

The Synagogue Journal

1856-2006

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Shabbat Vayeshev

Issue 50 Chanukah

In this issue ...

Chanukah is a holiday of freedom. While it has been caricatured as a simple, miraculous victory of the Jewish Hasmoneans over their Greek oppressors, in fact it represents a broader triumph of human rights. In refusing to assimilate, the Hasmoneans protested against the hegemonic imperialism of the Greeks who violently and nonviolently, militarily and culturally, sought to subjugate all people to their identity and ambitions. The lights of Chanukah remind us that political freedom is the right to be different and to pursue holiness and righteousness according to one's heritage and hopes.

Each year at Chanukah the congregation rededicates its commitment to protect human rights. The Journal provides several historical articles from *The Brooklyn Eagle* and *The Scroll*, which recall the significance of the holiday. Earlier this month a scholarly discussion led by Philip Gourevitch, author of "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families" put the atrocities committed during our generation in Rwanda, Darfur, Zimbabwe and Burma into historical context and raised our collective consciousness about international humanitarian laws and strategies of intervention against genocide.

Newspapers of the day record the many aspects of Chanukah observance. In the nineteenth century the congregation attended the Sunday school's holiday programs, lit candelabra, bestowed gifts and attended charity balls. A mid-twentieth century reminder by Rabbi Goldfarb focused on "giving charity to needy individuals and institutions, by giving gifts to family and friends, by feasting and entertaining." The congregation has continued its traditions by reciting the Al Hanissim prayer found in the prayerbook which begins, "We thank You for the miraculous deliverance, for the heroism and for the triumph of our ancestors from ancient days until our time." We light the menorah, feast on latkes and *sufganiyot* (doughnuts), play dreidel games and sing Chanukah songs. The singing invariably includes the old children's favorite "My Dreidel". Surprisingly, the song was written by Samuel E. Goldfarb, Rabbi Goldfarb's brother and the congregation's choral director in the 1910s. An article about the song's origins by the lyricist's granddaughter Susan Wolf gives the background.

This year, as in the past, the Hebrew school began its Chanukah preparation with two fundraisers to support the school and shul. Orders for Israeli candles were due in November; the book fair at Book Court was held December 3rd at Book Court bookstore. The synagogue will light the first candle before sundown on December 15th. A community dinner follows services. On Shabbat afternoon at 1PM Rabbi Weintraub leads an open discussion for interfaith couples about "The December Dilemma". We say goodbye to Shabbat at 5PM with "Saturday Night Spice!" a family Havdallah program with songs, storytelling and pizza. On Sunday at 3PM, the theater troupe "Storahtelling" presents "Who Stole the Light?" retelling the Chanukah story with live music, puppets and audience interaction.

Special thanks to: Rabbi Sam Weintraub; the Brooklyn Public Library "Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™" and "The Brooklyn Collection"; Brooklyn Paper Publications, *Being Jewish* magazine, Susan Wolf.

Happy Chanukah,
Carol Levin, Editor
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Contents ...

Brooklyn Eagle

“Channuccah” December 4, 1877

Provides details about the history of the holiday, the Daughters of Israel Benefit Society and the holiday program
Credit: Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™

“Hebrews Who Kept Christmas. How Baith Israel People Surprised an Old Friend”

December 27, 1885

Teachers, officers and Sunday school students surprise the assistant school superintendent with a gift and party.
Credit: Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™

“A Chanuka Festival. Celebrating an Event of Historic Interest at the State Street Synagogue”

December 23, 1889

This program at the Boerum Place Synagogue included the candle lighting of the large brass candelabrum, a number of essays about the holiday and musical offerings.

Credit: Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online™

“Sees Jews Growing Weaker in Faith” December 19, 1927

Rabbi Goldfarb urges stricter observance of Orthodox customs at Chanukah celebration.

Credit: Brooklyn Public Library, The Brooklyn Collection

The Scroll

“Chanukah Reflections” 1939

Rabbi Goldfarb offers the healing rays of the Chanukah lamp “to illumine the darkness of our present era and to bring consolation and cheer to our sorely tried generation.”

“The Miracle of Chanukah – Symbol of Jewish Immortality” December 1959

Rabbi Goldfarb gratefully acknowledges the stars who kept our sacred “National Menorah” filled with oil. “May we dedicate our lives ... to G-d’s law and to disseminate its moral teachings among the Nations.”

“Chanukah Party” December 1985

For a number of years the congregation partied at members’ homes.

“The Rabbi’s Message” January 1986

Rabbi Jonathan Ginsburg reports on Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s Chanukah message about the primary mission of the state of Israel... “to provide a home for all the Jews who want and need a home in the Jewish homeland.”

“Kane St. Synagogue greets Russian Jews” January 11-17, 1990

Leaders at the synagogue’s Chanukah party address the plight of refugees.

Credit: *Brooklyn Paper Publications*

“I Have a Little Dreidel – The True Story” Winter 2001/5762

Composer Samuel E. Goldfarb, head of the Music Department of the New York Bureau of Education and Kane Street’s Music Director in the 1920s wrote the old-time favorite “My Dreidel.” Goldfarb’s granddaughter Susan Wolf gives details about the song’s origins.

Credit: *Being Jewish* www.beingjewish.org/magazine/winter2001/article4.html.

