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Kindling Lights in a Darkening World, 1950.

KINDLING LIGHTS IN A DARKENING WORLD

A Chanukah Sermon

December 10, 1950

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~~The Rabbis said that the lights of Chanukah will shine forever.~~ Now, there is no mention of Chanukah in the Bible. The historic events of Chanukah took place after the completion of the collection of books ^{which were included in} of the canon of the Bible. Nevertheless, the Rabbis sought to find in the Bible implied references to ^{this} the festival of Chanukah. ~~Thus,~~ they found in the words of the prophet, Haggai, "In a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth" - reference to the miracles in the days of the Maccabees; and ~~so also the verse~~ in the book of the prophet, Zechariah,

"I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece" - a

^{reference} reference to the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks. The festival of Chanukah has been celebrated with increasing love and pleasure by our people ever since the first day of victory when Judah the Maccabee ordained that the festival shall be celebrated from year to year, nearly 2100 years ago.

It is very interesting to note ~~in this connection~~ that the story of Chanukah, although it is not found in the Old Testament, was always popular among ~~the~~ Christians, and ^{that} the two Books of the Maccabees were regarded by the early church fathers with great reverence, so much so that while they are not included in our Bible, ~~in the Old Testament,~~ they are included in the Christian Bible. In the Vulgate, the authentic Latin version of the scriptures, the Books of the Maccabees are placed right after the Book of the prophet Malachi. ~~The~~ Early Christians were impressed with the heroic defense of religion which the Maccabees displayed and above all, with the martyrdom ~~for faith~~ as evidenced in the stories of Hannah and her seven sons and the story of the aged Eleazar, both of which stories are associated with the festival of Chanukah. ~~Thus,~~ St. Augustine in his "City of God" wrote: "These books of the Maccabees are held as canonical, not by the Jews, but by the Church on account of the extreme and ~~certain~~ of certain martyrs who, before Christ had come in flesh, contended wonderful sufferings

for the law of God even unto death."

Here we find one of the great appeals of Chanukah, ~~one of its great messages~~, and one of the noble facets of the religious genius of the Jews. No pagan ever died for his religion. Paganism has no record of martyrs. No Greek philosopher was ever martyred for his religion. Religion to the ancient heathen was not something you died for. It was an ~~arrangement~~, ^{AND CONVENIENT} a necessary arrangement, ~~a convenient arrangement~~, with the gods of nature whereby you brought to them the things which they wanted - sacrifices, animal sacrifices, human sacrifices - and you received from them what you wanted. ^{- PROTECTION} And if the deity failed you, perhaps your sacrifices were inadequate or, ^{Feeling completely} at worst, you re-
jected them ~~completely~~ and you looked about for other gods.

To love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might, to acknowledge and worship no other God, to serve Him not through sacrifice but through self-sacrifice, self-surrender and self-renunciation, to be His servant, if necessary His suffering servant, to bear affliction for His sake, to endure persecution, hate and contumely in order to bear testimony to your God, and if necessary, to lay down your life for your faith - ^{such religious loyalty} ~~that~~ was first proclaimed and practiced by the Jews. ~~This is a very important thing to remember.~~

With the story of Chanukah there are two martyrdoms records. First is ^{The} ~~that~~ of the seven sons of Hannah. King Antiochus, according to the legend, and legends are important, not for their historic accuracy, but for their ^{symbolic and} moral significance, ~~for the lesson which they contain, the heart of the story~~ - King Antiochus wished to compel these seven sons of Hannah, as he wished to compel all the Jews of his day, to accept the faith of the pagan world and as a symbol thereof, to eat in public the flesh of the swine which was sacrificed upon the altar ^{of} to Zeus. ~~And~~ These sons were tormented each in his turn with scourges and whips and were mangled and mutilated and finally put to death in the sight of their mother because each in turn refused to save his life at the expense of abandoning his faith. "We are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of our fathers." ~~And~~ When it came to the seventh and youngest son, after the

