

What Are We Fighting For?

by [Rabbi Kalman Packouz](#)

GOOD MORNING! Happy Hanukkah! I thought you might enjoy a perspective article written by my friend and colleague Rabbi Nachum Braverman, Aish HaTorah Los Angeles, to enhance your appreciation of Hanukkah.

WHAT WERE THE MACCABEES FIGHTING FOR?

It is ironic that Hanukkah is so widely observed in America, because it's not clear that Jews today would side with the Maccabees. The Jews didn't battle the Greeks for political independence and Hanukkah can't be recast as an early-day version of Israel against the Arabs. Hanukkah commemorates a religious war.

The Greeks were benevolent rulers bringing civilization and progress wherever they conquered. They were ecumenical and tolerant, creating a pantheon of gods into which they accepted the deities of all their subjects. Their only demand was acculturation into the melting pot of Greek civilization and religion.

The Jewish community was divided in response to this appeal. Some believed assimilation as a positive and modernizing influence and they welcomed the release from Jewish parochialism. Led by Judah Maccabee was a small group opposed to the Greek ideal, and prepared to fight and die to preserve the exclusive worship of Judaism. (The name "*Maccabee*" is an acronym for the Torah verse "Who is like You amongst the gods, Almighty.")

This was no war for abstract principles of religious tolerance. It was a battle against ecumenicism fought by people to whom Torah was their life and breath. Would we have stood with the Maccabees or would we too have thought assimilation was the path of the future? Would we fight for Judaism today, prepared to die to learn Torah and to keep Shabbat?

Today we face a crisis of identity as serious as the one confronted 2,500 years ago. Will we survive this century as a religious community or merely as a flavor in the American melting pot? Hanukkah calls to us to combat assimilation and to fight for our heritage.

Besides those who actively supported assimilation there were many who passively acquiesced. What is the use in opposing the force of history, they reasoned. We can't halt assimilation any more than we can stop the tides or the passage of the seasons. Who would be so foolish as to oppose the inevitable? Today, too, there is paralysis before the apparently inevitable progress of assimilation. What chance do we have of convincing our children not to intermarry? Jewish particularism is a past value swept away on the tides of liberalism. With the barriers of anti-Semitism down and the land of opportunity beckoning, the day of cohesive Jewish community seems gone. It's with resignation that we accept the spiraling intermarriage rate which spells our destruction as a people. Not so the approach of the Maccabees.

Remember the end of the story? Finally triumphant, Jews captured Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple. (The word *Hanukkah* means dedication and refers to this act.) They found just one flask of oil but the flame which should have lasted one day burned for eight as if to testify that our determination was enhanced by some ineffable power suffusing our efforts with transcendent glow and power. Light the candles, says the holiday to us. Act vigorously, teach, reach, courageously and with determination, and God will invest our efforts with a power, a permanence, and a glow, far beyond our capacity to convey.

A HANUKKAH STORY

I heard the following story years ago when I lived in Israel and to the best of my knowledge it is true. Before the USSR let the Jews leave for Israel, Jews used to hire a guide to smuggle them out of Russia. One Hanukkah a group of Jews were playing "cat and mouse" with a Soviet army patrol as they approached the border. When the guide thought they had lost the patrol, he announced an half-hour break before continuing the trek. One of the escapees, hearing the "magic" number of "one-half hour" -- the minimum time a Hanukkah candle must be lit to fulfill the mitzvah -- pulls out his menorah, sets up the candles, says the blessing and starts to light the candles. The other escapees immediately pounce upon him and the menorah to put out the candles -- when the Soviet patrol moves in and completely encircles them.

The head of the army patrol speaks: "We were just about to open fire and wipe you out when I saw that man lighting the Hanukkah candles. I was overcome with emotion; I remember my *zaideh* (grandfather) lighting Hanukkah candles I have decided to let you go in peace."

There is a verse in the Book of Psalms, (chapter 116, verse 6), "The Almighty protects fools." Should he have lit the candle? NO! The Talmud tells us (Ta'anis 20b), "One should not put himself in a place of danger saying, 'Let a miracle happen.' " So, while the story is one of action, adventure, suspense ... the real lesson is not to rely upon a miracle to save you from danger ... but to be thankful if the Almighty performs one to save you!

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HANUKKAH



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Torah Portion of the Week

Miketz

Pharaoh dreams of cows and sheaves and demands for someone to interpret his dreams. The wine butler remembers Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. They bring Joseph from the jail. Pharaoh acknowledges the truth of Joseph's interpretation (that there would be seven good years followed by seven years of famine) and raises Joseph to second-in-command of the whole country with the mandate to prepare for the famine.

Ten of Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food, Joseph recognizes them, but they don't recognize him. Joseph accuses them of being spies and puts them through a series of machinations in order to get them to bring his brother Benjamin to Egypt. Then Joseph frames Benjamin for stealing his special wine goblet.

Next week ... the denouement!

* * *

Dvar Torah

based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

The Torah states:

"And Pharaoh sent and he called Yosef (Joseph), and they ran with him from the prison." (Genesis: 41:14).

What lesson is the Torah teaching us about life?

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, points out that when the time came for Joseph's liberation, he wasn't let out of prison slowly. Rather, he was rushed out of his captivity with the greatest of speed. This is the way the Almighty brings about redemption. The moment it is the proper time, not even one second is lost. "This is how it will be with the final redemption," said the Chofetz Chaim. "As soon as the right time comes, we will immediately be delivered from our exile."

Our lesson: In every difficult life situation, realize that in just one moment the entire picture can change. Joseph had no time set for the end of his imprisonment upon which he could count on being set free. His imprisonment and freedom were not ultimately dependent on the whims of his mortal captors. Rather, the Almighty gave him a set time to remain in prison; as soon as the time was reached, Joseph was immediately saved from his plight.

This awareness can give you encouragement in difficult times. Even where you can make no change for improvement and you do not see the situation changing in the future, your liberation can still come in the next moment. Remember: The salvation of the Almighty can come in the twinkling of an eyelash!

CANDLE LIGHTING - December 14

(or go to <http://www.aish.com/sh/c/>)

Jerusalem 4:02
Guatemala 5:17 - Hong Kong 5:23 - Honolulu 5:34
J'Burg 6:36 - London 3:33 - Los Angeles 4:27
Melbourne 8:19 - Mexico City 5:41 - Miami 5:15
New York 4:11 - Singapore 6:49 - Toronto 4:23

QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

**You can't control the wind,
but you can adjust your sails
-- Yiddish proverb**

In Loving Memory of

**Abe & Jean Schneider
Avraham ben Kalman
& Sheina bas Yakov**

Paul & Helaine Kurlansky

With Deep Appreciation to

Mr. Wafik Nodeir

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/tp/ss/ssw/182724811.html>

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