

Hannukah – Sharing the light

Why precisely on Hanukkah Jews place their Menorot in the window or outside of their houses, inviting those who are not Jews to see what they are doing and to listen to the message of the festival?

If Hanukkah is only one of the many Jewish festivals of the Jewish calendar, why is it on this occasion that, us Jews, we invite the larger community to join us in our celebration?

I think the answer is related to the history and to the essence of Hanukkah itself. Because, what is Hanukkah after all?

In Hanukkah we are remembering when our ancestors, more than two thousand years ago, fought against religious intolerance and tried to preserve the continuity of the Jewish tradition which was threatened by the Greek empire.

The Jews fought because they wanted to continue to be Jews, but at the same time they fought because they wanted to preserve a Judaism which could live together with the general society, integrating Jewish values and traditions with the ones that were part of the community in which they lived.

From those times Judaism incorporated many traditions that today are an integral part of our Jewish life: Mikvaot (the ritual baths), the model of the traditional Jewish academy, even the word “synagogue” comes from Greek and means “a place of gathering”, the house of the congregation.

The Macabim, leaders of the rebellion against the oppression, taught that religious freedom means trying to integrate Judaism with the values and practices of our neighbors, in a way that would allow us to

maintain our identity, and still both contribute to society and be enriched by the lessons of non-Jews.

The Macabim taught us that religion doesn't mean fundamentalism: They did not intend to replace the religious intolerance of their oppressors with their own. They wanted us to understand that when we open ourselves, love our neighbors and respect them, no matter what they think or represent, we can grow spiritually and can contribute to mending this world.

Hannukah is when we try to tell humanity: Let's work together to heal the world, let's try to create light and multiply it through our example, because after all we are not so different... because we share values, we are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God, and because through sharing, we strengthen our own identities while we work together to make this world a better place to live.

May God bless us with the light of Hanukkah, with peace, shalom to every human being!

Hanukkah Sameach!

Rabbi Claudio