broken his tuches.  
I put on my slippers, eins, tsvey, drei,  
While Bubba was now on the herring and rye.  
I grabbed for my bathrobe and buttoned my gotkes  
While Bubba was busy devouring the latkes.

To the window I ran and to my surprise  
A little red yarmulka greeted my eyes.  
Then he got to the door and saw the Menorah,  
"Yiddishe kinder," he said, "Kenehora.  
I thought I was in a goyisha hoise,  
But as long as I'm here, I'll leave a few toys."

With much gesshray, I asked, "Du bist a Yid?"  
"Avada, mein numen is Schloimey Claus, kid."  
"Come into the kitchen, I'll get you a dish,  
A guppell, a schtickala fish."  
With smacks of delight, he started his fressen,  
Chopped liver, knaidlach and kreplach gegessen.  
Along with his meal, he had a few schnapps,  
When it came to eating, this boy was the tops.

He asked for some knishes with pepper and salt,  
But they were so hot, he yelled "Oy Gevalt."  
"Unbuttoning his haizen, he rose from the tisch,  
And said, "Your Kosher essen is simply delish."  
"As he went to the door, he said "I'll see you later,  
I'll be back next Pesach, in time for the Seder."

More rapid than eagles his prancers they came,  
As he whistled and shoutted and called them by name:  
"Now Izzy, now Morris, now Yitzak, now Sammy,  
Now Irving and Maxie, and Moishe and Mannie."  
He gave a gesshray as he drove out of sight:  
"Gooten Yomtov to all, and to all a good night.  
"HAPPY HANUKKAH!



# Each Night of Hanukkah Blessings

**W**hile Jews alone celebrate Hanukkah, its meaning and its message are charged with deep significance for all freedom-loving people everywhere.

It recalls the first struggle in written history when individuals fought not for material possessions and not for land, but for ideals, especially the ideals of human liberty. It calls to mind the first recorded instance when men spurned security purchased at the cost of conscience, when the human spirit refused to be intimidated by force. It salutes humanity's first martyrs in religion's cause: Hanukkah is thus a powerful inspiration for all people everywhere to resist tyranny.

The festival warns us that Judaism has as much to fear from internal enemies as from external ones. Jews who hold their heritage cheap, who are willing to abandon their priceless traditions or are ashamed to identify themselves with their fellow Jews — such Jews are the modern counterparts of the ancient Hellenists. The best way to resist them is to deepen our own Jewish loyalties and observances.

"Hanukkah" means "dedication" and underscores not so much the military achievement as the spiritual victory — the rededication of the Temple. Significant as is victory on the field of battle, the ultimate triumph lies in the inner Temple of the spirit — in the hearts and minds of people. The Sabbath of Hanukkah includes the prophetic reading which contains the words: "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Hanukkah commemorates not the spirit of power but the power of the spirit.

Our sages told the legend of the small flask of oil which was found in the Temple after the enemy had been driven out. Containing sufficient oil for only one day's burning, it miraculously lasted for eight days. Here we can find a clue to the destiny of our people and our faith. By every known standard, we should have "burned ourselves out" long centuries ago. Yet time and again, through courage and loyalty, we kept alive the flames of faith and hope. Hanukkah summons us, in our day, to act as worthy heirs of a dedicated people.

After the lighting of the candles, one of the following readings is recited each day:

## 1st night—Jewishness

Though Hanukkah is regarded by our tradition as a "minor" holiday, its importance has never been slighted. For in those days the Maccabees proved to the world their allegiance to Judaism. In answer to King Antiochus did Mattathias say in a loud voice: "Though all the cultures that are under the King's dominion obey his edict and forsake each one of them the religion of his fathers, yet will I and my sons and my people abide by the covenant of our fathers." (I Maccabees, 2; 19f). As we kindle these lights we are adding our names and lives to the chain of centuries of Jews faithful to the duties of our religion.

## 2nd night—Martyrdom

In the Maccabees' story we read of Hannah and her seven sons who fought and died in their yearning for freedom. Often has our history been stained with the tears and blood of our people. Often has the world exacted a high price for the privilege of prayer and worship. We sit in awe of those who paid this price, for we wonder what we would have done in their place. In our age of confusion and doubt we search for ultimate causes which elude us. May we be blessed with insight that we might find our ideals, and with courage that we might pursue them. May we be as the followers of Judah Maccabee who were prepared to give their lives in the struggle to insure a meaningful life.

