

# Herut, Hanukkah and Jewish Unity

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HERUT NORTH AMERICA  
חרות צפון אמריקה

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## SHIR HADEGEL - ANTHEM OF THE FLAG

BY ZE'EV JABOTINSKY



Do not say that we are not  
The blood of our father the Maccabee  
For three drops of his blood  
Are mingled in my heart's blood  
One is like the color of the Kinneret  
One is like snow and one is gold  
On the armband on the flag  
On the head and in the heart  
Forever our souls will find  
Knowledge, beauty, purity  
And from our Holy Mount will go forth  
The truth which is Torah

## FORWARD

The Zionist non-profit world is a particularly unstable one. Activists come and go and its often difficult to run long term programming. We rely predominantly on volunteers and the few employees which we hire, earn much, much less than the norm in the corporate world.

In order to lead a successful Zionist movement, one must be blessed with unique people who are completely committed to the cause. Such is the case B”H in our movement “Herut North America”.

It all starts with a big idea...

A fabulous idea in our weekly leadership by our Director of Special Projects Jeff Dunetz to prepare a special Hannukah E-book with original articles on what is, in my humble opinion the most Zionist holiday on the Jewish calendar. Jeff then proceeded to message the community leaders to see if perhaps we could get a few original pieces from them...time was of the essence.

D’Vorah Singleton our National Director of operations didn’t waste a minute and joined Jeff to coordinate the complicated preparation of the Herut North America Hannukah E-book.

We were hoping to fill 8 pages... As you will see dear readers, we have been truly blessed with yet another Hannukah miracle ... leaders and activists from all across the United States, Canada, and India each wrote beautiful essays on Hanukkah.

Many thanks to Jeff, and D’Vorah for working so hard to make this happen!

And to our wonderful Herutniks who took the time to write and contribute to this wonderful project:

Rivka Reis – Chairwoman of Herut India

Joshua Goldstein – Chairman of Herut North America

Lauren Isaacs – National Director of Herut Canada

Virag Gulyas – Director of communications and marketing Herut North America

Miriam Fischer - Community Leader Marion County Florida

Mordechai Snow – Herut North America

Shannah – Herut North America

So as you can all see Herut HAS been blessed with a unique group of committed unapologetic Zionists and for this I am eternally grateful.

Wishing all our members, supporters, and Unapologetic Zionists a

חג אורים שמח

Karma Feinstein Cohen,

Executive Director

## **THE TRUE STORY AND MEANING OF THE HANUKKAH HOLIDAY**

**By Jeff Dunetz, Director of Special Projects**

On December 16th at sundown, Jews worldwide will light a Shamash (the candle used to light the others), recite blessings, and use the Shamash to light the first candle in the chanukiah. With that action, we begin celebrating the festival of Chanukah.

Before we begin talking about Hanukkah, you should know that the meaning of the word Chanukah is not "Let's come up with a holiday that has so many ways of spelling in English we can drive the Gentiles crazy (it drives Jews crazy also). The holiday with many spellings (some of them below) is spelled only one way In Hebrew חנוכה.

The true Chanukah story has parts usually left out of what we've been told. But in many ways, the omitted part has an important lesson for the people of the Jewish nation today. Hanukkah celebrates the renewal of the Beit HaMikdash, the holy Temple atop Mount Moriah in Jerusalem after the Judeans beat the forces of Seleucid King Antiochus IV.

Chanukkah also celebrates a victory in a Judean civil war. Those who maintained their faith triumphed over assimilated Hellenized Jews.

As far as Jewish holidays go, Hanukkah is not that important because it was created by Rabbis, just like Purim. The command to observe festivals such as Passover, Sukkot, or Shavuot came from God via the Torah. Since God outranks rabbis (although some rabbis don't consider themselves outranked), the holidays in the Torah are considered much more important.

The common view of the holiday includes the miracle of the one day's worth of Kosher oil lighting the Holy Temple's menorah and lasting for eight days, the Maccabees' defeat of the superior forces of King Antiochus IV, the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, etc.

The Seleucid King Antiochus IV invaded the Jewish State of Judea at the request of the assimilated Jews. Some of those Hellenized Jews were expelled from Judea to Syria around 170

BCE. The exiled assimilated Jews lobbied King Antiochus IV to capture Judea's capital, Jerusalem. It's a good thing there was no off-track betting back then because Antiochus bet on the wrong "horse."

The story begins in the town of Modin. A government representative of Antiochus demanded that the local Jewish priest Mattathias ben Johanan, offer sacrifices to the Greek gods. Mattathias refused to make the sacrilegious sacrifice. When another Jew offered to make that sacrifice, Mattathias killed him. Then he killed the government official who demanded the sacrifice.

When an order to arrest Mattathias was issued, he went into the wilderness to hide. Mattathias was joined by his sons and others who heeded this call, "Let everyone who has a zeal for the Law and who stands by the covenant follow me!"

In the wilderness, the team came together. They picked up the nickname Maccabee. That wasn't their last name (neither was Schwartz). Maccabee began as a nickname for Mattathias' son Judah and spread to the other fighters. The word is an anagram for a Hebrew phrase that translates into "Who is like You among the heavenly powers, oh God?"

Two hundred years after the end of the war, a failed Judean General who became a Roman historian named Josephus wrote:

"The king being thereto disposed beforehand, complied with them, and came upon the Jews with a great army, and took their city [Jerusalem] by force, and slew a great multitude of those that favored Ptolemy [Egyptian King], and sent out his soldiers to plunder them without mercy. He also spoiled the Temple and put a stop to the constant practice of offering a daily sacrifice of expiation for three years and six months."



Tomb of Mattathias ben Yohanan HakKohen (Mattathias Son of Jonathan The Priest)  
Father of the Maccabees And The Man Who Started The Revolt

The Chanukah holiday started out as a celebration of Sukkot. When the Maccabees finally retook the Temple in the month of Kislev, they decided to celebrate Sukkot three months late. The war had stopped them from observing the Sukkot. Therefore, the Maccabees rededicated the Temple and immediately set out to observe the skipped festival, which was kind of an excuse.