other six had been put to death, ~~King~~ Antiochus was greatly abashed. He had lost face with the people who had watched the scene, and he tried to coax the youngest of the seven to accept the heathen faith, ~~and we~~ read in the Second Book of the Maccabees, Chapter VII, "Now Antiochus, thinking himself despised, and suspecting it to be a reproachful speech, whilst the youngest was yet alive, did not only exhort him by words, but also assured him with oaths, that he would make him both a rich and a happy man if he would turn from the laws of his fathers; and that also he would take him for his friend and trust him with his affairs when he grew up. But when the young man would in no case hearken unto him, the king called his mother, and exhorted her that she would counsel the young man to save his life. And when he had exhorted her with many words, she promised him that she would counsel her son. But she, bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her native language in this manner: O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education. I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise. Fear not this tormentor, but being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren. Whiles she was yet speaking these words, the young man said, Whom wait ye for? I will not obey the king's commandment; but I will obey the commandment of the law that given unto our fathers by Abraham. And thou, that hast been the author of all mischief against the Hebrews, shalt not escape the hands of God.

"Then, the king being in a rage, handled him worse than all the rest and took it grievously that he was mocked. So this man died undefiled, and put his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all after the sons the mother died."

~~And in the same way~~ ^{also} there is recorded in the Book of Maccabees the story of the martyrdom of Eleazar, an aged man, one of the principal scribes, who likewise refused to eat of the swine's flesh brought to him from the heathen sacrifice which was

to have been the sign of ^{his} the rejection of his faith by ^{ANCESTRAL} him. His closest friends tried to induce ^{ELEAZAR} him to make it appear in public that he was eating of that flesh while actually he would eat lawful meat which they would provide him, and in so doing, might be delivered from torture and death. But he refused. "It becometh not his age," he said, "to ~~dissemble.~~" And so we read in the 6th Chapter of the Book of Maccabees, Eleazar says: "For it becometh not our age, in any wise to dissemble whereby many young persons might think that Eleazar, being fourscore years old and ten, were now gone to a strange religion; and so they through mine hypocrisy, and desire to live a little time longer, and a moment longer, should be deceived by me, and I get a stain to mine old age, and make it abominable. For though for the present time I should be delivered from the punishment of men: yet should I not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither alive nor dead. Wherefore now, manfully changing this life, I will show myself such a one as mine age requireth, and leave a notable example to such as be young to die willingly and courageously for the honorable and holy laws. And when he had said these words, immediately he went to the torment."

^{THE POWER OF JUDAIISM TO COMMAND LOYALTY}
This is one of the significant lessons which have come down to us through the ages associated with this holiday of Chanukah. There are others. ~~This festival reveals other brilliant facets of the genius of the Jew.~~ Why were these people prepared for martyrdom? Why among all the peoples of antiquity did they regard themselves as ready to die for their faith? Because they felt themselves to be chosen, not superior, but chosen, and the concept of election ~~of having been chosen~~ is integral, ~~is at the core~~ ^{to} of the Jewish spiritual life through the ages.

Why did the Jews in the days of Antiochus refuse to be coordinated like other heathen peoples? When ~~King~~ Antiochus, eager to consolidate his empire, demanded, ~~as the Book of Maccabees writes~~ that "all should be one people and everyone should leave his laws and his faith" ~~his particular laws and his faith~~ and accept the one faith which he proclaimed for them, all the other peoples offered no opposition whatsoever.

^{OF MACCABEES}
The Book records, "All the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the King."

