NEWLY REVISED edition, including:
Celebrations in Intercultural Families

THE HANUKA FESTIVAL — A GUIDE FOR THE REST OF US

by Hershl Hartman, *vegvayzer*

A few words before we begin...

Jews, both adults and children, even those from culturally conscious or religiously observant homes, cannot be convinced that *khanike* is a reasonable substitute for the tinsel, glitter and sentimentality that surround Xmas, the American version of Christmas that has virtually engulfed the world.

Accordingly, it is *not* the purpose of this work to help project *khanike* as an "alternative Xmas" but, rather, to provide non-observant Jewish families with a factual understanding of the festival's origins and traditions so that it may be celebrated meaningfully and joyously in its own right.

Why "...for the rest of us"? Increasingly, American Jews are identifying with their ethnic culture, rather than with the Jewish religion. At the same time, Hanuka is being projected more aggressively as a *religious* holiday, focused on the "Miracle of the Lights," purporting to celebrate "history's first victorious struggle for *religious* freedom," to quote the inevitable editorial in your local newspaper. Actually, as we shall see, Hanuka is nothing of the sort. The issues of "religious freedom" vs. "national liberation" vs. "multicultural rights" were actually confronted back in the second century B.C.E., albeit with other terminology. This booklet seeks to separate fact from fancy so that those who identify with Jewish culture will not feel excluded from celebrating the festival.

Now, about the matter of spelling. The "right" way to spell it is: חנוכה. What is the "best" way to *transliterate* the Hebrew into English? The earliest "official" form was **Chanukah** or its inexplicable variants: **Chan*n*ukah** and **Chanuk*k*ah**. Hearing non-speakers of Yiddish or Hebrew saying "*tcha*-noo-ka" convinced the arbiters of these things to try **Hanuka** and *its* variegated versions: **Hanuka*h*, Han*n*ukah, Hanuk*k*ah**, etc. None of these approximate the Yiddish (Ashkenazi) pronunciation for which there *is* a transliteration standard: ***khanike***. That's the form that most satisfies the author, although he has bowed to common practice in this work. You are free to make your own choices. The right to be different is part of what khanike is all about...

—Hershl Hartman

Do you sometimes find it difficult to maintain the 'Hanuka spirit' when:

- the Oil Miracle seems just too mythological?
- the 'superiority' of Hebrew lore over Greek philosophy doesn't jibe with your college classics course?
- giving children eight gifts appears more like consumerism than Judaism?
- ...even celebrating the Maccabees' victory feels a bit too militaristic for comfort?

Take heart: your ambivalence is not unique in Jewish history and traditions. From its very beginning—even *before* its official beginning—Hanuka has been a controversial festival. For almost 2,000 years, thanks to the Talmudic rabbis, it was considered a "minor holiday," when ordinary work is permitted. The record of its historical origins, the Book of Maccabees, was excluded from the Bible. To this day there is continuing controversy over the "real meaning" of Hanuka.

To help sort it all out, perhaps it would be helpful to go back to the very beginning of a festival that the ancient Hebrews and their descendants in Palestine came to know as *Neyrot*, or Lights.

Primitive Origins

Primitive people everywhere and especially in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East met the crisis of the winter solstice, the dying sun, with the traditions of imitative magic. To encourage the rebirth of the sun, they lit bonfires or, as in the rites of Dionysus, ran through the hills, carrying torches. In some cultures, ever-larger fires were lit on successive nights. In more northerly Europe, the threat of the death of all living things was ameliorated by the promise of rebirth inherent in the evergreen fir tree. Worshipping it encouraged the rest of nature to be reborn. The trunk of that tree, the *yule log*, was set ablaze as an example to the sun of what was expected of it. In Scandinavia, young women parade to the village square wearing wreaths of candles in their hair, creating a blaze of light. In all these customs, human activity is seen as manipulating the forces of nature, rather than posing humans as the mere subjects or victims of natural or supernatural forces.

In ancient Israel, these primitive winter solstice customs were retained in the eight-day folk festival of *Neyrot*. As a folk holiday, it was disdained by the priesthood and is not mentioned in the Bible. Interestingly, when the Talmudic rabbis sought to downplay the Maccabean exploits, they turned to the flame-lighting traditions of *Neyrot*. Even such an unremittingly pagan tradition was preferable, it seems, to a celebration of the hated Maccabees. We, however, need to recall and understand the important episode in Jewish history that underlies the modern festival of Hanuka.

Hanuka — The Historical Aspect

Among the many major contributions of secularists to the history and development of the Jewish people is their historians' rescue of the Maccabean revolt from the secret chamber into which it had been thrust by rabbinic Judaism for almost 2,000 years. It is virtually impossible to transmit the utter, liberated joy of Jewish young people in the 1880s and beyond—both in "the old home" of Eastern Europe and "the new countries" in the Americas, Palestine, South Africa and Australia—upon learning that the Maccabees did more than mint fresh coins upon rededicating the Temple in Jerusalem; that they had conducted a successful revolt against a mighty Empire. The Yiddish poet Morris Rosenfeld rhapsodized:

I have an ancient dream:
Jew, you were a warrior once;
Jew, you were a victor once!
O, how strange that seems!

