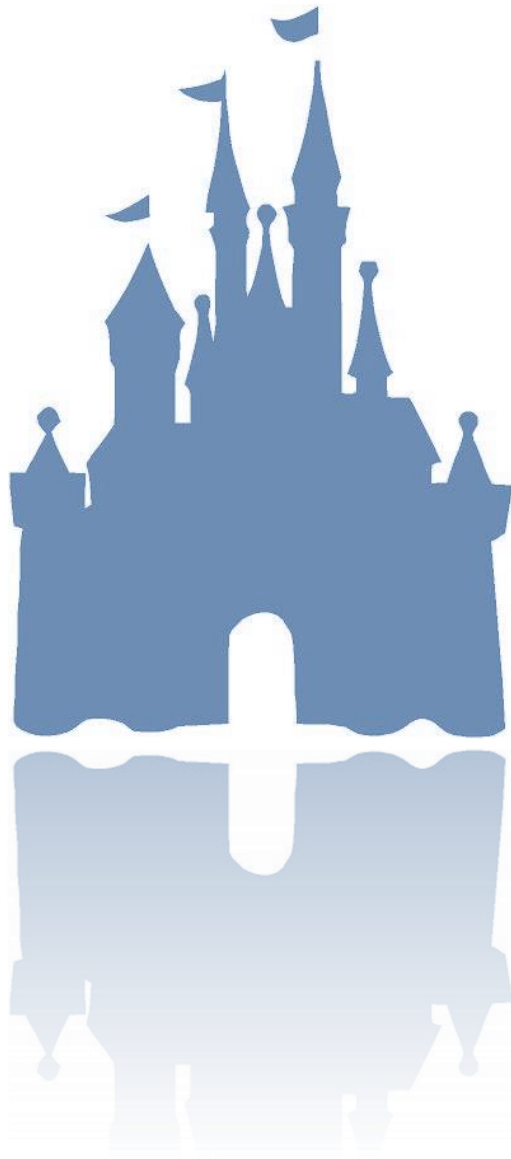


DIGGING DEEPER IN  
A DISNEY WORLD



WRITTEN BY RABBI ARIEL BANNETT

**Ever notice that a lot of Jewish sports teams use the name “Maccabee”?**

**Ever wonder why?**



Many people think that the war between the Maccabees and the Greeks from the story of Chanukah was simply a series of battles of two groups: one, a vast and experienced army and the second a ragtag group of fighters with a good sense of strategy.

From this perspective, the victory by the Maccabees is history's best example of Jewish physical might and achievement.



This view of the Maccabee's story is the underlying theme of the following well known Israeli Chanukah song:

Who can retell the mighty [actions] of Israel, who can count them?

In every generation, the mighty will arise to save the nation.

מי ימלל גבורת ישראל אותן מי ימנה?  
הן בכל דור יקום הגיבור גואל העם.

What do you think might be missing from these lyrics?

The problem is that the Maccabees weren't fighting to prove how mighty they or their nation were; they were fighting for the spiritual identity of the Jewish people.

**To understand the underlying struggle in the Chanukah story let's get a few facts straight:**



**The Book of Maccabees (not part of Tanach but still a good source of historical facts) describes the situation in the Jewish homeland prior to the war as follows:**



**"In those days there went out of Israel wicked men, and they persuaded many, saying: 'Let us go and make a covenant with the heathens (meaning the Greeks) that are around us...' (Maccabees I, 1: 12).**

**What is being described here is the *Hellenization* of Jews: Jewish people embracing the culture, philosophy and religious practices of the Greek empire. In Hebrew such Jews are referred to as "מתִּיבְנִים", which comes from the root יבן, meaning "Greece".**

**Furthermore, the Greeks, led by Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to move the Hellenization efforts forward by not letting Jews keep the Torah:**

**"During the Second Temple era [...] the Greek Empire established decrees on the Jewish people, and eradicated their religious practices and did not allow them to learn Torah and do Mitzvot, and they entered the Temple and made it impure". (Maimonides, Laws of Chanukah, Chapter 3 Law 1)**

