



***Not by might, nor by power,
but by my spirit, thus says the Lord.***

These words, originally spoken by the prophet Zechariah in the 6th century BCE, are chanted as part of the haftarah each year during the synagogue celebration of Chanukah. Perhaps these words were chosen to be part of the haftarah for Shabbat Chanukah as a counter balance to the primacy of the military victory of the Maccabees that is the historical reason for the celebration of this great winter festival. A military victory is indeed a valid cause for celebration, however, the words of Zechariah remind us that victories in life are dependent upon spiritual strength at least as much if not more than physical power or might. The Chanukah candles that bring light into the darkness of night testify that physical might alone cannot bring about a victory for the establishment of God's kingdom here on earth, without an inner passion to pursue justice and to promote peace, harmony and well being as part of a mission to fix a broken world. On Chanukah we celebrate the victory of the Maccabees who were able to stand up for that which is good and true and to rededicate the Temple in Jerusalem to the glory of God and to the values of our tradition.

The primary mitzvah of Chanukah is to advertise to the world the miracle of the victory of the few and weak over the many and powerful. When we light the candles, in the second blessing, we thank God who created miracles for our ancestors and continues to create miracles for us. Just as it was a miracle for the Maccabees to prevail against all odds and were able to win the battle for goodness and peace, so too it is a miracle every time we stand up for our beliefs and prevail against the lure of corruption and immorality.

We are living in a time when this message is more important than ever. On a regular basis, Israel and the Jewish people are maliciously and unfairly criticized and maligned as if it is our fault that Palestinian teenage terrorists are attacking innocent civilians with knives. That somehow this behavior is understandable because of the oppressive and unjust policies and actions of the Israeli government and the Israeli people who are our brothers and sisters. We must not allow the biased media to blur the facts and make us feel anything but strong and proud of who we are as Jews and advocates for Israel as a nation among the nations. On Chanukah we celebrate the victory of the Maccabees for religious and political freedom. In a world where these freedoms are increasingly challenged, let us draw strength from the courage of the Maccabees to fight for that in which they believed and from the inner spirit that guided, motivated and strengthened them.

This year, as we celebrate Chanukah, with the exchange of gifts, gatherings of friends and family, spinning the dreidel, eating latkes and lighting candles, may we have the words of the prophet Zechariah in our minds and remember that our personal and communal victories can be possible when we allow God's spirit to be a real force within our lives. May God's spirit help us to conquer all of the darkness that is plaguing our world. I hope that you will be able to take advantage of the numerous opportunities that our congregation is offering to learn about and to celebrate Chanukah this year. Take a look at page 7 and the supplemental flyer in this December 2015 edition of Temple Talk.

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