More than poetics expressed their delight. In post-World War I Europe and in the Palestinian *yishuv*, Zionist youth organizations formed soccer teams and leagues called *makabi* and competed in tournaments called *makabiada*, a sort of Jewish Olympics. (That the Maccabean revolt was directed, in part, *against* Hellenic athletics did not seem to bother the young Zionist enthusiasts; one can only imagine the horror of the anti-Zionist Orthodox rabbinate of the time.) Beyond sports, the principle of armed Jewish self-defense that was shared by both Zionist and Socialist youth took inspiration from the Maccabees and was later expressed in Jewish anti-Nazi resistance and in Israel's war of independence.

Hanuka, unlike other Jewish holidays, is based on historical fact, verified in the Book of Maccabees and in other sources.

The history of the Maccabees is complex; what follows is a condensation of the summary provided by Dr. Theodor Gaster (*Festivals of the Jewish Year*):

When Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.E.) conquered the Persian Empire, including Palestine, the influence of Hellenism (Greek culture, language, philosophy, religion) began to spread, aided by a policy that we might call, nowadays, "cultural pluralism." The subject peoples of the Hellenic Empire, from Egypt to India, were permitted to "follow the ways of their fathers" as long as they obeyed their rulers and paid their taxes. In the tiny but strategically located corner of the empire known as Judah, the nobility and much of the priesthood began to become Hellenized, but the peasants and artisans resisted assimilation.

After the death of Alexander, the empire was divided among his generals who formed the separate kingdoms of Egypt in the south under the Ptolemaic dynasty and Syria in the north under the Seleucid dynasty. Palestine, which lay between them, passed from one to the other for over a century until, in 198 B.C.E., it was conquered by Antiochus the Great, king of Syria. His son, Antiochus IV, ascended the throne in 175 B.C.E. and commenced planning an attack on the Ptolemies of Egypt, partly to prevent them from seeking to avenge or reverse his father's theft of Palestine. Preparation for that effort required "national unity," which Antiochus IV sought by replacing Alexander's traditional policy of "cultural pluralism" with one of "cultural imperialism."

In Jerusalem, that policy resulted in the removal of the moderately Hellenistic high priest of the Temple, Onias, replaced by his more fully assimilated brother, Joshua, who promptly adopted the emphatically non-Jewish name, Jason. (This may come as something of a shock to a whole generation of American Jews named Jason.)

The Hellenistic trend that had started generations earlier in a relatively natural way now became accelerated under the pressures of both the Seleucid imperial state and the Jewish theocratic state. Among the peasants and artisans, however, state pressures produced stiffened resistance, rather than compliance. *They* could not gain status by dressing in Greek costumes or by playing in the gymnasium, but they would lose their own identities if they ceased to be Jews. A resistance movement developed, called the Pietists (*hasidim*—no relation to the current *hasidic* sects) which sought only a return of the right to "follow the ways of the fathers," *i.e.*, religious freedom.

Antiochus, frustrated in his plans to conquer Egypt by a warning from Rome, the newly developing superpower, intensified his efforts to weld the disparate peoples of his empire into a single Seleucid whole. It wasn't the classical culture of Grecian splendor he had in mind. He proclaimed Zeus to be a super-god with whom all the lesser gods of the subject peoples would be identified. He also declared himself to be "Epiphanes," the living manifestation of the super-god. To make himself perfectly clear, he ordered that the new title, Antiochus Epiphanes, appear on all newly-minted coins and that services in all religious holy places—in Jerusalem, that meant the Temple—be conducted in accordance with the new state religion. Failure to comply was punishable by death.

The order was brought to the small town of Modin, to its aged Jewish priest named Mattathias (in the Greek pronunciation; *matesyohu* in Hebrew), of the family called Hasmoneans (*khashmanoyim*). His response, as retold in the First Book of Maccabees (2:17-28):

"Even if all the nations within the king's dominions...fall away each one from its ancestral faith...yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers."...Now, when he had finished speaking these words, there came a Jew...to sacrifice on the altar...in the manner prescribed by the king's commandment. But when Mattathias saw him, his zeal was inflamed...and he slew him beside the altar. And Mattathias cried out in the city in a loud voice: "Whoever is zealous for the Law and would maintain the Covenant—let him follow me." And he and his sons fled to the hills.

It is clear, then, that the spark lit in Modin ignited both a civil war and a war of liberation.