**"בבית שני כשמלכות יבן גזרו גזירות על ישראל ובטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בתורה ומצות...ונכנסו להיכל...ושמאו הטהרות." (רמב"ם, הלכות חנוכה פ"ג ה"א)**

**The real fight of the Maccabees was to save Judaism – to save the spiritual character of the Jewish people! The Greeks were taking away our culture before our eyes.**





**To understand this better let's look at some fundamental differences between Jewish culture and יבן/Hellenism:**

**The physical form of man is at the center of Greek culture. This is the source of the many traditions of Ancient Greece:**

**For Greeks every physical thing had a "god" that controlled it. That's how you get the god of the sea (Poseidon), the god of love (Aphrodite) etc**

**The Greeks imagined their gods as real, physical, people with special powers. Gods were, in essence, created in the image of man – with the same behavior and feelings of that people have. That's how you get all the Greek myths about jealous infighting between gods and of gods having relationships with human beings**

**Athletics were a central part of Greek society. These sports focused on the beauty of the human form and glorified human physical achievement.**

**In short, the Greeks worshipped the physical form and especially the human body and Jews believe physicality is best when it's served alongside spirituality.**

**Take a minute and think: how many of your daily activities do you think of as spiritual?**

**At the heart of Judaism is the idea of infusing our physical lives with spirituality:**

**Judaism believes in One G-d who actively involves Himself in our daily physical lives.**

**In Judaism, mankind is created in the image of G-d: "בצלם אלוקים ברא אתם", "in the image of G-d they were created". G-d is a completely spiritual Being with no physical attributes and human beings in some way reflect Him. and people are expected to spend their lives enhancing their spiritual lives to become more similar to G-d.**

**The physical body in Judaism is viewed as a partner with the soul. "וייצר ה' אלוקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה, ויפח באפיו נשמת" "and Hashem G-d formed man [out of] dust of the earth, and He breathed a living soul into [man's] nostrils." The physical earth was infused with spirituality. According to Judaism, people are expected to take the "normal", physical parts their lives and make them spiritual, bringing out their "soul power" to become more similar to G-d.**

As we just saw, according to Judaism, even the more “normal” parts of our lives are supposed to have a spiritual side. In the next few pages let’s look at how three “normal” parts of our lives – our relationships with other people, how we eat and how we dress - can be deepened with a Jewish spiritual outlook:

Take a look at the pictures below and match them with the appropriate labels found at the bottom of the page:

A



B



E



D



HOMELESS PERSON

TORAH SCHOLAR

HIGH POWER BUSINESSMAN

FAN OF HIGH CULTURE

STAY AT HOME PARENT

Let's take a deeper look at the people from the last page:



In truth, Person A is a homeless person who borrowed a suit from an old friend for his first interview in years.

Person B is a fan of high culture and has been sleeping outside for three days hoping to purchase tickets to the New York Philharmonic's latest show.



C is a stay at home mom who got a babysitter today and is looking forward to a night out with her husband.

Person D is a high powered businessman running a chain of highly successful department stores.



Person E is a Torah Scholar, having retired many years ago from her job as an executive lawyer for Person D and spent her time learning Torah deeply.

IN DISNEY MOVIES, PEOPLE ARE OFTEN JUDGED AT FACE VALUE. YOU CAN TELL WHO THE VILLAIN, THE LOVE INTEREST AND THE LOVEABLE SIDEKICKS ARE AT FIRST SIGHT. BUT, IN THE REAL WORLD, HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW LITTLE A LOOK AT A PERSON'S APPEARANCE REALLY TELLS YOU?

Everyone sees what you appear to be...

How often do we assume we know a person before we stop to ask about the deeper story?



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...few really know what you are.

Is this person kind and giving?  
Is she a good mother? Is he a hard worker? What motivates her? Is he someone's hero?

