



Rabbi Weiner's Dec. 2008 Bulletin Article

At this time of the year, I am always moved by the story of the Macabees and their victory over the Syrian Greeks, which we celebrate at Chanukah. The courage and bravery they demonstrated are no less compelling today than they were 2200 years ago when the Macabees and their followers began their struggle for freedom. There is so much to be thankful for at Chanukah – the rededication the Temple, the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel – but to my mind the simple act of resistance to Syrian Greek tyranny and their willingness to sacrifice so much to maintain the Jewish way of life is the most magnificent aspect of their victory. It has inspired every generation at moments of difficulty to hold on and persevere.

Thank G-d that despite the many challenges that we face here in the United States of America, our status and safety as Jews is in no way comparable to the oppressed Jews who join the ranks of the rebellion against the Syrian Greeks. But you would not know that from the recent whining about the lack of available Kosher meat and the steep rise in prices that has followed in the wake of the collapse of the Agriprocessors Kosher meat facility in Postville Iowa last month. You may recall that I spoke at length on Rosh Hashanah about the federal raid that had taken place there earlier last spring, which confirmed allegations of wide spread hiring (as well as abuse of) illegal aliens, who were mistreated, poorly trained, and subjected to all too often, dangerous working conditions. The raid also confirmed poor treatment of animals, as well as a host of other violations of both Jewish as well as USDA laws. As of the writing of this article, millions of dollars of fines have been levied against Agriprocessors, its CEO was indicted on Federal conspiracy charges, and the dietary laws of the Jewish people, and the values that guide them have been defamed before the eyes of our entire country.

Yet what do our Jewish newspapers complain about? Not the abuse of the workers, not the abysmal conduct of the *Mashgichim*, the Kashrut supervisors at the facility and their bosses at the OU, not the lives of the workers, or the economy of the town that Argiprocessors has destroyed, not the *Chilul HaShem*, the desecration of G-d's name that such flagrant disregard of Jewish values has brought – no, the big complaint is the shortage of Kosher meat because Agriprocessors has filed for bankruptcy.

I for one am absolutely unconcerned about the possible shortage of Kosher meat. I have faith in the free market, and strongly believe that in a few months

other domestic Kosher meat suppliers as well as suppliers from Israel, Europe and South America will begin to fill the alleged void. And even if that does not happen so quickly, remember that we all lived just fine years ago before Agriprocessors grew from a family owned butcher in Brooklyn to the largest supplier of Kosher meat in America. But even more importantly, we can and should live without eating Kosher meat that has been produced under conditions which mock our values and obligations. But we cannot live as Jews, by ignoring the very values that have preserved us for 3300 years.

The Macabean revolt began when a handful of Jews refused to bow down to the false gods and idols of Hellenism. Though persecuted and even murdered for their devotion, they did not give up. And because of their courage, from every corner of Israel, they were joined by others. They were victorious because instead of succumbing in the values around them they held fast to the values of their fathers and mothers. And so it is with us. Will we worship the values that teach us that price alone is the ultimate arbiter of what is mortal or immoral? Do we really believe that we can enjoy our meals and holidays celebrations and ignore the impact it they have on those who help produce these foods, or their impact on the environment? Do we really believe that we can observe the strict letter of the law, and ignore the spirit and values which give it its meaning? If we have the courage to draw upon the wisdom and sacrifices of the Macabees, the answer to these questions and so many others will become clear.



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