The Pietists believed, rightly, that the Hasmonean partisan brigades were aiming for more than a restoration of the former "religious freedom" but were intent on ousting the Seleucid empire as it weakened under pressure from ever-expanding Rome. An uneasy "united front" was established, with the common aim of driving the enemy, including Jewish collaborators, out of the now-defiled Temple in Jerusalem. Leadership of this peasant guerrilla army, after the death of Mattathias, was vested in the third of his five sons, Judah, whom his followers named "the hammer"—*ha'makabi*, the Maccabee. After a three-year guerrilla-war campaign, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and the Temple, cleansed it on the 25th of Kislev, 166 B.C.E., and proclaimed an eight-day celebration, "like *sukis* (Sukkot)." Thus, *khanike* or Hanuka, dedication.

Had theirs been the only revolt in the empire, there is little doubt that Antiochus could have crushed it easily. However, other subject peoples were also rising up against Antiochus' decrees. His troops, therefore, were fighting a multi-front war, in Parthia and Armenia, for example. (Che Guevara, in our day, called a similar situation "one, two, many Viet Nams.") It can be truly said, therefore, that the victory of the Maccabees was due, not to supernatural intervention nor to moral superiority, but to the simultaneous struggles of many oppressed peoples for their own freedom. And, by the same token, the Maccabean victory hastened the liberation of other peoples.

Is it any wonder that the Zionist and Socialist youth of our century found such inspiration in the history of Hanuka?

More—and less—inspiration could be found in the post-liberation record of the Maccabean dynasty, for such it became. On the plus side, from one point of view, was their fulfillment of the goal of national independence, rather than mere "religious freedom." On the negative side was how they behaved as independent rulers.

Says Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine (*Judaism Beyond God*):

In many respects the Maccabees were no different from Antiochus. Each adversary was committed to the absolute validity of his position and to the necessity of destroying all opposition. The Hellenists fared no better under the Maccabees than the pious did under Antiochus...Ultimately, John Maccabee, through his conquest of Samaria and Galilee, sought to impose Jewish identity on the newly conquered. As a Jewish Antiochus, he combined imperialism with religious conformity.

Let us note here, painfully, that the imposition of Jewish identity—and its re-imposition on Hellenists—involved forced male circumcision. Wine adds:

National liberation is distinct from personal liberation...What the Maccabees achieved for the Jews was not religious freedom or personal independence...(but)...a government of Jews who were not the puppets of outside powers...In so far as they were independent, the nation was independent.

A more historical view is offered by Theodor Gaster, who cautions:

...we must not read modern ideas and ideals into an ancient story. At the time of the Maccabees, the modern concept of personal liberty of conscience had not yet been developed, and religion was a collective regimen rather than an individual persuasion.

And then there is the role that the Maccabean uprising played in the American Revolution. The ministers of the Congregational Church in New England faced a dilemma: their hearts were with the colonists but their theology taught that kings ruled by divine right. Where in the holy books was permission given to oppose the royalty that God had anointed? They found it in the First Book of Maccabees. "Resistance to tyranny," said old *matesyohu*, "is obedience to God." Gotcha, George III! Hi there, Sam Adams!

When and Why The Oil Myth Was Invented

The story of the one-day flask of sanctified lamp oil that lasted for eight days appears in the Talmud, written centuries later. It is one of three *contradictory* Talmudic stories on the same subject.

But, first, some background.

There were many reasons for the intense dislike, in the post-Hasmonean era, of the rabbis for the Maccabees and for the intense efforts over several centuries to suppress their memory. Many rabbis sided with the Pietists in their emphasis on spiritual, rather than military, might. The Maccabees, they noted, assumed both religious and temporal power, contravening Jewish tradition that put the state into the hands of descendants of King David.

"And worst of all," writes Arthur Waskow (*Seasons of Our Joy*), "the Hasmonean kings sided with the Sadducees, the priestly upholders of the primacy of Temple sacrifice...against the Pharisees—forerunners of the rabbis who saw prayer and the study and interpretation of Torah as the path to God." And it was the Maccabees who allied the Jewish state with Rome, opening the way to Roman domination that threatened Jewish sovereignty on the one hand and, on the other, raised the specter of wholesale slaughter in the event of Maccabee-inspired uprisings.

This last motive for the rabbis to replace the Maccabees with a miraculous flask of oil leads a bemused Theodor Gaster to note that "it is as if the Catholic church, nervous about the implications of the Christmas story, had officially substituted the Yule log for the cradle in the manger as the symbol of the day when Jesus was born."

Whatever their motives, it is clear that the rabbis, who ruled under Roman domination, took steps to minimize the Maccabees as far as they could. The Book of Maccabees, as noted, was excluded from the Bible; Hanuka is the only holiday not even mentioned in the *mishna*, the first level, or layer, of the Talmud. "And in the later layer—the *gemara*—it is treated in a very off-hand way," Waskow notes:

> The rabbis are discussing what kinds of candles may be used for Shabbos when one of them asks, rather casually, whether the rules for Hanukkah (sic) candles are different. They explore this for a bit, talk about how the candles are to be lit, and then one of them says, as if he cannot quite remember, "What is Hanukkah?" They answer him:
>
> *Our rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev [begin] the eight days of Hanukkah, on which lamentation for the dead and fasting are forbidden. When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils in it, and when the Hasmonean dynasty...defeated them, they searched and found only one bottle of oil sealed by the High Priest. It contained only enough for one day's lighting. Yet a miracle was brought about with it...they lit [with that oil] for eight days...[Shabbat 21b].*
>
> And at once the rabbis go back to discussing the candles. They have no more to say about the internal divisions of the Jews, the revolt against Antiochus, the victory of the Maccabees, the rededication of the Temple...