During Biblical times, on Sukkot and all the God-directed festivals, Judeans from all over the land would come to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices at the Temple. The festival's late celebration

allowed the Jews who couldn't go to the holy Temple for three and a half years an opportunity to rededicate themselves to the Jewish faith.

The Temple's rededication was also celebrated, now called Hanukkah. It was initially named the festival of lights (which can only be spelled one way in English), but that name was made for a different reason than one may think.

Josephus wrote:

"Now Judas celebrated the festival of the restoration of the sacrifices of the temple for eight days, and omitted no sort of pleasures thereon, but he feasted them upon very rich and splendid sacrifices, and he honored God and delighted them by hymns and psalms."

"Nay, they were so very glad at the revival of their customs when, after a long time of intermission, they unexpectedly had regained the freedom of their worship that they made it a law for their posterity that they should keep a festival, on account of the restoration of their temple worship, for eight days. And from that time to this, we celebrate this festival and call it Lights."

By the way, there is no record of the Judeans ordering Kosher Chinese takeout, making potato latkes, or going to Dunkin Donuts for sufganiyot. That didn't become Jewish practice until much later. The reason for eating the greasy, oily food is in recognition of the miracle of eight days of oil (and the fact that they taste good).

Chanukah is called the festival of lights. It's not because the oil lasted eight days but because Jews believe God's teachings bring his light into the world. The Chanukah festival was a rededication of the Temple and a rededication of the Jews to the Torah and the light of God. To put it differently, the reason the Jews are called the chosen people does not mean the Jews are better than other nations. It means we were chosen for the responsibility of spreading the light of God throughout the world. We are our creator's flashlights.

The primary miracle of Hanukkah is the victory of the Jews over superior forces thanks to help from God. That's one of the lessons of the holiday. God's miracles aren't always giant such as parting the Reed Sea or stopping in the middle of the sky. The kind of miracles that make you say, "Wow! Now that was a miracle, and the big guy upstairs made it happen.

Faith is all about believing God is always involved, even when you don't see him kicking King Antiochus' soldiers out on their butts, or the creation of Israel in 1948, Israel winning the Six-Day-War, and most recently, the miracle of the NY Jets winning Superbowl III. Actually, he does a miracle every day. When you wake up every morning to have your coffee and a shmear, the universe God created in six days is still there.

The Rabbis tell us that we cannot use the Chanukah candles for reading or seeing the same way we could do with a Shabbos candle. The chanukiah lit on Hanukkah is supposed to be placed near a window. That way, the light of God will shine outward into the world. We light the Shabbos candles for the opposite reason, to bring the light of God into the house. Each of the eight nights, we light the chanukiah. It's not called a menorah. When fully lit, the menorah has seven candles. On the last day of Hanukkah, we light nine candles (including the Shamash).

The chanukiah lit on Hanukkah is supposed to be placed near a window, so the light of God shines outward into the world. The Shabbos candles work the opposite way. We light those candles to bring the light of God into the house. And when the candles go out, we lock the doors, so no bum carrying a flashlight doesn't steal the 60-inch TV from your house and show off to the world their new TV.

There's an interesting story in the Talmud about lighting Hanukkah candles. The students of two great rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, were having a debate about how to light the candles. The Shammai students said on the first night, light nine candles (the Shamash and one for each of the eight nights) and take away one each succeeding night. The house of Hillel said to light

two the first night (the Shamash candle plus one) and add one each subsequent night. While both camps were brilliant and wise, the Hillel camp won (as they usually did). The reason is it's crucial to increase holiness every day. Adding a candle increases holiness.

Even though Chanukah is a minor holiday, it is one of my favorites, not because of the eight days of gifts (that's an American custom based on trying to one-up Christmas) and not because of the greasy clogged artery-inducing donuts and potato pancakes. Chanukah is a holiday about Jews fighting against assimilation. That lesson is just as important today as it was in the days of the Maccabees. So be a modern Maccabee and fight assimilation (with your words) and ensure your entire family connects with God's light. Who knows? If enough Jews do that, the Jets might win another Superbowl. As a long-suffering Jets fan, that will be a major miracle.

Most importantly, may everyone have a Chag Chanukah Samayach, a happy Hanukkah holiday, and now that it's been rededicated, may all Jews achieve the dream we've had for 1,800 years, a return to our eternal homeland.

## THE MITZVAH OF CHANNUKAH

By Lauren Isaacs, National Director Herut Canada

I heard a Rabbi give a beautiful D'var Torah about Channukah last year, and I want to share it with you all now. It goes like this:

Mitzvahs give us insight into the deeper meaning of Jewish holidays. What we are commanded to do usually alludes to the essence of the holiday itself. On most Jewish holidays, we have a mitzvah to eat. On Purim, Passover, and others, we are commanded to eat and drink. This speaks to the physical nature of those holidays. When we physically survived an attempted genocide or war against the Jews, we commemorate the holiday (in-part) by physically enjoying ourselves and giving the physical body food and drink.

On Channukah, there is no commandment to eat anything. On Channukah, there is no commandment to have a seder, or any type of festive meal.

Why are we not commanded to eat, and what does this tell us about the essence of Channukah?

The commandment on Channukah is to light the candles (להדליק נר של חנוכה). What do we understand from this?

Channukah is a spiritual holiday, about spiritual survival, and has nothing at all to do with the physical.

In Egypt, Pharoah physically enslaved all the Jews. In the times of Esther, Hamman drew lots and attempted to genocide the entire Jewish people as well. On Channukah, the Jews survived something different.

We survived the Hellenization of the Greeks, and that is what is commemorated on the holiday of Channukah!

