

# THE STRONG AND THE WEAK

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Chanuka represents a triumph, in the words of the al hanism prayer recited during this holiday, of "the weak over the strong." There is no doubt that the words "weak" and "strong" that appear in the prayer refer to physical, military strength. The Syrian-Greek army that waged war against the Hasmonean rebels was far larger and better equipped - elephants, et al - than was the Jewish force. Yet even though on paper the Jews were weaker militarily they somehow persevered and triumphed against their foes.

Now we all are aware that the highest devotion to duty and greatest moral commitment are not enough in the course of natural normal events to overcome tanks and machine guns with horses and spears. Thus the physical definition of "weak" and "strong" always remains in place. Yet there is a dimension of strength and weakness that Chanuka clearly illustrates for us. And that is the power of self-confidence, faith and belief. For though it does not per se stop machine gun bullets, it does give those who possess it the ability to outwit, outfight and outlast a heavily armed enemy.

The French army in 1940 outnumbered its German adversary in numbers and equipment in World War II. Yet it collapsed in weeks because it was demoralized, defeatist in attitude and without any belief in itself as a fighting force. The Hasmoneans triumphed after heavy losses of their own because of their belief and faith and self-confidence, their moral commitment if you will. They were fighting for their Temple and their religion, for the God of Israel and the justness of His cause. This gave them moral strength that helped overcome their physical weakness and shortcomings.

The modern Haman of Iran/Persia proclaimed last week that Prime Minister Olmert's unfortunate reference to Israeli nuclear weapons is only further proof of the weakness and desperation of Israel. He is encouraged in this painfully erroneous assessment by the presence throughout the Jewish world of the self-hating Jews of Leftist academia and the fanatical lunatics in their treacherous Jewish garb who claim to be religious and who echo his calls for the dismantling of the Jewish state here in Israel.

What can be better proof that this modern version of Haman is right when he is only quoting Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein, Satmar and Neturei Karta? Do these disparate Jewish bed-fellows not illustrate the moral bankruptcy of the State of Israel and the Jewish people? Truly to his warped mind they show that the Jewish people are weak - physically, morally and religiously. What results is his confidence in defying everyone in the world in pursuing his mad game of terror and destruction.

He feels himself strong and has decided that his opponents are weak. Well, the strong usually triumph and conquer the weak so he apparently has the odds on his side. But he is sadly mistaken in his assessment of us and of the situation. He has not done his homework with due diligence and has avoided learning the lessons of history. It is he that is weak for he is embarking on the road to his appalling disaster. The Talmud teaches us that anti-Semitism is a shortcut to fame but eventually it is a long road to Hell and destruction. Ask the Greeks, the Romans, the Crusaders, the Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Germans.

Chanuka symbolizes this great inner strength of the Jewish people and its firm attachment to Torah and its values. Jews as individuals may waver and weaken but the Jewish people - klal yisrael - never falters. There is a strength and resilience placed within us by our history and faith that makes the weak physically strong morally and eternally. The little lights of Chanuka still shine in the Jewish world long after the bonfires of our enemies have been extinguished by even greater conflagrations that overcame them.

We have to continue to strengthen ourselves in the justice of our cause and the faith of our traditions and observances. They are truly the "security of our lives, the length of our days." Our road is never an easy one and Chanuka marks only the beginnings of victory and not the ultimate triumph. But it points the way for us and warms us in the cold winter of our problems and discontent. Chanuka may be sufganiyot and svivonim, latkes and gelt. But it is more than that. It is the affirmation of our strength of purpose and determination to live and succeed. That is what makes it such a meaningful and joyous holiday. Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at

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