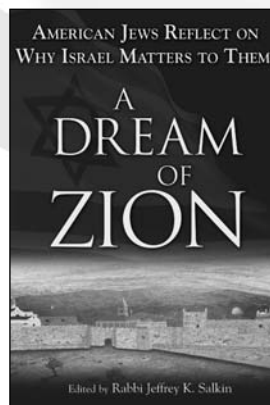


FOR HANUKKAH— REDEDICATING OURSELVES TO ISRAEL

Readings about Israel and Zionism,
in Celebration of Israel's 60th Hanukkah

Based on *A Dream of Zion: American Jews Reflect on Why Israel Matters to Them*

RABBI JEFFREY K. SALKIN



Jewish Lights Publishing
Woodstock, Vermont

Introduction

BY RABBI JEFFREY K. SALKIN

Nun, gimmel, hay, shin. Those are the Hebrew letters that appear on each side of the dreidl. It is an acronym for “a great miracle happened there,” in the Land of Israel during the time of the Maccabees.

But dreidls that are produced in Israel put it somewhat differently: “A great miracle happened *here*.” The Land of Israel has always been a place of miracles, whether through the apparent hand of God or the partnership between God and humanity. If any miracle characterizes our age, it is the creation of the State of Israel, the revival of a people, a land, and a language.

This Hanukkah is particularly poignant because it comes on the heels of the sixtieth anniversary

of the date when the United Nations voted to create a Jewish State—November 29, 1947. This Hanukkah also anticipates the sixtieth anniversary of Israel’s birth in May 1948.

The passages that follow are part of American Jewish history. They are the voices of American Jews who reflected on the meaning of Zionism and the hopes for a reborn Jewish nation in the Land of Israel. We invite you to read each of these passages as you kindle the Hanukkah candles during the eight nights of Hanukkah.

May you always remember: “A great miracle happened there.” We American Jews are part of that miracle. As we sustain that miracle, it sustains us as well.

FIRST NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

EMMA LAZARUS was a nineteenth-century American Jewish writer and activist best known for her poem “The New Colossus,” which adorns the base of the Statue of Liberty. The descendent of an old Sephardic family, her poem “The Banner of the Jew” stands as a song of early American Zionism.

THE BANNER OF THE JEW

Wake, Israel, wake! Recall to-day
The glorious Maccabean rage,
The sire heroic, hoary-gray,
His five-fold lion-lineage:
The Wise, the Elect, the Help-of-God,
The Burst-of-Spring, the Avenging Rod.

From Mizpeh’s mountain-ridge they saw
Jerusalem’s empty streets, her shrine
Laid waste where Greeks profaned the Law
With idol and with pagan sign.
Mourners in tattered black were there,
With ashes sprinkled on their hair.

Then from the stony peak there rang
A blast to open the graves: down poured
The Maccabean clan, who sang

Their battle-anthem to the Lord.
Five heroes lead, and, following, see
Ten thousand rush to victory!

Oh for Jerusalem’s trumpet now,
To blow a blast of shattering power,
To wake the sleepers high and low,
And rouse them to the urgent hour!
No hand for vengeance—but to save,
A million naked swords should wave.

Oh deem not dead that martial fire,
Say not the mystic flame is spent!
With Moses’ law and David’s lyre,
Your ancient strength remains unbent.
Let but an Ezra rise anew,
To lift the banner of the Jew!

SECOND NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

RABBI KAUFFMAN KOHLER (1843–1926) was one of American Reform Judaism’s greatest rabbis and thinkers. Even though he was opposed to the Zionist movement, in 1919, he could utter these words that would affirm the place of the Land of Israel in the Jewish spirit.

“Let Palestine, our ancient home, under the protection of the great nations, or under the specific British suzerainty, again become a center of Jewish culture and a safe refuge for the homeless. We shall all welcome it and aid in the promotion of its work. Let the million or more of Jewish citizens dwelling there ... be empowered and encouraged to build up a commonwealth broad and liberal in spirit to serve as a school for international and interdenominational humanity. We shall all hail the undertaking and pray for its prosperity.”

THIRD NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

LOUIS D. BRANDEIS is one of American Jewry’s greatest heroes. He was the first Jew to be appointed to the United States Supreme Court. In fact, because of his precedent, there has always been a “Jewish seat” on the nation’s highest court. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a special nickname for him: “Isaiah.” Brandeis identified Zionism with the true American spirit. Like the university that would ultimately bear his name, his life and career bear testimony to the fact that there need be no separation of loyalties between a person’s Jewishness and a person’s Americanism.

“Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism. Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent. A man is a better citizen of the United States for being also a loyal citizen of his state, and of his city; or for being loyal to his college.... Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so.”



FOURTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

RABBI MILTON STEINBERG (1903–1950) was a great American Conservative rabbi. His best-known book is the perennially popular historical novel *As a Driven Leaf*, about the life of the rebellious sage Elisha ben Avuya. His other major literary gift to the Jewish people was his short primer, *Basic Judaism*, published in 1947, which has guided countless numbers of people into Jewish life and is still used in many introduction to Judaism classes. Here, in an excerpt from that precious literary legacy, is his interpretation of the meaning of Zionism. For him, as for all Jews at that time, Israel was not “yet” Israel; it was still British Palestine.