The Jews alone offered resistance. Why? Why did they refuse to be absorbed ~~within the totality~~, within the heathen amalgam into which ^{The} ~~all~~ other nations of the Near East were ready ^{so minded?} ~~and eager~~ to be absorbed. ^{It did not} ~~It wasn't that~~ they despised the culture and the civilization of the Hellenistic world of the Second century. They were not unaware of the high and brilliant qualities of Greek culture - its art, its philosophy. There was much in Greek civilization which was noble, brilliant, unprecedented and the Jews were not unaware of it. ^{had} ~~And~~ many Jews felt the impact of that civilization and ^{had} ~~succumbed~~ to it completely. They were overwhelmed by its brilliancy and by ~~his~~ its external grandeur to a point where they were prepared to abandon the Jewish way of life and accept the Greek way of life, just as Jews today - many of them - are prepared to assimilate themselves completely in their environment, captivated by the surface glamor and appeal and convenience. But the ~~real~~ Jews of those days who ^{had some measure of judgement} ~~knew what it was all about~~ abhorred the moral and spiritual corruption which lay festering within that brilliant civilization - ~~materialism~~, the licentiousness, the cruelty, the slavery, the idealization of war, the contempt for the poor, the weak and the aged which was ~~prevalent and dominant~~ and characteristic of the pagan civilization. They knew that theirs was a ~~higher code of life~~, that ~~theirs were~~ nobler concepts of God and man and society, that they had a higher vision of human destiny bound up with ~~the~~ concepts of justice, brotherhood, peace and the care of the weak and the dependent. ~~And they believed and~~ they were convinced that their faith and their code and their way of life alone could prove the salvation of mankind. ~~And so they felt themselves, being~~ the only people believing and proclaiming these truths ~~in the whole of the surrounding world, because~~ they knew themselves as an island of monotheism ~~and~~ in a sea of paganism, ^{AND} they felt themselves as having been chosen by God for the mission and the task of keeping alive the ^{GRAND} ~~great~~ prophetic truths which had come to them. And this concept of election, of having been chosen, of having been designated by destiny, exalted them ~~and~~ gave them the strength to defy the whole world around them,

AND gave them the courage to die for their way of life.

Jews ought not out of hand reject this concept of the Chosen People. It is to be rejected only ^{if} when the concept is misunderstood. Dr. Baeck, in his splendid book, "The Essence of Judaism", writes ~~the following on this theme:~~

The idea of election is therefore nothing but the living certainty in which the religious community realizes that it possesses the knowledge of truth, the Divine revelation. With it was given inward independence, the capacity of acting in conscious freedom. In the consciousness of this unique vital possession, of the covenant with God, the community gained the power to be different, the will to be distinctive and to remain indifferent to numbers and to success. This resolute following of its own conscience and its own heart, this courage to believe in them rather than in the many outside, produced spiritual independence. By this means alone was the community able to confront the whole world, as it had to in so many hard times, to be that community which accepted no compromise. History has demanded again and again that it should be inconspicuous among the many, and small as against the mighty, commanding that it should remain the few and weak. It was repeatedly the duty of its existence to be oppressed and humiliated, and yet to cherish within itself the conviction that it was living a sublime, yea, the sublimest, history. But for the idea of election, this would have been impossible.

This is the second important ~~fact~~ ^{theme} which comes to us from the holiday of Chamukah. There is a third. When you feel yourself chosen, then you are not afraid of being in the minority. "One with God is a majority," ~~someone said~~. That ~~is~~ a profound truth. Our people was cautioned time and again, almost from the very beginning of its history by their sages and their prophets not to be impressed by numbers. They were told early that they had been chosen

"not because you were more numerous than all the other peoples did the Lord God choose you, , you are fewer in numbers than all the other people." And ~~then~~ ^{we} the prayer read in our synagogues in connection ^{you we} with the festival of Chamukah wherein God is thanked for the miracle of the deliverance, ~~it is stated,~~ "Thou didst hand over the mighty into the hands of the weak, and the many in the hands of the few."

And I read you this morning from the First Book of the Maccabees where Judah, going into battle, addressed his followers. He said, "Be not afraid of their multitudes." And when Judah came near to going up to Beth Haron and went out with a small company to fight the enemy who, when the Jews saw those coming to meet them, said unto Judah, "How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong seeing that we are ready to faint with fasting all this day, and to whom Judah answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few, and with the God of heaven, it is all one to deliver with a great multitude or a small company, for the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude or the host, but strength cometh from God."

