



CHAGIM

at the Masorti Movement

CHANUKKAH

Let's Light up the World

When Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek king that governed over the ancient kingdom of Israel, around the year 168 BCE decided to ban the fundamental observances of Jewish practice, he decreed restrictions on five specific areas: Torah study, Shabbat observance, Circumcision, the holiness of marriage, and the Jewish calendar.

The Maccabees, a small group of Jews back in the day, managed, against all odds, to overthrow the army of the king, liberate Jerusalem and rededicate the Temple (the Bet Hammikdash).

The festival of Chanukkah ("dedication") that we will start to celebrate on Motzei Shabbat, December the 8th and which will continue for the next eight days, receives his name from the fact that during the eight days we light candles in a special nine branch candelabrum named "chanukkiyah" in memory of the miracle that occurred when the Temple was rededicated, since, as we mentioned before, it had been desecrated.

As the Talmud narrates (Bavli Shabbat 21b), the Maccabees wanted to light the Menorah of the Temple and for this purpose they found only one jar of consecrated oil, which would only last for one day; however, the oil burned for eight days, giving time to the Maccabees to press more oil that would be fit for Temple service and to keep the light burning in our sanctuary.

When we light the Channukah candles, we are not only remembering the epic struggles of the Maccabees, but also are internalizing the messages that this beautiful holiday teaches us:

- Never give up before starting to fight. Always try.
- We should value all of our actions, even though, at first, they may appear insignificant.
- We have a duty to light up the world, especially with all the darkness that surrounds us.
- We are not only duty bound to light up the world but to increase the amount of light in it every day.
- Lastly, it is not enough that we light up the world, nor that we add some light every day, but we have an obligation to publicize this miracle, to share our message and light with others.

As the prophet Zechariah says in the haftarah read on the Shabbat of Channukah (Zec. 4.6): "Not by strength and not by power but by spirit alone..." So much so that the word Chanukkah is made of the root Chet, Nun, Kaf which also lies at the heart of Chinnuk ("education"). Maybe because the central message bequeathed by our Sages was that we will only be able to light up the world and our lives through the study of our sources and the transmission of our millenary texts to future generations.

May the lights of Chanukkah light up our way and urge us to work together for a more sensible world full of solidarity.

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