

# Faith matters: Chanukah, a matter of light vs darkness

Through lighting of the Menorah, Judaism reaffirms a different spiritual message as recorded in the Hebrew Bible

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This year on the Jewish calendar, Chanukah, ‘The Festival of Lights’ will be celebrated for eight days beginning the evening of Dec. 18.

Reflecting on its religious significance, the Talmudic rabbis concluded that beyond the military victories of the Maccabees, the essence of lighting the Menorah revealed a flame that had one purpose and one purpose only: to commemorate the spiritual victory over Hellenism that threatened to destroy Judaism in the 2nd century B.C.E.

By contrast, another ‘flame’ ubiquitous to the Hellenistic world of sport emerged in the original Olympic Games in Greece centuries ago as a tribute to Prometheus’s theft of fire from the gods. This lighting ritual, systemic to the Olympic Games, came to symbolize the artistry of the Olympian.

But all that changed in 1936 at the Berlin Olympic Games! The guidance of Joseph Goebbels, the chief Nazi propagandist, convinced Adolph Hitler to transform the ceremonial lighting of the torch: instead of the traditional lighting of the flame in the stadium, Goebbels instituted the ‘torch relay’ starting in Greece and culminating in Berlin.

As Dr. David Clay Large records in his work “Nazi Games: The 1936 Berlin Olympics”: “There was no torch relay like this in ancient times ... The relay came into being as part of the political propaganda used by the Nazis” as a tangible means of connecting ancient Greece to German, Aryan sovereignty thereby celebrating the Third Reich that would last a thousand years.

It’s also most ironic that at these Olympic Games, the African-American track and field athlete Jesse Owens, (1913-1980) won four gold medals defeating Germany’s long jump champion Luz Long.

Enough said about the myth of Aryan superiority.

Indeed, Hitler firmly believed that German culture fostered intellectual, philosophical, scientific and artistic supremacy anchored in Nazi ideology.

By contrast, through the lighting of the Menorah, Judaism reaffirmed a different spiritual message as recorded in the Hebrew Bible: “Not by might and nor by power, but by My spirit said the Lord of Hosts.” (Zachariah 4:6)

In the contemporary words of the late United States Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, a devout Catholic addressing a Congressional Holocaust Memorial: a cogent response to Nazi propaganda “can be achieved only by acknowledging and passing on to our children, the existence, uncompromising standards of human conduct. Mankind has traditionally derived such standards from religion; and the West has derived them from and through the Jews.”

Indeed, the flames of the Menorah continue to remind us that at the end of the day: light will always vanquish darkness!

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