“For long centuries the growth of Judaism has been hampered by dispersion and persecution. But when a Jewish Commonwealth has become into being, when outcast Jews have found peace, when the Hebrew language and literature have taken root in their native soil, the Tradition will have a fresh chance at free, spontaneous unfolding. Its circumstances will be favorable as they have not been in two millennia. And not in Palestine only, but throughout the world. For Palestine then will be an unfettered heart pumping the blood of health and vigor to all the Jewries of the dispersion.

Who knows what revelations the people of revelations shall have to speak at that time? This much is certain: the Jewish people everywhere will be the stronger for the homeland and its revived Hebrew culture, and therefore the better able to labor for the advent of that ideal society which it was the first to project and after which it has striven so long and mightily.”

FIFTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

ALBERT EINSTEIN (1879–1955) was one of the greatest Jews in history—a man whose life work in physics would ultimately transform the human way of understanding the universe. While he was not a religious Jew, over the course of his life (and through his confrontation with growing German anti-Semitism), he would come to embrace Zionism, though he was often critical of it as a movement. He was one of the forces behind the creation of Hebrew University in 1925, and was offered the presidency of Israel after the death of its first president, Chaim Weizmann. Here are two quotes that refer to his love for the Land of Israel.

“One can be an internationalist without being indifferent to the members of one’s tribe. The Zionist cause is very close to my heart.... I am glad that there should be a little patch of earth on which our kindred brethren are not considered aliens.”

[Upon visiting Palestine in 1922]: “I consider this the greatest day of my life. Before, I have always found something to regret in the Jewish soul, and that is the forgetfulness of its own people. Today, I have been made happy by the sight of the Jewish people learning to recognize themselves and to make themselves recognized as a force in the world.”

SIXTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

RABBI ROLAND B. GITTELSON (1910–1995) was a great twentieth-century Reform rabbi. He was the first Jewish chaplain in American history to be assigned to the Marine Corps. He received three medals of honor for his service in the Iwo Jima campaign and delivered the dedicatory address at the Jewish section of its cemetery. He was the founding president of ARZA (the Association of Reform Zionists of America).

“What is the Zionist movement really about? What are its basic purposes and aims?...

[First,] individual Jews whose lives are made intolerable in other lands will have a place to which they may go and in which they may live, free of persecution.

[Second,] the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people will be rendered more probable.... [With the] entrance of Jews into the larger world facilitated, with the threat of total assimilation thereby immeasurably increased, there is grave danger that, lacking a concentrated center, Jews and their continuing heritage may cease to exist as identifiable historic entities.

To survive and develop creatively, a civilization must have a locus, a laboratory or hot-house, where it can be the primary culture of its people, where new strands and strains may be tested and refined.”

SEVENTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

LILLIAN HELLMAN (1905–1984) was a prominent American playwright and the author of such classics as *The Children's Hour*, *The Little Foxes*, and a memoir, *Pentimento*. She is perhaps most famous for *Julia*, the cinematic portrayal of her life during Nazism. While she was never known either for her Zionism or her strong connection to the Jewish people, in this passage, written in the 1940s, she credits Zionism with a realistic assessment of the situation of Jewish People in the world.

“Historically the Zionists turned out to be right. What are they saying? That Europe is doomed for the Jews. Liberal democracy won't save us. The Socialists won't save us. And the Communist revolutionaries won't save us.... On that fundamental insight [the Zionists] were absolutely right.”



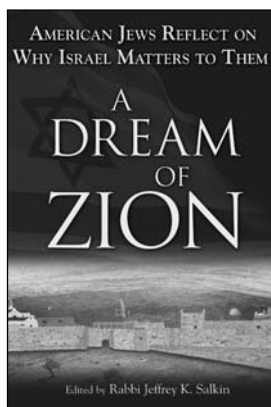
EIGHTH NIGHT OF HANUKKAH

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL (1907–1972) was one of the most profound definers of Judaism in the contemporary period. Theologian, educator, poet, author, activist—there was virtually no corner of the Jewish world that he left untouched. He wrote *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* after visiting Israel in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967.

“When I go to Israel every stone and every tree is a reminder of hard labor and glory, of prophets and psalmists, of loyalty and holiness. The Jews go to Israel not only for physical security for themselves and their children; they go to Israel for renewal, for the experience of resurrection.

Is the State of Israel’s God humble answer to Auschwitz? A sign of God’s repentance for men’s crime of Auschwitz? No act is as holy as the act of saving human life. The Holy Land, having offered a haven to more than two million Jews—many of who would not have been alive had they remained in Poland, Russia, Germany, and other countries—has attained a new sanctity.

So many lives of people whose bodies were injured and whose souls were crushed found a new life and a new sprit in the land. The State of Israel, as it were, sought to respond to the prophet’s exhortation: ‘Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees’ (Isaiah 35:3).”



A Dream of Zion American Jews Reflect on Why Israel Matters to Them

Edited by Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin

6 x 9, 304 pp, Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-58023-340-8

\$24.99

Available from Jewish Lights Publishing

(800) 962-4544 • www.jewishlights.com
