

The value of telling the story

Hanukkah is a holiday that takes on different meaning, depending on your stage in life. As kids, we relish the excitement of gifts; as parents, we enjoy sharing the story of the Maccabees with our kids. As we age, we see the holidays differently. The value of telling the story to our children is the root of what most of the holidays are about – teaching. The Maccabees, the rededication of the Temple, the miracle of the oil lasting eight days – we learned from our parents and grandparents; we teach our children and grandchildren.

Hanukkah is not considered a major Jewish holiday as it came after the Torah was given. The significance of the story – defending religious freedom, survival, overcoming persecution – still resonates today. We are living in one of the most powerful times as Jews. As we celebrate Hanukkah this year, we are experiencing yet another miracle – we have survived, we have rededicated our Jewish homeland, we are thriving. Israel will be celebrating its 70th birthday this year – think about that, 70 years! This is a miracle made of human, not divine providence.

Israel has prospered in so many ways! The Maccabees could not have begun to predict what was to come.*

We all know these highlights –

- Israel's \$100 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbors combined.
- Israel has the highest ratio of university degrees to the population in the world.
- Israel is the only liberal democracy in the Middle East.
- When Golda Meir was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 1969, she became the world's second elected female leader in modern times.
- Israel is the only country in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees, made more remarkable because this was achieved in an area considered mainly desert.
- In response to serious water shortages, Israeli engineers and agriculturalists developed a revolutionary



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drip irrigation system to minimize the amount of water used to grow crops.

Here's my list of another 10 highlights, some not known or celebrated -

- Israel is the 11th happiest country in the world (the U.S. is 14th) of more than 150 ranked.
- Israel has the highest rate of entrepreneurship among women.
- The most popular name for Israeli babies – both boys and girls – is 'Noam'.
- Israelis who observe Shabbat can buy car insurance that doesn't cover Saturdays
- Israel's cows produce more milk than cows from other countries.
- The glue on Israeli stamps is kosher.
- Israeli rabbis, with the help from scientists, have ruled that giraffe milk is kosher.
- Israel has one of the highest concentrations of bird traffic in the world – 500 million migrating birds cross its airspace every year.
- The largest known dog cemetery in the ancient world was unearthed in the Israeli city of Ashkelon.
- After Tokyo and New York City, Tel Aviv has the most sushi restaurants per capita.

These achievements* and the connection to Hanukkah is that Israel and the Jewish people are dedicated to taking care of the world through Jewish commitment to learning and teaching. Most of our successes as a people come from the stories and teaching we pass down from generation to generation.

The story of Hanukkah is over 2000 years old and we still value the lessons. In our Community Study, we learned that only 55% of our community always/usually light Hanukkah candles. As a community, we must be dedicated to being the light to the other 45%. We strive to commit that 2000 years from now, 100% of our community will be celebrating and observing the Jewish holidays.

Happy Hanukkah,

Alan

*This and so much more were achieved while engaged in regular wars with a relentless enemy seeking its destruction, and with an economy continuously under strain by having to spend more per capita on its own protection than any other country on earth. This from a country just 70 years old!