They have no more to say about the vaunted Miracle of the Lights, either. And for good reason. The oil-that-continues-to-burn was a tired old magician's trick by then. As Hayyim Schauss (*The Jewish Festivals*) notes, the Greeks "also relate that the bit of oil poured into the lamp near the statue of the goddess Athena, on the Acropolis, burned for an entire year."

Even more significantly, Schauss points out that "Amongst Jews the...miracle ...is also found in the tales of Elijah and Elisha"—*in the Bible*! Sure enough, Elijah (I Kings 17:16) tells of an oil jug that keeps on pouring and Elisha (II Kings 4:1-6)

relates the tale of a debt-foreclosure averted by a jug of oil that keeps filling other containers that can be sold.

Schauss underlines another significant matter: in other parts of the Talmud, the rabbis explain the Hanuka candles and the eight-day length of the festival *without referring to any miracles at all!* In one part of the *midrash*, the third layer of the Talmud, the reason for kindling lights on Hanuka is given thus:

> When the sons of the Hasmonean, the high Priest, defeated the Greeks they entered the Temple and found there eight iron spears. They stuck candles in these spears and kindled them.

Elsewhere in the Talmud, Schauss continues, the eight-day length of the festival is explained by the fact that it took the Hasmoneans (the rabbis preferred to avoid the term, Maccabees) eight days to erect and whitewash the new altar and to install the new sacred utensils. The reason for kindling the lights, in this contradictory version, is that the Hasmoneans entered the Temple carrying *their own* eight iron spears which they then covered with wood in which they kindled lights.

Further commentary on these 'sacred commentaries' would be superfluous.

A Hanuka Celebration For The Rest of Us:

a) The Secularist *menora/khanike lempl*

Having, by now, thoroughly trashed the erstwhile Talmudic oil-miracle folderol, have we not thereby crushed underfoot the eight-branched candelabra that has been the symbol of Hanuka for over 2,000 years? Not at all. As described above, the Hanuka lights have their roots deep in the customs that are common to all humanity, the means by which primitive and ancient people sought to exercise *human* control over the unruly forces of nature.

In fact, we have seen that part of the motivation for the creation of the oil-miracle legend was the need to imbue the ancient folk-tradition with a "holy" significance that it did not have. The origin of the Hanuka lights is non-religious. Should Secularists, of all people, discard them?

And yet there are Secular and Humanistic Jews who find that a ceremonial lighting of candles is too close to religious ritual for their comfort. Not only on Hanuka. On *shabes* (*shabat*, sabbath), too.

It is not candles, *per se*, that they find objectionable. Candles on a dining table are acceptable, charming, beautiful, even romantic. It is the *ceremonial* kindling of candles that makes them uncomfortable. This stricture, however, does not seem to apply to birthday cake candles which are both lit and extinguished ceremonially, not to say *ritually*.

The problem, somehow, seems to center only on Jewish ceremonial candles. Consistency and intellectual honesty would, then, demand equal rejection of *fireworks* during celebrations of July 4th, or of Bastille Day, *yom ha'atzmaut*, or in the skies over Moscow in celebration of victory in the Great Patriotic War.

For Jewish ceremonial candles are the fireworks of a small people, oppressed for much of its recent history, in exile of one kind or another for much of its existence—a people that has never been accorded the right of national/cultural self-determination, not even in the nominally free New World, not to this very day. Those candles are our fireworks. But they are more than that: they are our link with the common human foundation on which every people's culture grew and developed. There is no rational reason to break that link and, certainly, no Secularist or Humanistic reasons to do so.

Before we turn to the matter of what to do when lighting the candles and while they're burning, please permit a small, personal digression about terminology.

For just about a millennium, the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe had a fond, diminutive name for the Hanuka candle holder: *khanike lempl*, or little Hanuka lamp. Then, in the course of the present century, the Reform movement on

this continent decreed that the once-modest little lamp, now growing ever-larger as Hanuka became more and more popular in Western countries, should be called by a grander name: *menorah*, candelabrum. Moreover, it was not to be pronounced *menoyre*, in the Ashkenazic way.

Most North American Jews went along, fearing to appear uncouth, unlettered, or somehow anti-Israel. Yet, lo and behold, it was from Israel itself that a new decree came forth. Inasmuch as *menorah*, in modern Hebrew, can mean any light—even a traffic light—the Hanuka lamp was hereafter to be called by all right-thinking Jews a...*hanukiah* (or *khanukeeya*, if you want to be gutturally trans-literative about it).

