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IS IT THE JEWISH CHRISTMAS?

A GUIDE FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC
BY STEVE GREENBERG
FROM THE VENTURA COUNTY STAR

SO, WHAT IS THIS "HANUKKAH" THING, MR. ROTH?

IT MEANS "DEDICATION," BILLY!

SO IS IT THE JEWISH CHRISTMAS?

FAR FROM IT... IT'S ACTUALLY ALL ABOUT MAINTAINING ONE'S OWN FAITH!

"ABOUT 168 YEARS B.C., THE SYRIAN-GREEKS, LED BY KING ANTIOCHUS, SEIZED THE JEWISH TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM AND CONVERTED IT TO THE WORSHIP OF GREEK GODS."

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

A TEMPLE? LIKE ONE OF THOSE PLACES IN THOUSAND OAKS?

NO... THERE WAS ONLY ONE—THE BIG KAHUNA OF TEMPLES!

"THE JEWISH RELIGION WAS OUTLAWED, AND A GROUP OF REBELS HEADED FOR THE HILLS TO PLAN AN ATTACK."

"THE REBELS, LED BY JUDAH MACCABEE (ALIAS JUDAH 'THE HAMMER') DEFEATED THE SYRIAN-GREEKS DESPITE GREAT ODDS."

I WANT YOU TO WORSHIP ZEUS

"ONCE THE TEMPLE WAS RECLAIMED, IT NEEDED PURIFICATION WITH SACRED OIL FOR CANDLE-LIGHTING."

"ALL THE OIL FLASKS HAD BEEN DESTROYED, EXCEPT FOR ONE THAT HAD BARELY ENOUGH OIL FOR A DAY. MIRACULOUSLY, IT LASTED EIGHT DAYS. SO WE CELEBRATE HANUKKAH WITH EIGHT DAYS OF LIGHTS."

HANUKKAH'S JUST A MINOR HOLIDAY, BUT SINCE IT FALLS CLOSE TO CHRISTMAS, MODERN-DAY JEWISH PARENTS GIVE THEIR KIDS GIFTS SO THEY WON'T FEEL LEFT OUT NEXT TO THEIR CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS.

WOOHOO!! EIGHT DAYS OF PRESENTS!! THAT TOTALLY ROCKS!!

CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AT LAST!

EAT PORK

GREEKS RULE

FOR A GOOD TIME CALL ATHENA

LOOK AT THIS MESS!

SOME HANUKKAH-ISMS

EIGHT NIGHTS BUT NINE CANDLES? THE HANUKKAH MENORAH HAS A CANDLE FOR EACH NIGHT OF THE MIRACLE, PLUS A "HELPER" CANDLE THAT'S JUST FOR LIGHTING THE OTHERS.

HAPPY CHANUKKAH! HANUKKAH! CHANUKKAH! HANUKKAH! FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS!

ALL THOSE SPELLINGS? THEY'RE ALL ATTEMPTS TO TRANSLITERATE A HARD-TO-PRONOUNCE WORD IN THE HEBREW LANGUAGE. THE ACTUAL SPELLING LOOKS LIKE THIS: חנוכה

THE SPINNING TOP CALLED A DREIDEL HAS LETTERS THAT MEAN "A GREAT MIRACLE HAPPENED THERE." IT HELPED FOOL THE SYRIAN-GREEKS INTO THINKING THE JEWS WERE GAMBLING AND NOT ILLEGALLY PRAYING. TODAY IT'S USED FOR... GAMBLING (FOR FUN).

THE POTATO PANCAKES CALLED LATKES ARE FRIED IN OIL TO COMMEMORATE THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL.

AND MODERN ANTACIDS ARE A MIRACLE TOO!

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The God Factor

by Sara Yoheved Rigler

Chanukah demonstrates how history can produce the most improbable victors.

