

1. Rambam Hilchot Chanukah 3:1

בבית שני כשמלכו יון גזרו גזרות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ובמצות, ופשטו ידם בממונם ובבנותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות, וצר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחצום לחץ גדול עד שריחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה עד החורבן השני .

In [the era of] the Second Temple, the Greek kingdom issued decrees against the Jewish people, [attempting to] nullify their faith and refusing to allow them to observe the Torah and its commandments. They extended their hands against their property and their daughters; they entered the Sanctuary, wrought havoc within, and made the sacraments impure. The Jews suffered great difficulties from them, for they oppressed them greatly until the God of our ancestors had mercy upon them, delivered them from their hand, and saved them. The sons of the Hasmoneans, the High Priests, overcame [them], slew them, and saved the Jews from their hand. They appointed a king from the priests, and sovereignty returned to Israel for more than 200 years, until the destruction of the Second Temple.

2. Maccabees 1, Chapter 2

Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice, 'Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him and have chosen to obey his commandments, everyone of them abandoning the religion of their Fathers, I and my sons and my brothers will continue to live by the Covenant of our Fathers! Far be it from us to desert the Law and the Ordinances! We will not obey the king's swords by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left!' When he had finished speaking these words a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to his righteous anger and he ran and killed him on the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the Law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the town with aloud voice, saying, 'Let everyone who is zealous for the Law and supports the Covenant come out with me!'

3. Hanukkah And The Myth Of The Maccabees In Zionist Ideology And In Israeli Society by Eliezer Don-Yehiya

Hanukkah was one of various Jewish traditional festivals which the Zionist movement employed to assert the continuity of Jewish identity and the national right of the Jews to the Land of Israel. However, although the secular Zionist groups continued to celebrate the traditional religious festivals, they changed the manner of the celebration and also reinterpreted some of those festivals, with the aim of replacing their original religious content with new national or social myths. The leaders of the Zionist Labour movement in particular grasped the importance of the political potential of Jewish festivals. One of them, Berl Katznelson, commented: **'The Jewish year is filled with days which for sheer depth have no parallel in other peoples. Is it in the interest of the Jewish workers' movement to squander these latent forces?'**

The approach to the traditional festivals was selective, and the principle of selection applied both to the festival itself and to its attendant ceremonies and customs. A guiding principle was the degree to which the traditional festival could be imbued with a national or social aura, and serve to reinforce a political myth. ... The renewed importance given to Hanukkah was apparent from the early beginning of the organized Zionist movement in 1882. Zionist clubs and associations were named after the Hasmoneans or the Maccabees, while Hanukkah was chosen as the preferred time to hold conferences and parties; it was also a popular theme of nationalist sermons and speeches. **It must be remembered that Theodor Herzl concluded his book, *The Jewish State*, with the words: 'The Maccabees shall rise again'.**

...In 1910, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (who later became the second president of Israel) depicted the Hasmoneans as **'simple peasants' who liberated their people from foreign rule, as well as from exploitation by Jewish priests and 'capitalists', who enriched themselves 'at the expense of the people' the vast majority of the Jewish community of Palestine continued to regard Hanukkah as chiefly expressing the values associated with the struggle for national liberation.** This perception was shared by the two rival movements which competed for hegemony in the Zionist movement ...

4. Revisionists:

The Revisionists glorified the Zealots who revolted against the Romans in 66-70 U.E. as well as Bar-Kokhba's fighters who also rebelled against the Romans in 132-35 C. E. Bar-Kokhba's last stronghold was Betar and this

was also the name of the youth movement of the Revisionists, while their most radical group was called Brit Habiryonim, after the most militant of the Zealots...

The Revisionists saw themselves as disciples of the renowned Zionist leader, Max Nordau. In an article published in 1900, Nordau urged the cultivation of a 'muscular Jewry', which he associated especially with Bar-Kokhba, whom he described as 'a hero who never knew defeat' and who embodied 'the Jewry that is steeled in war and is enamored of weapons' Nordau also lauded, as representatives of 'muscular Jewry', **the young Hellenizing Jews** who took part in wrestling competitions and who were among the bitter enemies of the Hasmoneans...