For me, both *menorah* and *hanukiah* evoke the huge, public-display monstrosities that the followers of Chabad (*khabad*, actually) insist on erecting alongside Christmas trees on public property as a means of proving that Jewish fundamentalists, too, can disdain the First Amendment. If it's alright with everyone concerned, I think I'll go back to calling it by the name it had before it assimilated: *a poshet* (a simple) *khanike lempl*. End of digression

b) A Folk-Cultural Hanuka Observance

The challenge is: how can Secularist and Humanistic Jews celebrate Hanuka in a meaningful, moving, enjoyable way without compromising their integrity just to 'go along?' The question is *not* any of these: How do they celebrate Hanuka *in Israel?* What are the *traditional* ways of celebrating Hanuka? What aspects of Hanuka am I, personally, most *nostalgic* about? These may all be legitimate questions, but they do not help us determine what aspects of the traditions associated with Hanuka can be adopted or adapted to meet the needs of Secular and Humanistic Jewish families, both in-married and inter-cultural.

In addition to the central role of the Hanuka lights, a Secularist and Humanistic Hanuka celebration must focus on the Maccabees without attempting to depict them as simply the "heroic leaders of a people's uprising for freedom." It is important that we and our children know that great leaders—in storied history no less than in the recent past—are no more than human, with all the frailties and weaknesses that we recognize in ourselves. With that understanding, we can and should—must—honor the Maccabees for their roles as leaders of a truly radical struggle for national self-determination in opposition to both the assimilationist and pietistic paths that continue to contend for loyalty among the Jewish people.

The self-delusion of the Hellenists in Jerusalem is still with us—the idea that denial of our own identity, stripping off our own cultural uniqueness, somehow brings us closer to others (who have their own identities, after all) or somehow hastens the day when all humanity will be bereft of distinctive identities and that this is somehow A Good Thing. And still among us is the self-delusion of the Pietists—the concept that all wisdom, all knowledge, all virtue is assigned to the anointed of Gee-dash-Dee and that if the rest of us would but follow blindly behind self-erected ghetto walls, shunning *them* and any of *their non-kosher ideas*, then surely *moshiakh*, the Messiah, will arrive, perhaps not in Brooklyn but certainly on prime-time television and the Internet.

One way to place the Maccabees at the center of our Hanuka observance is to tell their story, simply and honestly. Another way is to dedicate the candles to others in history and in our own time, Jews and non-Jews, who exemplify some aspect of the Maccabean spirit. The concept need not necessarily be limited to individuals: ideas, too, are worthy of celebration—including the idea of cultural pluralism that is discussed just above. Most important is the thought process that goes into making the selection of people or ideas to be honored. A discussion of the reasons for their selection makes an interesting while-the-candles-burn-down activity, even if it's not as engrossing as betting on the candle-that-lasts-the-longest.

Candle dedications, no matter how intellectually meaningful, cannot truly be emotionally moving. For that, we need to look to the sources that religion has exploited so successfully: poetry and music. Secular and Humanistic Hanuka observances, communal and familial, can be inordinately enriched by appropriate

readings: some brief, some not-so-brief, some funny, some moving, some heart-rending, some soul-lifting—but all expressing what we feel as well as think about the whole, rounded, profound meaning of Hanuka in our past, distant and recent, in our present and in our future, not overlooking what must be done and overcome if we are to have any future at all. We might—should—even try our hands at writing some of these readings. But where to find the rest?

Where we find appropriate readings for Hanuka depends on where we look; where we look depends on our outlook as to the fundamental nature of Secular and Humanistic Jewishness.

Some Secularists and Humanists limit their search to religious rituals, customs, *aggadot*, sayings of the sages, etc., taking care to eliminate all direct references to the deity. That step, they seem to believe, produces certifiably secular material, appropriately "kosherized," in Sherwin Wine's phrase, by dutiful adherance to "the tradition." No matter that the ethos of such material is unremittingly non- or anti-humanistic (e.g., in attitudes toward women or non-Jews). Little concern that this newly-secularized wisdom comes no closer to modern times than the tenth century C.E. and does not reflect more than a thousand years of relevant and exceedingly rich Jewish experience. It's easy. It's all laid out. It's comfortingly familiar. However, it is not a useful contribution to the development of celebrations *for the rest of us.*

In addition to the stated objections to bowdlerizing material from the religious tradition, there is the consideration that inherent in the act is the implication that Secularists and Humanists can only delete—that we have nothing new, useful and creative to contribute. That is a confession that all thoughtful Secular Humanistic Jews will reject.

We have much to contribute. Very little of our treasure has been translated into English. Worse yet, very little of that treasure is known to its rightful inheritors, the leaders and spokespeople of Secular Humanistic Jewishness.

It is for that reason—and not from motives of maudlin nostalgia—that we must gain access to the treasure-trove of the thousand-year tradition known as Yiddish culture. That culture is secular and humanistic to its very core, in its very marrow. Without it, we cannot hope to develop celebrations, observances and life-cycle events that are meaningful, moving and, above all, rooted in rich Jewish tradition.

