

Shabbat Parashat Mikeitz/Erev Hanukkah Jewish Heroine-ism

Hanukkah is not my favorite of the Jewish festivals. I often find it difficult to peel away the layers of the generations of the modern world that overlay the essence of what Hanukkah is supposed to be about: pride in the preservation of Jewish identity and a rededication to Jewish practice. Fortunately, there are two heroines of Jewish history who have been connected to the celebration of Hanukkah who highlight aspects of this theme and allow us to rededicate our own minds to Hanukkah's essence. The tales of bravery of both Judith and Hannah (the one with seven sons in the time of the Romans, not the Hannah of the Book of I Samuel) inspire us, are similar to that of the heroic Maccabees and are very fitting tales (though not for the faint of heart or the squeamish) in connection to the Hanukkah festival. These women take matters into their own hands and take control over their destinies and, in the case of Judith, the destiny of her entire town in the face of a Greek siege.

In this week's *parasha*, we learn of another woman faced with a dilemma and difficult circumstances: Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Judah. She too, in her own way (again, not a story appropriate for young children), takes charge of her life and situation in order to overcome challenges she was facing and becomes independent. Perhaps, Judith and Hannah took inspiration from Tamar in acting in the ways that they did many centuries after the fact.

We are fortunate to have the stories of Tamar, Judith, and Hannah (and the Maccabees) as part of our history and tradition, from which we can draw inspiration and be reminded that we all have the power to take control of our destiny and to create the future that we want for ourselves and our people (even though we may disagree with some of the choices they made in doing so). It is these lessons of perseverance, dedication, and self-determination that allow me to love Hanukkah, even though it is not my favorite of the Jewish festivals.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Urim Samei'ah!

Please click on this link to download this year's Family Guide to Hanukkah in which you will find the details of the heroic stories of Judith and Hannah.