"Women your age have a 5% chance of becoming pregnant using in vitro fertilization," Dr. C. was telling me as I sat opposite her in a leading Israeli I.V.F. clinic. I was 45 years old and, since the birth of my first child at the age of 40, had been trying to conceive a second baby using every means available. "Of those 5%, only half carry through to term and deliver a live baby," Dr. C. continued. "Thus, you have 2½% chance of succeeding."

I stared at the good doctor, thinking, *God runs the world. If He wants me to have a second child, I will. And if He doesn't, I won't. My job is to exert maximum effort. Whether or not I succeed is up to God.*

"In any case," I told Dr. C, "I would like to try."

The first time I did I.V.F., I failed.

The clinic offered two tries for the same price. I tried again. This involved getting two shots of powerful fertility drugs every day for two weeks in order to generate as many eggs as possible; a minimum of three eggs was required to continue with the process. Then the doctor would surgically extract the eggs from the ovary, fertilize them, and reinsert them into the womb.

The day before my scheduled extraction, I had an ultrasound to determine the number of eggs. The doctor informed me that I had only two eggs, not enough to even bother with the extraction. Tearfully, I begged him to fudge the results and write that there were three eggs. If God wants me to get pregnant, I thought, He can do it with just two eggs. The ultrasound doctor consented.

When Dr. C. performed the extraction the

next day, she found only one egg. My chances of success slid from 2½% to zilch.

Since I was already on the operating table, Dr. C. humored me. She extracted and fertilized the single egg. Two days later, as she reinserted it, my non-religious doctor looked me straight in the eye and uttered a single word: "Pray."

I prayed and cried to God. Two weeks later, I got a positive pregnancy test.

The next day I saw Dr. C. in the clinic. I was jubilant. She was skeptical. "I'll believe you're pregnant when I see an ultrasound with a heartbeat."

Three weeks later I ecstatically waved in front of her an ultrasound with a heartbeat.

At the end of nine months, at the age of 46, I gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

EXPERTS AND PREDICTIONS

In 1967, as Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser was proclaiming the imminent destruction of the State of Israel, both political pundits and military strategists predicted Israel's defeat. The figures were formidable. The 19-year-old state was up against the impending combined attack of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. The four Arab armies together boasted 810 airplanes against Israel's 350; 2,880 tanks against Israel's 800; and 465,000 troops against Israel's 265,000. So convinced were the Israelis themselves of an inevitable blood bath that the Rabbinate officially designated all of Jerusalem's parks as cemeteries.

Apparently, God had a different idea. Instead of defeat, Israel experienced a surprise victory.

The experts were left stammering. They left out the most crucial factor: God runs the world.

In just six days, Israel not only pushed back the Arab forces, but recaptured all of the major Jewish holy sites, including the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem.

The experts were left stammering. They left out the most crucial factor: God runs the world.

CHANUKAH

The story of Chanukah comes to teach us how history can take the most unlikely turns and produce the most improbable victors.

What would the experts of 167 B.C.E. have said about the chances of the old priest Mattathias and his family and friends defeating the mighty army of the Syrian Greek empire? I can imagine their pronouncements now:

"An Orthodox priest and his reactionary compatriots have raised the banner of revolt against not only the prevailing rule of the Seleucid Empire, but also against all of modern Greek culture and enlightenment. This motley band of guerrilla fighters is outnumbered more than 4-1 by the Seleucid army, which boasts some 40,000 professional troops equipped with the cutting edge of military technology, as well as the ultimate weapon—a herd of elephants trained for battle, against which no warriors can stand.

"The Maccabees are opposed not only by the considerable Greek population on the coastal plain, but also by a large proportion of the Jewish inhabitants, who have, over the last century and a half, adapted to the world-wide hegemony of Greek language, culture, and religion. Thus, the Maccabees have initiated a civil war, targeted at their own progressive fellow Jews who are called Hellenists. As the Hellenists comprise the most wealthy and influential segments of Jewish society, the effort to unseat them is nothing less than preposterous.

"The attempt of the Maccabees to score a military victory, overthrow the progressive culture which dominates the whole world, and re-establish their antiquated religion on the soil of Judea is futile."