Without access to the scores of thousands of poems...the volumes full of pithy, profound and funny folk expressions...the historical, cultural, anthropological and social insights of hundreds of thinkers, researchers and essayists...the hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of songs created both by and for the folk...the thousands of personal memoirs that can keep an army of historical researchers going on grants for decades...and, yes, whole libraries full of novels, plays and short stories...overflowing archives of thousands of newspapers and periodicals from every continent on earth—without access to this treasure trove we cannot create a meaningful, viable Secular and Humanistic expression in Jewish life.

Even if, somehow, we could figure out how to do so while bypassing a tradition that is truly our own, we would still be guilty of depriving the Jewish people as a whole of its access to our treasure-trove. For if we don't provide it, no one will.

All of which is emphatically *not* a call for the Secular and Humanistic Jewish movement to become Yiddishistic or even Yiddish-speaking. It is, rather, a call to exert the necessary energies required to gain access to our cultural treasure-trove and to use it to the fullest extent possible, lest we and all our works become sterile, unrooted and cut off from a past of richness that we can hardly imagine or hope to duplicate.

In terms of the immediate question at hand—what to do while lighting and watching the Hanuka candles—I have no doubt that there are at least thirty-six poems about the *makabeyer*, the Maccabees, in twentieth-century Yiddish literature. Some brilliant, no doubt; some probably marginal, but thirty-six times better than what we have at the moment. (See Appendix.) And as for music, we will never make *Maoz Tzur*, ("Rock of Ages") secular, nor *Judas Maccabeus* Jewish, while secular humanistic Yiddish songs abound.

c) The Fun Part

The dreydl. No need to retell and debunk the tortured attempts, in Sunday School coloring books, to link this medieval Central European custom with events in the Middle East a millenium earlier. The Yiddish *dreydl* is a spinning top, originally made of lead by schoolboys (*kheyder yinglekh*) who carved their own wooden molds. It was used in a gambling game, played by children during the time it took for the small *khanike likht*, Hanuka candles, to burn down. Rabbinic tradition forbids using the lights for reading, so gambling—cards for adults, *dreydl* for children—was a festive pastime.

The secular *dreydl* was "kosherized" by giving its letters a pious meaning: *Nes Godol Hoyo Shom*—a great miracle happened there. Actually, the letters stand for gambling values. Next to each of the Hebrew letters below is its name, its game value in Yiddish and in English. Learn 'em or lose!

gimel; gantz, gut Take all	ג	*nun; nisht,* Nothing (pass)	נ
sheen; shtel, Pay the pot	ש	*hey; halb,* Take half the pot	ה

To start the game, each player (any number can play) puts an equal number of tokens (traditionally, nuts or candies) into the "pot." Each player, in turn, spins the *dreydl*, adding to or taking from the pot as determined by the letter that faces upward when the *dreydl* falls. In the event of disputes, the decision of the nearest adult shall be final. Or not.

Very important: the plural of *dreydl* is **not** "*dreydls*" no matter what you may read or hear elsewhere. It is ***dreydlakh.*** Winners at the game may not keep their spoils unless they repeat three times: *dreydlakh, dredlakh, dreydlakh.* It's a rule.

khanike gelt or gifts. As Hanuka celebrates liberation, here is some liberating news for parents and all adult relatives: **there is no accepted tradition—religious or secular—of giving eight gifts during Hanuka.** The custom arose in recent decades in North America, apparently as a desperate parental counter-measure to withstand the onslaught of the televised Xmas frenzy.

Hanuka gift-giving stems from the Eastern European custom of presenting children with *khanike gelt*, coins, on the fifth night. None of the usual sources explain why that night was selected, but we may surmise that, being just beyond the mid-point of the festival, it held children's anticipation long enough to get them fully involved; postponing the excitement any further would have risked frustration, disappointment and, ultimately, disaffection.

Why give gifts at all on Hanuka? There can be no doubt that the custom was influenced by what was happening in late December outside the ghetto walls or in the countryside surrounding the Jewish *shtetlakh* in Eastern Europe. Why coins? The truly Jewish answer would be: why not coins? or: what else, if not coins? Toys were considered frivolity: children from the age of three or four had serious responsibilities—studying for boys, apprentice housework for girls. New clothes were traditionally made for *peysakh*, Passover. Which left *gelt* for *khanike.*

Now, About That Hanuka Bush...

A wintertime greeting card recently encountered shows a reindeer with one of its antlers in the shape of a Hanuka *menora.* Inside, the message reads: "Happy Whatever." The card is probably a best seller in its line, for it accurately reflects today's relaxed attitude toward what was once considered a monumental problem.

With intercultural families proliferating year by year and from one survey to another, it is apparent that Hanuka and Christmas (or Xmas, in some cases) will be celebrated together in many homes. Such celebrations need not leave the children in those homes scarred for life by a fuzzy understanding of the differences between the two holidays. It is possible for them to be uplifted, instead, by an atmosphere of family togetherness and warmth. As in so many other aspects of child-rearing, the outcome depends on the understanding and the skills of the adults involved.