And from this thought there streams another thought, a message of Chanukah, very relevant to our day. From faith in the power of the few comes faith in the power of the One. And from that flows the mandate of personal responsibility. A man not only must stand alone; a man can stand alone. "In the place where there are no men, be thou a man; be thou the man." There are many people in our day, in this highly coordinated and rigidly organized, almost monolithic world in which we find ourselves, masses being moved about on the checkerboard, as it were - there are many individuals who say, "What can I do about it. I'm just one individual. I'm helpless." Religion has always rejected this idea of the personal helplessness of the individual. Quite the contrary. Religion has always challenged the individual to think of himself as possessed of tremendous power, supplemented by the power of God which, like nuclear energy released, can destroy the seemingly indurate mountains of evil and wickedness in the world.

When we think of reforming the world, therefore, we have to start with ourselves. Never the mind the others. If you have the truth, ultimately the others will come around. And in the selection which I read to you this morning, there is that famous saying of Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees:

All the Jews were falling away to the weevils. The embellishments, the attractions, and the threat of punishment to the disobeyed. When Mattathias was asked to do likewise, he answered and spake with a loud voice, Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers and give consent to its commandments; yet will I and my sons, my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.

They would not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion either to the right hand or the left. Men are so inclined in every generation, particularly our generation, to unburden themselves of all personal responsibility and place it upon the shoulder of the state or the group or the class, and declare utter helplessness in the face of a wrong and evil situation.

The message of Chanukah is a challenge to that attitude, and finally there streams from this beautiful holiday the tremendous conviction as to the power of the spirit. Nothing is more important for these darkening days in which we live than not to lose faith in the power of the human spirit. "Not by strength and not by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord."

I think in our world today, in our international relations, our own country is perhaps relying too much upon its power of its might and its wealth to influence the course of human events. And as you can see, they are proving altogether inadequate. We have not relied as much, confidently relied as much, upon the power of spirit and of the ideals of the traditions which are ours; ultimately, if we ourselves remain faithful to them, to affect the course of history and to remove many of the evils which exist in the world today. We have, I am afraid, substituted for spirit inspired statesmanship, a primitive confidence in the power of arms to win wars and of money to win and hold friends.

Our religion, this holiday of Chanukah, has stressed quite other ideas - the power of the spirit and never to lose hope. On this day of Chanukah we are asked to recite in our synagogues that magnificent Psalm 30 a song possibly written in the days of the Maccabees on the occasion of the re-dedication of the

Temple, and in that Psalm there sounded an amazingly optimistic note which I had occasion the other day, when another temple was dedicated in Israel, to call attention to. Seemingly the most persecuted, the most driven and harassed of all the peoples of the world, the Jewish people, has been the most optimistic throughout its history. It never succumbed to pessimism; it has never given way to hopelessness; but always it reaffirmed life, the ~~new~~ promise of life and the glory of life, and so in this beautiful Psalm 30,

Thou didst bring up my soul right from the pit of
the netherworld. I found myself in the pit - in hell broken in spirit. Thou
didst bring me up from the pit of the netherworld. Thou didst
turn my lamentation into song and dance. Weeping
abideth in the evening but joy cometh in the morning.

