

Modern Miracles

On Hanukkah, let's celebrate the light God gives us even now

By HOWARD TEICH

“To be Jewish is to believe in miracles,” Rabbi Jay Rosenbaum, president of the North American Board of Rabbis, commented to me

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in a recent conversation. We celebrate with Hanukkah the miracle of one vial of oil lasting eight days after the Greeks in ancient days defiled the remaining oil in the Temple when they ruled Judea. Is that the only miracle that we should celebrate today when we observe the eight days of Hanukkah, or is there more? I say there is much more, and it will bring us closer to the living nature of the celebration.

My viewpoint does portray my optimism, that miracles are with us in so many ways in our lives. The holiday of Hanukkah is more than the celebration of one miracle from 2,000 years ago; rather it is a celebration, during the eight days, of the continuous range of miracles of our Jewish people that have happened even up until today. In the lighting of the candles, we see the reminder of the light in the world that sweeps away the darkness.

As we spin the dreidel, we watch the letters, *nun, gimel, hay* and *shin*, on each side pass us by, standing for “*Nes gadol hayah sham*,” translated as “A great miracle happened there.” This is what living in God’s world means to me. And for many of our ancestors who were persecuted, those letters, or substitute ones they used on the side of their dreidel, provided an opportunity for protection, for renewed light, and for the continuity of the Jewish faith.

The story as we know it, in the simplest version, is that the

He led a revolt, the Temple was liberated and tradition was to be restored. The Jewish people needed to light the eternal light, and only one vial of oil could be found, and yet they needed eight days’ worth — and the miracle occurred that the oil burned for the eight days.

It was a year later that the holiday of Hanukkah was established and celebrated for eight days, a celebration of the weak imperiled by annihilation overcoming the mighty, with God’s intervention. Clearly, Hanukkah is a time of searching for a path to holiness, to opening our hearts, educating ourselves, and looking to the spirit within ourselves, and the opportunity of a spiritual renewal as we look to the miracle that happened, and that we are celebrating.

Was the miracle in the taking back

happening in the very moment that the Maccabees suspended doubt, in their commitment to liberating Jerusalem and the Temple, against all odds. Their faith was strengthened, and so they took action. Although their action was earthly based, God was with them, and they succeeded.

Hillel proposed lighting one candle the first night and adding one each day up to eight the last night, as he saw that the light would be growing during the celebration of the Hanukkah festival. We follow that today. Light is always welcomed in the dark, and the more faith you have, the more and brighter is the light as the dark recedes. That is the Jewish optimism that shines, and the continued belief in a God that we serve on Earth as a Jewish people. That’s my viewpoint.



Raising the flag at the conclusion of Israel's War of Independence in 1949. “I look at today's miracles, starting with the rebirth of the State of Israel, including our eternal capital Jerusalem, as one of the true miracles of our time, and cannot imagine that we do not include that in the wonder of our celebration of the eight days of Hanukkah,” writes Teich.

of Jerusalem and the Temple, or the oil burning for the eight days? There are many different interpretations of this, some limiting the miracle to the oil burning eight days when there was only a supply for one day, and others including the retaking of Jerusalem and the Temple.

I look at today’s miracles, starting with the rebirth of the State of Israel, including our eternal capital Jerusalem, as one of the true miracles of our time, and cannot imagine that we do not include that in the wonder of our celebration of the eight days of Hanukkah. It was the commitment of the Jewish people that never gave up, and I call it a miracle. Against all odds, against a mighty enemy, the Jews won the initial victories necessary to establish the State in 1948.

There were multiple wars later, among them the war in 1956, the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Lebanon War, the wars in Gaza, all defending the State of Israel against attacks by its neighbors. All miracles. And Israel has built a country with a strong economy, a strong, diverse people, with a wealth of talent in the arts, science, design and you name it. Yes, a miracle.



I see the return to Judea and Samaria as a modern-day miracle; we are able to again walk upon the land of our ancestors, of King David, of Sarah and all our great biblical ancestors, and once again be in the capitals of our original kingdom in Hebron and Shiloh. Yes, to me a miracle, and we should observe it for what it is in our history and for its spiritual significance to our people.

With continued optimism and conviction, the State of Israel continues as the home of the Jewish people. It also continues as a nation that is bringing light unto the world in a neighborhood of darkness and turmoil. We sometimes need to be reminded of that, and that’s the story of Hanukkah in the lighting of the candles for eight days.

In today’s world, there is another miracle, and that is the story of the Jewish people in America, and we need to recognize it. In a land of freedom, the Jewish community has thrived, creating one of the greatest civilizations in the 5,000-year history of our Jewish people. And we Jews in America have lived and worked shoulder to shoulder with people of every background and conviction. The extraordinary breakthroughs and leadership that we have created for our own people and for others have brought true light upon our people. And even after the great loss of the Holocaust, we have Jews in Diaspora throughout the world, living full lives and contributing immensely to the world.