Thus, on Channukah, the mitzvah placed upon us is not a physical one of eating, but a spiritual one of lighting. We ignite the flame of Judaism and publicize our Jewishness to all. Channukah is about maintaining, sustaining, and publicizing our Yiddishkite, the very Jewishness of our souls. The Channukah triumph of the Maccabees and the Jewish people was a spiritual survival, against Hellenization and assimilation. The enemies did not simply want the Jews dead, but they wanted them drawn away from their Judaism.

This was potentially the most dangerous war the Jewish People have ever fought, and we are seeing it mirrored in society today.

Physically, we are strong. Our physical survival is no longer in question (shoutout to our amazing IDF warriors!). However, the Jewish spiritual survival is at risk. We are fighting a battle nowadays not at all dissimilar to that of the Maccabees: a spiritual battle against assimilation. This Channukah, when you perform the mitzvah of lighting the candles, do it with intent, with kavanah, and publicize your Judaism with extreme pride. Do not let your guard down against the Hellenizers, as they are as powerful today as they were back then.

Guard your candles, guard your Judaism, and connect to the spiritual aspects this Channukah with joy and simcha.

I pray for everyone to be strengthened in their Jewish conviction and Jewish identity. Wishing everyone a Channukah Sameach!!!

## **WHAT COULD A NON-JEW SAY ON HANNUKAH EVE?**

**By Virag Gulyas, Communications Director of Herut North America**

Last year this time, I gave a speech in Atlanta, Georgia, to celebrate Hanukkah. Before I sat down to write that speech, I sat with myself, thinking, what can a non-Jew say on a Jewish holiday that is all about miracles? The miracles of liberation from oppression, religious freedom, and human courage.

It also made me think of how I got introduced to Hannukah in the first place. I was 26 living in Belgium and dating an Israeli man. The details matter because today when we are facing an unseen level of antisemitism around us, we need to remind ourselves that so much of that hatred derives from ignorance. I was a well-educated woman, and yet unless I dated that Israeli man, I do not know at which point in life I would have been exposed to any Jewish customs. Do I say to give antisemitism a pass? No. Do I say we need to be more compassionate towards each other and acknowledge how we all have different journeys? Absolutely.

On the first night of Hannukah, I got introduced to the line of fluffy and tasty sufganiyot, the spinning dreidel, the gelt (aka chocolate coins covered in gold), and the story of miracles.

The sentence "A Great Miracle Happened Here" is what stuck with me from that night. And that phrase is the primary thought I connect to Hannukah now, ten years later.

So, what could a non-Jew say at a synagogue on Hannukah eve?

Well, I decided to bring the truth - because the truth is that there is always a deep-running miracle behind the scenes. How else would I explain my journey from antisemitism to being an unapologetic Zionist? A line of miracles.

I was an antisemite who did not know any better. I was born in 1985 in Hungary, which was still under the regime of the Soviet Union. I was born into an era when we had no internet and no social media. We were exposed to what was around us and nothing more.

And for me, that environment told me all Jews are Hasidic Jews. Why? Because my ballet school was beside that beautiful synagogue in Budapest. And that is all that I was exposed to as a 10-year-old aspiring ballet dancer.

I heard around me all the usual Jewish jokes. How Jews rule the world, Jews are rich, Jews have a big nose, Jews only help Jews... so yeah, you've got the picture.

So, while I can bring up a line of explanations for my antisemitic views, the fact is that I definitely had no positive views on Jews. But it is also a fact: that I could never tell you if I even met a Jew while having this firm negative opinion.

It's easy to hate what we don't know. And this is what we are experiencing around us at a dangerously uncomfortable level. Each weekend since the start of 2022, Jews have been violently attacked in NYC. Each and every weekend.

On this Hannukah, I invite all of us to remember three things:

One is that unless you are as proud of your Jewishness as the Maccabees were, a miracle cannot happen. Unless you bring the light as a proud Jew instead of hiding that light, the world will reflect back at you by shedding darkness on you.

Two, do not curse the darkness but bring in the light to the world. And you can do that in many different ways. What if you would invite your non-Jewish neighbors for a Hannukah candle lighting? You have no idea how that can change their perspectives forever.

Three, we can only meet others at the level they are now. Change doesn't happen overnight. It took me months of honest self-observation and self-questioning to try to figure out why I disliked the Jews, who taught me those generalizations, and what I think of the Jews without all that external noise.

Today, when I think about the phrase: a big miracle happened here (or there, as the Diaspora Jewry says), I think about less of a Macabbee type of military miracle but a miracle that would make people curious about each other. A miracle that would make us ask questions instead of reacting with hatred, a miracle that would make us brave enough to face our own discriminating patterns, a miracle that would make us all realize that we are in this together. An antisemitic attack is not only an attack against a Jewish person but an attack on our humanity.

We all have different roles in amplifying this change. Please, never underestimate yours.

We all need to be that light ... you know, because one candle can light another.

Chag Hannuka Sameach, thank you for being the light for our future generations.

## **CHANUKAH A STORY OF A CIVIL WAR AND A MESSAGE OF JEWISH UNITY**

**By Joshua Goldstein, Chairman of Herut North**

The more we look at the Chanukah story, the more we see this as a civil war that went well overall.

Chanukah, the Rabbis, focused on the miracle of the Maccabees throwing out the Syrian Greeks and the Hellenization of Jews. As we investigate this holiday, it becomes clear that this was a fight between the Hellenized Jews and Greek power and the religious theocracy of the Hasmonean dynasty. It is yet another religious versus the anti-religious, the Pharisees versus the Sadducees of later years, and in modern times Progressive versus Halachic.

The book of the Maccabees and the description of the wars did not make it into the Tanach. This, too, was a highly debatable topic.

One explanation is that the canonization process of the Torah is associated with the Council of Jamina (Hebrew word Yavneh). Around 90 CE, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped the destruction of Jerusalem and received permission to rebuild a Jewish base in Jamina. There, the contents of the canon of the Hebrew Bible were formalized, and there was a list of books and documents that were decided not to be included.