Here then, good friends, are some of the lights that Chanukah can kindle for us in a darkening world. They all have to do with things of the spirit, and they all have to do with the essential message of our religion. We sometimes wonder what has given this amazing power of survival to this religion of a minority in the world. These are the ideas which became of the very warp and woof of the life of our people, part of the pattern of its living and thinking, of its emotional as well as of its intellectual life; self-sacrifice - necessary martyrdom for a great idea. If these ideas have any worth at all for us, it is worth paying the price for; a sense of having been chosen - every one of us - for something significant to do in the world. Every one of us has a mission in life, if we could only become aware of it and live by it. Not to be afraid of being in a minority at any time, not that minorities are always in the right, but when you feel yourself to be in the right, do not abandon your conviction because you find yourself in a minority. The power to stand alone and the moral obligation to stand alone at times - ~~like~~ to face the world, if need be - stand by your truth. Finally, absolute faith in the power of the spirit ultimately to win through. Are these helpful ideas to nurse and to cherish and to propagate in this darkening world of ours. I believe they are the most basic ideas, and for the long pull - and it is going to be a long and hard

and bitter pull - to bring mankind back to the high road of progress and decently international human relationships for the long hard pull. We need these - spiritual convictions - all of them, and each one of us needs them - these ideas, these slender tapers of Chanukah would speak to us about. No wonder that the rabbis said that the lights of Chanukah will burn forever. Amen.



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The Rabbis said that the "lights of Chanukah will shine forever". Now, there is no mention of Chanukah in the Bible. The historic events of Chanukah took place after the completion of the collection of books of the canon of the Bible. Nevertheless, the Rabbis sought to find in the Bible implied references to the festival of Chanukah. Thus, they found in the words of the prophet, Haggai, "In a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth" - reference to the miracles in the days of the Maccabees; and so also the verse in the book of the prophet, Zechariah,

"I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece" - a reference to the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks. The festival of Chanukah has been celebrated with increasing love and pleasure by our people ever since the first day of victory when Judah the Maccabee ordained that the festival shall be celebrated from year to year, nearly 2100 years ago.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the story of Chanukah, although it is not found in the Old Testament, was always popular among the Christians, and the two Books of the Maccabees were regarded by the early church fathers with great reverence, so much so that while they are not included in our Bible, in the Old Testament, they are included in the Christian Bible. In the Vulgate, the authentic Latin version of the scriptures, the Books of the Maccabees are placed right after the Book of the prophet Malachi. The early Christians were impressed with the heroic defense of religion which the Maccabees displayed and above all, with the martyrdom for faith as evidenced in the stories of Hannah and her seven sons and the story of the aged Eleazar, both of which stories are associated with the festival of Chanukah. Thus, St. Augustine in his "City of God" wrote: "These books of the Maccabees are held as canonical, not by the Jews, but by the Church on account of the extreme and ~~certain~~ of certain martyrs who, before Christ had come in flesh, contended wonderful sufferings

for the law of God even unto death."

Here we find one of the great appeals of Chanukah, one of its great messages, and one of the noble facets of the religious genius of the Jews. No pagan ever died for his religion. Paganism has no record of martyrs. No Greek philosopher was ever martyred for his religion. Religion to the ancient heathen was not something you died for. It was an arrangement, a necessary arrangement, a convenient arrangement, with the gods of nature whereby you brought to them the things which they wanted - sacrifices, animal sacrifices, human sacrifices - and you received from them what you wanted. And if the deity failed you, perhaps your sacrifices were inadequate or, at worst, you rejected them completely and you looked about for other gods.

To love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might, to acknowledge and worship no other God, to serve Him not through sacrifice but through self-sacrifice, self-surrender and self-renunciation, to be His servant, if necessary His suffering servant, to bear affliction for His sake, to endure persecution, hate and contumely in order to bear testimony to your God, and if necessary, to lay down your life for your faith - that was first proclaimed and practiced by the Jews. This is a very important thing to remember.

