



# THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 1, Folder 7, "Hanukah", November 1956.



## HANUKAH

Marc H. Tanenbaum

"Peoples and governments," wrote Hegel, "have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it."

*Confiders*  
When one reviews the epic of Hanukah, the Jewish Festival of Dedication, in light of the present international turmoil in the Russian satellite countries and in the *unsettled* explosive Middle East, one *is persuaded of* ~~(cannot but help acknowledge)~~ the tragic but inseluctable truth in ~~of~~ the gloomy judgment of the 18th century German philosopher.

~~Resignation with historical principles~~

Hamkah, which is observed by the Jewish people throughout the world for an eight-day period beginning this year on November 29th, is a case history which unhappily illumines the Hegelian conclusion.

As recorded in the First and Second Books of the Maccabees, and in the writings of the historians Polybius and Josephus, Hanukah - in the simplest scenario terms in which it is popularly understood - commemorates the victory of the Israelites in the year 165 B. C. E., under the leadership of *the Hasmonian Mattathias & his sons* ~~Judah Maccabee~~, over the massed military might of the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus IV. In this aspect, Hanukah is generally *regarded (the commemoration of) victory wrought by the Israelites in their struggles for national liberation,* ~~observed as a military adventure, whose twentieth century appeal is~~ all the greater because of our universal preoccupation with the ~~transcendant importance of power, guns, armies and ammunitions~~ ~~in our current power struggles.~~

*larger*  
An accurate understanding of the ~~full~~ historic context in which Hanukah's events took place, however, will indicate the

~~more~~ <sup>universal</sup>  
~~larger~~ <sup>present-day</sup> implications of this observance, its remarkable parallels to the international occurrences which so concern all of us, and, above all, our <sup>unaccountable</sup> ~~unbelievable~~ failure to learn anything from its history or the principles with which it is freighted.

To ~~unfold~~ <sup>give partial answer to the question</sup> the background events of Hanukah is to  
 What are some of these implications and parallels? In the year 334 B. C. E., Alexander the Great unleashed his invincible armies upon Asia Minor. Before them fell ~~the~~ Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, among other Near Eastern peoples. Influenced by his court philosophic mentors, notably the Stoics, Alexander did not seek to "brainwash" his conquered subjects with Hellenistic speculative philosophies and pagan religions. He conceived his empire as oikoumene (from which ~~the~~ "ecumenical" is derived), loosely translated, a "brotherhood of men". He demanded <sup>of his subject nations</sup> acceptance of his political <sup>and economic</sup> ~~sovereignty~~ sovereignty; but cultural and ~~religious~~ religious autonomy were assured to the conquered. The <sup>concept of the</sup> Greek city-state, or polis, with its local magistrates, councils, temples, and other internal institutions, were in effect transplanted to the Near East. <sup>It is held that</sup> The Jews of Palestine, for example, <sup>during this period</sup> ~~under Alexander~~ conceived their community as "a polis of the Mosaic faith."

(It should be noted that in this comparatively permissive atmosphere, Hellenism made considerable headway in influencing the customs, beliefs, social, cultural and religious practices of the vassal peoples.)

On the death of Alexander in 323 B. C. E., his empire became carved up among his generals. The Seleucid empire, including Syria, swiftly entered into military rivalry with the <sup>of</sup> Ptolemys of Egypt. Antiochus IV of Syria set out to defeat the Ptolemys, <sup>and</sup> had entered onto Egyptian soil when the rising Roman empire <sup>ordered</sup> ~~threatened~~ him to desist. Antiochus returned to Palestine, crossroads between Syria

In the face of a <sup>desperate</sup> ~~desperate~~ <sup>desperate</sup> to achieve solidarity <sup>over the people he already dominated</sup> and  
HANUKAH Consolidate diverse population /3

and ~~the~~ Egypt. Fearing his loosened <sup>ing</sup> control over the Palestinians ("Titoist tendencies") <sup>were becoming manifest</sup> ~~were manifested by the Jews~~, Antiochus determinedly sought to enforce total <sup>allegiance</sup> conformity. He demanded not alone political "Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state," loyalty, but cultural and religious conformity as well. To achieve this, ~~and~~ he forbade the practice of Judaism, which ~~was and~~ is not simply a religious creed but a religious regimen rooted in a communal way of life. (In dramatic reversal of Alexander's policy of autonomous polis, he imposed his own priests upon the Jews, and defiled their <sup>The</sup> ~~central sanctuary~~ <sup>established his icons in their</sup> the Temple in Jerusalem, <sup>desecration</sup> ~~central sanctuary~~ <sup>religious sanctuaries</sup>)

The rebellion of the Maccabees against Antiochus IV was more than an instance of guerrilla warfare. This revolt of the Israelites under the Hasmoneans was a supreme act - the first serious attempt in recorded history - to assure the identity of a people. Thereafter, self-sacrifice became an accepted tradition central to Christian saints and martyrs. It was a proclamation of the principle of religious and cultural diversity of a people within the human family. It was a defense of the civil rights of all groups <sup>within the Seleucid empire</sup> against their arbitrary abrogation <sup>the ruling dictator</sup> by ~~an external power~~.

