

FROM THE EDITOR

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I heard someone speaking the other day regarding the recent goings on in Israel. He proceeded to list the many world powers throughout history which have fought against and persecuted the Jewish people, and which, today, are nothing but a bad memory – a fleeting history lesson. He noted how this too will be the fate of all of our enemies, including our current enemy, which will eventually be crushed and come crawling to us on their knees to beg for our forgiveness. Am Yisrael Chai! There was only one thing missing from this person's recollection of our many triumphs: any mention of G-d.

Mark Twain famously spoke of the eternal Jew, explaining how we Jews are entitled to be "vain" for the "marvellous fight" that we have made in this world, with "[our] hands tied behind [us]", against the many civilisations who "made a vast noise, and...are [now] gone". Show me a Jew whose heart doesn't swell when he recalls the accomplishments of the ancient Chashmonaim, or the Irgun and Hagana, the precursors to the modern day Tzahal – the great Jewish fighting machines past and present – who "easily" defeated much larger and better equipped armies. Add to this the modern-day cloak and dagger tales of the Mossad and the Shin Bet, the advances in technology constantly coming out of Israel that lead the way in every sector, and the ridiculous percentage of Jewish Noble Prize winners (currently 24%, if you don't count the peace prizes), and it's easy to get carried away and even full of ourselves, making the fatal mistake of believing our own press releases and those of others.

What Twain and many others have missed, however, is that we didn't defeat any of those many armies through our own strength and skill or through our own cunning and tactics. Hashem hides His hand behind the veil of the natural world, leaving to us the choice of whether to see that hand, and acknowledge His wondrous deeds, or to chalk things up to chance and luck – with the overt and open miracle of Chanukah being one of the great exceptions to the rule, where He made it impossible for us to deny His role in those events that took place so long ago.

The many nations that have stood up against us throughout our history were defeated for us – not by us (what a difference a preposition makes!). And, often, the defeat of those enemies was only after we experienced many, many years of seemingly endless suffering, persecution, bloodshed, and death. We tend to romanticise the past, focusing on our victories, but glossing over the fact that we lived, for example, under the harsh decrees of the Greeks for 52 years! We spent decade after decade, with no end in sight, being persecuted and killed for such basic and fundamental things as learning Torah, keeping Shabbos, giving baby boys a bris milah, and declaring the new month (without which we couldn't determine and designate when each of the yomim tovim fell out).

Time and time again we have made it back from the very brink of utter extinction. We do not follow the patterns found in history books for the nations of the world – the rising, falling, and vanishing of empires – because our very existence is one that rises above the natural world and its rules, above what can be predicted, quantified, and calculated. The defeat of each of those world powers – as with the Ancient Greeks – was nothing less than miraculous, directly traceable back to their source: our Creator.

As we sit before our chanukiyot each night of Chanukah, may we be reminded that Am Yisrael Chai... only because Hashem decrees it to be so, and not from anything that we did.

On behalf of everyone here at *Jewish Life*, we wish all of our readers a Freilichen (Happy) Chanukah! And mazel tov to Linda Superfain, our operations director, and her family, on Steve's bar mitzvah.

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

* Rambam Iggeret Teiman

ON THE COVER: PIC BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

DURING CHANUKAH, IT IS CUSTOMARY TO DISTRIBUTE COINS (CHANUKAH GELT) TO CHILDREN AS A REWARD FOR TORAH STUDY (SOMETHING WHICH THE GREEKS TRIED TO STOP), THEREBY ENCOURAGING THEM TO STUDY MORE TORAH. IT'S ALSO CUSTOMARY TO DISTRIBUTE COINS TO THE POOR BECAUSE THE GREEKS TRIED TO STOP US FROM PERFORMING ACTS OF CHESED. PICTURED ON THE COVER IS A CHOCOLATE GELT COIN, AN INNOVATION BY AMERICAN CHOCOLATEERS WHICH CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY.



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