This points to another struggle within Judaism. That of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees, a priestly class in charge of the Temple, openly rejected the oral interpretation of the Torah, while the Pharisees, a pre-rabbinic class, openly promoted it. Since the Maccabees were a priestly family, it is possible that the Books of the Maccabees was a move by the Pharisees to promote their rabbinic view over the Sadducee view and barred the Hasmoneans because of their affiliation with Sadducees.

Would the rabbis at Jamnia have been inclined to canonize a document that so clearly praised the priestly Hasmonean family?

Despite all the issues and conflict, the Hasmoneans had a stunning victory that freed the country from foreign rule.

So, when we celebrate, what can we learn from the message of Chanukah?

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We need to keep religion and political issues separate. It is no wonder the founding fathers of the United States, while deeply religious, saw that the only way to balance things was to separate the religious power from the political power in the Federal Government. The one who was both in control would oppress and cause conflict with the non-religious. We, as Jews, hold so many different opinions, but if we are to survive, we cannot make it about black versus white but about respecting the spectrum of the streams of Jews. There are things that both can agree on upon-Jewish education, job opportunities to the unemployed, educational sharing, and learning where we could learn from great teachers, helping our poor. Only when we adopt this mindset of inclusiveness, not baseless hatred, can we have more incredible achievements that can improve the lot of the Jewish people.

One takeaway is that we do need separation between religion and state, as we have here in America, to ensure that both sides do not have absolute authority. The fear of the framers was that concentrating all authority in one person or organization can become destructive against another minority. In a healthy democracy, opposing views help to keep the other in check. Now you might object and say your religious and progressive stance is the only “Torah true” way of life. I argue that the Chanukah story is about Jews uniting just enough to become a powerful force. You may not like how other Jews live and practice, but you cannot let your “truth” sow the seeds of hatred, so you are against co-existing with them. Flaws and all, Jews come in different forms. All societies seek to find a balance between different issues. The family unit and the rules of the 1950s have swung to unbridled freedom of the 1970s, leading to the disintegration of the family. Each has its own problems created. Eventually, a free-thinking

society does work toward balancing towards the center. Pendulum swings are ways of society. It is the natural law of the world trying to find order.

The religious theocracy of the Hasmoneans had a glorious beginning but only lasted 80 years until the Romans defeated Mattathias Antigonus, whose death brought the land under the control of the Romans in 37 BCE. Just one, the famous Herod, a son-in-law of Hyrcanus II, was appointed as King of Judea by the Romans.

Despite losing our land again to a foreign invader, the Chanukah story invites us to recognize the power of unity, the power of connection, and the power of creating a bigger community of Jews who can pool their resources together to create with one another while keeping to their own religious beliefs. The Rabbis teach us that the second temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, or causeless hatred between Jews.

I believe the second miracle of Chanukah, the light lasting eight days, was a tacit approval from above. God was saying the unity of purpose can overcome the consecration of a physical earthen structure. Despite the sullied and imperfect world, we find ourselves living in, creating bonds of unity, especially with all types of Jews, can create that silent burning and enduring light that goes beyond the confines of our Temple's and Shuls. More than the structure that contains the Menorah, Jewish unity is a force that can make us stronger. Despite a defiled Temple, God's light was a way of reassuring us that unity, despite our differences, can create supernatural and positive things in this unity. Chanukah is about restoring a semblance of order. When a theocratic force gets too powerful, it is eventually righted. Jews had this freedom restored to them, and despite this civil war, a form of balance was true, restored to the Jews of their time, even for a short while.

King Herod built so many historic structures in Israel and expanded and beautified the Temple. Yet despite his architectural achievements, he did not gain the honor and respect of his subjects. You cannot create bonds of unity through structure but through the kindness of spirit.

We can utilize Chanukah as a way of restoring balance with fellow Jews. So, during this Chanukah holiday, when you light the candles, look to create unity with other Jews, and in doing so, bring the message of unity of Chanukah into a reality.

## **WHY DO I LOVE THE JEWISH PEOPLE?**

**By Shannah, Herut Member**

As simple as the question sounds, it is a challenging question to answer. Because the question of love means that the reasons for loving that which is loved should be less logical and more emotional in nature, since love itself is something that we feel. We often find it hard to express why we love something. We just know that we do. Perhaps the feeling of love comes from a certain recognition of something that is familiar to us and that gives us a sense of belonging. Or perhaps love comes from recognizing that which we don't have, and the hope of becoming complete by loving what is lacking in ourselves.

My love for the Jewish people means that I love the comfort and the familiarity of being part of a Jewish family. It also means that I love the challenges that come with joining the Jewish people, which means going through certain changes and growing on my side in order to feel complete. The Jewish family is the family which I will always find to be there for me, even when I am in a strange place or among the strangest of people. The Jewish family is always there to make me feel home and less strange.

Jewish peoplehood represents hope, courage, never giving up, perseverance, consistency, and having an unbreakable faith throughout time itself. How can I not love the Jewish people and not feel inspired by this undying history that extends to infinity?

I'm currently in the process of converting to Judaism, and just to mention a few things that I really admire, Jewish people are very educated in terms of historical and general knowledge. I haven't come across any Jewish people who aren't knowledgeable about different cultures and societies, which is something I don't come across often when I speak to other Americans.

All of the Jewish people I've met know more than 1 language, which is also very rare to find with other Americans. Another thing is the overwhelming kindness that I have come across in the span of 2 years. For example, just recently we were invited to stay at the house of a Jewish family for 4 days in New York City for the Thanksgiving holiday and for Shabbat. We had only met them once at the Celebrate Israel Parade, and they were so hospitable and welcoming even though they barely knew us and even though I am not yet considered Jewish, but they considered us family and they told us that from now on we will always have a home in NYC!

Another example is a friend of mine in DC, who lives in a studio and who let me, and my husband stay at her apartment for Shabbat while she was out of town. This trust and kindness, coming from people who barely know us, has touched my heart greatly and has made me believe in humanity again through the Jewish people this time, as it is almost Hanukkah, we just bought a beautiful new menorah, and this will be the first year where we'll be lighting it. In that light, we would like to wish all Am Yisrael a Happy Hanukkah.

## THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS – CHANUKAH

By Rivka Reis, Chairwoman of Herut India

Shalom and greetings all the way from India. I guess we are all looking forward to the winter festival Chanukah, which happens to be my favorite festival. In India, the concept of lights denotes purity, calmness, growth, and spirituality. It also speaks about being triumphant over the forces of evil.

It is a joyous time for my family and lighting the Chanukia brings about a sense of peace and serenity, a reminder that the Jewish people are the light to the nations in whatever capacity and to bring the teaching of Torah to the world.

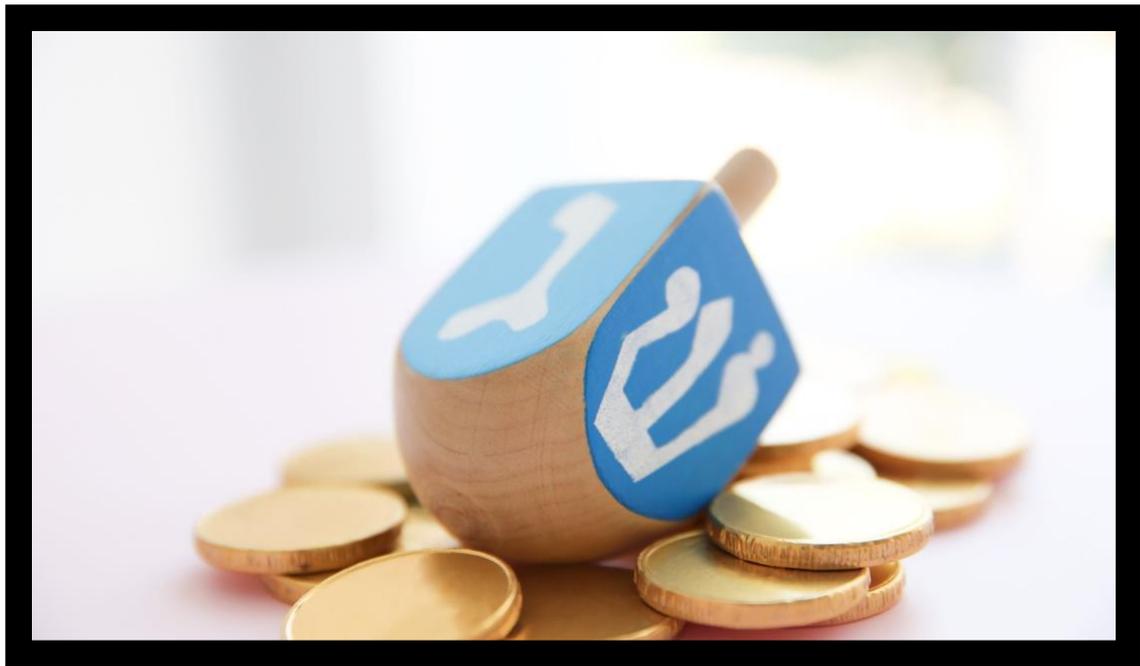
This year the communities from in and surrounding the state of Andhra and Telangana (Southeastern part of India) would be meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> night of Chanukah to light the Chanukia together and celebrate as **ONE** people.

Amidst loads of food prepared by the women, and the men setting up the venue to accommodate more than 50 families, the highlights would be the performances by the children accompanied by Hebrew music and dance. For us Jews in India, Purim and Chanukah are times when we truly let down our hair (pun intended) and enjoy ourselves. We decorate our homes with beautiful lights and cook an array of delicious mouth-watering curries accompanied by fried pappadams, pilaf rice, and flatbread that make their way to the dining tables. Whereby our tradition is that men and women have separate dining areas, it doesn't deter the buzz of chatter and the spirit of camaraderie.

Through the activities of Herut India and Magshimey Herut India. I had the opportunity to meet all of our members just recently – their zeal and love for Torah Mitzvot and Eretz Israel gives me immense hope that the presence of our Herut movement in India has and is making a big difference in bringing Jews and emerging Jewish communities together onto one platform.

My hope and prayer this year as we light our Chanukia's is that we truly shine our light and adapt it to be more action-orientated in bringing light, peace, and love to families and communities at large and staying connected with our hearts despite the distance.

Chag Urim Sameach to all Herutniks around the world. May we all grow from strength to strength as we re-dedicate our lives to serving the Jewish people and humanity at large.



## CHANUKAH MIRACLES

By Mordechai Snow, Herut North America Member

One of the miracles which the holiday of Hanukah commemorates is “רבים ביד מעטים” – the many of the Syrian Greek army were defeated by the few of the Hasmonean (the “family” name of the leaders of the successful Judean revolt).

On the surface, this is very difficult for us to understand as we can think of many times when the few have defeated the many. For example, the Vietcong was a formidable foe of the United States in the Vietnam war. Likewise, in pre-State Israel, Menachem Begin recorded in his autobiography that the “אצ”ל” (Etzel, also known as the Irgun), a Zionist paramilitary organization that operated in Mandatory Palestine between 1931 and 1948 and headed by Menachem Begin in the years leading to statehood, never had more than one hundred dedicated fighters at any one time. Yet the British with 80,000 soldiers in Israel were petrified of the Irgun.

To bring home the point further, in college I took a class on War and Society given by Professor Bela Kiraly, who at the time was the highest ranking living member of what had been the Hungarian Revolutionary Government in 1956.

He told us that when Germany defeated the combined armies of Britain and France in WWII, the two sides were of essentially equal military strength. We all know that to win an offensive war, it takes an army that is easily at least two to three times as big as the defenders – so how did the Germans do it? Professor Kiraly stated that the Germans had the will power to win and the British and French did not. The Germans were united in wanting to defeat the victors from WW1 and their unity and will power were so strong that they won an offensive war against the combined might of the British and French.