It is worthy of note that on the morrow of their military triumph against Antiochus, the Maccabeans did not engage in a military ~~grand~~ parade, ~~marking their~~ Their first act was to repair to their Holy Temple which they rededicated. In effect, the Maccabeans intended in this fashion to affirm the principles and values which their oppressors were bent on eradicating.

Throughout the 2100 years which separate us from the Maccabees, on the Sabbath preceding Hanukah, Jews assemble in their Synagogues and recite a portion from the book of Zachariah.

His doctrine was pharisee some 2,000 years later by a fundamentalist mission. Confiscated Temple Treasures 40,000 in Jerusalem. Sanctuaries or Corpses. P. 244

When the pale yellow glow of Chanukah candle-light spreads unevenly across the window-panes, a warm moving spirit will surge through the breasts of Jews throughout the world.

Huddled about the candelabrum, Jewish families in Boston, <sup>NY</sup>  
~~Manhattan~~ Buenos Aires, Hamburg, Shanghai, and Tel Aviv will with prayer book in hand and melody in heart usher in Chanuka 5708,  
~~the~~

Since the justly-heralded triumph of the Maccabees circa 167 B.C.E., the twenty-fifth day of Kislev (this year December 7th) has come to mean many things to many Jews. To most, ~~however~~, the eight-day period has been symbolized as: The Feast of Lights, The Feast of the Maccabees, The Feast of Dedication. To all, the festive Chanukah has <sup>strikingly</sup> meant this: inspiration, invincibility, ~~and~~ the triumph of the human soul.

Scurrying back through the avenues of history, one finds few epochs in the annals of man so stirring, so valorous as that of the Maccabees. The breath of freedom which sustains twentieth century man was first exhaled by the unassuming priest Mattathias of Modin, ~~hardy, unflinchingly, and~~ who, with his/five sons struck the first blow of resistance against the imperial fascist Antiochus Epiphanes, king of all Syria. Incensed by the invasion of <sup>Syrian</sup> ~~foreign~~ hordes, who sought to excrete trunk-& -root the Jewish religion and spirit and to impose their decadent Hellenic culture and cult upon tiny Judae, the Maccabees organized guerilla bands, harrassingly assaulted the fat Syrian flanks until reeled back in flight they ~~and~~ ~~in~~ confused and wounded.

But before going down in crushing defeat, the Syriac pagans gleefully chalked up one achievement: they violated the stiff-necked



Jews' sacred shrine in Jerusalem where they set up a pagan altar in the Temple. But the achievement was short-lived. Three years later on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, 167 B.C.E., the Temple was thoroughly cleansed, then solemnly dedicated.

Dedication ceremonies lasted eight days. The splendor of lamps and torches, songs of triumph and tribute, and the offering of sacrifices made the occasion memorable.

And as time slipped by, the Feast of the Maccabees, the Feast of Lights, the Feast of Dedication delighted the palate of the ballad-singer and the raconteur who delicately wove the legend into the tapestry of Jewish history. Each, in his own time and place, found new meaning, laid different stress on the story of the Maccabees. This was a great military triumph, thought those who dreamed of Palestine as a re-emerging political power to be reckoned with in their world. This, <sup>the rededication of the Temple,</sup> was a powerful religious victory, thought others who saw ~~Israel's mission~~ it divined that Israel's mission was to live <sup>unmolested</sup> on the holy soil in accordance with the Torah.

But the heir of this Jewish epic who stands on the banks of time and observes the stream of Jewish tradition, there is a noticeable undercurrent which swells the tide and lends added direction. The Maccabean revolt, he sees, signifies the first instance in human history of men taking up arms in defense of freedom of conscience.

But for the Jew personally, it <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ more than that. The Maccabees battered down the sickening cowardice of furry-minded Jews who, thinking the "melting pot" their salvation, wished Israel to cast off his traditions, lose his identity, and ~~with intermarriage~~ <sup>be reduced</sup> to an amorphous clot.

Because of the Maccabees' determination that Jews will survive as a <sup>dignified</sup> people among peoples, because they routed the first fascist ~~hating~~ herrenvolk, because they made freedom of the human soul a hallowed ~~the~~ ideal, Jewish fathers, mothers, and children around the world ~~and~~ this evening light the first Chanukah candle, and jubilantly sing "Ho'os Tsur", Rock of Ages.

To them, the candelabrum, the dreidle, the latke, the stirring melodies have become cherished symbols, gilded with memories of the glorious past, and suffused with meaning for the uncertain future.