Shaul Tchernichovsky(1875-1943), a great admirer of Hellenistic culture... bluntly blamed the Maccabees because they had sought to eradicate Hellenism. **In his 1926 poem 'My Melody' the poet rhetorically asks: 'Who are you, my blood that seethes within me? The blood of the Maccabees?' and replies: 'No! ... the blood of the conquerors of Canaan is my blood' .**

Ze'ev Jabotinsky... in 1905 declared: **Mankind will be eternally grateful to Hellenism, which was first to point to sports as the best educational means for creating, by prolonged training and will-power, a type imbued with spiritual beauty and courage. The Hellenes were the first to establish special gymnasia for this purpose.**

5. Labour

Although other Zionist groups also admired the fighter against the Romans, they gave pride of place to the Hasmoneans who had waged war only after grave acts of provocation and of suppression by the Greek rulers. Such a reaction was more in tune with the 'defensive ethos' (to use Anita Shapira's term) of the Labour movement and of other moderate groups in the *Yishuv*, while the revolts against Roman rule were more in line with the militant ethos of the Revisionists.

6. The Differences

The ideological differences between the Revisionists and Labour also became apparent in their differing concepts of the Hanukkah festival and of the Hasmonean revolt. The Revisionists saw the revolt as exhibiting heroism in battle and self-sacrifice for the cause of national independence, while their political rivals interpreted that revolt as a popular uprising of peace-loving peasants who had to defend themselves against their cruel oppressors.

7. "The Canaanites"

The Canaanites depicted the Hasmoneans not as Hebrew fighters in a campaign for national liberation against foreign rule, but as Jewish religious fanatics who were primarily fighting their internal adversaries, the Hellenizers. Although that struggle occurred in Eretz Israel, the Hasmoneans did not fight for the cause of a political territorial nation, but for that of a dispersed and self-enclosed religious sect. **Adaya Horon, the Canaanite historian, has claimed that the only original purpose of the war of the Hasmoneans was to secure 'independence of worship in Jerusalem and its environs with freedom to take revenge on "the wicked" - the Hellenizers among them ... No national liberation was involved'.**

8. The Problem

The first difficulty is that, historically, the revolt of the Maccabees against the Greeks began as an uprising of traditional Jews against religious decrees enacted by the Greek ruler with the encouragement and active support of the Hellenizers, who wished to impose on the Jewish people an alien secular culture. This was an obstacle for those Zionists who aimed to make the events and heroes of Hanukkah the source of a national political myth, devoid of a religious content.

Virtually every national or social movement must at some point decide how to resolve the problem of the gap between myth and fact. One solution is simply to disregard the inconvenient facts, or to present them in a new light by reinterpreting them. Secular Zionism resorted to the former option in its reinvention of the Hanukkah festival: 'problematic' aspects of the Hasmonean revolt were ignored or played down, and the accent was placed on elements which seemed to lend themselves especially to the aims of the Zionists. Thus, the causes of the revolt were not stressed and the spotlight was directed at the heroism and courage of the fighters and at the continued struggle for political independence even after the religious decrees were abolished. **Israel Eldad aptly summed up the stratagem when he noted that Zionism 'appropriated the form but not the content of the war of the Hasmoneans'. Hasmonean goals were also reinterpreted in a manner which placed the emphasis on 'loyalty to the people' and on 'preserving national distinctiveness', without specifying the actual components of that distinctiveness. Thus, even the Zionists who admired Hellenistic culture denounced the Hellenizers for deserting their people in favour of foreign rulers.**

