



# Winston Spencer Maccabee

BY RABBI DR. MEIR Y. SOLOVEICHIK

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Gilbert interviewed Edward Lewis Spears, a longtime friend of Gilbert’s subject. “Even Winston had a fault,” Spears reflected to Gilbert. “He was too fond of Jews.” If, as one British wag put it, an anti-Semite is one who hates the Jews more than is strictly necessary, Churchill was believed to admire the Jews more than elite British society deemed strictly necessary. With attention now being paid to Churchill’s legacy as portrayed in the film *Darkest Hour*, I thought it worth exploring the little-known role that Churchill’s fondness for the Jewish people played at a critical period in the history of Western civilization.

The film highlights three addresses delivered by Churchill upon becoming prime minister in the spring of 1940, with the Nazis bestriding most of Europe. Of the three, his two speeches before Parliament—the one that promised “blood, toil, tears, and sweat,” the other that “we shall fight on the beaches”—are more famous. The most important disquisition, however, may have been the radio remarks delivered on May 19, as they were the first words spoken by Churchill to the British people as leader of His Majesty’s Government. Britain faced, he said, “the foulest and most soul-destroying tyranny which has ever darkened and stained the pages of history.”

The Nazis had thus far destroyed every adversary that they had faced, leaving in their wake a “group of shattered states and bludgeon-

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And Judas said, Arm yourselves, and be valiant men, and see that ye be in readiness against the morning, that ye may fight with these nations, that are assembled together against us to destroy us and our sanctuary: For it is better for us to die in battle, than to behold the calamities of our people and our sanctuary. Nevertheless, as the will of God is in heaven, so let him do.

As Hillsdale College's Richard Langworth has noted, Churchill altered the quotation, as "the writer in him could not resist an editorial improvement." One edit that he made is particularly interesting. In paraphrasing Judah, Churchill spoke of the outrages against "our altar," rather than "our sanctuary." Here Churchill combined an understanding that Judah's victory concluded with a rebuilding of the altar (the word "Chanukah" itself refers to the *chanukat ha-mizbeach*, the dedication of the sacrificial altar in the Temple). Through Churchill's rhetoric, England was transformed into an altar for which the English must be willing to sacrifice, and ultimately rededicated.

Even more fascinating is the choice of citation itself. Why would Churchill select this verse with which to conclude his first address as prime minister? Like traditional Judaism, Churchill's own Anglican Church did not include the book of Maccabees in its canon, and there are any number of biblical instances, from Moses to Joshua to David, of eloquent exhortations in war.

The answer possibly lies in the fact that the Chanukah story is one of the few instances of a biblical battle waged

# Dignity in Flames

BY RABBI DOV LERNER

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**H** both enchantment and futility in a way that speaks to the narcissism of our age.

To understand how, we need to turn to the work of a pivotal thinker. Immanuel Kant's philosophical toil marked perhaps the most decisive moment in the history of modern thought. He wrote during the eighteenth century, in an age in which the sway of confessional faith began to fade and the pillars of traditional metaphysics underwent irreparable change. Aristotelian beliefs that had seized the stewards of a whole slew of religious creeds—from Avicenna to Aquinas to Maimonides—were deserted in a powerful critique of pure reason.

With the ground caving beneath the feet of revealed ethics (which threatened to bring about a Nietzschean politics), Kant and his peers and devotees frantically sought a surrogate to bind people together and inspire them to virtue. Kant, in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), outlines the notion of the categorical imperative and what he calls the Kingdom of Ends (Reich der Zwecke).

The Kingdom of Ends is an imaginary realm in which human needs and responsibilities are perfectly balanced. The central tenet of this moral paradise is that each person serves as an end in and of themselves, and never as a means to another's ends. Everyone serves one

another, and no one uses anyone else; there is no abuse or exploitation, no persecution or manipulation—each and every human being keeps an unassailable and essential dignity.

The ritual choreography of the Hanukkah candles stresses a similar attention to ends. The candles grace windowpanes and doorframes in a row of low flames, but maintain a ritually endowed futility throughout the night: They may not serve as a means to reading or eating or seeing beyond themselves in any way. The flames are lit and seen, but never used; while the blazes draw our gaze, the wicks have no utility. The rhythmic liturgy makes this confession: "*Ein Lanu Reshut LeHishtamesh Bahem, Elah Lir'otam Bilvad*

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