With the story of Chanukah there are two martyrdoms records. First is that of the seven sons of Hannah. King Antiochus, according to the legend - and legends are important, not for their historic accuracy, but for their moral significance, for the lesson which they contain, the heart of the story - King Antiochus wished to compel these seven sons of Hannah, as he wished to compel all the Jews of his day, to accept the faith of the pagan world and as a symbol thereof, to eat in public the flesh of the swine which was sacrificed upon the altar to Zeus. And these sons were tormented each in his turn with scourges and whips and were mangled and mutilated and finally put to death in the sight of their mother because each in turn refused to save his life at the expense of abandoning his faith. "We are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of our fathers." And when it came to the seventh and youngest son, after the

other six had been put to death, King Antiochus was greatly abashed. He had lost face with the people who had watched the scene, and he tried to coax the youngest of the seven to accept the heathen faith, and we read in the Second Book of the Maccabees, Chapter VII, "Now Antiochus, thinking himself despised, and suspecting it to be a reproachful speech, whilst the youngest was yet alive, did not only exhort him by words, but also assured him with oaths, that he would make him both a rich and a happy man if he would turn from the laws of his fathers; and that also he would take him for his friend and trust him with his affairs when he grew up. But when the young man would in no case hearken unto him, the king called his mother, and exhorted her that she would counsel the young man to save his life. And when he had exhorted her with many words, she promised him that she would counsel her son. But she, bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her native language in this manner: O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education. I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise. Fear not this tormentor, but being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren. Whiles she was yet speaking these words, the young man said, Whom wait ye for? I will not obey the king's commandment; but I will obey the commandment of the law that given unto our fathers by Abraham. And thou, that hast been the author of all mischief against the Hebrews, shalt not escape the hands of God.

"Then, the king being in a rage, handled him worse than all the rest and took it grievously that he was mocked. So this man died undefiled, and put his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all after the sons the mother died."

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to have been the sign of the rejection of his faith by him. His closest friends tried to induce him to make it appear in public that he was eating of that flesh while actually he would eat lawful meat which they would provide him, and in so doing, might be delivered from torture and death. But he refused. "It becometh not his age," he said, "to dissemble." And so we read in the 6th Chapter of the Book of Maccabees, Eleazar says: "For it becometh not our age, in any wise to dissemble whereby many young persons might think that Eleazar, being fourscore years old and ten, were now gone to a strange religion; and so they through mine hypocrisy, and desire to live a little time longer, and a moment longer, should be deceived by me, and I get a stain to mine old age, and make it abominable. For though for the present time I should be delivered from the punishment of men: yet should I not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither alive nor dead. Wherefore now, manfully changing this life, I will shew myself such a one as mine age requireth, and leave a notable example to such as be young to die willingly and courageously for the honorable and holy laws. And when he had said these words, immediately he went to the torment."

This is one of the significant lessons which have come down to us through the ages associated with this holiday of Chanukah. There are others. This festival reveals other brilliant facets of the genius of the Jew. Why were these people prepared for martyrdom? Why among all the peoples of antiquity did they regard themselves as ready to die for their faith? Because they felt themselves to be chosen, not superior, but chosen, and the concept of election - of having been chosen - is integral, is at the core of the Jewish spiritual life through the ages.

Why did the Jews in the days of Antiochus refuse to be coordinated like other heathen peoples? When King Antiochus, eager to consolidate his empire, demanded, as the Book of Maccabees writes that "all should be one people and everyone should leave his laws and his faith" - his particular laws and his faith and accept the one faith which he proclaimed for them, all the other peoples offered no opposition whatsoever.

The Book records, "All the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the King."