Judaism doesn't want us to life like we're in a Disney movie: to really know people, we have to dig beneath the surface!

The English word for “face” is related to “facade” implying a view that is only skin deep. The word for “face” in Hebrew is פנים which is related to בפנים meaning “inside”. In Judaism we are expected to never take things at face value.



All love that is dependent on something, if the thing it is dependent on goes away, the love goes away too. Love that is not dependent on anything in particular, will never go away. (Pirkei Avot, 5, 16)

כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר, בטל דבר, בטלה אהבה. ושאינה תלויה בדבר, אינה בטילה לעולם. (פרקי אבות ה', ט"ז)

If you want to have everlasting relationships that can weather any challenge, your love must be unconditional!

The Mishna's example for this is the relationship between דוד שאול המלך (Jonathan) the son of המלך (King David) and יהונתן (King Saul). דוד and יהונתן were best friends even though as long as דוד was alive it meant that יהונתן would never inherit his father's position as King of the Jewish people. No matter what happened, they were the closest of friends.



Think about the relationships in your life – parents, friends – and ask yourself which are unconditional and which would break with petty changes. If your mom switched jobs would you love her any less? If your best friend gained a few pounds would he suddenly become unlikeable? Are these relationships rooted in deep love or shallow values?

Let's take at two other parts of everyday life not usually associated with anything "holy" – eating and clothing- and see if there might be more to them.

Eating is incredibly enjoyable. Who doesn't love a great steak or some delicious pasta? But can eating be more than just physical pleasure?

The gemara in ברכות tells us that eating food without saying a ברכה is like stealing from Hashem:



“Rabi Chanina bar Papa said: anyone who enjoys benefit from this world without making a Beracha is like he has stolen from Hashem” (Talmud Berachot 35b)

”אמר רבי חנינא בר פפא כל הנהנה מן העולם הזה הלא ברכה כאילו גוזל להקדוש ברוך הוא” (ברכות ל"ה:)



It seems that when we eat we are acknowledging that Hashem gives us everything. Only after we have taken in that idea are we considered to have His permission to eat.

Based on this, what do you think should be going through your mind the next time you eat your favorite food?