Now we return to the holiday of Hanukah. Perhaps the significance of the miracle was that we made it “easier” for Hashem to perform a miracle of “רבים ביד מעטים” for us because we were

unified. We backed the Hasmonean and we had the will power to win and Hashem carried us through.

As the prophet Zachariah says, “לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי אמר ה צבאות” – the lesson that Professor Kiraly taught us in Military History class was already well known to our prophets. Weapons may be necessary for war, but they are not sufficient. The spirit of a people to do the right thing is infused with the spirit of Hashem which leads to unimaginable victories and hence the miracle of Hanukah.

We are still left with a question though – was Hanukah the only time in Jewish history that we had a miracle of “רבים ביד מעטים”? To answer this, we can look in the teachings of Maimonides who writes, “

בבית שני כשחלכו יון גזרו גזרות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסק בתורה ובמצוות. ופשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות. וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחצו לחץ גדול עד שרחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה עד החרבן השני

וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואבדום בכ"ה בחדש כסלו היה ונכנסו להיכל ולא מצאו שמן טהור במקדש אלא פך אחד ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה שמונה ימים עד שכתשו זיתים והוציאו שמן טהור

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן כ"ה בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס. וימים אלו הן הנקראין חנכה

As translated on [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/952008/jewish/Megillah-vChanukah-Chapter-Three.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/952008/jewish/Megillah-vChanukah-Chapter-Three.htm) (translation copied on December 13, 2022), this means the following:

“In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish people, [attempting to] nullify their faith and refusing to allow them to observe

the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their daughters; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc within, and made the sacraments impure.

The Jews suffered great difficulties from them, for they oppressed them greatly until the God of our ancestors had mercy upon them, delivered them from their hand, and saved them. The sons of the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, overcame [them], slew them, and saved the Jews from their hand.

They appointed a king from the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Temple.

When the Jews overcame their enemies and destroyed them, they entered the Sanctuary; this was on the twenty-fifth of Kislev.<sup>1</sup> They could not find any pure oil in the Sanctuary, with the exception of a single cruse. It contained enough oil to burn for merely one day. They lit the arrangement of candles from it for eight days<sup>2</sup> until they could crush olives and produce pure oil.

Accordingly, the Sages of that generation ordained that these eight days, which begin from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, should be commemorated to be days of happiness and praise [of God]. Candles should be lit in the evening at the entrance to the houses on each and every one of these eight nights to publicize and reveal the miracle.

These days are called Chanukah.”

On the surface, we’re left wondering – we had a salvation of the nation, we won a guerrilla war, we had Jewish unity, the people came together and what do we celebrate? The finding of pure oil. Is this really as big a miracle as all the others? And if it is what is the relevance of Maimonides mentioning the other miracles – after all Maimonides does not write history in his works.

So the point is there are two types of victories – one where you win and yes everyone comes together, but after the war is over, you are left rebuilding from scratch. The second type of victory is one where after you win, you are restored to your prior status and you do not need to

start from scratch. Clearly this type of victory is much greater because once the war is over, it is truly over. This is the type of victory the Hasmonean had – as soon as they won, the service in the Temple was immediately restored; there was no rebuilding. And this was truly a huge miracle.

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## MODERN DAY MACABEE

By Miriam Fischer, Community Leader Marion County Florida

Are world events setting us, the Jewish people, up to have a modern day Chanukkah?

For those not 100% familiar with the complete history, starting around 200 BC, Judea – now Israel – came under Syrian (Hellenistic) rule. When Syria came under Roman rule and levied oppressive taxes, a substantial part of that burden was placed upon Jews who already shouldered the heaviest burden. By 174 BC, Syria – including Judea – was ruled by the tyrant Antiochus IV. He “tried to rule out individualism of the Jews” and destroy all Jewish tradition and rules. According to the Chabad story of Chanukkah: “Jewish worship was forbidden; the scrolls of the Law were confiscated and burned. Sabbath rest, circumcision, and the dietary laws were prohibited under penalty of death.” Thousands of Jews who opposed these rules were punished – to the extent of being put to death.

The Jews were divided into two camps: The Torah-based (adhering to the first five books of the Bible), and Hellenistic Jews who took on the laws and customs of their tyrannical Syrian-Greek rulers. The latter adopted practices like idol worship. Jews who pushed back were to become known as Maccabees. They fought the Syrian armies, eventually liberating Jerusalem and the Temple. At this point we are familiar what happens, when the Maccabees went to light the menorah as part of its rededication, there was only enough oil for one day. By a miracle of G-d, the oil burned for a total of eight days.

When I look at the world I see similar events and situations that are similar to those that happened over 2000 years ago. We currently have world “leadership” (i.e. the United Nations) and world leaders placing an undue burden on the only Jewish nation in the world. They expect Israel to live up to a much higher standard than an overwhelming majority of the world’s nations. Many people are recategorizing large swaths of Jewish history. In many instances Jews and Jewish historical sites and/or events are misidentified as either Arab and/or Palestinian

despite archeological proof. Groups of people who have nothing to do with Jews or Judaism or claiming themselves are real Jews while our foods and artifacts are being misappropriated.

You would think, as all of this antagonism is occurring, Jews throughout the world would be united but unfortunately it is the opposite. As in the past, Jews are divided into two groups: those who support the Jewish state and the land of Israel, and those who vehemently oppose it. Within both groups you will find Jews of all complexions, backgrounds and religious levels. Some, who are against the Jewish nation, bend over backwards to appease those who wish to not only harm the nation but them as well.

The question I ask you, the reader, are you willing to be the warrior that will fight what is happening. Will you be counted as one who stood up to prevent the planned extinction of anything and everything that is Jewish, include the land of Israel? Will you be there to light the Menorah in the end? Are you a modern day Maccabee?

# AN IRREVERENT LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND HANUKKAH

**By Jeff Dunetz, Director of Special Projects**

Hanukkah begins Sunday night, December 18th, and Christmas is the week after. All too often, people lump the two together with the politically correct expression "happy holidays." But the two holidays are very different.

