



# Sermon Tidbits

DECEMBER 11, 2017

## Parashat Miketz – Shabbat Hanukkah

### A Symbol of Female Jewish Strength – Shabbat Hanukkah

**The women also played a role in the miracle (Rashi on Shabbat 23) (רש"י שבת כג) אף הם היו באותו הנס**

Did you eat your dairy Hanukkah food yet? Cheese latkes, perhaps. Maybe bagels and cream cheese. I know what you're thinking: those aren't traditional Hanukkah foods. Latkes and jelly doughnuts—that's what we eat on Hanukkah. Yet, according to Rabbi Moses Isserles in his gloss on the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayyim* 670:2), we've got it all wrong. Latkes and doughnuts are certainly oily, but some people also have the custom of eating specifically dairy foods. He writes, "Some say that [one should] eat cheese on Hanukkah, for the miracle [of Hanukkah] was done through [the use of the] milk that Judith fed to the enemy."

While men get most of the publicity on Hanukkah as we focus on Mathias the High Priest and his sons, (Judah and the other four brothers), Jewish tradition teaches us that without the heroic efforts of Judith, the Maccabees' victory could never have been achieved. Her story is related in the apocryphal *Book of Judith*. Prof. Deborah Gera [writes](#) that, "Judith is a compelling and challenging figure: beautiful and bold, pious and violent, seductive and wise. She does not hesitate to take the initiative in saving her people when the leaders of her besieged city are ready to surrender, reprimanding the leaders for their lack of faith in God (*Judith* 8:1-36). She also toys with the enemy general Holofernes, using ironic and duplicitous words as well as her extraordinary beauty to lull and then kill him (11:5-19; 12:1-4, 13-18)." As the book is not included in the Jewish bible, her story was preserved through the vehicle of Jewish legend and folklore, but was clearly familiar to commentators and rabbis from the Middle Ages onward. We even find a connection between this Shabbat—Shabbat Hanukkah—and the Judith story. In his book *Hanukkah: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebration*, author Ron Wolfson [writes](#), "A midrash dealing with a variation of the Judith story was read on the Shabbat or Shabbatot of Hanukkah during the Middle Ages." (p. 47) Today, Judith's story serves not only as a legend, but also as a symbol of inspiration for thousands of Jewish women who today serve and defend their homeland in the IDF.

Israel was one of the first countries with female combat soldiers and currently has the largest percentage of women serving in the military in the world. According to the Equality Amendment to the Military Service Law, women and men have equal rights to serve in any role in the IDF. Now more than ever, Israeli women are exercising that right playing critical roles in Israel's defense. According to [i24News](#), "the number of women serving in its combat units had reached a record level this year...[with] some 2,700 women enrolled in combat units." Over the past five years the number of female combat soldiers has increased nearly fivefold, and last year the IDF projected that some 9.5 percent of enlisted women would serve in combat units in 2017. In addition, the [Times of Israel reported that](#) thirteen female trainees completed their training to become the Israeli army's first female combat tank operators. "We're standing before a bit of history. For the first time, a tank operator medal will be pinned on the uniform of female IDF soldiers," said Col. Moran Omer, head of the corps' training brigade.

So, as we celebrate Hanukkah this year with a good dollop of sour cream on our latkes or perhaps a milk-custard doughnut, let us take a moment to focus on the heroism of Judith symbolized through the milk-based treats. And, we can also take pride in the incredible Israeli women following in Judith's footsteps, protecting and defending the modern Jewish state. ■

## A Partnership of Understanding and Wisdom – Miketz

A man discreet and wise (Genesis 41:33)

איש חכם ונבוך (בראשית מא:לג)

While the Iron Dome system undoubtedly saved many lives during the war with Hamas several years ago, since that time it has become a symbol as well. Iron Dome, which recently was [declared operational](#) for maritime use to protect Israel's natural gas platforms in the Mediterranean Sea, has become synonymous with Israeli ingenuity and technological military prowess. Only a few years after the system's deployment, Great Britain has [purchased the system](#) to protect the Falkland Islands and the United States army is [also considering](#) buying the system to protect American troops in Europe. The Iron Dome is also symbolic of an important partnership between Israel and the United States, as [America provides Israel](#) with the critical funding needed to develop and deploy not only the Iron Dome system, but the David Sling and Arrow missile defense programs as well. Combining American financing with Israeli ingenuity to produce a game-changing defense system is a model inspired by no less than our forefather Joseph in our parashah.

After interpreting the Pharaoh's dreams and predicting the terrible years of famine that would soon befall the Egyptian empire, Joseph offers some unsolicited advice on how the monarch should prepare for the coming calamity. "Now therefore let Pharaoh look for a man discreet and wise..." (41:33) In the Hebrew text we read that Joseph recommended that Pharaoh should find a man who is *chacham v'navon*. The word *chacham* we recognize from the Passover Seder, as the *chacham* is the "wise son." *Navon* refers to a person with *tevunah*—reason or understanding. Yet, these translations only beg the question: what qualities do these words represent? What are the qualities of leadership that would guide a leader through trying times? Ramban (on verse 33) explains that a leader must be, "understanding in order to know how to support the people of Egypt from his hand with bread...and sell the balance to other countries to accumulate wealth...[He needs] wisdom in order to know how to preserve the produce so that it should not rot..." According to Ramban, in order to succeed in the daunting task of surviving the famine, the leader would need *tevunah*—understanding—to find the means to finance any proposed solution. Without funding, Egypt would fall, no matter how clever a solution it devised. With this financing in place, the leader would then also need the *chochmah*—wisdom—critical to devising the technical and technological means to address and solve the problem.

Like Joseph in his time, Israel is facing a growing threat in the metastasizing Iranian regime and its proxies that it knows it will need to address in the near future. And like Joseph, the path to addressing Israel's security challenges requires both the *tevunah*—the understanding needed to procure badly needed funds—as well as the *chochmah*—the wisdom required to devise the tactics, equipment and training necessary to get the job done. Last month, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman delivered the sobering news that the IDF would seek an additional 4.8 billion shekels for its defense budget in the coming years to address the looming threat growing to Israel's north. [According to the Jerusalem Post](#), "Liberman detailed three new situations that did not exist when the budget was first drafted: a 'massive Russian presence' in Syria; precision weapons introduced in the area, with both Hezbollah and 'other elements' trying to get precise weapons; and a dramatic acceleration in the Iranian military industry."

These growing threats only further reinforce the need for continued American security assistance to Israel, which helps ensure that the Jewish state has the resources to defend itself—by itself—against an array of mounting threats throughout the Middle East. Israel already spends nearly 6 percent of its GDP on defense—the highest proportion in the industrialized world. While our elected representatives have consistently supported ongoing security assistance to Israel, we must continue to promote the value of *tevunah* about which Joseph spoke—that without the *kemach*—the critical financial wherewithal—Israel would never be able to utilize its *chochman* to develop the systems that save lives every day. ■

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