They fought us !!
No! WE fought us!
2 visions of Hanukkah. One we grew up with, the other a more sophisticated reading of history. In the first version it was us against the Greeks, And Hanukkah celebrates the glorious victory of the Maccabees over an external enemy.
The more sophisticated version includes the tale of a civil war between radical assimilationists, and the Maccabees who defended the faith. The Hasmoneans fought against the extreme Hellenists who desired that our people abandon all that was unique about Judaism. It was this victory of the Maccabees that allowed our people to continuously shed our light upon the world.
In a sense these two versions can be seen as a summary of jewish history. There have always been threats from the outside. From our beginnings in Egypt we have felt the iron hand of oppressors. Assyria, Babylon, Rome, Spain and Germany make up only a partial list of those who attempted to destroy our people.
But there has also been the threat from within. The Hellenists were not the only ones to assimilate. Sometimes assimilation was forced, such as in post revolution Russia. But sometimes, as in the story of the Maccabees and the reality of 21st century jewish America, it is the enemy within that threatens our continued existence.
I often hear fellow jews ridiculing halakha. Why can't I take pictures on Shabbat? Why kashrut… after all the FDA takes care of the health of our food? To many assimilated jews our tradition is seen as a burden.
But Judaism has always been a system of mitzvah. Torah provides us with a spiritual pathway to god. It dictates just what it means to love our brothers as ourselves. The Hellenists in their time envisioned an Israel without mitzvah. Some of our people today have that same vision.
I am a baseball fan. It has been said that baseball is a game with 3 bases. Conceivably, one could create a game with 5 bases, and it might be a great game. But it would not be baseball. The same Can be said for Judaism without mitzvah.
There is another danger. Only a generation after Hanukkah, the maccabees forced the pagans within their borders to convert to Judaism. A danger on the other side of the spectrum of assimilation is fanaticism, and a Judaism unwilling to change to meet the needs of the time. Mitzvah may have always been central to our people, but our understanding of mitzvah has always evolved. In the past century, the inclusion of women is a prime example of such evolution.
We have faced so many dangers in our history. Enemies who threatened our destruction, radical assimilationists, and fundamentalism. Perhaps the miracle is not so much in the oil that lasted so long, but rather in our people' survival through the centuries. Have a happy and healthy Hanukkah!