One sad thing about each faith's end-of-the-secular-year holiday is that most Jews do not understand Christmas, and most Christians don't get Hanukkah. But they should. After all, each faith believes that Jesus was a nice Jewish boy who went into his father's business. The disagreement is about what his father's occupation was. As we are about to celebrate Chanukah and Christmas is about to start, it's time for me to explain their differences to my fellow members of the Jewish nation (with tongue firmly in cheek).

**1. Christmas is on December 25th, the same day every year. The date is based on the secular solar-based calendar. Hanukkah begins on the 25th of Kislev every year. But that date is tied to the Hebrew LUNAR calendar.**

The Jewish calendar date of the 25th of Kislev falls on a different day of the secular calendar every year.

Most Jews have no idea where Chanukkah falls on the secular calendar until a Gentile friend asks when Chanukah starts. Their question forces us to consult the calendar given to us by the local Jewish Funeral Home. For the funeral home, it's a great marketing tool. When someone dies in one's family, the phone number to call is always handy.

**BTW the Jews also celebrate December 25th.** Why not? It's a paid day off from work. Usually, we go to the movies because on the 25th, there are no lines to the winter blockbusters because the Gentiles are doing something else. After the movie theater, we make our annual Christmas pilgrimage to get Chinese food, a traditional Jewish cuisine.

In the book of Genesis, we learn that the patriarch Abraham kept his tent flaps open all the time. Theologians will tell you that he wanted to welcome people, but that's not true. He kept the flaps open, so the Chinese food delivery guy saw that he was home.

It's 2022 in the secular calendar, 4720 in the Chinese calendar, and 5783 in the Jewish calendar. Archeologists and historians still haven't figured out what the Jews ordered for take-out for the first 1063 years of our existence.



## 2. There is only one way to spell

**Christmas. No one can decide how to spell**

**Chanukah.** The Oxford English Dictionary shows 24 different spellings for Hanukkah (Chanucha, Chanuchah, Hanuca, Hanucka, Chanuca, Chanukah, Chanucca, Chanuccah, Chanuka, Chanukah, Chanukka, Chanukkah, Hanucah, Hanucca, Hanuccah, Hanucha, Hanuckah, Hanuka, Hanukah, Hanukka, Hanukkah, Khanukah, Khanukka, and Khanukkah). I like to use many of them—even in the same post. The reason for the spelling differences, actual name is in Hebrew חַנּוּכָּה, and Hebrew can be

transliterated into English in many ways. We also like the spelling differences because it confuses the Gentiles.

**3. Christmas is a major Christian holiday. Chanukah is NOT a major Jewish holiday.** Chanukkah is only a big deal in America because Jewish parents wanted their kids to brag about getting gifts like their Christian buddies, but for eight nights.

**4. Christians (and Jews) Don't work on Christmas. Regular work schedules apply to Hanukah.**

Christmas is also a national holiday in the United States; therefore, everybody is off (unless one works at a movie theater or a Chinese restaurant).

**5. Christians purchase and gift ugly sweaters for Christmas.** As golf is the game of ugly pants, Christmas is the holiday of ugly sweaters. Jewish mothers and wives would never allow Jewish men to wear tacky sweaters like that in public. **"Uch, you are not going out of the house wearing THAT!"**

**Christians get wonderful presents such as jewelry, perfume, and stereos.** The traditional Jewish gift is Chanukah Gelt—coins made from chocolate. Since the increase of type two diabetes and protests about childhood obesity, some have frowned on gelt-giving. Sometimes Jewish kids feel left out because not all of the gifts are things they want...some days, they get practical presents such as pajamas, underwear, socks, shirts that make you itch when you put them on...or even scholarly Jewish books which they will ignore and put on their bookshelves unless it's built into a Nintendo.

**6. Chanukah is about a war, and Christmas is about "Peace on Earth."** Peace on Earth is a big theme of Christmas. Everybody—even non-Christians know this. It says it in almost all the Christmas carols.

Chanukah is about a war against being forced to assimilate. But with God's help, we won the war against the Syrian-Greek Seleucid Empire and threw them out of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

Sadly, while Chanukah is about Jews fighting against forced assimilation, some ACLU Woke types would have us celebrate it by putting "menorahs" into nativity scenes or putting Stars of David atop Christmas trees in the town square. Which proves they have no understanding of the meaning of the holiday. A message to my Gentile friends, you have a lovely holiday, enjoy

it—but **please** don't merge it with my holiday about assimilation. And by the way, they're not menorahs. They are Chanukiahs.

**7. Christmas is a time of enormous pressure for husbands and boyfriends. Their partners expect special gifts.** Jewish men are relieved of that burden on Hanukah. Adults give each other cheap gifts just to teach the kids about gift-giving.

My father, of blessed memory, was a house painter. He used to get two wallets as a promotional gift from the store he purchased his paint. Every year my mother would gift wrap each of the wallets, my dad would give one to mom, and mom would give one to dad. The real secret was that we knew what they were doing but didn't say anything. Why ruin their Hanukkah?

For guys dating the same girl for a long time, Chanukah is much better than Christmas. Some Christian men give their girlfriends engagement rings on Christmas. **No self-respecting Jewish woman expects a diamond ring on Hannukah.** They want to double-dip— jewelry on Hanukkah— and the diamond ring on a different day.

**8. Christmas brings enormous electric bills.** There are lights around the outside of the house and the inside, lights on the tree, etc. Trees are sometimes lined with popcorn on a string. If that was done for Hanukkah, Jewish mothers would say, "How can you waste food? People are starving in Africa!" However, in many Christian homes, there's no popcorn. There are blinking lights. Some families create beautiful displays outside their houses, but putting them up can be dangerous.

**Hanukkah is more of a green holiday.** No extra electricity, **Just** candles or oil. Not only are we spared enormous electric bills, the "green" feel good about not contributing to climate change. By the way, Jews don't give coal to the bad kids—We don't hang stockings, and coal might make a mess of the carpet. Besides the cleaning lady doesn't come till next week.

