

Chanukah & WZO Elections

- Jacob J. Schacter.

Who is the most significant hero of the Chanukah story? Message: Act now, worry later.

SHABBAT CHANUKAH

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter

Time is short before the deadline for one of the most important acts we can do in support of maintaining Judaism and Jewish life in the Jewish State as well as supporting it in the Diaspora. Elections are now under way for delegates to the Thirty-Fifth World Zionist Congress which will choose the leadership responsible for the allocation of over \$1 billion for Jewish causes in Israel and in the Diaspora in the next few years. It is imperative that the Religious Zionist voice be large and strong to represent the kind of values so important to us in our beloved State of Israel and in Jewish communities throughout the world.

If your family is like mine, you spent some time during these last few days debating who is the most significant hero of the Chanukah story. Certainly, there are many candidates for this honor. Some suggest Matityahu, the fearless and courageous old man who heroically challenged the heathen soldier in Modi'in in the act that precipitated the entire Hasmonean revolt. Or is it Yehudah ha-Makkabi, the leader of the Hasmonean forces whose heroism on the field of battle insured a victory for our ancestors? More popular in recent years is Yehudit, daughter of Yohanan Kohen Gadol, whose daring action certainly contributed towards the ultimate Jewish victory.

All of these suggestions are certainly legitimate and reasonable but I suggest someone else who, perhaps, should take precedence over all the others, someone whose indispensable contribution is generally ignored and overlooked by subsequent generations. As my most important Chanukah hero, I would like to nominate the priest who lit the cruse of oil even though he knew that there was only enough to last for one day. After all, it was going to take eight days to provide for a steady supply of ritually appropriate oil. The candles in the menorah would burn for one day and then it would be dark for a week while new oil was being prepared. Why light it for only one day; wait until a full supply would be assured and then light it in an uninterrupted fashion? This forgotten, unknown and anonymous priest, however, had a different perspective. He had just lived through a period of extreme adversity and dire misfortune, having just overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. He was faced with the challenge of a very difficult, precarious and uncertain future. But this priest forged ahead. If after years of darkness in the Temple he was now in a position to kindle the light, even for only one day, he was in a rush to do so. He was not going to wait until everything was in place. You have oil? The menorah needs to be lit? Light it immediately and then figure out what the next step will be.

This perspective provides an answer to the most famous question posed in connection with the Chanukah holiday. Rabbi Joseph Karo, the celebrated sixteenth century scholar and mystic, author of the Shulhan Arukh, wonders why the holiday of Chanukah is celebrated for eight days if the miracle was only for seven days? After all, there was enough oil to last for one day (see Bet Yosef, Hil. Hanukah #670, s.v. Ve-ha-ta'am).

But now we understand. The first, and perhaps most significant, miracle is that the cruse of oil

was lit at all in the first place. Logic dictated that the priest wait until he had everything he needed before lighting it but he went ahead and did so anyway. The miracle of the lighting plus seven days of miracle that it remained lit equals eight miracles and, hence, eight days of Chanukah. This is genuine heroism.

Sometimes caution is appropriate, but not always. When it comes to lighting the menorah of Torah, of faith, of Jewish tradition, jump in and take the plunge. And who knows, maybe a miracle will happen to you as well.

In the case of the elections for the forthcoming World Zionist Congress we are not looking for miracles, only for you to register and cast your ballot for the Religious Zionist slate. Please make sure that all the members of your family who will be eighteen years of age by June 2006 register as well. To do so, please go to www.votetorah.org. May the light of Chanukah continue to enlighten us, in our personal as well as national lives.