Previous Jewish generations looked on joint Hanuka-Christmas celebrations with horror or, at least, deep suspicion. Most often, the families that engaged in such rites were those in which both parents were Jewish but who had acceded to their children's (or their own) desire to share in the surrounding glitter. It was not the nativity of Jesus that was being observed, but the arrival of Santa Claus with gaily-wrapped presents under a tinselled tree. It was not Christmas, but Xmas. Its pagan (or secular, some argued) evergreen was not the symbol of an abandoned Jewish heritage but of a "modern acceptance of reality"—in short, the "Hanuka Bush," ruefully named to lessen friction with grandparents. Nevertheless, the decorated fir—whatever it was called—came to be seen as an emblematic denial, or downplaying, at least, of one's own Jewish identity.

(Ironically, one rationale for this development was provided by the rabbinical traditionalists who most deplored it. If Hanuka, as they insisted, was the celebration of the Miracle of the Lights, then it dovetailed nicely with the twinkling lights of Xmas and its faintly-heard echoes of another miracle.)

The need for the protective cover of the assimilationist Hanuka Bush began to recede as the Black Pride revolution produced a new legitimacy for non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity. For a complex of reasons that sociologists have yet to unravel fully, by the late 1970s "being Jewish" in North America was far more acceptable than at any other time or place in recorded history. The Hanuka *menora* (or *lempl* or *hanukiah*) achieved unheard-of status, especially in those major U.S. and Canadian cities and suburbs that are centers of Jewish settlement. Families that once might have prided themselves on the perfection of their ornamented evergreens now vied as to who would have the most artistic, most original, commissioned, one-of-a-kind, hand-wrought, eight-branched and frequently electrified candelabrum that could under no circumstances ever be mistaken for a *khanike lempl*.

The Inter-cultural Hanuka Bush

In an entirely different category are the intercultural families that seek to preserve the best of the heritages brought by each partner to the marriage and to their children. The most successful of these observances mark the winter solstice, in the Secular Humanistic tradition, with a selection of the symbols that the folk-cultures of the family's joint heritages have developed over the last two millenia. An added dimension of this approach combines the Jewish Festival of Freedom with the social gospel and liberation theology of progressive Christianity.

The immediate, shopworn objection is: "won't that confuse the children?" If that argument were ever valid, it certainly has less weight now, as those self-same children confidently guide their parents' hesitating steps onto the information superhighway, treading lightly among Gophers, Archies, Veronicas, WWWs and who-knows-whatall. Children who "chat" with NASA from their kindergarten classrooms don't have too much trouble understanding that one part of their heritage is reflected in the lights of Hanuka and another part—different, but no better nor worse—shines in the lights of the Christmas tree. Nor are such children "confused" by the idea that their family honors the separate traditions of both father and mother—just as it celebrates the separate birthdays of each.

Recognition of that reality seems preferable to an earlier, seemingly enlightened attempt to "protect the children from confusion" by encouraging (in some cases, insisting upon) the *exclusive* adoption of one parent's cultural identity. In fact, radicals in past generations had it all down in a pat formula: children in multicultural families would be raised in the more oppressed culture, lest they adopt the more dominant heritage and look down upon the parent with the less-favored background. That these approaches are frought with their own dangers is clearly stated by a member of an intercultural family from whom I have learned a great deal about this issue:

"I have seen...(among)...many members of my own and succeeding generations," she writes, "...that the child becomes confused because s/he is being told in a not-so-subtle way that only part of him/herself is good and acceptable...

(while)...the other part is bad and inferior. Such people have fascinating mid-life crises, let me tell you..."

There is, too, the attempt by some families to seek refuge from possible confusion and alienation by divesting both Hanuka and Christmas of any significant content. "It's just a time to be joyful and happy," goes the argument. "Isn't that enough?" The irony at work here, of course, is that children end up with only the commercial orgy of Xmas, thereby being abandoned to...confusion and alienation.

Joint observances of Christmas and Hanuka in intercultural families—and in community settings—can be wholesome and warm when based upon:

- an understanding of both holidays' common roots in the human observance of the winter solstice and the varied ways in which different cultures adapted those primitive rites;
- honoring the shared humanitarian goals articulated by the minority voices within both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions;
- celebration of family love and oneness as the major focus...not necessarily to the exclusion of gift-exchanges but certainly ahead of them in emphasis and attention.

Are such celebrations easy to devise? According to some intercultural families I've known, the effort required is not simple but it is intellectually and emotionally stimulating. And it gets easier each year...

Finally—*latkes*. Actually, the early Ashkenazi tradition called for cheese pancakes (*latkes*) for reasons that are lost in the mists of folk culture. The ostensible Hanuka connection was the tale in the Apocryphal Book of Judith of how that heroine lured the enemy general Holofernes with salty cheese, causing him to drink so much wine that he fell into a stupor, whereupon Judith beheaded him. No matter what one may think of the story (Renaissance artists loved it), the cheese connection is tenuous, at best. As for potatoes, there cannot possibly be a connection with the Maccabees or with anything Middle Eastern: these tubers originated in South America.