## 3rd night—Peace and war

(Read responsively)

How long, O Lord, shall I cry, and you will not hear? I cry unto You of violence, and You do not save. Why do You show me evil, and why are destruction and violence before me?

May the nations realize that the triumphs of war turn to ashes, and that justice and righteousness are better than conquest and dominion.

The Haftarah reading during Hanukkah reminds us that: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of the Universe." Is not our land to be a haven for the lovers of peace? "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" — free from the chains of fear and war.

Let the glories of a just, righteous, and God-fearing people increase from age to age. Enlighten with Your wisdom those whom the people have set in

authority. "Seek peace and pursue it; seek it in your own place, and pursue it in another."

## 4th night—Unity

The blessing of Hanukkah has traveled more than 2,000 years to our day. It speaks of a father and sons who united to save their people from slavery to alien gods. To read of the Maccabees who faced life as a single unit reveals to us the beauty of such a home. It reflects the realization of the biblical hope that the hearts of the children be turned to the parents, and the hearts of the parents be turned to the children. Such a hope is meant for outside the home as well as inside. Too often do we build walls instead of bridges — between the generations, whether they have the same name or not, between races, between religions. For the Maccabean victory to have meaning today, we must continue the struggle for peace and communication between those whose ideas or appearance or deeds differ. Let our Hanukkah signify unity in our home, and our land.

## 5th night—Israel

The kindling of these lights not only links us to the millions of Jews whose lives are now past history, but also binds us to our brethren of today scattered across the face of the globe. Their joy this moment is ours. Their personal struggle too. And their sorrow is also ours for we are of one body and soul. If the left arm is struck, the head registers pain and the right arm lashes out in retaliation. If Israel is besieged, American Jews rally. If Soviet Jewry desires prayerbooks, English Jews send them. And if we ever feel this kinship lessening, the world and our hearts will remind us of it for as our heritage has said: all members of the people Israel are bound together, each to each. May all Hanukkah lights shine from home to home, country to country in an eternal chain of sensitive souls.

## 6th night—God

Who is the God whom we praise today, who prompted wondrous acts in ages past? He is the God who presents us with deeds by which we might sanctify our lives. A rabbi once said: "Know what is above you. But what is this that is above you? It is the form we symbolically shape when we serve God with true and fervent hearts. Such service shapes a human form for our Creator. When a person is charitable and willingly serves others out of love, he contributes to the form of God's right hand. And when a person fights in the ranks of God and drives evil away, he contributes to the form of His left hand." You are to be praised, Lord our God, for presenting to us a religion which allows us to sanctify ourselves as we glorify You.

## 7th night—Understanding

Have you ever stopped to notice the dancing flame of a candle reflected in the eyes of another person? Our Hanukkah lights tonight are outside us and also within the souls of those about us. So too when we look at another, we see ourselves in miniature. When we judge others, we are judging ourselves. The Hassidic Jews tell this story: "A person is like a tree. If you stand in front of a tree and watch it constantly to see how it grows, to see how much it has grown, you will see nothing. But tend it at all times, prune it, and water it, and in good time it will grow and be seen as worthy. It is the same with a person. It is not right to examine him hour after hour to see how much has been added to his stature. Let him live, and he will thrive and grow." May the candles of Hanukkah prod us to see others as we see ourselves, to understand rather than condemn. Let us be free to enjoy everyone.

## 8th night—Endurance

The light of these candles burns briefly, flickers, and is gone. Indeed, all we have and prize truly "is but lent to us." To use these passing objects to enrich our lives is the most we are able to accomplish, and often we fail even at this. Shall we not try to set our actions and thoughts into perspective knowing how easily the present is lost? Let us hold firmly to the truly worthy in life and echo these hopes of the martyr and poet, Hannah Senesch: "O Lord, my Lord, I pray that these things never end; the sand and the sea, the rush of waters; the crash of the heavens; the prayer of man." We pray, O Lord, that the light of our lives may find its permanence in You.

## How to observe Hanukkah

Each home should have its own Hanukkah Menorah. In some families, it is customary for each member of the household to have his or her own Menorah.

The entire family should participate in the lighting of the Hanukkah candles.