The Jews alone offered resistance. Why? Why did they refuse to be absorbed within the totality, within the heathen amalgam into which all other nations of the Near East were ready and eager to be absorbed. It wasn't that they despised the culture and the civilization of the Hellenistic world of the Second century. They were not unaware of the high and brilliant qualities of Greek culture - its art, its philosophy. There was much in Greek civilization which was noble, brilliant, unprecedented and the Jews were not unaware of it. And many Jews felt the impact of that civilization and succumbed to it completely. They were overwhelmed by its brilliancy and by ~~his~~ its external grandeur to a point where they were prepared to abandon the Jewish way of life and accept the Greek way of life, juast as Jews today - many of them - are prepared to assimilate themselves completely in their environment, captivated by the surface glamor and appeal and convenience. But the real Jews of those days who knew what it was all about abhorred the moral and spiritual corruption which lay festering within that brilliant civilization - materialism, the licentiousness, the cruelty, the slavery, the idealization of war, the contempt for the poor, the weak and the aged which was prevalent and cominant and characteristic of the pagan civilization. They knew that theirs was a higher code of life, that theirs were nobler concepts of God and man and society, that they had a higher vision of human destiny bound up with the concepts of justice, brotherhood, peace and the care of the weak and the dependent. And they believed and they were convinced that their faith and their code and their way of life alone could prove the salvation of mankind. And so they felt themselves, being the only people believing and proclaiming these truths in the whole of the surrounding world, because they knew themselves as an island of monotheism ~~and~~ in a sea of paganism, they felt themselves as having been chosen by God for the mission and the task of keeping alive the great prophetic truths which had come to them. And this concept of election, of having been chosen, of hawing been designated by destiny, exalted them and gave them the strength to defy the whole world around them,

gave them the courage to die for their way of life.

Jews ought not out of hand reject this concept of the Chosen People. It is to be rejected only when the concept is misunderstood. Dr. Baeck, in his splendid book, "The Essence of Judaism", writes the following on this theme:

The idea of election is therefore nothing but the living certainty in which the religious community realizes that it possesses the knowledge of truth, the Divine revelation. With it was given inward independence, the capacity of acting in conscious freedom. In the consciousness of this unique vital possession, of the covenant with God, the community gained the power to be different, the will to be distinctive and to remain indifferent to numbers and to success. This resolute following of its own conscience and its own heart, this courage to believe in them rather than in the many outside, produced spiritual independence. By this means alone was the community able to confront the whole world, as it had to in so many hard times, to be that community which accepted no compromise. History has demanded again and again that it should be inconspicuous among the many, and small as against the mighty, commanding that it should remain the few and weak. It was repeatedly the duty of its existence to be oppressed and humiliated, and yet to cherish within itself the conviction that it was living a sublime, yea, the sublimest, history. But for the idea of election, this would have been impossible.

This is the second important fact which comes to us from the holiday of Chanukah. There is a third. When you feel yourself chosen, then you are not afraid of being in the minority. One with God is a majority, someone said. That is a profound truth. Our people was cautioned time and again, almost from the very beginning of its history by their sages and their prophets not to be impressed by numbers. They were told early that they had been chosen

,"not because you were more numerous than all the other peoples did the Lord God choose you, , you are fewer in numbers than all the other people." And then the prayer read in our synagogues in connection with the festival of Chanukah wherein God is thanked for the miracle of the deliverance, it is stated, "Thou didst hand over the mighty into the hands of the weak, and the many in the hands of the few."

And I read you this morning from the First Book of the Maccabees where Judah, going into battle, addressed his followers. He said, "Be not afraid of their multitudes." And when Judah came near to going up to Beth Haron and went out with a small company to fight the enemy who, when the Jews saw those coming to meet them, said unto Judah, "How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so great a multitude and so strong seeing that we are ready to faint with fasting all this day, and to whom Judah answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few, and with the God of heaven, it is all one to deliver with a great multitude or a small company, for the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude or the host, but strength cometh from God."

And from this thought there streams another thought, a message of Chanukah, very relevant to our day. From faith in the power of the few comes faith in the power of the One. And from that flows the mandate of personal responsibility. A man not only must stand alone; a man can stand alone. "In the place where there are no men, be thou a man; be thou the man." There are many people in our day, in this highly coordinated and rigidly organized, almost monolithic world in which we find ourselves, masses being moved about on the checkerboard, as it were - there are many individuals who say, "What can I do about it. I'm just one individual. I'm helpless." Religion has always rejected this idea of the personal helplessness of the individual. Quite the contrary. Religion has always challenged the individual to think of himself as possessed of tremendous power, supplemented by the power of God which, like nuclear energy released, can destroy the seemingly indurate mountains of evil and wickedness in the world.