These are a few current particulars within the bigger picture. We must open our eyes and hearts, and strengthen our souls, by seeing the miracles in even the small things around us, the daily common occurrences that we too often

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take for granted, and I must say many of which we now start seeing on Facebook as people are identifying those miraculous moments in their daily lives as they experience them. The sunrises, the children in their lives and the changes as they grow up, the relationships we have with other people who enter into our lives in sometimes inexplicable ways.

The story of Judah Maccabee started the celebration of Hanukkah, the recognition of miracles and the light that God has given to us, and it did not just stop there. Miracles continued in our history for more than 2,000 years now, which clearly I will not enumerate, although I am suggesting we be most conscious of them during the Hanukkah season. Hanukkah to me is also recognition of the earlier great historic moments in Torah when God was with us.

So, let’s expand the significance of Hanukkah. Let it be a true celebration of and for our Jewish people. Let it restore a greater understanding for young people that miracles are not just part of our past, rather an ever-present part of today, and our future. When the candles are lit, let the children understand our Jewish commitment to light,

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Maccabean Jews regained control of Jerusalem from the Greeks in 165 BCE, and rededicated the Temple. The Greeks wanted idols in the Temple, an altar to Zeus, among other things, and Judah Maccabee would not accept that.

Rashi’s interpretation in the Talmud sees the miracle only in the oil lasting for eight days, as that could only have been in the hands of God, and could only have happened with the intervention of God. Other rabbis see the miracle

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jihadis, especially taking account of the ISIS boasts that it has imbedded thousands of fighters in the exodus.

They will augment and strengthen the swelling Muslim community enclaves — 50 million already living in Europe — which seek to impose Sharia law. Bernard Lewis, the renowned Islamic scholar, has predicted that unless drastic steps are taken to stem this movement, the high birth rates of the migrant population will irreversibly transform the entire demography of the region and bring about a Muslim majority by the end of the century.

Setting aside the broad threat to Western civilization in Europe, it will be the Jews who will initially bear the brunt of Islamic fundamentalist hatred.

It is therefore utterly ironic that at a time when Jewish institutions and schools in Europe require military protection and many are leaving the continent because of escalating anti-Semitism, we find Jews worldwide at the vanguard promoting a migration movement comprising primarily the bitterest anti-Semitic elements.

Even more incredible is the almost universal inclination by Jewish leaders to make analogies between the status of the current Middle East refugees and Jews during the Holocaust.

Former British Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was one of the first to make this analogy and his lead

was taken up by a broad plethora of other American and global Jewish leaders and organizations ranging from the Washington Holocaust Museum to the Anti-Defamation League to the American Jewish Committee, as well as Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbinical groups. They all conveyed a central message: Jews, above all other groups, must support the entry of refugees because of the pain Jews underwent when anti-Semites denied them haven from the Nazis.

One of the most shocking recent remarks came from British Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, a highly regarded and dedicated Jewish leader. The *London Jewish Chronicle* reports that Mirvis, together with four other United Synagogue rabbis, visited a refugee camp on the Macedonian border. The chief rabbi and his colleagues were warned not to inflame the prevailing hostility against Jews by the inhabitants and to “dress down” when they entered the camp and put on baseball caps to hide their *kippot*. Yet Mirvis was apparently so moved by the plight of the inmates that he felt obliged to draw comparisons to “what as Jewish people we have seen before. ... I’ve been thinking about bunkers in Auschwitz where there was a very different end.” Ironically, Sweden’s Deputy Prime Minister Asa Romson, after making a similar statement, apologized, stating that “it was wrong to make the comparison with Auschwitz.”

While reaching out and providing assistance to refugee families in distress is highly commendable, to make such analogies between these

“refugees” and Jews facing Nazi genocide is abominable and trivializes the Holocaust.

Jews who obtained refuge from the Nazis integrated into their host societies and never sought to impose their Jewish values — in stark contrast to the tensions created in Europe over recent decades by Islamic immigrants seeking to impose Sharia law on their host societies.

In fact, the Jewish refugees and immigrants from Nazi persecution were all highly committed advocates for strengthening democracy and made major contributions to the economic and cultural enrichments of the countries that provided them haven.

Nor can one point to a single example of a second-generation Jew transformed into a terrorist by extremist rabbis as has been the case with many second-generation Muslims indoctrinated in European countries by extremist mullahs into becoming jihadis. The idea of Jews engaging in terrorism in Western countries is simply inconceivable.

These are indeed difficult problems and there is no easy solution. But to allow compassion to determine policy without reference to long-term repercussions is utterly irresponsible and a recipe for disaster.

The reality is that Western democratic values are under threat and that while multiculturalism is an idyllic concept, it can only apply in an environment where all parties accept an open society. Alas, the situation is that the Muslim radicals in Western

democracies are gaining strength and becoming increasingly aggressive toward their host societies. While there are genuine distinctions between moderate and radical Muslims, all evidence indicates that the expansion of powerful and surging anti-democratic and jihadist elements dominating every expatriate Muslim community, is rapidly transforming multicultural societies into warring factions.