Before lighting the Hanukkah candles, recite the following prayer:

Lord our God and God of our Fathers, as in days of yore our father rededicated the Temple on Mount Zion, so may we each year, in light or in darkness, reconsecrate our shrines unto thy service. May these lights be as the light of truth and peace, which shall shine forth from this sacred place. May they kindle joy and courage in our hearts. May their rays go forth like the light of good deeds into the spirits of all men. Enable us to purify and rededicate Thy house ever anew by purifying and rededicating ourselves. May our worship be acceptable in Thy sight and may the faith of Israel ever inspire us to seek the truth, to serve man in loving kindness, and to cling steadfastly unto Thee. Amen.

The shamos is lit, and the following blessings are recited:

*Baruch Ata Adonai Elohenu Melech Ha-Olam Asher Kid-Shanu Bemitzvosov Vetzivonu Lehadlik Ner Shel Hanukkah.*

*Baruch Ata Adonai Elohenu Melech Ha-Olam She-Asa Nisim La-Avosenu Bayamim Ha-Hem Bazman Hazeh.*

On the first night only add the following benediction:

*Baruch Ata Adonai Elohenu Melech Ha-Olam Shechechianu Vekiyamanu Vehigyanu Lazman Hazeh.*

On the first night of Hanukkah, one candle is lit. On the next night two candles are lit, and another candle is added each night until eight are lit on the eighth night. For the sake of continuity through the eight days, the same *shamos* ("servant") candle is used to light the candles each night, then extinguished, except for the eighth night, when the shamos finally is allowed to burn out.

The first candle is placed at the far right of the Menorah, and one candle is added each night, but always beginning at the far right. However, the candles are lit from left to right to denote the importance of each day of Hanukkah.

On the fifth night of Hanukkah, each member of the family may make his charitable contribution. Contributions may be sent to a charity or institution of one's choice.

On Friday evening, the Hanukkah lights are kindled before the Sabbath lights.

The Hanukkah lights also must be kindled in the synagogue, but they do not absolve one (not even the one who kindled them in the synagogue) from kindling the Hanukkah lights at home.

The traditional delicacy associated with Hanukkah is potato pancakes, or latkes. Legend teaches that Jewish housewives fed the Maccabean patriots pancakes when they stopped to rest in their villages.

## Light notes on Hanukkah

In the celebration of Hanukkah, the miracle we recall that the oil in the Menorah of the Temple, reentered by Judas Maccabeus after his victory over the Syrians, enough only for one day but miraculously lasted for eight. However, the real miracle is how heavily outnumbered were they and so little did they have in the way of equipment.

Judas Maccabeus is one of a handful of military leaders honored with a statue on the grounds of West Point Military Academy. If he had lost his fight against Antiochus, there would have been no Judaism and, ultimately, no Christianity.

Longfellow wrote a dramatic poem about Judas Maccabeus, and Handel composed a symphony on the same theme. Emma Lazarus, author of the famous inscription on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, wrote several odes to the Menorah and Hanukkah.

If you've lost your fortune and are trying to recoup, the Hanukkah lamp may help you out, according to J.L. Peretz. This famous Yiddish author wrote a story on how the candelabrum helped a man regain his wealth.

The rabbis were adverse to people going into debt, even for religious purposes. But they made an exception of Hanukkah candles, even if you had to borrow to buy them. Fortunately, they are cheap. Even a beautiful Menorah made in Israel can be purchased very reasonably.

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Rabbi Everett Gendler points out that the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light, was once fueled by oil from olive trees that are "perpetually renewed and replanted" as in the ancient olive trees in Israel. We, too, must find a renewable energy source so we can create our own modern-day miracle of oil, independence and freedom.

Hanukkah teaches responsibility and education. We must learn about the unity of creation and our responsibility for its care. *Shalom* also refers to the unity and peace of creation – all is connected. As Rabbi Tarfon says in Pirke Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, "It is not your obligation to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it."

May our celebration of Hanukkah this year remind us of the need for a new miracle of oil and tikkun olam, renewal and restoration of the works of creation. Have a happy and safe holiday season.

*Rabbi Weiss was born in Philadelphia and ordained by Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, along with his wife Rabbi Faedra Weiss. He worked as a social worker/counselor in alcoholism and mental health and as a paramedic in Cincinnati before starting his career in chaplaincy. Fifteen years ago he came to Indianapolis as the Jewish chaplain at Methodist Hospital, now Clarian Health. He also works with the airport, the fire and police departments, the American Red Cross, and the Mental Health Association Crisis Line. Faedra and Lew have three daughters, a dog and cat, and are affiliated with Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation and Congregation Beth-El Zedeck. Lew is also addicted to spinning at the JCC.*