The pundits would have been accurate in their analysis. After all, who could have predicted that in three years Mattathias and his followers would reconquer Jerusalem, purify the Temple and reinstitute the Temple service? Although the total victory was hard-won -- taking over 20 years and costing the lives of four out of five of Mattathias's sons, the Maccabees ultimately triumphed over the Greeks.

The prayer to God we add during the eight days of Chanukah emphasizes the unlikelihood of the Jewish victory: "You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few..."

The Maccabees did not sit back and wait for a miracle to happen. A Jew must always exert maximum reasonable effort and not rely on miracles. But they were neither cowed by the odds nor discouraged by daunting prospects.

Chanukah celebrates the victory of the virtually impossible. It is the antithesis of the Greek worldview which adulates logic and the laws of nature as absolute. Chanukah demonstrates that in a world run by God, miracles can happen.

Sara Yoheved Rigler is the author of the bestseller Holy Woman and Lights from Jerusalem. She is a graduate of Brandeis University. After 15 years of practicing and teaching meditation and Eastern philosophy, she discovered "the world's most hidden religion: Torah Judaism." Since 1985, she has been practicing the spiritual path of Torah. She is a popular international lecturer on subjects of Jewish spirituality and feature writer on Aish.com. She resides in the Old City of Jerusalem with her husband and children.

The Maccabees were neither cowed by the odds nor discouraged by daunting prospects.

Chanukah in the Soviet Gulag

by Natan Sharansky

The power of the few against the many.

"A camp is not a synagogue. We won't permit Sharansky to pray here."

Natan (Anatoli) Sharansky was arrested in 1977 for his insistence on the right of Russian Jews to make aliyah to Israel. However he was accused of the much more serious crime of treason, for spying for the United States. He sat in prison from 1977 to 1986 including eight years in a Soviet prison camp in Siberia. After continuous public protest in the West, spear-headed by his wife Avital, Natan Sharansky was released in a spy exchange between the US and the USSR in 1986. After making aliyah and establishing a Russian immigrant party in 1996, he became Israeli Minister of Industry and Trade and later of the Interior.

His memoirs of the Soviet period are filled with sparkling anecdotes about the power of the few against the many -- the power that derives from "fearing no evil" and laughing in the face of oppression. The phrase, "fear no evil," is taken from the little book of Psalms, which he carried with him through his long imprisonment.

The holiday of Chanukah was approaching. At the time, I was the only Jew in the prison zone, but when I explained that Chanukah was a holiday of national freedom, of returning to one's own culture in the face of forced assimilation, my friends in our "kibbutz" decided to celebrate it with me. They even made me a wooden menorah, decorated it, and found some candles.

In the evening I lit the first candle and recited a prayer that I had composed for this occasion. Tea was poured, and I began to describe the heroic struggle of the Maccabees to save their people from slavery. For each zek [a prisoner in the Soviet Gulag] who was listening, this story had its own personal meaning. At one point the duty officer appeared in the barracks. He made a list of all those present, but did not interfere.

On each of the subsequent evenings of

Chanukah I took out my menorah, lit the candles, and recited the appropriate blessing. Then I blew out the candles, as I didn't have any extras. Gavriiliuk, the collaborator whose bunk was across from mine, watched and occasionally grumbled, "Look at him, he made himself a synagogue. And what if there's a fire?"

On the sixth night of Chanukah the authorities confiscated my menorah with all my candles. I ran to the duty officer to find out what had happened.

"The candlesticks were made from state materials; this is illegal. You could be punished for this alone and the other prisoners are complaining. They're afraid you'll start a fire."

I began to insist. "In two days Chanukah will be over and then I'll return this 'state property' to you. Now, however, this looks like an attempt to deny me the opportunity of celebrating Jewish holidays."

The duty officer began hesitating. Then he phoned his superior and got his answer: "A camp is not a synagogue. We won't permit Sharansky to pray here."

I was surprised by the bluntness of that remark, and immediately declared a hunger strike. In a statement to the procurator general I protested against the violation of my national and religious rights, and against KGB interference in my personal life.