To stem the exodus of millions of Muslims to Europe, there must be an intense effort to stabilize the Middle East and bring an end to the civil war in Syria and defeat ISIS. In this context, it should be noted that the barbarism that currently dominates the region could be attributed to U.S. President Barack Obama’s failed efforts to appease the Iranians and his bridge-building approach to rogue states at the expense of his allies. The turning point was the abrogation of his commitment to act against the Syrians after Bashar Assad used chemical weapons against his own people.

It is also scandalous that the Arab League and the 57-state Organization of the Islamic Conference turn to the non-Muslim international community to resolve issues created by Islamist extremism from their own ranks. The adamant refusal of the wealthy Arab oil countries to absorb even a minimal number of their own kinsman is despicable. Saudi Arabia even has 100,000 empty air-conditioned tents that could accommodate 3 million refugees. Incredibly, the Saudis seek to justify their exclusion on

the grounds that such people will create disorder and represent security risks.

The Western world must overcome these challenges or these evil elements will destroy our freedom and way of life. As Jews, despite feeling compassion for the harrowing images of suffering endured by those seeking to find a better and more prosperous life in Western countries, we must not let ourselves be ruled by emotions or intimidated by accusations of Islamophobia. In the cruel world which we inhabit, we must not under any circumstances allow our compassion to be exploited and empower those who seek to destroy our democratic freedoms, which can ultimately lead to death and destruction.

We must rationally consider the long-term repercussions of our actions and instead of blindly endorsing these migratory upheavals, join calls for Christians and Yazidis, who, unlike the Sunnis, do face genocidal extermination by ISIS, to be accepted as refugees in Western countries. That is not, as Obama spuriously claims, being discriminatory. It is acting rationally to seek to implement a humanitarian policy designed to provide haven to threatened minorities.

Above all, we should avoid creating a situation that, in the absence of adequate vetting, will lay the foundations for jihadis to achieve their objectives by demographic means and devour the hand that feeds them.

Isi Leibler is a columnist for The Jerusalem Post and Israel Hayom.

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particularly in a world of significant darkness these days.

It is quite interesting — and I just learned this — that it is traditional during Hanukkah that there should be no mourning and no fasting. The concentration is on miracles, and celebrating the light. Let us see

during Hanukkah, each of us, that we can make the Hanukkah light our own inner light. Let us go beyond ourselves, and treat other people from the perspective of light and not darkness, and let us look at the earth and its wildlife, and renew our commitment to the environment and to conservation.

Let us have the traditional fried foods, *latkes* and donuts, as symbols of Hanukkah, as they reflect the significance of the ancients who

saw the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. We need to remember. Let us have Hanukkah *gelt*, treating it in whatever way we do. For me, Hanukkah *gelt* will always be the \$1 bill that my grandmother gave me together with a blessing over my head each year, that the \$1 bill should represent 100 pennies, for 100 years of my life. She was passing the light and the optimism.

Let us place our shining menorahs on a window, or near the door,

or in a public place, so we can share our Hanukkah, our miracles, our light, outside with others, to bring new inspiration to the world at large.

By giving a new optimism and respect for the continuity of our Jewish people, let the spirit of the dreidel pervade our current thinking, that a miracle happens at every moment, place and time, and we need to recognize that and celebrate it in today’s world of our Jewish tradition and people.

Yes, to me Hanukkah is more than celebrating that one vial of oil that lasted eight days. Hanukkah is recognition of the miracle that God has given me in life, and the light that shines on me and from me, and on and from each one of us.

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and I am respectful ... I don’t care who is on the other side. If justice demands it, I will fight for it.

Is that why you became a lawyer?

I had no choice but to become a

lawyer. I was so argumentative and feisty as a young boy that I had to be a lawyer. ... Then I read Abraham and it was like this a-ha moment. Wow! In what other religion does the founder start out by arguing with God? I knew my calling.

But the essence of the book is not all about you. It talks in general about why Jews are so

attracted to the legal profession. Why is that?

We are good at it. We are always being persecuted, so we have to be good at it.

Would you consider this book a religious book? A book for Jews?

No, it is a book for both Jews and non-Jews. There are three people who talk about my book on the back cover: Rabbi Lord Jonathan

Sacks, a Protestant minister and an atheist. ... And this book is also not only for lawyers. Anyone interested in the legal system — and we are all subject to our legal system — should read it. I am told it is a very funny book. All the reviews say it’s humorous. If you want to read a good Jewish joke, my book is a good place to do that.

So what’s next?

I am thinking about writing about why I left the left and couldn’t join the right, about my disillusionment with politics. I’ve already drafted a few things. But who knows? I am retired, so I only have to do things I want to do now.

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