Then why potato *latkes*? Mainly, because they taste good. Besides, potatoes were among the few foods available in Eastern Europe in the dead of winter because they could be stored. And, since boiled potatoes were daily fare, potato pudding and potato *latkes* were ways of providing festive variation. Both became part of the traditional Hanuka menu, along with roast goose, for those few who could afford it.

Sephardic culture, which developed in more temperate climates where potatoes were not significant, produced another Hanuka delicacy, *sufganiyot*, fried doughnuts. The attempt to link them with *latkes* because both are fried barely holds water, let alone oil.

Is there a Secularist and Humanistic slant on potato *latkes*? Two, actually. First, in our spirit of full disclosure, let it be known that *latke* means, literally, "little patch." Examine the ragged edges of thin, deep-fried *latkes* to see the obvious derivation. More important, however, is our conviction that *latke*-making is not an exclusively feminine undertaking, but that only *latkes* made with the participation of male family members and friends—in grating or food processing, frying or baking and certainly in cleanup—are truly, secularly, humanistically *kosher*.

And one last word: which is the traditional accompaniment to *latkes*, sour cream or applesauce? We raise this question partly because it is often asked and, partly, because it allows us to underline the important point that has been alluded to frequently—but not explicitly—in this manuscript. **There is not just one Jewish tradition**, there are many. When people talk about "The Tradition" they are usually referring to the traditions of Rabbinic Judaism with the implication that rejection of that particular body of beliefs and practices implies rejection of Jewish identity. That is nonsense. Rabbinic Judaism is no more "authentic" than Zionism, which it opposed for decades, or Secular Humanistic Jewishness, which it still opposes.

So it is with sour cream and applesauce. Lithuanian Jews, *litvakes*, prefer sour cream (even salt!) on their *latkes*. Jews from Galicia, *galitzyaner*, opt for applesauce (and/or sugar!). In the polyglot New World, where these disparate strains of Jewishness met and even (gasp!) intermarried, a new tradition arose: *latkes* with *both* applesauce and sour cream! One Hanuka (or *khanike*). One dish of latkes. A plate of *sufganiyot*. Many, many, different traditions.

Gut yontif! Khag sameyakh! **Happy holiday!**

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APPENDIX

The following **DEDICATION OF THE HANUKA CANDLES** has been used for many years in secular Jewish schools, including the Sholem Educational Institute, Los Angeles, which the author has served as Principal and Educational Director. The original Yiddish and English translation (adapted by the present author) are by **Martin Birnbaum**, Yiddish poet and teacher.

Shammes:	Recalling our ancient Struggle tonight - You be the first To kindle the light.	*du zay der ershter -* *tsind es un vider;* *dos ondenk likht* *far heldishe breeder.*
Candle 1:	To the Maccabees, To their glorious fight; To the heroes of old I kindle this light.	*dos ershte likht* *mit shtolts tsind ikh on* *tsu dee heldn fun folk,* *tsu der makabeyisher fon.*
Shammes:	(Repeat each time: You be the second... third... etc."	*du zay der... tsveyter* *driter...ferter...finfter...* *zekster...zibeter...akhter*
Candle 2:	For the right to be different And to speak without fear— To the spirit of freedom This candle burns clear.	*far dos rekht tsu zayn* *zikh* *vee nor ikh aleyn ken;* *far frayhayt un* *glaykh-hayt* *o, likhtele, bren.*
Candle 3:	I light this candle With love in my heart For my people's culture Our writers, our art.	*mit shtolts un mit freyd* *tsind ikh on ot-dem flam;* *far der shprakh un kultur* *fun mayn yidishn shtam.*
Candle 4:	To all the children, Wherever they live— To my friends in all lands This candle I give.	*far ale kinder* *umetum af der velt;* *far zeyer frayntshaft* *zol dos likht zayn tsehelt.*
Candle 5:	I light the fifth candle On this Hanuka night For the land of my birth: May its freedom stay bright.	*far mayn eygn land* *unter himlishe shtern;* *vee frayhayt tseloykhtn* *zol dos likhtele vern.*
Candle 6:	And now, to Israel And to Jews everywhere: May peace be their lot And freedom, their share.	*far medinas yisroyl* *un vu es lebn nor yeedn:* *zul oyfgeyn dos likhtl* *far glik un far freedn.*
Candle 7:	To all those who live By the work of their hands This light to the toilers Of all the world's lands.	*tsu yedn vos arbet,* *tsum mentshn fun mee,* *zol oyfgeyn dos likht* *in shtralikn glee.*
Candle 8:	To joy everywhere, To justice and right, To life and to peace This candle burns bright.	*farn mentsh fun der velt,* *far dem frayen gedank;* *far lebn un sholem* *o, likhtl, bren lang*