9. Modiin vs Meron

...members of *Hashomer*, the first Jewish defence organization, were renewing the heroic tradition of the Hasmoneans **and of the insurgents against the Romans. In Zerubavcl's view, that** tradition had been abandoned in the Diaspora, which had sanctified 'passive martyrs' and had consigned to oblivion activist heroes. Those responsible were 'the passive Torah bearers ... who carried the name of God on their lips but whose hearts were far from every feeling of freedom and liberty'. The author observed: 'Martyrs are evoked at a time of weakness, heroes are emulated at a time of courage and action'. The village of the Hasmoneans, Modi'in, became a shrine for the Zionist youth movements and a place of pilgrimage. Zerubavel pointed to the contrast between Modi'in and Miron, the pilgrimage site in the Galilee, which has been a centre of prayer and ritual for traditional Jews. While Modi'in is a symbol of activism and courage, Miron symbolizes the passive waiting of traditional Jews for a miraculous salvation from the heavens. **The author asked: 'Miron and Modi'in ...which is stronger? Which will triumph? Which will determine the course of our current history?'**

10. Events

The festival of Hanukkah was celebrated in public ceremonies and at mass events to foster in the people the Hasmonean spirit of heroism and devotion to the national cause. According to the historian Ben-Zion Dinur, the ceremonies included: lighting the candles with great ostentation, lectures and speeches in **synagogues and community halls, in schools and kindergartens, on the Hasmoncans'** war of freedom ... so that the whole people might know ... what the heroes did, what a people is capable of accomplishing if moved by faith, by trust, by the ability to lay down its life ... The Modi'in marathon became part of a series of sports events which were held during the Hanukkah period.

The period of Hanukkah was also perceived as a time of 'national reflection' in which individuals as well as the whole Jewish community must engage in self-examination, asking themselves: 'What brick did I bring to the great edifice we are building- a home for the Jewish people in its land?' Hanukkah was also used for various Zionist activities. The days of the festival were described as 'days of convocation for the whole movement, days of assemblies and conferences'. The Jewish National Fund, which was engaged in buying land for Jewish settlement, chose the days of Hanukkah for its mass fundraising operations.

On the other hand, the Hanukkah celebrations aimed at the general public almost entirely ignored the festival's religious-traditional significance. The decrees of the Greek ruler against Jewish religious observance were 'depicted as merely an incidental effect of the subjugation to foreign rule, not as the root cause of the Hasmonean revolt. The 'miracle of the cruse of oil' was openly belittled since it was believed that it was a salient example of the passive approach which characterized traditional Diaspora Jewry...

11. Songs

מי ימלל גבורות ישראל, אותן מי ימנה / הן בכל דור יקום הגיבור גואל העם .
שמע! בימים ההם בזמן הזה / מכבי מושיע ופודה / ובימינו כל עם ישראל יתאחד, יקום ויגאל.

A Zionist Hannukah, Rabbi Peretz Rodman

*The lyrics of the popular Hanukkah song *Mi y'mallel* ("Who can recount...?") were written by one of the creators of Hebrew folk music in the early 20th century, Menashe Ravina (1899-1968). He begins by reworking the verse "Who can recount the mighty acts of the Lord, recite all His praises?" ([Psalms 106:2](#)) into this: "Who can recount the mighty acts of [the people] Israel? Who can count them? / In every generation a hero arises, redeemer of the people." Praise of God has yielded to praise of military victors, and the title of "redeemer" (*go'el*) is now applied to a human rescuer, not a divine one.*

*Similarly, traditional liturgical texts refer to God when they use the terms *moshia'* (savior) and *podeh* (redeemer), but the song *Mi Y'mallel* next speaks not of God but of the Maccabees in those terms...It will not be by a miraculous divine intervention that the Jews are delivered from repeated persecution and exile, claims the songwriter. Using the Maccabees as his model, he advocates that the Jewish people take their fate into their own hands and, rather than responding with flight, adaptation, or martyrdom, instead take up arms against their oppressors.*

גס לא קרה לנו - / פד שָׁמֶן לא מִצְאָנוּ. / לְעֵמֶק הַלְכָנוּ, הִהָרָה עָלֵינוּ... /

Aharon "Zeev"

We are carrying torches. In the dark night the paths shine beneath our feet, and whoever has a heart that thirsts for light—let him lift his eyes and his heart to us and come along. No miracle happened for us. No cruse of oil did we find. We walked through the valley, ascended the mountain....

