

Chanukah Sameach from The Great Synagogue, Sydney

A Chanukah Message

The festival of Chanukah celebrates the victory of the Jews over the Hellenists who espoused idolatrous Greek culture. While Greek philosophy is celebrated in the Rabbinic tradition for its wisdom and its civilisation for its magnificent achievements, Greek rule was expressed through the enforced worship of idols and intolerance for other cultures. Had the Maccabees' revolt to reclaim Jerusalem and the Temple in c160 BC not been successful then Jewish monotheism would have been lost. The "Judeo-Christian tradition" we value today could never have come to be.

The Book of the Maccabees highlights the pitfalls of religious corruption as well as lauding the piety of martyrs who refused to sacrifice to idols, abandon Jewish learning or its ways. It is also the story of a bloody civil war and cautionary instances of zeal taken to excess. It is not included as a book of the Bible in the canon of the Tanach (Jewish Old Testament).

Religious celebration of Chanukah focuses on the rededication of the Temple and the miracle where one day's measure of olive oil for the Menorah (the Temple Candelabra) burned for eight whole days till new oil could be pressed and purified. In Jewish houses a symbolic menorah is lit every evening of the festival with an extra candle added each night to commemorate the rededication of the defiled sanctuary and the rededication of the people who had abandoned spiritual and moral values and the reverence for life as sacred in the pursuit of the purely physical pleasures that Hellenism represented.

While Jewish teaching prizes the wisdom and contributions of our diverse cultures, Chanukah celebrates the idea that we should neither hide nor diminish the light and the warmth of our own teachings and traditions. We should be proud to come together in our families and radiate our life-values from our homes.

R' Jeremy Lawrence

