

Peri Nitkin

Professor Crow

REL 1300

15 April 2016

The Story of Chanukah and its Relation to Modern Day Anti-Semitism

Despite the Greeks attempts to destroy the Jewish people and their religion, the Jews survived and the holiday of Chanukah was born. This holiday serves as a reminder to the world that the Jewish people will continue to overcome the anti-Semitism that is present on a daily basis. Anti-Semitism is defined as, “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group” (Merriam-Webster). Although the term anti-Semitism is fairly new, the act has been committed for thousands of years before the time Chanukah took place. Although anti-Semitism is prominent around the world the Jewish people work to create peace for their country of Israel and the religion as a whole.

The history of Chanukah dates back to the year 168 B.C.E. when the Syrian tyrant known as Antiochus sent his soldiers into the city of Jerusalem. This is the holy land the Jewish nation resided in after being exiled for many years. The Syrian-Greeks went into Jerusalem and desecrated the Jews holy temple with Greek idols. The holy temple served as a home to the Jewish G-d and was used as a place for the Jewish people to pray. Antiochus tried to abolish the Jewish religion by outlawing traditions such as, Shabbat and circumcision. Antiochus was focused on converting all the Jews to Hellenism by giving them no other option but death. The Maccabees, a resistance movement, was developed to fight the anti-Semitic ways of Antiochus and his people. The Jewish people persevered to overcome Antiochus’s anti-Semitism. This holiday

was later recognized as Chanukah to represent the Jewish people overcoming the great odds against them and to celebrate their self-determination. (Gitelman)

The story of Chanukah, a strong example of the Jews dedication to their religion, has served as an example of strength for the Jewish nation in times of hardship. The hatred afflicted on the Jewish people during the time of Chanukah directly relates to the holocaust. “In this particular conflation, the narrative structure of the Hanukkah story features a heavy dose of violence that can be intertextually linked to the violence of the Holocaust, ushering in the Holocausts unfathomable recent presence through the story of a smaller, more remote persecution” (Eichler- Levine, 94). The story of Chanukah begins with the Syrian-Greeks desecration of the Jews holy temple. The holocaust also begins with a similar instance, the night of broken glass in 1938 known as Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was the Nazi’s attempt to terrorize and humiliate the Jewish people by destroying the Jewish temples, homes, and stores. These events mark the beginning of horrific acts of violence against the Jewish nation. The Nazi’s just like the Syrian-Greeks attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion with acts of murder. In both cases the Jewish people held on to their beloved religion and were freed from their oppressors through their resilience to conform.

Throughout history there have been acts of anti-Semitism from multiple nations, but the story of Chanukah serves as a reminder to Jews all over the world to stand up for their religion. In the holocaust, the story of Chanukah served as an example that Jews can overcome the hatred presented against them. Even when the Jewish people were in the Nazi concentration camps they found ways to celebrate the holiday of Chanukah. Chanukah is the holiday of light, it not only spreads light physically from the menorah but symbolizes the Jews

coming out of a dark time. The light of Chanukah brought light to the dark time of the holocaust and gave the Jewish people hope that they would overcome their enemies, just as the Maccabees overcame the Syrian- Greeks. As the Nazi's tried to dehumanize the Jewish people and take away their hope of survival, the story of Chanukah helped bring hope to the Jewish people:

“Hanukkah" is a Hebrew word that means "dedication." The eight-day Festival of Lights represents a rededication each year of the Jewish people to their religious beliefs. Hanukkah is a symbol to the Jewish people that they are free to select the religion of their choice and pledge their love to God and to others close to the family. The holiday represents two miracles: the military triumph for religious freedom and the cruse of oil that burned for eight days, instead of the anticipated one day, in the desecrated temple. (Gitelman)

Although the Jews were not free while under the control of the Nazi's they still practiced their Jewish beliefs in private. Many Jews resisted the Nazi's attempt to deface them of their Jewish identity by bringing Jewish books and making holy objects in the concentration camps. Many of the Jewish prisoners would come together for Shabbat and holidays to pray to G-d with the prayers they memorized before entering the camps.

