

FROM THE EDITOR

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Included among the greatest ironies in Jewish history has to be the naming of a Jewish sporting event modelled on the Ancient Greek Olympic Games after the very group of Jews who fought and died to resist the evil influence and terrible decrees of those same Ancient Greeks. The Chashmonaim, aka the Maccabees, arguably the most famous Jewish warriors of all time, were out to destroy Greek cultural influence, not promote it.

Although often portrayed in illustrations wearing armour from that time period and holding swords, we mustn't forget what they were actually fighting for, what motivated these Jewish rebels to take up arms in the first place, something that's simply impossible to capture in any illustration.

The Chashmonaim and their followers were G-d-fearing men who lived their lives in accordance with the Torah, who carefully guarded things like kashrus and Shabbos, and who, as Kohanim, even served in the Beis HaMikdash (the Temple).

So what prompted Matisyahu, the head of the family known as the Chashmonaim, to start this seemingly unwinnable battle with the mighty Greek Empire?

When he saw the suffering of the Jewish people, that they were no longer able to keep the mitzvos of the Torah, it was at this point that he instructed his son Yehuda to go secretly from city to city throughout Judea and to say, *"Mi l'Hashem eilai!"* – "Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!", and gather together the G-d-fearing among the people of Israel.

They fought not for land, nor property, nor power, nor honour, nor any other host of reasons for which nations fight. They fought so that they and the rest of the Jewish people could live by Hashem's Torah. Simply put, these were men who gave their lives in order to ensure that Jews could peacefully live as Jews.

Some even say that the name so well known to everyone, Maccabi, is really an acronym for, *"Mi ka-mocha be'ilim Hashem!"* "Who is like you, Hashem!" Yehudah, who was known as the fiercest warrior among the Chashmonaim and who served as their leader after Matisyahu passed away, had a battle cry that was known to leave enemy soldiers quaking in fear. So what did he shout? *"La'Hashem hayishua!"* "Salvation is Hashem's!"

This wasn't just a war, it was a holy war. Normally when we hear those words we think of people trying to forcibly convert others to their religion or to acquire "holy" territory. But this wasn't a war about such things. This was about fighting for the right to live as Jews: to learn Torah, to keep Shabbos and Yom Tov, and to give baby boys a bris milah (circumcision)!

Unfortunately, the war that the Chashmonaim fought wasn't just against the Greeks – it was simultaneously also a civil war, pitting Jew against Jew, brother against brother. Quite sadly, there were many Jews who were so enamoured by the Greeks and their culture that they were willing, consequently, to abandon Torah and mitzvos entirely. In fact, it was a Jew, one of the many Greek sympathisers, who betrayed his people and revealed to the Greeks what Matisyahu and his followers were up to, which quickly led to a violent confrontation that surprisingly left the Greek soldiers that came to confront these Jewish rebels fleeing in terror from them.

So what was the first act of these Jewish rebels after this initial confrontation, after their war against the mighty Greek Empire had begun? Did they give chase after the Greek soldiers who had fled from them and kill them?

They went to a Jewish city and they gave a bris milah to every Jewish male child who had not had one previously. And such a thing is only fitting, as, after all, this was a battle to do mitzvos, something that we take for granted every day, and a level of persecution the likes of which has probably not been seen in our days since the dreaded Iron Curtain of Communism that extended across Eastern Europe.

Contrary to what Madison Avenue believes, the celebration of Chanukah has nothing whatsoever to do with giving presents each night. It's a holiday about the great sacrifices that a small group of Jews were willing to make so that we could all live as Jews, so that the Torah would not be forgotten. So it should come as no surprise that the only customary "present" is to give children Chanukah gelt (money)... for the specific purpose of encouraging them to study more Torah.

From everyone at JL, a freilichen (happy) Chanukah!

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

**The details excerpted above are based on Sefer Midrashei Chanukah.*

ON THE COVER: A DECORATIVE, ENAMELLED METAL DREIDEL. IT IS CUSTOMARY FOR CHILDREN TO PLAY WITH A DREIDEL ON CHANUKAH. OUR SAGES SEE A LESSON IN THE WAY THE DREIDEL IS GRIPPED FROM THE TOP IN ORDER TO SPIN IT, IN CONTRAST TO THE GRAGGER USED ON PURIM, WHICH IS HELD FROM BENEATH (CAUSING THE TOP TO TURN). THE DREIDEL SYMBOLISES THAT THE EVENTS OF CHANUKAH WERE CONTROLLED BY HEAVEN DESPITE OUR ACTIONS, WHEREAS ON PURIM, OUR REPENTANCE WAS WHAT STIRRED HEAVEN TO INTERCEDE.



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