**9. Christmas carols are beautiful because the good ones were written by Jews,** Silent Night, Come All Ye Faithful, etc. Most Jews are secretly pleased that many of the beautiful Christmas

carols were composed by one of our tribal brethren. My favorite is White Christmas which was written by Irving Berlin (born Isaac Bailen). "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire" and "I'll be home for Christmas" were also written by Jews. It's a bit upsetting that Jews like Barbra Streisand have sung Christmas songs at concerts and TV specials. When she sings those songs, Babs is raining on my Chanukah parade. Note to my Christian friends, how about reciprocating with a Chanukah album. How come Nat King Cole never sang "Latkes frying in a frying pan?" Where is Dolly Parton's "I'm bringing jelly donuts home for Chanukah?"

**There aren't many good Hanukkah songs.** Why didn't those Jewish songwriters write for their own people? **BO-ring!** Most Chanukkah songs are about dreidels made from clay or having a party and dancing the hora. All we really have is Adam Sandler playing Jewish geography and my favorite which was written by Tom Lehrer. His is almost a travel song, "I'm spending Chanukkah in Santa Monica. Wearing sandals, Lighting candles by the sea."

**10. At home, the celebration of Christmas and Chanukah is much different.** Both are loud, but they each have a different kind of loudness. During Hanukkah, even when the entire family is in the same house, the only time the entire family is in the same room is when they light the Chanukiah. Otherwise, people are grouped by their household roles in different rooms. Generally, the adults are all talking at once, trying to talk over the others. Well, truth be told, only the mothers were talking.

In a Jewish family, there are only two words that a husband is allowed to say in front of other people, "Yes Dear." Every time my mother and her three sisters got together on Hanukkah (or any other time), they would sit at the kitchen table talking so loudly I was afraid the neighbors would call the police. They weren't fighting, but that's what happens when four Jewish women from Brooklyn get together and talk.

The four husbands would follow the Jewish concept of "Shalom HaBayit," peace in the household. In this case, it meant not interrupting their wives. Therefore, the men sat on chairs

in the living room, arms crossed, heads tilted all the way back, and snoring away, adding to the decibel level. The kids would be hiding from their parents downstairs in the den. The TV would be on, with the sound all the way up to mask the sound coming from their parents.

It is also loud on Christmas, but it's a different kind of loud. Their houses are filled with their entire families— grandkids, kids, adults, and even dogs. It gets really loud and chaotic on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. But the entire family celebrates together, generally not grouped by family roles. Everyone HAS to celebrate together. And they can't sneak away to see all the new films at the movies. The Jews have already purchased all the movie tickets.

**11. Christians go out for a drink, Jews get food.** After an office "holiday" party, many Christians will continue the party at a bar. The Jews will complain about the food at the party and then go to the local diner and complain about that food, also. Jews have been complaining about food since biblical times. For example, in Chapter 11 of the book of Bamidbar (Numbers), the former slaves complained about not having meat or fish. They only had that manna stuff they got from God.

**12. Christian parents never withhold Christmas gifts from their children.** Jewish parents have no qualms about withholding a gift on any of the eight nights of Hannukah. When they do withhold a gift, Jewish parents don't blame a fat bearded guy in a red suit and a sleigh pulled by reindeer, putting them on a naughty list. When I was a toddler, I thought Santa was an anti-Semite because he skipped the Jewish homes. Jewish Parents try to make their kids feel guilty when withholding gifts. "Great! Now I have to wait in a long line to return your Hanukkah gift!" By the way, a Catholic friend of mine claims they invented guilt. Even if that were true (it's not), we Jews learned to market it much better.

**13. The people in the Christmas story have names that are easy to pronounce and spell, such as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.** The names in the Chanukkah story are Antiochus, Seleucid, and Matta... whatever. You don't believe me? Try saying King Antiochus three times fast.

On the plus side, even if we don't know the names of the players in the Chanukah story, it doesn't matter when we are talking to non-Jews. We can tell our Gentile friends anything about Judaism, and they will believe us. Just as long as we throw in a few guttural "cchh" sounds and we fool them into believing we are wonderfully versed in Hebrew and Jewish history.

**14. In recent years, Christmas has become more and more commercialized.** The same holds true for Hannukah.

It would be hard to commercialize other Jewish holidays. I was in marketing for over 30 years and never figured out how to market a major holiday like Yom Kippur.

Can you imagine a TV Ad? A Chazzan chants Kol Nidre in the background while the announcer says, "***Hey everybody...Come to synagogue and starve yourself for 27 hours. Become one with your dehydrated soul. Beat your chest while confessing to a list of every sin in the book. It's a guaranteed swell time for you and your family.***"

**15. Hanukah movies are easier to identify.** Christians fight over which movies are Christmas movies. If you ever want to purposely start an argument, walk into a room full of Christians and ask, "Is Die Hard a Christmas movie?" Oh boy, it will get ugly. (Please don't tell anyone, but the truth is Die Hard is a Hanukkah movie).

So many movie plots occur during the Christmas season. Therefore, there is a very good chance of disagreement about whether or not a particular film can be considered a Christmas Movie. But with Hanukah movies, there is no grey area, perhaps because there are so few Hanukah movies besides "Eight Crazy Nights," "The Hebrew Hammer," "The Rugrats Hanukkah," and of course the one I mentioned above.

**Piece De Resistance.** Chanukah and Christmas are totally different holidays with totally different meanings. But in the end, I wish you all a joyous Chag Chanukah Samayach surrounded by family, friends, potato latkes, jelly donuts, and maybe a few laughs. After all, serving God with joy is another Jewish tradition.

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Herut is a nonpartisan Zionist organization established to implement the philosophy of Ze'ev Jabotinsky. We represent every sector of Jewry; women and men, secular to religious Zionists and everything in between. Herut members work each and every day to empower Jews to stand to Antisemitism, while waging against the anti-Israel hate which is a polite way to be anti-Semitic.

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