

Good Shabbos Everyone. On Chanukah we light candles to celebrate the victory of the Chashmonayim over the Greeks over 2000 years ago. In reality, the kingship which the Chashmonayim established did not last very long, it was quickly eclipsed by the growing Roman Empire. Nevertheless, we celebrate the victory. In a greater sense we celebrate on Chanukah the everlasting victory of the Jewish People over those nations who have sought to destroy us in every generation.

Even the non-Jewish scholars have recognized the everlasting nature of the Jewish people. As the American author and commentator Mark Twain writes in his short essay entitled: Concerning the Jews.

"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of stardust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it.

The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

The following amazing true story, told in the first person by a doctor, illustrates that although we have been persecuted, the Jewish nation has survived all those who sought to destroy us...

"Several years ago, a physician from southern France contacted me. His granddaughter had taken ill with a disease that baffled the physicians there. He called after reading several of my articles on disorders of the autonomic nervous system. His granddaughter's symptoms seemed to match those I had described, and he asked me if I could help. I readily agreed, and for many months, I collaborated with the child's French physicians by telephone and by fax, directing their diagnostic testing. At last we came to a diagnosis, and I prescribed a course of therapy.

During the next several weeks, the child made a seemingly miraculous recovery. Her grandparents expressed their heartfelt thanks and told me to let them know should I ever come to France. In the summer of 1996, I was invited to speak at a large international scientific meeting that was held in Nice, France. I sent word to the physician I had helped years before.

Upon my arrival at the hotel, I received a message to contact him. I called him, and we arranged a night to meet for dinner. On the appointed day we met and then drove north to his home in the beautiful southern French countryside. It was humbling to learn his home was older than the United States.

During the drive he told me that his wife had a terminal illness and was not well, but she insisted upon meeting me. When introduced to her, I saw that despite her severe illness, she was still a woman with a noble bearing.

We sat in a 17th-century salon, sipping cognac and chatting. Our conversation must have seemed odd to the young man and woman who served us because it came out in a free-flowing mixture of English, French, and Spanish. After a time the woman asked, "My husband tells me you are Jewish, no?" "Yes," I said, "I am a Jew." They asked me to tell them about Judaism, especially the holidays. I did my best to explain and was astounded by how little they knew of Judaism. She seemed to be particularly interested in Chanukah. Once I had finished answering her questions, she suddenly looked me in the eye and said, "I have something I want to give to you." She disappeared and returned several moments later with a package wrapped in cloth. She sat, her tired eyes looking into mine, and she began to speak slowly.

"When I was a little girl of 8 years, during the Second World War, the authorities came to our village to round up all the Jews. My best friend at that time was a girl of my age named Jeanette. One morning when I came to play, I saw her family being forced at gunpoint into a truck. I ran home and told my mother what had happened and asked where Jeanette was going. 'Don't worry,' she said, 'Jeanette will be back soon.' "I ran back to Jeanette's house only to find that she was gone and that the other villagers were looting her home of valuables, except for the Judaic items, which were thrown into the street. As I approached, I saw an item from her house lying in the dirt. I picked it up and recognized it as an object that Jeanette and her family would light around December time. In my little girl's mind I said 'I will take this home and keep it for Jeanette, till she comes back,' but she and her family never returned."

She paused and took a slow sip of brandy. "Since that time I have kept it. I hid it from my parents and didn't tell a soul of its existence. Indeed, over the last 50 years the only person who knew of it was my husband. When I found out what really happened to the Jews, and how many of the people I knew had collaborated with the Nazis, I could not bear to look at it. Yet I kept it, hidden, waiting for something, although I wasn't sure what. Now I know what I was waiting for. It was for you, a Jew, who helped cure our granddaughter, and it is to you I entrust this."

Her trembling hands set the package on my lap. I slowly unwrapped the cloth from around it. Inside was a menorah, but one unlike any I had seen before. Made of solid brass, it had eight cups for holding oil and wicks and a ninth cup centered above the others. It had a ring attached to the top, and the woman mentioned that she remembered that Jeanette's family would hang it in the hallway of their home. It looked quite old to me; later, several people told me that it is probably at least 100 years old. As I held it and thought about what it represented, I began to cry.

All I could manage to say was a garbled "merci." As I left, her last words to me were "Il faudra voir la lumiere encore une fois -- it should once again see light." I later learned that she died less than a month after our meeting. That Chanukah, the menorah once again saw light. And as I and my family lit it, we said a special prayer in honor of those whose memories it represents. We will not let its lights go out again!

The original owners of that menorah were unfortunately taken as sacrifices during the war. However, the Jewish nation has survived and we continue to light the Chanukah lights to symbolize the everlasting nature of this great nation. **Good Shabbos and Happy Chanukah Everyone.**

In memory of Shusha Malka bas R' Avrohom ה"ב

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