

Dear haverim,

The prophet Zechariah, resolutely proclaims in this week's Haftarah, "lo v'chayil v'lo v'choach ki im b'ruchi, amar Adonai Tz'evaot- 'Not by might, nor by power but by My spirit', says the Lord of Hosts." With these powerful words the rabbis, two thousand years ago directed the focus of Hanukkah toward the spiritual and away from the physical.

Have we accepted the rabbis' redirection? Have we heard their plea? Are we willing to acknowledge the rabbis' attempt to emphasize the spiritual while downplaying the physical?

When we think of Hanukkah, most of us gravitate to the victory of the few over the many- the ability to overcome extraordinary odds and defend the traditional Jewish way of life. The story of the Maccabees is a legendary story of bravery, courage, resolve and faith- we take great pride in its message. It is the story most readily identified with the wonder we know as the birth of the modern state of Israel!

But, today like two thousand years ago there is a conflicting narrative. Today, there are many Israelis and Jews across the world yearning for the spiritual value in the story. Now that Israel exercises power and authority in a land of her own sovereignty will she be able to temper the use of power with a sense of compassion and mercy? Too many times, recently the fabric of Israeli society has been shaken to its core because this balance between the physical and the spiritual appears out of balance.

As an antidote to man's physical use of power the rabbis introduced the story of the cruse of oil burning eight days instead of one. In the flickering flame of the hanukkiah candles we are to find the message of God, directing us to care for the needy amongst us, to respond to the needs of the vulnerable amongst us, to demonstrate love, compassion and care to a world that seems to thrive on the outrageous use of physical force. Yes, we need to demonstrate physical strength at times- especially during the trying times we are facing, now- but we must be ever vigilant with the use of that force, always striving to temper its use with the highest regard for humanity.

As we light the candles this evening may we recognize that each of us can function as the "shamash," bringing light, warmth and love to a world bereft of compassion. May we become the leaders the rabbis sought, redirecting our world to the wonder of the spirit.

Hag Urim Sameach,

Rabbi Stefan J Weinberg