When you begin an unlimited hunger strike, you never know when or how it will end. Are the authorities interested at that moment in putting a swift end to it, or don't they give a damn? In a few weeks a commission from Moscow was due to arrive in the camp. I didn't know this at the time, but the authorities, presumably, were very aware of it, which probably explains why I was summoned to Major Osin's office two days later, in the

evening.

Osin was an enormous, flabby man of around 50, with small eyes and puffy eyelids, who seemed to have long ago lost interest in everything but food. But he was a master of intrigue who had successfully overtaken many of his colleagues on the road to advancement. During my brief time in the camp he had weathered several scandals and had always managed to pass the buck to his subordinates. I could see that he had enjoyed his power over the zeks and liked to see them suffer. But he never forgot that the zeks were, above all, a means for advancing his career, and he knew how to back off in a crisis.

Osin pulled a benevolent smile over his face as he tried to talk me out of my hunger strike. Osin promised to see to it personally that in the future nobody would hinder me from praying, and that this should not be a concern of the KGB.

"Then what's the problem?" I said. "Give me back the menorah, as tonight is the last evening of Chanukah. Let me celebrate it now, and taking into account your assurances for the future, I shall end the hunger strike."

"What's a menorah?"

"Candlesticks."

But a protocol for its confiscation had already been drawn up, and Osin couldn't back down in front of the entire camp. As I looked at this predator, sitting at an elegant polished table and wearing a benevolent smile, I was seized by an amusing idea.

"Listen," I said, "I'm sure you have the menorah somewhere. It's very important to me to celebrate the last night of Chanukah. Why not let me do it here and now, together with you? You'll give me the menorah, I'll light the candles and say the prayer, and if all goes well I'll end the hunger strike."

Osin thought it over and promptly the confiscated menorah appeared from his desk. He summoned Gavriliuk, who was on duty in the office, to bring in a large candle.

"I need eight candles," I said. (In fact I needed nine, but when it came to Jewish rituals I was still a novice.) Gavriliuk took out a knife

and began to cut the candle into several smaller ones. But it didn't come out right; apparently the knife was too dull. Then Osin took out a handsome inlaid pocketknife and deftly cut me eight candles.

"Go, I'll call you later," he said to Gavriliuk. Gavriliuk simply obeyed orders. He was a fierce, gloomy man, and this sight must have infuriated him.

I arranged the candles and went to the coat rack for my hat, explaining to Osin that "during the prayer you must stand with your head covered and at the end say 'Amen.'" He put on his major's hat and stood. I lit the candles and recited my own prayer in Hebrew, which went something like this: "Blessed are You, God, for allowing me to rejoice on this day of Chanukah, the holiday of our liberation, the holiday of our return to the way of our fathers. Blessed are You, God, for allowing me to light these candles. May you allow me to light the Chanukah candles many times in your city, Jerusalem, with my wife, Avital, and my family and friends."

This time, however, inspired by the sight of Osin standing meekly at attention, I added in Hebrew: "And may the day come when all our enemies, who today are planning our destruction, will stand before us and hear our prayers and say 'Amen.'"

"Amen," Osin echoed back. He sighed with relief, sat down and removed his hat. For some time we looked silently at the burning candles. They quickly melted, and the hot wax was spread pleasantly over the glass surface of the table. Then Osin caught himself, summoned Gavriliuk, and brusquely ordered him to clean it up.

I returned to the barracks in a state of elation, and our kibbutz made tea and merrily celebrated the end of Chanukah. Naturally, I told them about Osin's "conversion," and it soon became the talk of the camp. I realized that revenge was inevitable, but I also knew they had plenty of other reasons to punish me.

Excerpted from Mr. Sharansky's book, Fear No Evil. The writer is head of the Adelson Institute for Strategic Studies at the Shalem Center.

"He took out a knife and cut the candle into several smaller ones."

Latkes Galore!

by Tamar Ansh

Instead of the typical oily potato latkes, why not try some of these different ideas?

