

for religious freedom

by surprise when the banner of rebellion was raised.

A man called Matthias and his five sons led the attack on the Syrian soldiers when they came to that town. He then fled to the nearby hills where he was joined by others and organized a guerrilla army.

The fight for freedom lasted 25 years, with leadership transferred to Matthias' son Judah Maccabee. Judah's nickname, "Maccabee," is Hebrew for "hammer of the Lord." The name may also come from the slogan on his banner, "Who is like unto thee, oh Lord" which forms the initials "Maccabee" in Hebrew. Jews believe the torch of freedom lit at Modin was destined to burn through the centuries with its timeless message and inspiration for Jews and for all oppressed peoples.

AFTER A SERIES of victories, the road to Jerusalem itself was opened to the Maccabees in 165 B.C. The Jewish soldiers had not yet defeated the huge Syrian army but proceeded to clean and rededicate the temple, which had been desecrated with Greek idols.

As recounted in the Book of Maccabees in the apocrypha of the Bible, the ceremony rededicating the temple was held on the third anniversary of its desecration — the 25th anniversary of Kislev in the Jewish calendar.

The Festival of Lights celebration lasted eight days because it was modeled after the Festival of Booths —

Sukkot — a very popular festival among the Jews. Tradition has it that the Maccabean soldiers used eight Syrian spears they found to make a lamp in the temple, the first Hanukkah menorah.

Another traditional story says the Maccabean soldiers, while cleaning the

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temple, happened to find one day's supply of ritually pure oil left over from the days of Samuel and King Saul. The oil miraculously lasted eight days, according to the story.

REGARDLESS OF the reasons behind the eight candles of Hanukkah, the holiday has grown in importance and spiritual meaning for Jews through the centuries. The lights represent loyalty to tradition and the triumph of religious freedom over tyranny.

fer Christmas

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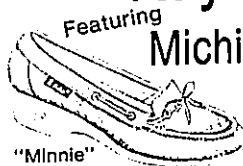
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