

# MERRY CHANUKAH

*by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky*

Well, it's that time of year again. The holiday season. That is, unless you're Jewish. Then it's only Chanukah. We already had our holiday season in the fall. You remember, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Simchas Torah. Now all we have is Chanukah. I guess in American society the story of the tenacious band of Torah scholars fighting for religious freedom doesn't quite measure up to the other holiday with a Ch. So most Jews manage to turn Chanukah into some kind of a Jewish Christmas. You know "Deck the halls with boughs of Chally..". The television stations in major cities wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy Chanukah.

Now how can a nice Jewish family manage to withstand the onslaught of the American Christmas experience relatively unscathed? Well, you could move to Israel where except for the Christian Quarter and Bethlehem (and the occasional Tel Aviv restaurant) the Christian holiday passes unnoticed. But then you wouldn't have to deal with the American experience would you? I guess we could figure out how to make Chanukah more meaningful, and although that wouldn't insulate us, it would at least give us something to focus on while our children sit by the Chanukah Bush waiting for Judah Maacabee to come down the chimney with his bag of gifts and eat the milk and latkas we set out for him.

Let's start by figuring out what the Jews are doing in the world anyway. I know many non-Jews haven't figured it out, that's why they have tried to get rid of us for the past 3000 years. Well, we have all heard that the Jewish People are the Chosen People. What exactly does that mean? That G-d likes us more than everyone else? G-d is the G-d of the whole world! Does it mean that we have been selected to receive special reward and have it better than anyone else, because if so, I think He should choose someone else for a change.

The Jewish view has always been that G-d has chosen us to make the world a better place. To be, in the words of Isaiah "a light unto the nations". In a world of spiritual darkness, the Jews have been given the mission of bringing the light of G-d into the world. The question is, what is the best way to light up the world?

Well, if you wanted to light up a room you could take a giant chandelier and hang it right in the middle. That would light up the whole room. Or you could take a number of smaller lamps and spread them all around. That also works, but there will probably be a lot more shadows. So we Jews have always felt the first method is the best.

Which brings us to King Solomon. The Jews captured the Land of Israel, settled in the land and under King David established a government with Jerusalem as its capital. David's son King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem to be a light to the world. His plan was that when people would come to see the Temple they would feel G-d's Divine presence and study the wisdom of the Torah. And it worked. People came from near and far and went away transformed. Had Solomon stayed the course, world history would have been dramatically different. But as you probably know, Solomon married a thousand wives. That's a strange thing, since we know that King Solomon was the smartest man who ever lived. So why would he want a thousand mother-in-laws?

If we eliminate the possibility that this intense man of G-d with prophetic power was only a debased oriental potentate, then we have to search for a more rational explanation for this bizarre behavior. Rabbi E. E. Dessler explains that King Solomon was trying to solve this very dilemma, namely what's the best way to light up the world. So in addition to the Temple he had this great idea: marry the princess of every kingdom. Then his sons would be the heirs to all the thrones and all the kingdoms would be Jewish. It was a clever idea but it's not the way we Jews work. Had Solomon focused on the Temple as the source of light, then he could have lit up the whole world. Unfortunately, he chose to use the candle approach, spreading little lights all over the world. This is known as exile and dispersion. If the Jews live in their land as a perfect people their light will reach everywhere. And there won't be any shadows. Otherwise they'll have to travel the world and provide a little light wherever they go. That's less effective, but still better than nothing.

Which brings us to the Greeks. The Greeks also felt they had a mission in the world. They wanted to fill the world with the light of Greek culture and civilization. That wanted to Hellenize the whole world. So they went about conquering the world and then forcing the light of Hellenism on them. Now as you can imagine the stage was set for a confrontation between these two philosophies. The Jewish people living in their land thinking that the best way to light up the world is to be left alone. By living a holy existence in their land they would fill the world with the light of holiness and purity. And the Greeks thinking that the way to light up the world is to force everyone to study Socrates and Plato and play discus.

That's Chanukah. The Jews are forced by the Greeks to become Greek and they have to fight to be left alone. To be a holy people in their own land. We won that war and rededicated the Temple, the

light of the world. We removed all the impurity and found one small cruse of oil that remained pure. We used that to relight the Menorah, the lamp that burns inside the Temple unseen by human eyes but whose light shines to the furthest corners of the Earth. It was an oil lamp and as we know oil doesn't mix. If you make salad dressing the oil will float to the top and if you stick in a wick and light it, you're salad dressing would give light. You can try this with some latkas too.

We Jews have to learn to be oil. To stay apart and be allowed to light up the world. It's tempting when the outside world tries to force Plato or Santa on us, but we know that our power comes from following a lifestyle that's better than what the world has to offer. Through living as Jews we can bring G-d and His Torah into a world filled with moral decay. We can light up the world and chase away the shadows. It's not much fun being the only one on the block without all the colorful Christmas lights. But those little Chanukah menorahs have burnt for over 2300 years and seen all the tinsel of past civilizations burn out. We are either going to be a light unto the world or vanish into the world of darkness that surrounds us.

If we want to make a real choice, then let's remember what we are doing in the world and what the Greeks tried to extinguish the Temple and the light of Torah learning. Let's resolve this Chanukah to make sure that every Jewish person gets the opportunity to receive a quality Jewish education so they will have the chance to see beyond the darkness around us and bring light to our people and the entire world.

Happy Chanukah