

# CHANUKAH

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The uniqueness of the holiday of Chanuka is apparent in the fact that it is so widely celebrated amongst the Jews the world over and no matter what their level of Jewish observance is. It is not only that Chanuka has the "good fortune" of always falling in the month of December that accounts for this level of interest in it. This is definitely a factor, but I do not believe it to be the deciding factor. I think rather that Chanuka represents the last refuge of Jews who want to be Jewish but are unable to verbalize or express in their actions that inner desire. So, Jews allow Chanuka to speak for us. For Chanuka declares clearly that there is a God in the world, that there are basic principles of faith and godly behavior that are worth great sacrifices, that a little light can overcome a sea of darkness and that God demands a certain greatness from the Jewish people and He will perform miracles to guarantee human realization of His presence in world events. Jews really believe in these ideas but somehow they are not publicly expressed in our lives. It may be that in our modern world that has cast away so much of the positive of the past, it is embarrassing to mouth these eternal truths. Certainly in this century when Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler and other representatives of the new, modern, progressive world, were ascendant, the lights of Chanuka were certainly dim and the ideas they represented were only capable of being whispered but not proclaimed. So the Jewish person retreated into Chanuka and let the holiday itself speak for them and their inner being and hopes.

One of the qualities of Chanuka, which the Talmud emphasizes, is the concept of *pirsuma nissa* - the requirement to publicize and make known the miracle of Chanuka. Thus the lights of Chanuka are lit in a window that opens to the outside street. In Israel we light the lights of Chanuka in the passageway of our outside doors so that they shine on the street and the passerbys. The lights of Chanuka, the symbol of the miracle and the lessons of this holiday, thereby become a public statement of Jewish faith and of our deepest instincts and godly intuition. What we cannot say in words, either out of ignorance, shame, or weakness, we say therefore with the lights of Chanuka themselves.

The problems in Jewish life that Chanuka records for us are still present today in the Jewish world. The Hellenistic Jews no longer go by that name but their program of advocating unchecked Jewish assimilation, no matter what the cost, still lives on. There are other Jews in our time that advocate putting all of our trust in our own might and power, even though all of the history of the events of this bloody century seem to deny the validity of such a strategy. There are still other Jews that are blind to the realities of being subjugated and are unappreciative of the benefits, spiritual and physical, of being an independent nation. All of these groups existed within the Jewish world of the

Hasmoneans almost twenty-two centuries ago. The victory and miracles of Chanuka stand as a stark reminder to all of us that we have been through this trial once before. A wise people learn from its past history. Chanuka and its lights are a powerful memory aid for all of us.

The Torah records for us in this week's reading the story of the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams. The Torah reading of Miketz almost invariably coincides with the Sabbath of Chanuka. The message here is also clear. Chanuka and Jewish dreams are inseparable. In order to have a meaningful, spiritual, Jewish life, one must be a dreamer. One must have a maximum vision of one's self and one's importance and contributions to Jewish life and destiny. Without that vision, it is difficult to appreciate the lights of Chanuka. For Chanuka not only commemorates our past, it is meant to illustrate our future. It gives hope for our dreams' fulfillment and a sense of confidence - Jewish confidence - that somehow all will yet be right for us and for all of humankind.

Happy Chanuka.  
Rabbi Berel Wein

---

Text Copyright &copy 2000 [Rabbi Berel Wein](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**

---