



Torah Reflections for Chanukah

25 Kislev - 2 Tevet 5767
December 15-23, 2006

Scholars believe that Chanukah is a late celebration of Sukkot. That is, Judah Maccabee, while “underground” fighting the Greeks, was unable to celebrate holidays in any public manner. And so once the Maccabees won the battle, the first thing they did was celebrate the most recent holiday they had missed; Sukkot. It is the sort of thing as being out of the country for your favorite American holiday, like Thanksgiving, and celebrating it once you return even though the actual date for the holiday has already passed. It is interesting that as the Maccabees drew upon and perhaps adapted some of the themes of the earlier Sukkot festival, they contributed to a new and emerging celebration of re-dedication; Chanukah.

How many times have we ended up some place else when a holiday is celebrated? We may be in the hospital for an unplanned medical need, we may be on a business trip, or flying across the county for an ill loved one. We may even, emotionally and spiritually, just be in a different “place”, unable to really enjoy the celebrations we do attend.

We all know that life happens even in the midst of calendared holidays: we get sick, we have work demands, we have to make last minute changes, we end up in some place we just would rather not. Sometimes we are pleasantly surprised by a sudden change in the calendar and sometimes we are faced, in an instant, with a life-changing circumstance that alters our calendar.

Judah Maccabee fought with his entire army to overthrow the imposition of the Greek way of life. Oftentimes, we are left alone to face what can be an onslaught of sudden change; a sick loved one, a sudden death, a devastating diagnosis. And there we are feeling “overthrown” as it were by a force beyond our control: we can’t get an emergency ticket to be with a loved one, a doctor’s office is booked, the system --whatever it is! --just can’t budge. And there we are to struggle with various forces, and to look for support, to get to where we need to go.

And sometimes, no matter how good it all seems on the outside, the holidays can just feel alienating. And we feel as if we just want to go “underground” only to emerge after it is all over.

This Chanukah maybe one of the lessons is to take some of the metaphors – and even the way the Maccabees adapted by celebrating Sukkot in another season altogether -- and apply them to our real lives.

- Holidays can't always be celebrated according to the calendar. If you miss it, re-schedule it. Is there a better time to celebrate Chanukah than right now?
- Think of things that would make you feel more in tune with your own yearnings and try one a day, for the eight days of Chanukah.
- If you find yourself facing the unknown alone, then at least ask for help and gather up your own group to help you; friends and professionals.
- Likewise, if you feel like you need to go "underground", let folks around you know where you are. Don't get isolated. Call a friend. Seek some professional support.
- Might there be someone you know whose life has been so altered in this way that you can reach out to them this season and help them adapt this year's Chanukah? Or can Chanukah be a time also to celebrate other holidays that you missed?

In many ways our calendars can reflect the truths we live with each day. May this season be one of bringing celebration in line with your inner yearnings.

© Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, Rabbi Eric Weiss



This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Eric Weiss, Executive Director of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a program of the Institute on Aging, and a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties). Visit our website at www.JewishHealingCenter.org for download and subscription information.