

Hanukah: The festival of lights—and personal freedoms

By SHIRLEE IDEN



Lighting the Hanukkah menorah is a special occasion for Jewish young people during this traditional holiday. (Staff photo)

The fight for freedom and survival was an old tradition for the Jewish people long before the Americans fought at Lexington in the 18th century. Two thousand years before that, the Jewish Maccabees played out their struggle at Modin in what is now modern day Israel.

It was the world's first record fight for religious freedom and for liberty. Jewish people today remember that and call it Hanukkah.

Beginning on Sunday evening at sundown, they will commemorate it by lighting the first of eight candles and gathering their families around them. Each night they will kindle an additional flame in the eight-branch Menorah until all eight burn brightly in remembrance of a brave fight for freedom.

Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, is the story of the very first fight, not for land or material possessions, but for the ideals of religious freedom and liberty.

In 175 B.C., Antiochus IV became the King of Syria, the land to which Israel had been exiled. He wanted his subjects to conform to one set of ideals and tried to force the Jews to forsake their faith and renounce their traditional customs. He wanted them to worship Greek idols.

UNIFORMITY was the goal of Antiochus. He thought he could take his people and make them one, all uniform, by his arbitrary acts. He decreed that any Jew caught observing the Jewish sabbath, or having the Torah scroll in his possession, or who perpetuated Jewish ceremonies and did not worship the Greek gods should be killed.

In Modin, a little town northwest of Jerusalem, the banner of rebellion was raised by a man called Matthias and his five sons.

"Whoever is for God, follow me," he cried, and Jews from the entire country rallied to join the guerrilla forces.

The torch of freedom lit at Modin was destined to burn through the centuries with its timeless message and its inspiration for oppressed peoples.

The fight for freedom continued after the death of Matthias under the leadership of Judah Maccabee. His name is Hebrew for "hammer" and symbolizes that Judah and his followers were the "hammer of the Lord" as they fought the Syrians.

The band won a series of victories against the well-armed Syrians with brilliant military tactics and the Syrian legions were routed in 168 B.C. Finally, the road to Jerusalem itself was opened in 165 B.C. and the city was won. The Maccabees proceeded to clean and rededicate the temple which had been desecrated by the Syrians.

For the ritual cleansing, purified oil was needed but none could be found. After searching, a small jar of oil was produced. It was enough for only one day, but it lasted for eight days.

THAT WAS the miracle of Hanukkah, which is the Hebrew word for dedication.

Since that day, throughout the centuries, Hanukkah lights have been kindled in Jewish homes. They commemorate the relighting of the eternal light in the ancient temple by the Maccabees. They represent loyalty to tradition and the triumph of democracy over tyranny.

The fight of the Maccabees helped to maintain the identity of the Jewish people. They fought for freedom of worship, for the right of people to be different and to maintain their differences in what we call cultural pluralism.

If the Maccabees had lost their war and Judaism had disappeared in 168 B.C., Christianity and Islam would not have been born at all since a dead mother-faith could not have given birth to any spiritual offspring.

In a very real sense, the church and the mosque no less than the synagogue owe their existence to the Maccabees. The Maccabees victory in 165 B.C., culminating in the rededication of the temple, assured the spiritual continuity of Judaism for the entire world.

Beth Achim marks 10th anniversary

Congregation Beth Achim in Southfield will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the congregation, the dedication of the Klein Daily Chapel and the observance of Hanukkah at the Weekend of Festivities Dec. 2-4. The celebration will begin at 6 p.m. on Friday with Kabbalat Shabbat services and a dedication ceremony of the

Klein Daily Chapel, which was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Max Klein.

A traditional Friday evening dinner will be held in Wasserman Hall. There will be a charge of \$7.50 for adults and \$5 for children under 12.

On Saturday, Dec. 3 Sabbath morning services will be conducted by

Rabbi Milton Arm and Cantor Simon Bermanis assisted by the High Holiday Choir. Services will begin at 8:45 a.m. and a Kiddush will be served afterward.

The climax of the weekend activities will be a concert on Sunday at 7:45 p.m. by two prominent New York Cantors. A candle-lighting ceremony will open the festivities.

Featured in the concert will be Cantors Joseph Malovany and David Lefkowitz.

Cantor Malovany, a native of Israel, is associated with the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, an orthodox New York congregation.

Cantor Lefkowitz is associated with the Park Avenue Synagogue, has sung tenor roles in many operas and has appeared in concerts here and in Israel.

Cantor Bermanis will conduct the Sisterhood Choral Group in a cantata.

The concert is free, but tickets must be obtained in advance by calling the synagogue office at 352-8670. No tickets will be available at the door.

Congregation vice presidents Allan Rosenberg and Leonard Herman are co-chairpersons for the event. George Rossman is program chairperson.

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