

Dear Haverim,

As we live in the 21st Century, Hanukkah may be one of our most important Jewish holidays. While so many Jews try to diminish its significance, perhaps because of its connection with the December holiday season, the lessons of Hanukkah could not be any more relevant to us today. Hanukkah is the celebration of a small religious minority standing up to the Greeks and practicing their religion. The Maccabees wanted to live with religious freedom and without hatred.

Unfortunately, as we look around our world today, so many people still do not have the ability to live their religion freely. Some Jews today still practice Judaism in silence, and many other religions fear for their safety. As Jews, we know all too well what it is like to be hated and to be attacked for our religious beliefs. For most of our history we have been outsiders, seen as the 'other' and that is why the Torah reminds us over and over to take care of those who are on the fringes of society, for those who may be different than us.

Each night as we light the candles, we must recognize the very miracle that we are celebrating. Over 2,000 years ago a group of Jews stood up for their religious freedom. We celebrate their heroism and sacrifice. Each night we increase the light as a reminder to bring more light and love into the world. During this holiday, while celebrating our religious freedom, how will we stand up for religious freedom for others? Will we demand that people around the world have the same religious freedoms that the Maccabees fought for so valiantly?

Hanukkah reminds us of the miracle of Jews living free from hatred. As we light the 5th candle, ask yourself how we can strive to be like the Maccabees and not Antiochus.

Hag Urim Sameach,
Rabbi Michael Kushnick