

In My Opinion...

By Amy Krakovitz Montoni

As the end of the secular year rolls around, we begin to reassess ourselves. Unlike Rosh Hashanah, when we review our spiritual accomplishments and disappointments of the year past, we tend to focus on things outside ourselves at the end of the calendar year. Many people take stock of their physical selves, vowing to eat more healthfully, to exercise more vigorously, or to stop smoking or other bad habits. And unlike the end of the Jewish year, when we gather friends, family and acquaintances into our hearts to ask forgiveness, we use this year ending to say thank you to all for what they have brought to our lives.

I would like to thank many of you. To the voluntary subscribers, thank you again for your contribution to the well being of *The Charlotte Jewish News*. Someday when there is enough room, I will publish all your names. You are generous and I am grateful for your support. Anyone who would like to sustain us with a voluntary subscription may use the form below.

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Thanks to three wonderful advertising sales people. To Rita, who really IS *The Charlotte Jewish News*; to Pam, who keeps on plugging; to Debbie, our newest addition; thank you all of you, I know that the paper means as much to you as it does to me.

Thank you to Erin for a beautiful layout and never complaining when there's always "just one more thing" before the issue is complete.

To all my terrific contributors: thank you for getting things as close to "on time" as you can. I will do my best never to publish without your articles if you do your best to not make me beg for your stories.

To the staff of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, who makes my job easy. Thanks for the camera, the suggestions, and the moral support. And a special year-end thank you to Marvin Goldberg. We miss you already.

Thank you to you, those of you who read the paper. I hope you enjoy it and it keeps you well-informed about the Jewish communities in Charlotte, the nation, and the world.

Finally, thank you to my special family. Thanks to No. 2 son for letting me work while he waits patiently for me to take him home. Thanks to No. 1 son for letting me use the computer at home when I know he wants to chat online. And thanks to Mr. M. for being my best friend and resident psychologist.

Happy Chanukah and Happy New Year to all. ☆



Point of View

Each issue of the CJN features an article written by one of the rabbis active in the Charlotte Community.

This Month:

Rabbi Jessica Spitalnic of Temple Beth El

There is an American Jewish folk story that tells of a mid-winter night at Valley Forge when the American Revolutionary troops have lost hope and George Washington is feeling low. As the story is told, George Washington takes a walk through the camp and comes upon a Jewish member of the Continental Army lighting his chanukiah.

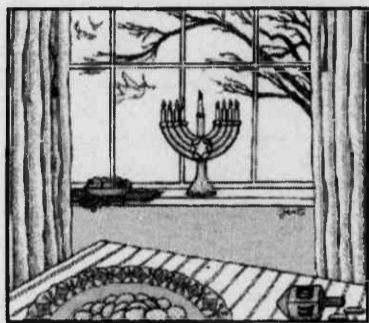
The soldier explains Chanukah to George Washington. He explains the story of another people in another land fighting oppression almost 2,000 years earlier. The soldier tells Washington of the rule of the Selucids in the Middle East and the king Antiochus IV. He tells of the Jewish people under Hellenistic rule and the desecration of their Temple in Jerusalem. He shares the heroic story of the Hasmonean family of priests in the Judean town of Modin. He tells of the battles of the small Jewish army against the well-armed troops of the king. Washington listens to the tale of their leaders, as they are led first by the patriarch Mattiyahu and then of his son Judah, nicknamed the Maccabee (the Hammer). The soldier tells of the victory of the Jewish people, the faith in God that sustained them and the reclaiming of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. He tells of the rededication of the Temple and the one day's supply of pure olive oil to light the Menorah in the Temple and the miracle of the oil. That night after night the small amount of oil lasted for eight full days. Washington, enthralled with the soldier's story, finds renewed strength to go on. Later, the first president sends the soldier a silver menorah and a letter that says, "Judaism has a lot to offer the world. You should be proud to be a Jew." (Adapted from *The Art of Jewish Living: Hanukkah*, Dr. Ron Wolfson, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996.)

While the verity of the American Jewish folk tale is unclear, the message of inspiration

found in the Chanukah story is clear. George Washington walked through his dark camp looking for light and he found it.

Light has always been a powerful symbol to the Jewish people. Look at Genesis 1:3. "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated light from darkness." The power of the words, "Let there be light" should ring in our ears at this time of Chanukah.

There is a famous debate between the house of Hillel and the house of Shammai as to the way the Chanukah lights should



be lit. The students of Shammai said that Chanukah should begin with eight lights and one light should be taken away each night. The followers of Hillel disagreed. They said that Chanukah should begin with one light and each night one light should be added, because holiness is something that must grow and not become smaller.

Not only do we add one light each Chanukah night, we also place our Chanukah menorahs near a window, a visible testimony to the world at large of the miracle of Chanukah. Furthermore, we are instructed that the light of the Chanukah menorah may not be used for reading by, lighting a room, or any other utilitarian purpose. This is a light that is meant to be shared and not wasted on our own personal needs. We can share the light of Chanukah by doing our part in the community at large — volunteer work, visiting the

sick, and other acts of *gemilut hasidim*, acts of lovingkindness, at this time and year round — acts that bring light to the lives of others. As beings created *biselem Elohim*, in the image of God, we like God, can use Chanukah as a time to shine a light that is good throughout our world through good deeds and kind words.

We can also shine a light within our own community. Each candle of the menorah offers its own light. Every single light is beautiful and every single light has the honor of testifying to the miraculous story of Chanukah and every single light has the ability to inspire. The Jewish people, like the lights of the chanukiah, have different branches that are beautiful and inspirational. And like the lights of the chanukiah that are united by the strong central base of the chanukiah, so too are the diverse lights of the Jewish people united by the strong central base of Judaism and the belief in God, Torah and Israel.

Two hundred years after George Washington, another person put his inspiration found in the Chanukah candles into song. "Light One Candle" by Peter Yarrow, of "Peter, Paul and Mary" fame reminds us again of the timeless message in the light of the Chanukah candles. He sings, "Light one candle for the Maccabee children, give thanks that their light didn't die; Light one candle for the pain they endured when their right to exist was denied; Light one candle for the terrible sacrifice justice and freedom demand; Light one candle for the wisdom to know when the peacemaker's time is at hand."

Yarrow's song reminds us yet again that the power of the Chanukah story is timeless. But it is impossible to convey the message of the Chanukah story if we do not shine a light — both internally and externally — and use that light for the good that it was created for at the very beginning. ☆

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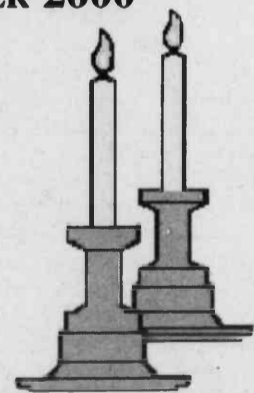
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