

Spiritual Lessons of Hanukkah

Michael Lotker

We all know the Hanukkah story. Judah Maccabee organizes a band of guerrilla freedom fighters who successfully overthrow the Syrian-Greek oppressors who have forbidden the study of Torah and the practice of Judaism. With the revolution successfully completed, the Jews turn to the cleansing and dedication (the word *Hanukkah* means “dedication”) of the holy Temple. With great effort, the Temple is cleansed (archeologists believe that the tunnel that runs along the Western Wall – the one many of you have visited in recent years, was a water pipeline built during this time to bring sufficient water to cleanse the Temple), and the eternal light is lit. But, as our Talmud teaches, there is only enough pure oil for one day and, in what is the miracle of Hanukkah, the one day’s worth of oil lasts for eight days. This is the basic story; let’s look deeper for some spiritual lessons.

You Have Enough: How many times in life, indeed, in each day, do we think “if I only had more.” More time, more money, more strength, more patience, more help, more friends, more love, more understanding. The list is endless. One of the deeper spiritual lessons of Hanukkah, is that, with confidence in God, what you have is enough! The Maccabees did not have sufficient troops, sufficient supplies, sufficient weapons to defeat a much larger armed force. But with God’s help they did. There was not enough oil to be able to last the needed eight days. But with God’s help, there was.

What Was Soiled Can Be Made Clean and Pure: Imagine what the Jews found when the war was won. The sacred Temple, where one had to be in a state of ritual purity just to enter, completely befouled with pig’s blood, idols and every kind of dirt and filth and trash. So much garbage that it would take huge amounts of water and effort to clean. But what was foul and filthy could once again be made into the most holy and pure spot on earth. So it is with our lives. No matter what we’ve done, no matter what type of trash we have allowed into our sacred precincts, our lives – our souls – can be made pure again. Once again, the key is God and the determination to commence a “Hanukkah,” a re-dedication of our lives. We are never so far gone, in our lives, in our relationships, in our work, in our experience of God, that we cannot repair the damage and cleanse our own sanctuaries.

What Was the Miracle on the First Day: As you all know the miracle of Hanukkah was an eight day one – the small flask of purified oil lasted for eight rather than just one day. And so we light candles on each of these eight days. But think about this question: what was the miracle on the first day? After all, it was no miracle that the oil lasted this first day – it was supposed to last a day. Our sages teach that the miracle on the first day was that the Jews had the faith in God to light the Menorah in the first place. The first day’s miracle was having faith in God even when the days literally seemed darkest.

This year, as you light the candles and are warmed by their glow, open yourself to the possibility that you have enough of what you need to make your world into the beautiful place that you want it to be. May you have the faith in God and yourselves to take a leap

of faith to make your own world a better, brighter, happier and healthier place. May you have a joyous, peaceful, and meaningful holiday season.

Chag Samayach!