Potato-Beet Latkes

1 small onion, pureed
2 eggs
3 potatoes, peeled and shredded
2 medium sized beets, cooked, drained and shredded
1/2 cup ground walnuts
1/2 cup flour or potato flour
1 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper

In a food processor fitted with the sharp "S" blade, puree the onions until liquidy. Add the eggs to the pureeing onions, one at a time. Turn off the processor and change the blade to the shredder blade. Put the potatoes and beets through the shredder. Pour all contents into a large bowl. Add the walnuts, flour, salt and pepper and mix well.

Heat some olive or canola oil in a non-stick skillet. Using a large spoon or ladle, start frying your "latkes". Spoon portions that will be approximately 2 or 3 inches in diameter and allow them to brown nicely on the first side. Flip them over and continue to fry on the second side until they are nice and crispy on the second side. Remove from pan onto plates lined with paper towels to drain off some of the excess oil. Serve immediately with sour cream, cream cheese, or applesauce (or all three!) on the side.

Cheese Latkes

Kids everywhere love this one!

1 cup any kind of American cream cheese OR
1 container (250 grams) 5% Israeli white cheese
1/2 cup cottage cheese OR 1 container Israeli leben
1/2 cup light brown sugar
2 eggs
1 1/2 cups white flour or a half-half mixture with whole wheat and white flours
2 tsp. baking powder
1 packet vanilla sugar or 2 tsp. vanilla liquid
small pinch of salt

Mix together all ingredients in a bowl by hand, or, for a really smooth texture, blend them with a hand beater. Spray a heavy frying skillet with baking spray and spoon out the cheese mixture by small ladlefuls and fry on both sides until golden brown. Serve immediately. Goes great with strawberry or blueberry preserves.

Chanukah "Light" Latkes

This recipe keeps the oil and fat calories at bay...

2 large potatoes, scrubbed and unpeeled
1 small onion
1/2 small carrot
2 egg whites
1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
3-4 Tbls. flour
Pinch celery seed
Scant 1/4 tsp. each curry and fennel
1/4 tsp. pepper

Grate potatoes alternately with onion and carrot in the food processor. Drain. Mix with remaining ingredients. Spray a good quality non-stick frying pan with Pam or another oil spray. Drop mixture by heaping tablespoons into hot frying pan and flatten with a fork to make the latkes thin. Fry on medium - high heat until brown. Flip over and brown the other side as well. Serve with applesauce. Yields 16-20 thin latkes.

Tuna Latkes

These make for a fun and different way to serve an otherwise boring can of tuna fish. They can even be used as a sort of burger, when placed on a bun, along with some lettuce, tomato slices, and onion rings...

1 medium potato, peeled and boiled
1 small onion, diced and sautéed
1 stalk celery, diced and sautéed
1 can tuna, mostly drained and flaked
2 egg whites
1 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
1 scallion, diced
1/2 small carrot, shredded, optional
2 Tbls. matzo meal or whole wheat flour

In a small pot, place the potato and boil until soft. Drain and mash. Reserve for later use.

Place onion and celery in a small frying pan and sautee for 7 minutes until just turning brown. Put them in a large bowl, together with everything else. Add mashed potato and combine by hand until well mixed.

Heat a non-stick skillet and spray with some oil spray. Make small balls out of this mixture by hand and lay them on the skillet to brown. Flatten slightly with a fork, taking care not to break them. Fry on both sides until browned and slightly crispy. Serve immediately. Serves 2.

Enjoy all these recipes and have a Happy Chanukah!

Tamar Ansh is an author, freelance recipe developer, and food columnist. Her publications include: Splitting the Sea; Let's Say Amen!, an illustrated children's book (Feldheim Publishers); and her first cookbook, which is both gluten free and kosher for Passover, A Taste of Tradition. All are available online or wherever Jewish books are sold internationally.

Chanukah Candles How-To

Everything you need to know about how to light up.

Each night of Chanukah we add one more candle, culminating in the final night of eight lights. All eight candles on the menorah should be at the same height -- and preferably in a straight line.