When we think of reforming the world, therefore, we have to start with ourselves. Never the mind the others. If you have the truth, ultimately the others will come around. And in the selection which I read to you this morning, there is that famous saying of Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees:

All the Jews were falling away to the weevils. The embellishments, the attractions, and the threat of punishment to the disobeyed. When Mattathias was asked to do likewise, he answered and spake with a loud voice, Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers and give consent to its commandments; yet will I and my sons, my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers.

They would not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion either to the right hand or the left. Men are so inclined in every generation, particularly our generation, to unburden themselves of all personal responsibility and place it upon the shoulder of ~~the~~ state or the group or the class, and declare utter helplessness in the face of a wrong and evil situation.

The message of Chanukah is a challenge to that attitude, and finally there streams from this beautiful holiday the tremendous conviction as to the power of the spirit. Nothing is more important for these darkening days in which we live than not to lose faith in the power of the human spirit. "Not by strength and not by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord."

I think in our world today, in our international relations, our own country is perhaps relying too much upon its power of its might and its wealth to influence the course of human events. And as you can see, they are proving altogether inadequate. We have not relied as much, confidently relied as much, upon the power of spirit and of the ideals of the traditions which are ours; ultimately, if we ourselves remain faithful to them, to affect the course of history and to remove many of the evils which exist in the world today. We have, I am afraid, substituted for spirit inspired statesmanship, a primitive confidence in the power of arms to win wars and of money to win and hold friends.

Our religion, this holiday of Chanukah, has stressed quite other ideas - the power of the spirit and never to lose hope. On this day of Chanukah we are asked to recite in our synagogues that magnificent Psalm 30 a song possibly written in the days of the Maccabees on the occasion of the re-dedication of the

Temple, and in that Psalm there sounded an amazingly optimistic note which I had occasion the other day, when another temple was dedicated in Israel, to call attention to. Seemingly the most persecuted, the most driven and harassed of all the peoples of the world, the Jewish people, has been the most optimistic throughout its history. It never succumbed to pessimism; it has never given way to hopelessness; but always it reaffirmed life, the ~~new~~ promise of life and the glory of life, and so in this beautiful Psalm 30,

Thou didst bring up my soul right from the pit of
the netherworld. I found myself in the pit - in hell broken in spirit. Thou
didst bring me up from the pit of the netherworld. Thou didst
turn my lamentation into song and dance. Weeping
abideth in the evening but joy cometh in the morning.

Here then, good friends, are some of the lights that Chanukah can kindle for us in a darkening world. They all have to do with things of the spirit, and they all have to do with the essential message of our religion. We sometimes wonder what has given this amazing power of survival to this religion of a minority in the world. These are the ideas which became of the very warp and woof of the life of our people, part of the pattern of its living and thinking, of its emotional as well as of its intellectual life; self-sacrifice - necessary martyrdom for a great idea. If these ideas have any worth at all for us, it is worth paying the price for; a sense of having been chosen - every one of us - for something significant to do in the world. Every one of us has a mission in life, if we could only become aware of it and live by it. Not to be afraid of being in a minority at any time, not that minorities are always in the right, but when you feel yourself to be in the right, do not abandon your conviction because you find yourself in a minority. The power to stand alone and the moral obligation to stand alone at times - ~~like~~ to face the world, if need be - stand by your truth. Finally, absolute faith in the power of the spirit ultimately to win through. Are these helpful ideas to nurse and to cherish and to propagate in this darkening world of ours. I believe they are the most basic ideas, and for the long pull - and it is going to be a long and hard

and bitter pull - to bring mankind back to the high road of progress and decently international human relationships for the long hard pull. We need these - spiritual convictions - all of them, and each one of us needs them - these ideas, these slender tapers of Chanukah would speak to us about. No wonder that the rabbis said that the lights of Chanukah will burn forever. Amen.