12. The State

The establishment of the State of Israel apparently led to a decline in the importance of Hanukkah in Israeli political culture. It is no longer a major national event, with public assemblies, declarations, and speeches, or with mass parades. One reason for this decline was that there was now a new annual national celebration – Independence Day. Another reason is related to the attitude of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, who wished to glorify the Biblical period and its heroes, not the Hasmoneans or other heroes of the post-Biblical period. For, although Judah the Maccabee or Bar-Kokhba were undoubtedly brave heroes, they were eventually defeated and were unable to preserve and consolidate the political independence for which they had fought; hence they could not serve as role models for Ben-Gurion's *Mamlachti* (Statist) approach, which put the emphasis on enduring military and political achievements. Moreover, Ben-Gurion did not wish to engage in a confrontation with the religious sector of Israel, which opposed the secularization of traditional festivals. He explained that since the Bible was accepted or revered by all sections of Jewish society, secular as well as religious, it was the most fitting source for national myths and symbols

Ben Gurion: 'the Israeli child, the Israeli youngster ...needs to feel that our history did not begin in 1948, nor in 1897, and not even in the days of the Maccabees', but that it had its origins in the Biblical era, 'the period of Jewish glory and independence ... the period of independent spiritual creativity which forged the Jewish people and brought us to this day'.

13. Charedim

Ironically, the Canaanite conception of Hanukkah resembles that of the Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews). For both groups, who rejected Zionism out of diametrically-opposed reasons, Hanukkah is a religious holy day, and the struggle of the Hasmoneans cannot serve as the source of a national-political myth. However, the difference between the Haredim and the Canaanites is that the former exalt the religious character of Hanukkah, whereas the latter excoriate it...The fiercest opponents of the Zionist version of Hanukkah were the Haredim, who also dismissed Zionism as a movement which ran counter to the spirit of religious tradition. They claimed that the manner of the Zionist celebrations of Hanukkah was closer to the outlook of the Hellenizers than it was to that of the Hasmoneans, although the Zionists were pretending to be praising the latter.

Yitzhak Breuer, a major Haredi leader, commented: The Hellenizers loved their people and their land in their own fashion ...They loved the land but loathed the Land of Torah, loved the people but despised the People of the Torah, loved Greek licentiousness but hated the burden of Torah ... It is not for the Jewish State that the Hasmoneans fought but for the People of the Torah. They did battle against the kingdom of evil when it threatened the People of the Torah with destruction ... They also fought against the wicked among their own people ... This was a kulturkampf ... Greek culture triumphed over the whole world, and only the Torah culture was able to withstand it.

14. "Jewish Sovereignty Was Restored", Rabbi Yehuda Amital zt"l

I have heard Religious Zionists claim that the State of Israel is merely a means to fulfill the commandment of settling Eretz Yisrael. I was astounded. Religious Zionism means one thing: God is bringing Am Yisrael back to their land. What differentiates our path from that of R. Shakh, for example, is the view that Jewish sovereignty is important and significant in and of itself. And this is doubly true after the Holocaust.

What better authority could we seek than the Rambam, who views the fact that Jews achieved some level of independence in their own country as one of the reasons for the holiday of Chanuka? We must guard ourselves against the anti-Zionist trends that are developing specifically within the extreme Zionist Jewish public.

It is true that we have great differences of opinion in many realms within our small sovereign kingdom. Everything that exists in the western world makes its way here very quickly and finds its way onto the streets and into popular culture. The secular public has increasing difficulty with the idea of Jewish sovereignty. We, who recognize the value of Jewish freedom and sovereignty, and who recognize the significance of God's compassion towards us, must grant each value its proper weight.

If those two hundred years of Jewish sovereignty give added significance to the miracle of Chanuka, then the ingathering of the exiles, which is taking place before our eyes, is surely of no less significance!