In addition to the eight main lights, the menorah has an extra helper candle called the "Shamash." Since the Shamash does not count as one of the eight regular lights, your menorah should have the Shamash set apart in some way -- either placed higher than the other candles, or off to the side.

In Ashkenazi tradition, each person lights his own menorah. Sefardi tradition has just one menorah per family.

What Candles to Light



It is best to use olive oil since the miracle of the Maccabees occurred with it. Whatever you use, be sure that your candles burn for at least 30 minutes after nightfall.

Where to Light



To best publicize the miracle, the menorah is ideally lit outside the doorway of your house, on the left side when entering. If this is not practical, the menorah should be lit in a window facing the public thoroughfare.

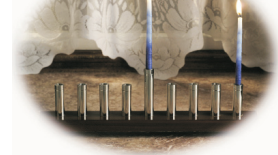
When to Light



The menorah should preferably be lit immediately at nightfall. It is best to wait, however, until all the members of the household are present. This adds to the family atmosphere and also maximizes the mitzvah of "publicizing the miracle."

On Friday afternoon, the menorah should be lit 18 minutes before sundown.

How to Light



On the first night, place one candle at the far right, as you face the menorah. This applies whether the menorah is placed next to a doorway or by a window.

Another candle is placed for the Shamash (taller helper candle) which is used to light the others. It is not counted as one of the candles.

First light the Shamash, then recite the blessings, and then use the Shamash to light the Chanukah candle.

On the second night, place two candles in the two far-right positions -- and use the Shamash to light the left one first.

On the third night, place three candles in the three far-right positions -- and use the Shamash to light them in order, from left to

right.

Follow this same procedure each night of Chanukah... until all the lights are kindled and glowing brightly.

The Blessings

The blessings are said with the Shamash already lit, but immediately prior to lighting the Chanukah candles.

BLESSING #1

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

Baruch Ata Adonoy Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kid-shanu bi-mitzvo-sav, vi-tzee-vanu
li-had-leek ner shel Chanukah.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of
the universe, Who sanctified us with His
commandments, and commanded us to kindle
the Chanukah light.

BLESSING #2

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנָן הַזֶּה.

Baruch Ata Adonoy Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
shi-asa nee-seem la-avo-seinu, baya-meem
ha-haim baz-man ha-zeh.

Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of
the universe, Who made miracles for our
ancestors, in those days at this season.

BLESSING #3

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחֲיִינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ
לְזִמְנָן הַזֶּה.

Baruch Ata Adonoy, Eloheinu Melech haolam,
shehecheyanu vikiyimanu vihiyigyanu lazman
hazeh.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the
universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained
us, and brought us to this occasion.

This blessing is said **on the first night only**.

The following paragraph is said each night,
after the first light has been kindled:

Ha-nerot ha-lalu anach-nu mad-likin
Al ha-nissim vi-al hanif-la-ot
Al ha-tshu-ot vi-al ha-milchamot
She-asita la'avo-teinu
Ba-yamim ha-heim, baz-man ha-zeh
Al ye-dey koha-necha haki-doshim.

Vi-chol shmonat ye-mey Chanukah
Ha-nerot ha-lalu kodesh heim,
Ve-ein lanu reshut li-heesh-tamesh ba-hem
Ela leer-otam bilvad
Kedai le-hodot u-li-hallel li-shimcha
Al ni-secha vi-al niflo-techa vi-al yeshua-
techa.

We kindle these lights
For the miracles and the wonders
For the redemption and the battles
Which You performed for our forefathers
In those days at this season
Through Your holy priests.

During all eight days of Chanukah
These lights are sacred
And we are not permitted to make ordinary
use of them
But only to look at them
In order to express thanks and praise to Your
great Name
For your miracles, Your wonders, and Your
salvations.

*For animated video on how to light the Menorah
and audio of the blessings for lighting the Menorah
visit: aish.com/menorah*

For more inspiring articles, visit:
aish.com/chanukah