**Commemorating Hanukkah in Israel and the Diaspora**

**Berl Katzanelson, an Introduction to the Anthology of Heroism**

The power of forgetfulness and suppression of memory is great in Hebrew history. Much destruction, burning at the stake, tyranny and the ill fate of the defeated. And where the long arm of the external censor failed to reach, the internal censor picked up. Have we received but one line from the zealots’ literature? Hebrew acts of heroism that did not end up in victory were deemed to be expunged. The fate of the defeated! A Jewish child could have contemplated Samson and Gideon; David and his heroes; the heroism depicted in Sefer HaYashar ("Book of the Upright One"), however even the bravery of the rebellious Hasmoneans was not recorded and preserved in a proper original book and was reduced to bits of rumors and the Miracle of the cruse of oil. Any heroic act that came after the destruction of the temple; any attempt to remove the chains of the diaspora; all of the enormous sacrifices of brave warriors who couldn’t come to terms with the decrees of evil were rejected and suppressed from memory and reduced to vague tales and nebulous idioms, tucked away like dried flowers among the pages of legend and Halacha.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1 Maccabees** | **2 Maccabees** |
| **Hebrew Book vs. Greek Book** | |
| 16 chapters on 175-134 BC | 15 chapters on 175-161 BC |
| Written in Judea, most likely Jerusalem in the end of the 2nd century BC | Written in the Hellenistic Diaspora most likely Alexandria in the mid (?) 2nd century BC |
| Original Language: Biblical Hebrew (original version was lost; there are Greek and other translations) | Original Language: Hellenic Greek (in existence) |
| Many biblical innuendos and references | Few but many Greek literature references |
| Style: biblical, restrained | Style: Pathetic, sensational, grandiose |
| **Israel Vs. the Diaspora** | |
| Vast knowledge and interest in geography and topography of the land of Israel | None |
| Book topic: Hasmonean Dynasty | Book topic: The City (polis) of Jerusalem |
| Foreign rulers – evil and persecutors of the Jewish people | Foreign rulers – benevolent and good for the Jewish people |
| The surrounding peoples persecute the Jewish people | Neighboring peoples treat the Jewish people with respect |
| Divided and conflicted Jewish sects | United front except for a few rogue weeds; informers |
| The heroes are reputable warlords | The heroes are martyrs who set an example |
| Fight even on the Sabbath otherwise they will die | Highlights the severity of fighting on the Sabbath several times |
| **Judea Vs. Judaism** | |
| We are not being punished for our sins; we are being attacked by others | Our sins have angered God; attacks by others are pawns of gods anger; fundamental use of the “Song of Moses” |
| Kairos sometimes works for them and sometimes for us | Divine providence in times both good and bad |
| Martyrs have good intentions but do not solve anything; Judah Maccabee and his soldiers sooth the wrath of god | The blood of martyrs pays for sins and makes god change anger into mercy and return to protect us with his mercy |
| No miracles or phenomena; it is also emphasized three times that there are no more prophets | Many divine phenomena; God and angle interventions; the sward to defeat Nicanor is given to Judah by Jeramiah from the heavens |
| No Law of Retaliation (“Eye for an Eye”) | The law of retaliation appears many times explicitly and inexplicitly – hidden proof of god’s efficient divine providence |
| Hardly any prayers, especially after chapter 5 | Many prayers that are also answered |
| God isn’t mentioned and after chapter 5 (the beginning of the days of Judah Maccabi) only a few “god” and “heavens” | God is mentioned dozens of times throughout the book |

**Taanit Megillah (Scroll)**

On the 3rd of Tishri were removed the 'mentions' on documents. As the evil Greek empire rules the destruction of Israel and said to them denounce the kingdom of heaven and say we have nothing with the God of Israel and will not mention God’s name. And when the Hasmoneans struck, writings and mentions of God had appeared and were documented. And they would write in the year of such and such of John, the High Priest and when scholars heard of this they said that such is mentioned in deeds and the next day the deed is paid, torn and found in the garbage null and void and that day was made a holiday.

**Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 66a**

And Abaye said: From where do I say this claim of mine? As it is taught in a *baraita*: An incident occurred with King Yannai, who went to the region of Koḥalit in the desert and conquered sixty cities there. And upon his return he rejoiced with a great happiness over his victory. And he subsequently summoned all the Sages of the Jewish people and said to them: Our ancestors in their poverty would eat salty foods when they were busy with the building of the Temple; we too shall eat salty foods in memory of our ancestors. And they brought salty food on tables of gold, and ate.

And there was one person present, a scoffer, a man of an evil heart and a scoundrel called Elazar ben Po’ira. And Elazar ben Po’ira said to King Yannai: King Yannai, the hearts of the Pharisees, the Sages, are against you. In other words, they harbor secret resentment against you and do not like you. The king replied: And what shall I do to clarify this matter? Elazar responded: Have them stand by wearing the frontplate between your eyes. Since the frontplate bears the Divine Name, they should stand in its honor. Yannai, who was a member of the priestly Hasmonean family, also served as High Priest, who wears the frontplate. He had the Pharisees stand by wearing the frontplate between his eyes.

Now there was a certain elder present called Yehuda ben Gedidya, and Yehuda ben Gedidya said to King Yannai: King Yannai, the crown of the monarchy suffices for you, i.e., you should be satisfied that you are king. Leave the crown of the priesthood for the descendants of Aaron. The Gemara explains this last comment: As they would say that Yannai’s mother was taken captive in Modi’in, and she was therefore disqualified from marrying into the priesthood, which meant that Yannai was a *ḥalal*. And the matter was investigated and was not discovered, i.e., they sought witnesses for that event but none were found. And the Sages of Israel were expelled in the king’s rage, due to this rumor.

And Elazar ben Po’ira said to King Yannai: King Yannai, such is the judgment of a common person in Israel. In other words, merely expelling a slanderer is appropriate if the subject of the slander is a commoner. But you are a king and a High Priest. Is this your judgment as well? Yannai replied: And what should I do? Elazar responded: If you listen to my advice, crush them. Yannai countered: But what will become of the Torah? He retorted: Behold, it is wrapped and placed in the corner. Anyone who wishes to study can come and study. We have no need for the Sages.

The Gemara interjects: Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak says: Immediately, heresy was injected into Yannai, as he should have said to Elazar ben Po’ira: This works out well with regard to the Written Torah, as it can be studied by all on their own, but what will become of the Oral Torah? The Oral Torah is transmitted only by the Sages. The *baraita* continues: Immediately, the evil arose and caught fire through Elazar ben Po’ira, and all the Sages of the Jewish people were killed. And the world was desolate of Torah until Shimon ben Shataḥ came and restored the Torah to its former glory. This completes the *baraita*.

**Shabbat 22b**

The Gemara asks: What is Hanukkah, and why are lights kindled on Hanukkah? The Gemara answers: The Sages taught in *Megillat Ta*’*anit*: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them. What is the reason? When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary by touching them. And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest, undisturbed by the Greeks. **And there was** sufficient oil **there to light** the candelabrum for **only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit** the candelabrum **from it eight days. The next year** the Sages **instituted** those days **and made them holidays with** recitation of ***hallel* and** special **thanksgiving** in prayer and blessings.

**Al Hanissim “For the Miracles”**

And we praise You for the miracles and for the redemption and for the mighty deeds and for the victories and for the battles that You performed for our fathers in those days at this time:

In the days of Mattisyahu, the son of Yochanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons, when the wicked kingdom of Greece rose up against Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah and to stray from the laws of Your will, You, with great mercy stood by them in the time of their distress. You fought their fight, judged their cause and avenged them with vengeance. You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous and the arrogant into the hands of those engaged with Your Torah. For Yourself you made a great and holy name in Your world, you performed a great deliverance for Your people Israel on this day. After these things, Your children entered into the Holy of Holies of Your House, cleansed Your Temple, purified the place of Your Holiness, kindled lights in Your holy courts and established these eight days of Hanukkah to express thanksgiving and praise to Your great name.)

