

## Miracles Old and New

### *Thought for the Day*

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Tonight, around the world, Jewish people will celebrate the festival of Chanukah by lighting the *Menorah*, an eight-branched candelabrum, to commemorate the events described in the Book of Maccabees.

Oddly, this is not actually part of the Jewish Bible, though the story does appear in other ancient Jewish sources, but it is where religion meets history! After Alexander the Great's empire fell apart, the Greek rulers of the Holy Land desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem, set up altars to their idols, and banned many Jewish religious practices. Resistance to the Greeks came to a head when Judah, who was nicknamed the *Maccabee* or Hammer, led a rag-tag army to victory against the might of the empire. They rededicated the Temple and relit the Menorah that had burned continuously since the days of King Solomon.

At this point they hit a snag: they found only one small jar of the pure oil needed for the Menorah, but tradition reports that a miracle occurred, and that one day's supply of oil burned for eight days till fresh oil could reach Jerusalem.

Of course children learn that that's what the festival commemorates, but what Chanukah really signifies is not the miracle of long-life oil, but the miraculous survival of a minority religion and culture in the face of the unrestrained efforts of the dominant power to eradicate it. It celebrates, in other words, cultural diversity.

So I can't help reflecting on the remarkable, perhaps miraculous, contrast with Scotland, where successive administrations have promoted a Scotland of many cultures, so that we have managed to avoid the pitfalls both of assimilation and of separate development.

Just last week, my own organisation, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, arranged a "Kosher Ceilidh" tour of rural Scotland, and brought connection to people who had thought they were completely alone.

It is those connections that form just one of the threads of different colour that make up the tartan. We are fortunate to live in a country that celebrates that diversity, so a very Happy Chanukah to you all.

*Ephraim Borowski*

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