

Weekly Teaching

December 15, 2017

On Chanukah we celebrate both the re-dedication of the Jerusalem Temple after the Maccabees defeated the Syrian Greeks and the miracle of the oil.

For Rabbinic Judaism, the Maccabees' victory alone did not merit the creation of a religious holiday. Rather, the Sages of Blessed Memory wished to highlight that the success of the Maccabees came with God's assistance. The "Miracle" of Chanukah is the link between the potential of human beings to be strengthened by the Power of the Divine Spirit.

The Talmud teaches that when Judah Maccabee entered the desecrated Temple, he discovered only a small vial of oil which had the seal of the High Priest certifying it was sanctified for ritual use.

- There was only enough oil for one night, and yet it burned for eight.

It is because of this Talmudic teaching that we recite three times daily during Chanukah "Al Hanisim—for the Miracles."

This prayer begins with recalling the military victory but ends by stating:

- Your children came to Your holy abode and... purified Your Temple and... kindled lights in the courtyards of Your holy place. And they established these eight days of Chanukah in order to give thanks and praise to Your great name.

The Al Hanisim prayer makes a distinction between the means and the end.

The military victory was the means. However, it's the personal spiritual renewal that we celebrate.

Chanukah is ultimately about our faith and trust in God.

The Maccabees knew that they had only enough sanctified oil to light for one day; only an eighth of what they needed; yet they nevertheless lit the oil.

This is how it should be for us as Jews.

We put our trust in God, and we courageously take the first step.

When the Maccabees suspended their doubts and strengthened their faith, and subsequently took action despite the odds, this is when miracles can occur.

This teaching also comes in play with the famous midrash about the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea:

- When Nachshon ben Aminadav walked into the water, right up to his nose, then the sea finally split. It took an act of trust to cause the sea to divide, and the result was salvation.

Faith can empower our sacred actions.

Trust builds strength.

This is applicable in our relationship with God, and also with our family, friends and neighbors.

The ultimate lesson of Chanukah is that we must trust, and never lose hope. The Maccabees can inspire us to hold fast to our sacred goals.

Every night that we light a Chanukah candle we are reminded that the mighty fell into the hands of the weak, and one day's oil lasted eight days.

In a world darkened by fear, our strength of Faith and Hope can usher in the light.

This is why we add one candle each night until all eight candles are burning brightly. Chanukah embodies the idea of constantly growing more light so as to cast away the darkness.

This year may our Chanukah story strengthen our resolve to pursue sacred actions even in the face of the odds that might be against us.

“Not by Might, nor by Power, but by Spirit Alone” shall we be able to help bring miracle of greater light to better permeate our world.

Happy Chanukah and Shabbat Shalom,

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