**I'm sure many of you put a lot of thought into what you wear. People want to look their best.**

**Have you ever thought about why?**

**Judaism has a very clear outlook on clothes:**



**“Clothing brings honor to a person,” (Rashi on Isaiah 10, 16)**

**הבגדים מכבדים את האדם  
(רש"י, ישעיה י ט"ז)**

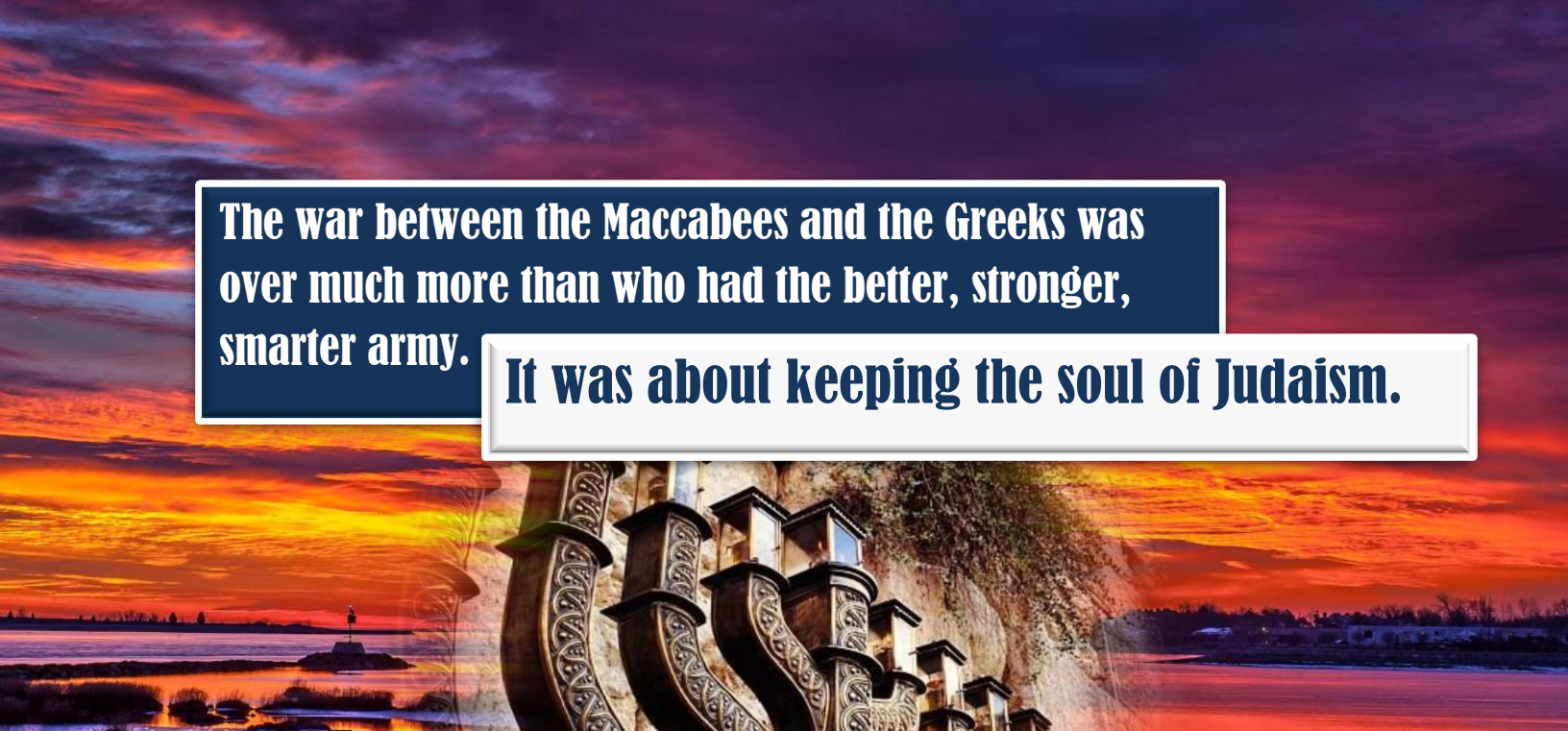
**“The clothing of a Torah Scholar should be pleasant and clean... and he should not wear regal clothing that everyone will stare at...” (Maimonides Hilchot De'ot, 5, 9)**

**“מלבוש תלמיד חכם נאה ונקי... ולא ילבש מלבוש מלכים שהכל מסתכלים בהן...” (רמב"ם הלכות דעות ה, ט)**



**Clothes shouldn't make the man; man should make the clothes!**

**Judaism's view of clothing is that it brings a sense of honor and dignity to a person. We don't dress a certain way to attract attention. Rather, our clothes are meant to communicate a sense of self-respect.**



**The war between the Maccabees and the Greeks was over much more than who had the better, stronger, smarter army.**


**It was about keeping the soul of Judaism.**



**The Greeks and the מתיבנים threatened to uproot Judaism, and it'd deep perspective of the world, with a shallow worldview.**

**In many ways, this battle is still being fought today:**

**So many people get stuck on the things on the outside – the newest fashions, technologies and trends – instead of trying look deeper into what they already have.**



**This message is constantly reinforced in pop-culture in the constant advertisements telling us that what we have isn't good enough- that we need more; that if we don't look a certain way we are simply inferior; that its normal for pop stars to treat their spouses as disposable instead of deepening relationships.**

**If we allow ourselves to only look at the face of something but never see what is בפנים, we are at the same risk of losing our Jewish identity: we'll be living in a "Disney" world!**

**We have to remember that underneath everything in this world there is deep spiritual meaning waiting for you to discover it.**