It is evident that the Jewish people as a whole are a target for much hatred in the world, which is shown through acts of anti-Semitism. Many Jews in France look to emigrate to the Jewish home land of Israel because of the recent increase of anti-Semitism:

After the murder of four Jews on January 9 at a kosher supermarket, many in France's Jewish community are thinking of emigrating, joining a rising tide of

their coreligionists who have fled increasing anti-Semitism in recent years. Others hope that the attack, and its link to the earlier massacre at the Charlie Hebdo magazine, will finally force ordinary French people to face up to the fact that their fellow citizens commit more anti-Semitic crimes than any other European country. (Ford and Llana, 17)

Jews from all over Europe are emigrating to Israel because they feel unsafe in their current countries. Although anti-Semitism around Europe is causing the Jewish population to move to the Jewish safe haven that is Israel, the Jews continue to fight against anti-Semitism. The Jewish people are working together as a nation to spread awareness to the world. Remembering the Maccabees resistance against those who opposed their faith, the Jewish people continue to resist against those who try to murder them and their religion.

The recent acts of anti-Semitism in France are similar to the attacks by the Syrian-Greeks against the Jewish people in the Chanukah story. Just like the Syrian-Greeks performed murderous acts to rid the Jewish people of the land, so are some of the radical Islamist men in France:

Although anti-Semitism still colors the thinking of some traditional supporters of far-right parties such as the National Front, police lay most of the recent anti-Semitic violence at the door of radical Islamist young men. Amedy Coulibaly, who attacked the kosher market, was not the first such gunman to kill several French Jews. In 2012, Mohammed Merah shot and killed three Jewish children

and one of their teachers at a school in the southern city of Toulouse. (Ford and Llana, 17)

These acts of violence are not going unannounced, groups such as AIPAC help lobby to create strong bonds between Israel and the United States to keep Jewish people around the world safe. Just like the Maccabees rose up to defend their nation so are many pro-Israel groups today.

Pro-Israel groups such as AIPAC, Stand with Us, and Christians United for Israel are widespread throughout many American colleges. These groups see the importance of the Jewish homeland of Israel for the safety of the Jewish people. Anti-Semitic acts are committed on a daily basis, therefore these groups are necessary for the survival of the Jewish nation:

The members of these groups are mostly American Jews, but there is also now a large number of evangelical Christian Zionists involved in pro-Israel activities—which is why the term pro-Israel lobby should be used rather than Jewish lobby.

The pro-Israel lobby is defined by its political agenda, not by religion or ethnicity.

The pro-Israel lobby, then, is composed of groups who actively lobby the US government on issues concerning Israel. (Waxman, 9)

Without the advocacy of these organizations it would be difficult to keep strong relations with Israel's allies. It is important for the Jewish people along with people of other religions and ethnicities to support the growth of Israel and its relations worldwide.

The Jews self-determination and will to live is what has held the religion together and allowed it to flourish even when faced with overwhelming hatred. “Hanukah is a celebration of Jewish strength and resistance in the face of attractive non- Jewish practices. It is translated to mean “dedication,” or rededication of the Temple after its desecration by the Syrians” (Silberman-Federman, 212). Jewish strength has been present during times of hatred, assimilation, and mass murder. The story of Chanukah serves as a reminder to Jewish people around the world that it is possible to overcome the hatred presented against them. The story of Chanukah serves as a perfect example that the Jews will fight for their religion even against nations much stronger than their own. The light of Chanukah serves as a lesson to the Jewish people that as long as they stand up against anti-Semitism there will never truly be darkness.

Works Cited

- Eichler-Levine, Jodi. "The Curious Conflation Of Hanukkah And The Holocaust In Jewish Children's Literature." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Jewish Studies* 28.2 (2010): 92- 115. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.
- Ford, Peter, and Sara Miller Llana. "French Jews Look To Emigrate Amid Rising Anti-Semitism." *Christian Century* 132.4 (2015): 17-18. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.
- Gitelman, Honre F. "Sharing Hanukkah With Young Students." *Social Studies* 88.1 (1997): 39. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 9 Apr. 2016.
- Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 10 Apr.2016.
- Silberman-Federman, Nancy Jo. "Jewish Humor, Self-Hatred, Or Anti-Semitism: The Sociology Hanukkah Cards In America." *Journal Of Popular Culture* 28.4 (1995): 211-229. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 9 Apr. 2016.
- Waxman, Dov. "The Israel Lobbies: A Survey Of The Pro-Israel Community In The United States." *Israel Studies Forum* 25.1 (2010): 5-28. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.