**Rambam Megillah and Hanukah, Chapter 3**

In the days of the Second Temple, when the Greeks ruled over Israel, invalidated their religion and would forbid them to practice the Torah and its mitzvahs (edicts); violated they properties and daughters; forced entry and desecrated the holy temple until out God saved them and the Hasmonean killed them, thus liberating Israel and instating a king from the priesthood and the kingdom returned for 200 years until the second destruction.

**Ramban on Genesis 49:10**

And that was [the cause for] the punishment of the Hasmoneans who reigned during [the time] of the second Temple - as they were [otherwise] lofty pious ones; and, but for them, the Torah and the commandments would have been forgotten from Israel. And nonetheless they were punished a great punishment; as four of the sons of the elder Hasmonean who reigned one after the other - [in spite] all of their strength and their success - fell to the hands of their enemies by the sword. And in the end, the punishment reached to that which the rabbis, may their memory be blessed, said ([Bava Batra 3a](/Bava_Batra.3a)), "Anyone who says, 'I come from the Hasmonean dynasty' is a slave" - as they were all excised from this sin. And even though there was a punishment to the seed of Shimon [the Hasmonean] due [to their being] Sadducees, the entire seed of Mattatyahu the righteous Hasmonean was only removed because of this - that they ruled and they were not from the seed of Yehudah and from the House of David, and [that] they removed the scepter and the law-inscriber from Yehudah completely. And their punishment was poetic justice, as the Holy One, blessed be He, had their slaves rule over them, and [these slaves] cut them off. And it is also possible that their reign was a sin for them because they were priests (Kohanim) and they were commanded ([Numbers 18:7](/Numbers.18.7)), "guard your priesthood in everything pertaining to the altar and to what is behind the curtain; I make your priesthood a service of dedication" - and they should not have reigned, [bur rather, just] served the service of the Lord.

**Rabbi Zadok ha-Kohen Rabinowitz of**[**Lublin**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lublin) **– compilation of writings page 54**

The kingdoms of David and Judea love David and want to see him king which is not the same for the rule of Joseph over his brothers that was taken by force (not by their will) and the rule of Joshua by conquering the land and commanding 31 kings; Jerovam who rebels himself as well as Omri and Yehu and all of the house of Joseph. Future Messiah of the house of Joseph he will defeat the nations and will rule by force, whereas, Messiah of the house of David with receive rule and governance accepted as king; the rule of the house of Joseph is needed only for the influence and plentiful bounty he provides.

**Haim Nachman Bialik, To the Volunteers Among the People**

“And we are a poor and oppressed generation / the hearts of our sons struck,

And one thing is at our disposal and that is our formidable mallet

Our strength should not be scorned as we place our courage in the hands of god

To aid the people! To aid the people!

For what? Wouldn’t you ask? We will find

Uncover the light! Reveal the glow!

If the mountains of Nashaf slide upon us, the flickers will not die out

From these mounts we will carve a flame; from the rocky gorges - plentiful sapphire

In the bottom of the people and in the bottoms of their souls a divine dwelling will shine

Oh, sons of the Maccabees, step up and lead the generation

Uncover the light! Reveal the glow!”

**We are Carrying Torches” – Anu Nos’im Lapidim – a poem by Aharon Ze’ev**

We are carrying torches. / In the dark night / the paths shine beneath our feet, / and whoever has a heart / that thirsts for light – / let him lift his eyes and his heart to us / and come along. / No miracle happened for us. / No cruise of oil did we find. / We walked through the valley, ascended the mountain. / We discovered wellsprings of hidden light.

We quarried in the stone until we bled: / “Let there be light!”

Aharon Ze’ev, 1900-1968

**S. Goren “Spirit and Force in the Jewish Mishna”, Mahanayim (1965)**

The holiday of Hanukah is symbol of victory of the few over the many and due to the nature of an imbalanced war with unique sacred goals against the Greeks who wanted erase the memory of the Jewish people. And yet the Talmudic scholars chose to highlight Miracle of the cruse of oil rather than the military achievements… this demonstrates extent of the Torah scholars and the peoples’ objection to relating crowns to heroes and victorious warlords, thus rejecting the attribution of bravery to a particular person. The physical victory on the battlefield and the motives of bravery are considered a danger to the foundations of the Jewish faith as it inspires idolization and reverence of human beings.