

Rabbi's Reflections: A Potpourri of Textual Hanukkah Thoughts

I offer several observations on different Hanukkah texts. On a candlelighting *b'rakhah*: the second blessing ends either: *ba-z'man ha-zeh* or *u-va-z'man ha-zeh* (or *u-vi-z'man ha-zeh*). Most of us say the former, but many prefer the latter. The former means "who performed miracles for our ancestors in days of old, at this season"; the latter is "who performed miracles for our ancestors in ancient days until our time." In the latter, *ba-yamim ha-hem* refers to Hanukkah's miracles (defeating the Seleucids, reconquering Jerusalem, and restoring the worship of the One God within the Temple) so *ba-z'man ha-zeh* is redundant. *U-va-z'man ha-zeh* refers to any of the ideas that: God still performs miracles today, there were other miracles both before and after Hanukkah's eight days, or *ba-yamim ha-hem* refers to the Maccabean victory and *u-va-z'man ha-zeh* refers to the oil flask. Life's daily small miracles still occur, if we wish to see them.

On the *Torah* reading: Only Hanukkah's last day has a name, *Zot Hanukkah* (the reading's first words). Rabbi Murray Stadtmauer's father told a story (in Galitzianer Yiddish) of an old man in his *shtetl* who greeted people the last day, "A *gittin* *Zois Hanikkeh*." He asked each youth, "Why is today *Zois Hanikkeh*?" He explained, "Some people think as soon as they light the last night's candles, 'Nu! *Shoin upgepattered mit Hanikkeh!*' ('Well, Hanukkah now over!') So, we tell them, 'No! *Zois Hanikkeh!* This is also Hanukkah. We still have today to go.'" Then he walked away chuckling. These days we think it ends with lighting eight candles and giving the last gift, but it is not yet over. We overemphasize gift giving and are glad. Remember the point: its message.

On the *Haftarah*: In the *Torah* reading, the chieftains' offerings mark the Tabernacle's dedication, which in Exodus (25:8) allows God to "dwell among them." With the exiles' return to the land, it anticipates the new Temple when God again will dwell among the people. The Tabernacle atoned for the sin of idolatry, the Golden Calf, while the new Temple is purified from ritual defilement. In Hanukkah's context, it anticipates the Temple's rededication and God again "dwelling among you" (Zechariah 2:14). The *Haftarah*, by stressing God's return to our midst, marks the close of exile (of course not for all). "The new Temple symbolizes a restoration of the world, a rekindling of the lights of Creation through the pure worship of God" (Michael Fishbane). It criticizes martial means and accents spiritual ones. Rethink what is important, how we get there, the messiah and the Third Temple—free to worship with a goal to better the world.

In years with two *Shabbatot*, in the second *Haftarah*, King Hiram of Tyre (Lebanon) provides King Solomon with raw materials, another Tyrean, Hiram, a half Israelite coppersmith, works on the non-holy Temple objects, and King Solomon, works on the Temple items. Two Tyrean Hiram's show that not all non-Jews hate us (contrast two Lebanese Hiram's with Syrian Antiochus). The coppersmith Hiram teaches that *Sh'lomo Ha-melekh* used the best skills to beautify sacred space. By using the Tyrean Hiram for profane items and himself for sacred ones, King Solomon distinguishes between learned and inspired skill. Holiness needs beauty, which requires inspiration plus skill.